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Ritschl's Theology

"Ritschlianism is the most highly developed form that theological empiricism has yet taken."¹) This is the claim of the former dean of the Methodist Boston University School of Theology, Professor Knudson. The majority of liberal theologians hail Ritschl as their champion, because the empirical method is the formal principle, the *principium cognoscendi*, of American liberal theology.²) Three German theologians are largely responsible for the wide acceptance of the empirical method in modern theology: Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Troeltsch. Schleiermacher is the father of the modern empirical method in theology. *Das fromme Gottesbewusstsein*, his feeling of dependence upon God, became for him the source of religious knowledge.³) Ernst Troeltsch (1865—1925) is, like Schleiermacher, an empiricist, the difference between the two men consisting in this, that Schleiermacher proposed to find God in his own mystical experiences, whereas Troeltsch held that

1) Knudson, A. C., *Present Tendencies in Religious Thought*, 1924, p. 132.

2) Theological empiricism is usually defined as that theory which holds that all religious knowledge is derived from and tested by experience. Truth is not given to man by revelation, but man finds the ultimate truth by examining the various religious experiences of mankind. All religious concepts, such as God, redemption, ethics, arise from experience and grow with experience—and, of course, may also disappear in experience. Empiricism became popular as the antithesis to the early nineteenth century philosophical rationalism which made reason the ultimate source and criterion of truth and rejected not only supernatural revelation (in this it agreed with empiricism), but also the validity of all emotional and mystical experiences as criteria of truth.—The term *empiricism* is employed rather loosely at times, and it has therefore been suggested that the term *intuitionism* be substituted, since the religious empiricist bases religious truth not so much on valid and real experiences, but on his insights, his intuition. Wieman and Meland, *American Philosophy of Religion*, 1936, Chapter IX.

3) See the first article in this series, February issue of this magazine.

the full and final revelation of God comes in all of history. He and the entire History of Religion School, represented in Europe by Bousset, Gunkel, Drews, and in America especially by Shailer Mathews, believe that a study of comparative religions and the psychology of religion, in short, the religious experiences of all men in the various cultures and civilizations are the final source of full and ultimate truth. At first glance Albrecht Ritschl seems to have little, if anything, in common with the empirical theologians. In fact, his theological method impresses one as being strictly Biblical. "Back to the New Testament by way of the Reformation" was his watchword. Conservative theologians hoped that Ritschl's theological method would heal the breach between liberal and conservative theologians, especially between the theologians and the rationalistic scientists.⁴⁾ But Ritschlian theology is a theology of experience and therefore differs in its approach little from that of Schleiermacher. The liberal theologians of the American Congregational Church found in Ritschl's theological empiricism the method by which they could support their liberalism. Through the influence of two men in particular, Professors A. C. McGiffert and W. A. Brown of Union Seminary,⁵⁾ American liberalists accepted first the empirical method of Ritschl and second the heart of his theology, that concept of the kingdom of God which under the leadership of Rauschenbusch, Gladden, Mathews is now known as the Social Gospel. A summary of Ritschl's theology should prove helpful to the Lutheran pastor in properly evaluating liberal theology's method and message.

Albrecht Ritschl (1822—1889) was the son of the Superintendent of the Evangelical Church in Pomerania, an advocate of the Prussian Union, and young Ritschl early imbibed the spirit of mediating theology, Pfliegerer even classifying him as an eclectic mediating theologian.⁶⁾ Ritschl successively came under the influence of such mediating theologians as Nitsch (Bonn), Tholuck and J. Mueller (Halle), such radicals as the Hegelians Schaller

4) Seeberg says: "An die Ritschlsche Theologie sind die hochfliegendsten Hoffnungen geknuepft worden. Man dachte an ein 'neues Dogma,' von dem reicher Segen auf die Christenheit ausgehen wuerde. 'Der evangelische Protestantismus,' sagte man, 'wird eine bisher ungeahnte Kraft in allem Volk, unter allen Voelkern entfalten; dann wird er eine in sich abgerundete und festgeschlossene Groesse sein, das reine Gefaess des Evangeliums, der Quellort des goettlichen Geistes und Segens fuer die Menschheit.'" *Die Kirche Deutschlands im 19ten Jahrhundert*, p. 298. Cp. also Stange, C., *Der Dogmatische Ertrag der Ritschlschen Theologie*, 1906, p. 1 f.

5) There were, of course, many others, notably C. A. Briggs, H. C. King, C. A. Macfarland. Heick, O., "Albrecht Ritschl in Modern Thought," *Lutheran Church Quarterly*, XIV, p. 361 ff.

6) Pfliegerer, O., *The Development of Theology*, translated by J. F. Smith, p. 183.

and Erdmann (Halle), the eccentric Rothe (Heidelberg), and finally of Baur at Tuebingen. While at first an enthusiastic disciple of Baur and an ardent advocate of his higher criticism, he later broke completely with the Baur school. At the age of twenty-four years he began his teaching career at Bonn, where he lectured on the New Testament, history of doctrine, and finally on dogmatics. In 1864 he began his professorial work at Goettingen. Here he found in his colleague Lotze the man who supplied him with a philosophical basis for his theology, inasmuch as Lotze based his philosophy on ethics and eliminated metaphysics from his system of knowledge. However, Orr is no doubt correct in claiming that Ritschl remained closer to Kantian, more specifically Neo-Kantian, concepts than to Lotze's philosophy, although Lotze's recognition of a faculty in man of judging according to worth and stressing a distinction between a "world of forms" and a "world of values" no doubt dominated Ritschl's thinking.⁷⁾ Ritschl's field of special interest was historico-dogmatical theology, and his writings reflect his thorough acquaintance with the entire field of the history of doctrine, especially his most important literary contribution, the three-volume work *Rechtfertigung und Versoehnung*; the first two volumes, historical and exegetical, lay the foundation for Ritschl's system as presented in the third volume.⁸⁾

1

The basic, or formal, principle of Scripture theology is Scripture, from which the material principle, or the central doctrine, must be derived. In Ritschlian theology, as in every subjective theology, it is difficult to determine which principle is prior. Did Ritschl start from a clearly defined formal principle, or did he first establish his material principle and then adapt his formal principle accordingly? The central thought of Ritschl's theology is the kingdom of God as "the moral unification of the human race through action prompted by universal love to our neighbor," as "God's activity toward the establishment of an ethical community of mankind," as "the moral union of all the peoples of the world."⁹⁾ Did this central thought of an ethical kingdom determine his *principium cognoscendi*? Ritschl was hailed as a Bible theologian. He himself insists that he will accept no source of doctrine except

7) Orr, James, *The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith* (1895), pp. 32-41.

8) A valuable summary was prepared by L. Fuerbringer, *Lehre und Wehre*, vols. 40 and 41 (1894 and 1895). Other writings of Ritschl include: *Geschichte des Pietismus*, 3 vols.; *Unterricht in der Christlichen Religion*; *Christliche Vollkommenheit*; *Theologie und Metaphysik*.

9) *Rechtfertigung und Versoehnung*, III, p. 30; 270 ff.; 288 f. The material principle may also be stated as the love of God. In Ritschl's theology the kingdom and the love of God are correlative terms.

the New Testament. He says, "The Christian doctrine is to be drawn alone from the Scriptures."¹⁰ Furthermore, his theological method impresses one as being strictly Biblical. He was the bitter foe not only of speculative rationalism with its claim that theological truth is theoretical knowledge arrived at by logic,¹¹ but of every form of subjectivism as well. Ritschl has no room for metaphysics in his dogmatics and less for mysticism.¹² Metaphysics and mysticism were considered by him as obstacles which barred the way to the historical Jesus. But Ritschl is not a Bible theologian in the Lutheran concept, but an empiricist. As such he does not differ essentially from the father of modern religious empiricism. The difference between the methods of the two men consists primarily in establishing the *object* to be experienced, Schleiermacher maintaining that every individual's religious experiences constitute the criterion of truth, Ritschl narrowing down the source of experienced knowledge to a single person, the *historical* Jesus or—as some students think—to the experiences of the first Christian community as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels.¹³ The difference between Ritschl's and Schleiermacher's

10) *Unterricht in der Christlichen Religion*, p. 2.

11) Mackintosh, H. R., *Types of Modern Theology* (1937), p. 142 ff.; Orr, James, *op. cit.*, p. 48 f. Cp. L. Boettner in *The Word of God and Reformed Faith* (1942), p. 64 ff.

12) Ritschl apparently is so Bible-centered in his theological approach that he virtually denies the natural knowledge of God and that he would not accept the doctrine of the *unio mystica*. He seems to be thoroughly anti-Schleiermacher, for as Mackintosh says, his *bete noire* was every form of pietistic, mystic subjectivism, as is evident in his *History of Pietism*.

13) Ritschl speaks of the "revelation value of Jesus" but fails to enlighten the reader as to whether he believes that Jesus Himself had experiences which constitute the source of religious truth or whether the experiences of His disciples and the early congregation are normative. In one instance he says that the disciples' view of the deity of Christ is religious, because this concept indicates the value which Christ has for establishing the Christian world view and that the life of Christ manifested those ethical effects which characterize God. *Rechtfertigung und Versoehnung*, III, p. 382 f. And again we read: "Der Stoff fuer die theologische Lehre von der Suendenvergebung, Rechtfertigung, Versoehnung muss direkt nicht sowohl in den Ausspruechen Christi, die sich darauf beziehen, gesucht werden, als vielmehr in den entsprechenden Darstellungen des *urspruenglichen Bewusstseins der Gemeinde*. Der Glaube der Gemeinde, dass sie zu Gott in dem Verhaeltnis steht, welches durch Suendenvergebung wesentlich bedingt ist, ist das unmittelbare Objekt des theologischen Erkennens. Sofern aber dieses Gut auf das persoenliche Wirken und Leiden Christi zurueckgefuehrt wird, wird diese Vermittelung durch die authentische darauf im Voraus gerichtete Absicht Christi erlaeutert." "Man muss alle Glieder der theologischen Erkenntnis aus dem Standpunkt der christlichen Gemeinde bestimmen, und nur so kann man den *Offenbarungswert* Christi als den Erkenntnisgrund fuer alle Aufgaben der Theologie durchfuehren." *Op. cit.*, pp. 3, 6. While Ritschl claims to be historical, it must be noted that he selected those facts from history which appealed to him and ignored the others.

empiricism is only in the *subject* of religious experiences. Essentially both are agreed in that they make experience the determining factor in theology. Ritschl, who intended to be very objective and historical in his approach to theology, in reality is as subjective as Schleiermacher and his contemporaries in the Erlangen school were.¹⁴⁾ This must be said for Ritschl, he loathed a theology which was based on subjective feeling and ignored revelation. He aimed to make theology independent both of natural science and philosophy. It was in the interest of these basic principles that he worked out his famous theory of value judgments (*Werturteile*).¹⁵⁾ The prerogative of science, so he held, is to make existential judgments (*Seinsurteile*), to view individual phenomena in science, history, e. g., the laws of nature, the crucifixion as a historical fact. Religion, however, alone has the prerogative to make a value judgment, i. e., it must determine the value of each phenomenon in as far as it is capable of inciting pain or pleasure and as it is able to further or hinder the Kingdom of God, i. e., our perfect dominion over the world. The concept of God's wrath must be evaluated as to its possible contribution in furthering the ethical kingdom; and since this concept evidently does not engender delight but rather pain, it has no *religious* value. The validity of the Christian doctrine of reconciliation must be judged as to its value to serve the ethical end-purpose of humanity. Theology is not interested in abstractions and metaphysical speculations about God, in the interrelation of the three Persons, in the pre-existence of Christ, or in the manner of His incarnation, but only in those religious experiences which lead man to the end-purpose, his full dominion

14) Knudson thinks that Ritschl's apparent objectivism was a reaction to the subjectivism of the Erlangen theologians, who held that the converted and confessing congregation, more specifically, the Lutheran Church in her Confessions, is the ultimate criterion of truth, that the revealed will of God is refracted and reflected in the confessions and cultus of the Church. This so-called spectral-analysis theory was developed by Frank in his system of Christian Certainty, and it prompted him to publish his worth-while *Theologie der Konkordienformel*. Knudson, *op. cit.*, p. 161 ff. But is there much difference between making the earliest congregation or the Lutheran Church of 1870 the criterion of truth?

15) Stephan says that Ritschl, being an objective theologian, really did not intend to make a distinction between *Wert- und Seinsurteil* but rather between value and theoretical opinion, for he held that the value is not determined by us, but is inherent in the thing itself. Stephan, H., *Geschichte der Evangelischen Theologie*, p. 197. The fact remains, however, that Ritschl claims that man, though involved in natural processes, has inherent capacities to rise above them. The conflict between man's involvement in the natural processes and man's independent spiritual personality makes faith in man's exalted spiritual power the source of religion. And that is subjectivism. *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, III, p. 189 f.

over the world in the Kingdom of God.¹⁶⁾ Ritschl wants to separate philosophy from religion, whereas in reality he develops a system of philosophy which has all the earmarks of William James's pragmatism. Ritschl wants to be objective, but in rejecting theoretic knowledge he has no guarantee that the objects really exist nor that his representation is correct. How can Ritschl claim to be a Biblical theologian if value judgment is the criterion of truth? His material principle is complete before he approaches the Bible, and therefore Scripture must fit into his preconceived pattern. This will become evident as Ritschl unfolds his view of the essence of Christianity.¹⁷⁾

2

Ritschl's material principle is not — as in Lutheran Scriptural theology — the doctrine of justification, but rather, as previously indicated, the establishment of a this-worldly ethical kingdom. According to Ritschl, man's moral destiny in this world is man's true end. He makes Christianity truly anthropocentric and entirely this-worldly. Evangelical Christians view Christianity as a circle in which Christ's vicarious atonement is the focal point from which all doctrines radiate. Ritschl, however, says that Christianity is not like a circle, but "an ellipse with two foci," the redemptive activity of Christ and the Kingdom of God.¹⁸⁾ Ritschl's much discussed geometrical illustration of Christianity as an ellipse has this implication: There are two wholly independent but equally important factors which constitute Christianity. The one is God, the other is the Kingdom. But Ritschl's kingdom is not the result of God's *gracious* activity nor the communion of believers. It is rather the ethical and moral union of men. In Ritschl's theological thinking, however, the idea of the Kingdom of God as humanity organized to attain ethical ends actually ceases to be one of two

16) Chapter XXVIII of *Rechtfertigung und Versoehnung*, which discusses the relation of religious to theoretical and philosophical cognition, is, like most of Ritschl's writings, couched in very involved sentences. His theory is summed up in the following: "Die religioese Motivierung des sittlichen Handelns im Christentum besteht darin, dasz das Reich Gottes, welches unsere Aufgabe ist, zugleich das hoechste Gut darstellt, welches Gott fuer uns als das ueberweltliche Ziel bestimmt. Hierin schlaegt eben das Werturteil durch, dasz in der bestimmungsgemaessen Erhebung ueber die Welt im Reich Gottes unsere Seligkeit besteht. Dieses Urteil ist religioes, eben indem es den Wert dieser Stellung der Glaeuibigen zur Welt bezeichnet," p. 196. In brief, every truth which motivates us toward effecting the ethical kingdom in this world, has religious value and is therefore true.

17) Lack of space prevents us from bringing samples of Ritschl's exegetical method. The second volume of *Rechtfertigung und Versoehnung* shows how arbitrarily the philosophizing empiricist manhandles Scriptures. For a résumé of Ritschl's "Biblical" foundation of his central theological thought see Fuerbringer, *op. cit.*, p. 296 ff., 333 ff.

18) *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

foci and actually becomes the central point of his system. Ritschl arrived at this definition of Christianity in his opposition both to rationalism and mysticism. He had no use for philosophy which would make of religion merely an ethical moralizing concept, nor for mysticism and pietism which view Christianity only as a mystical emotional experience. To him Christianity is "the monotheistic, completely spiritual (*geistig*) and ethical kingdom which, on the ground of the redeeming and kingdom-founding life of its originator, consists in the freedom of divine sonship. This freedom becomes the incentive to an activity which flows from love and aims at the moral organization of humanity. Salvation consists in this filial relation to God and in mutual reciprocal love in the Kingdom of God."¹⁹) Thus, according to Ritschl, the Christian life has a double character. The personal end (*Selbstzweck*) of the individual is freedom from sin, and the final purpose (*Endzweck*) is the Kingdom of God, the reign of mutual love. This is the heart of Ritschl's theology. His material principle is the theory that man is destined to find salvation in ethical society.

3

Ritschl's formal principle (the empirical method and the value-judgment theory) and his material principle (the Kingdom of God an ethical communion) have completely disfigured not only the doctrines of justification and reconciliation, but every fundamental Christian doctrine.²⁰) In accord with his twofold principle, God has being only in so far as He has value for man, and He possesses

19) *Op. cit.*, pp. 13, 14. The first sentence describes the first focus, and the second the other focus of Ritschl's ellipse.—The Kingdom of God as a correlative term of the loving God denotes the extensive and intensive union of humanity active in mutual action of its members. The Kingdom of God viewed as the Church is the sum total of believers who accept Christ in faith and are active in prayer. In this, that the members of the Kingdom love the brethren, the love of God is made complete. *Op. cit.*, p. 267 f. "Jesus saw in the Kingdom of God the moral end of the religious fellowship He had come to found, the organization of humanity through action inspired by love." *Op. cit.*, p. 12.—The Kingdom of God as our duty and as the highest good is the motivation for all moral action. The value of all religious concepts must be determined by the purpose for which God has placed them into His kingdom, an ethical and a religious society. *Op. cit.*, p. 195 f.—In the Kingdom, that is, in the relation of mutual reciprocal love among men, we have God's complete and highest revelation of Himself. *Op. cit.*, p. 276.—The Kingdom of God is not so much descriptive of God's relation to man or man's relation to God, but rather expresses man's highest ethical conduct toward his fellow man in the Christian community. *Op. cit.*, p. 27—30.—The terms *kingdom* and *salvation* are to be understood as designating man's lordship over the world, that is, over all the hindrances which would interfere with organizing a perfect ethical society. *Op. cit.*, pp. 365, 497.

20) In presenting a summary of Ritschl's theological views we shall follow the third volume of *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* (638 pages).

only such attributes as have meaning for establishing the ethical kingdom. Ritschl dismisses all theological statements concerning God's absoluteness as "heathenish metaphysics."²¹⁾ The concept of God's eternity has no value for it "as a metaphysical abstraction." At best this term denotes the unswerving and unchangeable direction of God's will toward his own final purpose (*Selbstzweck*), establishing an ethical kingdom.²²⁾ In fact, only the divine attribute of love has value, because it is a comprehensive definition of God and as a correlative of the concept *kingdom* reveals all that is necessary to found the Kingdom and to solve the problems of the world.²³⁾ Ritschl has eliminated entirely the wrath of God from his dogmatics. As a "Bible theologian" he recognizes the fact that Scriptures often speak of God's wrath; yet he has the effrontery to say that on the authority of Scripture we have no right to relate the wrath of God to sinners, since they are hypothetically members of His kingdom and therefore objects of his love. Only those who persist in their opposition to God's final purpose will ultimately, "eschatologically," come under God's wrath. God as judge has no value and 1 Pet. 1:17 means no more than that God will vindicate His own.²⁴⁾

Following his formal principle, Ritschl discards all those passages which plainly teach original sin. He says that Luther's doctrine of original sin is based on a false interpretation of *isolated* Scripture passages; Ps. 51:5 is an individual's confession and does not teach a universal truth.²⁵⁾ From the viewpoint of his value-judgment theory he says that the doctrine of original sin is absurd, "original sin is no vehicle of salvation."²⁶⁾ From the Christian viewpoint original sin is social.²⁷⁾ Mankind is the object of God's love and therefore cannot be viewed as guilty by God. Sin is only man's ignorance of God's at-one-ment and hence not subject to punishment, for guilt exists only in the heart of the sinner.²⁸⁾

21) *Op. cit.*, pp. 226, 227.

22) *Op. cit.*, p. 284.

23) *Op. cit.*, pp. 260, 282.

24) *Op. cit.*, pp. 305 f., 90 f., 363. Ritschl arbitrarily distorts the Scriptural definitions of God's attributes, particularly His holiness (identical with love) and righteousness (identical with God's purpose to establish a righteous community). See second volume of *Rechtfertigung und Versoehnung, passim*, or, Fuerbringer, *op. cit.*, p. 296 ff.

25) Vol. III, p. 326. Cp. Vol. II, p. 147. 26) *Op. cit.*, p. 311.

27) "Die Suende, welche als Handlungsweise und habitueller Hang ueber das Menschengeschlecht verbreitet ist, wird in der christlichen Weltanschauung als das Gegenteil der Ehrfurcht und des Vertrauens gegen Gott sowie des Reiches Gottes, naemlich als das Reich der Suende beurteilt, welches weder in der goetlichen Weltordnung noch in der Freiheitsanlage der Menschen einen noethigenden Grund findet, aber alle Menschen durch die unmeszbare Wechselwirkung des suendigen Handelns miteinander zusammenfasst." P. 363.

28) *Op. cit.*, p. 77.

Sin and death stand in no relation to each other. In fact, theology is not interested in the doctrine of death at all, and the Christian world view requires no religious judgment as to the origin of death. It makes little, if any, difference whether death is viewed as a biological necessity or the result of Adam's sin.²⁹⁾

Ritschl's entire Christology may be reduced to the following formula: The doctrine of Christ's person and work is of importance only in so far as it has spiritual value for establishing the Kingdom. The existential judgment (*Seinsurteil*) Christ is God has no place in theology, and Christ Himself nowhere submits a doctrine concerning His deity. The term *kyrios* refers only to the exalted Christ and is not intended as a judgment concerning the pre-existence of Christ.³⁰⁾ In determining and defining the deity of Christ we must rely on a value judgment based on His vocation. In this Christ reveals His perfect agreement with the essential will of God, identifies His final purpose (*Endzweck*) with God's, reveals complete dominion over the world, and manifests Himself as an authority which regulates human confidence in God. Thus Christ becomes God.³¹⁾ The work of Christ must be viewed from the two religious meanings which it has for us: 1) He is the perfect revealer of God, and 2) the perfect archetype, or pattern (*Urbild*), of man's spiritual dominion over the world.³²⁾ Thus Christ realizes the Divine Kingdom. Ritschl readjusts the three offices of Christ in such a manner that the prophetic and priestly offices are subordinated to the kingly and offers a twofold division, the kingly-prophetic and the kingly-priestly office.³³⁾ Ritschl furthermore distinguishes between the ethical and the religious end of Christ's official acts. Every intelligent life must move in the direction of fulfilling its personal self-end (*Selbstzweck*). To view Christ's work as substitutionary is unethical and untenable, since it does not allow Christ to exist for Himself first of all (!) The purpose (*Selbstzweck*) of Christ's kingly-prophetic office, therefore, consists primarily in this, that in His life, suffering, and death He manifested His fidelity to His own vocation, and that He was fully committed

29) *Op. cit.*, pp. 335, 339—441.

30) *Op. cit.*, p. 378 f. See Pfeleiderer, *op. cit.*, p. 189 ff.

31) *Op. cit.*, pp. 383, 421—424, 426, 428, 434, 454. — Ritschl has no interest in the pre-existence of Christ, it is an object of cognition only for God. P. 443 f.

32) *Op. cit.*, p. 367. Cp. Orr, *op. cit.*, pp. 128—130.

33) *Op. cit.*, p. 403. — Franks, R. S., *A History of the Doctrine of the Work of Christ*, Vol. II, ch. 6, offers a good summary of Ritschl's theory of the Atonement. This twofold division of Christ's offices enables Ritschl to deny categorically the vicarious character of Christ's work. Implicitly and explicitly he rejects the vicarious atonement as unscriptural, unethical, and completely untenable. Vol. II, p. 26 f. Vol. III, pp. 533—537. *Lehre und Wehre*, 40, p. 333 f.

to the *self-purpose* of His being. This is the ethical value of Christ's prophetic office.³⁴⁾ Evaluated religiously, the kingly-prophetic office reveals Christ as viewing His vocation as fulfilling a special ordinance of God for *God's sake*, the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Christ sees in His death the end-purpose (*Endzweck*) of His life, because it was destined by God to serve the purpose of God.³⁵⁾ Ritschl's concept of the kingly-priestly office is also predicated on his denial of the vicarious atonement. Like the prophetic the priestly-kingly office must be evaluated ethically and religiously. As priest, Christ must exercise his private prerogative (*Selbstzweck*) of communing with God in prayer, and thus Christ is a priest first of all for Himself. That is *ethical*.³⁶⁾ But the ethical purpose of Christ's priestly office is supplemented by a religious end, namely, by His private and personal communion with God; Christ established and published the fact that God has always been at-one with men, though man did not realize it and thus was burdened unnecessarily with guilt-consciousness. In revealing this fact he served man, and thus his kingly-priestly office receives *religious value*.³⁷⁾ This is Ritschl's theory of the Atonement. Orr has summarized it: "(1) Justification, the Divine act of forgiveness and adoption, which conveys to the sinner, under condition of faith, the assurance that his guilt forms no barrier to his access to God and to the enjoyment of fellowship with Him; and (2) Reconciliation, the removal of the sinner's active enmity to God and his acceptance of the Divine end as His own."³⁸⁾ As kingly prophet, Christ reveals "justification," and as kingly priest he implements this divine-human relation by bringing the "community" into fellowship with God.³⁹⁾

34) *Op. cit.*, pp. 417—423. This is a case in point showing how an unbelieving theologian labors to find philosophical support for his pre-conceived notions.

35) *Op. cit.*, pp. 423—426. The kingly-prophetic office of Christ is established not by Christ's miracles, nor even by His resurrection, but by an ethical and religious value judgment. Christ's miracles and resurrection belong to Christian faith rather than to its verification. The doctrine is proved by Christ's actual victory over the world, manifest in His patience and by the Christian community's experience of the same lordship over the world.

36) *Op. cit.*, p. 447 f. 37) *Op. cit.*, p. 449.

38) *Op. cit.*, p. 105. — *Rechtfertigung und Versoehnung*, III, p. 83.

39) There is no room in Ritschl's theology for the necessity of God's reconciliation. He holds that the assumption that divine grace and righteousness tend in opposite directions is irreligious, because the *unity* of the divine will is unconditionally necessary for man's trust in God. Ritschl denies that the Old Testament sacrifices were ever thought of as an expiation of sin and guilt. Their purpose was only to symbolize that finite man required a covering when he approached God. II, p. 199 ff.; III, p. 446. — There is no room in Ritschl's theory of the Atonement for the vicarious value of Christ's active and passive obedience; no room

By revealing God's essence as love (kingly prophetic) and by uniting Himself with the Father in prayer and communion (kingly priestly), Christ is both the standard and the source of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is the extensive and intensive union of humanity active in mutual moral action of its members and thus is a correlative term of God's love and the highest revelation of God.⁴⁰⁾ The means to establish the Kingdom is the reconciliation, i. e., God's at-one-ment, as revealed by Christ and the Christian congregation.⁴¹⁾ The reconciliation or adoption becomes actual for the individual as a member of the Christian community, not as an individual. The ideals of the Kingdom cannot be achieved by a withdrawal from the world, monasticism, asceticism, pietism, or mysticism, but only by a *fellowship* of love.⁴²⁾

As Christ's work, so also the Christian community's activity must be judged from the religious and the ethical viewpoint. As a religious concept the Kingdom denotes lordship over the world, and as an ethical concept it is loyalty to the vocation, the founding of the Kingdom. Thus the Kingdom is at the same time Christian perfection.⁴³⁾ As a member of the congregation, the Christian obtains the assurance of his reconciliation and adoption. Realizing God's at-one-ment, he loses his former distrust of God and his guilt consciousness. He is now free to "imitate Christ's divinity," to share His lordship over all things, and to practice humility,

for faith, which "comes under the general definition of obedience," *op. cit.*, p. 97; no room for the forensic character of justification, because God has always been at-one with man, *op. cit.*, p. 159. His theory of the Atonement comes very close to the moral-influence theory of his contemporary Horace Bushnell. See Foster, *The Genetic History of New England Theology*, p. 412.—The title of Ritschl's *opus magnum* is incorrect theologically, inasmuch as it places justification prior to reconciliation, and factually, inasmuch as its title really should read: *What Is Left of the Old Doctrines?* (The liberal Washington Gladden published a book under this title in 1899.) The underlying premise of Ritschl's atonement theory is the "fatherhood of God" principle. While Modernism has followed Ritschl in the main thesis, it did not employ Ritschl's line of argumentation. The liberal Pfeleiderer speaks of Ritschlianism as rationalistic dogmatism and a return to the weakest side of that rationalism which he had so severely censured. *Op. cit.*, p. 192. In fact, Ritschl returns to Abelard's rationalistic views concerning the Atonement, as he also expressly states, III, pp. 351, 445.

40) *Op. cit.*, pp. 271—283. See Note 19. The idea of a moral reign in non-Christian cultures are latent and preparatory elements of God's kingdom. Pp. 288—295.

41) *Op. cit.*, p. 308. Cf. p. 105. 42) *Op. cit.*, p. 276.

43) See pp. 575—624. For a synopsis see Warfield, B. B., "Ritschl and His Doctrine of Christian Perfection," *Princeton Theological Review*, XVIII (1920), pp. 44—101. Flew, R. N., *The Idea of Christian Perfection in Christian Theology* (1934), Ch. XXI. Flew is an Anglican theologian who not only offers a very satisfactory résumé of Ritschl's idea of perfection, but also criticizes his theology, because it denies metaphysics in theology, is defective in the doctrines of sin, grace, and communion with God.

patience, and trust in God's providence, knowing that all things work together for good. This is the religious view of the Kingdom. The moral, or ethical, end consists in this, that the believer serves faithfully in the vocation which God imposes upon Him. Thus, Christian perfection consists in fulfilling both the religious end as fellowship with God and the moral end as Christian service.⁴⁴⁾ The religious and moral freedom from, and lordship over, the world is the present blessedness of eternal life.

4

It has been said that Ritschl restored to dogmatics an objective basis, the Scriptures, particularly the historical Jesus, that he liberated German Protestant theology from Hegelianism and introduced a new critical evangelical method.⁴⁵⁾ True, he uses Scripture, but he either distorts or denies the basic truths of Scriptures, such as the doctrines of God's transcendence, the reconciliation as a change in the heart of God, the Kingdom as God's gracious activity and the realm of believers accepting by faith the meritorious and substitutionary work of Christ. It has further been said that by making the Christian community the starting point of theology Ritschl eliminated metaphysical speculation from theology. But in his opposition to metaphysics he poured the child out with the bath, for he discarded all those doctrines which in his opinion were metaphysical abstractions and had no religio-ethical value, such as the doctrines of the Trinity, the pre-existence of Christ, the personal union, eschatology. It has been said furthermore that he divorced theology from theoretic cognition. In reality, however, his value-judgment theory compelled him to base theology on the subjective experience of the Christian community. Finally, it has been said that Ritschlianism with its emphasis on Christian perfection has conserved true evangelical piety. But Ritschlianism fails to supply either an absolute standard or a dynamic for Christian perfection in the Kingdom of God. While Ritschl was possessed of keen philosophical and systematic powers, he was unable to divorce theology from philosophy; in fact, he

44) *Op. cit.*, p. 633 f.

45) Stephan says: "After the collapse of idealistic thinking in contrast to the influence of natural sciences and realism, theology was in confusion, even as German culture was forced to re-orient itself critically—historically. Ritschl's theologizing and systematic thinking was not based on experience or speculation, but was grounded in history. He and his followers viewed their theology as a purgative bath in which evangelical theology would cleanse itself from pagan-mystic catholicism, and from pietistic, romanticistic, individualistic, rationalistic, and God-conscious approaches, and thus would be able to attack the problems of Christianity." *Op. cit.*, p. 195.

moves in Kantian thought patterns. His theological system is cold rationalism and moralism.⁴⁶⁾

Ritschl's influence was perpetuated in Germany through his disciples Herrmann, Harnack, and Kaftan. Through these men Ritschlianism came to America.⁴⁷⁾ The fatherhood of God, the empirical method, pragmatism, the social gospel of American Modernism, are in a large measure the result of Ritschl's theology.

F. E. MAYER

A Guide

For the Spiritual Care of the Unduly Grieved, of the Melancholy, and of the Mentally Afflicted

Rubric: The pastor should determine by a frank and sincere talk with the patient and his loved ones the cause of the deep grief. Since there are various reasons for such cases, we hereby present several formularies which may be followed.

1. Spiritual Care of One Who is Unduly Grieved over the Loss of a Loved One

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

DEAR FRIEND:

I find you at the present time deeply grieved; your spirit is very depressed, dejected. You may feel as if the Lord had hidden His face from you and had forsaken you. It is not surprising, for you have suffered a great loss. In His unsearchable wisdom the Lord has deprived you of a great treasure, has taken from your heart and bosom a dearly beloved child (devoted wife, faithful husband, mother, father, brother, sister, etc.). This loss has deeply affected your heart, so that you cry out with Job: "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me" (Job 19:21). Such sorrow and grief is natural, and we have many examples in the Scriptures showing how the faithful children of God mourned the loss of their loved ones.

46) As to Ritschl's own personal attitude toward the Savior we are not in a position to pass judgment. His son reports that Ritschl had asked him to comfort him in the hour of death by praying with him Paul Gerhardt's "O Haupt, voll Blut und Wunden." *Leben*, II, p. 524. It is not established historically whether Ritschl's wish was fulfilled.

47) Foster, *Modern Movement in American Theology* (1939), Ch. VII. The reader who is interested in tracing the influence of Ritschlianism in American liberalism will find the additional historical treatises helpful: Coffin, S. H., *Religion Yesterday and Today*; Conger, C. P., *The Ideologies of Religion*, Chaps. VIII—XV; Hopkins, C. H., *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*; Knudson, A. C., *Present Tendencies in Religious Thought*; Macintosh, H. R., *Types of Modern Theology*; Smith, G. B., *Religion in the Last Quarter Century*; Wieman and Meland, *American Philosophies of Religion*.