

Theology for Beginners

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WHY STUDY THEOLOGY

...The incident took me back thirty years. I was a boy, and I had remarked to a theologian how sad it was that a layman could not get a course in theology. He said, “But why should you study theology? You are not obliged to.” In my new excitement over dogma, I was quite incapable of giving any lucid answer to his question why. I mumbled something to the effect that the truth would make me free, and I wanted to be free. I shall try now to answer that question of thirty years back.

In a way I am still hampered now as I was then by a feeling of the strangeness of having to make a case for anything so exciting and so joy-giving. But the joy and excitement of theological knowledge is like the joy and excitement of any other love - it cannot be explained to one who has not experienced it; it need not be explained to one who has. **I shall keep, therefore, to the plainest of reasons. Truth is food and truth is light.**

“Not on bread alone doth man live,” said Christ Our Lord, quoting Deuteronomy to the Devil. Everybody knows the phrase, and most people tend to complete it according to their own fancy of what is most important to the hungry soul of man. But it had its own completion in Deuteronomy and Our Lord reminded the Devil of that too – “but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.” Revealed truth, then, is food. Now it is a peculiarity of food that it nourishes only those who eat it. We are not nourished by the food that someone else has eaten. To be nourished by it, we must eat it ourselves.

Truth is light too. Not to see it is to be in darkness, to see it wrong is to be in double darkness. The greater part of reality can be known only if God tells us: doctrine is what He tells us: lacking it, we lack light. To be stumbling along in the dark, happy in the knowledge that our guides can see, is not at all the same thing as walking in the light. It is immeasurably better than stumbling through the dark with blind guides but it is poverty all the same.