
A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

When the statement became popular at the time of the War that Christianity had failed, Mr. Chesterton replied that the actual truth was that it had been found difficult and not tried. Does not this mean that it is only when faith is tried in difficulties, when, in fact, it is tried out to the point of a Cross, that we become sure of its real power? For only thus do we realize that it succeeds.

If we are to keep our convictions we must live them, and there are many occasions to give us opportunity. There is, for instance, the way of love and sympathy with the suffering of others. It would have been so easy for Jesus to turn aside, to have become absorbed in His own trouble, to shut away His heart; but everywhere He went He lifted up the Son of Man. He made them aware, through that sympathy of His, of a power which was able to heal and redeem. But there also He renewed His own inner conviction that He was the Son of God. And they who give themselves, as He gave, make a great discovery. They discover in that love which takes them out of themselves a power which can save the world. They may not find the solution of the problem of evil, but they find something better: a fellowship with One who can redeem from evil and overcome it. Think, too, of the way of love in forgiveness of others. That is where the way of the Cross opens up in most of us. The biggest challenge Christ threw out to the world is in the call to love our enemies, and He assures us that that kind of forgiving love is the true secret of overcoming them, because it turns them into friends. It is just there that the challenge to the conviction that Christ is Lord comes home to us in practical life, but that conviction will never become a reality unless we try the way of love; then we know. It may be that when we try that way we shall fail to begin with, as He failed. But we must be ready to carry our convictions out to the point of suffering? And sooner or later the victory is with love.[1]

[1] J. Reid, *In Touch with Christ*, 247.

Dogma and Spirit.

By Professor William Fulton, B.Sc., D.D., The University, Glasgow.

The title of this article was the title of a theological dissertation which I read long ago, at a time when my critical interest in the problems of theology was awakening, and which influenced my mind considerably. The author was Horace Bushnell, a name still familiar to many besides theologians by profession as that of a New England divine who 'flourished' about the middle of last century. A man of deep and intense spirituality, and a progressive Christian thinker, he wielded an influence upon the preachers of his generation at least comparable to that wielded a little later in the century, on this side of the Atlantic, by Frederick William Robertson. And not only upon preachers, and not only on this side of the Atlantic: it was a Scottish physician that placed in my hands the dissertation aforesaid, on 'Dogma and Spirit,' and he had made a theological companion of Bushnell for many years.

The Limitations of Dogma.

Dogma, in the general sense of the term, is formulated opinion or logical statement of conviction. In the particular sense in which it is here used, it is formulated opinion, logical statement of conviction, concerning the matters of religion, or —more specifically—concerning the matters of the Christian religion. The dogmas of religion seek to state or formulate the truths disclosed in religious experience, and the dogmas of the Christian religion the truths disclosed in Christian experience, just as, for example, the dogmas of physical science seek to state or formulate the truths disclosed in sense-perception.

Now the formulation of religious dogma is necessarily imperfect. For it has often been observed (Dr. John Caird, for instance, observes it in relation to theology) that language is an inadequate vehicle of spiritual ideas and impressions. It conveys spiritual things by things of sense. It interprets the world of unseen reality by means of the world that is seen. By image and symbol, analogy and metaphor, it seeks to embody the formless mysteries without us and within. The result is a number of comparatively dull propositions at the best, to represent the glowing inspirations of the Spirit; a result even more apparent

when the attempted representation is in the precise formulas of logical speech, as in the case of the dogmatic effort. While the poet or the prophet may catch living sparks of the fire that cometh down from heaven, the dogmatic thinker may well be content if he may secure still smouldering embers. Religion, to change the figure, cannot be crushed into the moulds of the logical understanding without damage to its fulness; it cannot be laid upon a rigid, logical framework, as on a Procrustean bed, without suffering mutilation, diminution, and loss.

Some theologians are so impressed with this truth of the limitations of dogma, and at the same time so distrustful of the attempt of philosophy to overcome these limitations, that for a dogmatic theology they would substitute what has been called a symbolical theology. Symbol, as compared with dogma, accentuates the difference of which I have been speaking, namely, between the original religious experience and the ideas through which it is expressed. It is fully conscious that it expresses religious experience by means of image and figure, that it blends imagination with thought, as, for example, when it looks upon God as a Father. And not only would it abandon the dogma; it holds that a figurative idea like that of the Fatherhood of God may be a better centre and support of religious feeling and experience than may be furnished by 'pure thought,' as more readily conveying the depth and fulness of the relation of the Supreme Spirit to finite spirits. This plea is reinforced by the fact that the theology of the Bible is symbolical rather than dogmatic in character, and that it is on the theology of the Bible rather than on dogmatic theology, whether old or new, that the modern preacher nourishes his soul and the souls of his hearers. Nor is it to be forgotten that the language of devotion is the language not of dogma but of symbol.

Undoubtedly, the symbol has its place in religion and theology. But we contend that the dogma, despite its limitations and the difficulty of overcoming them, has also its place and uses. We need not stamp the legend of the Preacher upon the dogmatic effort and declare it vanity. The consideration that language, and more especially the language of logical thought, is an inadequate vehicle of spiritual truth may be pressed too far. It is to anticipate by a little what follows, but let me at this point summon a distinguished contemporary scientist to the support of the dogmatician: 'Progress in truth,' says Dr. A. N. Whitehead, '—truth of science and truth of religion—is mainly a progress in the framing of concepts, in discarding artificial abstractions or partial metaphors, and in evolving notions which strike more deeply into the root of reality.'

The Justification of Dogma.

Let us now pass from the consideration of the limitations of dogma, of which the distinction between dogma and spirit is a reminder, to the consideration of its uses; in other words, let us consider the question of the justification of dogma.

In the first place, a dogmatic theology may exercise a *regulative* function. The reduction of religious ideas and impressions to terms of logical and rational thought serves to check the flights and fantasies of an over-wrought emotionalism, to restrain the outbursts of extravagant fanaticism, of blind enthusiasm. Yet this is not said in wholesale disparagement of those who have been collectively named the 'School of the Spirit,'—of Montanists, Anabaptists, Quakers, the followers of Swedenborg or Edward Irving, and all who claim possession of the 'inner light,' whereby truths latent in the historical revelation, or truths unrevealed in it, are discovered to their hearts and minds. We have learned in this modern time, through Schleiermacher and his successors, how very important in theology is the subjective factor; indeed we have learned it so well that our theology actually tends nowadays to be subjective and narrowly empirical. Whence such a reaction as is discernible in Switzerland and Germany at the present hour, in the Neo-Calvinistic movement led by Karl Barth, Gogarten, and others.

In the second place, besides exercising a regulative and controlling function, a dogmatic theology possesses an *educative* value, as formulating spiritual truth in terms of the common life, and so offering to the 'natural man' some points of contact with the deepest religious experience. Without a dogmatic theology it would be difficult, in any society that has risen well above the stage of primitive culture, to secure continuity of religious custom and belief. The beginnings of Christian dogma were, in fact, largely due to the necessity, or at any rate desirability, of providing a formal creed or confession of faith for converts before baptism, such as was originally the so-called Apostles' Creed.

In the third place, a dogmatic theology serves also an *apologetic* end, as expounding, or rather when it expounds, the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith in the light of, and with reference

to, modern thought and knowledge. In so doing, it helps to vindicate Christian truth against scepticism and unbelief. Indeed I often think that the best defence of our religion is the positive and precise statement of it, such as the dogmatic attempts to give. Is it not significant in this connexion that our text-books of Christian Apologetics usually contain little that may not be found in a good text-book on Christian Dogmatics? The usual modern Prolegomena to Dogmatics, namely, discussions of the Nature and Truth of Religion, and of the Nature and Truth of Christianity, virtually comprise all that is included in the discipline of Apologetics.

But in the fourth place, the best justification of a dogmatic theology is simply this: as rational beings we try to set forth our deepest thoughts and experiences in the logical terms of reason. 'Human nature,' it has been said, 'craves to be both religious and rational.' And though we may not hope, as already allowed, to present the universe of religion within the limits of a dogmatic exposition, we should not lightly give up the attempt. Even Herbert Spencer, for all his agnostic philosophy, admitted that the sphere occupied by religious creeds (which form the climax of the dogmatic activity) could never become an 'unfilled sphere'; and in the well-known conclusion to his *Autobiography* he confesses to a sympathy with religious creeds based on community of need, feeling—as he says—that dissent from them results from inability to accept the solutions offered joined with the wish that solutions could be found.

It reminds us of Dr. Edward Caird's picture of men 'whose very life is in religious ideas,' but who, for want of a convincing dogmatic presentation or embodiment of them, 'dwell, as it were, in a world of eclipse and paralysis, neither able to find a faith nor to do without one'; and of Sir Henry Jones's characteristic comment, reflecting the buoyancy of his own confidence in reason, that such men have not discovered that 'the experience which condemns the creeds contains the elements, were they but comprehended, of a better faith.'

It was also a far different attitude from Herbert Spencer's that Bushnell adopted. Approaching the great doctrines of the Church in the fulness of vital conviction, he declared himself ready to accept all the creeds and confessions that might be set before him—for the sake of the truths which they struggle to express, and in expectation of a time when language shall be so perfected as to mirror forth in universal symbolism the universal truth of God. Be that as it may, it would appear that dogma is sure of its place in the effort of human thought, mysterious and profound as are the truths of religion, shallow and hard the forms into which they must needs be cast.

Professor Flint used to tell his students in Edinburgh University that the main part of their work at the Divinity Hall should be to arrive at a system of dogmatic theology. They were not justified, he said, in setting up as religious teachers or preachers if they possessed only superficial, disconnected, discordant, and fragmentary religious impressions and ideas. It seems to me that Professor Flint was in the right, unpopular as such a contention may be at this juncture. The Christian preacher should be the last to claim what George Eliot once whimsically called 'the right of the individual to general haziness.' The Christian religion may indeed, as Professor Flint's distinguished successor has remarked, continue to do its work of reconciliation and renewal in despite of a chaos of crude or questionable theology, but it can hardly be gainsaid that the Christian preacher should have as firm a grasp as possible of theological truth, not merely in its parts, but also as a whole. I do not say that his preaching should usually be dogmatic, *i.e.* doctrinal, in form or even in matter; what I say is that it should be securely based, wherever possible, upon a coherent and consistent interpretation of religious faith and experience. Otherwise, it cannot but lose in power and convincing quality. And so, to borrow a metaphor, I would ask the young preacher to regard his theology not as so much deck cargo to be jettisoned when the ship puts out to sea, but as the ballast which steadies the ship in the stormy weather.

The Authority of Dogma.

So far the limitations and the uses or justification of dogma, and now some remarks on the authority of dogma. Till now I have been using the word 'dogma' in the somewhat narrow sense of formulated conviction regarding the Christian religion, but it is not the narrowest sense of the word. Dogma commonly carries with it the notion of churchly authority. If the function of authority is to bear witness to spiritual experience, then we need have no quarrel with the *potestas dogmatica* of the Church. But if the function of authority is to compel assent or to override reason, then we may hardly avoid a quarrel with it.

It may not have been altogether clear at the Reformation, but it is abundantly clear now, that the spirit of submission to ecclesiastical doctrine

as such is alien to the true genius of Protestantism. What Dr. Rendel Harris has remarked apropos of the dispute between the traditionalist and the historian is also applicable to the clash between the principles of authority and freedom: the trouble begins when rights are claimed over the solid ground of truth, merely on the presumption of a prior occupation of the soil, and the hereditary plea as expressed by Caliban:

'This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother.'

Already, indeed, in the Westminster Confession the Church's dogmatic authority is conceived in a moderate sense, being recognized as spiritual rather than legal in form; but modern Protestantism is become still more conscious than was the Protestantism of the Reformation era of the distinction in this context between the spiritual and the legal, and is not inclined to grant the claim of finality, of churchly authority *per se* binding, so commonly made for itself by the dogma or the dogmatic scheme. It is not that, according to modern Protestantism, the deeper principles or values which the creeds were designed to express have changed, but that our conception of them has changed, or is in process of change. Accordingly, dogmatics is to be viewed not as a closed system of thought but as a progressive discipline, and as such liable to revision and restatement with the increase of knowledge. Its authority is the authority, not of its original mental cadres, but of the abiding spiritual truths it enshrines or enwraps. The casket is not to be mistaken for the gem, the shell for the kernel. The image and superscription are not the coin itself.

It must sometimes even be hard for the truth to know itself when couched in logical form. Take, for example, that fundamental principle of the Protestant Church, the doctrine of justification by faith. It is a passionate expression of the unquestionable fact that the best works of man cannot stand the scrutiny of a holy God. All generous minds at least would acknowledge this, but, as Froude remarked, when reduced to formulas of theological pedantry, as it was in the age of the Protestant scholasticism, when technicalized into imputed righteousness, grace resistible and grace irresistible, grace of congruity and grace of condignity, the theory becomes dead, dry, infertile, even incredible. What is true to conscience and imaginative feeling is apt to become a stone of stumbling when made into a scheme of salvation.

But, fortunately, the tendency of ecclesiastical doctrine to magnify itself and to usurp the authority of *religio vitæ* is corrected from time to time. The Christian Church was itself born of the conflict between spirit and dogma; and ever and again in the course of Christian history the self-same conflict has been renewed; and it looks as though in our time the spiritual life which Christ gifted to the world must again throw off the forms in which it has been enwrapped and take to itself fresh form and expression.

Does not Professor Whitehead put the plea for revision and restatement of doctrine in arresting language? Reminding us that by formulation in precise dogmas the simplicity of inspiration disengages itself from particular experience, and may thus be enabled to face the transformations of history, he adds these significant words: 'A system of dogmas may be the ark within which the Church floats safely down the flood-tide of history. But the Church will perish unless it opens its window and lets out the dove to search for an olive branch. Sometimes even it will do well to disembark on Mount Ararat and build a new altar to the divine Spirit.'

'Creeds pass, rites change, no altar standeth whole.'

And there are signs in plenty that our preachers and theologians hold the free or spiritual conception of dogmatic authority herein implied. Their allegiance, as Bishop Barnes has phrased it, is to a 'living power' and not to a 'coercive mechanism of formula and system.' They realize that doctrinal thought must be subject to change and development with the expanding religious and cultural life of mankind. As my old teacher, Dr. William Hastie, used to declare in his eloquent prophetic way, 'Theology is not so prone as she once was to linger on the confines of the mediæval twilight, nor so hesitant to open her dream-bound eyelids in the fuller light of the new dawn; she hears the wondrous voices that ring in the melodies of the morning, and all nature calling her to larger and clearer vision; she sees all true science and all true history coming to her again and tendering to her faithful service, asking only for the joy of freedom and the one constraint of love.'

Yes, although the new creative spirit has been present and active all through the history of dogma (Mr. R. L. Poole assures us that the life of Christendom was never so confined within the hard shell of its dogmatic system that there was no room left for individual liberty of opinion), yet one has the feeling that we are now entering upon what will prove to be a great and memorable era of reconstruction. In the years lying before us should be

garnered the results of the new history and psychology of religion, of the new literary and historical methods as applied to the study of Church doctrine, of the new knowledge of the universe and of human life and its conditions which the natural sciences have been imparting. The ground will thus be prepared for the new dogmatic constructions, the new theological syntheses, which our age seems to demand. The dove must be sent out to search for an olive branch. A new altar even may have to be built to the divine Spirit.

The Reconstruction of Dogma.

How then shall we characterize the theology of the future? Is it not clear, in the first place, that it will be on comparatively *simple* lines? It is simplification and not further elaboration of dogma that we want. To be truly scientific the new constructive or synthetic effort need not be elaborate. We may be confident, at least, that no modern theologian in his senses would dare, like John Gerhard in the heyday of the Lutheran scholasticism, to construct a dogmatic system in nine quarto volumes! We have learned the lesson impressed by Matthew Arnold on his contemporaries, in words that have long possessed my mind, that the licence of affirmation about God and His proceedings in which the religious world indulge is more and more met by the demand for verification.

One way of simplification that appeals to many is through abandonment so far as possible of speculation, and concentration on the ground of Christian experience. For example, we may 'throw out our minds,' as it has been phrased, towards such a transcendent dogma as that of the pre-existence of Christ, but we should realize that we may only 'throw out our minds' towards it.

In the second place—it is part of the same thought of the simplicity of the new construction—theology will be more and more expounded in the *unsectarian* interest. No doubt there has been in recent years a good deal of what might be termed intra-Christian apologetic, in which traditionalist and modernist, sacramentarian (or shall we say sacramentalist?) and evangelical, maintain as against each other their respective positions. But a school of thought is not a Church; and what I would say under this head is that the Churches are becoming more concerned to discover the things in which they agree than those in which they differ. It is enough to cite in these columns the names of Stockholm and Lausanne. The polemic is being transformed into an eirenic. A wave of toleration and mutual understanding is passing over us, and in it all our minor differences will be submerged. A few belated voices, no doubt, will uphold the old battle-cries of sectarian strife, but to them our *post bellum* world will not listen.

Said the late Bishop Brent, at the opening of the Lausanne Conference: 'We are living in a world that has lost its way. Religion as summed up in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom can alone hope to rescue it. It must be, as God's voice has warned us from the beginning, and our own experience has tragically confirmed, unified religion.'

In Scotland a great step towards unified religion was taken on 24th May last, when the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church decided with practical unanimity for Church Union. If the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland forecasted truly in his Closing Address, soon after the actual completion of union a movement towards doctrinal reform will be instituted. If and when such a movement is instituted and attains its goal, the restatement of faith which will result will be found to be at once simple and unsectarian.

In the third place, the theology of the future will not only be simple and unsectarian, it will be formulated largely in terms of the *personal*, which is the moral and spiritual, life. In the old dogmatic systems, which rested on the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, the relationship between the divine and the human was conceived in abstract, metaphysical, and legal terms. In the newer formulations and interpretations, which rest upon the modern philosophy deriving from Kant, the relationship between the divine and the human tends to be personalized and so kept nearer to the realities of the religious experience. In the age when Christian theology was founded—to adduce a more definite instance—God was thought of, partly under the influence of Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism, as far separated from the evil material world in which man has his habitation, and only modern reflective thought—so it would appear—enables us to speak of Him with some show of reason as truly a Father of spirits, having His life in and through a world-order and a kingdom of selves. And when all is said, this insistence on the personal in the dogmatic presentation is only a return, if by the way of philosophical reflection, to the Biblical conception of divine and human relationships.

Lastly, the new theological synthesis will be more *Christian*. The distinction and pre-eminence of Christianity is its possession of the historic Christ, and in the remoulding of the traditional

theology the historic Christ will be acknowledged as the heart and centre of the doctrinal system. Towards Him all the rays of spiritual light will be seen to converge; from Him again all the subsequent light will be seen to radiate. In thus giving the rightful, central place to Him in the system of doctrine we shall learn to mediate between the so-called 'liberalism' which reduces Christianity to the religion *of* Jesus, and the so-called 'idealism' which sublimates Christianity into a religion *about* Jesus. Any sound reconstruction of our religion will combine both elements of the historical revelation, namely, the revelation in the Jesus of history, and the revelation in the Christ of experience. This the traditional theology has always done according to its lights; but while it has faithfully interpreted the Christ of experience, it has been unsuccessful in presenting within its logical formulas the gracious divine-human figure of the Jesus of history.

For the rest, the recasting of dogma must wait for a time when faith is ardent, when religious experience is intense and vital; a time of revival, when the Spirit breathes into the dry bones that they may live; a time of uplift and enthusiasm, when the great tides sweep in from the ocean, to surge and break upon the shore. The time may be nearer than we think. It is our hope and confidence that out of the present travail of the nations there shall yet come forth a new and wondrous life, strong, robust, of elemental energy, which shall fill the whole world, not of religion only, but of literature and of art, of science and philosophy, with new and fresh creations.

The Original Position of Acts xiv. 3.

By the Reverend Professor J. Hugh Michael, M.A., Victoria University, Toronto.

One cannot read the story of the visit of Paul and Barnabas to Iconium in the opening verses of the fourteenth chapter of Acts without being pulled up by a seeming lack of proper sequence in the thought. V.^{3} does not come naturally after v.^{2}. This is how these two verses run in the R.V.: 'But the Jews that were disobedient stirred up the souls of the Gentiles, and made them evil affected against the brethren. (3) Long time therefore they tarried *there* speaking boldly in the Lord, which bare witness unto the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.' V.^{2} does not seem to furnish a natural reason for the long stay described in v.^{3}. If v.^{3} is in its right place we should have expected it to open with 'yet,' not with 'therefore.' Weymouth, indeed, has 'yet' in his rendering, but there is no authority whatsoever for that reading.

An attempt is made by Knowling (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. ii. p. 302) to show that the seeming inconsequence is not as serious as it appears. 'As the text stands,' he writes, 'it is quite possible to suppose that the effect of the preaching in the synagogue would be twofold, v.^{2} thus answering to the last clause of v.^{1}, and that the disciples continued to speak boldly, encouraged by success on the one hand, and undeterred by opposition on the other, the consequence being that the division in the city was still further intensified!' This, doubtless, is a possible interpretation, but it does not succeed in removing the feeling that v.^{3} was not intended to come immediately after v.^{2}. Knowling refers to Blass's view that the aorists, which are rendered 'stirred up' and 'made (them) evil affected' in v.^{2}, show that the disaffected Jews actually succeeded in their attempts to influence the Gentiles; and if we are to read so much into these aorists—and there is no obvious reason for refusing to do so—it is most improbable that the Apostles would have been able to continue their ministry in Iconium.

Many attempts have been made to remove the difficulty presented by the ordinary text:

(*a*) Ramsay would just eliminate v.^{3}. But merely to remove the verse leaves us wondering where it came from, and how it found its way into the text. Ramsay offers no explanation of its presence. Nor can the solitary argument adduced by him in support of his view that v.^{3} is an early gloss be regarded as at all convincing. The verse speaks of the Lord 'granting signs and wonders to be done' by the hands of Paul and Barnabas; but Ramsay holds that the emphasis laid by the historian on the healing of the cripple