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# The Fraternal

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No. 153

	page
EDITORIAL .....	4
<b>THE PASTORAL SESSION : JUBILEE REMINISCENCES</b> .....	4
Rev. Arthur Dakin, B.D., D.Th., Principal Emeritus, Bristol Baptist College.	
<b>BAPTISTS AND SOME CONTEMPORARY ISSUES.....</b>	6
Rev. J. J. Brown, B.D., Senior Minister Dagenham Group, Essex.	
Rev. W. H. Wragg, B.A., B.D., Minister, North Finchley, London.	
Rev. S. J. Voke, B.D., Minister, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey	
<b>THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEILHARD DE CHARDIN (2)...</b>	21
Rev. Michael Walker, B.D., M.Th., Minister, Higham's Park, London E.4.	
<b>SOME THOUGHTS ON RE-READING WORDSWORTH...</b>	28
Rev. J. O. Barrett, M.A., retired Minister, formerly General Superintendent, North Eastern area.	
<b>THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE .....</b>	31
Rev. Donald Monkcom, B.A., B.D., M.Th., Minister, Holmesdale Road, South Norwood, London.	
<b>OF INTEREST TO YOU .....</b>	45
<b>OVERSEAS NOTES .....</b>	47

## EDITORIAL

### THE ASSEMBLY PASTORAL SESSION: 50th ANNIVERSARY

J. J. Brown sprang a surprise on most of us at the Assembly Pastoral Session by informing us that this was our 50th anniversary! The occasion could not have been celebrated in a better way than by devoting an afternoon to further consideration of our General Secretary's address of last year. Jack Brown, Walter Wragg and Stanley Voke served us well and the three addresses are published in this issue of **THE FRATERNAL** in order to stimulate discussion in local fraternals. On hearing of the special anniversary our newly appointed B.M.F. Chairman (Sidney Hall) sent a note to Dr Arthur Dakin, one who was present at the first Pastoral Session in 1919. Dr Dakin has shared a few reminiscences with us regarding the beginnings of the Pastoral Session. As we publish them we send our warm greetings to Dr Dakin at this time and our thanks for all his service and fellowship. If any other Minister who was in at the beginning cares to add any further comments we shall be pleased to hear from him.

We have had a few letters regarding our April Editorial about retired Ministers. One or two make good practical suggestions and offer some useful ideas. We hope that these, and others, will be seriously discussed and lead to some action that will enable our retired men to know that they are not forgotten.

### THE PASTORAL SESSION: JUBILEE REMINISCENCES

The actual origin it is easy to state. It arose out of the chronic poverty of many of our ministers at the end of the first world war. Before the war the pay was poor; after it was appalling! I got £200 a year at my first church, Waterbarn—that was an excellent stipend. A neighbouring minister with five children got £2 per week! A girl at the mill earned 30/- per week, the lowest paid worker—a porter on the railway—got 16/-. During the war I had a stipend at Coventry of £400 a year—a princely sum in those days. But what happened was this. While workers' wages during the war years trebled, ministers' wages remained the same. The result was really chronic poverty for a large number of ministers. I remember vividly standing on the steps of Bloomsbury and surveying the crowd of ministers gathered after the Assembly—many men in old frock-coats, green with age, and black and white straw boater hats! It

made such an impression on me that I decided never to wear a top hat and frock-coat again! This was not altogether welcomed but it very soon caught on and there's no doubt it helped.

Then in some way or other a few of us got together and decided to form a ginger group to stir up the B.U. Council. From that came the idea of calling a meeting of all ministers to face the situation. We had no policy except this of stirring up the Council. But, as so often, other ideas and purposes came in and somewhat obscured the original aim. We had a great gathering of ministers on that first occasion. I spoke about the need and advocated the ginger group. Herbert Morgan also spoke—all I remember of his address was his attack on the Baptist Times. Then Henry Townsend of Manchester College spoke. He departed entirely from our original purpose and made a really scathing attack on J. H. Shakespeare, the B.U. Secretary. Shakespeare had published his book on church unity and had given one or two addresses on it and was consequently very much out of favour with many in the denomination including senior ministers like D. J. Hiley. But the fact was that this attack on him upset our original purpose and the result was that the meeting was at sixes and sevens. The idea of a ginger group hung fire and then, when we were getting nowhere, Tom Phillips, the minister of Bloomsbury, moved that we have an annual ministerial session in the Union Annual Meetings. This was harmless enough and was easily carried. So the Pastoral Session was born. The first meeting had done nothing save rouse a fair amount of prejudice against the ministers, with apparently no real appreciation of their difficult position. As far as I recall, the initiative to improve the lot of the ministers came from other quarters.

Several times afterwards the Pastoral Session met without the approval of the "powers that be". It discussed many subjects but had no positive plan as far as I remember. Then, after it had been going some few years, J. H. Shakespeare had a talk with me and I suggested that the Union should acknowledge the Pastoral Session and show goodwill to it, putting it in the annual programme of the Assembly. I suggested to him that, if he himself would come and grace it with his presence, much of the ill feeling would be done away. This he agreed to do and his presence at the front and his later recognition of it established it as a permanent part of our organization. It has done much good and, as often happens, different good from that which was originally intended. May it continue to flourish.

ARTHUR DAKIN

## BAPTISTS AND SOME CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

At the 1968 Pastoral Session of the Baptist Union Assembly, Dr David Russell gave a stimulating address to our Ministers which was later published in the 'Living Issues' series of booklets.\* The Pastoral Session of this year's Assembly was given over to further consideration of the topics raised by our General Secretary and the three contributions are published below in order that our readers may be able to encourage the discussion of these important themes in their local fraternals.

### I

In one of the introductory paragraphs, after illustrating the theory of paradox, Dr Russell says: "Truth is to be found in tension at the intersection of different approaches. As I grow older I find myself more sure of my faith but less dogmatic in my assertion of it. I no longer see things as clearly as once I did in blacks and whites. But the alternative is not the acceptance of a murky grey as once I thought; it is a deeper appreciation of the many-coloured wisdom of God".

The spirit of this paragraph encourages us to avoid the disreputable associations of dogmatism—the closed mind, the intolerant attitude, the aggressive assault upon another's freedom. It would scarcely be Dr Russell's intention to discourage the emphatic expression of considered beliefs concerning the Gospel and the Church. There are fundamental elements of the Faith which merit unequivocal statement. Paul Tillich in *The New Being* quotes Martin Luther "What is more miserable than uncertainty. Take away assertion and you take away Christianity. It is not the character of the Christian mind to avoid assertion". To which Tillich adds the comment that every word of the prophets and writers of the New Testament confirms his attitude—though we are to distinguish between self-certainty and God-given certainty. The apostle Paul alludes to the essence of the Gospel which is common to the New Testament churches. There are the baptismal confessions (Romans 10:9, 10); the echoes of hymns of the Faith (1 Timothy 3:16). Later there are the great credal statements and the confessional formulations of 17th century baptists. The flight from dogmatism need not become an escape route from confident assertion regarding ultimate concerns—albeit without the dogmatic tone and spirit. The very title of the book in which the theory of paradox is employed is a dogmatic statement: "God was in Christ" (D. M. Baillie). That is a fundamental Christian conviction. It justifies assertion. Truth may be discovered in tension. If it is indeed truth then it merits proclamation. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a paradox! Hence Dr Russell quotes D. M. Baillie's

\* D. S. Russell, *Baptists and Some Contemporary Issues*, Living Issues booklet, 1/6d obtainable from Baptist Union Publications Dept. (postage 4d).

reminder that we cannot fall back on paradox too easily and make this an excuse for not thinking our way through our faith, and, we might add, for not proclaiming the certainties.

The paradoxes with which D. M. Baillie's book is concerned are the paradoxes of the Faith—they are theological. The so-called paradoxes in Dr Russell's address are of a practical nature. The first concerns our British Baptist way of life. "British" because it would appear that the issue of independence and interdependency is less acute in other parts of the world where a greater measure of control by committee is acceptable. It has something to do with our British temperament. The Report of the Commission on the Associations says that "The British generally are individualists who disdain logic and uniformity, and Baptists in particular are of an independent turn of mind" (v). However, 8 pages later there is a quotation from W. L. Lumpkin: "Formal associationalism was primarily the result of a native Baptist connectional instinct". So we appear to be temperamentally independent and instinctively connectional! Yet independence and interdependency are not necessarily self-contradictory practices—not unless they are distorted out of recognition into isolation on the one hand and autocracy on the other hand. Neither of these distortions has any place in historic Baptist policy, but both independence and inter-dependence are there.

Regarding independence it is plain enough that a company of people gathered together in the name of Christ, electing its officers, disciplining its members, practising the New Testament ordinances, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit and paying attention to Scripture, was considered competent to govern itself. The spiritual autonomy of the local fellowship was accepted. As Dr Payne shows, it was in striking contrast to the prevailing concept of the church as a centralised, authoritarian institution. "Baptist groups rejected any suggestion that one church could have authority over another". The point is not missed in the various official polity statements. The constitution of the Union formed in 1813 contained the clause: "This Society disclaims all manner of superiority and superintendence over the churches or any authority to impose anything upon the faith or practice of any of the churches". The Declaration of Principle formulated sixty years later included the statement: "It is fully recognised that every separate church has liberty to interpret and administer the laws of Christ". The reply to Lambeth says: "Every local community thus constituted (i.e. on the basis of confession of personal faith) is regarded by us as both enabled and responsible for self-government". The 1948 Statement on Baptist Doctrine reaffirmed that each local church is held competent under Christ to rule its own life.

But these same documents contain other clauses which make it equally plain that Baptists were conscious of the need to associate in an organised and committed manner. The 1813 Assembly recommended the grouping of churches under one minister, the ordination and support of pastors, and the establishment of a fund akin to the Home Work Fund. The Reply

to Lambeth affirmed the belief that the same Holy Spirit who inspires responsible self-government also leads local congregations to associate freely in wider organisation for fellowship and for the propagation of the Gospel. The 1948 Statement says: "Baptists have been aware of the perils of isolation and have sought safeguards against exaggerated individualism", and it goes on to show how this can be done through Associations, the Union, the Missionary Society and the Baptist World Alliance. As people who had a common Faith and practice our Baptist forebears were constantly endeavouring to express their relatedness in words and deeds. They do not give the impression of being last ditch defenders of local independence but rather that of being brethren in quest of closer relationships, freely negotiated and maintained. So they met together, invited others to join with them in assembly and in Association life.

Local liberty has always been significantly qualified: it is to be held under the Lordship of Christ, the Head of the Church; it is to be brought to the light of Scripture; it is to be "under the guidance of the Holy Spirit". So it will be recognised by the fruit of the Spirit, lacking which it must be suspect. It is only the acceptance of such qualifications which will save a healthy independence from distortion.

Such a distortion can be seen when a Church Meeting is turned into a monthly or quarterly wrangle about trivialities, over-concerned with itself, oblivious to the existence, to say nothing of the needs or blessings, of sister churches and of the world. We can at least try to make the Church Meeting a true fellowship of believers, concerned about the mission of the church in the world. It is here that the competence and sense of responsibility, and the maturity of the local fellowship can and ought to be demonstrated.

Another distortion occurs when we mis-use our ministry. Dr Russell credits the ministers with being "the most powerful uniting or divisive force in the denomination". It is not our function to exercise what John Owen called "magisterial authority", however tempted we may be to impose our personal desires and interpretations and policies upon unwitting or unwilling people without any reference to the feelings and opinions of the local fellowship or to recognised Baptist beliefs and practices. We are called to be faithful pastors, teachers and ministers of the Word and Ordinances. We have no mandate to indulge in mini-popey under the guise of independence. The freedom we cherish is freedom for the whole fellowship and not simply for the person who happens to be fulfilling a function which places him in a position of influence.

There is further distortion when a diaconate or other body assumes dictatorial authority and makes far-reaching decisions without proper reference to the rest of the membership.

Distortion also occurs when the independence which is claimed is the result of a temperamental attitude which has nothing to do with theological conviction—the type of inde-

pendence which reacts unfavourably to the very mention of change; which stands in the way of adventurous planning, and reacts unfavourably, say, to the grouping of churches, the closure of premises, however redundant, no matter if these policies seem to be the right and sensible thing to do, fondly imagining that independency is thus being preserved. How this will serve the kingdom of God is a question which does not seem to be asked.

We take it for granted that our people understand what Baptist independency is about. Perhaps we need to explain that in the first place it was the reaction to a high-powered hierarchy embodied in the State and in the Roman Church, and also in the structures introduced by Luther and Calvin. Certainly it had nothing to do with a local congregation cutting itself off from fellow-believers who had common convictions regarding the Gospel and the Church.

To regard our Associations, the Baptist Union, or the Baptist Missionary Society as "high-powered hierarchies" or red-taped bureaucracies is plainly nonsensical. The Union is a voluntary association of churches and Associations. The Assembly can reject a recommendation from the Council. Assembly resolutions can on occasions be ignored by local churches (though not lightly we trust). But these bodies are recognised as the kind of machinery required to enable the churches to be of service to one another in the fulfilment of their common task, the means by which we can at least try to bring into effective partnership churches which claim to be autonomous.

Meanwhile there are some experiments at a more local level which show what can be done. The Dagenham Scheme (of which an account was given in the last issue of THE FRATER-NAL) has drawn four churches into close working association, led by a team of ministers. The aim is to encourage one another in the fulfilment of the churches' mission in the neighbourhood. There is a rôle for each congregation to play in the immediate vicinity of its premises. There are local projects to be planned and local interests to be served. But scarcely anything can happen in one of the churches which remains uninfluenced by the relationship in which each stands to the other in the Group. A Central Fund has been established into which each church pays an amount commensurate with its resources, and from this fund the ministerial stipends, pastoral expenses and some other items (in connection with publicity for example) are met. The churches are members one of another—a fact which could well be expressed in a united church meeting for matters of major importance affecting the Group—such as the calling of a minister, or plans for evangelism. There is discussion in progress as to whether we can be designated "Dagenham Baptist Church". It is interesting to recall that Dr J. H. Shakespeare suggested a plan of this kind which Dr Dakin commented on at the Pastoral Session in 1944: "We might do worse than look again at (the) idea (of) one Baptist Church in each locality combining all the individual churches in a defined area". This is not a subtle attempt

to centralise church government, neither is it the thin end of a Baptist bureaucratic wedge. It is a venture in commitment on the part of ministers and churches — commitment to one another and to our Lord for the task which He has assigned. I believe in the competence of the local church provided it is competent! Competence requires vision, responsiveness to the Holy Spirit—and a quorum!

When churches are continually harping on their rights of autonomy, and when they show little sense of responsibility for their sister churches they are allowing the world to squeeze them into its own mould. But we are called to be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we may discern the will of God. From this thought expressed in Romans chapter 12 the apostle goes on to describe the fellowship of believers urging that love for our brotherhood should breed warmth of mutual affection. It is this spirit which alone can help us to make our church structures a worthy and effective expression of the Gospel—the good news of God's love and of His gracious invitation to enter into fellowship with His forgiven, if imperfect, people for the fulfilment of His purposes in the world for which Christ died and rose again. In such structures there will be no place for isolationism or autocracy, but plenty of room for mutual responsibility—in the Lord.

J. J. BROWN

## II

When we try to think for ourselves, it is impossible to escape completely from the influence of current thought-forms. The fact that the Christian Church was once split wide open on the question of whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and *from* the Son, or from the Father through the Son, may now seem astonishing to us, but it expressed the way men's minds worked at that time.

On the other hand, we are not inhibited entirely in our search for truth by the fact of current categories of thinking. We may grasp truth imperfectly, but we can still grasp it in some fashion, and surely our history shows repeatedly that this is so.

Now clearly there is no sense in the statement that a thing is true because it is paradoxical. Such a claim would be lunacy. But it is also a fact that truth sometimes does impinge upon our consciousness as the delicate equilibrium between opposing principles; we can see in terms of tensions what is otherwise unintelligible.

Of the three paradoxes referred to by Dr Russell, Mr Brown has spoken of the first. The only comment I feel constrained to add is that all three of us, as we spoke together and prayed together and thought it all out, agreed on the fact that Inde-

pendency should never be interpreted in terms of isolationism. On the third paradox Mr Voke will speak, and I would just say that we ought to take seriously Dr Russell's warning that when we try to state what many believe we are in danger of drifting into the attitude which states what *some* require *all* to believe.

Clearly, all three paradoxes overlap; but it is my task to draw your attention to the second one, namely that between Unity and Diversity. And I would begin at the point where we would all agree that no one can claim infallibility. We have never taken kindly to such claims from others, and it would ill behove us to make any such demands for ourselves. We reject any doctrine of *personal* infallibility; and, what is more, we would reject any such notion even if it were applied to the church meeting, the regional association, or the national assembly.

Now of course there will be some who will tell me that I am barking up the wrong tree, and that the point is not one of human infallibility, but the question of the infallibility of the Scriptures. I have a certain inbred sympathy with this; but it is an over-simplification. For there is more than one way of interpreting the Scriptures, and the issue is not one of reverence for the Bible or irreverence for the Bible, but whether or not we can take into consideration the work of Biblical scholars of all shades of opinion. There are many Christians who attach great importance to the work of Biblical critics, yet who still see the Bible as God's Word *when properly understood*. They would say that the work of devoted scholars does, in fact, help us to understand what the Scriptures are saying to us. Yet I am sure that *all* of us would acknowledge that we owe far more than we can say to the strange, self-authenticating power of the Word of God, and that we could not imagine any kind of Christianity without a proper reverence for the Holy Scriptures.

My reason for saying this is to show that the point at issue is not the infallibility of the Bible but the infallibility of one or other method of interpreting the Bible. And it is this which places us in grave peril, for it is, basically, the old business of *personal* infallibility again, or the infallibility of a particular tradition.

At this point we may well ask whether we have the courage to think a little further. If there are different points of view among us, as there are, what is to be our attitude? Are we to shout down any other viewpoint than our own? Or try to ignore them? And even if we did, would we, in our heart of hearts, ever manage to be content with such an attitude? Is it not far more true to our Master to give to the other fellow the courtesy he has the right to expect from us, and to commence the difficult business of trying to understand his view and how he has arrived at it? *That* we can do, at least—and we do not thereby involve ourselves in the surrender of any point which we conscientiously hold. It can never be wrong, surely, to talk with the other man.

In so doing, of course, let us not be so carried away that we fall into the trap of what Dr Russell calls "double-talk", creating handy verbal ambiguities which will mean different things to different men. That would be both useless and hypocritical.

And let us remember that if there are variations among us in thought and conviction this is no new thing, and we should not be surprised by it. But there *are* two comparatively new factors which make it more difficult for us, and which tend to bear out what I have said about our being influenced by current thought-forms. The first of these factors is the recent trend in theology which has capitulated to philosophy and produced many statements to astonish us. They come from sources which, in spite of some foolish kinds of publicity, deserve to be taken seriously, but they seem to some of us to have changed theology into the merest speculation. And the second factor is the tendency to react against the principle of tension by a process of "polarisation", whereby we are exhorted to "make up our minds", and not to "sit on the fence" . . . We are invited to draw the inference that we must take up an extreme position, and that there is no room whatever for any kind of "middle" view. This tendency to polarise us is seen in many departments of modern life; it is certainly very much with us in the realm of theology. We are offered a series of choices, all of the straight "either/or" type; and whilst I gladly concede that it is a bad thing for any of us to use the reputation of "middle-of-the-road" thinking in order merely to cover up an unwillingness to face important issues, it is none the less true that many of us find it impossible either to go back to a rigid conservatism which would impose internal stresses upon us by reason of the conflicting claims of soul and mind, or to move in a direction which is assumed to be "forward" but which seems to render the Gospel of Christ unintelligible to anyone who is not a professor of semantics and an adept in philosophy.

It is with all this in mind that I plead for a serious attempt to understand the other fellow. I am asking for something which is difficult, something for which we may not have any natural inclination. Clearly, I do not mean that we should affect an attitude of amused indifference, in place of hostility; nor do I mean that any of us should "go overboard" in favour of the theology which we happen to have been most recently reading. What I do mean is that some of us must give more weight to the honest feelings of many conservative evangelicals who feel that the Baptist Union does not sufficiently heed their point of view; and I also mean that those same conservative evangelicals must give more weight to the genuine abhorrence entertained by many concerning any kind of "orthodoxy-test".

It is a very sad thing that some churches have seen fit to withdraw from the Union without offering to that body even the elementary courtesy of a readiness to talk things over first; and I am sure that many, if not all, of us would share that sadness. Equally sad is the urging of other churches by zealots

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—some of them not even Baptists!—to follow suit in severing their connection with the Union. It is good to remind ourselves that when Spurgeon felt it laid upon him to quit the Baptist Union he did so very reluctantly, very sadly, and very much aware of the awful responsibility inherent in his action.

Of course, it is possible for a point to be reached at which this unhappy step is seen as the only course left open to the conscience. But when we arrive at that point it is perhaps pertinent to enquire whether conscience itself could just possibly be in error, before we take the decisive step. If the Baptist Union were propagating doctrines which were agnostic and clearly non-Christian, then some such action would clearly be called for. But who among us would claim that this is what is happening today? And even if it may seem to us that this individual or that is drifting in the direction of a non-Christian position, then surely the course of action for us is anything but *our* secession! If, however, we make the kind of effort for which I have pressed; if we try to understand that particular individual, and not merely to condemn him, then we have to see our need to be the need for a position midway between two extremes. On the one hand, let us avoid the Scylla of orthodoxy-tests; but on the other, let us steer clear of the Charybdis of simply ignoring the problem raised by his views. How can we manage this? It seems to me that we can ask him some basic questions, representing the genuine desire to find out where he stands as regards what might be termed the Lowest Common Denominator of our faith. But what questions? There will be many who are better qualified than I to frame these questions, but I suggest something like the following:—

- (1) However you may interpret the Biblical story of the Fall, do you accept the view that it nevertheless symbolises for us the estrangement of man from God?
- (2) Do you accept the Incarnation as God's approach to the human predicament, and recognise the need for, and the reality of, the Atonement in Jesus Christ?
- (3) Do you accept the fact of Christ's self-identification with mankind, as symbolised in His Baptism, realising that only thus can the Cross make sense?
- (4) However you may interpret the Easter stories in the Gospels, do you accept as a fact that Christ was raised from the dead?
- (5) Do you believe that because of these things salvation and eternal life are offered to us in Christ *and in no other way*?
- (6) Do you, in the light of the facts already outlined, adhere to the belief that the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper can only be fully meaningful when the recipient is already a believer?

Of course, I know that many would go much further than this. I have made no mention of the authority of the Scriptures, nor of the Holy Spirit, and perhaps I ought to have done so. But I repeat that these questions are not exhaustive; they represent what seems to me to be the Lowest Common Denominator of the faith which we all share. And I would quote, in support of my plea that some such questions should be asked, the comment of Dr Gordon Rupp that whatever changes may take place in our methods of approach to the world our message must still be about sin, and grace, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life, *or it will not be the Gospel*.

I believe that the asking of questions in this way might well evoke some decidedly illuminating replies; and perhaps the outcome would be a new understanding, even if there were no modification of our own beliefs. There could be a better spirit among us, arising out of the effort to understand our fellow-Christians. Our task is a combination of charity and watchfulness, and it seems to me to be our plain duty not to allow either of these two to obscure the other. It would not, I repeat, be easy; but it would be worth while. And the outcome could be unifying, and not divisive.

There may be some among us who take the view that the function of our denomination is mainly to preserve a proper attitude towards the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, placing both of them upon the basis of a prior state of belief and discipleship on the part of the candidate or recipient. Others would perhaps not agree. But those who do take this view may well go on to suggest that a time may arrive when the Church Universal would accept those things which our denomination has cherished for so long. Then, it may be claimed, our Baptist Union could die, like the corn of wheat, losing itself in the wider brotherhood of the living Body of Christ. It would have fulfilled its destiny, for which our forefathers laboured so long and so sacrificially. Of this I am not yet sure. But of one thing I *am* sure, here and now: that the *premature* death of our Union because of mass desertions from its ranks would have no sense of fulfilment about it. In such a miserable demise there would be no redemptive element, no springing up of new life. It would merely rip out from the pages of history those chapters which our forebears laboured so lovingly to write. In one mad episode the devotion of centuries could be rendered null and void. If it be the will of God that our Union should one day die, then let it die nobly, productively, and redemptively, when the time comes. But in the meantime let it live, with mutual love and respect within its ranks, so that the things most surely believed among us may be safeguarded for the Christendom of the future.

W. H. WRAGG



### III

I want to consider three things:

- 1 The Concept of Paradox.
- 2 The application of Paradox to faith and "THE FAITH".
- 3 The importance of the credal element in our denomination today.

Dr Russell in his excellent and forthright address last year based his arguments on the concept of paradox borrowed from D. M. Baillie's book *God was in Christ*, where we read on page 110 "The Christian faith when thought out, conceptualised and put into human language runs into paradox at every vital point. The incarnation is the climax of all Christian paradoxes".

In order to get things into perspective let us remind ourselves of the drastic changes in the concept of truth, affecting the approach to Christian truth, which have taken place during the past 150 years,

1. Until the early nineteenth century Christians (both Protestant and Catholic) considered that *Truth was Rational*. The Biblical view, held by the Reformers was that thesis was set over against antithesis in clearcut opposition. So what was A was not non A, what was right was not wrong. Biblical truth was regarded as rational and absolute and could therefore be rationally stated and believed. In Scripture this absolute standard of truth exists together with innumerable pairs of opposites, good and evil, truth and error, God and Satan, light and darkness, heaven and hell, saved and lost. The issues are clearcut.

2 With Hegel came the concept that *Truth is Dialectical*. Neither thesis or antithesis are finally true but exist in a constant tension of opposites which in turn produce synthesis, so that in a never-ending process, truth always lies beyond. The effect of this on liberal and neo-orthodox theologians was profound and direct assertions about God and man tended to become displaced by what is called "antimony" or dialectical contradiction pointing away to ultimate truth which is hidden from view.

3. Soren Kierkegaard in violent opposition to Hegel introduced the concept that *Truth is paradox* applied not to scientific and general truth, but to all truth about *God*. This he said was "existential truth". It was irrational, 'absurd', incapable of being known by the act of understanding but only by the irrational leap of faith. Such truth is purely inward as his famous phrase has it "Truth is subjectivity" Faith was therefore divorced from reason (as Francis Schaeffer so clearly shows) with dire consequences not only in the theological field but also in the secular.

Baillie distinctly echoes Kierkegaard in his emphasis that Christianity is at every point paradoxical. We must notice however that this concept, if we are to be true to its origin, involves the divorce of faith from reason, and that Baillie also

makes the Hegelian emphasis of truth existing in tension, found in the intersection of opposites. These two things have a crucial bearing on our whole attitude to credal definitions and indeed to any Christian truth in propositional form. I have outlined this so that we may see what lies at the heart of the idea and paradox in this document "Contemporary Issues".

That there are obvious paradoxes in Scripture (such as predestination and freewill) we must all accept, but we must be careful not to cast all Christian truth into the paradoxical mould, and I am not at all sure that any of the three issues raised by Dr Russell, if examined closely, is true paradox. For instance independency and interdependency are not paradoxical for they are not logical incompatibles, not absurdities, but complementary situations in the interplay of which all normal functioning of society takes place. In all organic life independency exists within the framework of interdependency. So in the body of Christ each church formed by the Holy Spirit is an integral local fellowship, responsible to Christ its Head, developing its own spiritual identity, guided by its own elders, and yet by the very law of spiritual life related to all other true churches of God. It is the simple law of life, as for unity and diversity, which again is no paradox. All medical science is based on the rational unity of the human body, having one life yet a variety of structures and functions. The Body of Christ is organically one by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who manifests himself in a variety of gifts, operations and administrations.

My concern however is with the third so called paradox, that between the '*faith once given to the saints*', and its definition in credal form, and the statement that "*faith experienced cannot be adequately expressed*". I would question here whether "Faith experienced" is quite the same as the "faith once delivered to the saints", for the former is surely *subjective* faith, while the latter is the *objective* content, the original deposit of truth to be believed. This was in a sense credal from the start, and was also the expression of the faith experienced. Otherwise how does a valid New Testament theology arise at all?

Now in approaching this matter we must begin by asking not, how do *men* arrive at theological truth, but how has *God* communicated truth? The answer for the Christian is, by His selfrevelation through the Scriptures. Whether it be in history, events, persons or Christ the Incarnate Word it ultimately comes to us by the original words of Scripture. Whether in Old Testament or New, truth comes to us by words. The final form of the revelation is verbal. God does not encounter man in some subjective existential experience incapable of expression. He describes himself and imparts his truth in terms which, whilst accommodated to our thought forms, are rational and valid. He does not becloud or deceive us in the media of revelation.

This brings us to the emphasis made upon CHRIST as the sole and absolute authority for truth with its definitive phrase



“as revealed in the Holy Scriptures”, I ask “How is he so revealed?” Some will say with Bultmann and Tillich, by signs and forms, myths and symbols, or with Austen Farrer and Mascall, by “images”. Whilst this is true we find that Christ is set forth in New Testament teaching and preaching in rational propositional statements—a Christianity plainly conceptualised, with no problem or paradox. So in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 we read “Christ died for our sins, he was buried, he rose again the third day, he was seen of witnesses” or again “He was manifest in flesh, seen of Angels, received up into glory” “Shall so come again in like manner”. So we might go on. The New Testament is crammed full of conceptual statements of faith which, whilst they contain symbols and imagery are nevertheless factual, historical and credal. The apostolic gospel in not presented as paradox, or dialectic pointing directionally to truth, but as dogmatic statement to be accepted, believed and then sounded forth as Divine truth, unalterable and all-sufficient, (e.g. Acts 2). The New Testament does not regard “Faith experienced and faith expressed” as paradoxical. It in fact joins them together—the facts of faith and the act of faith as complementary parts of the God-man encounter. God has given the truth in order that faith may respond to it. Faith is not therefore as Kierkegaard says an irrational leap into the dark, but an intelligent response to light, it is the mind, enlightened by the Holy Spirit coming to the truth in Christ as he is set forth rationally in the Gospel “So we preached and so you believed” is the apostolic testimony.

It is not therefore surprising that the ultimate apostolic concern was as much with the purity and integrity of “the faith” as doctrinal content, as with the subjective experience of faith, essential as this latter was for salvation. If the truth preached be uncertain or defective, then faith itself is impaired, it becomes vague, superstitious, false, empty. Faith must not “stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God”, and that power as the whole New Testament demonstrates is always linked with truth. That is why Paul writes so passionately in Galatians 1 : 6-8 about any “other Gospel”. This is the reason for such deep concern in Timothy, Titus and Jude that the *content* of Gospel truth be safeguarded in verbal form. The ‘pattern of sound words’ is seen as vital to the whole future of Christianity. They must therefore be carefully adhered to, and the faith once delivered in doctrinal form defended at all costs. For unless faith is based on sound doctrine which in turn is expressed in sound words, it will not in the end be sound faith.

Now once we see that revelation has been given to us in clear verbal form, the paradox between faith experienced and faith expressed disappears. But if we divorce faith from revelation and give the “I-Thou” experience an independent validity to doctrine (as existentialists do), then paradox arises. The Scripture does not do this, but holds together valid truth and valid faith as equally necessary and complementary

things. It not only matters *that* you believe, and *Whom* you believe, but also *what* you believe. What you *believe* depends on what you *hear*, and will determine what you *confess*. And since God is the God of truth He has given an adequate revelation for an adequate faith that can be adequately expressed. It is not therefore true to say that the faith which can be gloriously experienced cannot be adequately expressed. It may not be exhaustively expressed. It will take all the saints all eternity to do that. But it can be accurately expressed, and adequately enough for our needs here below. Of this accuracy the apostles were fully convinced and with its maintenance they were deeply concerned.

What do we say then about credal statements?

First that *they are a necessary safeguard against error*. We may want to eschew them, but we cannot escape them for our faith is laid in the bedrock of doctrine. Credal statements must not compete with, nor attempt to fulfil, Scripture but they do formulate in a clear manner its basic truths, and this is most necessary because of the continual danger of misrepresentation, perversion or abandonment of basic truth by people either without or within the church. This has happened in every age since error abounds in the world and human philosophy will always try to accommodate Biblical truth to its own mould. Consequently the church which is “the pillar and ground of truth” must always define, purify and reform its faith by Scripture. This is what Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers and the Reformers did. Credal statements are not simply attempts to “parcel up the faith in neat formulae” as Dr Russell suggests but are necessary definitions of basic Christian truth safeguarding the church from subtle intrusions of error.

Secondly they are *necessary as a unifying principle*. W. T. Whitley in *History of British Baptists*, quoting two authorities, says that the unifying principle holding Baptists together from the beginning was “the strong effort made to maintain unity of doctrine through very definite teaching” and “the attempt to create a church of perfect purity”. In this Baptists were truly in line with the New Testament and a careful study of our history will show that we have ever and again had to formulate our faith in confessions, and have been most effective where we have been most doctrinally clear.

I am convinced that our real problem denominationally is not the constitution of the B.U. Council nor the Ecumenical movement, nor the Home Work Fund, but the theological mistrust and tension that exists among us, which if it is not resolved will ultimately tear us apart. I do not see how we can be held together as any kind of effective unit unless there is more theological confidence, and I believe the way to this is to test our experience more honestly by the New Testament itself and give ourselves to a more careful study of Christian doctrine as for instance has been done in the “Spirit and Mission”. We need a renewal of Whitley’s “very definite teaching”.

Thirdly they are *necessary to instruct our people*. I welcome Dr Russell's emphasis on this, not for the young only, but for all age groups. Our people need to be much better taught in the Scriptures than they are. Yet of all groups none need this more than the ministers. Why does Paul press on *Timothy* and *Titus* to "hold sound doctrine" and "keep the form of sound words"? Why is it *Bishops* who must "hold firm the form of the sure word as to give instruction in sound doctrine and confute those who contradict"? (Titus 1.9) Because it is the minister who is responsible for the maintaining of truth and it is the ministry that ultimately affects the doctrinal and spiritual state of the church. Here is a solemn charge upon us, upon those who teach in our colleges and those who determine the intake of probationers.

Finally they are *necessary for the faithful propagation of the truth*. Baptists have continually issued confessions of faith, stating clearly where they stand. Never was this needed more than today. Everywhere people are confused, ignorant of Christian truth, swept about by innumerable errors. England needs more than anything the clear truth of the Gospel. We need social concern, yes, evangelical passion, yes, but at the heart of both must be doctrinal clarity else are we found false witnesses. There is, I believe, within our Baptist churches enough doctrinal soundness for us to confess our faith so clearly that none will doubt where we stand. Let us get away from paradoxes, tensions, antinomies and intersections of different approaches, which leave people nowhere, and get back to those absolute unchanging, unqualified truths which are of the very bedrock of faith. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to make them alive to us in all their pristine freshness and power and then let us confess them without compromise.

In conclusion may I call for two things—first that in each association we ministers take a lead in discovering and declaring our agreements together in things theological so that there may be among us a more robust and comprehensive confession of faith than exists at the moment. If the denominational trend towards closer integration continues, we need something more than the present inadequate 'Declaration of Principle' on which to stand together. Surely this is possible. It would do a great deal to bring about greater trust between us at home and restore confidence in British Baptists amongst those abroad.

But finally is it not time that we began to come again to the feet of our Lord in this matter to seek his forgiveness for our suspicions, resentments, and sharpshootings one of another? Some of us need to repent deeply of our overdogmatism on non-essentials, others of our compromisings on essential truth, some of our conservative pride, others of our radical pride, some need to come down from our intellectual pedestals, others to come out of our theological defences, and all of us need to gather around the Cross of our Lord Jesus to admit our need, our poverty, our hardness of spirit, our sins against

one another. Brethren I speak for myself as one who himself needs to do just this. It is only here at the place of penitence and new cleansing that the truth will again become new to us and this truth will set us free.

S. J. VOKE

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEILHARD DE CHARDIN (2)

Teilhard made a brave attempt to weld into one great synthesis the truths that he perceived as both theologian and scientist. The furnace in which that union took place was his poetic and visionary temperament. His was a vision that coined new words and put old words to new use. The strangeness of the language leads the unwary reader to believe that he is moving in a completely new realm of theological speculation, radical, and without antecedents. Such is not the case. The problems that Teilhard raises are indigenous to the theological traditions of both the Eastern and Western churches. The very fact that he seeks to build a system puts him in a pre-radical category. He sends us back to re-think our beliefs in the light of the scientific world-view that has grown in the past two hundred years. Space permits only a cursory glance at four areas of Christian doctrine in which his ideas raise questions, the nature of Christ, the eschatological hope, the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of the church.

### (i) The Nature of Christ

To Teilhard Christ is cosmic and transcendent, immersed at the incarnation in the world of matter which He had created. Through Him that world came into being, He is the heart of its energy, and towards Him the universe moves. He is the Alpha and the Omega, in whom all things are to be gathered.

Christ is the Second Adam. We have to decide how far we can draw the parallelism between the first Adam and the second, and how far Paul intended it to be taken in passages such as Romans 5: 15-21 and 1 Corinthians 15: 20-28, 42-57. The first Adam is representative man created in the freedom that is the image of God. This Adam, in his freedom, makes the decision to disobey the God who has created him. As a result of that one decision he 'falls', he is alienated from the realm of innocence symbolised by the Garden of Eden, he is alienated from God from whom he hides, he is alienated from the realm of creation of which he is master, but which he must subdue before it will serve him, and he is alienated from his brother for it is not very long before the soil is moistened with the blood of Abel. His condition is the condition of every man, his significance is not that he enables us to identify the origin of our sin, but rather its character and its effect. The fate of every man and of the whole created order is bound up in this Adam.

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We have to decide whether Christ is representative man, related to all other men and to the created order in the same way as the first Adam. The natural meaning of the Pauline passages would seem to be that He is. His obedience has restored grace to mankind; it has reconciled man to God and to his fellow, it has accomplished a redeeming act whereby *the whole realm of creation* is affected. Nature is inseparable from the first Adam, it is also inseparable from the second. This would seem to be the way Teilhard's thought ran. The concept of energy driving the world on to its destiny was identifiable with the transcendent Christ Who has come incarnate in nature.

The notion of a representative death upon the cross cannot be separated from the notion of the representative man. The death is effective on our behalf simply because of the One who is dying. It is because Christ is the representative man that His death which He chooses to die *with* us is effective as a death that is *for* us. Thus the whole incarnation is a redemptive act spelt out in the sequences of birth, life, death and resurrection. The idea may be foreign to Western minds steeped in legal theories of the atonement, but its antecedents go through the Eastern church and the Greek Fathers to John and the Paul of *Ephesians* and *Colossians*.

(ii) **The Eschatological Hope**

Teilhard took with thorough-going seriousness the faith of Paul that, in the end, all things shall be gathered into Christ. He coupled this faith with his acceptance of an evolutionary world-view. Christ is the *Omega-point* towards which the universe moves.

Problems are posed for this view by the eschatological teaching of the New Testament, not least that uttered by our Lord himself. These utterances are characterised both by the deep pessimism of the apocalyptists and the strong note of hope and triumph unique to His own eschatology. Keeping this pessimism and assurance in balance has been a juggling act that has defied theologians for a good deal of the time. On the one hand, in the hey-day of nineteenth century liberalism the gruesome predictions of apocalyptic were either spiritualised out of all recognition or dismissed as meaningless for modern man. Today, Armageddon is a fairly common word with a contemporary connotation. On the other hand, advent enthusiasts have fastened on the pessimism of apocalyptic and pieced it into a Bradshaw of the last things to guide the way-faring man through the wilderness of the dying world. This enthusiasm raises problems. In relating apocalyptic prediction to events that take place at certain times and in certain places, it burdens history and man with historical determinism. The good that we do, albeit in Christ's name, cannot allay final disaster. There is a certain hopelessness attached to Christian obedience within the world because the situation *must* become hopeless before the return of Christ. Further, the terms of Christian hope are monarchic. Christ comes to establish his rule by the sheer force of the kingdom, the power and the glory in a world where as now his rule does not hold sway.

This is expressed in terms that put the *eschaton* a world away from the incarnation, cross and resurrection. It is significant that adventists often take Old Testament passages referring to the kingly rule of the coming Messiah and apply them to the *second* advent, by-passing entirely the first. But if the discipline of Biblical study means anything the eschatological words of the Old Testament apply to the Christ who *has* come, and have to be interpreted in the light of *that* coming, as Peter well perceived in his Pentecost sermon.

Teilhard was on the side of the optimists. To recognise the destiny of the world in Christ was to know the release of creative love. Teilhard's Christian man is much like Bonhoeffer's man 'come of age'. He is thrust into responsibility and, more like an adolescent than one who has attained his majority, he finds his new responsibilities irksome and balks at the decisions with which he is faced. Yet the responsibility and the decision are unavoidable. Man is faced with what Teilhard called 'the grand option'. The pessimism of apocalyptic and the hope of eschatology spell out for man the alternatives with which he is faced. He is already no stranger to the fiery world of the apocalypticist's night-mare; he is summoned to believe in that destiny that grace is giving to the world.

### (iii) The Doctrine of Sin

Any evolutionary view of the world raises problems for the traditional Christian doctrine of original sin. Teilhard's view of the incarnation and the 'last things' can fairly be claimed to be reconcilable with Biblical and traditional view-points. On the matter of original sin, however, many have averred that he is less than orthodox. Indeed, it was a paper on the subject that first brought him before the disapproving scrutiny of his superiors in the early 20's.

The traditional interpretation of *Genesis* 1-3 is that it describes a universe that was perfect in the beginning. From this perfect beginning it fell through the sin of Adam, and since then all that makes for chaos, grief, suffering, wickedness, and death itself, is directly attributable to the tragic choice made by Adam and Eve. This was, as Newman described it, the 'vast aboriginal calamity' to which all the world's ill are due. The evolutionary view, on the other hand, describes a world in movement from simplicity to complexity. At times that movement has been uncritically acclaimed as the bearer of progress and happiness, ignoring the simultaneous growth of man's capacity for evil. Extravagant enthusiasm apart, however, it may fairly be claimed that man is faced with the *possibilities* of making human life fuller and happier.

If the latter view be accepted, one is still able to accept the Genesis story as a magnificent portrayal of our human condition, albeit by boldly turning traditional interpretations on their head! Thus the Garden of Eden is seen as a sign of that goodness of God in which the world was conceived and created, a goodness still apparent in the created order. The eating of the tree of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil can be identified with the emergence of consciousness in

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man. In that moment he passes from innocence to responsibility, from the paternal protection of God to his first stumbling steps as Man as we now know him. Sin is then seen to be what man does with his freedom; there is innocence in his nakedness, in his essential humanity, but not in the way he looks at his own humanity, his nakedness, or with the way he uses it. For better or worse, his eyes are open, he is burdened with freedom, and angels with fiery swords guard the way back to innocence. No decision that has a genuine concern for human welfare can rest on the assumption that man is innocent.

This interpretation of our human condition confronts us with the seemingly unpalatable view that the world we now have is the world that God intended. Yet if theologians shrink from that it is strange that they have seen nothing unpalatable in the view that the world as it now is is a tragic mistake and not the world that God intended. The view is incompatible with that of the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, through whom God accomplishes His purpose for the human race. It is man, a little lower than the angels, whom God has made, and only man, by his very nature, who can know God as saviour, as loving-kindness, and as a forgiving, merciful God.

The main objection to the evolutionist theory, and it is a formidable one, is that it takes little account of the terrible sinfulness of sin. It is one thing to rejoice, as Teilhard did, at the vast potential for human good present in atomic power, it is another to be sensitive to the agony of Hiroshima and the threat that still hangs over the human race. To take full account of human ill, the sheer wastage of life as children are born only to die within months from starvation, the bloody violence of our wars and the way we fight them, the remorseless onslaught of pain which does not ennoble or refine, and our insatiable appetite for cruelty, is to face the question, If God could have prevented sin in the world, then why didn't He?

The answer must be that there is no room for docetism anywhere in the world. The suffering inflicted upon Christ can no more be an illusion than the flesh and blood within which He endures that suffering. If God has given man freedom, at the price of innocence, then the options cannot be illusory. It is not enough that evil provide the back-cloth against which goodness and truth stand out in starker clarity, it also threatens to engulf the stage and there have been times, it must be confessed, when it has dominated it. Evil is not contained within acceptable boundaries, it is free to go to the limits of its power, even though this be unacceptable, and even though beyond there lies nothing but the desert. It has been claimed that Teilhard, much as he had seen of suffering and human perversity, nevertheless appeared at times insensitive to the destructiveness of evil. It is a danger to which optimism is prey, and a contradiction with which optimism must come to terms if it is ever to deepen into Christian hope.

The fact of evil must affect our view of the final gathering of all things into Christ. If the whole witness of scripture is to be accounted for then it must be recognised that at the end there is loss as well as gain, there is deprivation as well as fulfilment there is the lake of brimstone as well as the Eternal City. Teilhard saw the flames of hell as deriving from that one energy in God, lighting by their sombre glow the mercy of God in redemption. But those flames are far more sinister than a means of illumination. They represent the final destruction of hell and death, enemies that have not simply constituted a threat to man, but can be chosen by man. Whether any shall perish finally in those flames no man living can judge, but sin would have no reality if there were not the final *possibility* that a man can be damned and, choosing death rather than life, finally perish. If there is eloquence and hope in the way Teilhard describes the final gathering into Christ, the Omega-point, there is eloquence and reality also, in the way that Ulrich Simon in *A Theology of Auschwitz* describes the nothingness, emptiness, meaninglessness of the damned. Teilhard encourages us to believe that in conflict with evil we grow to maturity, and such encouragement is not ill conceived. What would be ill conceived is the denial that evil has the power finally to destroy us.

#### (iv) The Church

Teilhard cannot be numbered amongst the reformers of the church. He writes little of its renewal. Had he been alive now it would be fascinating to see how he would apply his worldview to the renewal of the church. As it was he suffered at the hands of its dogmatism and authoritarianism, yet paradoxically was sustained by its faith, its sacraments, and its spiritual discipline.

Here lies the significance of Teilhard for us. His life is witness, as was Bonhoeffer's, to the gracious power of the secret disciplines of the church. Renewal of forms and structures there must be, but finally the church is validated by its ability to sustain men, through the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of prayer, the constant ministry of the Word, and the spiritual food of the sacrament. Despite his priestly vocation, Teilhard spent most of his life in secular movements, working most of the time with people who did not share his faith. In that situation he derived profound strength from the spiritual resources of the institution with which, in so many other respects, he was at odds.

Beyond the example of his life, we have the implication of his teachings for the church. The church is the bearer of Good News. Accepting the power of Christ's incarnation in the world, it is world-loving and not world-loathing. It accepts the stewardship of man for the resources of creation, and is opposed to all abuses of that stewardship. As it faces the 'last things' it is with the stance of hope and not the crumbling of nihilism.

MICHAEL WALKER



## SOME THOUGHTS ON RE-READING WORDSWORTH

Matthew Arnold once wrote: 'If only Wordsworth could be relieved of a great deal of baggage which encumbers his collected works . . . his supreme greatness would immediately be apparent to all the world'. This judgment sums up the prevailing attitude to the poet, and to this it must be added that for most serious students there are two Wordsworths—the early and the late—and that most of the great poetry was written by the young man.

There is undoubtedly a striking contrast between the young Wordsworth—radical, even revolutionary, and semi-atheist—and the older Wordsworth, the orthodox defender of Church and State: something much more than the common development from youthful idealism to middle-aged conservatism. His masterpiece was *The Prelude*, completed in 1805, when he was thirty-five. There are thirteen books of approximately six hundred lines each. The poem was an outpouring of his mind and heart, the story of his own development, and it may be that he was exhausted by this supreme effort. At all events De Quincey said that at thirty-eight Wordsworth was once mistaken for over sixty, and he attributed this premature ageing to 'the secret fire of a temperament too fervid'. He certainly suffered from eye trouble, constant headaches, and exhaustion, and his sister Dorothy, his inseparable companion from the earliest years, had no doubt that these were caused by the intense effort involved in being a poet.

The story of his life may give us clues to the change which came about in him. He was born in 1770 at Cockerthorpe in Cumberland. His father was agent for Sir James Lowther, one of the richest landowners in the North of England. He was often away from home and no doubt had little time for his five children. But Wordsworth owed him one great debt. He was a lover of English literature and encouraged his son to learn great parts of Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton by heart.

His mother influenced him profoundly in his earliest years. 'She bestowed upon her brood . . . the priceless gift of a peaceable and tranquil love that sustained and cherished them without ever interfering with their pleasures or dominating them with schemes and activities of her own . . . She it was who introduced him to 'Nature', and when her own presence was withdrawn, he stood safely . . . in that universe which she trusted and in which she had felt so perfectly at home. Soon he learnt to transfer to Nature the affection, the faith, the 'religious love' which he had felt for his mother.' (Moorman, *William Wordsworth* i, pp. 2f.).

When William was only eight a tragedy befell the Wordsworth family. The mother died. Most of the children went to live with the grandparents, who were really too old to care for them, and the climate of the household was repressive—'decorum and respectability without culture'. William's high spirits often brought him into disfavour. Fortunately he was

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happy in his school at Hawkshead and was able to continue there after his father's death in 1783, though the children were left very poorly provided for and were dependent on their grandparents and uncles for help with their education. His natural aptitudes were encouraged by William Taylor, his Headmaster, a Cambridge graduate who loved the poets—and at fifteen he began to write poetry himself. With a view to the Law or the Church as a profession he went to St. John's College, Cambridge, where he spent his time reading Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton, and studying the eighteenth century philosophers, hoping to find in them an acceptable interpretation of life.

By the time he left Cambridge he had come to think of himself as a dedicated poet. But so that he might earn a living he went to France to perfect his French, in order to take an appointment as a tutor. Whilst there he fell violently in love with Annette Vallon and she bore him a daughter. They intended to marry, but there were formidable difficulties. Annette was a Roman Catholic, her family were Royalists, and soon England and France were at war. William could not return to France for some years, and in the end the idea of a marriage appears to have been tacitly dropped on both sides. Years later he contributed generously to his daughter's dowry.

In the early days back in England he suffered intense depression and frustration. No one seemed interested in his poems. He was deeply troubled at the turn of events in France. His enthusiasm for the cause of the revolution, deepened by friendships he had made while staying in Blois, and expressed in the famous lines

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven—

was gradually worn away by the excesses of the Jacobins and their attempts to force their ideas on their neighbours. 'I abandoned France and her rulers when they abandoned Liberty, gave themselves up to tyranny, and endeavoured to enslave the world.' At the same time he was distressed by the hard conditions of life for the poor. Always sympathetic to simple people, the experience in France had forced upon his attention the social injustice under which so many suffered, and his poems based on the stories of beggars and tramps and pedlars express his belief in the intrinsic value of every human being, each capable of infinite development. There was great depth in his feeling for humanity, strikingly illustrated in such a poem as *Guilt and Sorrow*.

In the face of his personal problems, his disillusionment with the turn of events in France, and his consciousness that a great deal was wrong with English society, he was finding his earlier belief in the philosophy of William Godwin—that the world could start afresh on the basis of pure reason—totally inadequate. Gradually he turned more and more to the Nature which had always been of great significance to him, and through it found a faith, 'spiritual traffic with an infinite universe.' His sister Dorothy, 'the saint of the Nature poets',

now became his permanent companion, at the same time making a home for him and adding her insights to his own. In a country life of extreme simplicity he found his way back to peace and health, and with Coleridge's friendship to enrich him began the years of his supreme achievement. They were wonderful by any standard, and that he long survived them and wrote little comparable to his great poetry in his later years may well be because he was burnt out by the intensity of his experience. Many artists have achieved their greatness before the age of thirty-five.

What was his attitude to the Christian religion? Was he, in 1796, at the age of twenty-six, as Coleridge said in the early days of their friendship a 'semi-atheist'? The generally accepted view, supported by evidence from the earlier poems, is that he was a pantheist. *Tintern Abbey* speaks of

A motion and a spirit which impels

All thinking things, all objects of all thought.

But against this interpretation it must be noted that for the pantheist there is no problem of evil, and Wordsworth's poetry certainly grapples with this. That is why Leslie Stephen said that Wordsworth is the only poet who will bear reading in times of distress. Again, his earlier poems make use of conventional religious ideas, of God, of the Saviour and of the Cross. What are we to make of this? There is no hint of atheism while he was at school or at Cambridge. The fact is that the vocabulary of Christian theology was part of his mental furniture. Clearly the second Wordsworth was an Anglican—a High Anglican—the party in the Church that revered antiquity and upheld tradition. A fellow churchman has aptly written "When I think of Wordsworth the Anglican, I see him meandering about the churchyard, studying the epitaphs . . . He had little interest in sacraments and sermons . . . He loved the Church of England because it cared for the memory of the successive generations of his fellow countrymen."

A comment of Teilhard de Chardin underlines the value of Wordsworth's concepts. "His religion was essentially a cosmic experience. I suspect that the present revival of interest in his work is due in part to a spreading conviction that if the universe in its entirety is declared out of bounds for the purposes of religion, religion itself is under sentence of death."

JOHN BARRETT

## THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

All Christians acknowledge the authority of the Bible, and Evangelicals accept it as their final authority, under Christ. A few minutes' reflection, however, reveals that the question of biblical authority is by no means a simple one.

An element of subjectivity inevitably enters into our attitude to the Bible. Two hundred years ago many Christians defended slavery on biblical grounds, and today some sections of the world Church invoke the Old Testament in their defence of a policy of apartheid. We reject their arguments, but the fact remains that intelligent Christians did, and do, use them.



Again, we say that the legal codes of the Old Testament are not binding on those who live under grace, but we make an exception in the case of tithing. We maintain that the Prophets and Psalmists have a living message for the Church, but we are highly selective in our use of their writings. One other illustration must suffice, this time from the New Testament. If any passage has abiding authority it is the one containing the "Words of Institution" in I Corinthians 11. In the same chapter Paul insists that women should have their heads covered when they pray, and, if he does not give it dominical authority, he bases his directive on the divine intention for the sexes. Do we follow Paul here? If not how do we justify such a radically different attitude to two parts of the same chapter?

Enough will have been said to show that we all accept the authority of the Bible with considerable qualifications. This being so, a number of questions press for an answer. What kind of authority does the Bible possess? Where is it located: in its words, its teachings, its writers, or in some standard behind and beyond the Bible? If the latter, what is the standard? This article does not claim to give final answers to these questions, but it is offered as a contribution to their solution. The writer acknowledges his great indebtedness to the scholars to whose books reference is made. He can only claim that he has tried to make their ideas his own.

Let us begin by examining the concept of authority in general. The word is used in two ways. It can denote a person or institution invested with power to act, or to compel the obedience of others. The policeman is such an authority. The second use of the word denotes a standard or norm by reference to which the accuracy of statements and opinions can be established. Leading scholars are described as authorities in their special fields. In the phrase, "the authority of the Bible", the word may bear either, or both, of these meanings. It may indicate the role of the Bible as the book given by God to prescribe religious beliefs and to regulate moral conduct. Thus we hear it said that we ought to believe something, or do something, "because it is in the Bible". The second meaning of the word is the one which it frequently bears in theological and ecclesiastical discussions. In Protestant circles, at least, the content of the Christian faith is defined in accordance with the teaching of the Bible, and appeal is made to that teaching in disputed questions. These meanings are frequently blended, as for example, in the claim made by Baptists that the New Testament is their authority for faith and practice.

We must now consider the attitudes towards the authority of the Scriptures adopted during the past hundred years or so. We are all well aware that faith in the Bible's integrity and veracity has taken some hard knocks. Today, many deny that it has any authority. Others accept it as a source of moral guidance, but are doubtful about its divine origin. This was not the position in Victorian England, where the vast majority accepted the Bible as the Word of God without question, even if they flouted its authority in practice. Even among church

members today the practice of regular, systematic Bible reading is the exception rather than the rule.

The return to the Bible in theological circles during the last two or three decades has been most encouraging, but the fact that it is a "return" is significant. Moreover, it would be too much to claim that the returning tide has yet flowed into every pulpit. Even "Biblical" preaching is not infrequently eisegetical rather than exegetical. How far we Baptists fall under judgment here I am unable to say, but my impression is that we have no grounds for complacency. Certain it is that so far as the structure of our services is concerned our practice frequently denies our principles. We claim to submit to Scripture as a final authority, but, whilst at an Anglican service at least one psalm is sung or read, and there are lessons from both Testaments, in a Baptist church you are likely to hear only one lesson, and that may be a very brief one!

## I

We must now consider the causes of this erosion of Biblical authority. We have selected three of the most important ones.

### 1. The Emergence of Biblical Criticism.

The techniques of "higher", or literary and historical, criticism were developed as adjuncts to the study of the ancient classical literature, and it was not until about the middle of the last century that they were widely applied to the Bible. It was then that Wellhausen gave classic formulation to the Documentary Hypothesis. It was claimed that four different strands could be distinguished in the Pentateuch, and that the latter, far from being of Mosaic authorship, was the deposit of the work of centuries. The activity of the Deuteronomistic writers in editing and interpreting, not to say colouring, the records of Israel's history was laid bare. The Davidic authorship of the Psalms, and the Solomonic authorship of much of the Wisdom literature were strongly challenged. The prophetic writings were likewise subjected to investigation, with the result, in many cases, that they were found to be composite in structure, and their several sections were assigned to different dates. The New Testament suffered a somewhat milder shock at the hands of the critics, but as a result of their work the literary integrity of the Synoptic Gospels was challenged, the traditional apostolic authorship of the fourth Gospel was denied, and also the Pauline authorship of "Hebrews".

The reports of these conclusions, distorted as they often were, did much to undermine faith in the authority of the Bible. To take the Pentateuch alone, it had always appeared to both Christians and Jews that the five books were the Word of God through Moses. Now it was authoritatively said that they were a patchwork of pieces discordant in colours, age, and quality, clumsily stitched together by generations of forgotten seamsters. Intelligent people could believe that books of the Bible were the Word of God even though their human authors were unknown. It was a different matter when the claims which the Bible seemed to make, and often did make, for its human provenance were shown to be untrue.

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## WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

409 BARKING ROAD, PLAISTOW, LONDON, E.13

My dear Brother Minister,

The sudden death of Bill Bodey came as a great shock to many of us. From 1929 to 1965, he served the Mission in many capacities. But of course his greatest work was done at Child Haven and Greenwoods. He and Gladys Bodey made a magnificent team, and Bill left his mark on hundreds of people, who are grateful to God for his ministry. His death spotlights one great feature of our work. We rely a great deal on Churches and individuals to provide the "sinews of war". And we are grateful for all our friends. Nevertheless, it would be impossible to carry on our work, however much money was sent to us, unless we had the hard core of dedicated workers who are motivated by the love of Christ. As we salute the memory of Bill Bodey, we should also salute the large number like him who through the years have served with self-sacrifice and devotion and never minded about the headlines.

We were glad recently to welcome Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Kent to Greenwoods and Orchard House. She proved a most delightful visitor with the tremendous gift of making everyone feel quite at home. And even the boys of Orchard House fell under her spell. (You would need to know the boys at Orchard House to realise the full implication of this achievement!)

The Duchess of Kent congratulated both Ronald Messenger of Greenwoods and George Hickmore of Orchard House on the fine work they were doing. And she told me that she had had a most thrilling afternoon, and thoroughly enjoyed herself. I believe that this was a sincere tribute, and not "flannel".

Greenwoods and Orchard House and Rest-a-While and Marnham House Settlement, and a great deal of extra work done through the agency of the Memorial Church, is financed by the gifts of our Churches and of individuals. If you would be kind enough to keep our name and our work in front of your people, I should be most grateful. And I would count it a special kindness if you would pray for our work in your Services of Worship from time to time.

May God's blessing be on you and your own ministry.

Yours very sincerely,

STANLEY TURL,  
*Superintendent of the Mission*

J.K.S. Reid writes: "The authority of the Bible for men today has been seriously impaired . . . . because it seems now on the evidence of criticism to have been masquerading under false colours and wielding an authority to which its claims are now refuted". (*The Authority of Scripture*, 19).

### 2. The Extension of Scientific Knowledge.

The impact of this on the concept of biblical authority is a familiar story. The discrepancies between biblical cosmology and the post-Copernican view of the universe had been observed before, but these, being of marginal importance, had not caused serious difficulty. "The Battle between Science and Religion", as it is called, was first joined in the middle of the last century, and the issue was the Darwinian hypothesis of evolution. The acceptance of this appeared to necessitate the abandonment of the biblical account of the creation of the universe, and of the creation and nature of man. Seen in this light, the issue was one of life and death for many in the Church. The seriousness of the challenge was increased by the fact that "Genesis" opens with the account of creation; for this suggests that the doctrine of creation is paramount in the Bible, whereas it is, in fact, ancillary to that of redemption. In the long warfare which ensued between evolution and a literally-interpreted Bible the latter emerged the loser, and Biblical authority appeared to be further reduced.

### 3. The Challenge to the Uniqueness of Israel's Faith.

This was the result of the revolution in historical study which took place in the last century. It was then realized that human history, far from being a series of more-or-less separate episodes, was a continuous development. Once this was accepted, it was inevitable that the religion of the Bible should be given a place in the process of development, and subjected to the investigations of historical science. This task was undertaken by the scholars of the Religio-Historical School. "The members of this school considered it necessary to place biblical religion in its universal context and to seek its relationship with other religions in the ancient world" (*The Old Testament in Modern Research*. H. F. Hahn, 85) They challenged the assumptions of earlier scholars that Israel's development had taken place in a hermetically-sealed compartment, untouched by outside influences. They used the evidence supplied by the study of contemporary Semitic religions, and by archaeology, to show that Israel's development was constantly influenced by her neighbours. Many features of her cult-sacrifice, priesthood, and shrines—had their counterparts in the life of other peoples. The same was true of her ethical codes. Resemblances can also be traced in the area of theology. The Israelites were not the only people who believed themselves to be united to their God by covenant. Gunkel, Gressmann and Mowinckel have drawn attention to affinities between the mythological ideas of the Hebrew psalmists and prophets and those extant in other lands in the Middle East.

This is a subject of vast proportions and complexity, but enough will have been said to show that such ideas, in their

first impact, would undermine belief in the uniqueness of the biblical revelation, and therefore in its authority.

It will be as well to remind ourselves that none of these developments has done permanent damage to the authority of the Bible as this is understood by Christian scholars. If the Documentary Hypothesis continues to command acceptance, the form in which it was proposed by Wellhausen has been revised at crucial points, and the reconstruction of Israel's religious history which was based on it has been found untenable in many respects. The War between Science and Religion has ended in a truce, except in a few pockets. As for the findings of the Religio-Historical School, it is now agreed by Old Testament scholars that Israel was highly selective in her borrowings from other peoples, and that she adapted what she borrowed, "baptising" it into Yahwism. All of this is very reassuring, but it has not yet repaired the damage. The image of the Bible which persists in the minds of many is of a collection of legends and obsolete moral codes, with little or nothing of value to say to the world today.

## II

It is time to move to more positive considerations. We must consider the views of biblical authority current in the Church today. These can be classified in three groups. It will make for clarity if each genus is represented by one of its more extreme varieties, but it must be remembered that the number of varieties is great. Most of us are eclectic, and draw the elements of our working doctrine from more than one group.

### 1. Verbal Inspiration.

It may be objected that this phrase belongs more properly to a discussion of the inspiration of the Bible. This is in part true, and it reveals the nature of the particular point of view under consideration. The notions of biblical authority and biblical inspiration are always difficult to separate, but in this case they are fused. It is claimed that the Bible derives its authority, not only from its divine source and unique revelation, but also from the manner in which the revelation was given to men. The very words were supplied to the writers, either by divine dictation or inward illumination. The Bible is the inspired textbook of doctrine and morals, and as we read it we read the very words of God. The Bible is therefore inerrant in contents and expression. It follows that it must be literally interpreted, though allowances are made for different literary forms — poetry, vision, etc. Verbal inspirationists are frequently hostile towards biblical criticism, and they deprecate any suggestion which appears to detract from the uniqueness of the Bible.

The doctrine which we are considering runs into practical difficulties in connection with the undeniable textual discrepancies and factual errors of Scripture. These are often ascribed to mistakes made in transmitting the text, the original autographs having been perfect. This was Augustine's view, and it is now part of the official Roman Catholic doctrine. It is difficult to see why an indefectibility which belonged to the

original documents was not extended to the copies. But, in any case, the former are not available, and a verdict should not be given when the evidence cannot be produced in court.

Further difficulties are presented by some parts of the Old Testament; the presence there of views of God which are unacceptable to us, and the condoning or approving of conduct reprehensible by Christian standards. These are sometimes removed by analogy or typology, after the manner of the Fathers. More frequently they are explained in terms of progressive revelation or apprehension, theories which are not consistent with a belief in verbal inspiration. Barth has drawn a parallel between the refusal of extreme conservatism to come to terms with the errors of Scripture, and the tendencies of a docetic theology. Just as Docetism robs our Lord of His real humanity, so obscurantism robs the Bible, and therefore the Word of God, of its humanness.

The most serious weakness of the theory of verbal inspiration is that it does not accord with the biblical insight that God reveals Himself, not in propositions, but in His activity. The Verbal Inspirationist acknowledges this truth, but in practice he identifies the Scriptures, which are the record of revelation, with revelation itself. The Word of God becomes words in a book. The consequent danger is that of bibliolatry, of the Bible becoming what Luther called "a paper pope". Enough will have been said to show that the focus of Scriptural authority cannot be found in the words of Scripture.

Before we leave this subject it will be as well to state that, contrary to an impression widely held, extreme conservatism is not a return to the primitive attitude towards Scripture. The claims which the Bible makes for itself are not such as demand a doctrine of inerrancy. The Fathers and the Medieval Church certainly accepted the Bible as the Word of God, but they occupied themselves very little with the mechanics of its inspiration. Moreover, the exuberance of their typological and christological treatment of Scripture reveals an attitude very different from that of the modern literalist.

What of the great Reformers? It might be supposed that theirs was a rigid and mechanical view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Interpreters are divided on this point. A carefully-documented discussion will be found in J.K.S. Reid, *op. cit.* chaps. II & III. In the case of Luther it would be possible to construct from his writings a catena of passages to prove that he was a verbal inspirationist. For example, he says that the mouth of the prophets and apostles is the mouth of God. On the other hand, he says almost the same thing about the tongue of the preacher. Concerning discrepancies in the Bible Luther says: "One must let them go . . . provided they do not affect the articles of the Christian faith". He expressed the view that the later prophets built wood, hay, and stubble, whilst his estimate of the Epistle of James is well-known. Of great importance is the connection which Luther makes between the Spirit, the living Christ, and Scripture. The authority of Scripture lies in the fact that it treats of Christ, and this authority is acknowledged by the man into whom the

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Spirit enters. The Word of God is not identified with the written word.

The thought of Calvin is parallel to this. In some places he writes like an extreme literalist, but in others he says things which would raise eyebrows today: for example, where he admits that a psalmist "allowed unadvised words to escape from his lips". The balance of evidence shows that Calvin also clearly distinguished between revelation and record. In his doctrine of "the inner witness of the Holy Spirit" he joins hands with Luther in asserting that the authority of the Bible is felt only where the Spirit unites believer and Scriptures in a living relationship. (See J. Huxtable, *The Bible Says*, chap.II.) Thus neither of the Reformers held a mechanical view of Scripture, but one which was flexible, creative and religious.

The extreme conservatism of our day stands nearer to the Orthodoxy which characterised second-generation Protestantism. The Reformed Church, faced by the offensive of a revived Romanism, retreated into the intrenched position of a verbally-dictated Bible. A formula of 1675 declares of the Hebrew text of Old Testament that its vowel points, at least so far as their value is concerned, were inspired; a view which is still held by Hebrew examiners. Brunner has likened the Age of Orthodoxy to "a frozen waterfall—mighty shapes of movement, but no movement".

In his *The Authority of the Old Testament*, (ps. 94-98), A. G. Hebert makes an interesting comment: "The traditional view of the Bible has been profoundly modified by the rise of the scientific spirit, and the acceptance by the ordinary man of the truth of physical fact as the norm of all truth. Hence the statements of the Bible must, if the Bible is the word of God, be true statements of physical fact. On the other hand, if they can be proved not to be, then the Bible is not the word of God—the inerrancy of the Bible, as it is understood today, is a new doctrine, and the modern Fundamentalist is asserting something that no previous age has understood in anything like the modern sense".

One of the popular theological sports of the day is said to be that of throwing rocks at the Liberals. More than one writer on the authority of the Bible in recent years has revealed considerable skill in the sister sport—throwing rocks at the Conservatives. The present article was not undertaken as an exercise of this kind. It would be quite unjust to identify conservatism with bibliolatry, or to forget the much greater flexibility of outlook which characterizes the present-day conservative school. This appears in the "Tyndale" N.T. Commentaries, and other publications, by which the whole Church is being enriched. Moreover, even very rigid doctrines of verbal inspiration are often accompanied by untiring and fruitful evangelistic activity, and, where charitable, they can co-exist with deep personal sanctity.

### 2. The Liberal View.

For the beginning of the liberal interpretation of the Scriptures we must go back again to Julius Wellhausen and



his disciples. As we have reminded ourselves, they began by resolving the Old Testament into the several documents from which, they claimed, it had been compiled. They then arranged the documents in a chronological order based on the religious development which each appeared to reflect. On the basis of this, and with the aid of a Hegelian philosophy of history, they propounded an entirely-new view of Israel's religion. This was presented as a process of steady development from lower forms to higher: from primitive animism, through the concepts of a tribal God and a national God, to the insights of the prophets, in whose writings a doctrine of ethical monotheism first appears; then there followed Judaism, a period of congealment and of recrudescence of primitive ideas. The course of development culminated in the Incarnation. A modified form of this thesis underlies the book, *Hebrew Religion*, by Oesterley and Robinson, which used to be part of the staple diet of theological students.

To the Liberal, then, the Bible was the record of a development in moral and religious ideas. This development was not merely the outcome of man's search after God; rather, it was the response in man to God's progressive self-disclosure. Throughout the process God was working towards the revelation of grace and truth in Jesus Christ. Christ is the goal and centre of revelation, and everything else must be judged in His light. There was no need for the Liberal to explain away the difficulties of the Old Testament. They are the marks of spiritual immaturity. Now Christ has brought the fullness of truth, and to Him alone we must look for our understanding of God and our duty. There is still much of abiding value in the Old Testament—the lives of its heroes and saints, the psalms and the prophets. But much also can safely be discarded, like the scaffolding of a finished building.

We must recognize both the sincerity of the liberal scholars, and the value of many of their insights. They deserve nothing but praise for the central and normative place which they gave to our Lord. They must be thanked for the solution which they offered to many of the problems of Old Testament exegesis. With one stroke they cleared away a tangle of special pleading and desperate harmonizing, opening a way whereby the human elements in the Bible can be recognized, whilst belief in its divine inspiration is retained. The influence of the liberal view has been enormous, and there can be few ministers who do not serve themselves heirs to it when dealing with Old Testament problems.

Yet the Bible emerged from the hands of the Liberals with a changed appearance and a reduced authority. This was especially true of the Old Testament, whose truth, at all points, could only be regarded as relative. This is a far cry from the book's own understanding of its authority—as that of the word of God spoken to man. Nor was the reassessment confined to the Old Testament. On the liberal view there were many elements in New Testament teaching which were alien to the teaching of the Jesus of history and which the Church should reject.

Another serious weakness of the liberal view must be mentioned. It appears to provide an objective canon by giving to Jesus Christ the normative place in revelation. But which particular view of Christ is to serve as touch stone: the liberal view or the conservative?; the supreme Teacher and Example of Harnack or the "apocalyptic storm-trooper" of Schweitzer?; Christ as interpreted by Rome or by Geneva? John Bright, to whom much is owed here, and elsewhere in this article, points out that in the end we may find ourselves assessing the value of the Bible's teaching by the vague Christian standards and attitudes of society, which, he says, "come dangerously near to becoming a synonym for what is reasonable and good and commends itself to conscience" (*The Authority of the Bible* p. 109)

### 3. **The Theology of the Word.**

The theology thus designated is the product of our own century. It represents a reaction against a theological liberalism, weighed in the balances and found wanting during the agonies of 1914 to 1918. I shall confine my attention to Karl Barth, and will attempt to summarize his teaching on the authority of the Bible.

Barth sees the Word of God as assuming three forms. For the present purpose I presume to reverse the order in which he treats them. There is the Word revealed, the Word as written, and the Word as preached. In each case the Word of God is to be understood as God speaking, and as God revealing, not abstract truth, but Himself. Corresponding to these three forms of the Word are what Barth calls three "times", during which God bears witness to Himself. The first time, to quote Barth, is that of "the direct, original utterance of God Himself in His revelation, the time of Jesus Christ . . ." Secondly, there is the time of testimony, "the time of prophecy and the apostolate, the time of Peter upon whom Christ builds his Church, the time when the canon arose . . ." Barth claims that the New Testament documents which were then composed have a prior and uniquely-normative position in the Church, because they are the work of "special men", eye-witnesses of Jesus and the Resurrection. The third time is that of proclamation, the time of the Church and her witness. The Church's witness rests upon that of the Scriptures, which in turn rest upon Christ. The time of Christ, however, is contemporary with all times. He is Lord and King both of Scripture and of the Church.

At this point we may note one of Barth's most significant contributions to theology. He gives a new meaning to the contentious phrase, "the Word of God". That Word is present only in the event in which God speaks. The Bible is the Word of God only if and when God makes it so. To quote Barth: "the Bible is God's Word so far as God lets it be His Word, so far as God speaks through it".

It will appear that Barth makes a clean break with the doctrine of Protestant Orthodoxy. Like the Reformers, he draws a clear distinction between revelation and record. Whilst it is true that we can only hear the Word of God in the Bible

or through some other related medium, the Word and the Bible are always to be distinguished. To quote Barth again: "Revelation is originally and immediately, what the Bible and Church proclamation are derivatively, God's Word". Barth is thus free from embarrassment in the presence of what he calls the "imperfections" of Scripture. Like Luther, he welcomes them. There was an indispensable humanness and worldliness about God's Word in the Incarnation, and these characteristics belong to the Bible, the medium of His Word.

The Theologians of the Word have returned to the positions occupied by the Reformers, but they have taken with them the gains won by the Biblical scholarship of the past one hundred years. Their unaccommodating emphasis produced a reaction in many quarters, and the present climate of theological opinion is unfavourable to some of their basic assertions. But it can safely be said that no-one since the Reformation has done as much to rehabilitate the authority of the Bible, and to redirect the Church to its message. We may hope and pray that this direction will never be reversed.

We have thus surveyed three views of the nature of the authority of the Bible, which may be summarized as follows: authority resident in the truth progressively revealed in Scripture, in the words of Scripture, and in the Living Word who makes Scripture His own.

### III

In the closing section of this article we attempt to present a constructive statement. Again, there are three points; the last is the most important, but its full meaning only appears in the light of the other two.

#### **1. The Scriptures are the Record of God's Redeeming Revelation up to, and including, the Incarnation.**

It will be necessary to consider the Testaments separately, as well as in their relationship. We will begin with the Old Testament. What value can now be ascribed to it? The Church has shown a repeated tendency to make one of two mistakes here. On the one hand, it has followed Marcion in emptying the Old Testament of much of its value. This was the undesigned result of the liberal analysis, and we may be profoundly grateful that the findings of Biblical theologians during the past thirty years have made it unlikely that the mistake will be repeated. The other tendency is to place so much emphasis on the unity of the Testaments that their fundamental difference is overlooked. When this happens, the Old Testament is treated as if it was a Christian book. Some of the scholars of the contemporary Typological School make this mistake. Christ is certainly to be found in the Old Testament, but He is not present there in exactly the same way as He is in the New. In our efforts to vindicate the authority of the Old Testament we must not do violence to its nature.

What, then, is the nature of the Old Testament? If we can answer this question we should be able to define its authority. Biblical Theology has helped us to see that the Old

Testament is, in the first place, the record of a series of acts of God in history, whereby He gave to one nation a unique revelation of His nature and purposes. In the second place, the Old Testament is the literary repository of the theology which was the precipitate of this experience of God. We will consider these in turn.

The faith of the Old Testament is faith in a God who fulfils His eternal purpose in history. He elected an enslaved people, delivered them by the hand of Moses, and bound them to Himself by covenant at Sinai. This God repeatedly intervened in the fortunes of His people, and His activity manifested a distinctive pattern. Events followed one another in the same sequence: divine promise and warning; human rebellion and divine judgment; human despair and divine deliverance. The pattern can be traced in the time of the Judges, in the period of the Monarchy, and in the Exile and the Return. It is one of the themes of the Psalter, and is the burden of the Deuteronomic historians. Towards the end of the Old Testament period there is foreshadowed the figure of an eschatological Redeemer who will consummate the purposes of God. This recurrent activity of God is known as "the biblical pattern", or "salvation history" (heils-geschichte). The Old Testament possesses authority because it is the unique record of this unique activity.

The theology of the Old Testament is the result of Israel's encounter with God. It was given to her to know the one, eternal God, Creator and Redeemer, holy in His transcendence and immanence, in His righteousness and steadfast love. This theology is present in all essentials at the very outset, and amidst many varieties it has an impressive unity. We are about to consider the relationship between the Testaments, but it is important to remember that the Old Testament is a book of revelation in its own right, for the Christian as well as for the Jew. It speaks its distinctive and indispensable word. There is nothing to compare with it in the literature of the pre-Christian world. We may turn to Plato, Aeschylus, and Virgil for metaphysical and psychological insight and for consummate artistry, but it is to the Prophets and Psalmists that we turn if we would learn of God. Jesus presupposed in his hearers a knowledge of Israel's faith, and the New Testament presupposes such a knowledge in its readers. Scholarship has learned to seek in the life and faith of Israel the meaning of New Testament concepts, before turning to Greek thought. Again, there are some important aspects of the Christian faith which are not made very explicit in the New Testament, presumably because the mind of God concerning them had already been made plain in His self-disclosure to Israel. One of these is the concern for social justice. Thus the theology of the Old Testament has a unique, intrinsic authority.

As we turn from the Old Testament to the New, we note the fact that both Testaments are records of historical events, and both contain theologies. But in neither of these respects is the New merely the continuation of the Old. Nor can we

say with the Liberals that it is the product of the Old, in the sense that Jesus Christ is the goal of an evolutionary process recorded in the Old Testament. Between the Testaments there is a difference, not of degree, but of kind. The Old Testament is a book of promise; the New Testament is a book of fulfilment. The New Testament is not another book of the acts of God; it is the book of the act of God. All the promises of God find their "Yes" in Christ. The "saving pattern" woven into the fabric of Israel's story is now displayed to all races and generations in His death and resurrection. The Yahweh of the Old Testament is now known as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"! Both the story recounted in the New Testament and the theology which it conveys are Christological.

Inseparable from the above is the fact that the New Testament is the record of eyewitnesses. It is the primitive apostolic testimony. We may agree with Barth that the Apostles were "special" men, not in the sense that they were endowed with unique gifts, but because of the special relationship which they sustained to Christ. Chosen to be with Him, they were appointed to be His witnesses and interpreters. Conjoined with them were others, not themselves eyewitnesses, who had lived in close contact with the Apostles, and whose testimony could be checked by their memories. The New Testament is the literary deposit of these men. When this generation died there could be no more primitive apostolic witness to Christ, nor was there need of any. Writing of the history of salvation O. Cullmann has said: "... it has a centre which serves as a vantage point or norm for the whole extent of this history, and this centre is constituted by what we call the period of direct revelation, or the period of the Incarnation. It comprises the years from the birth of Christ to the death of the last Apostle, that is, of the last eyewitness who saw the risen Jesus and who received from the incarnate Jesus or the risen Christ the direct and unique command to testify to what he had seen and heard" (*The Early Church*, p.76). Christ did not cease to work at the close of the apostolic age, but in that age He revealed His nature and purpose in accordance with which He ever acts. Thus the New Testament is uniquely authoritative and normative for Christianity.

## **2. The Scriptures are a Means of God's Redeeming Revelation in the Present.**

This point is deserving of much more development than can be given to it here. In addition to being a record of revelation in the past, the Scriptures are the place of present encounter between God and the human soul. They are not the legacy of a deistic Creator, but the gift of the living God. When the Bible is read and preached it bears witness to One Who stands behind it. Someone has pointed out that this was true of the Prophets of Israel. When they said, "Thus saith the Lord", they were speaking of Yahweh "the Holy One in the midst". When Amos cried, "Prepare to meet thy God", he was speaking in the name of a God who was treading on the heels of His word. So it is with all Scripture. When it is read in faith

the Spirit closes the gap between the material and the spiritual, between the word of man and the word of God, and record becomes revelation. Luther, Calvin, and Barth rightly insist that for this to happen we are utterly dependent upon God's grace; that the Bible becomes His Word in this sense only "so far as God lets it be His Word". Nevertheless, the Scriptures carry the promise of God. They are the place where He has covenanted to meet us.

In his book, *Psychology, Psychotherapy and Evangelism*, Professor J. G. McKenzie quotes a remarkable passage from a volume published many years ago. The writer has been classed as a sceptic and agnostic, but he writes concerning the public reading of the Bible in church: "The story is quite familiar to us. We supply the sentences beforehand as the reader proceeds. Yet it has happened—one knows not how—it will doubtless happen again—one cannot tell when—that, as the verses follow one another, suddenly out of the well-known story there comes a strange thrilling sense of heights and depths never before scaled or plumbed and we say within ourselves, 'This thing is of God'.

Here the question of authority is lifted out of the arena of controversy into the courts where the voice of experience is heard. Liberal and Conservative agree that in experience the Bible proves itself to be the Word of God.

## **3. The Scriptures derive their Ultimate Authority from their Relationship to Jesus Christ.**

We have already said that this is the most important of the three constructive points we are making, and that it is taken last because it can only be fully appreciated in the light of the other two. Indeed, it is a summary of them. We have been trying to discover the nature of the relationship between the Scriptures and Christ, and we have found it to be a relationship of witness. The Old Testament is the witness of promise, and Christ set His seal to it when He found His own career foreshadowed in its history and prediction. The New Testament witnesses to fulfilment in Christ. It is the product of apostolic men, commissioned for their task by Christ himself. The Bible in experience is a witness to the living Christ, for it is the prime means whereby He speaks to the human soul. No other book in the world's literature has such a relationship to Him. It is this relationship, surely, which constitutes the ultimate ground of the Bible's authority for all who share the Christian estimate of Christ's person and place.

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