

“ So then we are ambassadors for Christ ” (20). St. Paul uses the regular word employed in the Greek-speaking world to describe the emperor's legate. He calls himself a legate in the Kingdom of God, an accredited representative of the Emperor Jesus. The reference is primarily to the apostles and to the ministry of the New Covenant whose glorious superiority to the ministry of the Old Paul has elaborated in chapter 3 of this epistle. Nevertheless, these words may be applied to the duty of the whole Church.

God is not content with devising and effecting our reconciliation. He also makes provision for its promulgation. Its heralds are mortal men. He gives us the reconciliation itself ; He gives us the ministry of reconciliation (18) ; and He gives us the message of reconciliation (19). Whereas He made His peace with us through Christ, He makes His appeal to others through us (20). For our sake He made Christ sin ; but for Christ's sake He makes us ambassadors. The business of the Christian minister is not just to lead the worship, to comfort the sad, to shepherd the flock and to teach the faithful, but to implore men and women to be reconciled to God. Our message is a declaration first : “ All is of God. God has acted in Christ. God has reconciled the world to Himself. God has not imputed your trespasses to you. God has made Christ sin ”. Then it becomes an urgent invitation : “ We beseech you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God ”.

The transformation is complete. The rebel who has become a friend, becomes his former enemy's ambassador. Once we are “ in Christ ” for salvation, we are “ for Christ ” for service. Although God is the author of our reconciliation, and Christ is its agent, we poor, sinful, stupid, stammering mortals are its privileged ambassadors.

The Incarnation and the Bible

A SYMPOSIUM EDITED BY THE REV. G. W. BROMILEY,
M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt.

INTRODUCTION

IT may be remembered that in the last issue of *The Churchman* it was suggested that there should be further discussion of section iv of the article on the Authority of Scripture in *The New Bible Commentary*. The main drift of this section is to the effect that the problem of the Bible should be “ studied in the light of the similar problem of the incarnation ”, and that “ with the incarnation as our guide, it may well be that the way will open up to a truer and fuller understanding, one which is orthodox, and which safeguards the authority and integrity of the Scriptures, not in content only but also in historical form ”. Contributions have now been invited and submitted by three theological teachers, in which there is a preliminary discussion and development of the comparison. Rather strangely, attention focuses on the objective

nature of Scripture rather than its subjective effect, which is perhaps the starting point in the article quoted. And for the most part, it is hardly possible to go beyond general considerations: whether the comparison ought to be made at all, and if so in what general context and with what general conclusion. The articles have been arranged in what appears to be the logical order dictated by their substance, and in a final survey an attempt is made to assess the views and arguments advanced and to come to some sort of conclusion. The problem has not been exhaustively treated. Indeed, a detailed consideration has hardly begun. But the basic issues have been uncovered and it is hoped that these preliminary studies will show the direction which we ought to take.

I

BY THE REV. J. W. WENHAM, M.A., B.D.
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DR. BROMILEY'S article seems to me to be admirable, but in point of its actual wording I think that his suggestion that "a true doctrine of history and revelation in the Bible will be formulated only when the problem is studied in the light of the similar problem of the incarnation" needs to be accepted with reserve. There is indeed a remarkable parallel between the catholic doctrine of the Person of Christ and the catholic doctrine of Scripture. In the one, two natures, Divine and human, are bound together in One Person; in the other, two authors, Divine and human, have combined at every point to produce a single scripture, which is truly the Word of God and truly the work of man. Yet it is a false methodology to assume such a parallelism *a priori*, or to try to apply the parallel in every detail. A truly Biblical Theology must proceed by strict induction from the Bible itself, each doctrine being built up independently, without allowing suspected parallels to affect the inductive process.

That the catholic doctrines are the Biblical doctrines, I have little doubt. The Bible's own doctrine of Scripture that emerges from an examination of the many hundreds of relevant references—particularly the references of our Lord and the New Testament writers to the Old Testament—is (to my mind) one of the plainest doctrines in the Bible. Without any qualifications Scripture is regarded as being true in its record of facts and authoritative in its interpretations, because the God of Truth is the ultimate author working through the human authors. It is the great merit of B. B. Warfield's collected articles, recently reprinted as *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, that this induction is carried through with massive scholarship and relentless logic. (In the nature of the case it is impossible to summarize an inductive argument without robbing it of its force. But everyone who wishes to study the doctrine of inspiration seriously has a bounden duty to master this volume.) Warfield is simply the latest of a long line of great Christian thinkers, Biblical, Patristic, Mediaeval, Roman Catholic and Protestant, who till the nineteenth century were unanimous on this doctrine in spite of their radical differences on so much else. It may be possible to improve on even the best statements of

the catholic doctrine by careful refinements in the statement of detail, but to allow the foreseeable difficulties in the defence of the doctrine to cause one to abandon the doctrine is simply to abandon Biblical Theology.

With regard to the catholic doctrine of the Person of Christ, I feel less competent to judge, though I know no reason to doubt the historic doctrine and I have strong suspicions that the modern tendencies to depart from the Chalcedonian position arise, not from a Biblical induction more thorough than that of the early Fathers, but from a realization of the difficulties attendant upon its retention.

The heart of the trouble in the modern theological debate seems to lie in the pressure that so-called scientific criticism has brought to bear on theologians to make them modify the historic positions. In the Liberal era this was simple enough. Infallible Scripture was thrown overboard as demonstrably absurd. Our Lord's testimony to the Old Testament created some momentary difficulty, as it was scarcely possible to deny His belief in its Divine authorship. But with the aid of Kenosis, His infallibility was readily jettisoned also. Now, however, with the whole Church turning to Biblical Theology, the problem is far more difficult. How can we assert the authority of the Bible and accept scientific criticism? If I understand it aright, the modern line is to try to show from the Bible itself that our Lord was necessarily fallible—and of course the scriptures also. See, for instance, T. F. Torrance's recent attempt to confute Warfield by use of the notion that Christ assumed a fallen humanity.¹ But, whatever the truth may be with regard to our Lord's humanity, His infallibility is a clear Biblical doctrine, and to abandon it is to abandon Biblical Theology. The Synoptic Gospels represent our Lord as saying: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall in no wise pass away" (Mark 13. 31, etc.); "Every one therefore which heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, which built his house upon the rock" (Matt. 7. 24, cf. Luke 6. 46 ff.); "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father" (Matt. 11. 27, Luke 10. 22); He says of the law, "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away" (Matt. 5. 18), and then He proceeds with His magisterial, "But I say unto you". The Fourth Gospel repeats over and over again such statements as, "My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me" (7. 16); "As the Father taught me, I speak" (8. 28); "I say truth . . . the words of God" (8. 46f.); "The words which thou gavest me I have given unto them" (17. 8); "To this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice" (18. 37).

If Biblical Theology is to be followed, both the infallibility of Christ and the infallibility of Scripture must be retained; and, in addition,

¹ *Scottish Journal of Theology*, March 1954, p. 106. J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body*, p. 38n, refers to the "disreputable ancestry" of this theory of our Lord's fallen humanity. Though ancestry and associations provide no disproof of a doctrine, it is well to be wary of a theory originating in Adoptionism, and taken up by Irvingites and Seventh Day Adventists, before using it to confute long established doctrines. Incidentally, if the notion of fallen humanity requires that our Lord should be guilty of error like other men, does it not also require that He should be guilty of sin like other men? What then is left of His Deity?

a strong doctrine of the fallibility of criticism must be established ! Most of the plausible arguments against the infallibility of Scripture lie plainly upon its surface, and have been well known to the great minds—and, be it noted, the critical minds—who down the centuries have held the doctrine. The task of Biblical Theology is to go over to the attack and to demonstrate the sub-Christian doctrines of God and of revelation upon which the nineteenth century critical assault on the Bible was based ; and to call upon the critics to criticize their own arguments, and to produce *proved* errors and contradictions in the Bible. (Modest attempts at such a call have been made in the I.V.F. and Catholic One Volume Commentaries.) My experience is that when one seriously grapples with them, these supposedly inescapable errors simply do not stand up to a strict scientific examination. It will be a great day when the Church gives Wellhausen a decent burial and another great day when she ceases to read her Scriptures through Kierkegaardian spectacles. Such revolutions do not come in a day. But the Spirit of God has set on foot the revival of Biblical Theology, and Biblical Theology leads back irresistibly to catholic orthodoxy.

II

BY THE REV. W. M. F. SCOTT, M.A.

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THE comparison between the incarnation and the Bible will, I believe, be found to be a helpful analogy. But as Dr. Bromiley says it "must not be pressed too far".¹ How misleading it can become if exalted into a ruling principle, can be seen from the way the comparison of the incarnation with the sacraments has been developed. If it is held that the Word and the Sacraments are fundamentally akin, that the Sacraments are but the Word made visible, there would seem to be just as much reason to apply this comparison to the Sacraments as to the Word. Indeed in the pamphlet where the present writer first met the comparison between the incarnation and the Bible the same comparison was made with the Sacraments, and it was maintained that in each case there was a "hypostatic union".²

If we shrink from such statements as that "Christ unites Himself, body, soul and divinity, in an ineffable manner with the elements of bread and wine",³ we ought to hesitate before committing ourselves to a similarly thorough-going application of the analogy to the Bible. Indeed many of the successors of the Tractarians, such as Bishop Gore, eventually came to admit that the parallel between the incarnation and the Sacraments "does not admit of being carried out in detail", though they still held that "there is an analogy in fundamental principle".⁴

What Gore wrote about the incarnation and the Sacraments seems to me to apply even more to the incarnation and the Bible. The logic

¹ *New New Bible Commentary*, p. 23.

² *Modern Theological Debate*, p. 18, by T. F. Torrance.

³ Quoted from O. Shipley by W. H. Mackean in *The Eucharistic Doctrine of the Oxford Movement*, p. 167.

⁴ *The Body of Christ*, p. 133.

of the statement (to which I hold) that the Bible is the Word of God is that there is an analogy in fundamental principle between it and Him who is the Word of God incarnate. But we have always to remember that the Bible merits the title only in a derived sense, because of its direct relation to Him, because it is the unique embodiment in literature of the incarnate Word, not because all its separate statements are in their individual right words of God. While there is an analogy between the two there is also a great difference, the difference between the incarnation and inspiration. The Church's condemnation of Nestorianism is a standing witness that there is a great gulf fixed between these two things. If this is forgotten we shall be in danger either of falling into a Nestorian Christology and regarding Jesus as the summit of inspiration or of the practical substitution of the Bible for the Third Person of the Trinity even though the formulæ of orthodoxy are still retained.

In spite of this fundamental difference between the two there is, in my opinion, great value in the analogy. God's ways of dealing with man must be all of a piece. The Incarnation is basic and fundamental. Bible, Church and Sacraments, and all other means through which that incarnation is brought to bear on men, will be consistent with that which they express and convey. We have, therefore, to avoid views of Holy Scripture corresponding on the one hand to the Nestorian heresy and the other to the Monophysite. By the former I mean any view which so far separates the Divine and human in the Bible as to encourage the idea that there is a divine kernel which we can retain while we throw away the human husks. The Word of God speaks to us through the words of men. Moreover, because the whole Bible is connected with our Lord, God has something to say to His people through every part, though, of course, it needs to be read in the light of its relation to Him and not all parts are to be regarded as possessing the same degree of authority and inspiration. (Dr. Bromiley's treatment of this last point on p. 18 of the article under discussion seems to me admirable.)

Equally we must avoid the Monophysite view which swallows up the human in the Divine. This is found wherever divine inspiration is held to overshadow human characteristics and individuality. A further difference between the incarnation of our Lord and the inspiration of the Bible may be considered under this heading, namely that though our Lord was made sin for us He Himself was without sin. But the Biblical writers, though inspired, were sinful, with the inevitable result that they were also fallible. Any doctrine of inspiration which claims that this result of original sin was over-ridden must, in my opinion, come under the condemnation of Monophysitism. The Roman dogma of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary has been held to come under the same condemnation. But what shall we say of the view that the writers of all sixty-six books of the Bible were miraculously freed from this taint of original sin?¹ There is the further pragmatic objection that an infallible book would be fallibly interpreted by fallible sinful men. Therefore if the infallibility is to reach us we need an infallible interpreter. It is perhaps not without

¹ Cf. T. F. Torrance in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, March 1954, pp. 104-108.

significance that the Church of Rome alone of all the great communions is committed to biblical infallibility.

A truer view of inspiration is to be found in Brunner's simile of the gramophone record in which we hear surface scratch, sometimes more, sometimes less, but through the scratch we hear the voice. The sensible man does not refuse to listen because of the scratch, nor does he listen to the scratch : he listens to the voice through the scratch. The application of the simile is obvious. Denney made fundamentally the same point when he wrote, " I should not hesitate to say that the man who cannot hear God speak to him in the story of creation and the fall will never hear God's voice anywhere, but that does not make the first chapter of Genesis science, nor the third chapter history ".¹ " God has actually taken these weak things of the world and things that are despised, and has drawn near to us, and spoken to our hearts through them."²

III

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THE incarnation is the perfect example of the coming together of the human and the divine. Thus Dr. Bromiley's suggestion that we should study the doctrine of history and revelation in the Bible in the light of it is theoretically sound. Empirically also it appears well founded, in that there does seem in practice to be a certain correlation between men's views on the two subjects. The differences between the Antiochene and Alexandrine understandings of the Bible were by no means unconnected with the Christological controversies of the early centuries. Barth's view that " so far as we can get back to the historical Jesus, there is nothing remarkable to be found in His life and character and teaching "³ has obvious affinities with his disparagement of the objective Word, of the Bible merely as a book.

But, of course, the incarnation and the Bible are not the only places at which there is a special coming together of the human and the divine. The same is clearly true of the Church and of the sacraments. They too have been studied in the light of the incarnation. And it is right and proper that they should be, even though we may regard some of the conclusions that have been drawn from the idea of an extension of the incarnation as invalid and unfortunate.

The parallel of the Church is an instructive one. She is the body of Christ ; some theologians have therefore wanted to say that she cannot sin. But history shows incontrovertibly that she does. Her " empirical manifestation " we are then told, " may often belie her true essence ".⁴ But this evades the problem. We cannot force the facts to fit our theory. We have to admit that, although the Church is an expression of the divine in the human, it is one that is compatible with no small measure of sin. There are points of analogy, real

¹ *Studies in Theology*, p. 219.

² *Op. cit.* p. 218.

³ D. M. Baille : *God was in Christ*, p. 36.

⁴ Mascall : quoted without reference by Newbigin, *Household of God*, p. 81.

parallels between the Church and the incarnation, but the parallel must not be pressed too far.

And the same is, of course, true of the Bible. As Dr. Bromiley recognizes, the crucial question is how far the parallel can be pressed. The Bible is the Word of God: does it then follow that it cannot err? Pope Pius XII, in *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, declares that it does: "Just as the substantial Word of God became like to men in all things 'without sin', so the words of God, expressed in human language, became in all things like to human speech except error". Is this a legitimate use of the analogy or is it pressing the parallel too far? That question, like the question of the sinlessness of the Church, cannot be answered *a priori* but only empirically.

Thus when Geldenhuyts tells us that "the fact as such that Jesus possessed supreme divine authority . . . gives us the assurance that the Lord of all authority would have seen to it that . . . an adequate and completely reliable account of . . . His life and work were written and preserved for the ages to come"¹, and goes on to say that this "follows logically" from the once for all nature of the revelation of God in Christ, we must demur. It does not follow logically. We might expect God to have provided such a revelation (though on epistemological grounds even such an expectation would be highly questionable) but it does not follow logically that He has done so, any more than it follows logically that those who are born of God (note again the obvious parallel with the incarnation) cannot sin. (Here again there have always been those who have thought that this is how God must have revealed Himself, but it is quite clear that He has not.) The precise relation of revelation and history in the Bible, as elsewhere, can ultimately be determined by empirical study and no other way.

To sum up: in the Word made flesh, there is a perfect coming together of the human and the divine in a human life; it is unique, its manner defies analysis, but by faith we believe it, because nothing else is adequate to account for all the facts. In the Bible, there is also a special coming together of human and divine, its manner too defies analysis, but it is not a perfect union, because it is not an incarnation. The precise points of analogy and difference can only be determined by detailed study. Its relation to the incarnation reminds us that the Bible has a special authority, not *per se* but derived from its unique relation to that perfect coming together of the human and the divine once for all in the life of Jesus Christ.

SUMMING-UP BY DR. BROMILEY

WE have reason to be grateful to our three contributors for carrying further, and from different standpoints, the question of the relationship of the living Word to the written Word. Between them they have focussed attention on what are surely the critical points in the carrying through of this comparison. Therefore, even if the present discussion does not lead to any very conclusive result, it should at least serve to clarify and, to some extent, control our thinking.

The first and fundamental point is raised at once in the first article,

¹ Geldenhuyts: *Supreme Authority*, p. 43.

in which it is questioned whether the analogy can ever be anything more than a "remarkable parallel" which we may suspect but which we cannot assume *a priori*. The view propounded in this article is that Christian doctrines (including the doctrines of the incarnation and scripture) must be built up inductively and independently from the Bible itself. The obvious and fatal weakness of this teaching is that it does not take seriously the fact that Jesus Christ is Himself in person the Word of God. This means that the parallel between Christ and the Bible is posed *a priori* by the very nature of the case. Both are the word of God to man: Christ originally, the Bible secondarily, as that which testifies to Christ. But it also means that all Christian doctrine is necessarily and organically related to Jesus Christ, who is the Word in content as well as in form. No Christian doctrine can be built up without reference to Jesus Christ, and therefore to His redemptive mission fulfilled in the incarnation and atonement.

The dangers of denying this centrality of the Logos are very manifest in the article, as they are in the seventeenth century Protestantism from which it ultimately derives. Impeccable answers are given to the detailed questions of inspiration, as they would be to other doctrinal issues, but we may doubt whether they are given in answer to the right questions or on the right presuppositions. For one thing, the Bible itself has evidently replaced Christ, and therefore God, as the basis and centre. Christian doctrine is coherent because it is all inductively built up from the one book, not because it relates to the one God and His work. The doctrine of the Bible is necessarily the first article of the creed, as with the seventeenth century confessions, and in marked contrast to Calvin and the confessions of the Reformation. But this in itself is not the worst danger, for so long as we stick to the Bible we are led back willy-nilly to Christ. The worst danger is that inductive reasoning is made the ultimate criterion to which both our acceptance of the authority of the Bible and our development of Biblical doctrines must make total submission. Rationalism is none the less dangerous because it is impressed into the service of orthodoxy. It is still reason which is the final arbiter and manipulates the Biblical doctrine. The Christian way is the very different one of letting every thought be made captive to Christ. But this brings us back to our starting-point, that all our doctrines (including the doctrine of the Bible itself) must be brought into the strictest relationship to God's saving Word and work in Jesus Christ. To be sure, this does not mean that the Bible can be by-passed, for it is in and through the Bible that God meets us. What it does mean is that Jesus Christ is the subject as well as the subject-matter of the Bible. The Bible is His Word only as He Himself is the Word.

The other two articles both accept that there is more than an accidental analogy between the living Word and the written word, and they go on to discuss the limitations and qualifications which we need to make. The ultimate questions which emerge are twofold: In what form the parallel can properly be developed? and To what extent, if any, the Bible can be isolated from the general life and witness of the Church and given a particular authority by virtue of the christological analogy?

The first point that is made is the good one that in a strict sense we cannot speak of incarnation, or even of divine nature, in relation to the Bible, the Church and so forth. Whatever we do, we must not allow the Bible to be God. My own feeling is that the danger in this respect is a little exaggerated. It is significant that a doctrine of transubstantiation has never emerged in relation to the word as it has in relation to the sacrament. Even if an almost superstitious respect has sometimes been paid to the Bible there has never been any actual confusion with Deity. All the same, when we apply the incarnational parallel, we have to keep a keen awareness that we are moving, as it were, on a different level. The Bible is God's word in a human form, but it is not the Incarnate Logos.

The second point is also true that we cannot restrict this analogy to the Bible: we have to apply it to the sacraments, and indeed to the Church and the individual Christian. We do not need to shrink from this thought, although we must be careful to understand it correctly. Indeed, as I see it, it takes us to the very core of the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. It is the purpose of God that we should be as Jesus Christ is. We are His witnesses. In our life as the people of God and individuals, and in our witness of word and action we show forth Jesus Christ. But this means that necessarily we and our witness, as God's word in the world, reflect the supreme witness of God's Word in the world. In a very real, if derived and secondary sense, the Church is a divine-human institution, the sacraments are divine-human actions, and the Bible, and even preaching, is a divine-human word. The thought can be worked out in many different ways, and from many different angles. But of the truth of the thought there can be little question.

The third point which is emphasized in both papers is that, if this is the case, the christological parallel does not enable us to claim for the Bible any greater freedom from error than for the Church or individual Christians or, shall we say, preaching. The extension of the parallel seems to be urged partly with a view to this conclusion, although it is true enough in itself. Two not very good arguments are used to support it: the heresy of the Immaculate Conception, which is not a true parallel, because in the Bible we have to do only with individual works, not with a whole life; and the fact that even Christians who are born of the spirit can sin, which is true, but needs to be weighed carefully against 1 John 3. 6 and 9. The third paper betrays a dangerous tendency to a final empiricism, and I cannot think that either writer considers sufficiently the peculiar function and authority and the special spiritual gifts of the apostles, which puts their work and witness, and therefore the apostolic writing, in a class apart (possibly according to promise, cf. John 14. 26). Nor is it considered that while the dichotomy of a justified-sinful or regenerate-natural Church and its witness does in one sense reflect the incarnation from afar, there is a more perfect reflection in the Church and its witness when or to the extent that in individual words and actions a concrete manifestation is given of the new life of the Spirit, the life which it has with Christ in God. After all, it is in this way that consistently and perfectly we shall reflect Jesus Christ when we see Him face to face and are like Him.

To sum up : we can hardly escape bringing our doctrine of the word into relation with the Incarnate Word, and we must think twice before committing ourselves to any form of rationalism, however correct and orthodox. The danger of deifying Bible, Church or sacrament must be avoided, and the Bible cannot be completely isolated from its setting in the whole witness to Jesus Christ. On the other hand, may it not be that (objectively) as the prophetic and apostolic word, the Bible is like all the charismatic acts and words of the apostles and prophets a particular work of the Holy Spirit reflecting in a particular way the incarnation of the living Word. In this respect is it not perhaps a normative example of the words and works of the Spirit in Christian life and a prototype of the perfect christological reflection of the Church in heaven.

Henry Venn of Huddersfield

(1725-1797)

BY THE REV. M. M. HENNELL, M.A.

FROM Queen Elizabeth I's reign till the present century at least one member of the Venn family has been in Holy Orders. Henry Venn's father, Richard Venn (1691-1739), for many years Rector of St. Antholin's, Watling Street, was a strict High Churchman with Jacobite leanings. He was the first London clergyman to refuse his pulpit to George Whitefield. He also showed a High Churchman's aversion to Dissenters, which was shared by his son, who constantly assaulted the son of a Dissenting minister who lived in the same street, and who, although two or three years Henry's senior, used to keep out of the street if the Anglican champion was in it. Energy and high spirits marked these early years ; he was quick-witted and quick-tempered, but capable of great affection and a great favourite in his own family circle and outside it. His home was at Barnes and he went first to school at Mortlake, till his father died when he was fourteen. After brief periods of private tuition and in two other schools he went up to Cambridge at the age of seventeen.

From 1742-47 Henry Venn was at Jesus College, where he was a Rustat scholar. He was a keen cricketer and reckoned one of the best players in the University. In the week before he was ordained he was playing for Surrey against All England ; after the game he threw down his bat, saying, " Whoever wants a bat which has done me good service, may take that : as I have no further occasion for it ". When asked the reason he replied, " Because I am to be ordained on Sunday ; and I will never have it said of me, ' Well struck, parson ' ".¹ He was ordained by Bishop Gibson of London, but he served a curacy at

¹ H. Venn, *Life of H. Venn* (1835), p. 13-14.