

## A PLEA FOR PROGRESS IN THEOLOGY.

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**I**N the editorial article on "Modern Theology" Dr. Carus considers the development of modern theology as too rapid and thinks that it would be better if retarded, etc.; also that modern theologians are justified in not giving forth their views fully.

I understand the difficulties of modern theology very well; but in spite of all these difficulties I do not think that there should in the least be a retardation of the sure results and facts of modern scientific theological research nor keeping them back from the people. Liberal theology has all along been too much retarded and hampered by the Church and its results kept from the people; and therefore now, when progressive theology gets more opportunity to unbosom itself, I do not blame it for doing so as much as possible. There are a number of facts of scientific theology, known long ago, though perhaps not so fully substantiated as they are now, but enough so even then to have been accepted by any impartial thinker, and now, when these facts are beyond any doubt whatever, why keep them back? I only mention here a few: Deuteronomy was proven by De Wette one hundred years ago to have been written in the times of Josiah, and the critical dissection of the whole Pentateuch has been going on for over a century. The Book of Daniel was also long ago accepted as unauthentic. The enormous influence of the Persian religion on Judaism in regard to eschatology, Satan, Angels etc., now so brilliantly proven by Mills and others, was also accepted by many long ago. The mythical element in the history of Jesus had also been shown by Strauss and others. Why then retard theology and keep back the results from the people? Let liberal theology now open its floods and let the church take the consequences. If there is harm done, the Church is to blame for it. Liberal theologians in the past have not been too rash in demanding that their results should be given out, but even the most reasonable

demands were refused. Thus De Wette's translation of the Bible, made in order to give to the people a Bible more in accordance with modern linguistic knowledge and exegesis, was branded as "dangerous," and even D. Strauss was not the first one who brought the question of the mythical elements in the history of Jesus before the people, for his first edition of the *Life of Jesus* was purposely written in Latin for the clergy, but his opponents were the ones who immediately made the whole German nation the battlefield and gradually forced Strauss on to the attitude he took later. Advanced thinkers are generally naturally cautious, but even progressive thought uttered with great caution and reserve is pounced upon by the traditional party as something extremely dangerous. Advanced theologians everywhere in the Church have given it long enough time to adapt itself gradually to new thought. But the Church has all along obstinately refused to do so. Now let them take the consequences. Besides there is no danger that progressive thought will spread too fast and too much. The Church and the conservative human mind, especially so in religion, will see to it. It has always been the policy of the Church to suppress the knowledge of advanced thought and to calumniate it. A recent proof again is the interdiction in the Roman Church to read the criticism of the papal syllabus by Father Tyrell, and the Protestant churches do not act much more tolerantly. I know of large Protestant denominations in this country, where not only among the laity but among an overwhelming majority of the clergy there is Cimmerian night in regard to the thought of modern theology. I believe that it is because Dr. Carus has perhaps been more in contact with the liberal Anglo- and German-American circles, that he thinks the clergy as a rule is confronted with the various problems of modern theology. I believe this is a mistaken view. Speaking of our country, and especially of my personal experience as a minister, I know that the large Protestant German denominational bodies here are frightfully ignorant of the results of the liberal German theology of the Fatherland, and their young men, educated for the ministry in their seminaries are systematically kept in ignorance of the facts of modern theology and of modern science bearing upon theological questions. Yes, they are even kept in darkness about exegetical facts long since known, for instance the myth of the marriages of angels (the *Bne Elohim*) with the daughters of men in Genesis vi. I could tell amusing stories about the ignorance of *young*, not of old, men in the ministry, as for instance this one of a young minister

who teaches children of his parish that the Dead Sea had been brought about by the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the like.

The Anglo-American Protestant denominations, to be sure, are more open to accepting the results of modern theological research. But as far as I know, we can not even say of them, "that as a rule they have been confronted with the various problems of theology." As long as professors in theological seminaries publish books, as Prof. James Orr in favor of the virgin birth of Jesus, or Prof. Toftsen of Western Theological Seminary, Chicago, in favor of the Biblical chronology down to the flood, etc., and as long as there are chairs for the harmony of theology and science, as in Oberlin College, we can not expect the ministry to be so very enlightened yet in regard to the facts of modern theology. Besides this I could mention the frequent attacks of leading Protestant denominational papers on liberalism in theology.

I believe that the positive light of modern theology should not be placed under the bushel, but should be given to the people fully and without restriction. If the Church will not do this, others will, and in a way perhaps which very often is not a fair, impartial and historical way.

In regard to the statement that the minds of the most active members of the congregations ought not to be changed too quickly, and the value of these for the Church, there is also another side to the question. I know of instances where just because of their stubborn opposition to even the faintest progress in religion these people have been a great harm instead of a value to the Church. I know of a minister open to liberal views, but extremely cautious, who in order to broaden and liberalize his church, proposed that immersion should not be held obligatory for people coming over to his church from other churches not holding this tenet. This little matter, and because the preacher did not swear to the infallible literal inspiration of the Bible, was enough for the "pillars" of the congregation to make life so disagreeable for the pastor, that he resigned. I can't see much value for religion in the attitude of such men. The sooner the churches get rid of such people the better for them.

In regard to what Dr. Carus says about Jesus and the Christ-ideal I will say this: Although I also believe that Unitarians have too much shown a kind of "Jesus sentimentality," and may have put forward his moral leadership too much to the exclusion of other great religious and moral leaders in humanity, there is no denomina-

tion, nevertheless, which so far as I know, has so strongly pointed out the fact that there are also other religious and moral prophets who have a message for mankind. In their services readings are very common from other sources besides the Bible. And even although Unitarians may look at the evolution of Christianity as it appeared in the doctrine of Paul and later as a kind of perversion of the religion of Jesus, that denomination is at least more open to admit that Christianity is an evolution from Pre-Christian sources, and to bring such facts before the people. They would not question at all, that the Christ-ideal has always been the foundation, but they are not afraid to say that there is a difference between actual fact in the history of Jesus and the metaphysical speculation connected with his person. They would call things by their right names.—I do not think it honest for a preacher who is at heart fully convinced of the facts of modern scientific theology, to stand in the pulpit and use all the old terms of orthodoxy, so that no layman could suspect what he in his heart believes, although this standpoint is defended by many, and the pulpits of Germany can show a great number of such examples. With David Strauss I would prefer the *Ganzen* to the *Halben*. The new wine of modern theology should not be put into the old bottles. For new wine we must have new bottles. Let us be honest and with historical understanding reverence and fully admit the natural evolution of Christianity, but at the same time, if we wish to bring about a universal religion, openly say what Jesus really was and intended, not to found a new religion etc.; what were his limitations and defects beside his greatness, and that there are also other religious and moral prophets who with equal justice should be placed beside Jesus in the universal religion of the future. After all perhaps a human being who with all his defects was great and grand like Socrates and bore no grudge towards his judges when at the point of death, or a Jesus, Buddha, Laotze, grand and noble in spite of their defects, would appeal to mankind generally more than a perfect sinless ideal, an incarnate God.

A historical Jesus, Socrates, etc., we can understand and love, and their example is inspiring to us, showing us to what nobility limited human nature can ascend, but a Jesus of the Fourth Gospel, (the acme of Christ-idealization literature) the incarnate Logos, continually speaking in ambiguous, stilted and unnatural terms, not even deeming the word "mother" proper to use toward her who bore him, etc., we cannot understand and love. He is too far beyond us, he moves in an ideal atmosphere so cold that it freezes us.

Give us a fully human Socrates, who after being found guilty and having the chance to save his life by proposing a lesser punishment, i. e., banishment, for himself, manfully scorns to confess himself guilty by so doing, and ironically demands for his great services to the state a place in the prytaneum, thus embittering his enemies the more so that they now vote his death, but who nevertheless does not bear any grudge against them and dies a death as noble as that of Jesus. Give us likewise not a "gentle" Jesus, but one with passionate hatred against all sham in religion and like a true Oriental zealot and prophet using very hard words such as "vipers" etc., but nevertheless, even if he was a Galilean exorcist, brought up under the superstitions of his time, undeniably full of deep sympathy with the morally and socially unfortunate; and if he did not die with a prayer for forgiveness for his enemies, taught such forgiveness during his life. The teaching of loving one's enemies is surely not necessarily a superaddition to the Jesus picture as too great an idealization. If a Socrates, a Buddha, a Laotze, have likewise taught the same, why not Jesus?

Although I do not deny at all that the most important idea in traditional Christianity is the doctrine of an ideal man, a divine example, a God-man, a type of perfection, the universal religion of the future, I think, will rather with more justice and historical sense prefer in its religious pantheon beside Socrates, Buddha, etc., a Jesus with all his limitations to the ideal Christ of traditional Christianity.

And I think, so far as I am acquainted with the work of *The Open Court*, it too is striving for realization of this view.