

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE WORD OF GOD

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WE have entered on a period of history in which it is becoming difficult to obtain a hearing for the New Testament and Reformed doctrine of the Word of God. For it rests on the belief in a Word which God has spoken from beyond, once for all in time, and which is absolute, ultimate, and authoritative for the Church.

It is not a truth which can be arrived at by scientific investigation, and on that account it is a *scandalon* to the scientist, and to this scientifically-minded generation. It is not a truth which is discoverable by the study of history (although it has been given inside history), and therefore it is a *scandalon* to the historian. It is not a truth which can be reached by the processes of human thought, and on that account it is a *scandalon* to the philosopher—"the scandal of particularity"—because of its claim to be absolute, authoritative, and "once for all". Against this he has a rooted prejudice, combined with a strong desire to transform the "once for all" into a not-once for all, a timeless idea, in short, a philosophy.

The Church is being pressed into the decision that it has either to stand firm on the truth of a special revelation, a Divine irruption into history, on which the Christian Church is founded—but which the modern world rejects—or it must go the way of world-knowledge to the end, and, drawing the last consequences of the modern view of history, abandon the Christian doctrine of revelation in its New Testament sense as "Word of God", which was the witness of the early Reformers.

For this condition of things the Church has to accept a measure of blame. It has too much sought to understand God from man, in place of understanding man from God. It has endeavoured to bind God to man, rather than bind man to God. In its preaching and theology it has declared what man thinks about God, rather than what God thinks

about man. It has attempted to understand God through man, rather than to understand man through God. It has neglected the wise counsel of Calvin that "no man can arrive at the true knowledge of himself without having first contemplated the divine character and then descended to the contemplation of his own" (*Inst.* 1.1.2). In short, it has depreciated the uniqueness of revelation as the New Testament writers and the Reformers understood it, and treated revelation and discovery as but two aspects of the same process, differing perhaps in degree but not in character. "Revelation and Incarnation", says one of our Scottish theologians, "are not unique historical prodigies but are by God's grace of the very warp and woof of human experience."

But are they? Can we accept that view?

The time seems opportune for a discussion of the Nature and Character of Revelation as "Word of God". The Divine Word has to become again something great and significant by a return to its New Testament meaning as reaffirmed by the Reformers, which conceives of Reality, not as an object of man's search, but as the subject of man's life; God's seeking of man, speaking with man, and dealing with him in grace.

'Tis from the mercy of our God
That all our hopes begin.

1. THE UNIQUE NATURE OF THE WORD OF GOD

In later usage the term *Word of God* has come to be applied to the Scriptures. This is "the written Word," the record of, and the witness to, the Word of God spoken to the saints of old, who were so led by the Spirit that they faithfully recorded every word of God spoken to their hearts. By its power of touching our hearts and lifting our souls into converse with God, the Bible so approves itself as the true and perfect Word of God that we rightly speak of it as "the Word of God". We have our Lord's own example to support us, for He Himself lived in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, calling it to His aid in the great crises of His life: His temptation and His passion; and quoting it with reverence on many occasions as the authoritative Word of God. One of His most momentous pronouncements on the sanctity of the marriage relationship He based on the authority of Gen. 2.24 (*Matt.* 19.5).

But the term *Word of God*, as we find it in the Old Testament, means something quite different. It indicates the actual "meeting" of God with his servants, the prophets, a personal encounter in which He discloses His mind to them, that they may declare it to His People, Israel. It is not a bare, abrupt meeting which comes and passes. Something happens which has continuity in its results both on the man and on the situation. God in the Old Testament is known by what He does. He reveals Himself in acts, the act of redemption from Egypt, of which Moses is the prophet, or some act of chastisement upon the nation or upon other nations. Preceding these, or going with them, is the Divine Word spoken by the prophet who is the interpreter of God's providence. Both act and speech, agent and content, are expressed in the term *Word of God*.

All real knowledge of God, according to the Hebrew writers, is bound up with this personal encounter with God, and cannot be separated from it. This alone is real knowledge, compared with which the knowledge of mere ideas is only secondary knowledge. The very Hebrew term for "word" (*dabar*), which has a verbal and not a substantival form, indicates action, personal relation, the confrontation of a *Thou* and an *I*. The Greek equivalent (*logos*) in its Biblical usage, has the same activist character.

At a very early date, if not from the beginning, the term *Word of God* was employed in the Christian Church to denote the special revelation given in and by Jesus Christ. "The ministry of the Word" became the sole preoccupation of the Apostles. It was "the word of the Cross"; "the word of the Kingdom"; "the word of reconciliation"; "the word of salvation". Its living, dynamic quality was expressed in such phrases as "the word of God increased"; "So mightily grew the word". Its concrete quality was truly Hebraic. It was left for Greek thought later to convert its concretes into abstracts, and to replace the actuality of "meeting" with necessary truths of reason.

In this essay I propose, for the most part, to employ the term *Word of God* in its primary sense of the act, or event, of revelation itself, the meeting of God and man in grace. God's Word is God Himself in His Revelation; God's speaking

to and dealing with man. Revelation is the unveiling of a Person to persons, the confrontation of a *Thou* with an *I*. In its essence it is not the communication of an idea or a doctrine but the converse of Mind with mind. It is a real coming of God from beyond the space-time *continuum* into the world of time and space, in Jesus Christ, a real Divine Action and Divine Initiative in which the Word became flesh and the flesh became Word. However great the distance to be crossed between the holy and sovereign God and the flesh of sin, it has been crossed in the God-Man. Thus in the Incarnation we have the complete and perfect meeting of God and man, and the all-sufficient answer to the Old Testament cry of a Job: "O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat."

In order that the Biblical revelation should be given its true and central place, it is not necessary to assume that God has not revealed Himself to other men and peoples. There have been other approaches of Reality to men. The Sovereign God speaks to whom He wills, to a Cyrus or a Socrates. Other religions claim to rest on revelations, to be the disclosure of some truths of the supra-natural order, which men would not have known but for that particular communication. But no religion knows the concept of revelation as Christianity does. In all other religions, revelation relates itself to singulars, and is therefore a collection of many single, repeatable revelations which may continue to the end of time. There always will be men whose spiritual endowments will enable them to reach new insights into truth and whose capacities God may choose to enhance.

But the Christian Revelation, which meets us in the Old and New Testament, is *One Word*, pointing to Christ, which God spoke "at sundry times and in divers manners, and in these last days unto us by his Son" (Heb. 1.1). Luther described the Old and New Testaments as "two lips of the one Divine mouth of Jesus Christ". It is not one of the many revelations which we have to do with here, but the "once-for-all" Divine Sacrifice of the incarnate *Logos*, Jesus Christ, who is the absolute revelation of what God is, and of what man is meant to become. "This he did once" (*ephapax*), "he entered in once" (Heb. 7.27, 9.12). How concerned

all the New Testament writers are that we should not bypass the unique significance of the Cross!

There is, accordingly, a fundamental distinction between the Christian revelation and other revelations. It was not a movement *within* the world but a movement *to* the world which cannot be placed inside any general history of religions. For no other religion ever ventured to affirm that God became a man and suffered on the Cross.

The modern relativist philosophy of religion which attempts to arrive at the nature of revelation by placing the religions in an ascending scale, with Christianity at the summit, misses the significance of the Christian revelation, which is as much out of the category as it is out of the crowd of other religions. It stands over against all other religions, not as an individual among individuals, not as a perfect among perfects, not even as a final among preparatory religions; but as another *genus*; as the truth of God stands over against the search for truth, or as the answer stands over against the question. There is a difference of character which disqualifies all other religions from claiming a place beside the Christian faith. Only a religion which brings other religions to judgment, as Christianity does, can have universal validity.

The Word of God in Jesus Christ entered into history, not only as a unique power of renewal, but as a judgment. This was clearly enough perceived in the early days. Of all the new religions which swarmed out of the East into the Western world in the day of Jesus, the only religion to be persecuted was the Christian Faith. Its intolerance, its refusal of any alliance with the other religions of mankind, marked it off as something unique and apart.

It has become a commonplace of our time to represent Jesus as the crown of history, and of humanity and, as such, to be the revelation of God. But if Jesus be no more than the crown of history and humanity, then He belongs to our world on its religious side. He is one of us, a great spiritual personality, but only comparatively different from others, and, therefore, with no distinctive word to speak. But this comparative difference has nothing to do with revelation as the New Testament understands it. The need of revelation arises out of the qualitative difference between God and man,

and it is in relation to that difference that Jesus has his significance in the New Testament as the Divine *Logos*. But for that difference between God and man, that gulf which separated them (and which man from his side could not bridge), there would have been no need for a Mediator.

The New Testament witness is that Jesus stands related to religious history, not as the crown of humanity, but as the all-commanding crisis of humanity in His life, death, and resurrection; a crisis revealed only to faith. In the Christ according to the flesh must be discovered by faith the Christ according to the Spirit, the Eternal Son of God made flesh, before He can *become* revelation. His person is a mystery revealed only to faith. His "works" were mysteries rather than marvels, with convincing power only to faith. Even the resurrection, which is the crowning revelation, the absolute miracle, is to be understood not as an irrefragable outward fact—for belief and unbelief are alike possible beside the empty tomb—but as a historical Divine event, a deed of God, which is only to be grasped in the category of revelation and by the sensorium of faith. It is "on Christ's resurrection", says Calvin, "that our faith principally rests. For since there appears nothing but infirmity in the cross and burial of Jesus, faith must proceed beyond all these things to be furnished with sufficient strength" (*Inst.* 2.16.13).

But if the resurrection had been an event visible to all men and accessible to the unbeliever, if its wonder could have been experienced by profane eyes, it would have ceased to belong to the category of revelation and it would have been no decision of faith to believe in the Risen Christ.

In speaking thus about the other religions, we exclude, of course, Judaism, of which the Christian Gospel, as Christ Himself taught, is the fulfilment. The Old and New Testaments cannot be separated. It is one Word they bear witness to, one God Who speaks through both. "It was God in Christ all through the Old Testament," wrote my old professor, Dr. Rainy, "and the footsteps of Christ are heard all along the way. But it is only in New Testament light that this is clearly seen."

So it is not simply God's revelation of Himself in general terms which we have in the Bible, but a revelation which

follows one clearly defined plan, that inside the general stream of history there shall be a current of defined appointment for a specific purpose; God's revelation of Himself to the world through Israel. It is this which constitutes the unity of the Bible and makes its history: *Heilsgeschichte*—Sacred history.

This was the Reformation insight—the vision of Calvin as he expounds it in the *Institutes* (2.9-11)—the existence of a Divine Purpose working in and through the history of the Chosen People towards a consummation determined before all ages. The whole story of the people of Israel, he shows, their Divine call, their redemption from Egypt, the giving of the law, the building of the temple, the tragedy of the Exile, the subsequent return of the remnant—all were the foreshadowings of the greater and final salvation given in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, apart from which they have in themselves no abiding significance, and are not fully comprehensible.

We arrive, then, at a judgment of the Biblical Word of Revelation as being unique, once-for-all in time, the Word of God, a lamp to the feet and a light to the path of the way-faring sons of men. It is not an emanation from the sphere in which we find ourselves, nor from some subliminal region within us, nor is it a mystical illumination of the soul. It is a word from beyond this world of time, a Word from our Father "in heaven", which breaks in upon us from another dimension, falling, as it were, vertically, and cutting across our human wills and preferences. To quote Professor A. E. Taylor, it is "an intrusion of the other and supra-historical into the ordinary routine of becoming".

This is the uniqueness of the Word of God as revealed to us in the Bible in which the converse of God with His saints is recorded in all its stages, up to the full and abiding revelation of saving love in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the Eternal *Logos*—God's purpose incarnate—the ultimate clue to the mystery of God's nature and final purpose in the world. "In Him," says St. Paul, "all things hold together"—i.e. are a coherent whole (Col. 1.17).

But one thing has to be emphasised. This is a judgment of faith, the knowledge of which is not open to the historians as such. It would be foolish to demand a historical or scientific

proof of the truth of revelation. That Jesus is other than a great religious Founder, a Buddha, or a Zarathustra, can as little be proved as that He is the Son of God; and, if it could be proved, it would be something quite other than what faith is.

Outwardly viewed by the historian, Christianity is seen to be one of the world religions. The Bible appears as a document of the history of a primitive Asiatic race. Jesus appears as the Rabbi of Nazareth; the Christian Church as a historical and sociological growth. What we call history is always only the outside. At the heart of the event is the Divine mystery revealed only to faith, which no man can betray because no man knows save him to whom it is revealed. We have to believe in order to make sense of things. *Credo ut intelligam.*

2. THE UNIQUE CONTENT OF THE WORD OF GOD

The Word of God is unique in its Content as well as in its Nature. What distinguishes it from all human thoughts, philosophies, and even revelations, which men believe themselves to have experienced, is that it is the Revelation, once for all, which God the Father has given of Himself in His Son, who is "the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature" (Col. 1.15). Of this Word the Bible is the authoritative document, the book of the great acts of God in which He has made Himself known.

(i) This Word of Divine Revelation meets us first as the Word of *God the Creator*, who in an act of love, without which there would have been no cosmos, no history, no incarnation, no outpouring of the Spirit, called the world into existence by a Divine *fiat*. God *said* "let there be light", and there was light. God *said* "let us make man in our image after our likeness", and man, made in the image of God, drew breath.

It was the Word of One who was power as well as wisdom and love; the Word of a transcendent God. This does not mean that God is not immanent in the world of His creation. He is immanent in His grace and goodness, but it is the immanence of the transcendent God who is other than the world of His creation, and yet related to it by having bound it to Himself, through His Son. Rightly does our Creed begin with God: "the Maker of heaven and earth". It is

the first act of the great drama of Divine Grace. Rightly does it pass immediately to Jesus Christ in whom the secret of the Creator, and the secret of the creature, are revealed in that God the Creator became Himself creature. God became man. This knowledge of God the Creator we cannot separate from the knowledge of His dealing with men, and especially from His covenant with Israel.

This truth of creation in the Biblical revelation is unique, distinguishing it from all other religions and conceptions of antiquity. Paganism had no knowledge of God as Creator. Greek philosophy knew only of a World Moulder. The most that science, working with its concepts of causation on a different level, can offer is a world-ground, or mind-energy at work in the world. But the Bible, lit up from beyond, ascribes creation to the Spirit of God. "Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created." That God is Creator, who called the universe into being "out of nothing" by an act of volition, is to be known only through revelation, and rightly finds its place in the first article of our Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." It is a knowledge of faith and therefore a call that we should contemplate, adore and worship the Creator. "Thou art worthy O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4.11).

The Word of God, the Creator, is, at the same time, a claim upon us. It asks from us nothing less than our whole existence. "How can you", asks Calvin, "entertain a thought of God, the Creator, without immediately reflecting that, being a creature of His formation, you must by right of creation be subject to His authority, that you are indebted to Him for your life and that all your actions should be done in reference to Him?"

Such actions are also to be creative, for in His creative work God has called men to be workers together with Him. Creation is not something which lies in the past. There is a *creatio continua* proceeding through the activities of men whom God has called to be also creators.

(ii) The Word of God reaches us, secondly, as the Word of God the Redeemer. God did not, because of man's fall into

disobedience, withdraw Himself from those relationships of love in which he was made and still stands. On the contrary man's sin called forth a fuller expression of the Divine Love which pursued him into the far country to seek and to save the lost by means of a Mediator, since man deprived of freedom of will could not save himself (1 Tim. 2.5).

This "so great salvation" is the main theme of revelation, both Old Testament and New. It is God's great Love Story. We cannot understand the Word of God as Creator apart from the Old Testament, for the New Testament writers simply take it for granted. Nor can we understand the Word of God as Reconciler and Redeemer apart from the Old Testament conception of God the Creator. For how can one concern himself with redemption if one does not know the concern of being lost? We must needs begin with *Genesis* if we are to understand *Revelation* with its grand hymn of redemption. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." The New Testament revelation is the glorious transformation which the Creator has wrought upon His ruined creation, whose consummation is to be a new heaven and a new earth. It is with the one God, Creator, and Redeemer, that the whole Word of God is concerned.

As the Word of God the Creator issues in a commandment under which we stand, so also does the Word of God the Reconciler and Redeemer. It sends us forth into the whole field of Christian ethics. As God calls us to enter into partnership with Him as creators, so He calls us into the enterprise of redemption. The uniqueness of Christian ethics among the other ethical systems of the world is based on the new creation of which human nature is capable. A pagan like Plato could count on no such hope. But a St. Paul could say: "By grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." No wonder that one of the most characteristic qualities of the early Christians was their joyousness. Justification by faith alone may appear to the philosopher to be against all logic; yet it is not merely the foundation, but the fountain of all Christian morals. Dr. Rainy set it down, as a Church historian, that the great change which came over the world with the coming of

Christianity was that "the life of goodness became an assured career". For justification opened the road to sanctification, and what men were called to do was to proceed upon it. Renewed by the Holy Spirit those "called to be saints" pursued the road of faith and obedience, the humble, thankful, loving obedience of those who knew themselves to be redeemed. "There is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." That is the Word of *God the Redeemer*.

(iii) The Word of God reaches us, thirdly, as the Word of *God the Judge*. In virtue of the fact that God is our Creator who has bound man to Himself, and Himself to man, His Word is like a two-edged sword, death-dealing and life-giving, a judging as well as a saving Word.

The solemn note of Judgment sounds out through the whole Bible, especially in the prophets and on the lips of Jesus and the Apostles. For the Bible is an eschatological book concerned with men's final destiny in which time is viewed in the light of the eternal. It has a dramatic conception of history as leading up to a dénouement, the last Judgment, the final victory of God's cause, when the great drama of Divine Grace reaches its issue. Righteousness on earth is the issue. "Behold I create new heavens and a new earth." It is His righteousness that causes Him to bring forth righteousness, His righteousness that explains His wrath. No antithesis is intended between God's righteousness and His grace. He is both righteous and gracious. His judgment is His mercy and His grace. We are not to say that God is righteous and *yet* a Redeemer. He is righteous and *therefore* a Redeemer. The Judge is not in the first instance One who punishes the one and rewards the other, but One who creates order and restores what has been destroyed.

In the Old Testament the Judge is God. He is the Judge of the individual and of the nations, and of Israel in particular, because of her peculiar privileges as the People of God. In the New Testament Jesus steps into the place of God as his vice-regent and "sitteth on the right hand of God". He who came in humiliation and took on Himself the judgment on man in his sin, will come again on the clouds of heaven and in great power and glory. These are pictures, but pictures of the final reality.

This is the world we go to meet, a world which is already here. If there is terror in it, there is also comfort. "It is a source of peculiar consolation," says Calvin, "to hear that Christ will preside at the Judgment. . . . Indeed it is no inconsiderable security that we shall stand before no other tribunal than that of our Redeemer."

This may be taken as a brief summary of the content of God's Word, His special revelation to His Church, by His self-revealing acts. But, that there may be no misunderstanding, let me add that it is not to be taken as if the activity of God through His Word is His only activity in the world and in the souls of men. There is, and must needs be, what was known in medieval times as *assistentia generalis*, and by some of the Reformers as "common grace"—a general as well as an individual personal dealing with men—an immanent Divine working in the world as a whole, of which we have no knowledge; that continuous activity whereby He sustains all things in being by His power. God, we may be assured, is active in all things and nothing happens apart from His activity.

I have used the word "content" with some hesitation since God does not give Himself into our hands as a "content" but keeps us in His own hands. "The Word of God is not bound." It is an activity that is unconfined. But in absence of a better, we let the word "content" stand.

3. THE UNIQUE QUALITIES OF THE WORD

When we pass to consider the qualities and characteristics of the Word of God, we realise that we are moving in a realm far removed from abstract thought and impersonal truths.

(i) The Word of God is a *personal authoritative Word*. This constitutes the difference between the Word of God to a prophet, which he delivers as not his own, and the Word of a moral or religious genius. The word of the genius, once spoken, becomes everyman's, to be added to the stock of religious ideas. Such an idea is timeless, true to all circumstances, separable from its origin and thus capable of becoming public property. There is no personal relation, no meeting of a *Thou* and an *I* through an idea. But what the prophet says is a definite concrete living Word, spoken to him at a particular hour and in a particular place, which he duly

records. And it must always remain bound to the person of the speaker, who in the last resort is God Himself. God never spoke a word to any prophet which was not exactly suited to the man and the occasion. Separate it from the occasion and the man, and it ceases to be the perfect Word of God. It can never be converted into a universal truth of reason.

The most important thing is not *what* the prophet says but *that* he says it, with Divine authority, as something which has its meaning and validity in the fact that no other can say it, because no other has the commission to say it. It is this which gives its peculiar individual quality to the Word of God, making it unique. The supreme illustration of this is to be found in the words of Christ, and His own attitude to them. He declared that what He said was from God. Heaven and earth would pass but His words would not pass. He stood in the midst of humanity and declared that His teaching was divine in its authority and the response of the human heart was "never man so spake".

(ii) The Word of God is a *historical Word*. It is the Word of a living God who enters into history and is to be met with in and through the events of the world. God reveals Himself in history, in special times, special places and, in particular, in His own incarnate Son through whom the darkness of history is lighted up.

This does not mean that the movements of history are forthwith to be identified with the Divine Spirit. No bit of history, as such, is revelation. Revelation is history but history, as such, is not revelation. The Divine and the historical are not one and the same. But Divine Action always takes the character of a historical event, something which belongs to this world. It is essential indeed, if the Word of God is to reach us, that it take place in history. That the Word of God became flesh is an event of revelation, but it would not have been so if Jesus had not been "crucified under Pontius Pilate" at a historical point of time. The Bible is history—the history of the work of redemption—but it is also revelation, containing as it does the inner history of the converse of God with man.

(iii) The Word of God is a *contingent Word*. It always has the character of event, surprise, unforeseen, undetermined,

which cannot be calculated or presupposed, because it is the activity of a Sovereign God. Man is a contingent being in a universe abounding in contingency. His very existence depends on contingency. And just as revelation takes hold on the historical as its vehicle, so it takes hold on the contingent. Jesus Himself was born into the sphere of the contingent, meeting it at the very beginning. He was laid in a manger "because there was no room for them in the inn".

(iv) The Word of God is an *existential Word*. It is never a body of truth, a fixed *datum*, which can be set before us in a purely objective manner. It is always a *dandum*, which *becomes* the Word of God to man only in the event of faith through the mystery of the Spirit. This crisis need not be visible, nor need a man himself be aware of it, for it is a crisis not *of* his life so much as *in* his life. Faith is not something which a man can investigate even in himself. It is concealed, not only from external observation, but even from the man concerned. It is something which he cannot account for nor explain to the unbeliever. "Since the Word of God cannot be known without faith," says Calvin, "it is folly to think that it can be demonstrated to infidels." It is "existential truth," that is, truth which, in order to be seen and known in its reality has to become true to the man himself. All he can say is: "I know that whereas I was blind, now I see."

So we cannot speak in the abstract about faith but only and always in a highly concrete and existential manner. This emphasis on the "existential" is usually attributed to Kierkegaard, but Luther had already discovered the problem of the existential and with that the problem of the individual. Therein lies the difference between a knowledge that is purely speculative and a knowledge that is personal and practical. There is a whole world of difference between such existential truth and the necessary truths of reason. It is either *my* faith and *your* faith, or it is no faith at all.

(v) The Word of God is a *Divine-human Word*, the Word of God through the words of a man which are not exempt from the laws and limitations of human speech. What we have in the Scriptures is not an objective record of revelation, but personal witness, the speech of God with men as set down by themselves, with all the accuracy at their command.

It is this which gives its unique charm and variety and colour to the Bible, so that it is at one and the same time the most human and the most divine of all books. Its writers were not megaphones through which God poured His truth, but men, inspired men. He spoke not only through them but to them, and in them, and we can no more understand the Divine Word without taking account of the men to whom God spoke than we can understand a human conversation without taking account of the separate parties to it.

Thus the Word of God reaches us coloured by the personalities of the writers, and shaped by their experience and capacity to receive. God could do more through an Isaiah than through a Haggai; He could reveal His righteousness through an Amos, His tenderness through a Hosea or Jeremiah. "We must not be afraid", said Professor Robertson Smith, "of the human side of the Scripture." To confine ourselves to the Divine side would, he said, be thoroughly unprotestant and unevangelical. It would be a survival of medieval exegesis which buried the true sense of Scripture. It is to the credit of the Reformers that they changed all that, and brought about nothing less than a resurrection of the living Word, buried for many ages under the dust of a false interpretation.

(vi) The Word of God is a *living dynamic Word*. It is never static but always "quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit" (Heb. 4.12). There is no revelation of God which resides, as such, in nature, or in what has been called "the ordinances of nature". There is no revelation of God which resides, as such, in man, either in his soul or mind or conscience. It is inseparable from Him who speaks it. It is not something which we can hold as a private possession. It can never belong to the sphere of human having, since it always implies a call to man and a crisis for man. He who will hold it must do so by ever repeated taking hold.

Thus the Word that comes to us from the side of the Eternal, without being a part of us, becomes a power that works within us, it may be without our awareness, like a seed hidden in the ground, and transforms us by its living dynamic quality. "It must be God who first comes to meet us, and

who through all the moral life works in us," says Professor A. E. Taylor, "in a sense which is more than metaphorical."

It was a deep prophetic instinct on the part of the Reformers, especially Luther, to rediscover and liberate the existential and dynamic quality of the Word of God which had long been overlaid by a static scholastic rationalism deriving from Greek thought. Thomas Aquinas had built it into the very structure of medieval Catholicism in his grand attempt to effect a synthesis of the Biblical revelation and the metaphysics of Aristotle. Against this the Reformation was a protest.

Unfortunately this effort on the part of the Reformers to de-hellenise the Christian Faith only partially succeeded. A new Protestant orthodoxy came into being, the dynamic truth was again converted into a conceptual idea and the living Word was frozen into dogmas. It is a recurring tendency in the Church to lose hold of the dynamic power of the Word of God and to drift into the false security of dogma against which the sons of the Reformation must always remain on guard.

(vii) The Word of God is a *self-evidencing Word*. As a Word from the beyond it would be incomprehensible unless it was possible for man to receive and understand it. This possibility is the work of the Holy Spirit by which the miracle from without is met by the miracle within. As Calvin puts it: "nothing is effected by the Word without the illumination of the Holy Spirit." But, lit up by the Spirit, the Word is "like a mirror in which faith sees God" (*Inst.* 3.2.33).

Revelation, as Word of God, cannot remain only outward and objective. It must become inward and subjective; that is it must become an experience. This takes place in the miracle of faith which is wrought by the Word through the Holy Spirit. "Faith", says Calvin, "has a perpetual relation to the Word and can no more be separated from it than the rays from the sun whence they proceed. Take away the Word and there will be no faith left." That element which lifts belief out of the region of probabilities into the sphere of certainty is given by the Holy Spirit, bearing witness in and with the Word. The first work of the Word of God is to work this miracle of faith, in which the mind is enlightened to

understand the truth of God, and the heart is established in it.

By this truth the Reformers set great store, the "internal witness of the Holy Spirit" by which God works within the souls of men. He does not coerce. He pleads and draws; convincing the world of sin and of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16.8) through the same Spirit who spoke by the mouths of the prophets. "God alone", says Calvin, "is a sufficient witness of Himself in His own Word. This Word will never gain credit in the hearts of men till it be confirmed by the internal testimony of the Spirit" (*Inst.* 1.7.4).

Thus Word and Spirit are correlatives. Revelation calls for, and at the same time carries with it, the principle of its own interpretation. For only if the movement of God towards the world in Jesus Christ had been accompanied by a corresponding movement within the consciousness of man, could Christ have been known as the revelation of God. That took place in its fulness in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, a gift which God has never withdrawn from His Church.

(viii) The Word of God is a *contemporaneous Word*. Like the mercies of God it is new every morning. In the Bible we have something more than the record of the past utterances of God; in it the voice of God can still be heard to-day and by us. The Word spoken, then and there, becomes a Word spoken here and now, a contemporary word. Not a fixed, unalterable Word out of the past but an actual living Word for the hearing man of to-day. The revelation of God in Christ is never something done and done with; it is something done and yet not done with. It is not only an event of the past, but an event of the present. "We are", says St. Peter, "to be established in the *present* truth" (2 Pet. 1.12). The Bible is therefore a perpetual recurring occasion for crisis—judging, sifting, searching. At any hour the moment may arrive, a moment no more of time but lifted above time and set in the light of the Eternal, in which God speaks to this man, here and now, His Word for to-day.

This great truth was emphasised by Kierkegaard in his day—the contemporaneousness of the Divine Word, and of Jesus Christ who is our Eternal Contemporary. When Jesus becomes thus contemporaneous, that is when He comes in

the present to us, in spite of the distance of space and time which separates us from the historical Jesus, we stand in immediate personal relation to Him. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there *am* I in the midst of them." All barriers fall away and the historical Jesus becomes for us the living Christ.

But already the great Reformers, Luther and Calvin, understood well this contemporaneous quality of the Word of God. It was one of the most striking rediscoveries of the day of the Reformation. In the medieval Church the Bible was regarded as something static, the ultimate source of Christian dogma, whereas the Sacraments were the means of grace. Transubstantiation was the great miracle. But to the Reformers the Bible, by its contemporaneous quality, became again the great miracle, the living means of grace, the personal message of the love of God to man, the Word of reconciliation spoken to us as living truth, which we can take home to our hearts, just as the saints of old took it home to their hearts.

Herein also lies the mysterious power of the sermon whose place can never be taken by the best and brightest of addresses. God, the Holy Ghost, makes use of the poor organ of the human word of the preacher in so far as he holds by the Scriptures, that His people may not be without His Word. *Praedicatio verbi divini est verbum divinum.*

(ix) The Word of God is a *rational* Word. As an expression of the Mind of God, who is Eternal Reason, the Word of God must be rational. It is the act in which Reason communicates with reason, Person with person. And since man was made in the image of God, reason must be one and the same in God and in man. The final proof of this is the Incarnation in which God's own Son, the *imago dei* as God purposed man to be, took human flesh and functioned with a human reason.

But when the claim is made, as it is by many, that the Word of God must justify itself at the bar of our reason—that is a different matter. For if our reason could judge revelation, then it would be superior to it. But can it make any such claim? In the Word of God we have a different kind of knowledge from that which the reason supplies, a Divine knowledge, which comes by meeting with God and not by

reflection, a Word which before God spoke was a mystery man otherwise could not have possessed. Revelation must be without meaning to those who approach the mystery of life with the assurance that human reason can entirely solve all mystery.

That man has reason shows his origin from the *Logos* of the Creator to whom he is therefore ontologically related. But sin, which has infected the heart and the will, extends also to the reason, producing a pride and self-sufficiency which opposes a barrier to the Word of God. The light of the creative *Logos* has been darkened. Man is no more in his true mind. He is become eccentric, thrown out of his life's true order into an order, or rather disorder, of death. Since the whole man is fallen away, every part of his nature is affected and he is helpless so far as any capacity to come to the knowledge of God is concerned. His reason is involved in the problem it seeks to solve. He must first come to himself before he can come to God. It is only when the human mind, as Calvin says, "is divested of its natural carnality and resigns itself wholly to the direction of the Holy Spirit" that it can find the answer which it seeks.

Thereupon there ensues that "renovation of the mind" of which the apostle speaks, by which man can render to God "a rational worship" (Rom. 12.1). The reason comes thus to its true life through the Word of God. The self-glorification of man in his pride of knowledge is humbled, and there occurs what originally belonged to the reason, the receiving of the Divine Mind. Faith brings a renewed reason which justifies the old, while asserting its relativity. The living quality of the reason is taken up into the event of revelation, inside which there is a wide field in which the reason can be employed.

(x) The Word of God is a *hidden* Word. Since revelation comes to us, not with a character of proof but in a decision of faith, it must needs have a hidden quality. It is not a miraculous theophany, a wonder which is plain to all, but a mystery revealed only to the recipient.

Of God the Creator we have no empirical knowledge. Neither God the Creator, nor God the Redeemer, neither the Love of God, nor the Wrath of God, is knowable to a fallen world. From man in his creatureliness and sin they are

hidden. Creation is a hidden eschatological fact, the full meaning of which will only be revealed in the new creation in Jesus Christ, the Second Adam. The more we know of Jesus Christ, the more we know of God the Creator. Still more is redemption felt to be a hidden eschatological fact to which our Lord, and St. Paul especially, made frequent reference.

In other ways the Word of God appears as a hidden Word. It is never so given as the objects of this world, in a direct fashion, but always, as Luther said, *sub contraria specie*, in a broken, indirect, dialectical manner. Even in Jesus Christ the Word of God meets us under a worldly manner. Christ appears *incognito* in the form of a servant and in the likeness of sinful flesh. The incarnation itself was a hidden event, even to our Lord's own mother. In so far as it was an earthly event, the birth at Bethlehem was a simple, human occurrence, such as any chronicler might report without in the most distant way perceiving that something Divine had taken place. But:

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail incarnate Deity.

Also when later the Son of God moved among men He appeared as the very opposite of those shining sons of antiquity we read of. He was so completely hidden that the secret of His person was quite unknown to His contemporaries. "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?" The *incognito* was complete. The Son of God was a village carpenter.

Further, the Word of God comes to us hidden in a one-sided manner, so that we see only one aspect at a time. When we contemplate the Divine transcendence we do not see at the same moment the Divine Immanence, or vice versa. But both are true. Or when we see the human Jesus we do not at the same time see the Divine Christ. Yet both are there and both true. Our knowledge of the God-man is always partial and one-sided. The Word of God in Jesus Christ remains a paradox, a secret. God reveals Himself in hiddenness and hides Himself in His revelation.

This hiddenness of the Word of God has always been a source of perplexity to the saints. "Verily Thou art a God

that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour," cried Isaiah. Luther spoke of the *deus absconditus*—the hidden God. There is an ultimate mystery beyond our comprehension, but we know all we need to know.

(xi) The Word of God is a *last* Word. Not in the sense that it is the last word in a historical sequence, but in the eschatological sense that it is the once-for-all event, the breaking into time of the new world of God, the event which brings all history and all religions into judgment. The line of revelation reaching down through the law and the prophets of Israel not only came to an end but to a crisis in Jesus Christ. He was rejected and crucified by God's chosen people who, in condemning Him, condemned themselves and brought their history to a tragic close. It was more than a Jewish tragedy, it was a world judgment.

But the world was not done with Jesus Christ. He came again and comes ever again. What happened happens, and will happen. Jesus Christ has a past and a present and a future. He stands in the middle of time, *true time, the time of God*, which is not mere passing time. He has the power of a Divine present, being the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. From the Word of God there falls a new light on what we call time, by setting it in the light of God, the Eternal. This relation of the temporal and eternal is central to the Christian Faith.

The motive power of the Christian Faith by which it has endured for nearly two thousand years, which has determined its whole labour of thought, its consciousness of its world mission, its sense of otherness in relation to the religions of the world, has sprung from the conviction that God has come in "the fulness of time" and that something all-determining has taken place on which the history of mankind depends.

Jesus Christ thus has eschatological significance for the whole human race. In His death and resurrection something happened which has had decisive meaning in the relations of God and man. It was an act of God on the verge of history which has given new meaning to history. In the light of the Word of God history is seen to march toward a crisis, not merely in history, but of history. Crisis, indeed, is shown by revelation to be the very meaning of history, and by crisis we

mean judgment. "For judgment am I come into this world" (John 9.39).

I referred to the various *scandala* which the Christian doctrine of the Word of God presents to-day to the scientist, the historian, and the philosopher; but I have made no attempt to remove them, for they lie in the nature of things.

The Christian Church deals with a different kind of "science", or knowledge, from that of natural science. She moves in a different world and occupies herself with supernatural "science" (*theou-logos*) the knowledge of God, of which natural science disclaims all knowledge; and she believes that she has every right. Even a philosopher like A. E. Taylor declared that "theology is entitled to deal with its own very real problems without suffering its processes, or its conclusions, to be clipped and curtailed to the patterns presented in the natural sciences."

The Christian Church deals with a different kind of history also from that of the pure historian. What we call history is the story of the evolution of a sinful race, and some of our leading historians—e.g. H. A. L. Fisher—have stated that they have failed to find any pattern in it. They are recorders of the facts of history. What they actually record is the after-history. They see what has been hit by the lightning, but not the lightning itself. They can relate the later history of that "light from heaven" which struck Saul down on the Damascus Road—that conversion which had such momentous consequences. But of the light itself, which was the sword of the Word of God, they can record nothing beyond their surmise that it was a flash of lightning. The real history of that event was an inner history—revelation history—of which the historian has no knowledge.

The Christian Church deals with a different kind of philosophy from that of the professional philosopher, if it can claim to have a philosophy at all. Philosophy, as Hegel defined it, is "the thinking consideration of things". It concerns itself with the whole—with all the facts of the universe which come within human knowledge—and strives after some unity, some world-view, some synthesis of the whole. It is the most universal of the sciences and has its own good right to pursue its problems and even to put its questions to the other sciences.

It has a right, for example, to ask the theologian that the matter on which he works be something given, and that in his reflection on it he should be true to it; but it has no right to demand more.

Philosophy is not competent to deal with revelation. It has competence to deal with movements *of* the universe, but no competence to deal with movements *to* the universe. Theology is one thing, philosophy is another thing. The one starts from God—from the Word of God—the other from man. The God-idea of the philosopher, which is reached through human thought, has nothing to do with the living God of the Bible. The actuality of the Word is utterly different from any idea worked-out, or thought-out, by philosophy. Through the Holy Spirit the Word of revelation is lifted clean out of the sphere of philosophical ideas into the sphere of personal relations, in which the *Thou* confronts the *I*. The God of revelation, of miracle, of the Holy Spirit, is the *end*, that is the crisis of science, history, and philosophy alike.

If this be the New Testament and Reformed doctrine of revelation as the Word of God, which I have tried to indicate, it is for the Church to stand by it, and witness to it, whatever be the difficulties it encounters in our day. She will not save herself by any anxious compromise with scientist, historian, or philosopher, who each have their place and right, but only by claiming her own place and right to move freely within it—the Word of God in Christ Jesus.

God is to be found where it has pleased Him that He should be found—in His Word. Not where we think that we can seek Him out for ourselves, not in the region of our possibilities, whether they are called science, or history, or reason, not where we, in our wisdom, propose to find Him, but where He in His wisdom and grace, as our Creator and Redeemer, has sought a meeting with us and taken the initiative in the sending of His Son into the world. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared (unfolded) him.”