

Preface

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After a World Evangelical Fellowship conference a few years ago in Clarens, Switzerland, several participants in this symposium met informally to discuss contemporary Protestant theology. While the conversations included many not sharing in the present volume (among them Professor Andre Lamorte, then at Aix-en-Provence, and Principal René Pache of Emmaus Bible Institute in Lausanne), the contributions of Dr. Frank E. Gaebelin, Professor Roger Nicole, and Principal Ernest Kevan are clearly recalled. It was these informal discussions in Switzerland that provided the impetus for *Revelation and the Bible*.

In assessing the fortunes of Christianity in our century, we all agreed that authority, particularly the authority of Scripture, is the watershed of theological conviction. We concurred, too, that the Christian impact in our lifetime had suffered immeasurably from liberal Protestant deletion of authority from Biblical religion. Growing rejection of the modernist philosophy of religion seemed a good omen, however. We were gathered, as it were, in the land of neo-orthodox giants, such as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, who had questioned the Protestant disregard for supernatural revelation and redemption, and the vacillating accommodation of Christian belief and experience to the whims of modern man. We could not evade, nor did we desire to do so, their effective influence in undermining entrenched liberal positions.

At the same time we were burdened by the unsatisfactoriness of the newer alternatives, even though they recognized special divine revelation and the uniqueness of the Biblical witness. Gauged by the Biblical norm, the inadequacy and in fact the objectionable character of the new views were apparent enough. This was especially obvious in the religious epistemology formulated by the so-called "theology of revelation." Indebtedness to Kant and Kierkegaard, as well as additional liability to Ebner and Buber in formulating the divine-human encounter; perpetuation of Schleiermacher's profoundly unbiblical notion that God communicates no truths about himself and his purposes; and above all, injustice to the revelation-status of Scripture were some of the features of neo-orthodoxy that specially troubled us.

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Equally distressing was the relative inertia of evangelical theology in this time of cultural crisis. Compared with most liberal schools and churches, evangelical agencies no doubt were doing impressively well; so-called independent efforts, however despised by inclusivist leaders as "free lance," nevertheless displayed wholesome vitality and zeal. While liberalism slowed to a walk along the highway of modern theological influence these throbbings of evangelical life provided a measure of comfort to evangelical churchmen. When liberalism toppled in self-exhaustion, the situation changed, however, for the thrust that crippled liberalism came not so much from evangelical as from mediating thinkers. In large part, of course, collapse was forced by the counter-stroke of history, of archaeology, and of the modern study of personality. The relative ineffectiveness of the evangelical assault on liberalism was due in part also to historical circumstance. The Western world's crisis had reached its zenith in the first quarter of our century in Europe, where liberalism's anguished self-confession of irrelevance simultaneously forced its adherents to the task of theological replacement. In America, moreover, ecumenical pride, or whatever else it was, tended to deny intellectual hearing to all whose ecclesiastical identification placed them outside inclusive

Christianity. In those days merely to whisper that the "coming great church" could prove a colossus of corruption (as Luther had already discovered in an earlier century) was sufficient to provoke the stigma of divisiveness, despite the fact that ecumenists like Reinhold Niebuhr themselves had warned of similar perils of decay latent in the secular order. Evangelical scholars outside the orbit of inclusive ecumenism, notably J. Gresham Machen, gained little recognition from modernist thinkers (though many humanists read Machen gladly, and even granted him the edge in his argument with liberalism). By now, moreover, modernist forces had aggrandized for their own speculative purposes many academic centers established by evangelical endowments, and enjoyed the funds and facilities once available to conservative scholarship. Fundamentalist schools became mainly anti-intellectual in temper, and as its chief concern the evangelical movement concentrated on the neglected task of world evangelism and missions.

Furthermore, first-rate evangelical scholars were increasingly at a premium; for more than a generation it had been popular to defect to the modernist forces. While evangelicals took some active part in the theological debate, they tended to reactionary positions in maintaining the defenses, and were prone to excessive formulations of convictions. Moreover, convictions were too often asserted *in vacuo*; they failed to expound the larger implications and consequences of acceptance or rejection. Evangelical polemics became largely negative, and sought primarily the approbation of its own conservative constituency rather than the effective penetration of competing spheres of influence. These were among the tendencies that discouraged outside interest in conservative formulations.

To ascribe reactionary positions to all evangelical expositions of the doc-

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trine of inspiration, however, would be both inaccurate and unfair. The selective bibliography at the end of this volume attests this fact. Unfortunately, the prevailing concept of evangelical conviction about Scripture has been gained rather one-sidedly from remarks of popular evangelists and religious pamphleteers rather than from more serious academic expositions. Accordingly, the contributors to *Revelation and the Bible* avoid many of these reactionary defenses of the past. Rather, they discuss Biblical revelation with full reference to God's saving acts and thereby contemplate revealed ideas in association with redemptive history. They do full justice to the historical and personal elements in special revelation. They avoid borrowing modern scientific canons to defend the accuracy and reliability of the Bible. They recognize the need for correlating the doctrine of inspiration with the phenomena of Scripture. They do not rest the entire case for inspiration on the results of inspiration merely, such as inerrancy, nor do they rest it on the traditional datings of all the sacred books. They affirm that the fact that the Bible is a God-breathed book is the foundation of scriptural trustworthiness and reliability.

The writers of this symposium support the high view as over against the classic liberal repudiation and the neo-orthodox evasion of scriptural inspiration. Anyone familiar with the literature of the doctrine of inspiration senses at once their endorsement of the long-standing confidence of the evangelical tradition in the Bible. They are constrained by the meaning and spirit of Scripture, also by an awareness of serious defects in the newer views of inspiration. Even the casual reader will detect their uneasiness over certain features of the "theology of the Word of God": disparagement of the general divine revelation in nature and conscience;

exclusion of the laws of logic from the *imago Dei*; deference to sensory-spatial theories of the origin of language; repudiation of biblically disclosed doctrines; evasion of the Bible's witness to its own revelation-status; reduction of Scripture to merely an instrumental framework for dynamic divine-human encounter.

The primary objective of the contributors to this symposium, however, is a positive presentation of the Christian doctrine of the Scriptures. Only secondarily are they concerned with perversions of that view. These scholars are harbingers of an era in which once again the sacred Scriptures communicate their supernatural message with supernatural power. A recent issue of *Christianity Today* (January 20, 1958) comments that "the most hopeful sign on the theological horizon is the renewal of interest in a theology of the Word of God. If ministers professing such devotion could meet together across America, apart from reference to respective ecumenical orbits, and engage in serious study of the witness of Scripture to the Word of God—the Word incarnate and the Word written—they would not only find themselves fulfilling a divinely enjoined responsibility (cf. John 5:39), but could recapture afresh the note of authority that has evaporated from much of contemporary Protestantism." In *The Christian Century* (April 30, 1958)

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Arnold W. Hearn, instructor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, noted irenically that the nonfundamentalist who listens "to his more orthodox brethren... is likely to undergo at least one intellectually constructive experience: he will hear some of his own views subjected to acute and searching criticism from a theological viewpoint whose insights he has perhaps prematurely ignored. Particularly is this true in relation to the complex of problems which cluster around the basic question of religious authority." Were all of us—evangelical, neo-orthodox, and modernist alike—driven to a fresh and earnest study of the timeless realities of divine revelation and inspiration, the cause of Christian theology would indeed move ahead. The longer the neglect of this imperative by the ministry, that much longer will Protestant conscience and confidence suffer impairment.

Aware of the great responsibilities many of the symposium writers bear, I wish to include a personal word of appreciation for their participation. It is a genuine privilege to provide a vehicle to carry forward their contribution to contemporary evangelical thought. I gratefully acknowledge also the work of Philip E. Hughes in translating Dr. Pierre Marcel's chapter from the French, of Peter de Visser in translating several chapters from the Dutch, and of Miss Irma Peterson, my secretary, who has uncomplainingly assumed additional responsibilities of correspondence, typing and proofreading.

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