

### XIII. - Science in the Christian Country.

In Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge. COL. 2:3.

BET difference between true natural science and "the wisdom of the Greeks", which the apostle disputes in his letters, is expressed in French and English even in the language. In France, those sciences which are concerned with the study of Nature in the strict sense are called "*les Sciences exactes*", and in England one is accustomed to include only these subjects among the "Sciences". Therefore, neither in France nor in England is it denied that the historical and spiritual sciences can also have a high value, but it is opposed to putting them on a par with the strict natural sciences. What makes the results of scientific research so valuable is that they repeatedly arrive at results which, once found, are forever and for everyone fixed and can no longer be doubted by anyone. This should not be exaggerated either, because time and again, statements have been made in this field as well, which were believed to be based directly on the facts, statements which for that reason were widely believed to be correct, but which nevertheless turned out to be based on either too cursory perception or incorrect generalization. We know how, according to many people, the new electron theory is even in the process of dismantling the foundations of statics, and especially in the field of medicine we constantly notice how a method of treatment that is popular in one quarter of a century is generally abandoned in the second quarter. A certain boundary must therefore be marked out here too; but with this reservation we must gratefully acknowledge that in the field of physics, now taken in its broadest sense, a number of facts have been established through accurate imaginative observation, and behind these facts an action of forces has been discovered, and in the action of these forces a regularity as of a natural law has been found, which has given us absolutely solid ground under foot, and has extraordinarily increased our power of disposition over Nature. To this, of course, these exact scientists owe a high call of certainty. The research of these sciences is limited to the sphere of finite things; they do not concern themselves with the spiritual and with what exceeds the finite scope. The subjective part of the researcher, which plays such a large role in the historical and spiritual sciences, is hardly considered in these exact sciences. They therefore give the spiritually dead the impression of being of much higher value than sciences which deal with the sphere of faith. Many of the difficulties that stand in the way of unity of belief in the spiritual realm do not arise here. If the observation is correct and the conclusion drawn from it sharply worded, everyone immediately agrees with that conclusion. There is even no room for doubt, and as

soon as the result is found, everyone applies it and benefits from it. Precise observation and conclusions drawn from it in a strict and logical way, which can also be tested for correctness, provide us with a certainty and certainty in this area, which falls entirely within the framework of our finite thinking, and which therefore clarifies and defines the matter in question for everyone. We are not saying, therefore, that the certainty of faith is less solid; but in the spiritual sphere, and especially in the sphere of faith, this certainty and solidity is of an entirely different nature. Here the certainty rests in an inner condition of the investigator, which was present in him but not in all other persons. Whoever possesses this spiritual certainty can therefore stand firm in it for himself, but he cannot prove it to others, except to those in whose inner life the same condition was created. On the one hand we are dealing with the exact sciences that can be proven to everyone and that fall within the framework of our finite thinking, and on the other with the spiritual sciences, the results of which can only be understood by those who spiritually possess the organ for it. Just as a blind man cannot judge the colors or a deaf man the theory of sound, no researcher lacking the spiritual organ can judge or accept the results of spiritual research. And this has caused the exact sciences to present themselves more and more as science, and science, as the only true means of arriving at the truth, to oppose faith.

So far as this was concerned, there was nothing to be said against science, provided it was strictly confined to visible things and had nothing else in view but the truth of visible things. But these conditions have not been met. The men of exact science have constantly ventured into areas which were not theirs, and have ventured to construct all sorts of systems for which they lacked any foundation. And on the other hand, those who devoted themselves to the historical and spiritual sciences also quite unjustly demanded for their science the same recognition of certainty as they did for the physical sciences. Thus, they confused two very different fields, combined them under one name of science, and now took pride in the fact that also in spiritual matters science had the right to oppose faith and to determine and declare, as surely and as firmly as the natural sciences, what was truth and what was delusion. This was even less of a risk for the distinguished scholars of the first rank. Such scholars are always characterized by a certain modesty, but this boasting about "science" soon turned out to be a disaster for the men of the second and third rank, and especially for those who did not investigate themselves but relied on the results of other research. Especially among the unbelieving teaching profession and in the second-ranking press, this veneration of so-called science

became an annoying tendency, and it is especially from these lower spheres that this glorification of "science" as opposed to "faith" arose. And, conversely, it was natural for anyone whose inner state, whose subjective existence had been elevated by the organ of faith, to gratefully and unhesitatingly accept the irrefutable results of exact science as new discoveries, but to criticize everything that, in the spiritual sphere as well, presented itself as the leading and controlling theory under the high but stolen honorific name of "science."

It was precisely this way with the emergence of the Christian religion in the pagan world of Greece and Rome. Never, in a word, did any of the apostles question the results already obtained in the field of exact science. No thought was given to that \*. There is not a trace of it in any apostolic writing. What Scripture does attack and denounce as false "science", "guided wisdom," and "fake philosophy," is the imaginary security which unbelieving thinkers already felt they could claim for their systems based on guesses, conjecture and supposition. Exact science has as the object of its investigation the world of visible, audible and tangible things. In that field it is strong, and as long as it limits itself to that, it deserves, provided that the research is accurate, trust, applause and thanks. But exact science knows nothing about the origin of things, nothing about the spirit, nothing about a spiritual world beyond our earth, and likewise nothing about the effect that the spirit can have on matter. The entire spiritual sphere, which is so much higher and so much more complex and delicate than the sphere of material things, escapes its notice and lies beyond the scope of its investigation. She can tell you nothing about the unity of purpose in the course and history of this world; man's destiny after death, and the eternal things that come after it, are hidden from her behind an impenetrable veil. Even the moral struggle between the sacred and the unholy, the origin of this struggle, the governing power which leads this struggle, and what the end of this struggle will be, escapes exact science completely. It knows nothing of the government of God which governs all things. And when she comes at last to the highest, to religion, and to the sacred object of worship of this religion, she speaks like a blind man about the colors, and has, if she wishes to be sincere and honest, to confess her utter ignorance.

But it was precisely to this that the men of this science could not come. They were well aware that all these spiritual questions were intrinsically of much greater importance than the problems of the visible which they knew to be certain, and therefore they could not bring themselves to confess their ignorance in this much higher field. That is why they claimed the right to speak highly in this spiritual

field as well. With their phantasy, from guesswork and conjecture or by unbelievable mental gymnastics, they then formed an artfully constructed conception of the spiritual and of all spiritual questions, called it their system, and presented this lightly constructed system, lacking any foundation, as truth, wisdom, science and philosophy. The very fact, however, that philosopher after philosopher stood up to demolish the system of his predecessor and to set up another system in its place, proved the fragility and unreliability of their construction. Thus, school came to be opposed to school. Each school gave a different view of life and a different view of the world. And by these false systems they smothered the real thirst for God in the human heart, and drew the spirits to haughtiness or singing or eternal doubt. And the end was that, for all their exalted wisdom, the finest seeds of the human heart withered, and the soul could find no peace in its endless struggle. When Christianity stepped in to revive that very germ of the human heart and to bring to the endlessly agitated soul the peace from above that surpasses all understanding, it could not fail to do so, unless the Christian religion should take a firm stand against all this imaginary wisdom, which distracts from God, subvert it, expose it in its vanity, wipe it out of the minds of men, and thus clear the ground for what Scripture calls "the foundation" of the Christian frame of mind. It must never be inferred, therefore, that Christianity was hostile to true science. It only follows that Christianity, in order not to be blocked in its way to the human heart, broke away and nullified what was not science and yet presented itself as such on completely false grounds. It stood then as it stands now. We too welcome real science, but we maintain the rule of thumb: And as often as we now encounter systems built on conjecture and assumption that attempt to explain or eliminate spiritual things about which one knows nothing apart from faith, we will call these systems the "scientific" ones, we shall strip these systems of the label of "science" which they have been given, and try to contrast them with the Christian view of life and the world which rests on what God has revealed to us.

You cannot know anything about Australia unless you go there yourself, or someone who has been there tells you what it is like. And that is exactly how it is for us with the unseen world. We will see what it is like when we get there, and until then we know nothing about it, unless a revelation comes to us from that unseen world, or someone who was there comes down to us. Even of what goes on in the inner life of the spiritual world we know almost nothing. The Apostle so rightly says that only the spirit of man knows what is in man; and even every personality of significance is such a mystery to us that it has been said, not

unjustly, that our lives are too short to know one single person. It would therefore have been quite conceivable that man as a creature could know as little about what and who God is as a thrush, hanging in the cage on the front of Gladstone's house, could grasp, feel or understand what was going on in the head and heart of the great statesman. But it is not like that. Man, created in God's image, is gifted with religious feeling and with the ability to serve his God. And it is entirely consistent with this that God does not allow him to wander in darkness, but irradiates him with revelatory light, and allows himself to be known by man. This revelation was raised in Christ, who was in heaven, and who came down to us from heaven, to that highest perfection for which it was amenable in this sinful world, and only in this way have we been provided with the data from which we can build up our knowledge in the spiritual sphere, concerning the greatness of God, the origin of things, the government of the world, our inner life, our calling, our destiny and our own future. And thus, also this revelation of Christ did not enter the world, or paganism fell into all regions where the Christian religion penetrated, and the wisdom of imagination, in which the scholars of the day had amused themselves, was destroyed. It was the little people of the world, the simple people, the weak and feeble, who first seized upon this high revelation, but the higher classes followed suit; and it was not long before, after a fearful, hard struggle, the power of Revelation, and with it Christianity, triumphed over the highly developed wisdom of the Greeks.

Then, as we have already explained, a certain tendency crept in during the first approach to withdraw unilaterally into the field of Revelation and to underestimate the significance of exact science. This was not unnatural. At that time, exact science had not yet conquered its own terrain, and was almost universally mixed up with and dissolved in what presented itself as "wisdom", as a system, as a conception of life. As a result, everything that was called scientific at the time reacted sharply against the Christian religion, and it was in the nature of things that Christian study endeavored first and foremost to repel this attack by the intellectualism of the time. In addition, great upheavals were causing the society of that time to collapse and the once so high civilization of the Greco-Roman world to be swept away. The stream of the Christian religion flowed primarily to the still uncivilized peoples of Central and Western Europe, and in this new world everything had to be rebuilt from the ground up. In that first period of the rebirth of these newly converted peoples, there was not even any thought of the development of science. But hardly has this first period been overcome, or the school takes off

again, the scientific study is taken up again, and not long before the Universities appear on the scene, wide spread study begins to spread its wings, and more and more the day approaches when also the exact science begins to take root. Also in the days of the Reformation you see, how under the Christian regime of our then Republic, the foundation of Leiden Academy is one of the first acts of government. If one compares what the heathen academies of Athens and

If one compares the pagan academies of Athens and Alexandria, and after that the Mohamedan schools of Ispahan and Bagdad, or the Jewish schools of Pumpeditae and Tiberias as a lasting result for science, yes, what the great Mohammedan university in Cairo, with its 10. 000 students, is even now, with what in Christian Europe has become the glory of university life, not only now, but also in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, then the fact cannot be denied that, better than anywhere else, it is precisely in Christian lands that science has flourished and developed. A foundation such as that of the Calvinist University in Amsterdam provides ample proof of the importance attached to scientific development, not least in Calvinist circles. And truly, whoever is aware of the scientific literature that was created by the Roman Catholic side, cannot, if he wants to be correct, deny that science also flourishes among them.

Yet this evidence from history is not enough for us. Here too we must go back to Christ and to the Scriptures themselves. What, you may ask, has the plant kingdom, for example, to do with Christ? Those who ask this question are answered that the Christ is the eternal Word, and that through this eternal Word all things, and therefore also the plant and animal kingdoms, were created. The eternal thoughts of God, which found their embodiment in all creation and thus also in the plant and animal kingdom, only came to be embodied in all creatures through the eternal Word. There is not a flower or a songbird that does not represent something specific from the thoughts of God, and what they represent was instilled and incarnated in all creatures by the eternal Word. The Scriptures do not confine Christ to the realm of grace or to the world of human children, but place all creation, both the visible and the invisible, here on this earth and below it in direct dependence on Christ. Already in the Old Testament, Wisdom is glorified, not as a human invention, but as with God from eternity. I have been anointed from eternity, from the beginning, from the antiquities of the earth. I was born when the abysses were not yet, before the mountains were established. He had not yet made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the fabric of the world. When He prepared the heavens, I was there." (Proverbs VIII :23-27). Nothing is thus

excluded from the Son. Whatever kingdom of nature, whatever star or comet you wish to take, yea, if you wish to descend to the first principles and the dust of the earth, it is all with the eternal Word, it is all with the Christ, not in an oblique, but in a direct connection, and there is no power at work in Nature, and there is no law which governs the operation of this power, but it has already proceeded from that eternal Word. It is therefore preposterous to say that although the Christ is in spiritual things, the physical sciences are outside of Him and have no point of contact with Him. In a certain sense it must rather be said that every deeper penetration of knowledge into the nature of Nature glorifies the majesty of the eternal Word.

And this is not a twisted combination. The Apostle himself expresses it as clearly and unequivocally as he can when he tells us that "in Christ are hidden all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom". Notice, not just wisdom, but also knowledge, and not just some of that knowledge, but all the treasures of that knowledge and of that wisdom hidden in the Christ. And how could it be otherwise? He, by whom all things were created, who created in all creatures, high or low, the thoughts of God which they were to express, and who therefore created in each creature the powers, laws and functions which make them what they are, how could He be foreign to anything in the material or spiritual nature? How could there be anything in the creature, or work, that he did not bring to consciousness and operation in it? He not only knows and fathoms all of Nature, but what is in it, he himself has deliberately put into it. And what would the knowledge of a Linnaeus in the realm of plants be compared to the knowledge that the Christ possesses of them by virtue of the Creation? All the study of nature, like all the study of spiritual science, anthropology, ethnology or whatever you like, is the radiance of a new glory which is hidden in Christ. And therefore, even if the mighty increase in knowledge brought to us by the last century has alienated the spiritually defenseless in their pride in their own wisdom, we, as professors of Christ, accept with thanks whatever new knowledge is offered us, especially about Nature, because we see the holy mark of origin shining on it, and know that it is only a piece of "all those treasures of knowledge and wisdom which are hidden in Christ."