

**THE KANTIAN AND  
LUTHERAN  
ELEMENTS IN RITSCHL'S  
CONCEPTION OF GOD**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649621286

The Kantian and Lutheran Elements in Ritschl's Conception of God by Gregory Dexter Walcott

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Cover @ 2017

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IN

**RITSCHL'S CONCEPTION OF GOD**

BY

GREGORY DEXTER WALCOTT, A.M., B.D.

SUBMITTED IN

PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE

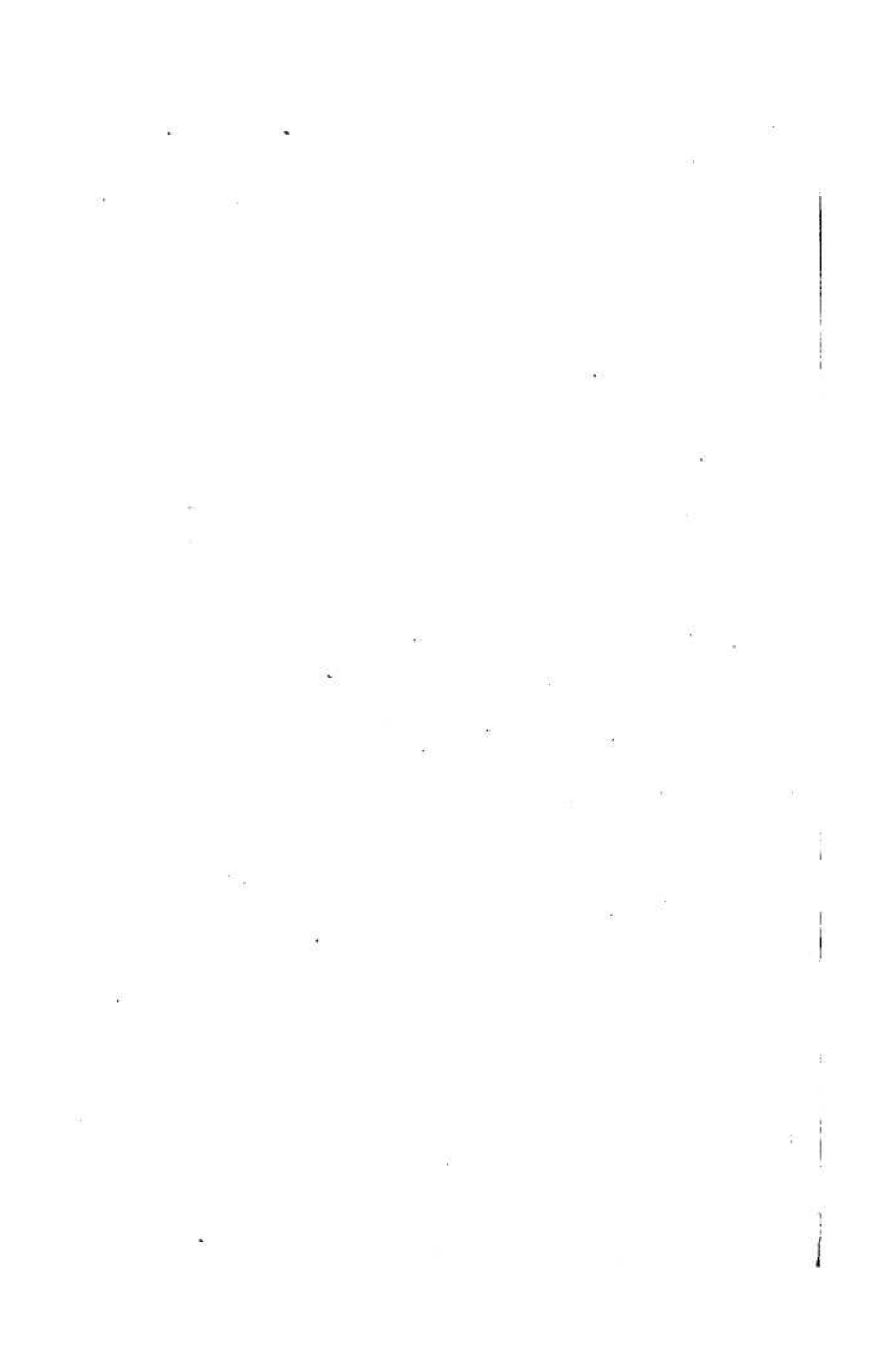
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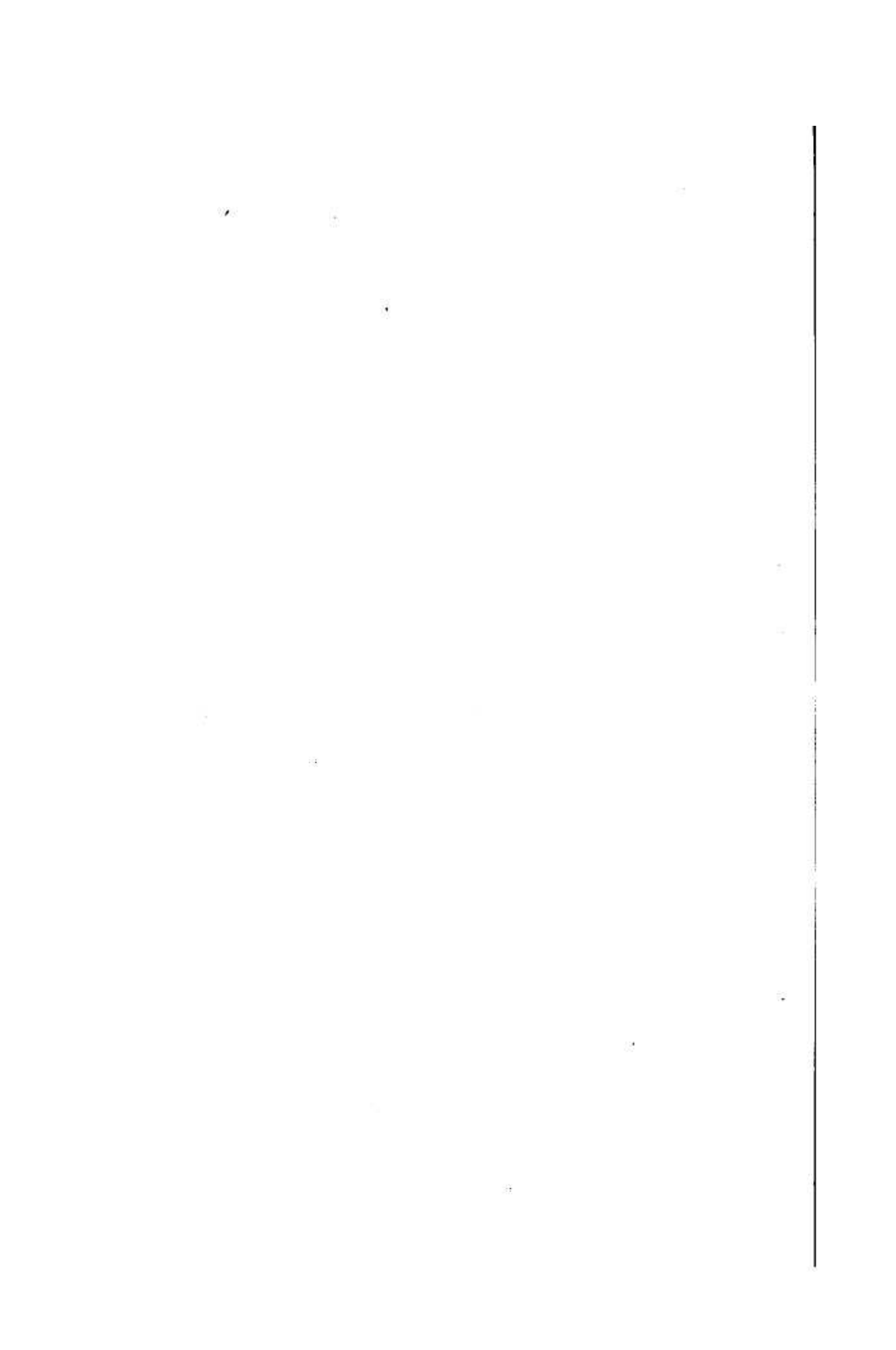


NEW YORK

1904



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## PREFACE.

The theology which to-day occupies the most prominent place in Germany, and which is also making its way into England and America, is the theology developed by Albrecht Ritschl and expounded with various modification by his immediate followers, as Harnack, Kaftan, and Hermann. To give a brief analysis of some of the fundamental elements in the conception of God central in this theology is the purpose of this dissertation.

At the beginning of the Reformation, Luther, who took the initiative in that movement, hardly perceived the need of a new, thorough-going theology. Melancthon's "Loci Communes," which appeared late in 1521, had Luther's unqualified approval. Of this work he says "A little book worthy not only of immortality, but of any ecclesiastical canon."<sup>1</sup> But when examined it is found that for the most part it emphasizes the religious elements in Christianity and is designed more to develop a simple pious life than to present theological truths in an all-embracing system. Luther himself, at first at least, had no thought of a new church. He simply held a few principles tenaciously, but because he did so hold them, the events which his attitude occasioned made a new church the necessary consequence. Other men with more logical minds than his saw the drift of affairs and recognized the need of a new, completely articulated theology which should on the one hand afford a bulwark against the teaching of the old established Catholic Church, and on the other hand meet the needs of pious supporters of the new movement. This recognition shows itself clearly in the later editions of the "Loci Communes," and with them the new theological development was begun.

As the years passed, however, the problem assumed new shape. Early in the seventeenth century efforts were put forth to secure a union of the Reformed and Lutheran churches and later with

<sup>1</sup> Köstlin: "Theology of Luther," Vol. II, p. 229.

Leibnitz this movement took new shape in the effort to unite all, both Protestants and Catholics, upon a modified platform. Still further, the rising tide of new thought which the centuries developed outside of Christianity could not be altogether ignored. Little by little discrepancies appeared even between the Protestant Christian teaching and the newer learning. In consequence of this there developed on the one hand an apologetic comparable with that in the early centuries of the Christian era, and on the other hand, there was an appropriation, frequently ungrateful, of the results of the newer experiences which life was continually presenting. This has continued down to very modern times.

In this development, confining attention simply to Germany, some great names appear, the names of men who guided, who opposed, who appropriated, and who determined either by opposing or by fostering, the particular course theology has taken since Luther's time. To mention Osiander, Calovius, Calixtus, and Schleiermacher greatest of all, is sufficient to bring to mind somewhat of the "storm and stress" period of German theological development. In direct descent from these, and indeed the latest and at present most influential through his works is Albrecht Ritschl [1822-1889], Professor of Theology at Bonn [1846-1864] and at Göttingen [1864-1889].

The problem Ritschl faced was slightly different from that of his predecessors. The union aimed at early in the seventeenth century was realized in 1817 when the Reformed and Lutheran churches in Prussia were formally united under the name of the Evangelical Church. Ritschl's father was heartily in sympathy with this movement, and gave much of his time and thought to perfecting the amalgamation, but the union remained in large part formal. Indeed, about the year 1850 another movement started which aimed at a rehabilitation of the Lutheran church as an independent religious body. Albrecht Ritschl saw that if the union were to become vital and permanent, there must be a return to the sources of the two streams, for only so could an inner harmony be discovered sufficient to build a stable church on. Still further, he felt the play of new forces upon himself from outside

Christian circles and could not altogether turn his back upon them. He was scientific in the temper of his mind. Early in his career he was a Hegelian of the Baur of Tübingen type, and in consequence advocated the "tendence" theory of studying history, which distorted rather than illuminated the course of human events. Later he moved away from the Hegelian influence and in his "Rise of the Old Catholic Church" [1857] he gave a presentation of that early period which conformed more nearly to strict scientific canons.

Ritschl was also very much out of conceit with Neoplatonism, though it was more against the Mysticism which that type of philosophy had fostered that his fulminations were especially directed. This disgust with Neoplatonism appears prominently in his "History of Pietism," one of his chief works. It was not unnatural, then, but exceedingly natural, that when Ritschl sought to construct a theology of his own, he should turn to that type of philosophic thought which was most in harmony with his scientific temper of mind, and apparently farthest removed from Neoplatonism and Mysticism, viz., the Kantian philosophy. No one of Kant's successors is so nearly in agreement with the strict scientific thought of to-day as Kant himself. It is true that Ritschl for his metaphysics turns consciously to Aristotle, and that he also makes large use of Lotze, but the Kantian influence is strong, as will be pointed out later.

Another influence that played upon Ritschl was the spirit of nationalism which was potent in Germany from 1848 until 1870. The comparative homogeneity of the civilized world at the dawn of the Christian era was shattered by the movements of the northern barbarians from the fifth century on. There emerged from the chaos then produced two contending forces, the Church and the rehabilitated Empire, each claiming supremacy. At first the Church won, and exercised practically absolute rule over Europe through Pope Innocent III. [1198-1216]. But real power did not lie with the Church. Gradually different centers established themselves representing in more modern times the phenomenon of the growth of independent nationalities. Ger-