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## CHRISTIANITY'S FINALITY AND NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

Every intelligent adherent of Christianity sooner or later faces the question as to the truth, the uniqueness, and the finality of Christianity. We, Christians, have in most cases imbibed Christian ideas and followed Christian standards from infancy. Having been born into a Christian environment and having enjoyed a Christian training, we were led to accept the system of Christian truth and to adopt the Christian moral norm as true, final, and satisfying. Consequently, Christianity has practically from infancy been our standard of truth and of value.

But as we grow in intelligence we wish to know the reason why. We discover that Christianity is not the only religion in the world. We challenge ourselves as Christians. Such questions as these involuntarily force themselves upon us. If I were born in India from Hindu parents, would I not as resolutely hold that Hinduism is the only true and satisfying religion? Just what is there in Christianity that gives it a claim to the allegiance of man? Is there really anything fundamentally, unique, final, absolute about Christianity? Granted that Christianity is true and has value, is such truth and value relative or absolute? Are not perhaps all religions true and satisfying in a measure, the one more, the other less so, the only difference between them being one of degree? Does not possibly each racial group have the religion best adapted to it and serving its needs best, so that the question as to the finality of any religion ought not to be raised? Is Christianity perhaps the highest form of religious de-

## WILHELM HERRMANN'S SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY \*

Herrmann tells us that a systematic theology which aims at making explicit for the Christian what is given him in his faith, has two tasks: that it has to show (1) How a man is inwardly renewed through the experience he may have of the power of the Person of Jesus; (2) How the faith—grounded in this experience and determined by it as to content—expresses itself. He deals with these two tasks in order.

Under the second head he expounds according to his claim "the ideas which are the expression of the faith which knows itself sustained by the power of the personal life of Jesus." He informs us, however, that, following this path, we shall never obtain "a closed and entirely consistent system of ideas; for faith itself grows, it changes daily, if it is really alive (Rom. xii.2), and is continually producing ideas which are in a state of mutual tension."

With our Lord's adage, "By their fruits ye shall know them," in mind, we shall consider first the fruits of Herrmann's faith.

### I. THEOLOGY PROPER

Herrmann's theology proper is not adequately grounded. As to the evidences for believing in the existence, personality, and the attributes of God, he represents the evidences from the adaptation and order pervading the universe as unworthy of consideration, because, "we do not know the totality of things," and because, "we do not by any means always find in the world, as we know it, a purposeful order," but "are often oppressed with a sense of the meaningless events"; and because moreover, "if this argument were sound, it would prove the existence not of God: i.e., a Being of absolute wisdom and power,<sup>1</sup> but only a Being of wisdom

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\* *Systematic Theology* by Wilhelm Herrmann. English translation by Michlem and Saunders.

<sup>1</sup> P. 71.

and power higher than our own." He represents the cosmological evidences for the being of God, as, of rational evidences, "alone worthy of serious refutation"; he says of it:

The cosmological proof starts from the fact that everything to which we can point is conditioned by other things. Had we, however, to imagine all things as thus conditioned, we should be unable in the end to ascribe existence in the full sense to anything whatsoever. We must therefore conceive the notion of a Reality distinct from this world, a Reality self-existent or absolute, on which all finite things depend, and from which they derive their share of reality. . . . Now it is perfectly true that science can only securely grasp the reality of things in time and space when they can be conceived in relation to an eternal Being. But in the work of science the eternal ground of all being is, as a matter of fact, never expressed in terms of God, but always in conceptions of law. In the attempt to substantiate the reality of a thing, the way of science is always to seek to make good the proposition that this thing is bound up with all other things in one uniform nature. The idea underlying the hypothesis—that of an all embracing law—is that which for science expresses the eternal ground of all that is in time and space.<sup>2</sup>

After disposing, in this easy way, of the evidences for the existence of God, and after passing more or less just criticism on the efforts of Eucken, Kaftan, Kant, and Schleiermacher to reach validly the truth of God's existence, Herrmann gives us his views of how it may be had—namely, through experience. He says:

The experience out of which religion may arise, then, is the realization on the part of any religious man that he has encountered a spiritual power in contact with which he has felt utterly humbled, yet at the same time uplifted to a real independent inner life. This is met with in ordinary life, when in the society of our fellows we experience in ourselves the awakening of reverence and trust.

If we have experienced the working of this power, through contact with which a life, which is life in truth, a real human life, arises in us, then we are in a position to settle the question whether God is a reality to us. It simply depends on whether we remain loyal to the truth, that is, whether we are prepared to treat the fact of such a power as what it really is for us. The moment we desire dependence upon it, and submit ourselves to it in reverence and trust, this spiritual power is really our soul's Lord. We can never again entirely forget the fact that we have met with a power which had not only an eternal sway over us, but subdued our hearts.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See pp. 22 and 23.

<sup>3</sup> P. 36.

(1) So far, we have been restating in a compendious way the method by which Herrmann supposes some men become possessed of the truth that God is a reality to them. "The method" seems to be by feeling, the cause of the feeling being "utterly humbling" and "utterly uplifting." The cause of the humbling and uplifting feeling is most vaguely grasped, apparently. It is described as putting us in a position "to settle the question whether God is a reality to us." There is no guarding here against the view that this "Reality to us," may be only subjective; and that corresponding to this Reality to us, there may be no substantially existing person or being. According to this view, only they who have this marvelous experience can possess the truth, "that God is a Reality to them." This contradicts the history of the human race and the views of men who teach in a manner far more convincing than Professor Herrmann. According to a great number of reliable historians there has been a widely prevailing belief amongst all nations in the existence of a supreme Deity, and among vast numbers in these nations who have in effect disclaimed any such experience as that described by Herrmann as conditioning the ability of a man "to settle the question as to whether God is a reality to him." Thousands and perhaps millions of men, who would disclaim any such phenomenal experience as Herrmann makes necessary to settle the question whether God is a reality to one, have believed in the existence of a Lord absolute of the universe. Paul teaches, in Rom. i.19-20: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them: for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." These words of Paul for saneness of thought and for philosophic insight, are weightier than Herrmann's and they show amongst other things that men who have not religion, and are not even "religiously minded" ought to see that God exists and that He is of "eternal power and Godhead." In

discussing the existence of God, Herrmann treats both the Bible and the history of thought with scant respect.

(2) When about to cast away the cosmological argument for the existence of God, Herrmann states it in no very strong form—rather he misstates it—and then in order to break its force indulges in some curiously inept remarks as follows, “Now it is perfectly true that science can only securely grasp the reality of things in time and space when they can be conceived in relation to an eternal being. But in the work of science the eternal ground of all being is, as a matter of fact, never expressed in terms of God, but always in the conception of law.”

One must ask, “The law of what?” “Law” and “ground” are heterogeneous categories. “Law” properly expresses the mode in which a cause acts, or, if the cause be moral, the way in which it should act; whereas ground is but another name for cause, efficient cause. If science seeks the efficient cause of the universe regarded (as it properly is regarded) as a begun thing it must seek a somewhat in the category of force and ultimately in the category of Being. The philosopher having refuted pantheism, and the doctrine that the present world is “the product of an infinite series of events,” and having stated the cosmological argument correctly, may draw a conclusion of vast weight notwithstanding the cavil of Kant which that great thinker made because of his misapprehension or misstatement of the law of causality. The argument never has been successfully overthrown. Herrmann should recognize the fact.

(3) The teleological proof is of force notwithstanding Herrmann’s assertion that it is “scientifically a quite indefensible attempt to find a basis upon which to prove the existence of God.” He is following a widespread modern tradition in this assertion but a tradition itself “quite indefensible.” Let the argument be stated: Every phenomena must have an adequate cause; Adaptation and order pervade the universe; Therefore the cause of this ordered world, of this ordered begun thing, must be a thing of intelligence and

power of choice. Herrmann would object, indeed, that we do not know that order pervades the universe. But he will not deny that every advance in science as far as it teaches anything, shows that adaptation and order prevail in the heavens above and in the elements of the earth. Order is manifest to the naked eye, more widely manifest when telescope, or microscope is used. With every advance of science purpose becomes more manifest. We do not always know what the purpose in some creation is. The purpose of the spleen is not yet fully understood; but the man of science shows that he believes it has a purpose. If he did not, he would not labor to understand it. Granted that some events are meaningless to us, men of science think that meaninglessness to us is due to the imperfection of our insight. Professor Herrmann says, "Even if this teleological argument were sound, it would prove the existence not of God, i.e., of a being of absolute wisdom and power, but only of a being of wisdom and power higher than our own." Surely, however, this conclusion is unworthy. The being competent to bring about the order and adaptation displayed in this universe possesses wisdom and power not merely higher than Professor Herrmann and his followers possess, but indefinitely higher. He who contrived the order disclosed in the movement of the heavenly bodies, and in the combinations of the ultimate chemical elements, the adaptations observable in the eye, the ear, the hand, shows himself possessed of a wisdom and power so vast that no man who is not a supreme egotist dares to say that God's wisdom may not be infinite. And, if on other solid grounds absolute wisdom and power may be affirmed of the Creator of the universe, the adaptations and the order which pervade the universe, fall in with and support that truth in no mean way.

(4) A miraculously given revelation, and in particular, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Son of the living God settles the fact of the absolute wisdom and power of God.

The plausibilities of certain schools of false philosophy



and of rationalistic criticism had been adopted by not a few of the occupants of theological chairs in Germany, whence once the truth had been taught. Their teachings had occasioned confusion, dismay and rout; and, after a little, enthusiastic hostility to Bible truths on the part of many of their students. The Ritschlians, for whom Herrmann speaks had suffered the stampede, had retreated with the rout, but later made a stand. They found a much less tenable position, however, than that from which they were stampeded.

Herrmann's treatment of the attributes of God is meagre and unsatisfactory. He feels obliged to derive the knowledge of His attributes from the inexplicably produced Faith, which comes into being without a warrant. But according to Herrmann himself this faith is a most imperfect guide into the truth. Hear him,

But as trust in God produces in us the concept of His omnipotence, our idea of God's personality necessarily grows dim; for an almighty Being cannot possess either the knowledge or the will by which we recognize personal life. An omnipotent power is for us quite an inconceivable mystery. . . . Although the idea of omnipotence cannot be reconciled with our conception of personal life, we still see that the absolute confidence created in us implies both those ideas. It is when we consider the wonderful fact of that real life created and stirring in us that God Almighty is revealed to us as personal Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

To a man of common sense, a kind of sense by no means to be despised, it is clear that Herrmann needs to revise his view of the relation of omnipotence to knowledge, his view of the relation of personality to power, and needs to reconsider the historical grounds for believing that God exists and has certain attributes, instead of throwing himself on the "faith" about which he is probably self-deceived. Possibly, probably, he blindly calls on faith, as he defines it, to do more than it can do.

Amongst the divine attributes Herrmann gives little, if any, specific place to Justice. Hence we may look ultimately for a more or less vicious ethical system following this school.

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<sup>4</sup> Pp. 97-98.

Herrmann's scheme is anti-trinitarian. He holds to the uni-personality of the Godhead. He says:

It is involved in the relationship to which our faith consciously owes its life, that we can perfectly picture to ourselves the God who redeems us in only these aspects. He is to us the Father to whom we may appeal with confidence of being heard. He is similarly Jesus' spiritual power working upon us. But He is also to us the Spirit who overcomes the overwhelming might of nature both in ourselves and in the fellowship of believers. The doctrine of the Trinity must always start from the fact that God reveals to us His single nature in this three-fold way (Economic Trinity).<sup>5</sup>

The Holy Spirit is simply the uni-personal God working in the life of the redeemed.<sup>6</sup> In other words the Holy Spirit is merely the name for God as He presents Himself in the life of redeemed humanity. Christ also is divine in that *in Him no less than in the Father* is the one personal Spirit who is God alone.

It may be a little difficult for the reader who has not read Herrmann to gather his view on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from what we have stated, though his own language has been freely used to set that view forth. His doctrine is that God is a uni-personal Spirit whose power works in Jesus Christ in a wonderful way, and who because He hears prayer, may with eminent propriety be called Father, and who as dwelling in the hearts of His people may be called the Holy Spirit.

Herrmann openly repudiates the Chalcedonian Christology: "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who being the eternal Son of God became man and so was and continueth to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever." According to Herrmann, satisfaction could be felt with this Chalcedonian conception

<sup>5</sup> P. 151. Cf. the statement on p. 148:

"The briefest expression for the nature of the Holy Spirit is this: God in us and Christ in us. The question therefore whether the Holy Spirit is to be thought of as personally living or as impersonal force indicates a complete failure to understand these conceptions of faith. The Holy Spirit is simply the living God present and working in us."

<sup>6</sup> Pp. 140 and 145.



only because of "the vague idea of redemption which, as early as Irenaeus, had driven off the field the Pauline Johannine recognition of the manner of our redemption through Christ." He says: "It had been forgotten therefore that Christian faith, if it treats Christ as God, must have before its eyes, without being able to comprehend it, a wonderful fact which it recognizes as the source and foundation of its own life."<sup>7</sup>

We are not concerned to vindicate the views of Irenaeus; but Herrmann's own view of the Pauline and Johannine view of the manner of our redemption through Christ is sadly defective. But, of that a word, later.

He makes much of the incomprehensibility of the doctrine of the Trinity; and yet he bases his whole doctrine on a faith incomprehensibly produced in the heart of the religiously minded person, and which in an incomprehensible manner determines everything else man is to believe. He also talks at times as if he had a most inadequate idea of the orthodox conception of the Trinity, or as if he were careless to a degree in presenting views which he wishes to overthrow. For instance, he talks as if "person" in the Godhead were in the thought of the orthodox, the precise analogue of person in the human sphere; whereas the intelligent orthodox think of the term "person" as applied to the subsistences in the Godhead because they are more nearly like personalities in the human sphere than any other modes of subsistences with which we can compare them. Our author is rather gifted in caricature. When he refers to Scripture for confirmation of his views, he has a faculty for selecting texts which superficially viewed seem to answer his purpose, and conveniently passes by masses of Scripture which run counter to the current of his teaching. On the whole he seems to flee Scripture unless it approves itself to his subjectivity. So much for Herrmann's theology proper.

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<sup>7</sup> P. 142.

## II. ANTHROPOLOGY

Herrmann's anthropology is very imperfectly developed. He teaches by implication that only the Christian has any right to claim that he is at all akin to God. He says:

Our consciousness that we are akin to Him is therefore, always at the same time a consciousness that a transcendent life has begun in us.<sup>8</sup>

He also says:

The idea that man possesses a life akin to the divine is not derived from such a source by the piety of the Old Testament. This difference between the Old Testament and the New is linked with another. In Genesis the image of God is clearly understood as shown in the powers which man received at the creation. This idea persists in pre-Christian religion. On the other hand the saying of Jesus in Matt. v.45 shows that, in His view, what connects man with God is not a power inherent in man's nature but a task which is set before him. According to this saying man is to become God's child by the exercise of that pure charity which identifies itself with its object and is thus creative life.<sup>9</sup>

Herrmann also says:

The anthropological ideas which are to be found elsewhere in the Bible can play no part in Protestant dogmatics; for we are at a loss to see how their appearance in us should be the outcome of the faith created in us by the power of the person of Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

He holds that the human will is free. He says:

Necessarily, therefore, the consciousness of our free will arises in faith not from logical deductions, but from actual surrender to God's universal life-creating activity.<sup>11</sup>

That is, it arises in an experience.

With reference to man's immortality, he says:

The idea that after the death of the body the soul lives on as an intrinsically immortal entity, is not Biblical but Platonic, and it stands in opposition to the fact that the inner phenomena of consciousness, are in a manner beyond our ken, conditioned by the changes in the bodily organisms.<sup>12</sup>

As to the goal of man, he says:

If we become conscious of the reality of God through the awakening

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<sup>8</sup> P. 89.

<sup>9</sup> P. 90.

<sup>10</sup> P. 91.

<sup>11</sup> P. 92.

<sup>12</sup> P. 94.

in us of pure confidence, that carries with it, too, a knowledge of the goal to which God would lead us. God will one day bring mankind to a perfect fellowship in which each individual will find inexhaustible tasks and infinite increase of personal life.<sup>13</sup>

If a man's anthropology is to be limited to truths derivable from and ratified by the trust wrought in regeneration and conversion—in regeneration even of a Biblical and not merely a Herrmann type—it must necessarily be inadequate. A regenerate mind is an illumined mind, but one in need of further light from without. It is absurd to limit the materials to be used in constructing anthropology in any such way. Certainly man has been conscious, indubitably conscious, of other experiences than conversion, and the appearance of trust in God. From these other experiences he ought to be able to learn somewhat of anthropology. There is a very respectable book, too, the Holy Scriptures, on which the author should have drawn. There is a consistency between the anthropology of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament. Herrmann seems to have only a superficial view of the Scriptures, and thinks that the anthropological ideas of the Old Testament can play "no part in Protestant dogmatics." Moreover, he appears to be unaware of the sonship of man as he comes from the hand of his Creator and, in distinction from that, the adoptive sonship of him who has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Bearing the distinction between these two kinds of sonship in mind and the difference between un-fallen and fallen man, he will find little difficulty in seeing the propriety of the Old Testament representing the image of God as a part of man's original endowment, and the New Testament representing the image as restored in regeneration and sanctification.

His discussion of freedom is inadequate and faulty. He confuses the freedom of man as a moral agent with his ability for the good. He says that consciousness of freewill arises in faith from actual surrender to God's "life-creating

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<sup>13</sup> P. 96.

activity." What God gives in this life-creating activity is ability for the good—for the choice of His service. Freedom which is essential to responsibility is never lost. The man of the world has it, as really as the saint of God.

He belittles the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, as held in the Old Testament as the unsophisticated students of the Old Testament have seen since the time of Christ, and as Christ saw, according to the record, Matt. xxii. 31-32; and he only feebly presents the New Testament evidence. An American professor of theology has written: whatever the Scriptures may be worth,

they unhesitatingly teach the immortality of man. This they do in four signal ways: (1) By fundamental assumption; the Bible is delivered to the world and issues all its instructions and warnings to man upon the idea that human life and history do not end with the grave; adopt for one moment the doctrine that death is final and how meaningless and silly the whole Bible becomes. (2) The Bible teaches the immortality of man by pictures, such as the translation of Enoch, the transfiguration on the mount, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the vision of Stephen, and the apocalyptic visions of the seer on Patmos; in these pictures the veil of the invisible world is drawn aside and we are allowed to look in upon some who died on earth, and behold them alive forever more. (3) The Bible teaches the immortality of man by dogmatic assertions, as in such declarations as 'This mortal must put on immortality.' (4) Finally the story of Christ, if it has a shred of truth in it, demonstrates the hope of immortality.<sup>14</sup>

These words give a much fairer representation of the character of Biblical teaching on the subject of immortality than do the words of Professor Herrmann.

As to what he says of man's goal, the goal to which God is moving him, Herrmann is vague and unconvincing. His teaching can not validly come out of his mere confidence in God, unless he has taken the measure of the Infinite in mind and heart. He also leaves much to be said. Compare intimations about the goal of a part of our sinful race intimated in John iii.36 and other such passages.

Herrmann is singularly unconvincing in his attempt to develop his doctrine out of his "faith," or "confidence," in God.

<sup>14</sup> See *The Christian's Hope* by Robert Alexander Webb, pp. 35-36.

## III. SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

This head comes logically to be considered under the general head of anthropology; but for convenience it is given a separate consideration.

Herrmann says, of the initial form of sin:

To comprehend the origin of sin is impossible to us; yet we can and must make clear to ourselves the primary form of sin. The spiritual attitude in which unbelief and selfishness are as yet only implicit, but which is already in every case an indication of insincerity, is devotion to the pleasures of sense, or sloth. Under the rule of God there should be formed in us God's image, that is, the power of a love which through self-denial creates something new. This work of God is checked in us by slothful devotion to pleasures of sense.<sup>15</sup>

Herrmann makes the slothful devotion to the pleasures of sense to have been the incipient form of sin. This indicates that he has looked in the right direction at this point. "The fall of man occurred, apparently through a sin of omission, through man's failure to be everlastingly on the alert to do duty. Created with a duplex end, of doing duty, and being happy, and living in surroundings where every prospect pleased it was easy for man to find delight in sensuous impressions and to slide into slothful devotion to the pleasures of sense." It should be noted that Herrmann gives, in the latter part of the passage just quoted, a picture of the first man which is unhistorical. He pictures man as not originally created in the image of God, but as being in duty bound to work out in himself that image. In thus picturing man, he involves himself in a fanciful and false psychological view of "God's image." Like certain evolutionists he makes a thing evolve certain other things, the very potential bases of which are not found in that "which evolves them"—a claim that is self-contradictory. If man were not given, in his very constitution the image of God he could never evolve it. What is more, he runs counter to the word of God in Gen. i. 26-27, *et simil*, which, rationalistic critics to the contrary notwithstanding, is the testimony of a witness present and of absolute trustworthiness.

<sup>15</sup> P. 102.

Herrmann teaches also, that the term guilt is sometimes used of the sinner's relation to the power whom he has wronged in the civil sphere, which relation may be swept away by punishment; but he asserts that the "situation is entirely different when a man recognizes his actions as a transgression of the moral law, or of God's commandment." The moral consciousness which thus confirms the truth of the moral law carries within itself the inevitable necessity of self-condemnation, and thus forestalls the need of any external judgment. This sense of guilt felt by the moral consciousness is, however, still more intensified when we realize that our sin has caused an inward separation between us and those who are dear to us. This applies with special force to the relations between the religious man and his God.<sup>16</sup>

Through our sins, we all help to make the fellowship and organization of society sinful. All the members of society are responsible for the sin which thus arises. It is therefore corporate sin. . . . From the corporate sin of human society there issues also its inevitable inheritance. Every man is influenced by the corporate sins of earlier generations without the possibility of defense against it. For it is only through being brought up in human society that we become men. Now all education begins with a child's accepting the ideas and the behavior of the adult persons, but if these spiritual instruments of education have been spoiled by sin, we imbibe sin in the course of our education.<sup>17</sup>

These considerations bring home to the modern man the inevitable necessity of the inheritance of sin more forcibly than did the idea which has dominated the church since Augustine, though it is incapable of demonstration that sin is inherited by the mere fact of physical descent from parents.<sup>18</sup>

Every individual is inevitably bound to be sinful from the beginning of his conscious life, and is equally bound to condemn himself for his sin as soon as his knowledge of the moral law creates in him the consciousness of freedom. The incomprehensible thing in all this, however, is not the fact of the inheritance of corruption, but the freewill which, in spite of man's dependence upon sinful humanity, assumes responsibility for his disharmony with the moral law.<sup>19</sup>

The judgement or punishment of sin is executed in the earthly life of

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<sup>16</sup> P. 105.

<sup>17</sup> Pp. 106-107.

<sup>18</sup> P. 106.

<sup>19</sup> Pp. 108f.



the sinner: (1) In the inward compulsion to condemn himself. (2) In the knowledge that it is impossible for him to deliver himself from sin through his own efforts. (3) In the way in which it reacts to his lot in life. The completed punishment of sin is fundamentally sin in its completion. Namely, a life actually lived for itself alone, or a life in utter isolation. Herein the tendency to selfishness, or to lovelessness arrives at its inevitable goal.<sup>20</sup>

In this group of quotations the position seems to be taken that the sinner's self-condemnation forestalls the need of any external punishment, but this position is no necessary inference from our own inner self-condemnation. If the sinner's conscience works correctly his self-condemnation for an evil act—if it recognizes that the act was wrong, and if it brings regret—this self-condemnation and regret by no means vindicate the law adequately. The law had a penalty. That penalty is not paid by the sinner's saying: "I have sinned." Suppose the sinner has murdered his brother, or has seduced his sister, or looted a bank, or betrayed a trust, his condemnation of himself for his sin is not a satisfaction for it. True, self-condemnation and confession were in order, but to confess is not to bring to life the slain brother or to restore to purity his sister, or to make good the injury inflicted by the stolen property. To condemn oneself is not to undo the dishonor done to God in the breaking of His moral law. If aught of punishment be involved in the sinner's self-condemnation, it is by no means the whole of that punishment. It is indeed a small part of it. Sin dishonors God. The sin of unbelief dishonors Him. "He that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abideth on him." Here is something outside the sinner, the wrath of God which must needs have expression. If Herrmann has respect for the Bible, the Bible shows that God's external wrath comes upon transgressors or on their substitute. It came on Cain, came on the antediluvians, came on the cities of the plain, came on Egypt, came on apostatizing Israel, over and over again. It is to come on all who have not been covered by

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<sup>20</sup> Pp. 109f.

the blood of the substitute. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Death comes as judgment. God sends it now permissively now efficaciously. If He is immanent in, He is also transcendent to, man. If God be just He must see to it that some of His rational creatures shall be punished. Some are very wicked and repent not. Our argument is from Scripture, which Herrmann professes to have a measure of respect for.

There is also a good deal said about "inherited sin," but the discussion is all about sin, induced on occasion of birth, into sinful families, by education, so that we find ourselves in company with an author out of sympathy with Calvin, Augustine, Paul, John, and Christ—in company with one who has not a little in common with Pelagians, Unitarians *et id omne genus*.

In others of these quotations, Herrmann would substitute for the old distinction between potential guilt and actual guilt, that is, between ill desert for a wicked state or act, and doomedness to punishment by the ruler for that act—would substitute for this distinction the following: the guilt "which is the responsibility of a man for his wicked estate or act" and "the guilt which is the relation of the sinner to the power which he has wronged, which, if punished, is to be considered as removed." He seems to teach, as we have seen, that God never in any way punishes externally breaches of the moral law.

To hold any such views he must have cast away as unworthy large portions of Old and New Testament history and prophecy. He should read Isaiah, the fifty-first psalm, and the whole Old and the whole New Testament. True the most awful punishment of sin is the natural fruit of sin. God as ruler of the universe *ought* to punish sin. He provided in the very constitution of the human being and the world that the sinner shall reap as he sows.

Herrmann takes no note of God's laying all the guilt of sins of the Christian on Jesus Christ, of Christ's paying our penal indebtedness, thus, bearing away our doomedness to penalty.

On the whole his treatment of sin is inadequate and feeble and unscriptural.

#### IV. SOTERIOLOGY

In the earlier pages in his chapter on "The redemption through Jesus Christ," Professor Herrmann reviews briefly, and with more or less error, earlier efforts to set forth the doctrine of redemption, including Ritschl's which on the whole seems to please him most; and on Ritschl's effort he attempts what he regards as an improvement.

He teaches that Jesus Christ has the power to redeem us by personally convincing us that God will accept us. If He become our redeemer, Herrmann says:

We must have discovered in Him that one thing which awakens pure love and pure fear in us, or which can have complete sway over our soul. But our redemption by this experience of the power of Jesus always depends upon whether we ourselves desire deliverance from sin; for we remain in the power of sin, if we do not completely submit ourselves to the power that is manifested in Jesus, but try to withdraw ourselves from it. We recognize it to be the inevitable consequence of the sense of guilt that the sinner avoids all that brings God near him—God whose judgement he fears, hence the question arises how, in spite of this circumstance, it is possible for the power which touches us in the person of Jesus to unite us to God, or how we receive through Him the *προσ-αγωγήν πρὸς τὸν θεόν* (the access to God) to which Paul testifies (Rom. v. 2, Eph. ii.18, iii.12).<sup>21</sup>

It is the quiet power of His person which produces in certain sinners "profound penitence and therewith the courage to trust Him."<sup>22</sup>

It is to be noticed that our redemption is, according to this teacher, "*by an experience of the power of Jesus,*" by having "*discovered in Him that one thing which awakens pure love and pure fear in us, or which has complete sway over our souls.*" It is to be noticed that "our redemption by this experience . . . always depends upon whether we ourselves desire deliverance from sin."

From these words it appears that in Herrmann's view salvation is synergistic, that God and man must work it

<sup>21</sup> Pp. 115f.

<sup>22</sup> Pp. 117f.

out together even in its initial stages. If he be correct, then the natural man cannot be spiritually dead, and Paul's talk of man's being dead in trespasses and in sins is an exaggeration; and Christ's teaching about the necessity of being born again, must be incorrect.

From these words it appears also that, in Herrmann's view, if the natural man needs regeneration, that regeneration must be by moral suasion. The Biblical view is that regeneration is by recreation. Once more it is clear from these words that Herrmann needs to make clear for himself the Biblical distinctions between regeneration, justification, and sanctification and between these graces and their fruits.

The confusion into which he frequently falls is almost inevitable unless he make and keep clearly before him these distinctions. That he cannot reach these distinctions merely by the use of his experience of the power of the person Jesus Christ is proof that he has endeavored the impracticable in trying to deduce the doctrines of the Christian religion out of this "experience of the power of the person Jesus."

Herrmann teaches that the forgiveness of sins may be obtained through the power of the person of Jesus; not by His satisfying divine justice but simply by His showing the infinitely loving character of God. He points to 2 Cor. v.18, "And all things are of God, Who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ," and asserts that the "work of Jesus is not to reconcile God, but the result of God's own working in order to reconcile sinners," that, in the second place, "it is a fundamental conception of Biblical piety that God's goodness comes to meet every sinner who would return to Him. . . . For Jesus Himself it must have been inconceivable that His work was necessary to effect a change in God's attitude to sinners."

Dr. Charles Hodge takes a much more tenable view of 2 Cor. v.18.

To reconcile is to remove enmity between parties at variance with each

other. In this case God is the reconciler. Man never makes reconciliation. It is what he experiences or embraces, not what he does. The enmity between God and man, the barrier which separated them is removed by the act of God. This is plain (1) Because it is said to be effected by Jesus Christ, that is, by His death. The death of Christ, however, is always represented as reconciling us to God as a sacrifice; the design and nature of sacrifice are to propitiate and not to reform. (2) In the parallel passage, Romans v. 9-10, "Being reconciled by the death of His son," is interchanged as equivalent with "being justified by His blood," which proves that the reconciliation intended consists in the satisfaction of the divine justice by the sacrifice of Christ. In this case our reconciliation to God is made the source and cause of our new creation, i.e., of our regeneration and holiness. God's reconciliation to us must precede our reconciliation to Him. This is the great Bible doctrine.<sup>23</sup>

According to Herrmann the willing surrender of His life to death by powers of evil was the means required by God of Jesus that He might bring help to sinful man, and the love of God displayed in this infinitely tender way brings at least some persons to Jesus in deep penitence. But unless the suffering of Jesus can be explained as demanded in justice of Him as the sinner's substitute, then God appears to be an unjust God.

Herrmann teaches in a sort of hazy fashion that "the power of the person of Jesus Christ" in working faith in us also works belief in Christ's resurrection from the dead and in His present exalted Lordship; both which teachings he holds are confirmed by the apostolic traditions. Here again he surrenders a strong historical position; he cannot logically establish the position he has chosen.

Herrmann has in his book a caption: "The Eternal Election of the Faithful." He says "that the believer knows himself to be eternally elected as indicated by Paul" (Rom. viii. 28-30). He follows this pertinent citation with remarks that weaken—though intended to strengthen the position. He guards against his being misunderstood by saying, "On the other hand, the doctrine of a double predestination which, following Rom. ix-xi, Luther and Calvin developed even more crudely than Augustine, has no basis in faith,

<sup>23</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on II Corinthians*, in loco.

but is an attempt to solve a problem which does not arise from faith and for which faith has no solution." <sup>24</sup>

This is serious reflection on the Word of God as well as on three great uninspired thinkers. It is followed by a paragraph of confusion and assumption as to what Scripture is, and as to his ability to interpret it:

But the fact that the Bible contains such a development of thought as we find preeminently in Romans ix. 20-23 should also subserve our salvation, if it brings us to the question whether we are prepared to follow Scripture even in that which we can not understand to be a notion rooted in our faith. If we decide to do this, we are treating the Bible as a law book which requires from us external obedience. This is what the Roman church does. This is its loyalty to Scripture. But in reality this marks a falling away from the fundamental idea of Scripture; for a faith that repudiates such a law is thereby denied to be faith. There could be no grosser misuse of Scripture than this, for Scripture was given us for the awakening of faith, and so only is it a means to our salvation.<sup>25</sup>

Surely there is a great want of clarity of thought here. "Are we prepared to follow Scripture even in that which we cannot understand to be a notion rooted in our faith?" he asks. He leaves us to suppose that he means by faith, confidence or trust in God produced in us by the power of the person of Jesus. Certainly John Smith may not be able to see that trust in God would alone insure our belief in the vital union of believers and Christ, and that God may yet through inspired men teach us that such a union is possible.

We suppose Professor Herrmann would say, that there is no infallible teaching unless it be in his school! He has no warrant for most of his teaching save his subjective view. The Bible has a certain value, but a very limited value to him. He can not frame a convincing argument because his premises are too exclusively subjective.

If he wanted to make a stand for Christianity, he should have given himself to a vindication of the historical trustworthiness of the Bible, or a part of it. Instead he has built a fabric of dreams.

False philosophies, hostile to the supernatural, turned

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<sup>24</sup> P. 134.

<sup>25</sup> P. 134.



rational critics into rationalistic, destructive critics. The destructive critics have terrorized schools of Christians here and there who would hold "Christianity" with the heart whether, or not, they could hold it with the head. One such school is that of the Ritschlians. For this school Herrmann has spoken. Necessarily he has shown but little of the real content of Christianity. Instead of this poor defense of "Christianity" or stand for what the Ritschlian thought he could hold, he should have gone back to the root of the matter, overthrown the false philosophy, trampled down the *false* higher criticism (there is, of course, a perfectly legitimate higher criticism), vindicated a historically trustworthy supernatural revelation of truth; and drawn the truth revealed in our Holy Scriptures forth into a system. A system so constructed, would probably be very like that drawn out by the great reformers; but notwithstanding its lack of amazing novelty, would have blessed the world as Ritschlianism never can.

Herrmann's Theology cannot be much in the way of theology. It has too little materials with which to build a theology—only what faith, confidence in God, gives. He may give the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments nominal places as quarries for materials, but before his subjective view the Scriptures are clipped away, or are metamorphosed until their authors would not recognize them. He rejects the doctrine of the Trinity found alike in the Romish, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant churches and in the Scriptures. He claims to hold an economic Trinity. He knows nothing of three personalities of the Godhead existing contemporaneously. God, he thinks, can function in three different ways and so functioning can be described as threefold. He holds that the preexistence of Christ taught by John, by Paul, and by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is merely the subjective conception of those worthies. He never seems to reflect that what they teach about those religious concepts which he shares with them may be merely subjective. He seems to have held with Ritschl, his master,

that the only real preexistence of Christ was in the foreknowledge and predestination of God. He teaches that man comes into existence without sin, that he becomes universally sinful owing to teaching and example; that he can justify himself by enrolling in the body of Christ, subjectively; but that what God is, what Christ, what the resurrection is, are of small importance; that Christianity is true if it corresponds to the needs of men and they believe it; that the feeling of personal worth demands that the world be worthy of it, etc., etc.

Is this Christianity or is it, even if ingenious, nevertheless a beggar's basket of dreams, perversions of Scripture, and empty assertions?

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