

THE UNIQUENESS OF DIVINE REVELATION AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES: THE CREED ASSOCIATION'S STATEMENT

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In view of ideas now being given currency about biblical authority in the Church of Scotland, it may be helpful to draw attention to two articles of the Creed Association which were drawn up in the two decades after the end of the Second World War. The Creed Association was originally proposed and financed by a wealthy Glasgow businessman of rather pronounced liberal views, called Templeton, in the first decade after the end of the First World War, when its leading participants were H.R. Mackintosh and A.B. Macaulay. Right from the start it was rather more traditional and conservative in its outlook than Templeton had hoped! Its activity came to an end with the death of Mackintosh in 1936; but after the end of the Second World War it was given a new life under the inspiration of A.B. Macaulay, when the participants were John Baillie, James Pitt Watson, John Burleigh, Hugh Watt, William Manson and R.W. Stewart, with A.N. Bogle as chairman. It was Macaulay's idea that some younger theologians should be invited to join, when I proposed J.K.S. Reid, R.S. Wallace and D.F.S. Dick. I agreed to act as secretary. After a few years this task was taken over by G.B. Hewitt, then in the Education Department in the Church's offices in 121 George Street. We usually met in New College. Unfortunately the Creed Association never finished its work and ceased to function once again when George Hewitt died. Nothing of its work was ever published.

During its life after the Second World War work was done on sixteen articles toward a confession of faith. These were headed by a 'Preamble':

We believe that God has spoken; that his Word came to the prophets, became flesh in Jesus Christ, was witnessed to by the Apostles, comes to us through the Scriptures as the living Word of God, which calls the church into being, and to which the church bears continuing witness.

It was only after articles on the evangelical and Trinitarian substance of the faith were completed that the Association

turned to compose two articles dealing with the Holy Scriptures and the bearing of the Christian revelation to other religions. Both of these seem to be relevant to the call increasingly heard today for a reinterpretation of the Bible in the light of modern cultural ideas, and in view of the problem of so called 'inter-faith' relations. On both of these, as on the articles on the sacraments, William Manson left his distinctive mark.

Article XII **The Word of God**

1. The Word of God is the eternal Son of God who as Word of the Father, eternally begotten and abiding in the communion of the Spirit within the Holy Trinity, comes to us as the Revealer through whom God in his love makes known the mystery of his own being.

2. In Jesus Christ the Word made flesh God has truly manifested his glory in human form and by mighty acts has reconciled the world to himself. In this man Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, the eternal Son of God has assumed human nature and existence into oneness with himself in order thus, as true God and true man, to become the final Word of God to man, and the one Mediator between God and man, through whom we enter into communion with God and apprehend his glory.

3. Within the Church Jesus Christ by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit bears witness to himself through the witness and tradition of the Prophets, as the coming Saviour, and through the witness and tradition of the Apostles, as the Saviour who has come. Through their written word Jesus Christ the Word made flesh continues to speak, testifying to the mighty acts whereby he has redeemed the world, and offering himself to all people, men, women and children as Saviour and Lord.

4. The Old and New Testaments are acknowledged to be Holy Scripture and the authoritative Word of God, because Jesus Christ speaks to us in them. Through the Spirit the human word of the Old and New Testaments is elected and formed to be the authentic means of divine revelation, and is so conjoined with the Word of God as to be the written Word

of God to man. Thus the Scripture as human word is to be distinguished from the divine Word but not separated from it. By means of this Scripture God continues through the Spirit to speak his Word to the Church.

5. As the Church listens to the Word of God speaking through the Holy Scripture, and fulfils its commission to proclaim Christ, God himself is active in the Church declaring his Word through human witness and ministry. Thus through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit the word of the Church in exposition and application of Holy Scripture becomes the living Word of God to man.

Article XVI Revelation and Religion

1. Since God made the whole universe to reflect his glory we apprehend created things through the clear shining of his uncreated Light, but since God remains invisible in his own transcendent Being, we are unable to see his Light directly in the world or trace its shining back to him as its eternal Source. God is everywhere present to us so that our minds are intended to have a true sense of his deity and are moved to wonder and worship. Thus true religion arises as the response of the human spirit to the Creator.

2. In his purpose God has given to all that he has made creaturely light by which they are made intelligible and invite our understanding. Since they are distinct from God they are to be explored and investigated out of themselves and become amenable to rational exploration. In his creative purpose God has given man a special place in the universe, and it is part of that purpose that nature should be disclosed to human insight and scientific enquiry. When the structures and patterns of nature are seen as God's creation and thus dependent on him, they reflect the revelation of his greatness and power. But when this is not seen it is not the fault of God or of nature but of man who, through sin, has alienated himself from God and damaged his relation to the universe around him, and thus introduced disorder into the creation.

3. The Spirit of God is ever present giving all things being in their relation to the Creator. The Spirit of God continues to

shine increasingly throughout the universe. This is true in a more intimate way with man, who is given being and is supported in his personal existence by the Word of Divine Power even though he has revolted from God's fellowship and violated the law of his own being. Through men's estrangement the shining of God's self-revelation suffers refraction in his existence, so that ambiguity and opaqueness result in his understanding. While he retains a certain sense of the greatness and power of God, he shuts himself off from the knowledge of who God is for he gets himself in the way and eclipses the light of Heaven. His relation with God is dark and enigmatic; when he gropes after God he cannot find him and turns the truth into a lie. At the very best he can only raise an altar to the unknown God.

4. Through this fragmenting and darkening of man's relations with God religion has give place to the many religions of mankind which reflect the different answers that men have tried to give to the mystery that surrounds their existence or attempts they have elaborated to recover the lost destiny of mankind. Each arises under the pressure of God's presence but becomes distorted through the turning of the human spirit back upon itself, so that in spite of man's wonder and yearning for the Creator and Redeemer the answers and attempts of men can have no content except the mythological creations and projections of their own spirituality. Thus the truth in every religion is inextricably intertwined in the depth of the human spirit with man's estrangement and self-deception and can only take perverted form through assimilation with notions (whether crude or refined) within the different ethnic cultures within which it is expressed. Yet they all manifest the anguish and the need of the human condition and bear broken witness to the Reality of God.

5. It is the clear shining of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ alone that reveals the true nature of the human quest in the non-Christian religions which their followers are unable to discern for themselves, since the rise of the spirit of man toward God is thwarted by its very self-centredness. Because God's self-revelation by word and deed has taken final and complete form in Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, all other ways to the Father are thereby invalidated or

revealed to lead astray. Hence, while not rejecting anything that is good and true in other religions we are unable to acknowledge any revelation of God outside of Christ to which we can respond as his sure and certain self-disclosure or as his way of salvation for men. Since God has provided us in Jesus Christ the one and only Mediator between God and man, the revelation of God in him cannot be regarded merely as a variation of or a supplement to a general revelation, nor can the Christian religion be regarded as one among the many religions of mankind, for both the Christian revelation and the Christian response to it are grounded upon the absolute and final self-giving of God for all mankind. We believe that it is through this revelation and religion alone that all that is good and true in the other religions may reach proper affirmation and fulfilment.

6. 'The Christian religion' in history has found expression in the thought and language of different ages, peoples and cultures. In this way it has assimilated much that does not derive from God's self-revelation but from man's own imagination and mythological projections, so that it has not escaped the idolatrous distortions at work in the non-Christian religions. Thus through human sin and self-will even the 'Christian religion' may be turned into a form of man's cultural self-expression or the means whereby he gives sanction to a socio-political way of life, and may even become the means whereby he seeks to justify himself before God. As such it stands constantly in need of correction and renewal through reference to its source in Jesus Christ. It is in this way that the Christian Church grows and develops throughout history, its tradition becoming richer and fuller, the more surely and truly as it is grounded upon the unchanging foundation that has once and for all been laid in Jesus Christ.

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I pray that the publication of these two articles may help both toward a clarification of people's thinking, and toward the strengthening of their belief in the authority of the Holy Scriptures and the uniqueness of divine revelation in Jesus Christ.