

NATURE AND CONCEPT OF THEOLOGY.

(De Natura et Constitutione Theologiae.)

Introduction to Sacred Theology.

(Prolegomena.)

1. THE SCRIPTURAL VIEWPOINT OF THE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIAN.

Owing to the diverse views and tendencies prevailing among theologians today, it is necessary for the Christian theologian, before presenting to his readers his dogmatic treatise, to declare in clear and unmistakable terms from which viewpoint it has been written.

The viewpoint of the present-day modernistic theologian is that truth must be determined by human reason in the light of scientific research. The theological Liberalist therefore does not recognize Holy Scripture as the source and norm of faith, but holds that this ancient standard of Christian doctrine has been superseded by the standards of reason and philosophy which he himself has established. From this viewpoint his dogmatic treatise is written, and since this viewpoint is anti-Scriptural and unchristian, it follows that his whole theology is rationalistic, naturalistic, and diametrically opposed to the Word of God.

The viewpoint of the Roman Catholic theologian is that truth must be determined by both Holy Scripture and the "infallible" traditions of the Church as these are formally set forth in the papal decretals and decisions. Thus he accepts as a source and norm of faith, in addition to Holy Scripture (to which he falsely adds the Apocrypha), something that is foreign and even opposed to Holy Scripture and ascribes to it the same authority as to the Word of God. This erroneous viewpoint proves the antichristian character of papistical theology; for it, too, is in direct opposition to Holy Scripture.

The viewpoint of the modern rationalizing Protestant theologian is that, while Holy Scripture is indeed a "divine-human record of revealed truths," which contains the doctrines that Christians must believe for their salvation, these saving truths must be determined, not by any authoritative statement of the Scriptures, but rather by the Christian "faith-consciousness" or the "regenerate and sanctified mind" or the "Christian experience" of the theologian (das

christliche Glaubensbewusstsein, das wiedergeborene Ich, das christliche Erlebnis). In his opinion not the objective statement of Holy Scripture, but rather the "sanctified selfconsciousness of the dogmatizing subject" (das fromme Setztbewusstsein des dogmatisierenden Subjekts) is in the last analysis the norm which decides what is divine truth and what is not. Modern rationalistic theology is therefore a movement away from Holy Scripture (eine Los-von-der-Schrift-Bewegung) to a source and norm of faith established by man himself. This movement may differ in degree, but is always the same in kind. It is basically anti-Scriptural and has its source in the unbelief of the corrupt flesh. The viewpoint of the modern rationalistic theologian must therefore likewise be rejected as unchristian and opposed to Holy Scripture.

The viewpoint from which the present dogmatic treatise is written is that Holy Scripture is the only source and norm of Christian faith and life, for the simple reason that the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, which is absolutely infallible and inerrant, both as a whole and in each individual passage. Hence, whenever it speaks on any point of doctrine or life, the matter is fully decided. *Scriptura locuta, res decisa est*. This viewpoint identifies Holy Scripture with the Word of God; its claim is, not merely that the Bible contains the Word of God, but that it is, fully and absolutely, in all its parts, the Word of God. The fact that this viewpoint is the only correct one is proved by the statements and the attitude of both Christ and His inspired apostles. Our divine Savior accepted no other norm than Holy Scripture, and He invariably rejected the traditions of the Pharisees and the "reasonings" of the Sadducees. When He declared His divine doctrines and refuted errors, He constantly based His teachings on the immovable foundation of the written Word of God. Thus at the beginning of His ministry He met the temptations of Satan with the emphatic assertion "It is written," Matt. 4,4, and He adhered to this principle throughout His ministry. Cp. John 5, 39; Matt. 5,17-19; John 8, 31. 32; etc.

Also the apostles regarded Holy Scripture, including their own inspired teachings, both oral and written, as the sole source and norm of faith. Cf. Gal. 1, 8; 2 Tim. 3,15-17; Titus 1, 9; 1 Cor. 14, 37; 2 Pet. 1, 19-21; etc. When in the age of the Reformation the Bible was restored to its rightful place as the sole authority of the Christian faith, Luther once more proclaimed it to be "the fountain of all wisdom." (St. Louis Ed., I, 1289 ff.) The great Reformer declared:

"You must believe that God Himself speaks in the Bible, and your attitude must be in accordance with that belief." (III, 21.) Those who, like the scholastic theologians, deviated from the Word of God and based their views and doctrines on the ground of reason or philosophy, were branded "monsters" (portenta) by Luther. The claim of modern rationalistic theologians that Luther's attitude with regard to the authority of Holy Scripture was "rather free" (eine freiere Stellung) is disproved by his own clear and emphatic statements to the contrary. And like Luther all true Christian theologians have at all times maintained that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and therefore the only source and norm of Christian faith, - a truth which they stoutly upheld against all gainsayers.

Modern rationalistic theologians declare that they cannot identify Holy Scripture with the Word of God or accept it as the sole norm of faith. They aver that their sense of actuality (Wirklichkeitssinn) does not permit them to do so, but instead demands another norm outside and beyond Holy Scripture, for example, their "Christian consciousness," their "Christian experience," and the like. In reality, however, this claim only goes to prove how gravely they are deceiving themselves; for the knowledge of divine truth can be gained only from the Word of God. The Christian faith therefore can be based solely upon God's Word. Our divine Lord states emphatically that we shall know the truth only if we continue in His Word as proclaimed by Himself and by His inspired prophets and apostles, John 8, 31. 32; 17,20; Eph. 2,20.

How truly Christ has spoken the history of the Christian Church amply shows; for all theologians who at any time have rejected Holy Scripture as the sole norm of faith have invariably denied the specific Christian doctrines, such as the vicarious atonement of Christ, justification by grace through faith, etc. (Cf. Dr. F. Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, Vol. I, 4 ff.) Thus Hofmann, the father of modern subjective theology (Ich theologie), denied Christ's vicarious satisfaction and taught the pagan theology of salvation without the redemptive work of Christ. It is, moreover, proved by the confusion of doctrine (Lehrverwirrung) which has resulted whenever the principle that Holy Scripture is the sole authority in religion has been either ignored or surrendered. This confusion in doctrine prevails whenever norms different from Holy Scripture are accepted as the basis of Christian doctrine; for

subjective theology can never supply the Christian Church with a true and certain basis of faith. Without Holy Scripture as the sole source and standard of faith the Church is without any foundation whatsoever on which it can rest its faith; it finds itself in a maelstrom of conflicting subjective views, all of which are fatal to the Christian faith.

2. OF RELIGION IN GENERAL.

The etymology of the term religion is still a matter of controversy. The Lutheran dogmatician Hollaz writes: "Some suppose the term religion to be derived from religare (Lactantius), others from relegere (Cicero). According to the former derivation, religion signifies the obligation rightly to worship God or something which imposes upon man obligations and duties. According to the latter etymology, religion is diligent attention to those things which pertain to the worship of God. The former derivation is more generally received." (Doctr. Theol., p. 21.) The Lutheran dogmatician Quenstedt cites as synonyms of religion the Greek terms *dgrjoxeia*, Jas. 1, 26; *evaefieia*, 1 Tim. 4, 8; *ioyixrj iargsia*, Rom. 12,1. However, none of these terms is really synonymous with religion, although each designates and emphasizes a particular phase of it. True religion is communion with the true God through faith in Jesus Christ; it is nothing more and nothing less. Still the controversy concerning the etymological meaning of religion need not trouble us, since in the final analysis the denotation of a word does not depend on its etymological derivation, but rather on its usage (*usus loquendi*).

However, from the common usage of the term religion we can derive no satisfactory definition of religion if we desire to include both the Christian religion and the non-Christian religions. While both Christians and non-Christians employ the term religion, each of these groups connects with it its own specific concepts and meanings, and, as we shall see, these are contradictory. The matter deserves careful attention.

Investigation shows that all heathen religions stand in direct opposition to the Christian religion. They are all, without exception, religions of the Law. To the heathen, religion means the earnest endeavor of men to reconcile the deities by their own efforts or works, such as worship, sacrifices, moral conduct, asceticism, etc. In this respect all non-Christian religions agree, no matter how

much they may differ in individual details. Nor can we expect anything else; for the heathen by nature do not know the Gospel (1 Cor. 2,6-10: "We speak . . . the hidden wisdom, . . . which none of the princes of this world knew"), but only the divine Law, namely, so far as this is written in their hearts. Hence all their religious thoughts move within the sphere of the Law, so that from beginning to end their religions are, and indeed must be, religions of the Law.

Christians, on the contrary, believe true religion to consist in the very opposite. To Christians, religion means true faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or in the gracious message, revealed in Holy Scripture, that a perfect reconciliation has been effected between God and man through the vicarious atonement (*satisfactio vicaria*) of the divine-human Christ, the Redeemer of the world. Hence religion in the true sense of the term may be ascribed only to believers in Christ Jesus. And that is precisely what God's Word teaches on this point. True religion, according to God's Word, is communion with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus St. Paul testifies: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the Law," Gal. 2,16.

Whenever theologians or entire denominations within external Christendom deny the cardinal doctrine of justification by grace, through faith in Christ, either in whole or in part, these individuals or church-bodies surrender the Christian conception of religion and adopt the pagan view. They are apostates from the Christian faith, as St. Paul declares: "Christ is become of no effect unto you whosoever of you are justified by the Law; ye are fallen from grace," Gal. 5,4. In short, the doctrine of salvation by faith and that of salvation by works are opposites (*opposita*), which necessarily exclude each other, so that, if any one trusts in his works for salvation, he no longer in deed and truth professes the Christian religion.

The basic difference between the Christian religion and all other so-called religions has been aptly pointed out by Prof. Mai Mueller of Oxford University, who writes: "In the discharge of my duties for forty years as professor of Sanskrit in the University of Oxford I have devoted as much time as any man living to the study of the sacred books of the East, and I have found the one