

TRUTH AND COUNTER TRUTH

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Truth and Counter Truth by Thomas Richey

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THOMAS RICHEY

**TRUTH AND
COUNTER TRUTH**

D. S. Galt

TRUTH

AND

COUNTER TRUTH:

BY

THE REV. THOMAS ^{*W*} RICHEY, D. D.

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INTRODUCTION.

THERE are certain fundamental truths of revealed religion which it is impossible to state explicitly without running counter to other truths, as necessary and as well established as themselves. What, in such a case, are we to do? May we receive the one and reject the other? Such is the way of heresy. May we side with the one and neglect the other? That were partisanship. We are to receive both, and to hold to both; this is to prove and test our Faith. The relation of Divine Omnipotence to man's free will is a case in point. God's almighty power is a truth that admits of no question: it is simply to say, God is God. But the Divine Omnipotence has for a counter-truth the fact of man's free agency. This too, is a truth that admits of no question; it is simply to say, man is man and not a machine. Now if we keep the eye fixed exclusively on the power of God, we shall incline towards Fatalism: if, with the Pelagian, on the other hand, we regard man as an absolute cause, we overturn the very foundations of the mystery of grace. It is of Faith to receive both truths: the trial and test of Faith is to hold to both positively and without reserve. The

most we can do, in the way of adjustment, is to use the one truth to correct our *misapprehension* of the other ; it is by balancing truth against truth that we are to continue steadfast in the Faith. This, to many, appears a very narrow way. It is a narrow way, but as always, when we prefer faith to self-will, it is the way to liberty. He is a bigot, who, in the spirit of a narrow partisanship, resigns himself wholly to some one truth, or aspect of truth, and refuses to have his extreme views corrected by an opposing truth, although Divinely attested.

The rule now laid down with regard to Omnipotence and free will, holds in the case of nearly all the mysteries of revealed religion ; for it is characteristic of them all that it is to a *biune* or complex, and not to a simple article of belief our assent is asked. The Unity of the Godhead, for example, is, as a truth, absolute and unqualified ; at the same time, we must remember that the *manner* in which the One Godhead exists is not such as to forbid a plurality of persons in it ; and *vice versa*, the notion of plurality is *not* such as to militate against the Unity of the Divine substance. We are neither “ to confound the persons,” nor “ to divide the substance.” We are taught to believe, in like manner, that in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect Godhead exists ; yet the manner of its existence is not such as to swallow up, notwithstanding its glory, the proper humanity ; there is a perfect Humanity, yet it is not such as to exclude, notwithstanding its weakness, the perfect Godhead. The instances of *similar contradictions*, in connection with revealed mys-

teries, are manifold. How is the doctrine of justification by faith to be reconciled with a judgment according to works? How is the Bible, written by fallible men, the very word of God? How is the Church, at the same time the Bride of Christ, and yet a harlot? In these and kindred questions we have truths so related, that the very statement of the one involves a contradiction of the other. What are we to do? The part of true wisdom is to acquiesce in the conclusion, that man is not the measure of all things: while it is all-sufficient for the conduct of life under its present conditions, the moment Reason attempts to rise above the finite into the region of the infinite, it meets with contradictions which to deny were madness, and to acknowledge to ourselves waiting with patience the time when we shall know no longer in part is to be truly wise.

But in making the confession that there are things in revealed religion which we cannot reconcile, do we admit that all such antagonisms are of the nature of LOGICAL contradictions? Most assuredly not. *Metaphysical* contradiction is one thing, *logical* contradiction another. I am not able to think a beginning of time—a time when there was no time—but am I on that account to believe in the eternity of matter? I know it to be a fundamental condition of thought that every event must have a cause; how then can I reach the idea of a First Cause? I believe in the infinite; but it is in vain I try to grasp it by adding finite to finite. Omnipotence is an essential attribute of the divine nature, Infinite power can know

no bounds, and yet Omnipotence has a limitation in the fact of man's free will. All these are instances of metaphysical contradiction. The difference between a logical contradiction and what in philosophy is called an antinomy of the reason, or in religion a mystery, is that in the one case we have two propositions which we know cannot be reconciled, and one of which must therefore be false, while in the other there are two propositions that appear contradictory when they are brought together, although each can be separately shown to be true. "A contradiction requires a confession of positive error; whereas an antinomy only suggests a sense of the imperfection of our understanding, which can comprehend two opposite results, but not the mode of reconciling them."*

The narrow way is, after all, the way of liberty. The history of the Church abundantly proves this. Not the least instructive chapter of that history is the history of heresy. It is wonderful (if aught can be deemed wonderful where the Spirit of God rules and guides) with what an impartial hand the Church in every age holds the balance of truth. Nestorius and Eutyches both began as defenders of the Faith; but led away by their own ardor, they failed to weigh truth against truth, and so they were cast forth. And even in her relation to her more favored children, the Church has never permitted herself to become the patron of mere schools of opinion, while she has tolerated them within her pale. With all

* Thompson's Bampton Lectures, p. 121.

her indebtedness to St. Augustine, she has never become the advocate of absolute Predestination. She has rejected Pelagius from among the number of her teachers, yet she has continued to assert the freedom of the human will ; always maintaining the necessity of an Atoning Sacrifice for the remission of sins, she has never espoused the legal view of the mystery of Redemption ; true to her mission as "the Witness and Keeper of Holy Writ," she cannot be said to have any theory of Inspiration, and is free from the charge of Bibliolatry ; constantly affirming the doctrine of Original Sin, she condemns the notion of "total depravity" as heresy.

SIC SIT SEMPER.