

The Church as the Locus and Medium of Revelation

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IN A THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT the word "revelation" is used of the Christian conviction that God discloses his nature and purpose and will. The Greek *apokalypsis* and the Latin *revelatio* may be literally translated "uncovering" or "unveiling." The idea of revelation points to a reciprocal activity, a giving and a receiving, a speaking and a hearing, an act and a response. The unveiling of a picture by, let us say, some mechanical device in a salon in which there were not, and never would be, any people to appreciate it would be devoid of significance. Similarly the concept of divine revelation implies a receiving, a response. A God who strove to disclose himself with never a spark of response would not be a God who reveals. The Christian conviction that God is a God who reveals is a conviction not only that God is such that he can and will disclose himself and his will, but also that men, or some men, are such that they can and will comprehend and make a response to the disclosure.

The idea of revelation is closely bound up with that of authority. Whatever is taken by a man to be a genuine revelation of God must be authoritative for that man. The question of the locus and medium of revelation, therefore, is, under another aspect, the question of authority. Until quite recently, controversy and discussion have centred in the question of authority rather than upon the meaning of revelation itself; and this emphasis is, perhaps, an indication of a deep-seated predilection of the human mind. The quick answer is very tempting; an authority which could be confidently accepted would be very comforting and would save a lot of trouble. It is a natural inclination, even for theologians, to ask the question of authority before considering the closely connected, but more fundamental, question of the nature of revelation.

One of the major issues of the Reformation was certainly this question of authority. The Reformation was a protest against the authority of the Papacy. The very recent failure of the Conciliar Movement had taken away the hope of reviving the idea of the General Council as the fount of authority. The obvious candidate for the position of ultimate authority, already canvassed by the Waldensians and Hussites, was the Bible. Here seemed to be a ready-made answer to the question, "By what authority doest thou these things?"

Of the earlier reformers Zwingli perhaps gave this answer more uncompromisingly than the others. He identified the Word of God with the Scriptures, which he held to be infallible: "The Word of God is certain and

cannot fail: it is bright and does not let man err in darkness; it teaches of itself, it makes itself plain, and illumines the human soul with all salvation. . . . I will try everything by the touchstone of the Gospel and by the fire of the Apostle Paul. What agrees therewith, to that I shall hold fast; what conflicts therewith I shall reject." He adopted the position that what was not expressly allowed in the Scriptures was not permissible. If there were rival interpretations of a passage, he believed that other passages could be used to check that which was in dispute: "The Scriptures are to be compared, and their meanings are to be discovered from the Scriptures themselves."¹ It is to Zwingli rather than to Luther or Calvin that the biblicism of traditional Protestantism is traceable.

For Luther the Word of God was paramount. The Word of God alone can win victories over the human heart. Although there are many passages in Luther which appear to identify the Word of God with the Scriptures, there are very many which show clearly that it is an oversimplification to assume that for Luther "Word of God" and "Bible" are synonymous. One quotation, from an autobiographical passage in which Luther refers to the Diet of Worms, may suffice to make the point: "The Word did it all. Had I desired to foment trouble I could have started such a little game at Worms, that the Emperor would not have been safe. But what would it have been? A mug's game. I left it to the Word."² He did not mean that he left the issue to the Bible. Nor does his often repeated "The Word must do it" refer primarily to the Bible, as though Luther attributed efficacy to it as a book. He was not a biblicist. In fact the Bible was subordinate to what was for him a matter of revelation, the discovery, or rediscovery, of the truth of justification by faith—found within the pages of the Epistle to the Romans, it is true, but grasped intuitively and striking him as a personal disclosure from God. Luther was frankly scornful of any part of the Bible which did not seem to preach justification by faith; the Epistle of James was "a right strawy epistle," and he was extremely critical of the Book of Esther and of Revelation.

Calvin at first seems much more of a biblicist. It is true that he was aware of textual and critical problems, and that he did not hold an automatic theory of verbal inerrancy. But, says J. S. Whale,

the fundamental fact is that for Calvin the chief end of man is to know God, and that the Bible is ultimately the sole source of authority for this knowledge. The principle dominating his whole theological system is that we have to listen to the Sovereign Lord of the Universe as he makes himself known to each of us through the revelation of Scripture. Scripture is thus the Word of God. . . . At first sight then, it may seem that the Reformation is here consciously substituting for the authority of pope and ecclesiastical tradition the authority of a book.³

1. Quotations from V. H. H. Green, *Renaissance and Reformation* (London: Arnold, 1956), p. 169.

2. Quoted by E. Gordon Rupp, *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms, 1521* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1951), p. 99.

3. *The Protestant Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 133.

But for Calvin it is really truer to say that it is the authority of the Holy Spirit on which he relies. For here Calvin introduces the doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*. The Spirit of God works within man's heart and mind and authenticates the truth of Scripture. For Calvin the Bible is not authoritative in the sense that it sets out statements about God which have to be accepted because it is presupposed that God is their author; it is authoritative because the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures gently but surely persuades the believer of their truth.

Dr. Whale points out that here "the old and ever present issue of authority in religion" presses upon us, and asks whether the "attempted fusion of objective and subjective" in the doctrine of the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit solves the problem.⁴ He judges that it does not. As a definition of authority it leaves the door wide open to private judgment. "Is not the inward testimony of the Spirit one thing for this man and another for that?" He concludes that "such subjectivism and relativity are inevitable. Like moral obligation, real authority in religion is not something which can ever be demonstrated or proved. Man on this earth cannot have such absolute authority, even though he long earnestly for it and ascribe infallibility to pope or book as guarantee of his wishful thinking."

The extravagances of those who were called Spirituals and Anabaptists were beginning, even as early as the 1530's to make clear the dangers of radical individualism which rose out of a doctrine of the inward testimony of the Spirit, and were causing much anxiety both to Luther and to Calvin. The inward guidance of the Spirit was being claimed as the justification of many crackpot and revolutionary projects. The reaction of the two main streams of reformed Christianity took different forms.

Lutheranism (though almost certainly against Luther's own deepest instinct) allowed more and more authority to the Christian prince as the *praecipuum membrum*, the chief member, of the Church, who was bound to use his God-given powers for its protection. Calvin's answer was the tight theocracy of which the Church of Geneva was the model, exercising through its Consistory a strict control over even minute details of life and possessing the power of excommunication. The wheel was turning full circle. The protest against the authority of the Papacy, conceived to be tyrannous over men's minds and bodies, ended in the recognition of other authorities, "godly Prince" or Consistory, no less capable of curtailing spiritual freedom. The harsh rule of Henry VIII in England, and the effective pressure which the Church of Geneva was able to bring to bear on every department of life in that city, are examples of this.

This trend was perhaps inevitable, and for two reasons. First, the question was discussed around the issue of authority, a provocative word in quiet times, and a positively explosive word in times of turmoil. Secondly, in so far as attention was given to the more basic question of the nature

4. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

and meaning of revelation, revelation was generally conceived to be "the supernatural and infallible communication of propositional truths,"⁵ even though it must be added that both Luther and Calvin had deeper insights into the question. Such a view of revelation naturally raised two questions: Where are these propositions to be found? Where are they correctly interpreted? For men divided in so many matters as were Christians in the sixteenth century, there must have been an irresistible urge to propose and then stoutly to defend what appeared to be conflicting answers to the questions: the Church, the Bible, the inspired individual conscience.

But a changed view of revelation may well offer hope of a way out of this long-standing impasse. That there is a changed view is clear, for it has become a theological commonplace that revelation is not a series of propositions, but the self-disclosure of God himself. William Temple wrote: "What is offered to man's apprehension in any specific revelation is not truth concerning God but the living God Himself."⁶ John Baillie in *The Idea of Revelation* writes:

What is revealed to us is not a body of information concerning various things of which we might otherwise be ignorant. If it is information at all, it is information concerning the nature and mind and purpose of God—that and nothing else. Yet in the last resort it is not information about God that is revealed, but very God Himself incarnate in Jesus Christ our Lord.⁷

He quotes Kittel's word-book: "Revelation is *not* the communication of supernatural knowledge . . . but is quite essentially the *action* of Yahweh, an unveiling of His essential hiddenness, His offering of Himself in fellowship."⁸ Professor Leonard Hodgson, in a paper contributed to a symposium, *On the Authority of the Bible*, refers to the changed idea of revelation and declares that "revelation is given primarily not in words but in deeds, in events which become revelatory to us as the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see their significance as acts of God."⁹ If in the light of this idea of revelation as an event, an act of God and a response from man, a personal encounter, we consider the three claimants for the title "Locus and Medium of Revelation" which are mentioned at the end of the last paragraph, certain things, I believe, become clear.

First, it has to be said that the Bible is not itself revelation. To say this is not to discard or to belittle the Bible. On the contrary, such a view has coincided with a striking resurgence of biblical theology. For the Bible is a witness to and an instrument of revelation—a witness to revelation because it is a record of events experienced as revelatory, written by those who

5. The phrase is from J. M. Creed, *The Divinity of Jesus Christ* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 114.

6. *Nature, Man and God* (London: Macmillan, 1935), p. 322.

7. *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), p. 28.

8. A. Oepke, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, III, 575; quoted by Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation*, p. 28.

9. *On the Authority of the Bible* (London: S.P.C.K., 1960), p. 4.

so experienced them; and an instrument of revelation because the hearing or reading of it may lead to a revelatory experience at any time for any man, as it did in different ways for St. Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi, and Martin Luther.

Secondly, how does the new conception of revelation affect the claim of the individual conscience to be the locus of revelation? Does it not seem to ratify it? If revelation is the active self-disclosure of the living God, must not its locus be the inner personal being of the individual? When a man feels that in some event, external or mental, God has addressed him, and he is moved to respond by appropriate action, is not this, and this only, the revelatory moment?

There is a cogency about this argument until it is remembered that while it is true that the living personal God is concerned for the individual, to reveal himself to him and to save him, he is concerned for the individual *in his relations*. God is the Father of his people, the King of his Kingdom. The gracious influence of his Holy Spirit in countless ways is upon individuals that they may be saved. But salvation in God's intent is not an individual matter. God reveals himself to individuals in their many and varied existential plights, to Moses, Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, but he reveals himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of their fathers, of Israel, of the Church. An individual may indeed know himself to be in the presence of the wholly other, to be given an answer to his existential question, or to feel his heart "strangely warmed." But the revelatory act of God is only fulfilled when the individual experience is seen to have essential implications for all God's people.

Another contributor to the symposium already mentioned, Professor Christopher Evans, writing about the locus of revelation, says:

The critical analysis of the Scriptures, as it is pressed further and deeper, leads at every point—and this is a truth still unwelcome to some—to the Church, to the people of God, as the sphere within which the language of revelation has worked, and continues to work, with power for the drawing of the natural life of men into a living touch with the supernatural life of God.¹⁰

And so, I would add, does a study of what revelation means, when it is remembered that he who reveals is not only my God, but my brother's God as well.

Protestant scholars, then, have been looking again at the age-old claim that the Church is the locus of revelation. Until recently, the theological treatment of revelation has centred in the question of the Bible; and this aspect of the discussion continues, necessitated as it is by the stiff rearguard action being fought by the neo-fundamentalists. But out of it has arisen a new interest in the question of the Church and revelation. One certainly cannot say that Protestant scholarship has yet reached any position on this question which commands assent as unanimously as does the recognition

10. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

that revelation is not propositional. Many different lines of thought are being pursued by theologians of different backgrounds, and this makes assessment difficult. Here attention is drawn to what is said or implied about the Church as the locus of revelation by four prominent Protestant theologians, Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Barth, and John Knox, with the suggestion that here is a hopeful field for the study of those participating in the Catholic-Protestant dialogue.

Paul Tillich conceives revelation as "the manifestation of what concerns us ultimately."¹¹ It is a special and extraordinary manifestation "for someone in a concrete situation of concern." But Tillich is clear that revelation is not merely an individual affair. It may certainly begin with an individual, though it begins more often with a group. "Revelation," he says, "grasps an individual or a group, usually a group through an individual."¹² "No individual receives revelation for himself. He receives it for his group, and implicitly for all groups, for mankind as a whole."¹³ For a group which becomes "transparent for the ground of being and meaning, revelation occurs,"¹⁴ and it "can become a medium of revelation for other groups. . . . The Christian Church always has been conscious of its vocation to be the bearer of revelation for nations and individuals."¹⁵

Tillich devotes the first part of his *Systematic Theology* to the subject of revelation, and in it much more is relevant to our subject than can be dealt with here. I pick out two points which are of special importance. The first is the distinction he makes between original and dependent revelation:

While Peter encountered the man Jesus in an original revelatory ecstasy, following generations met the Jesus who had been received as the Christ by Peter and the other apostles. There is a continuous revelation in the history of the Church, but it is dependent revelation. The original miracle, together with its original reception, is the permanent point of reference, while the spiritual reception by following generations changes continuously. . . . "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever" is the immovable point of reference in all periods of Church history. But the act of referring is never the same, since new generations with new potentialities of reception enter the correlation and transform it. No ecclesiastical traditionalism and no orthodox biblicism can escape this situation of "dependent revelation." This answers the much-discussed question whether the history of the Church has revelatory power. The history of the Church is not a locus of original revelations in addition to the one on which it is based. Rather it is the locus of continuous dependent revelations which are one side of the work of the divine spirit in the Church. This side often is called "illumination," referring to the Church as a whole as well as to its individual members. . . . The divine Spirit, illuminating believers individually and as a group, brings their cognitive reason into revelatory correlation with the event on which Christianity is based.¹⁶

The second important point lies in Tillich's discussion of the overcoming

11. P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 110.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 127-8.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

of the conflict of autonomy and heteronomy by final revelation.¹⁷ For Tillich the final revelation (in the sense of decisive and unsurpassable) is Jesus as the Christ, as he who is completely transparent to the divine mystery and in uninterrupted unity with the ground of his being.¹⁸ In him is the Kingdom of God, and in him theonomy is perfected. "The Church as the community of the New Being [in Christ] is the place where the new theonomy is actual."¹⁹ Where theonomy is established there begins the overcoming of the conflict between autonomy and heteronomy, between obedience to the law of reason one finds in oneself and obedience to law imposed from outside, and the establishing of their essential unity in theonomy. The passage develops an important argument against both a heteronomous authoritarianism and an autonomous libertarianism as being self-destructive each in itself. Tillich ventures to advise Protestantism not to neglect the lesson of the Middle Ages when, "however fragmentarily and ambiguously," theonomy did determine the situation.²⁰ Theonomy alone can resolve the conflict between autonomy and heteronomy and, he says, it "cannot be fulfilled except through final revelation and in unity with the Church."²¹

Here then is one influential Protestant theologian who has moved far from the anti-Church biblicism which is the popular caricature of Protestantism. It is much the same with Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann holds nothing to be revelation which does not evoke answers to existential questions, enable a man to understand himself, and to enter into authentic existence. God's action in Christ, or the Christ-event, is the salvation-occurrence, the revelation which evoked the response of faith in the first Christians and brought self-understanding. This definition might appear to lead to an intensely personal and individual conception of revelation, for Bultmann says that "the revelation of God is realized only in the concrete events of life here and now" as a man comes to self-understanding—i.e., understanding of his personal existence.²² But Bultmann also says that there is a history leading up to the revelatory Christ-event, and a history leading from it; and this history is the history of a community. A presupposition of any revelatory experience is a certain pre-understanding of it, a previous life-relation to its subject matter.²³ For those who first experienced the Christ-event this previous life-relation was provided by their participation as Jews in the history of Israel, involving, as it did, persons and events which pointed forward to an eschatological Person and Event. "These events and persons are important for their influence upon the history of the People: and they become meaningful—as acts of revelation or as mercies of God—to the individual through his membership in the People."²⁴ The eschatological

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 147–ff.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

22. R. Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1960), p. 58.

23. See the discussion of this in S. M. Ogden, *Christ without Myth* (New York: Harper, 1961), pp. 51ff.

24. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1951), Vol. I, p. 36.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

event is one which is to concern the *ecclesia*, the congregation. The significance of Jesus was seen to be the fulfilment of these pointers, what Bultmann calls "the eschatological salvation-event." It is perceived by faith and it is proclaimed, and part of the salvation-event is the fact of "the Church as the community in and through which the Word continues to be proclaimed and within which individual believers are gathered as those who have already passed into eschatological existence."²⁵ The proclamation of the Christ-event and the Church "belong together, in so far as it is through the Word that the Church is constituted as the community of those who have been called, and in so far as the proclamation of the Word is not the statement of a general truth, but an authorized proclamation that as such has need of a legitimated bearer."²⁶ The Church then is the locus for the continued occurrence of the event of salvation.

Karl Barth's theology is in contrast at many points with that of Bultmann and Tillich. It is often, and rightly, described as a theology of the Word of God. But it is not a theology which has no place for the Church. This is apparent from the very title of Barth's *magnum opus*. In 1927 he had published the first volume of *Christian Dogmatics*. No other volumes of this work were to appear, but in 1932 there came the first of the several volumes of *Church Dogmatics*. The new title signifies Barth's consciousness that a theologian's work is to be done within the Church. At the very outset he speaks of dogmatics as "a function of the Church." It is "the scientific self-examination which the Christian Church makes with respect to the language about God which is peculiar to her." The criterion by which the Church conducts this self-examination is the Word of God, and Barth is above all concerned with the doctrine of revelation, with the Word which God in his utter freedom speaks in Jesus Christ. But "the Church is the place and the instrument of the grace of God. There faith is, in the Church and through the Church. There the reality of the Word become flesh and of God's Holy Spirit speaks and is heard."²⁷ The Church is the area "in which God's revelation is subjectively real."²⁸

All this needs deeper treatment than can be given here. Barth himself is kind to students pressed for time in providing in several of his smaller books a summary of his teaching about the Church. His sections on the Church in *Dogmatics in Outline*,²⁹ and in *The Faith of the Church*,³⁰ make it very clear that here is one who says "*credo in ecclesiam*" with deep conviction. The lecture quoted above, given in 1927 before an audience of Roman

25. Ogden, *Christ without Myth*, p. 89.

26. R. Bultmann, in H. W. Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma und Mythos*, II (Hamburg: Herbert Reich, 1952), p. 206.

27. Karl Barth, *Theology and Church* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1962), p. 280.

28. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I/2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), p. 228. The section "The Holy Spirit the Subjective Reality of Revelation" (pp. 203-42) deals with the Church as the sphere in which the objective and the subjective reality of revelation cohere.

29. London: S.C.M. Press, 1949.

30. New York: Meridian Books, Inc., Living Age Books, 1958.

Catholics and Protestants,³¹ will repay study. Here Barth speaks first of the many and important points of agreement between Catholics and Protestants in their doctrine of the Church, and then goes on to summarize their differences in the interpretation each would give to the words in the Roman Catechism: "by faith only we know that in the Church are the keys of heaven."³² It is in the part of this lecture which presents the evangelical view of the Church that Barth writes:

The Church is infallible, not because its pronouncements, which are of necessity humanly limited, possess as such inerrancy and perfection; but because by its pronouncements it bears witness to the infallible Word of God and gives evidence that it has heard that Word; because the Church, "abandoning all its own wisdom, lets itself be taught by the Word of God" (Calvin, Institutes, IV, 8, 13). So far as it does not so act, it is certainly not the Church. But when it does so act it will seek infallibility in what is *said* to it in antithesis to what it can itself say, to what is spoken not from heaven but on earth, to what is not *the* dogma but *a* dogma, to what is not the divine Word but is specifically the word of the Church—although the word of the Church *as such* has real authority and requires serious attention. The authority of the Church is genuine authority precisely because the Church is not for an instant unready to bow before the higher authority truly appointed over it.³³

John Knox, a New Testament scholar of Union Theological Seminary, New York, in a recent book³⁴ develops certain of the themes of Bultmann and Tillich. Like them, he holds revelation to be an event which is both an act of God and an apprehension of the significance of the act through faith; and he believes that God supremely revealed himself in the Christ-event. But more explicitly than the others he asserts that the locus of this revelation is and can only be the Church.

He begins his argument by grasping firmly that nettle of New Testament scholarship which many still can only regard as a stinging weed, namely, the contention that "what we have in the New Testament is a record and reflection of the life and thought of the early Church . . . , what confronts us immediately and directly in the New Testament documents is simply and only the primitive community . . . , what it remembered, what it knew, what it thought, what it felt."³⁵ He does not see this contention as a threat to Christian security. On the contrary, whereas it has led some to assume that, if we have only the Church (and cannot get behind it to the Jesus of history), we have nothing, he is prepared to say that "in having the Church we have everything."³⁶

Whereas Bultmann finds the beginning of Christianity in the earliest *kerygma*, the first proclamation of Jesus as God's eschatological act of salvation, and Tillich finds it in the moment when the first disciple saw the "picture of Jesus as the Christ," Knox contends that the Church itself is the

31. "The Concept of the Church" (Lecture IX in *Theology and Church*).

32. K. Barth, *Theology and Church*, pp. 279-85.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 283.

34. *The Church and the Reality of Christ* (New York: Harper, 1962).

35. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

beginning. The Church is the prior basis of *kerygma*, picture, symbol, and all else. In fact the revelatory event is the Church's beginning: "If God acted in history, as we affirm he did, he acted to bring this social community into being. The historical event to which all distinctively Christian faith returns is not an event ante-dating the Church, . . . but is the coming into existence of the Church itself. . . . (It involved a complex interaction of persons, incidents and circumstances over a period of time":³⁷ it includes the personal character and teaching of Jesus, the response which was made to him, his death and resurrection, the giving and receiving of the Spirit. But it is all the coming into being of the Church.

If it is objected that, in virtue of who and what he was, Jesus would have been important even if the Church had not come to be, this is not denied. But Knox points out that in this case Jesus would have been the formative element in some *other* event, and not the event on which the Church's faith centres and to which the Church's writings bear witness. But it is clear that the event to which Jesus and his career actually belonged was the emergence of the Church:³⁸ "God actually created the Church around and through the career of Jesus."³⁹ Consequently, the revelation of God, occurring in and through the event of Christ, can only be known within the Church.⁴⁰ The career of Jesus apart from the responses actually made to him by his disciples, and apart from the meaning found in it by what proved to be the incipient Church, would not be the revelatory event to which the Church traces its beginning.

Knox discusses the objection that his thesis ascribes to the Church an autonomy and authority which denies the Reformation principle that the Church always stands under the judgment of the Word.⁴¹ He does not agree that this is so, for the Word, in the sense of the act of God in history, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, being the event which is the moment of the Church's beginning, possesses unique authority for the Church. The content of this moment, preserved in the memory of the Church and in the documents inspired by the memory, has, in fact, decisively determined the Church, and is the norm to which it must continually have recourse.⁴² The Word in the sense of the Scriptures also has unique authority in the Church. The Scriptures are the documents which "the emerging Church either absorbed into its life or produced out of it." They give us immediate access to the event; they are the means by which the continuing Church has maintained "conscious contact with the Event which is essential to its identity."⁴³

The work of these Protestant scholars, then, illustrates what seems to be a growing conviction that the Church is the locus of revelation. John Knox begins the Foreword of his book with the words: "Christian theology in

37. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

the present epoch is marked perhaps most distinctively by concern for the nature and importance of the Church."

But there is no sign of a willingness to ascribe infallibility to the Church. Protestant scholarship, having emancipated itself from the bondage of an inerrant Bible, shows no inclination to deliver itself over to the idea of an inerrant Church. In this connection I should like to quote two Anglican scholars whose contributions to the symposium, *On the Authority of the Bible*, have already been mentioned. The first is Professor Christopher Evans, from whom come strong words: "The desire for infallibility short of the infallibility of God, be it of Church or Bible, is an idolatrous lust."⁴⁴ "The longing of the religious man is always for finality. Of course. Do we not come to our rest at length with God, and is not all our language about God in intention final language? But it is the particular temptation of the religious man to snatch at finality when it cannot be had and in the form in which he ought not to have it."⁴⁵ The argument for infallibility is an *a priori* argument: "Surely God would have seen to it that the Bible would have been preserved from error. Surely God would have seen to it that there would be an instrument on earth which would teach without error." Dr. Evans reminds us that our Lord was crucified by just such a religious *a priori*: "Surely God will see to it that when his kingdom is manifested on earth it will carry all before it."

Similarly Dr. Leonard Hodgson urges that to search for an infallible guide which will give us a statement of truth immune from all criticism is to father upon God the kind of revelation we feel we should have given if we had been in his place.⁴⁶ He quotes from his Gifford Lectures, *For Faith and Freedom*:

"We walk by faith, not by sight." False theories of revelation spring from a refusal to be content with our creaturely status, an insistence that the only revelation worth having is one which gives us the kind of knowledge open only to a spectator of all time and all existence. But it is not for us to dictate to our Creator. We must be content to see and think and speak as men of our own age and culture. The measure of our faith in Him is our willingness to walk by the light of the kind of revelation that He has thought fit to give us.⁴⁷

Between those who are convinced that Bible or Church or both must be infallible, and those who deny this, there would seem to be a sharp difference of belief about the nature of God, the one group believing that God's nature is such, and the other believing that God's nature is not such, as to give men an infallible guide which must be accepted, and which it is sinful to question. The basic reason why many of us cannot accept the idea that God has given to the world an infallible guide is that such a belief implies that it is God's will that men should be released from the necessity of using their minds to gain the truth in matters of doctrine and morals, and from the need of the response of faith to revelation, apart only from an initial

44. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

47. L. Hodgson, *For Faith and Freedom* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956-57), Vol. I, p. 89.

act of faith in the infallible authority. This supposition seems to us to be alien from what we know of God's ways with men. Prophets and teachers have certainly spoken with authority; our Lord taught with authority; but always the appeal is to man's conscience and reason; always the revelatory act or word seeks a free response. God does not override man's nature. He gives the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, but he does not hand truth to us "on a plate," nor dispense any man from the responsibility of thought and decision.

Because the Holy Spirit is given to the Church, we hold that the Church will not finally fail in God's purpose for it, but not that it is infallible. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."⁴⁸ But the very word "prevail" (*katischuo*) implies struggle and difficulty. The metaphor is an inappropriate one if the words mean that the Church possesses an infallible authority to which reference has simply to be made in time of doubt in order to get the right answer. Yet our disquiet about the idea of infallibility does not rest on any particular treatment of a few evidently relevant texts, but rather on the conviction that man is not addressed in this way by the God who revealed himself in the Christ who refrained from giving quick answers.

48. Matt. 16:18.