

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

out that in thus surrendering to the Catholic Party they are taking back with one hand what they offer with the other.

The controversy is simply a clear illustration of the conflict of ideals amongst us. The Catholic Party favour an orientation to Rome, and we Evangelicals to the Free Churches: the Catholic Party have their eyes on the past and we on the future. There is no doubt whatever as to what the final result will be. The progressive and forward-looking men always win. But what about our Church in the immediate present and the near future if the progressive party suffers a temporary reverse? That is the anxious question which agitates our mind.

With these preliminary observations I pass on definitely to open the Conference.

The basis of the various papers is the Lambeth Quadrilateral. This document was drawn up at the Lambeth Conference in 1888 and has since been frequently reaffirmed.



Holy Scripture as the Final Authority in Faith and Conduct.

By the Rev. J. M. HARDEN, B.D., LL.D.

Vice-Principal of the London College of Divinity.

I

“THE Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as containing all things necessary to salvation and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.” The Lambeth Conferences of 1888 and 1897 put this as the first of four Articles on the basis of which approach might be, by God’s blessing, made towards Home Reunion. Whether there is any special significance in its position as first is not quite clear. The compilers of the XXXIX Articles put first in Articles I–V what corresponds to the second Article of the Lambeth Quadrilateral. Only in their VIth Article did they first touch on the question of Holy Scripture. The Lambeth order is that of the Helvetic Confession and the Westminster Confession of Faith. As a matter of logic either order will stand. For if, on the one hand, it seems natural that the “ultimate standard” should precede, it is clear, on the other hand, that in a sense the Creeds (or, at any rate, a creed) must come first, at least so far as to assume

the existence of a Personal God, able and willing to communicate with His creatures.

None of those, however, whom this Quadrilateral concerns would deny the possibility of such a revelation, however much they might differ as to its character, its method, or even the nature of its authority, when given. On these points there has been, no doubt, endless controversy. Yet, viewed solely in relation to the reunion of *Churches*, this Article may be seen to involve no great difficulty, for it is quite evident on consideration that the question as to the authority of Holy Scripture (and as to its inspiration therein involved) is not a question of Church against Church, but of individual against individual. Differences of opinion, that is to say, will be found, to a greater or less degree, amongst the members of all the Churches concerned. Therefore the difficulty in connexion with this article is not to arrive at common ground between Church and Church ; rather is it to find some view sufficiently comprehensive to include all believers in a Divine revelation in a real sense, and specially not to exclude by over-definition any who might be willing to consecrate their natural gifts to the ministry of the Church.

II

It would be waste of time to prove that the last century has seen a great change in opinion as regards the Bible. Perhaps it may not be needless to point out that such change is a return in some respects to the position of some of the greatest of the Reformers. The later Reformers set up an infallible Bible in place of the infallible Church—making it infallible too not only in matters of faith and duty, but also in questions of science and history. Neither Luther nor Calvin thus taught. The former relegated to an appendix some of the New Testament Books and his words as to the Epistle of St. James are well known ; the latter expressed doubts as to the genuineness of 2 Peter, and recognized fully the existence of discrepancies in the Gospel narratives. The view that arose in the century following the Reformation that it was necessary to consider the Bible in every respect perfectly free from fault and omission reached its zenith when in 1675 the Formula Consensus Helvetica laid down that the “ volume of the Old Testament is *θεόπνευστος* both in its consonants, and its vowels—the points

themselves, or at least the force of the points." This view, or one akin at least to it, became the prevalent one.

When we seek to find the causes of the reaction from this view, and of the change to more modern opinions, some of them are obvious. Men have had in the first place to read their Bibles in the light of ever-increasing knowledge. Astronomy, Geology, Biology, Anthropology were yet in their infancy, if indeed they can be said to have been in existence at all in the 16th century. Historical Criticism again is almost entirely a modern growth and has altered *everyone's* opinion of the nature of the Bible. Once more, if we take Archaeology, while we can truly say that discoveries in this field have shed floods of light on the pages of the Word, removed not a few objections of its opponents and guaranteed in many wonderful ways its truth, yet it also has shown the necessity of caution in attributing absolute accuracy to such things, for example, as figures and dates.

But besides these obvious considerations, there are one or two others perhaps not quite so obvious which it is well to mention. The first of these belongs distinctly to the sphere of religious philosophy. A change has taken place in the views of most men as to the relation of God to the world. They have learned to emphasize His immanence no less than His transcendence. Formerly when prominence was given to His transcendence the tendency was to think of revelation as something coming altogether from without. On the other hand undue emphasis on His immanence tends towards a too subjective view. To get at the whole truth we must combine the two views, and recognize both elements, the objective and the subjective, or more simply, the divine and human elements in revelation.

Nor must we overlook the influence in the same direction of the application of modern scientific methods to Biblical studies. In days when deductive methods held sway the argument was, As God is what He is, the Bible which comes from Him must be of such and such a character. Against such a method Bishop Butler lifted his voice even in the 18th century. He was, however, in advance of his time. Few would now deny that it is best to follow the inductive method and learn what a revelation is from the facts presented by the Bible itself. What precisely these facts are, is a question which will receive widely different answers from many

who are ready to accept the Bible as the ultimate standard of faith and duty ; and therefore in all discussions on such points in connexion with Reunion, it will be necessary to see that any statement that may be made for general adoption is wide enough to include all whom it may be intended to include. Not to speak of those who deny the theory of verbal inspiration and assert the presence of a large human element in Scripture, it must be wide enough to embrace also those who cannot hold the absolute accuracy of the Bible in historic or scientific matters, those who believe in the progressive character of the revelation contained therein, and those who are ready to accept the modern opinions as to the method of its composition. Whatever our own particular opinions may be (and mine, were I to give them, would, no doubt, on some of these points appear old-fashioned and out-of-date to many here) we need, if we define at all, something wider than just that which will embrace our own immediate coterie. We need something which will be wide enough to include, shall we say, the writers of " Foundations " and of " Fundamentals," provided that they on both sides are tolerant enough to include each other. As lately as 1893 it was laid down : " The Bible as we now have it in its various translations and revisions, when freed from errors and mistakes of copyists and printers, is the very Word of God and consequently without error." To put forth such a statement in these times for the sake of binding together any one church, not to speak of uniting together different churches, betrays an absolute ignorance of present conditions of thought. It was of similar statements that it was written not by any German critic, but by a sturdy Protestant, the late Professor Mayor : " The sacred page endures worse wrong from friends than foes. A true instinct, say an overruling Providence, has saved the Church from defining inspiration : the wind of God's Spirit, blowing where it listeth, is too subtle to be pent in any Aeolus bag of human shibboleths."

It is a commonplace that the Anglican Church has nowhere given a definition of Inspiration. It has, in the VIth Article, laid down that Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation ; and in the words that follow, it excludes from the things necessary to be believed " whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby," but it does not state what things contained therein must be believed ; it also gives assent to the words of the

Nicene Creed that the Holy Ghost "spake by the prophets"; and in the XXth Article the phrase "God's Word written" occurs.

Not one of these phrases would cause any hindrance to reunion. It is perhaps otherwise with the well-known words to be found in the Office for the Making of Deacons, "Do you unfeignedly believe all the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament?" Quite apart from any suggestion of reunion, it has been felt by many that some alteration in these words is necessary. It would be out of place now to discuss what change, if any, should be made. I merely point out that the importance of the already existing discussion would be increased in connexion with Home Reunion. The words have obviously not been of use in the sense originally intended. One man in a hundred perhaps answers the question now in the same sense as the words had in the 16th century.

III

Is the range then of this article to be so wide as to include every view, even that of those who make the Bible differ, not in kind, but only in degree, from any other religious book? If it is, if the comprehensiveness pleaded for is to be as far-reaching as this, then the first Article of this Quadrilateral is meaningless. It was never intended to include such a view as would speak of "the total disappearance . . . of all external authority in matters of religion," or would say, "We have no authoritative text-book of divine truth and human duty, so we must open our minds to all that speaks divinely to them whether in the Bible or elsewhere." Without of course denying the truth of these last words, it must be maintained that the Bible, if it is to be the "final authority," must be regarded as a divine gift, nay more, as being in a unique sense a divine gift. It may not be possible to define in what this uniqueness consists with the precision which some might desire. May it not be wise to hold with Dr. Charteris that "it well beseems us to admit the truth of intuition which does not come as the last step in a syllogism"? Archbishop Bernard says much the same: "It will probably never be possible to set forth with logical precision the conditions under which the Divine Voice speaks to the children of men."

Is it any wonder? Is it not exactly here with the Written Word as with the Word made flesh? It has often been pointed out how

the Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries rejected the successive heresies which were attempts to explain the mystery of the Person of Christ, and contented themselves with reassertions of the fact of the Incarnation and of the union of the Divine and Human Natures. It may be our wisdom too, in this matter of Inspiration, to take a similar stand, while not forgetting Dr. Sanday's warning, "The legitimate consequence of a denial of inspiration is the denial of all spiritual influence of God on man, and the next step is the denial of any true Personality in God Himself."

Why, then, are we to receive the Bible as authoritative? On the one hand, we are told that "it is becoming more and more difficult to believe in the Bible without believing in the Church." The terms of this statement are not without ambiguity, but, if it means that the divine message cannot still come direct from the Word to the soul, the story of Christian Missions and the experience of many an unlearned reader at home shows that it requires correction. The College of Physicians may tell us much about the Laws of vision, but it cannot give us sight.

On the other hand we are told that only so far as the Bible "finds" us, is it God's Word for us. I need not quote the *locus classicus* from Coleridge. This, though it is true in a sense with regard to the message to the individual soul, is insufficient, by its utter neglect of historical testimony, when we consider the Bible as a standard of truth.

The truth of the matter seems to be, as Dean Wace puts it, that "from first to last the authority of the Scriptures has been equivalent to the authority with which they themselves have convinced men they came from God."

The books of the Old and New Testaments were accepted as of divine authority for generations before they were collected into a Divine Library. This fixing of a Canon could not impart to the books a divine authority which they had not before. "The judgment of the Church is nothing more than the consensus of the private judgments of those that constitute the Church."

So we receive the books as authoritative, because we believe, we know that we get in them and from them a message from God, and this belief or knowledge is guaranteed to us besides by the contemporary experience of other Christians and the continuous experience of the Church of Christ throughout the ages. It has

been well said that "the element of truth at the heart of this appeal to the Church is the fact that the general experience of Christian men comes in to confirm the individual faith, to correct its errors, enlarge its narrowness, and broaden its catholicity."

Somewhat in this sense the Bible is for us the Word of God, and therefore authoritative. We believe it to be inspired in a unique way. This uniqueness, as I have said, we may not be able to define with logical precision, but yet may we not say this much at least? First, it is unique, because no book leads us to God as the Bible does. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above. That we know, but the inspiration of the Bible differs from all other to which the name might, in a sense, be given, not only by being from God, but also by leading to Him. Then, again, and specially, the Bible is unique in that it points us to the Person of the Incarnate Word. He is the Light of all Scripture. In the Bible we see

"Him first, Him last, Him midst, and without end."

He is the centre and the cause of the organic unity which we discern within its pages. What He Himself said of the Old Testament, we may say of Old and New alike, They testify of Him. No need here further to develop the point. Part of the uniqueness of the Bible is in its unique subject—the Word made flesh. We accept the Bible as our "final authority" of faith and conduct because it contains in the Old Testament the record, given by inspired men, of the revelation which led up to Him—a record stamped by Him as of Divine authority; and then in the New Testament the story of His Life, His Teaching, His Death, His Resurrection—in a word, His Gospel; as well as the interpretation of His Person and Work by those who were His immediate followers, and had received from Him the promise that they would be led into all truth.

The limitation to the sphere of faith and conduct agrees with the teaching of the New Testament itself. It is the sphere mentioned by St. Paul when he claims for the Old Testament that it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness." We have no need, or indeed right, to go any further. "Inspiration," Dr. Gwatkin writes, "will guarantee the message so far as its proper purpose requires, but not necessarily any further. . . . We cannot assume that the record will be perfect

for any use to which we may please to put it, for example, as a text-book of science, or a horoscope of the future." We weaken rather than strengthen its authority when we attribute to it more than it claims for itself, or, it is necessary to add, when in our interpretations we apply to it methods which we would not apply to any other book.

It has been inevitable that much should be omitted, or lightly touched on, which might seem to have needed discussion. Questions about the Canon of Holy Scripture, about methods of interpretation, about Biblical Criticism in general were close at hand seeking admission, but time forbade their inclusion. My endeavour has been to confine myself strictly to the special part of the subject set before me—Holy Scripture as the final authority in faith and conduct, considered with reference to prospects of Home Reunion.



The Two Creeds.

By the Rev. H. B. GOODING, M.A., *Rector of Gatcombe, Isle of Wight.*

“THE Apostles’ Creed, as the Baptismal symbol; and the Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith.”

This is the second of the four corner stones which the Lambeth Conference of 1888 recommended as essential in any scheme of reunion between the Church of England and other Christian bodies. The words used remind us of an early chapter in Church History. Two kinds of creed can be distinguished, gradually taking shape, in response to two needs which became manifest at an early period of Christian experience. Firstly, there was the need, which must have been felt from the very beginning, of having some simple but definite profession of faith which every individual would be required to make before admission into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ which was being founded on earth. In origin the Apostles’ Creed was of this nature; and, although expanded in course of time and extended in use, it has always remained *the* Baptismal Creed. Secondly, it was not long before the growth of heretical opinions made it necessary that Christians should have some fuller profession of faith which would serve to exclude such errors. The