



**GOD'S
HAMMER**
THE BIBLE AND ITS CRITICS

GORDON H. CLARK

God's Hammer

The Bible and Its Critics

Gordon H. Clark

The Trinity Foundation

“Is not my word like a fire,” says the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”

Jeremiah 23:29

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Published by The Trinity Foundation

Post Office Box 68

Unicoi, Tennessee 37692

www.trinityfoundation.org

ISBN-10: 1-891777-33-5

ISBN-13: 978-1-891777-33-2

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Foreword

Today two areas of Christian doctrine are in the forefront for discussion by academicians in colleges and universities and by people in the pews: Christology and bibliography. The one has to do with the Word of God written – which is the Bible, and the other the Word of God Incarnate – which is Jesus Christ.

At the heart of the Christological discussion lies the question: From whence do we get our knowledge about the person and work of Jesus Christ? The answer is simple enough. The only Jesus the Church has known or can know is the Jesus of Scripture. Thus if Scripture tells us what we need to know about the second person of the Trinity, we are still left with another question: Is the source (*i.e.* the Bible and its sixty-six books) from which we get our knowledge about Jesus a reliable book? This opens the door to three possibilities:

1. The Bible is free from all error in the whole and in the part.
2. The Bible is free from error in some of its parts, but it is false in other parts.
3. The Bible is totally unreliable and cannot be depended on for any truth.

Whoever chooses any one of these propositions depends on some basic presupposition from which the inquirer starts. In our modern world there are basically two ways men write theology, and each involves a presupposition which ends up in quite different ways.

In all probability a majority of the scholars in the West today would choose option 2. Marxists and many people who adhere to the Unitarian Universalist denomination would more likely choose option 3.

But whoever writes theology properly starts with the presupposition that the Bible is a divine book. They do not deny that there were human authors who were involved in the inscripturation of the Word of God. The writers of Holy Writ were divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit so that they were kept from writing anything that was false. The divine authorship by the Holy Spirit guaranteed that the final product would be the errorless Word of God even as the historical Jesus was the sinless Son of God who was conceived by the same Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Since God cannot lie, no part of Scripture is false. The

omnipotent God of Scripture has not stuttered in his speech.

This brings us to Gordon H. Clark and his many contributions to the defense of historic orthodoxy. In this volume the learned pen of this twentieth-century giant is used to explain and defend the doctrine of an inerrant Scripture. Dr. Clark's insights are informed by Scripture. He is the quintessential man of that Holy Book, the Bible.

There are few, if any, philosophical systems that have not come under the scrutiny of this man of God, and in every instance he has looked at them through the eyeglasses of divine revelation. He has the rare gift of being a consummate logician. He uses the law of contradiction with telling effect. He knows and employs all of the laws of logic, and he can detect an error in any syllogism which defies those laws. He is relentless in his pursuit of truth, and he brilliantly demonstrates the logical fallacies of those who denigrate Scripture or who by the use of hermeneutical casuistry undermine the Word of God and make it seem to say what it does not.

It is signally unfortunate that those who oppose the view that the Bible is without error are not acquainted with or have not come to terms with the writings of this fearless expositor. Dr. Clark went to his eternal reward in his eighty-third year, but though he is dead he continues to speak through the legacy he has left us — a legacy that will stand the test of time until he who is the Truth comes again in glory.

Harold Lindsell

Acknowledgements

Our gratitude is extended to the following copyright owners for their permission to reprint the essays included in this volume:

The Moody Press, Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, for permission to reprint “How May I Know the Bible Is Inspired?” from *Can I Trust the Bible?* edited by Howard Vos, copyright 1963.

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The Evangelical Theological Society, Jackson, Mississippi, for permission to reprint “The Evangelical Theological Society Tomorrow,” copyright 1966; “Holy Scripture,” copyright 1963; and “Hamilton’s Theory of Language and Inspiration,” copyright 1972.

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Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, for permission to reprint “Special Divine Revelation as Rational,” from *Revelation and the Bible*, edited by Carl F.H. Henry, copyright 1958.

Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, for permission to reprint *The Concept of Biblical Authority*, copyright 1979.

Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, for permission to reprint “What Is Truth?” from the Fall 1980 issue of *Presbuterion*.

The final essay, “The Reformed Faith and the *Westminster Confession*,” is an address delivered in Weaverville, North Carolina, August 17, 1955.

Introduction

The twentieth century may be a pivotal period in human history, for the doctrines of justification through faith alone and truth through the Bible alone came under such a severe and sustained attack. That attack, which has been countered by only a few of the professed tens of millions of Christians in America, has come primarily from within the church itself. It indicated that the wolves are within the sheepfold, and in many cases, are actually posing as shepherds.

Over the decades the greatest defender of the Christian faith in the twentieth century wrote a number of essays defending the authority, necessity, clarity, and sufficiency of God's Word – essays which we have collected in this volume. The focus of this book is not on archaeology or history, but on the philosophical attacks which have been leveled against the idea of divine revelation, the adequacy of human language, the notion of literal truth, and the trustworthiness of human logic. The twentieth-century critics of the Bible have not been content merely to impugn God's veracity, they have denied his ability to reveal himself to men in intelligible propositions and asserted that man's mind is constitutionally unable to understand divine things.

Here those critics are answered, and with devastating effect. The Bible is infallible, logic is indispensable, language is adequate, and God, being omnipotent, is able to reveal truth to men. Equally at home in secular philosophy and theology and Christian theology and philosophy, Dr. Clark hammers God's critics with the tools of Scripture and logic. When he is through, the critics are flattened, their voices silenced. Dr. Clark, emulating Christ's methods of dealing with his critics and defending the truth, achieves the same effect, which is the effect that all defenders of the Christian faith should aim to achieve: "And no one was able to answer him a word."

John W. Robbins

March 1995

God's Hammer

The Bible and Its Critics

How May I Know the Bible is Inspired?

The question of this chapter concerns the inspiration of the Bible. It must be clearly distinguished from another question with which it might be confused: How may I know that the Bible is true? These two questions are indeed related, but they are not the same question. They have even been answered in opposite ways. The contemporary movement in theology called Neo-orthodoxy claims that the Bible is inspired, but also asserts that it is not completely true. And obviously some other book, such as Churchill's *The Gathering Storm*, could possibly be entirely true without being inspired. Such a book might even be called infallible. Truth and inspiration therefore must be distinguished.

The two ideas, however, are closely related, especially in the case of the Bible. The Neo-orthodox writers can hold to an inspired but mistaken Bible only because they have changed the meaning of *inspiration*. When the Biblical definition of inspiration is used, there can be no inspiration without truth, even though there often is truth without inspiration. For the Christian, therefore, the question of truth is a prior question, and unless the Bible is true, there is not much use in discussing inspiration.

Some of the evidence that the Bible is true is presented in other chapters of this book. Archaeological and historical research has corroborated Biblical history in numerous instances. This material will here be assumed.

In addition to historical evidence of the truth of the Bible, there must also be some logical support for the conclusion. If the Bible makes contradictory statements, then, regardless of archaeology and history, part of the Bible must be false. We may not know which half of the contradiction is false and which is true, but we would be logically certain that both parts cannot be true.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to discuss in detail any of the alleged contradictions. Most of them are based on rather transparent misinterpretations. A few remain as puzzles because we do not know enough about ancient conditions. Though we may guess how they can be explained, we have no objective evidence that our guesses are correct. However, to convict the Bible of inconsistency, there should be (1) several, (2) clear, and (3) important instances.

But the unsolved instances are not many, and they are either unclear or unimportant. We are at liberty therefore to guess that they will not ultimately prove insoluble.

Now, then, is the Bible inspired? Its truth, or at least its general trustworthiness, is assumed; but we want to know whether the Bible – like Churchill's *The Gathering Storm* – is simply a history book that happens to be true, or whether it is the Word of God.

The Biblical Claims

The first reason for believing the Bible is inspired is that the Bible claims to be inspired. When this reason is offered to an unbeliever, almost always his immediate reaction is derision. To him it is very much like putting a liar on the witness stand and having him swear to tell the truth. But why a liar? Do not honest witnesses also swear to tell the truth? Yet even a Christian with a smattering of logic may object to this procedure because it seems to beg the question. It is circular. We believe the Bible to be inspired because it makes the claim, and we believe the claim because it is inspired and therefore true. This does not seem to be the right way to argue.

It must be granted that not every claim is *ipso facto* true. There have been false witnesses in court, there have been false Messiahs, and there have been fraudulent so-called revelations. But to ignore the claim of the Bible, or of witnesses generally, is both an oversimplification and a mistake. For example, suppose the Bible actually says that it is not inspired. Or suppose merely that the Bible is completely silent on the subject – that it makes no more claim to divine inspiration than did Churchill. In such a case, if the Christian asserts that the book is inspired, the unbeliever would be sure to reply that he is going far beyond the evidence.

This reply is certainly just. There is no reason for making assertions beyond those that can be validly inferred from the statements of the Bible. But because this reply is so just, it follows that the unbeliever's derision at our first remark was groundless. What the Bible claims is an essential part of the argument. The Christian is well within the boundaries of logic to insist that the first reason for believing in the inspiration of the Bible is that it makes this claim.

The truth of a conclusion depends on the truth of its premises. This means that the next step is to show that as a matter of fact the Bible makes this claim. A good many people who have a fair knowledge of the contents of the Bible would be inclined to omit this step as unnecessary. Of course the Bible makes this claim. However, not everybody is so familiar with what the Bible says. Even those who have a fair knowledge may not realize how insistently the Bible makes this claim. And there are others who, troubled by critical problems and alleged inaccuracies and yet desirous of retaining the Bible as very important or even as a necessary religious document, think that they can discard inspiration while retaining the Bible as a fairly reliable source of religious knowledge. Such people may think that there are just a few minor errors in the Bible or many errors or – as is particularly the case in this mid-twentieth century period – that the Bible is entirely fable. Nonetheless they hold to it as in some sense a religious guide. This very widespread view loses all semblance of logic when confronted with the actual claims to inspiration that we find throughout the whole Bible.

The Meaning of Inspiration

There is another reason for canvassing the Biblical claims to inspiration. By doing so we shall come to see what the Bible means by *inspiration*. In recent theology, the Bible has been called inspired in the sense that Shakespeare's plays may be called inspired. That is, they are inspiring; they excite us, they elevate our ideas, they enlarge our views and give us an understanding of human nature. On this meaning of inspiration, it is usually said that not all parts of the Bible are equally inspired. The genealogies are dull and uninspiring.

But is this what the Bible means by inspiration? We should certainly be very careful to know what we mean when we discuss a subject. If two people have two different meanings in mind, their conversation will be at cross purposes and the one cannot understand the other. Similarly, if a person by himself studies inspiration (or any other subject) yet does not have a clear concept of what he is studying, he may not confuse anyone else so long as he keeps his thought to himself; but his thoughts in his own mind will be muddled, and he will lack understanding. Unfortunately, this is very often the case.

Perhaps the Bible's best known claim to inspiration is 2 *Timothy* 3:16: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine," and so on.

The English word *inspiration*, with its prefix *in*, gives the impression that after the Bible (or a book of the Bible) had been written, God breathed into it. However, the Greek word does not mean *breathed into*; it means *breathed out*. God breathed out the Scriptures. We might say metaphorically that the Scriptures are God's breath. Thus the claim is actually stronger than it appears in English.

Plenary Inspiration

Also to be noticed is the reference to *all* the Scripture. This idea we shall call the *plenary* inspiration of Scripture. God breathed out all of it. Differences in translation do not affect this point. The *American Standard Version*, Weymouth, and the German Bible have "every scripture"; the French translation, the *Revised Standard Version*, and Moffatt agree with the *King James*. It is a clear claim to plenary inspiration. To this verse may be added *John* 10:35, "the Scripture cannot be broken." The precise point of Christ's remark is that all the Scripture is authoritative.

Another passage that bears examination is *2 Peter* 1:20, 21: "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." One might at first wonder whether there is some "Scripture" that is not "prophecy," in which case this verse would not apply to all the Bible; it would apply only to the prophecies in the Bible and not to the rest of Scripture. A partial answer is that Moses was a prophet and that therefore even the book of *Leviticus* can be called prophecy. Prophecy is not necessarily prediction; it is any message from God. The phrase "prophecy of Scripture" simply means the divine message as written. Note next the universal negative: The verse says, "no prophecy." This covers it all.

Another difficulty is the word *private*. The contrast intended, however, is not with a supposed public interpretation, but with a *divine* interpretation. That is why verse 21 explains verse 20; otherwise the second verse would not be an intelligible reason for the first. No prophecy is of any private interpretation *because* prophecy was never at any time brought by the will of man, but men spoke from God, being borne along by the Holy Spirit. Thus the passage is a strong assertion of the divine origin of the message.

Since the last reference raised the question whether all Scripture is prophecy, a

few more verses relative to Moses may be added here. The main point, however, is not to show that Moses was a prophet, but rather to show the Bible's claim of inspiration. Of course Moses was a prophet. "This is that Moses, who said to the children of Israel, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear'" (*Acts* 7:37). "But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face..." (*Deuteronomy* 34:10). This last verse indicates that Joshua was inferior to Moses, so that Moses could be compared only with Christ. Christ himself said: "For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (*John* 5:46, 47).

That the prophetic authority mentioned in *2 Peter* 1:21 applies to the entire Old Testament is shown not only in *John* 10:35, previously quoted, but also in many other passages. *Romans* 3:2 designates the entire Old Testament as the oracles of God. In *Luke* 24:44, Jesus places the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the *Psalms* on the same level. Similar all inclusive designations are found in *Luke* 24:25, 27; *Matthew* 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; *Acts* 3:21, 22; 26:22, 27; 28:23; *Romans* 3:21. Since these and other verses gather together the whole Old Testament into a unit, it becomes possible to extend to all whatever authority is asserted of any part.

Some very interesting claims are made of various parts. Peter in *Acts* 2:30 calls David a prophet, and David himself says, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and his word was on my tongue" (*2 Samuel* 23:2). Christ also (*Mark* 12:36) said that David spoke by the Holy Spirit. Quoting the second *Psalms*, *Acts* 4:25 asserts that the Lord spoke by David's mouth. This is not true of David alone, as was just explained, but God "spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets, who have been since the world began" (*Luke* 1:70).

No doubt a few specific references to the later prophets should be added. Simple phrases, such as "the Word of the Lord came unto me" and "the Lord said unto me" and "thus saith the Lord," are too numerous to list. They imply that it was the Lord who spoke through the mouth of the prophet (compare *Matthew* 1:22; 2:15; *Acts* 3:18). There are, however, several instances where this idea is explicitly stated: "Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth and the Lord said to me: Behold, I have put my words in your mouth" (*Jeremiah* 1:9; compare 9:12; 13:15; 30:4; 50:1). The same idea is expressed in *Ezekiel* 3:1, 4, 11, both pictorially and literally. After commanding Ezekiel to eat a scroll that was written within and without, the Lord tells him to "speak with my words to them."

Such are the claims made by and for the Old Testament. But the Old Testament looks forward to a further and fuller revelation, one in which the Old Testament prophecies find their culmination and which, therefore, if not superior in authorship, is certainly not inferior. If the inspiration of the Old Testament can be defended, the case for the New Testament should be granted without further argument. However, for greater completeness, something will be said about the New Testament claims for itself.

As the material is extensive, only a few passages are selected for comment. Jesus (*Matthew* 11:9-15) asserted that John the Baptist was a prophet and more than a prophet. He was superior to all the Old Testament prophets. Yet the prophet who was least in New Testament times was a greater prophet than John. It follows, does it not, that the New Testament prophets were no less inspired than their forerunners.

Romans 16:25-27 and *Ephesians* 3:4-5 are similar. The first passage speaks of a mystery that was not revealed in the Old Testament but is now published in the writings of the New Testament prophets. In the second passage Paul claims for himself and the other apostles and prophets a fuller knowledge than that revealed in earlier ages.

Next, *1 Corinthians* 12:28, in listing the ranks of office in the church, places apostles above prophets. *Ephesians* 4:11 does the same thing. Therefore, these verses, as clearly as the previous passages, imply that the New Testament is no less authoritative than the Old.

In *1 Corinthians* 14:37 Paul says: "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord." This bears essentially the same meaning as Jeremiah's claim that God put his own words into Jeremiah's mouth.

A further idea is found in *Colossians* 4:16. Here Paul commands the reading of his letters in the churches. Just as *Isaiah* or *Jeremiah* was to be read in the synagogues, so by apostolic command the epistles were made a part of the worship of the church. If someone objects that this applies only to the letters and to the churches of Colosse and Laodicea, *1 Thessalonians* 5:27 extends the idea. Here too we have an example of the apostolic imposition of the New Testament Scriptures.

There are many pertinent passages, but *2 Peter* 3:15-16 will be used as a final

example. In this place Peter is speaking of the Pauline epistles: “As also our beloved brother Paul according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things...which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” From the way in which Peter speaks of all Paul’s epistles, it would seem that they are considered as a section of the New Testament canon, just as one might speak of the major prophets. Peter clearly regards them as a unit. Furthermore, he classifies them with “the rest of the Scriptures”; that is, he places them at least on a level with the Old Testament. And since in verse 2 of the same chapter Peter ranks himself and the other apostles with the holy prophets, it may be validly inferred that the Bible as a whole, both Old and New Testaments, claims to have been breathed out by God so that it cannot be broken.

Before we advance from the Biblical claims to the next stage of the argument, the significance of the passages quoted still needs some further elucidation. It has already been shown that the Bible teaches plenary inspiration. Plenary inspiration means that the Bible is inspired in all its parts. There is no section of it that was not breathed out by God. *Nehemiah* 7, with all its names and numbers, is just as much inspired as *John* 14.

Verbal Inspiration

In the next place, the Bible teaches verbal inspiration. God put words into Jeremiah’s mouth. Possibly Jeremiah or some other prophet failed to grasp the thought, as *1 Peter* 1:11 indicates; but the words were God’s words. This is what is meant by verbal inspiration.

Unfortunately, verbal inspiration has been caricatured by its enemies, and the teaching of historic Protestantism has been misrepresented. Since therefore we wish to be clear in our own minds, as well as to expose the blunders of unbelievers, a digression is called for.

The opponents falsely claim that verbal inspiration is a theory of mechanical dictation. They suppose that when God in *Deuteronomy* 18:18 says, “I...will put my words in his mouth,” the prophet is to be regarded as a sort of dictaphone, or at best as a stenographer whose personality is only minimally engaged in the transaction. This is obviously not true, because Jeremiah’s style is not Isaiah’s,

and Paul does not write like John. Neither Martin Luther nor John Calvin, nor more recent orthodox theologians like Benjamin Warfield, ever held a theory of mechanical dictation. It is a caricature invented by unbelievers.

At the same time, it is incumbent on the believer to explain how God could put his own words into the mouth of a prophet without reducing him to the level of a disinterested stenographer. This is not at all difficult. The slightest understanding of the relation between God and a prophet leads one quickly away from the idea of modern office procedure.

When God wished to make a revelation (at the time of the exodus or of the captivity) he did not suddenly look around as if caught unprepared, and wonder what man he could use. We cannot suppose that he advertised for a stenographer, and, when Moses and Jeremiah applied for the position, that God dictated his message. The relation between God and a prophet was not like that at all. A boss must take what he can get; he depends on the high school or business college to have taught the applicant shorthand and typing. But if we consider the omnipotence and wisdom of God, a very different picture emerges. God is the Creator. He made Moses. And when God wanted Moses to speak for him, he said, "Who has made man's mouth? ... Have not I, the Lord?"

Put it this way: God, who works all things according to his will and who has done whatsoever he pleased, for no one can stay his hand or say, what doest Thou, from all eternity decreed to lead the Jews out of slavery by the hand of Moses. To this end he so controlled events that Moses was born at a given date, placed in the water to save him from an early death, found by Pharaoh's daughter, given the best Egyptian education possible, driven into the wilderness to learn patience, and in every detail so prepared by heredity and environment that when the time came Moses' mentality and literary style were instruments precisely fitted to speak God's words. Between Moses and God there was an inner union, an identity of purpose, a cooperation of will, such that the words Moses wrote were God's own words and Moses' own words at the same time.

This has been a slight digression for the purpose of exposing a liberal misrepresentation of verbal inspiration and of thus further clarifying the Christian position. It is now time to return to the main line of the argument. Plenary inspiration has been defined; verbal inspiration has now been explained; one further point remains to be made concerning the Bible's claims for itself.

A Written Revelation

The Biblical revelation, the message that was breathed out by God, is a written revelation. The idea is not, or at least not merely, that the *prophets* were inspired. It is true, of course, that they were borne along by the Holy Spirit; but the Biblical claim is that God inspired what was *written*. In *2 Timothy* 3:16 the writers are not even mentioned. Nor is it the full truth that the public speaking of the prophets and apostles was inspired. It is the *Scriptures*, the writings, that cannot be broken. The doctrine of plenary and verbal inspiration attaches first of all to the written word.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century a phrase came into use for the purpose of minimizing and in fact denying plenary inspiration. The modernists often said that the Bible “contains” the Word of God. Of course in one sense this is true. The Bible contains the *Gospel of John*, for example, and this *Gospel*, or at least chapter 14, is God’s Word. Thus the Bible contains the Word of God. But this is not what the modernists meant. They meant that some of the Bible is not God’s Word. And because the phrase was true in one sense, it served as a diplomatic disguise for modernistic intention. Few Bible believers are any longer deceived by this language. They know that “the Bible contains the Word of God” is intended as a denial that “the Bible is the Word of God.”

But now in the middle of the twentieth century, modernism has become somewhat antiquated, and Neo-orthodoxy has taken its place. This movement has invented a new deceptive phrase. The Neo-orthodox people say that the Bible is a *record* of God’s revelation. This phrase is also true in a sense. God revealed himself to Moses and to Jeremiah, and the Bible is the record of those events. This true sense, however, is a deceptive disguise to cover a repudiation of the Biblical position. The Neo-orthodox writers, as well as the modernists, intend to deny that the Bible is the Word of God. Moses and Jeremiah may have received revelations, these writers say; but these revelations may have consisted only of historical events, or possibly of subjective emotions, but not of words. Thus the Bible becomes a record of Moses’ experience rather than a verbally inspired message.

At the present time many people are still deceived by this Neo-orthodox phrase. No doubt, in the future, recognition of its anti-Biblical meaning will become common. In the meantime, attention must be patiently called to all the passages quoted above. They show that the Bible does not regard itself as a mere

record of a past revelation. It is the revelation itself. It is itself the Word of God. It is the written words that God inspired. It is the Writings that cannot be broken.

The argument so far has shown that the Bible claims to be inspired, and in so doing has explained what inspiration is. If the reader already accepts the Bible as the Word of God, the question that forms the title of this chapter – “How May I Know the Bible Is Inspired?” – has been answered. But perhaps the “I” in the title, a reader of this chapter, does not accept the Bible as the Word of God. Such a person will say, “No doubt the Bible claims inspiration, but is the claim true?” The question then becomes, How may one prove Biblical inspiration to an inquirer?

The Proof of Inspiration

The point has already been made that to convince a person of the Bible’s inspiration it is proper and virtually indispensable to show that the Bible claims inspiration. If the Bible made no such claim, it would be very difficult to defend the doctrine of inspiration. Now, although not every claim is true (for some persons and some books make false claims) the manner in which the Bible claims to be inspired limits us to a very narrow range of choice. Only a minor fraction of the claims has been explicitly quoted in this chapter. If all of the Bible’s references to its own inspiration were quoted, it would be clear that this claim is thoroughly pervasive. It cannot be regarded as an accidental blunder in one or two books, nor as an excess of temporary enthusiasm in one or two writers. The claim to inspiration pervades the Bible throughout.

If Moses and the prophets were mistaken in making this claim, if the apostles likewise were deceived, and if our Lord himself entertained wrong notions of verbal inspiration, what assurance may anyone have relative to other matters about which they wrote? Is there any reason to suppose that men who were so uniformly in error as to the source of their message could have had any superior insight and accurate knowledge of man’s relation to God? Why should we today believe that God so loved the world or that a sinner is justified by faith, if it was not God who gave John and Paul this information? And finally, who can profess a personal attachment to Jesus Christ and yet consistently contradict his assertion that the Scriptures cannot be broken? Therefore, one is limited to a very narrow choice. Either the Bible is a worthless fraud and Jesus was a deluded martyr, or the Bible is in truth the Word of God written.

When people see that they are shut up to these two choices, some of them – because they cannot deny the general trustworthiness of the Bible as evidenced by archaeology, and because they feel compelled to acknowledge its spiritual excellence – will be induced to accept plenary and verbal inspiration. Others, however, will choose the opposite. Recognizing more clearly that the teachings of the Bible form a seamless garment, they will in consistency reject the Bible *in toto*, repudiate its ideals, and look with pity or scorn on its deluded Messiah.

If a believer wishes to defend the claims of Christianity in the face of such a consistent rejection, and of course the believer is under obligation to do so, he must first of all consider the nature of proof and argument. It would be a blunder to rely on an invalid argument. It is poor strategy to underestimate the strength of the enemy. We ought to know precisely what proves what. We must know the necessary conditions of a valid argument. On what premises can the conclusion be based? And if we have found a satisfactory premise, how can we get the unbeliever to accept it? All this is part of the general defense of Christianity known as apologetics. But as general apologetics is very extensive, the present discussion will be limited, so far as possible, to inspiration.

Almost a century ago Francis L. Patton, prominent for fifty years in the cause of conservative Christianity, defended inspiration by an argument of four steps. First, historical criticism shows that the history of the Bible is generally correct. Second, we then discover from the style, the information, and the harmony of the parts that they were written by a supernatural agency. Third, we note that the writers claimed inspiration. Therefore, fourth, we infer that the Bible is infallibly inspired. Patton supported point two as follows: “We know that the doctrines of the Bible have God’s sanction. For what is Hebrew history but a long lesson in monotheism? ... What was the sacrificial system but a divine exposition of the doctrine of guilt? ... Their inherent excellence witnesses to their heavenly origin.”

Today such an argument sounds naive. Patton’s essential point is weak and his support is weaker. His view of Hebrew history, of its monotheism, of the purpose of the sacrificial system, as well as the style and the inherent excellence, are not premises an unbeliever will accept. People today simply do not believe that the sacrificial system is a divine exposition of guilt – and they may think that guilt is a sign of mental illness – nor do they agree that Biblical doctrine is inherently excellent.

The harmony of the parts is a more valuable point. For although the unbeliever

asserts that there are innumerable inconsistencies throughout the Bible, patient exposition might convince him that its teaching is more consistent than he thinks. But the modern public has an ingrained belief that the Bible is self-contradictory, and it is extremely difficult to convince them otherwise. Yet, for reasons that will become clearer as we proceed, the attempt to show the Bible's logical consistency is, I believe, the best method of defending inspiration. But because it is so intricate and difficult, one naturally wonders about an easier method.

Here again we must consider the nature and limits of "proof." Demonstrative proof, such as occurs in geometry, depends on unproved axioms. However valid the demonstration may be, if two people do not accept the same axioms, they will not be convinced by the same proof. Is there then any proposition which the believer and the unbeliever will both accept without proof?

In times past there have been areas of agreement. Non-Christians would admit that God exists. During the Reformation the truthfulness of the Scripture was so widely taken for granted that the evidences seemed to furnish conclusive proof to any normal mind. But this situation no longer exists. Not only do most people reject the truthfulness of the Bible, but many also reject belief in God. Luther and Calvin did not have to face Instrumentalism and Logical Positivism. Today these two philosophies are widely influential. In times past it was generally agreed that Jesus' moral standards were admirable. But today his ideas on marriage and labor problems are rejected even by some so-called Christian churches, and the rest of his morality is said to be inadequate at best.

The more consistent unbelief is, the less can agreement be obtained. So long as the unbeliever is inconsistent, we can force him to make a choice. If he inconsistently admires Jesus Christ or values the Bible, while at the same time he denies plenary and verbal inspiration, we can by logic insist that he accept both – or neither. But we cannot by logic prevent him from choosing neither and denying a common premise. It follows that in logical theory there is no proposition on which a consistent believer and a consistent unbeliever can agree. Therefore the doctrine of inspiration, like every other Christian doctrine, cannot be demonstrated to the satisfaction of a clear-thinking unbeliever.

If, nonetheless, it can be shown that the Bible – in spite of having been written by more than thirty-five authors over a period of fifteen hundred years – is logically consistent, then the unbeliever would have to regard it as a most remarkable accident. It seems more likely that a single superintending mind could

produce this result than that it just happened accidentally. Logical consistency, therefore, is evidence of inspiration; but it is not demonstration. Strange accidents do indeed occur, and no proof is forthcoming that the Bible is not such an accident. Unlikely perhaps, but still possible.

How then may an unbeliever be brought to admit the inspiration of the Scripture? Or, for it is the same question, how did "I" come to accept inspiration?

The Testimony of the Holy Spirit

At the time of the Reformation when Luther and Calvin appealed to the Scriptures, the Roman Church argued that it and it alone accredited the Scriptures, and that therefore the Protestants could not legitimately use the Scriptures without first submitting to Rome. People were supposed to accept God's Word only on the authority of the church.

Against this claim the Reformers developed the doctrine of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. The belief that the Bible is the Word of God, so they taught, is neither the result of a papal pronouncement nor a conclusion inferred from prior premises; it is a belief which the Holy Spirit himself produces in our minds. Calvin wrote: "It is therefore such a persuasion as requires no reason; such a knowledge as is supported by the highest reason and in which the mind rests with greater security and constancy than in any reasons; in fine, such a sense as cannot be produced but by a revelation from heaven" (*Institutes*, I.vii.5).

Today this doctrine is easily misunderstood. Twentieth-century Protestantism is largely infected with unbelief – much of it is scarcely Christian at all. Many small groups that profess loyalty to God's Word have lost, forgotten, or discarded whole sections of the rich theology of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. They teach a diluted and impoverished Christianity. And underlying both these factors is the essential secularism and paganism of our civilization. Therefore the idea of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, if known at all, is subject to misunderstanding. Let us then try to spell it out in simple terms.

The first phrase in the quotation from Calvin includes and goes beyond what has already been emphasized. Reasons or premises by which to prove the authority of Scripture cannot be used because the consistent unbeliever will not

accept any Christian premise. In addition, even a Christian in his own thought cannot construct a formal demonstration of the authority of Scripture because all Christian syllogisms are grounded on that authority. We can believe the doctrine of the atonement only on the authority of Scripture, but we cannot believe the Bible on the authority of the atonement.

The second phrase in the quotation from Calvin says that, the mind can rest in this knowledge with greater security than in any reasons. This is obvious because the security of a conclusion can be no greater than that of the premise on which it is based. That the sum of the squares on the other two sides is equal to the square of the hypotenuse cannot be any more certain than the axioms from which it is deduced.

But the third phrase of the quotation comes to the most important point. All along, the problem has been how to accept a premise. Conclusions follow automatically, but what makes a man accept an initial proposition? Calvin's answer is plain: Belief in the Scripture "cannot be produced but by a revelation from heaven." And on this most important point the possibility of misunderstanding is greatest.

What is a revelation from Heaven? It could be a message delivered by angels, such as Abraham received. It could be the finger of God writing on tablets of stone or on the wall of a palace. It could be a vision, such as John had on Patmos. And such things, unfortunately, are what most people think of when they hear of the testimony of the Spirit. Unwise Christian workers, careless of their language, sometimes describe their experience in glowing terms and embroider it beyond reality. When younger Christians do not see such visions or dream such dreams, they suffer disillusionment.

But there are other forms of revelation. Jesus once asked, "But who do you say that I am?" and Peter replied, "You are the Christ." Then Jesus said, "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven" (*Matthew* 16:15-17). Peter had had neither trance nor vision, nor had he heard an audible voice. In modern American slang we would say, it just "dawned" on him. What happened was that the Spirit produced this conviction in Peter's mind. I should judge that Peter was not at all conscious of the Spirit's working. Of course, Peter was conscious of having heard Christ's sermons and of having seen his miracles. But the significance of all this just came to him at that moment. So too when anyone accepts the Bible as the Word of God, he is not conscious of any break in

the psychological process. He has probably been reading the Bible for some time, or as a child he had listened to Sunday school lessons, and one day he realizes that he believes the Bible was given by God.

The phrase “it dawned on him” is about as good a phrase as can be found in ordinary use. Many of the theologians compare the experience with sensation and perception. A high school student *reasons* out his geometry problem, but he simply *sees* the pencil and paper. Sight therefore makes a quick contrast with reasoning. Nevertheless, when one studies theories of sensation and learns the several ways in which it is explained, and when sensation is distinguished from perception, this metaphorical use of sensation to illustrate the work of the Spirit is more confusing than enlightening. It is better (so it seems to me) to say simply that God produced the belief in the mind.

So far, this exposition has been restricted to the logic of the situation. It has been a matter of the relation between premises (or reasons) and conclusions. Nothing as yet has been said about sin and its effects on man's mind. There were two reasons for this delay. First, the logic of the situation requires discussion simply because it is a part of the subject. It is moreover that part of the subject which has been least discussed by theologians. They have spent most of their time on sin, and of course this was necessary, but they have neglected logic. This neglect is unfortunate because in these days it is particularly the logic that is used against the Christian position.

Christianity is often repudiated on the ground that it is circular: The Bible is authoritative because the Bible authoritatively says so. But this objection applies no more to Christianity than to any philosophic system or even to geometry. Every system of organized propositions depends of necessity on some indemonstrable premises, and every system must make an attempt to explain how these primary premises come to be accepted.

The second reason for delaying mention of sin dovetails into the first. The situation in logic remains the same, sin or no sin. Adam faced it before the Fall. Of course Adam did not have a written Bible, but he was the recipient of a revelation. God spoke to him. How then could he attribute authority to God's commands? Was it possible in the garden to do what is impossible now, to demonstrate God's authority? Evidently not. To suppose so would be the same as supposing that Adam could deduce the axioms of geometry. Nor could Adam have asked Eve and taken her word for it. And surely he ought not to have

appealed to Satan to establish God's authority. Rather, because God is sovereign, God's authority can be taken only on God's authority. As the Scripture says, "Because he could swear by no one greater, he swore by himself" (*Hebrews* 6:13).

The Factor of Sin

However, sin is a factor now; and although it does not alter the basic logical situation, its complications cannot go unnoticed. Furthermore, it is in relation to sin and redemption that the Bible gives some important information applicable to the question of belief in inspiration.

When Adam fell, the human race became, not *stupid* so that the truth was hard to understand, but *inimical* to the acceptance of the truth. Men did not like to retain God in their knowledge and changed the truth of God into a lie, for the carnal mind is enmity against God. Hence the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, for the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God because they are spiritually discerned. In order to accept the Gospel, therefore, it is necessary to be born again. The abnormal, depraved intellect must be remade by the Holy Spirit; the enemy must be made a friend. This is the work of regeneration, and the heart of stone can be taken away and a heart of flesh can be given only by God himself. Resurrecting the man who is dead in sin and giving him a new life, far from being a human achievement, requires nothing less than almighty power.

It is therefore impossible by argument or preaching alone to cause anyone to believe the Bible. Only God can cause such belief. At the same time, this does not mean that argument is useless. Peter tells us to "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (*1 Peter* 3:15). This was the constant practice of the apostles. Stephen disputed with the Libertines; the Jerusalem council disputed; in Ephesus Paul disputed three months in the synagogue and then continued disputing in the school of Tyrannus (*Acts* 6:9; 15:7; 19:8, 9; compare *Acts* 17:2; 18:4, 19; 24:25). Anyone who is unwilling to argue, dispute, and reason is disloyal to his Christian duty.

At this point the natural question is, What is the use of all this expounding and explaining if it does not produce belief? The answer should be clearly understood.

The witness or testimony of the Holy Spirit is a witness *to* something. The Spirit witnesses to the authority of Scripture. If no apostle or preacher expounded the message, there would be nothing in the sinner's mind for the Spirit to witness to. The Spirit cannot produce belief in Christ unless the sinner has heard of Christ. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? ... So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (*Romans 10:14, 17*).

No doubt God in his omnipotence could reveal the necessary information to each man individually without a written Bible or ministerial preaching. But this is not what God has done. God gave the apostles and preachers the duty of expounding the message; but the production of belief is the work of the Spirit, for faith is the gift of God.

This is part of the reason why it was said above that the best procedure for us, if we want someone to accept the doctrine of plenary and verbal inspiration, is to expound the Scripture in detail. We may well use archaeology and historical criticism too, but the main task is to communicate the message of the Bible in as understandable language as we can manage.

It is to be noted too that the sinner, without any special work of the Spirit, can understand the message. Belief in its truth and understanding its meaning are two different things. The Bible can be understood by the same methods of study used on Euclid or Aristotle. Despite some pious disclaimers, it is true that antagonistic unbelievers often enough understand the Bible better than devout Christians. The Pharisees saw the significance of Christ's claims to deity more quickly and more clearly than the disciples did.

As Paul persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem and set out for Damascus, he understood the words "Jesus is Lord" as well as any of the twelve. It was precisely because he understood so well that he persecuted so zealously. Had he been unsure of the meaning, he would not have been so exercised. But the trouble was, he did not believe it. On the contrary, he believed that it was false. Then on the Damascus road Christ appeared to him and caused him to believe that the statement was true. Paul did not understand the phrase any better a moment after his conversion than a moment before. Doubtless in later years God revealed further information to him for use in the epistles. But at the moment, Christ did not enlarge his understanding one whit; he caused him to receive, accept, or believe what he already understood quite well. Thus it is that the Spirit witnesses to the

message previously communicated.

Strong emphasis needs to be put on the work of the Holy Spirit. Man is dead in sin, an enemy of God, opposed to all righteousness and truth. He needs to be changed. Neither the preacher nor, much less, the sinner himself can cause the change. But “blessed is the man whom you choose, and cause to approach you” (*Psalm* 65:4). “And I will...take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh” (*Ezekiel* 11:19; 36:26, 27). “As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (*Acts* 13:48). “God...when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (*Ephesians* 2:4-5). “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure” (*Philippians* 2:13). “God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (*2 Thessalonians* 2:13). “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth” (*James* 1:18).

These verses, which refer primarily to regeneration, are applicable to our acceptance of the Bible as the very Word of God. Indeed, the new life which the second birth initiates – the life to which we are raised from the death of sin – is precisely the life of faith; and a full faith includes the plenary and verbal inspiration of the message of salvation. It is the gift of God.

This is why the greatest of all the creeds issuing from the Reformation, the *Westminster Confession*, says:

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or Church, but wholly upon God (who is Truth itself), the author thereof; and, therefore, it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

...our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness, by and with the Word, in our hearts. (I: iv and v)

In the last analysis, therefore – although historical and archaeological confirmation of the Bible’s accuracy is of great interest to us and of great embarrassment to unbelievers – a conviction that the Bible is really the Word of God cannot be the conclusion of a valid argument based on more clearly evident premises. This conviction is produced by the Holy Spirit himself.

It must always be kept in mind that the proclamation of the Gospel is part of a

spiritual struggle against the supernatural powers of the evil one, and victory comes only through the omnipotent grace of God. Accordingly, as Jesus explained his mission to both Peter and the Pharisees, so we today must expound and explain the Scripture in all its fullness to all sorts of men; and we can then be assured that our Father in Heaven will reveal his truth to some of them.

The Bible as Truth

In a game of chess a player can become so engrossed in a complicated situation that, after examining several possibilities and projecting each one as far ahead as he is able, he finally sees a brilliant combination by which he may possibly win a pawn in five moves, only to discover that it would lose his queen. So, too, when theological investigations have been pursued through considerable time and in great detail, it is possible to overlook the obvious. In the present state of the discussions on revelation, it is my opinion that what needs most to be said is something obvious and elementary. This paper, therefore, is a defense of the simple thesis that the Bible is true.

This thesis, however, does not derive its main motivation from any attack on the historicity of the Biblical narratives. The destructive criticism of the nineteenth century still has wide influence, but it has received a mortal wound at the hand of twentieth-century archaeology. A new form of unbelief, though it may be forced to accept the Bible as an exceptionally accurate account of ancient events, now denies on philosophical grounds that it is or could be a verbal revelation from God. So persuasive are the new arguments, not only supported by impressive reasoning but even making appeals to Scriptural principles which every orthodox believer would admit, that professedly conservative theologians have accepted them more or less and have thus betrayed or vitiated the thesis that the Bible is true.

Because the discussion is philosophical rather than archaeological, and hence could be pursued to interminable lengths, some limits and some omissions must be accepted. Theories of truth are notoriously intricate, and yet to avoid considering the nature of truth altogether is impossible if we wish to know our meaning when we say that the Bible is true. For a start, let it be said that the truth of statements in the Bible is the same type of truth as is claimed for ordinary statements, such as: Columbus discovered America, two plus two are four, and a falling body accelerates at thirty-two feet per second per second. So far as the meaning of truth is concerned, the statement "Christ died for our sins" is on the same level as any ordinary, everyday assertion that happens to be true. These are examples, of course, and do not constitute a definition of truth. But embedded

in the examples is the assumption that truth is a characteristic of propositions only. Nothing can be called true in the literal sense of the term except the attribution of a predicate to a subject. There are undoubtedly figurative uses, and one may legitimately speak of a man as a true gentleman or a true scholar. There has also been discussion as to which is the true church. But these uses, though legitimate, are derivative and figurative. Now, the simple thesis of this paper is that the Bible is true in the literal sense of *true*. After a thorough understanding of the literal meaning is acquired, the various figurative meanings may be investigated; but it would be foolish to begin with figures of speech before the literal meaning is known.

This thesis that the Bible is literally true does not imply that the Bible is true literally. Figures of speech occur in the Bible, and they are not true literally. They are true figuratively. But they are literally true. The statements may be in figurative language, but when they are called true the term *true* is to be understood literally. This simple elementary thesis, however, would be practically meaningless without a companion thesis. If the true statements of the Bible could not be known by human minds, the idea of a verbal revelation would be worthless. If God should speak a truth, but speak so that no one could possibly hear, that truth would not be a revelation. Hence the double thesis of this paper, double but still elementary, is that the Bible – aside from questions and commands – consists of true statements that men can know. In fact, this is so elementary that it might appear incredible that any conservative theologian would deny it. Yet there are some professed conservatives who deny it explicitly and others who, without denying it explicitly, undermine and vitiate it by other assertions. The first thing to be considered, then, will be the reasons, supposedly derived from the Bible, for denying or vitiating human knowledge of its truths.

The Effect of Sin on Man's Knowledge

The doctrine of total depravity teaches that no part of human nature escapes the devastation of sin, and among the passages on which this doctrine is based are some which describe the effects of sin on human knowledge. For example, when Paul in *1 Timothy* 4:2 says that certain apostates have their consciences seared with a hot iron, he must mean not only that they commit wicked acts but also that they think wicked thoughts. Their ability to distinguish right from wrong is impaired, and thus they give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils.

Therefore, without in the least denying that sin has affected their volition, it must be asserted that sin has also affected their intellect. And though Paul has in mind a particular class of people, no doubt more wicked than others, yet the similarity of human nature and the nature of sin force the conclusion that the minds of all men, though perhaps not to the same degree, are impaired. Again, *Romans* 1:21, 28 speak of Gentiles who became vain in their imaginations and whose foolish hearts were darkened; when they no longer wanted to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind. In *Ephesians* 4:17 Paul again refers to the vanity of mind and the darkened understanding of the Gentiles, who are alienated from the life of God through ignorance and blindness. That ignorance and blindness are not Gentile traits only but characterize the Jews also, and therefore the human race as a whole, can be seen in the summary condemnation of all men in *Romans* 3:10-18, where Paul says that there is none who understands. And, of course, there are general statements in the Old Testament: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (*Jeremiah* 17:9).

These noetic effects of sin have been used to support the conclusion that an unregenerate man cannot understand the meaning of any sentence in the Bible. From the assertion "there is none who understands," it might seem to follow that when the Bible says, "David...took out a stone...and struck the Philistine in his forehead," an unbeliever could not know what the words mean.

The first representatives of this type of view, to be discussed here, are centered in the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Cornelius Van Til and some of his colleagues prepared and signed a document in which they repudiate a particular statement of the unregenerate man's epistemological ability. A certain professor, they complain, "makes no absolute qualitative distinction between the knowledge of the unregenerate man and the knowledge of the regenerate man" (*The Text of a Complaint*, 10, column 2). This statement not only implies that an unbeliever finds it less easy to understand that David smote the Philistine, but in asserting an absolute qualitative distinction between whatever knowledge he derives from that statement and the knowledge a regenerate man derives, the quotation also suggests that the unregenerate man simply cannot understand propositions revealed to man.

In another paper, two of Van Til's associates declare that it is "erroneous" to hold that "regeneration...is not a change in the understanding of these words" (A.R. Kuschke, Jr., and Bradford, *A Reply to Mr. Hamilton*, 4). According to

them, it is also erroneous to say, “when he is regenerated, his understanding of the proposition may undergo no change at all [but] that an unregenerate man may put exactly the same meaning on the words...as the regenerate man” (*ibid.*, 6). Since these are the positions they repudiate, their view must be precisely the contradictory; namely, an unregenerate man can never put exactly the same meaning on the words as a regenerate man, that regeneration necessarily and always changes the meaning of the words a man knows, and that the unregenerate and regenerate cannot possibly understand a sentence in the same sense. These gentlemen appeal to *2 Corinthians* 4:3-6, where it is said that the Gospel is hidden to them that are lost, and to *Matthew* 13:3-23, where the multitudes hear the parable but do not understand it. These two passages from Scripture are supposed to prove that a Christian’s “understanding is never the same as that of the unregenerate man.”

As a brief reply, it may be noted that though the Gospel be hidden from the lost, the passage does not state that the lost are completely ignorant and know nothing at all. Similarly, the multitudes understood the literal meaning of the parable, though neither they nor the disciples understood what Christ was illustrating. Let us grant that the Holy Spirit by regeneration enlightens the mind and leads us gradually into more truth, but the Scripture surely does not teach that the Philistines could not understand that David had killed Goliath. Such a view has not been common among Reformed writers; just one, however, will be cited as an example. Abraham Kuyper, in his *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* (110-111), after specifying eight points at which we are subjected to error because of sin, adds:

The darkening of the understanding...does not mean that we have lost the capacity of thinking logically, for so far as the impulse of its law of life is concerned, the logical has [sic] not [italics his] been impaired by sin. When this takes place, a condition of insanity ensues...sin has weakened the energy of thought...[but] the universal human consciousness is always able to overcome this sluggishness and to correct these mistakes in reasoning.

In thus defending the epistemological ability of sinful man, Kuyper may have even underestimated the noetic effects of sin. Perhaps the human consciousness is not always able to overcome sluggishness and correct mistakes in reasoning. The point I wish to insist on is that this is sometimes possible. An unregenerate

man can know some true propositions and can sometimes reason correctly.

To avoid doing an injustice to Van Til and his associates, it must be stated that sometimes they seem to make contradictory assertions. In the course of their papers, one can find a paragraph in which they seem to accept the position they are attacking, and then they proceed with the attack. What can the explanation be except that they are confused and are attempting to combine two incompatible positions? The objectionable one is in substantial harmony with Existentialism or Neo-orthodoxy. But the discussion of the noetic effects of sin in the unregenerate mind need not further be continued because a more serious matter usurps attention. The Neo-orthodox influence seems to produce the result that even the regenerate man cannot know the truth.

Man's Epistemological Limitations

That the regenerate man as well as the unregenerate is subject to certain epistemological limitations, that these limitations are not altogether the result of sin but are inherent in the fact that man is a creature, and that even in glory these limitations will not be removed, is either stated or implied in a number of Scriptural passages. What these limitations are bears directly on any theory of revelation, for they may be so insignificant that man is almost divine, or they may be so extensive that man can understand nothing about God. First, a few but not all of the Scriptural passages used in this debate will be listed: "Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?" (*Job* 11:7); "Behold, God is great, and we do not know him, nor can the number of his years be discovered" (*Job* 36:26); "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it" (*Psalms* 139:6); "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways" (*Isaiah* 55:8); "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become his counselor?" (*Romans* 11:33-34); "Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (*I Corinthians* 2:11).

These verses are simply samples, and many similar verses are easily remembered. Several of them seem to say that it is impossible for man to know God. We cannot search him out; we know him not; I cannot attain this knowledge; God's thoughts are not ours; no one knows the mind of the Lord, and no one knows

the things of God. It could easily be concluded that man is totally ignorant and that no matter how diligently he searches the Scripture, he will never get the least glimmering of God's thought. Of course, in the very passage which says that no man knows the things of God, there is the strongest assertion that what the eye of man has not seen and what the heart of man has never grasped has been revealed to us by God's Spirit "that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." It will not be surprising, therefore, if some attempts to expound the Biblical position are as confused actually as the Biblical material seems to be. With many statements of such theologians we all ought to agree; but other statements, misinterpreting the Scripture in the interest of some esoteric view of truth, ought to be rejected.

Man's Knowledge in Relation to God's

The professors above referred to assert, "there is a qualitative difference between the contents of the knowledge of God and the contents of the knowledge possible to man" (*The Text*, 5:1). That there is a most important qualitative difference between the knowledge situation in the case of God and the knowledge situation for man cannot possibly be denied without repudiating all Christian theism. God is omniscient; his knowledge is not acquired, and his knowledge, according to common terminology, is intuitive while man's is discursive. These are some of the differences and doubtless the list could be extended. But if both God and man know, there must with the differences be at least one point of similarity; for if there were no point of similarity, it would be inappropriate to use the one term *knowledge* in both cases. Whether this point of similarity is to be found in the contents of knowledge, or whether the contents differ, depends on what is meant by the term *contents*. Therefore, more specifically worded statements are needed.

The theory under discussion goes on to say: "We dare not maintain that his knowledge and our knowledge coincide at any single point" (*The Text*, 5:3). The authors repudiate another view on the grounds that "a proposition would have to have the same meaning for God as for man" (*The Text*, 7:3). These statements are by no means vague. The last one identifies content and meaning so that the content of God's knowledge is not its intuitive character, for example, but the meaning of the propositions, such as David killed Goliath. Twice it is denied that a proposition can mean the same thing for God and man, and to make it

unmistakable they say that God's knowledge and man's knowledge do not coincide at any single point. Here it will stand repetition to say that if there is not a single point of coincidence, it is meaningless to use the single term *knowledge* for both God and man. Spinoza in attacking Christianity argued that the term *intellect* as applied to God and as applied to man was completely equivocal, just as the term *dog* is applied to a four-legged animal that barks and to the star in the sky. In such a case, therefore – if *knowledge* be defined – either God knows and man cannot, or man knows and God cannot. If there is not a single point of coincidence, God and man cannot have the same thing, namely, knowledge.

After these five professors had signed this cooperative pronouncement, some of them published an explanation of it in which they said: “Man may and does know the same truth that is in the divine mind...[yet] when man says that God is eternal he cannot possibly have in mind a conception of eternity that is identical or that coincides with God's own thought of eternity” (A Committee for the Complainants, *The Incomprehensibility of God*, 3). In this explanatory statement, it is asserted that the same truth may and does occur in man's mind and in God's. This of course means that there is at least one point of coincidence between God's knowledge and ours. But while they seem to retract their former position in one line, they reassert it in what follows. It seems that when man says God is eternal, he cannot possibly have in mind what God means when God asserts his own eternity. Presumably the concept *eternity* is an example standing for all concepts, so that the general position would be that no concept can be predicated of a subject by man in the same sense in which it is predicated by God. But if a predicate does not mean the same thing to man as it does to God, then, if God's meaning is the correct one, it follows that man's meaning is incorrect and he is therefore ignorant of the truth that is in God's mind.

This denial of univocal predication is not peculiar to the professors quoted, nor need it be considered particularly Neo-orthodox. Although the approach is different, the same result is found in Thomas Aquinas. This medieval scholar, whose philosophy has received the papal sanction, taught that no predicate can univocally be applied to God and created beings. Even the copula *is* cannot be used univocally in these two references. When therefore a man thinks that God is good or eternal or almighty, he not only means something different from what God means by *good* or *eternal* or *almighty*, but, worse (if anything can be worse) he means something different by saying that God *is*. Since as temporal creatures we cannot know the eternal essence of God, we cannot know what God means

when he affirms his own existence. Between God's meaning of *existence* and man's meaning there is not a single point of coincidence.

The Scholastics and Neo-scholastics try to disguise the skepticism of this position by arguing that although the predicates are not univocal, neither are they equivocal, but they are analogical. The five professors also assert that man's "knowledge must be analogical to the knowledge God possesses" (*The Text*, 5:3). However, an appeal to analogy – though it may disguise – does not remove the skepticism. Ordinary analogies are legitimate and useful, but they are so only because there is a univocal point of coincident meaning in the two parts. A paddle for a canoe may be said to be analogical to the paddles of a paddle-wheel steamer; the canoe paddle may be said to be analogous even to the screw propeller of an ocean liner; but it is so because of a univocal element. These three things – the canoe paddle, the paddle wheel, and the screw propeller – are univocally devices for applying force to move boats through the water. Without a univocal element an alleged analogy is pure equivocation, and analogical knowledge is complete ignorance. But if there is a univocal element, even a primitive savage, when told that a screw propeller is analogous to his canoe paddle, will have learned something. He may not have learned much about screw propellers and, compared with an engineer, he is almost completely ignorant – almost but not quite. He has some idea about propellers, and his idea may be literally true. The engineer and the savage have one small item of knowledge in common. But without even one item in common, they could not both be said to know. For both persons to know, the proposition must have the same meaning for both. And this holds equally between God and man.

If God has the truth and if man has only an analogy, it follows that he does not have the truth. An analogy of the truth is not the truth; even if man's knowledge is not called an analogy of the truth but an analogical truth, the situation is no better. An analogical truth, except it contain a univocal point of coincident meaning, simply is not the truth at all. In particular (and the most crushing reply of all) if the human mind were limited to analogical truths, it could never know the univocal truth that it was limited to analogies. Even if it were true that the contents of human knowledge are analogies, a man could never know that such was the case; he could only have the analogy that his knowledge was analogical. This theory, therefore, whether found in Thomas Aquinas, Emil Brunner, or professed conservatives is unrelieved skepticism and is incompatible with the acceptance of a divine revelation of truth. This unrelieved skepticism is clearly indicated in a

statement made in a public gathering and reported in a letter dated March 1, 1948, to the Directors of Covenant House. The statement was made, questioned, and reaffirmed by one of the writers mentioned above that the human mind is incapable of receiving any truth; the mind of man never gets any truth at all. Such skepticism must be completely repudiated if we wish to safeguard a doctrine of verbal revelation.

Truth Is Propositional

Verbal revelation – with the idea that revelation means the communication of truths, information, propositions – brings to light another factor in the discussion. The Bible is composed of words and sentences. Its declarative statements are propositions in the logical sense of the term. Furthermore, the knowledge that the Gentiles possess of an original revelation can be stated in words: “Those who practice such things are worthy of death.” The work of the law written on the hearts of the Gentiles results in thoughts, accusations, and excuses which can be and are expressed in words. The Bible nowhere suggests that there are any inexpressible truths. To be sure, there are truths which God has not expressed to man, for “the secret things belong to the Lord our God”; but this is not to say that God is ignorant of the subjects, predicates, copulas, and logical concatenations of these secret things. Once again we face the problem of equivocation. If there could be a truth inexpressible in logical, grammatical form, the word *truth* as applied to it would have no more in common with the usual meaning of truth than the Dog Star has in common with Fido. It would be another case of one word without a single point of coincidence between its two meanings. The five professors, on the contrary, assert, “we may not safely conclude that God’s knowledge is propositional in character.” And a doctoral dissertation of one of their students says: “It appears a tremendous assumption without warrant from Scripture and therefore fraught with dangerous speculation impinging upon the doctrine of God to aver that all truth in the mind of God is capable of being expressed in propositions.” To me, the tremendous assumption without warrant from Scripture is that God is incapable of expressing the truth he knows. And that his knowledge is a logical system seems required by three indisputable evidences: first, the information he has revealed is grammatical, propositional, and logical; second, the Old Testament talks about the wisdom of God and in the New Testament Christ is designated as the *Logos* in whom are hidden all the treasures

of wisdom and knowledge; and, third, we are made in the image of God, Christ being the light that lights every man.

Certainly, the burden of proof lies on those who deny the propositional construction of truth. Their burden is twofold. Not only must they give evidence for the existence of such truth, but first of all they must make clear what they mean by their words. It may be that the phrase *non-propositional truth* is a phrase without meaning.

What I apprehend to be this confusion as to the nature of truth has spread beyond the group criticized above. The thought of Edward J. Carnell would presumably not find favor with them, and yet on this point he seems to have adopted much the same position. Consider his argument in *A Philosophy of the Christian Religion* (450-453). He begins by distinguishing two species of truth: first, "the sum total of reality itself," and second, "the systematic consistency or propositional correspondence to reality." It is not irrelevant to the argument to consider the correspondence theory of truth, but it might lead to a discussion too extended for the immediate purpose. Suffice it to say that if the mind has something which only corresponds to reality, it does not have reality; and if it knows reality, there is no need for an extra something which corresponds to it. The correspondence theory, in brief, has all the disadvantages of analogy. Carnell illustrates the first species of truth by saying, "The trees in the yard are truly trees." No doubt they are, but this does not convince one that a tree is a truth. To say that the trees are truly trees is merely to put literary emphasis on the proposition, the trees are trees. If one said the trees are not truly trees, or, the trees are falsely trees, the meaning would simply be, the trees are not trees. In such illustrations no truth is found that is not propositional, and no evidence for two species of truth is provided. Carnell then describes a student taking an examination in ethics. The student may know the answers, even though he himself is not moral. But the student's mother wants him not so much to know the truth as to be the truth. Carnell insists that the student can be the truth. Now, obviously the mother wants her son to be moral, but what meaning can be attached to the phrase that the mother wants the son to be the truth? Let it be that thinking is only preparatory to being moral, as Carnell says, but what can be meant by being the truth; that is, what more can be meant than being moral? The student could not be a tree. It seems therefore that Carnell is using figurative language rather than speaking literally. He then refers to Christ's words, "I am...the truth." Now, it would be ungenerous to conclude that when Christ says "I am...the truth," and

then the student may be said to be the truth, that Christ and the student are identified. But to avoid this identification, it is necessary to see what Christ means by his statement. As was said before, the Bible is literally true, but not every sentence in it is true literally. Christ said, "I am the door"; but he did not mean that he was made of wood. Christ also said, "This is my body." Romanists think he spoke literally; Presbyterians take the sentence figuratively. Similarly the statement, "I am...the truth," must be taken to mean, I am the source of truth; I am the wisdom and *Logos* of God; truths are established by my authority. But this could not be said of the student, so that to call a student the truth is either extremely figurative or altogether devoid of meaning.

Carnell also says: "Since their systems [the systems of thought of finite minds] are never complete, however, propositional truth can never pass beyond probability." But if this is true, it itself is not true but only probable. And if this is true, the propositions in the Bible, such as David killed Goliath and Christ died for our sins, are only probable – they may be false. And to hold that the Bible may be false is obviously inconsistent with verbal revelation. Conversely, therefore, it must be maintained that whatever great ignorance may characterize the systems of human thought, such ignorance of many truths does not alter the few truths the mind possesses. There are many truths of mathematics, astronomy, Greek grammar, and Biblical theology that I do not know; but if I know anything at all, and especially if God has given me just one item of information, my extensive ignorance will have no effect on that one truth. Otherwise, we are all engulfed in a skepticism that makes argumentation a waste of time.

In the twentieth century it is not Thomas Aquinas but Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, the Neo-orthodox, and existentialists who are the source of this skepticism to the detriment of revelation. Brunner writes:

Here it becomes unmistakably clear that what God wills to give us cannot be truly [eigentlich] given in words, but only by way of a hint [hinweisend].... Therefore because he [Jesus] is the Word of God, all words have a merely instrumental significance. Not only the linguistic vessel of words, but also the conceptual content is not the thing itself, but only its form, vessel, and means.

The utter skepticism of this position – in which not only verbal symbols but the conceptual content itself is not what God really wills to give us – is disguised in pious phrases about a personal truth, or *Du-Wahrheit*, distinct from the subject-

predicate relation called *Es-Wahrheit*. God cannot be an object of thought; he cannot be a *Gegenstand* for the human mind. Truth, instead of being a matter of propositions, is a personal encounter. Whatever words God might speak, Brunner not only reduces to hints or pointers, but he also holds that God's words may be false. "God can, if he wishes, speak his Word to man even through false doctrine." This is the culmination, and comment should be superfluous.

In conclusion, I wish to affirm that a satisfactory theory of revelation must involve a realistic epistemology. By *realism* in this connection, I mean a theory that the human mind possesses some truth – not an analogy of the truth, not a representation of or correspondence to the truth, not a mere hint of the truth, not a meaningless verbalism about a new species of truth, but the truth itself. God has spoken his Word in words, and these words are adequate symbols of the conceptual content. The conceptual content is literally true, and it is the univocal, identical point of coincidence in the knowledge of God and man.

Verbal Inspiration Yesterday and Today

The inspiration of the Scriptures, bearing as it does on the truth and authority of the Word of God, is of such obvious importance to Christianity that no elaborate justification is needed for discussing the subject. Indeed, it is even pardonable to begin with some very elementary material. Not only pardonable, but in fact indispensable. No discussion of inspiration can contribute much of value without taking into account the elementary Scriptural data. These data must be kept in mind. Yet, unfortunately, a number of these details may have faded from our aging memories. More unfortunately, the younger generation – owing to the low standards of many seminaries – may never have learned the Scriptural data. Therefore I wish first of all to make some simple statements about the doctrine of inspiration as it was commonly explained a hundred years ago.

It was in 1840 that Louis Gaussen published his famous little book *Theopneustia*. Gaussen was a Swiss theologian who, like J. Gresham Machen in this century, was deposed from the ministry and driven out of the church because of his adherence to the truth of the Scriptures. And his book *Theopneustia* is a defense of inspiration. In it Gaussen amasses the astounding amount of material that the Scriptures have to say about themselves. And although that was a century ago, no one should approach the question of inspiration without a good knowledge of Gaussen's work, or at least without a good knowledge of what the Bible has to say about itself.

The effect is cumulative; and it is most unfortunate that instead of examining and determining the significance of a hundred references, we must this morning select only a few.

For example, Gaussen notices the three times that Isaiah says, "The mouth of the Lord has spoken," as well as other similar expressions in *Isaiah*. Gaussen calls attention to 2 *Samuel* 23:1-2, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me and his word was on my tongue." Again, "In the second year of King Darius...the Word of the Lord came by Haggai." To Moses God said, "I will be with your mouth." And *Acts* 4:25 asserts that the Lord "spoke by the mouth of your servant David."

The cumulative effect of several dozens of such verses is the conclusion that

the prophets do not claim to speak on their own authority but that they testify that the Spirit gives them their message and makes them speak.

One should note well that the Spirit-given message is not merely the general idea of the passage, but rather the very words.

Deuteronomy 18:18-19: “I will raise up for them a prophet...and will put *my words* in his mouth...and whoever will not hear *my words*, which he speaks in my name, I will require it of him.”

Jeremiah 1:9: “Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: Behold, I have put *my words* in your mouth.”

There is time for only one more reference to show that the prophets claim to speak God’s words. Hear therefore the statement of our Lord himself: “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe *my words*?” (*John* 5:46-47).

Once again, I say, the effect is cumulative. One ought to read all of Gausse’s references and to note carefully the significance of each. Only so will one have an adequate basis for the doctrine of inspiration.

The last reference takes us one step further into this elementary material. Someone in ignorance might object that even though God gave the prophets his words and made them speak, the speaking has ceased these thousands of years, and we have only reports of the speeches. This question, concerning the relation of the spoken word to the written word, was answered by Christ in the last reference. Note carefully, our Lord says, “Moses... *wrote* about me [and] if you do not believe his *writings*, how will you believe *my words*?”

When the words that God gave his prophets were written, they became *The Writings*, i.e., the Scriptures. And it is the Scriptures, the Writings, that Jesus tells us to search for eternal life. In his temptation, Jesus repels Satan by saying, “It is written.” Also in *John* 6:45, 8:17, 12:14, 15:25, the phrase, “It is written,” settles the points at issue.

Permit me finally to refer to one more exceptionally important passage. In *John* 10:34-35, Jesus is defending his claim to Deity. He quotes *Psalms* 82. Does he quote this Psalm because *Psalms* 82 is more inspired and more authoritative than any other passage in the Old Testament? Not at all. He says, “Is it not written

in your law? ... and the Scripture cannot be broken.” Christ here has appealed to *Psalm 82* because it is a part of the Scripture, and since all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, this passage also is inspired, for the Scripture cannot be broken.

Let me repeat for the third time that the effect is cumulative. One should have in mind the hundreds of instances in which the Bible claims verbal inspiration. Now, to conclude this first section, this survey of elementary detail, I would like to ask a pointed question. If the prophets who spoke, if the authors who wrote, and if our Lord himself are mistaken these hundreds of times, what assurance may anyone have with respect to the other things they said and wrote? Is there any reason to suppose that men who were so uniformly deceived as to the source of their message could have had any superior insight and accurate knowledge of man's relation to God? Still more pointedly: Can anyone profess a personal attachment to Jesus Christ and consistently contradict his assertion that the Scriptures cannot be broken

The Dictation Objection

Since this elementary and abbreviated account of verbal inspiration has been based on a volume of a century ago, the next step, before bringing matters completely up to date, will be the examination of a century-old objection.

The idea that God gave his words to the prophets seems to many liberals a mechanical and artificial theory of revelation. God, they tell us, is not to be pictured as a boss dictating words to his stenographer. And further, the writings of the prophets show clearly the freedom and spontaneity of personal individuality. Jeremiah's style is not that of Isaiah, nor does John write like Paul. The words are obviously the words of John and Jeremiah, not of a boss dictating to several stenographers. The stenographers of one boss will turn out letters of the same literary style; they do not or should not correct his English. Now, therefore, if God dictated the words of the Bible, the personal differences could not be accounted for – from which it follows that the doctrine of verbal inspiration is untrue.

In answer to this objection, and to many other objections against various phases of Christianity, it is useful to note that the antagonists rather uniformly misrepresent the doctrines they attack. Accordingly, the first and indispensable step in making a reply is to show clearly what does and what does not belong to

the doctrine of verbal inspiration.

Now, let us keep certain facts clearly in mind. In the first place, the differences in style – and they are so obvious that even a translation cannot obscure them – show decisively that the Bible was not dictated as a boss dictates to a stenographer. There have been indeed a few theologians who have used the idea of dictation. Whether they all meant dictation in the sense in which it occurs in a modern business office, or whether some of them meant it in the more general sense of a command and authoritative imposition, we need not discuss. What is chiefly to the point is that the great majority of theologians who hold and have held to verbal inspiration never accepted the dictation theory. One could easily suppose that unbelievers found it easier to ridicule dictation than to understand and discuss verbal inspiration as it is actually taught by evangelical theologians.

How, then, are the differences of style to be accounted for, and what does verbal inspiration mean? The answer to these questions, involving the relation between God and the prophets, takes us quickly away from the picture of a boss and a stenographer.

When God wished to make a revelation (at the time of the exodus or of the captivity) he did not suddenly look around, as if caught unprepared, and wonder what man he could use for the purpose. We cannot suppose that he advertised for help, and when Moses and Jeremiah applied, God constrained them to speak his words. And yet this derogatory view underlies the objection to verbal inspiration. The relation between God and the prophet is totally unlike that between a boss and a stenographer.

If we consider the omnipotence and wisdom of God, a very different representation emerges. The boss must take what he can get; he depends on the high school or business college to have taught the applicant shorthand and typing. But God does not depend on any external agency. God is the Creator. He made Moses. And when God wanted Moses to speak for him, he said, “Who has made man’s mouth? ... Have not I, the Lord?”

Verbal inspiration therefore must be understood in connection with the complete system of Christian doctrine. It may not be detached therefrom, and *a fortiori* it may not be framed in an alien view of God. Verbal inspiration is integral with the doctrines of providence and predestination. When the liberals surreptitiously deny predestination in picturing God as dictating to stenographers,

they so misrepresent verbal inspiration that their objections do not apply to the God of the Bible. The trouble is not, as the liberals think, that the boss controls the stenographer too completely; on the contrary, the analogy misses the mark because the boss hardly controls the stenographer at all.

Put it this way: God, from all eternity, decreed to lead the Jews out of slavery by the hand of Moses. To this end he so controlled events that Moses was born at a given date, placed in the water to save him from an early death, found and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, given the best education possible, driven into the wilderness to learn patience, and in every way so prepared by heredity and environment that when the time came, Moses' mentality and literary style were the instruments precisely fitted to speak God's words.

It is quite otherwise with dictation. A boss has little control over a stenographer except as to the words she types for him. He did not control her education. She may be totally uninterested in his business. They may have extremely little in common. But between Moses and God there was an inner union, an identity of purpose, a cooperation of will, such that the words Moses wrote were God's own words and Moses' own words at the same time.

Thus when we see God's pervading presence and providence in history and in the life of his servants, we recognize that business office dictation does not do justice to the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit dwelt within these men and taught them what to write. God determined what the personality and style of each author was to be, and he determined it for the purpose of expressing his message, his words. The words of Scripture, therefore, are the very words of God.

Contemporary Theories

Inadequate though this elementary exposition and defense of verbal inspiration has been, a little time must be reserved for a third and last section on the contemporary state of affairs. With the decline of Ritschlian liberalism and the rise of Existentialism, Neo-orthodoxy, and Logical Positivism, the point of attack has shifted. It is no longer a question whether the words of the Bible are the words of God or merely the fallible words of a man; today a more sweeping objection is made on the basis of a theory of language. Philosophers have become interested in semantics, and some of their views would so alter the significance of words that with all the verbal inspiration imaginable, the Bible would be emptied

of its Christian meaning. According to various writers, either all language is metaphorical and symbolic or at least all religious language is. No religious statement should ever be taken literally. For example, John Mackintosh Shaw, professor of Systematic Theology in Queen's College, Ontario, refers to the terms *ransom*, *justification*, *propitiation*, *expiation*, and *reconciliation* as metaphors or figures of speech (*Christian Doctrine*, 207). From this sort of view it may and has been concluded that divine revelation cannot be a communication of truth.

Speaking of the early chapters of *Genesis*, William M. Logan, pastor of the University Presbyterian Church, Austin, Texas, in his book *In the Beginning, God*, says,

They are parables, not history or explanations...there is no attempt to formulate intellectual propositions to state basic truths. Instead the method is that of poetic imagery and symbolism.... This is not Adam I am reading about; this is myself.... For that reason, no changes in our knowledge of physical truth can at all affect the teaching of these chapters any more than it could affect Aesop's fables. (15-17)

Later on he says,

The really important question about the story of the Garden of Eden is not whether it is literally, factually true in the same order of truth with which history, geography, astronomy or geology deal.... This story is dealing with ultimate truth which...can be expressed only by image and symbolism.... Did anyone ever ask whether the Good Samaritan literally happened? (35-36)

The Fall is symbolism.... Eden is on no map, and Adam's fall fits no historical calendar. Moses is not nearer to the Fall than we are because he lived 3000 years before our time. The Fall refers not to some datable aboriginal calamity in the historic past of humanity, but to a dimension of human experience which is always present.... Every man is his own Adam. (47-48)

That religious language cannot be true literally has been supported by the following arguments. One author gives the illustration of a very ordinary preacher preaching a very ordinary sermon. But though trite and dull, this sermon or a sentence in this sermon becomes a vital message to someone in the

congregation. The person's life is changed. Yet the changed life could not be the result of the literal meaning of an undistinguished sentence. The words must have conveyed a religious content quite beyond any literal meaning. This religious content, so the argument concludes, is the meaning – the metaphorical, symbolic, or religious meaning – of the words; and if perchance the words had any literal meaning at all, it would be quite beside the point.

Although this argument is found in a scholarly journal published by the National Council of Churches, its faulty analysis and its failure to prove that religious language cannot be literal are so obvious that no time will be wasted explaining it.

Another author, who holds that all religious terms are metaphorical or symbolic, sketches a religious epistemology that is based on images. God, he says, always – and note the *always* – speaks to man through images, and “religious experience is a process of being hit by such images.” This process, which may be called a sort of mental idolatry, is then assimilated to art and mythology. The specification of myth as the form of religious writing is of course a prominent contemporary theme.

But if religious content cannot be literally spoken and must be expressed in the pictorial language of myth, some explanation is required as to the choice of myths. One group of people chooses Greek mythology and another group chooses Christian mythology. Doubtless such choices are often made unreflectively under the influence of society. But there comes a time for thought; there comes a time of conflict between two religions, and a person is asked to choose deliberately. Does it then make no difference? If neither myth is true literally, if both are equally symbolic, is not the one as satisfactory as the other?

Now, Greek mythology is such an unlikely choice today that the author last referred to, convinced as he probably is that modern times are superior to ancient, asserts the possibility of making a rational choice among myths on the basis of their adequacy to explain the facts of existence as we confront them in daily life and action.

It seems to me, however, that neither this nor any other attempt to justify a choice among myths can be successful. If myths were literal truths, one might be more adequate than another. The Greek myth of Zeus' method of producing rain might be considered more adequate or less adequate than the myth about the

windows of heaven, attributed to the Hebrews. But if these stories are both mythological and symbolic, simply symbolic of the literal fact that it rains, it is hard to judge what adequacy might require. A literal statement from Aristophanes' *Clouds* might explain, but a myth explains nothing. Furthermore, if the language is symbolic, it seems clear that one symbol (before historic events have fixed its meaning) is as good as another. Today the swastika symbolizes National Socialism; the hammer and sickle, Communism; but at the start there was no reason why the Communists could not have chosen the swastika and Hitler the hammer and sickle. To push this preliminary criticism one step further, we might ask the question, What is a religious symbol the symbol of? The cross no doubt is the symbol of Christ's crucifixion, but can the crucifixion itself be a symbol or metaphor of anything? The *prima facie* meaning of statements about the crucifixion is literal. And if someone says that religious language cannot be literal, there appears to be no rational method of determining what the crucifixion is symbolic of. Is it pessimistically symbolic of an inherently unjust universe, or is it symbolic of the love of God? On what grounds could one decide if nothing in the account can be taken literally?

But suppose now that someone decides without rational grounds. Suppose that the crucifixion, although it never occurred literally, were said to be symbolic of God's love. Then we must ask, is it a literal truth that God loves men, or is this symbolic too? Obviously this must be symbolic too, if all language is symbolic. And what is God's love symbolic of? No doubt it is symbolic of another symbol – that is symbolic of another – *ad infinitum*.

Although doubtless we are chiefly interested in the effect of modern semantics on the literal meaning of the Bible, it would be a mistake to suppose that the Christian ministry should not concern itself with the several secular theories from which the religious implications derive. Although a detailed analysis of these philosophies cannot possibly be undertaken here, one fundamental aspect of them ought not to be passed by in silence. I refer to the status of logic in these philosophies, and in particular to the law of contradiction. Although academic logic may seem somewhat distant from mythology and religious metaphor, the main matter of verbal inspiration and its immediate effect on Christian work is only thinly veiled by the professional terminology.

Just this spring I received a letter from the mission field in which my correspondent lamented the fact that so many of his associates who were

engaged in translating the Bible had accepted or were deeply influenced by contemporary linguistic relativism. Now it seems to me that the best way to handle this philosophy is to show what it does with the law of contradiction.

This philosophy of analysis, as it is sometimes called, not only repudiates divine revelation but all metaphysics as well. In particular it denies any innate or *a priori* forms of the mind, traditionally regarded as necessarily true. Logic and mathematics are explained as linguistic conventions that have been arbitrarily selected. Past history exemplified different selections. The logic of Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell is one, and the logic of Aristotle is another. And to quote A. J. Ayer, "It is perfectly conceivable that we should have employed different linguistic conventions from those which we actually do employ."

Positivistic, humanistic, or atheistic as this philosophy is, it apparently attracts Biblical translators and even teachers in American Bible schools. Last September, an instructor in one of the well respected Bible colleges published an article in which (along with what seemed to be a mechanistic theory of sensation) he rejected Aristotelian logic as an unwarranted, unnatural verbalization and accepted at least some of Dewey's Instrumentalism. This sort of thing is seen also, though perhaps in a less conscious form and to varying degrees, in the pietistic depreciation of a so-called human logic as opposed to some unknowable divine logic.

In defense of so-called human logic, in defense of the literal meaning of words, and therefore in defense of verbal inspiration, I wish to challenge the opposing viewpoint to face the argument and answer unambiguously. I wish to challenge them to state their own theory without making use of the law of contradiction.

If logical principles are arbitrary, and if it is conceivable to employ different linguistic conventions, these writers should be able to invent and to abide by some different convention. Now, the Aristotelian logic, and in particular the law of contradiction, requires that a given word must not only mean something, it must also not mean something. The term *dog* must mean dog, but it must not mean mountain; and *mountain* must not mean metaphor. Each term must refer to something definite and at the same time there must be some objects to which it does not refer. The term *metaphorical* cannot mean literal, nor can it mean canine or mountainous.

Suppose the word *mountain* meant metaphor, and dog, and Bible, and the United States. Clearly, if a word meant everything, it would mean nothing. If, now, the law of contradiction is an arbitrary convention, and if our linguistic theorists choose some other convention, I challenge them to write a book in conformity with their principles. As a matter of fact it will not be hard for them to do so. Nothing more is necessary than to write the word *metaphor* sixty thousand times: Metaphor metaphor metaphor metaphor....

This means the dog ran up the mountain, for the word *metaphor* means dog, ran, and mountain. Unfortunately, the sentence “metaphor metaphor metaphor” also means, Next Christmas is Thanksgiving, for the word *metaphor* has these meanings as well.

The point should be clear: One cannot write a book or speak a sentence without using the law of contradiction. Logic, therefore, is not an arbitrary convention that may be discarded at will. And all pious talk about our fallible human logic, as well as all modern metaphorical theories of religious language, makes verbal revelation impossible. But, fortunately, these theories make themselves impossible as well.

Therefore the orthodox Christian may well conclude, in my opinion, that verbal inspiration has no objections to fear. The older objections were successfully met a century ago. The more recent objections are still easier to dispose of. But though from an intellectual or academic standpoint we have no objections to fear, so one sided is the propaganda imposed on students in universities and seminaries that there is a great need to make the Calvinistic position universally known and widely understood.

The Evangelical Theological Society Tomorrow

The Evangelical Theological Society is a remarkable organization. The term *evangelical*, an inheritance from the Reformation, reminds us of the so-called formal principle and the so-called material principle of the origin of Protestantism. Justification by faith alone was the material principle, and the religious conditions of the sixteenth century required great stress on this essential element of the Gospel.

The Evangelical Theological Society, however, has not done much with the doctrine of justification. This is not because justification by faith alone is any less essential now, but rather because the battle today (in a way unlike that of the sixteenth century) rages around the so-called formal principle of the Reformation, namely, the Scripture itself. Both principles, are, of course, essential in every age. No one can rightly appropriate the term *evangelical* who rejects the one or the other. But though there are still many today who reject justification and who decry it as a forensic, legal, irreligious concept, the main battle centers on the truthfulness of Scripture.

It is for this reason that the Evangelical Theological Society is a remarkable organization. In a day when the main attack against Christianity is centered on the truthfulness of God's Word, and when the liberals loudly claim that no scholarly defense of the Bible can be made, this Society of college and seminary professors was organized for the purpose of propagating the doctrine of Scriptural infallibility.

Thus it happens that our Society includes the best conservative scholars in the land, and to this end our discussions examine every known phase of Biblical literature, archaeology, theology, and apologetics. At our first meeting, which may be called our constitutional convention, we saw clearly that if the Bible is the Word of God – a phrase even the Neo-orthodox sometimes use – it cannot contain error, for the simple reason that God cannot lie. Conversely, if the Bible contains errors, it cannot, certainly not in its entirety, be the Word of God. Hence the basis on which the Society was founded, and the principle on which it operates to this day, and the statement to which we all subscribe is: "The Bible alone and

the Bible in its entirety is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs.”

Note that the statement was deliberately cast in the logical form of an implication. The premise of the implication is the proposition that the Bible is the Word of God written. Therefore the conclusion follows that the Bible is inerrant. God cannot lie.

The Bible's View of Itself

This platform of our Society is not the result of an arbitrary decision. We chose this basic principle because it is the Bible's own view of itself. In *The Divine-Human Encounter*, Emil Brunner says, “The Bible...contains no doctrine of the Word of God” (45). But Brunner is completely mistaken. The Bible has a great deal to say about itself. There is of course the well known verse, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” This verse most obviously asserts plenary inspiration; and when we quote it, we often emphasize the word *all*. All Scripture is inspired. Plenary inspiration is important: We must insist that the Bible in its entirety is the Word of God. But what sometimes escapes notice is that the emphasis could equally well fall on the word *Scripture*. All *Scripture* is inspired. That is to say, this verse asserts the inspiration, not of the thoughts of the prophets – though their thoughts may have also been inspired – nor of the spoken words of the prophets – though their official speech may have been inspired too – but this verse asserts the inspiration of the written words on the manuscript. God “breathed out” the written words.

This verse is no *hapax legomenon*. It does not stand solitary and exceptional. There are many passages in which the Bible describes its own nature. A dozen times or more the Bible prefaces or concludes its message with the phrase, “The mouth of the Lord has spoken.” In one place we read, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and his word was on my tongue.” Or, again, “Lord, you are God... who by the mouth of your servant David have said,” and again, “This Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas.”

The meaning of these verses is unmistakable. No exegesis could make them plainer. They say explicitly that the words which proceeded from the mouth of David and were written on the manuscript were the words of the Holy Spirit.

Since these words are the very words of God, we are fully justified in concluding that they are therefore true – infallibly true. God cannot lie.

It must not be thought that the five verses quoted are the only verses in which the Bible asserts its own inspiration. Indeed, the verses quoted are only a small number selected from the amazingly ample statements that the Bible makes concerning its own nature.

May We Appeal to the Bible?

Dr. Dewey M. Beegle in *The Inspiration of Scripture* objects to this appeal to the Bible. He complains that the doctrine of verbal inspiration relies on a few proof texts instead of following the true scientific method of induction from the Biblical phenomena.

Now, in the first place, the doctrine of verbal inspiration does not rely on a few proof texts. It relies on an amazingly ample supply. Such references as Beegle's to a few proof texts give the impression that our opponents have never read Louis Gaussen's *Theopneustia*. If anyone's memory is dim with respect to the very extensive explanation the Bible gives of its own nature, Gaussen's *Theopneustia* is the corrective.

In the second place, an induction from the Biblical phenomena does not so obviously produce the conclusion Dr. Beegle desires. He takes it that an induction would result in a list of verses that are indisputably erroneous. Wellhausen nearly a century ago supplied such a list. But since his day, one after another has been crossed off his list. The investigations of the members of this Society have brought to light many cases where the alleged error has been shown to be no error at all. Then, too, outside our Society, Dr. Albright and Dr. Glueck, though they do not hold to verbal inspiration and are far from being fundamentalists, have conclusively disposed of the quick and easy assumption that the Bible is unreliable. Therefore we who hold to the doctrine have good reason to hope that whatever difficulties remain may likewise be removed as investigation proceeds.

Then, in the third place, we reject the invidious contrast that Dr. Beegle draws between a few proof texts and the true scientific method of induction. Let anyone who wishes give archaeology the honorific title of scientific. We shall not object.

On the contrary, we are delighted with the trend of archaeological investigation. But it is not scientific or scholarly – indeed it is utterly illegitimate – to ignore what the Bible says about itself as Dr. Beegle wants us to. On this particular point “The Inspiration of Scripture” by Dr. Roger Nicole (*The Gordon Review*, Volume VIII, Numbers 2, 3) deserves highest commendation.

The Present Task

The doctrine of verbal inspiration is not only the platform on which the Evangelical Theological Society stands, it is also the crucial issue in theological debate today. Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, in our Society’s *Bulletin* (Volume 8, Number 2), begins his extensive article on “Inspiration and Inerrancy” by recalling that James Orr made note of the fact that the Church in each epoch of its history had to come to grips with one particular doctrine of crucial significance. At the beginning of the fourth century, the crucial issue was the doctrine of the Trinity. Now toward the close of the twentieth century, controversy centers in the nature of the Word of God.

One major piece of evidence that the truthfulness of Scripture is the present center of controversy is the current situation in the United Presbyterian Church. Thirty years ago, by judicial action, that denomination refused to enforce its creed and made the *Westminster Confession* a dead letter. This year the formal and legal procedure was begun to replace the *Confession* with a new statement in which virtually nothing of the old creed remains. The motive acknowledged in the literature is the desire to be free from Scriptural infallibility. With infallibility gone, the other doctrines of Scripture automatically drop by the wayside. Thus the vicarious satisfaction of Christ and other doctrines are no longer regarded as truths, but merely as “images of a truth which remains beyond the reach of all theory” or knowledge.

In this century’s controversy over inspiration, the Evangelical Theological Society should take the lead. There are no doubt good and capable men who are not members of this Society, but there is no other professional association organized on this basis. Hence this is our present task.

The Blows of Battle

In a vigorously fought contest it is not usual for either side to emerge completely unscathed. The Evangelical Theological Society has suffered some losses and may suffer more. Just this year one of our members withdrew because, to quote his letter, “I have found it...intellectually impossible to accept the last clause of the Society’s doctrinal basis.”

Behind this statement there most probably lies the idea that historical investigation has discovered indubitable errors in Scripture. As was said a moment ago, this great confidence seems strange in view of the fact that so many particular allegations of error have been exploded.

The letter of resignation also suggests another reason why it is intellectually impossible to accept verbal inspiration. Our departed member believes that the idea of infallibility, even if it were true, would yet be useless because, to quote again, “secular history can be infallible in the sense of a faultless record of historical facts, but it will not be saving truth.”

What does this argument mean? Apparently the occurrence of true statements in secular history books is taken to imply that the Bible does not need true statements. Now, if anything is intellectually impossible, it is not Scriptural infallibility, but this queer argument against Scriptural infallibility. Just because certain true statements about American or Chinese history are not saving truths, how does it follow that saving knowledge need not be true? It is a very strange form of intellect that argues against infallibility, or against the usefulness of truth, or the necessity of truth on the ground that secular histories are sometimes true.

Is Infallibility Useless?

By its assertion that the truths of secular history are not saving truths, the letter of resignation seems to depend more on the idea that infallibility is spiritually useless than on its being intellectually impossible. To complete a quotation already given in part, the writer says, “I have found it spiritually unnecessary and intellectually impossible to accept the Society’s doctrinal basis.”

A sharp divorce between what is intellectual and what is spiritual, a divorce proclaimed by the Neo-orthodox and the pietistic fundamentalists alike, ill accords with our Reformation heritage. Dr. Beegle, previously mentioned, accuses the dogma of inerrancy of leading to a cold, impersonal relation to

Scripture as a body of objective, propositional truth, thus undervaluing experiential response. The use of the words *cold* and *impersonal* is simply a propaganda device. In a frigid winter the word *cold* makes us shiver; but in summers of tropical heat, something cold is very appealing. If now we put away the deceptive metaphors of propaganda, what remains is Dr. Beegle's distaste for objective, propositional truth. Apparently he finds truth spiritually unnecessary. Those who have been influenced by Kierkegaard and modern Existentialism adopt a view of the nature of religion which is quite different from the religion of Luther and Calvin. These Reformers, like the Apostle Paul, had no antipathy toward objective, propositional truth.

Perhaps the gentleman who resigned does not go so far into Existentialism as Bultmann or Beegle has gone. What he actually says is, "Secular history can be infallible...but it will not be saving truth." Therefore he seems to maintain that infallibility is spiritually unnecessary because a sinner can be truly saved without believing it. Other things he says indicate that he considers infallibility spiritually unnecessary because various other evangelical doctrines can still be defended after infallibility is relinquished.

The argument that verbal inspiration is useless because a sinner can be saved without believing it is an argument of massive confusion. True, the thief on the cross did not know of (and therefore could not believe in) the virgin birth, the doctrine of sanctification, and the second advent. Is, therefore, the doctrine of sanctification useless? Are ordinary Christians, not to mention pastors and theologians, to restrict their knowledge to the limitations of the thief on the cross? Dare any scholar speak so stupidly? Must one teach again the rudiments of the first principles to those who ought to be teachers but who have regressed from strong meat to the milk of infancy? Surely theology is not to be limited to the minimum knowledge essential for the initial stage of any random individual's salvation.

This reminds me of a professor in a Christian college whom I heard opposing the inclusion of a course in Theism in the curriculum on the ground that a course in Theism never saved anybody.

Evangelical Doctrines

If, however, we are willing to advance beyond the most elementary stage of

Christian life, and learn, discuss, and preach several additional doctrines, the next question is: Can we maintain those several doctrines apart from the doctrine of plenary and verbal inspiration? Historically, not much evidence can be found in favor of an affirmative answer. Examples are sufficient of individuals and of ecclesiastical organizations that relinquish infallibility and other doctrines either in succession or simultaneously. Above it was noted that the United Presbyterian Church, motivated by a desire to avoid the so called cramping effect of Biblical inspiration, is discarding virtually every one of the Westminster doctrines.

This is no anomaly. It is a perfectly consistent development. If the Bible in a hundred different passages is mistaken in its account of itself, why should the rest of its message be accepted as true? If the prophets spoke falsely when they said that their words were the words of God, put in their mouths by the Holy Spirit, so that the God who cannot lie was speaking through them – if they were thus in error, what confidence can we have in anything else they said? If the words of David and Jeremiah are God's words, then we are obliged to accept them. But if those words are only David's or Jeremiah's, would it not be more profitable to study Aristotle or Plotinus? And if, as the new creed of the United Presbyterian Church says, "the words of the Scriptures are the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought-forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written," and if "they reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current," can the Bible be anything more than a source book of the sociology of ancient Israel? I think not. A book that gives a false account of its own origin and nature (or a prophet who mistakes the current views of history and the cosmos for the Word of God) is not a reliable guide in religion. Its doctrine of the atonement, its account of the resurrection, its promise of Heaven could not then be trusted.

Biblical Authority

If now anyone insists that a chance statement by Jeremiah or the doctrine of sanctification in Paul may accidentally be true and can be accepted even after rejecting infallibility, we would like to know on what basis and by what method these other doctrines are retained. It is not enough to claim that this verse and that doctrine can be salvaged from an erroneous Bible. The claim must be substantiated. By what right can Brunner accept, "The Word became flesh," when he rejects, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child"? How can Bultmann

demythologize the Gospels and retain a transcendent God? Can the cosmological argument, based on mere observation of nature, prove the existence of a God who hears our prayers? Does history, including the world wars of this century, demonstrate that Christ's death satisfies divine justice? Do human frustrations imply the second advent? Or, perhaps, the Neo-orthodox will call these suggestions a parody and caricature. I am sorry; I apologize. But since they have never described their method, one can only make wild guesses. Yet I must continue to insist that their claim to salvage some doctrines is not enough. They must present a clearly articulated procedure for examination.

Instead of making their principles and procedure clear, they seem satisfied to call the Bible authoritative. The aforementioned letter of resignation does this. In fact the letter says the Scripture is "fully inspired," from which one may well conclude that the errors in Scripture are also fully inspired. The letter goes on to redefine *inerrancy* so that a Bible full of mistakes can be called inerrant. Whether or not this is intellectual honesty and spiritual necessity, it is at least poor lexicography. May we not legitimately ask how an erroneous book can be inerrant and spiritually authoritative?

Suppose I should call your attention to this book which I hold in my hand. It is an ancient book about Socrates, written by Simmias, one of Plato's friends. Simmias advances the unusual opinion that Anaxagoras was the father of Socrates, and not Sophroniscus as Plato says. Furthermore, the author tells us that Socrates was killed in battle and received a hero's funeral in Athens, and there are numerous other errors of fact in the book. Unfortunately, too, the author was so favorably impressed by Socrates' personality that he attributed to Socrates the theory of behaviorism which Socrates stimulated in his mind. And at the present time, since the historical Socrates wrote nothing, historical research cannot be sure of a single thing Socrates said.

However, let me say emphatically that this book is the authoritative source of Socratic philosophy. We must accept it, or at least so much of it as stimulates our own authentic reactions. This book is the infallible word of Socrates.

Now, if I had said all this to you in complete seriousness, would you not suspect that I was slightly demented? Of course, I might be sane enough on subjects such as baseball and the stock market; but if you were interested in philosophy I think you would find it intellectually necessary and philosophically useful to look elsewhere.

Human Need

The only criterion the letter of resignation uses to select something out of the confusion of error is spiritual need. If there is some other method for retaining a few fragments of the Bible, it too should be examined after it has been clearly articulated. The letter mentions only spiritual need.

This method proves to be a failure because of two related objections. The writer of the letter finds plenary and verbal inspiration spiritually unnecessary. Another person I could name finds that he needs, spiritually and intellectually, an infallible message from God. In this situation are we to say that a verse or doctrine is false for one man but true for another? Mr. A. needs the doctrine of sanctification, but Mr. B. – either because he is an antinomian or because he has already achieved sinless perfection – does not need the doctrine. Will those who adopt this procedure acknowledge and defend the relativism of truth that underlies it?

The letter of resignation gives the optimistic impression that a goodly number of evangelical doctrines can be maintained, and that evangelical churches can continue on this basis. Yet it is clear that some people think they need more, and some people think they need less. Will the resignation allow the latter people to discard more and finally discard all of the Bible? What arguments could he press upon them, who do not feel his need, to retain what he wishes to retain? If he has freedom to reject some doctrines, must he not grant them the same freedom to reject what they think they do not need?

Now, there is a second and related objection to this criterion of spiritual need. The objection relates to the determination of need. If the writers of the Bible were not infallible, could any of us be infallible percipients of our needs? Dare we claim to have made no error in our self-analysis? The Bible furnishes us with an analysis of human nature and need. It tells us that the guilt of Adam's first transgression was immediately imputed to us with the result that we were born in iniquity and that our heart is deceitful above measure. If this Biblical statement is true, any merely human analysis of human nature is bound to be unreliable. And if the Bible is not true, what reason is there for thinking that we have a more accurate understanding than the prophets, who even on Neo-orthodox principles stood so close to the fountains of the faith? May I suggest therefore that anyone who says he does not need the doctrine of infallibility has misunderstood his own

needs?

The Criterion

If in the face of this objection such theologians still maintain that many or even a few Scriptural doctrines can be retained out of an erroneous Bible, we have, at least, the right to know how they decide which doctrines they need. We press them for their method of retaining some while rejecting others.

Just recently one liberal writer referred contemptuously to this challenge. He said the conservatives win a cheap victory by asking the liberals to state their non-Biblical criterion of acceptance and rejection. Why this challenge is cheap, I do not know. Why it is not a victory, he did not say. If a theologian accepts a doctrine simply because the Bible teaches it, he accepts Biblical infallibility; but if he rejects Biblical infallibility, he cannot accept the doctrine simply because the Bible teaches it. Therefore he must use some other criterion. I do not see anything cheap in asking what this criterion is. In fact, the ideals of scholarship are abandoned – and the ground of faith is disguised – unless this criterion is plainly stated.

The Neo-orthodox, however, seem very reluctant to answer the question. They hide their criterion under a bushel. But it is “intellectually impossible” to get along without any replacement at all for the criterion of Scripture. In theology, as in automotive engineering, if you take out the spark plugs, you will have to use some substitute or the car won’t go.

The Evangelical Theological Society

Now, of course, if a person rejects inerrancy, he has no legitimate place in the Evangelical Theological Society. The person who resigned, having changed his theology after first joining with us, is morally commendable for his withdrawal. Too often ordination vows are exercises in perjury, and professors seeking positions in Christian colleges sometimes resort to lies when questioned on their religious faith. As a contrast to this liberal dishonesty, we express admiration for a man who honestly resigns.

His resignation disturbs us, however, when he hints that there are several in our membership who are not so honest as he. Perhaps in the last two or three years our membership has expanded too rapidly, but I shrink from accusing anyone in our fellowship of attempting to subvert it.

But in any event, I do not take kindly to our departed member's advice to alter the purpose of our Society for fear of losing other members by resignation. This may be the policy of liberalism, but it is not the voice of the Reformation. The voice of the Reformation says,

Let goods and kindred go
Some membership also.

This Society did not frame its platform out of considerations of size and money. Rather, we felt a spiritual need for a message from God, and we knew intellectually that a message from God must be true. For this reason we said, "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs."

Special Divine Revelation as Rational

The handiwork and the glory of God displayed by the heavens and the firmament have been called general divine revelation. In this category one may also include the constitution of human personality, for man himself is a creation of God and in some sense bears the marks of his Creator. This “light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation.” It is thus that the *Westminster Confession* briefly warns us that general revelation is inadequate. This inadequacy is partly a result of the noetic effects of sin, but there is a prior and inherent inadequacy as well.

Inadequacy of General Revelation

The beclouding effects of sin upon the mind as it tries to discover God and salvation in nature may best be seen in the divergent results obtained among the pagan religions. The ancient Babylonians, Egyptians, and Romans looked on the same nature that is seen by the modern Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist. But the messages that they purport to receive are considerably different. This, which is so evident when these faraway religions are mentioned, holds true also within Western civilization. What the humanist and logical positivist see in nature is entirely different from what the orthodox Christian believes about nature. Even if the humanist professes to discover in experience certain moral ideas and spiritual values that are at least superficially similar to those of the Bible, it can well be supposed that he actually learned them from his Christian heritage and not from an independent study of nature and man. The kindly atmosphere of humanitarianism is notably absent from societies to which the Christian message has not been taken.

The existence of divergent concepts of God, of moral ideals, and above all, of schemes of salvation, show the power of sin in the mind of man; but they also show the inherent inadequacy of general revelation. It is not because of sin alone that man fails to get God’s message. The truth is that nature has less of a message

than some people, particularly some Christian people, think

The planets above and the plants below show some of the wisdom and power of God; that is to say, they show it to those who already believe that God has created them. Even to a devout Christian, however, the universe does not show the full power and wisdom of God, for God has not exhausted himself in his creation. No doubt the stellar systems display a vast and unimaginable power, yet a greater number of stars with more complicated motions is conceivable. Therefore, omnipotence is not a necessary conclusion from the stars.

Neither is righteousness. The moral attributes that the Bible ascribes to God are still less deducible from an observation of nature. Indeed, the problem of evil – physical calamities like earthquakes, and tragedies caused by wicked men – has led some philosophers to deny God altogether or to posit a finite god. John Stuart Mill thought that the universe tended imperfectly toward the production of good; modern humanists are more likely to say that the universe is neutral with respect to the hopes and aspirations of man; while Bertrand Russell and Joseph Wood Krutch counsel bravery in the face of inevitable defeat. These various opinions, though partly due to human sinfulness, depend as much, I believe, on the inadequacy of general revelation in itself. God's message in the heavens is simply not extensive enough to cover these questions.

Again, the Hebrew-Christian view that “the heavens declare the glory of God” does not, in my opinion, mean that the existence of God can be formally deduced from an empirical examination of the universe. If on some other grounds we believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we can see that the heavens declare his glory; but this is not to say that a person who did not believe in God could demonstrate his existence from nature. Further reference to this point will be made a little later.

Now, finally, the inadequacy of general revelation is most obvious in the case of ideals or ethical norms. And this inadequacy is not solely the result of sin, but it is an inherent inadequacy. The exposure of infants in Greece, temple prostitution in Babylonia, and human sacrifice in Canaan and elsewhere were not practices which those societies condemned; they had full social sanction. These were their norms; these were their moral ideals. Similarly, contemporary humanism, though some of its values are superficially similar to Christian precepts, diverges more and more from the Biblical identification of right and wrong. Jesus is no longer regarded as sinless, but is accused of minimizing the values of scientific

intelligence, of holding inferior sociological views on labor and property, and even of insisting on too rigid a sexual standard.

If, now, someone wishes to argue that this ethical divergence does not indicate the inadequacy of general revelation but merely the darkness of the sinful mind, the clinching reply for a Christian is that God spoke to Adam *before the Fall* and gave him commands that he could not have otherwise known.

When Adam was created and placed in the Garden of Eden, he did not know what to do. Nor would a study of the Garden have led to any necessary conclusion. His duty was imposed upon him by a special divine revelation. God told him to be fruitful and multiply, to subdue nature, to make use of the animals, and to eat of the fruit of the trees (with one fateful exception). Thus moral norms, commands and prohibitions were established by a special and not a general revelation. Only so could man know God's requirements, and only so later could he learn the plan of salvation.

Such is the Christian viewpoint. Secular philosophers today assert that the story of Adam is a myth and that the idea of special revelation is irrational. Dependence is placed in reason, not in revelation. All truth is to be obtained by one method, the method of science. The Bible is alleged to be self-contradictory and historically inaccurate; its morals are those of a bygone age; and evolution is credited with disproving creation. These themes have been well publicized and widely accepted. Can the Christian therefore face the charge of intellectual dishonesty, frequently brought against him, and meet the objection that revelation is unreasonable?

Defense of Revelation as Rational

In the history of Christian thought the antithesis between faith and reason has been approached by several different methods. The debate, whether among Christians or between Christians and secularists, sometimes generates confusion because the terms are not always clearly defined. Not only do Augustine and Kant differ as to the nature of faith, but the term *reason* itself has borne different meanings. After providing a minimum of historical background, the writer hopes to avoid such confusion by suggesting a definition of reason that may help in the defense of revelation as rational.

The Medieval Scholastic Attempt

In this brief historical survey the first method of relating faith and reason to be discussed will be the Thomistic philosophy of the Roman Catholic Church. Aside from the personal assent of the believer, faith in this system means the revealed information contained in the Bible, tradition, and presumably the living voice of the Roman church. Faith, then, is revealed truth. Reason means the information that can be obtained by a sensory observation of nature as interpreted by intellection. Whereas the rationalists of the seventeenth century contrasted reason with sensation, Thomas contrasts reason with revelation. Truths of reason are those truths which may be obtained by man's natural sensory and intellectual equipment without the aid of supernatural grace.

These definitions of faith and reason make revelation "unreasonable" only in a verbal manner; revelation cannot be called unreasonable or irrational in any pejorative sense. Sometimes one suspects that the secularists seize upon the verbalism to suggest something more sinister.

Thomism indeed insists on an incompatibility between faith and reason, but it is a psychological incompatibility. If the Bible reveals that God exists, and if we believe the Bible, we have this truth of faith. It is possible, however, according to Thomism, to demonstrate the existence of God from ordinary observation of nature. Aristotle did it. But when a person has rationally demonstrated this proposition, he no longer "believes" it, he no longer accepts it on authority; he "knows" it. It is psychologically impossible to "believe" and to "know" the same proposition. A teacher may tell a student that a triangle contains 180 degrees, and the student may believe the teacher; but if the student learns the proof, he no longer accepts the theorem on the word of the teacher: He knows it for himself. Not all the propositions of revelation may be demonstrated in rational philosophy; but on the other hand some truths capable of demonstration have also been revealed to man, for God well knew that not all men have the intellectual capacity of Aristotle; therefore God revealed some truths, even though demonstrable, for the sake of the greater part of mankind.

The non-demonstrable contents of revelation (such as the doctrines of the Trinity and the sacraments), though outside the range of reason as defined, are not irrational or nonsensical. Medieval Mohammedans and modern humanists may claim that the Trinity is irrational, but reason is quite competent to show that

this doctrine does not contain any self-contradiction and that the objections to it are fallacious. The higher truths of faith do not violate any of the conclusions of reason; on the contrary, the doctrines of revelation complete what reason could not finish. The two sets of truths, or, better, the truths obtained by these two different methods, are complementary. Far from being a hindrance to reason, faith can warn a thinker that he is blundering. One should not picture the believer as a prisoner to his faith who should be liberated; faith restricts only from error. Thus faith and reason are in harmony.

Only one criticism of this construction will be made, but it is one which Thomists and objectors alike will concede to be crucial. If the cosmological argument for the existence of God is a logical fallacy, Thomism and its view of the relation between faith and reason cannot stand.[\[1\]](#)

The difficulties with the cosmological argument recall the earlier comments on the inadequacy of general revelation. If it is assumed that all knowledge begins in sensory experience and that therefore one looks out on nature in ignorance of God, the manifest calamities of men and the finitude and change of nature – vast though the galaxies may be – preclude any necessary conclusion to the existence of an omnipotent God who is good as well.

To these objections, which David Hume stated so forcefully, may be added specific criticisms of Thomas' Aristotelian formulation. Three will be mentioned. First, Thomism cannot survive without the concepts of potentiality and actuality, yet Aristotle never succeeded in defining them. Instead he illustrated them by the change of phenomena and then defined *change* or *motion* in terms of actuality and potentiality. To justify this objection would require too much technical apparatus for the present purpose; and if the reader wish, he need put no stress on this first point.

Second, Thomas argues that if we trace back the causes of motions, still this regress cannot go on to infinity. The reason explicitly given in the *Summa Theologica* for denying an infinite regress is that in such a case there could not be a first mover. But this reason, which is used as a premise to conclude for the denial, is precisely the conclusion that Thomas puts at the end of the complete argument. The argument is supposed to prove the existence of a first mover, but this first mover is assumed in order to deny an infinite regress. Obviously, therefore, the argument is a fallacy.

There is a third and still more complicated criticism. Inasmuch as this involves material that has recently become a subject of widespread debate, it is worthy of more detailed attention.

For Thomas Aquinas there are two ways of knowing God: First, the way of negative theology, which we shall not discuss; and second, the method of analogy. Since God is pure being, without parts, whose essence is identical with his existence, the terms applied to him cannot be used in precisely the sense in which they apply to created things. If it is said that a man is wise and that God is wise, it must be remembered that the wisdom of man is an acquired wisdom, while God has never learned. The human mind is subject to the truth; truth is its superior. But God's mind is the cause of the truth by thinking it, or, perhaps, God is the truth. Hence the term *mind* does not mean precisely the same thing in the case of God and man. Not only these terms, but the notion of existence also, is not the same. Since God's existence is his essence – an identity unduplicated in any other instance – even the word *existence* does not apply univocally to God and the world of creation.

At the same time, Thomas does not wish to admit that the terms are equivocal. When it is said that playboys lead *fast* lives, while ascetics *fast*, the word has no meaning in common. Though the letters and pronunciation are the same, the intellectual contents in the two instances are utterly diverse. Between such equivocation and strict univocity, Thomas asserts that words may have an analogical use; and that in the case of God and man, the predicates are applied analogically.

If, now, the analogical meanings of *wise* or of *existence* had a common area of meaning, that common area could be designated by a univocal term. This term then could be applied univocally to God and man. But Thomas insists that no term can be so applied. This in effect removes all trace of identical meaning in the two instances. But if this be so, how can an argument – the cosmological argument – be formally valid when its premises use terms in one sense and the conclusion uses those terms in a completely different sense? The premises of the cosmological argument speak of *the existence of movers* within the range of human experience; the conclusion concerns the *existence* of a *first mover*. But if these terms are not taken univocally, the argument is a fallacy.

Therefore, the Thomistic attempt to relate faith and reason – more because of its view of reason than its view of faith – must be adjudged a failure, and another

attempt must be made to defend the rationality of revelation.

The Renaissance Attack

The dominance of the medieval scholastic viewpoint, of which Thomas was the most brilliant example, ceased with the Reformation and Renaissance. Since this chapter aims to defend the Reformation position, the Renaissance will be discussed first. The discussion must be extremely brief; for, since the Renaissance gave rise to modern secular philosophy, the subject is too vast; modern philosophy, moreover, is not a method of harmonizing faith and reason, but of denying faith in favor of reason. Nevertheless, something ought to be said to indicate that this modern attack on revelation has not been completely successful.

Certain details of the attack – such as the allegations that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch because writing had not yet been invented in his day, and that the Hittites never existed – are more appropriately treated under the topic of Higher Criticism. Here only the guiding principles of its philosophy can be kept in view.

These guiding principles were those employed in the crucial problem of knowledge. Epistemology is the attempt to show that knowledge is possible, and modern philosophy is heavily epistemological. Did these schools succeed in establishing rational knowledge apart from faith or revelation?

The first main school was the seventeenth-century school of Rationalism. Their basic belief was that all knowledge is derived from logic alone. One should note that by *reason* these men meant logic as opposed to sensation. Experience, in their opinion, was the source of error. Only that which could be demonstrated as theorems of geometry are demonstrated (that is, without appeal to experimentation) is trustworthy.

In general, these thinkers (of whom Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz were by far the greatest) relied on the ontological argument to prove the existence of God. The ontological argument contends that God has the attribute of existence just as a triangle has the attribute of containing 180 degrees. To deny that God exists is as much a self-contradiction as to deny the geometrical theorem. Thus the existence of God is proved by reason alone, that is, by pure logic, without an appeal to

sensory experience. Then from the existence of God the rationalists attempt to deduce the laws of science.

Not many contemporary philosophers think that the ontological argument is valid; no contemporary thinker admits that Descartes or Spinoza succeeded in deducing the contents of science in the manner indicated. However stimulating the rationalists may be, however informative on some points, they are universally judged to have failed in the main matter of showing that knowledge is possible. Therefore a Christian can legitimately claim that their attack on revelation collapses with their system as a whole. This is a brief and summary treatment of Rationalism indeed, but no one will expect a complete history of modern philosophy in these pages.

Empiricism remains today as a living philosophy. Therefore it may not be said that Locke, Berkeley, and Hume are universally regarded as complete failures. Yet today's Empiricism is noticeably different from the eighteenth-century variety; and in some cases where it shows greater similarity, one wonders what answers the empiricist would give to the standard objections against Hume.

There are three chief objections to Empiricism. First, the impossibility of discovering any "necessary connection" between events or ideas (that is, the denial of causality) makes historical and scientific investigation futile. At best, knowledge could not extend beyond one's own present impressions and their traces in memory. Second, the disintegration of the "self" results in a world of perceptions that no percipient perceives. This in effect annihilates memory. Third and fundamental, Empiricism makes use of space and time surreptitiously at the beginning of the learning process, while explicitly these concepts are learned only at the end. Thus empirical objections to revelation, and in particular Hume's argument against miracles, are deprived of all foundation.

Immanuel Kant tried bravely to remedy the defects of Empiricism by assigning to the mind certain *a priori* forms. Space and time were supposed to preserve meaning for sensory experience, and the *a priori* categories were to make thinking possible. Kant's works stand as a monument to his genius, but hardly had the later volumes been published than Jacobi put his finger on a very sore spot. To enter Kant's system it is necessary to assume "things-in-themselves," but the full theory of categories makes the assumption impossible. This conflict between the *a priori* forms of the mind and the matter given in sensation started the advance to Hegel.

During his lifetime G. W. F. Hegel attained the acme of professional recognition, and for seventy-five years more his thought was extremely influential. Yet today we see that two of his students who completely rejected his absolute idealism, Karl Marx and Søren Kierkegaard, have won the decisive battle against him. There are still idealists, of course, and Hegel may still count a few followers. But the assertion of Hegelian bankruptcy cannot be dismissed as a prejudiced Christian device to maintain a theory of revelation.

However, as long as Hegel has some disciples and as long as remnants of Empiricism remain, one might insist that these philosophies have not been conclusively refuted. Therefore, although these viewpoints are not, in my opinion, the characteristic position of the twentieth century, a Christian defense of revelation is probably under some obligation to show how they should be treated. Unfortunately, not more than one example can be included.

The late Edgar Sheffield Brightman worked out a philosophy of religion along mainly empirical lines, though retaining some ideas from Kant. Values and religious ideals were to be discovered in experience; revelation either plays no part, or, if it is theoretically possible, still it must be judged on the basis of reason. Revelation, he says, must be tested by reason, not reason by revelation. By the term *reason*, Brightman does not mean the processes of logic as did the rationalists; for him, reason is a set of empirically derived principles by which we organize the universe of our experience. He speaks of concrete, empirical reason as opposed to bare, formal logic. Revelation, he asserts, cannot be used as the basic principle by which to organize experience.

Historically, of course, revelation has been so used; and Brightman never shows why, if there is a living God, revelation could not possibly furnish us with information that would enable us to understand the world and organize our lives. Serious flaws in Brightman's conception of God I have discussed elsewhere (compare *A Christian View of Men and Things*).

What is perhaps the basic difficulty is one that Brightman shares with the humanists, though generally he and they are in radical disagreement. Their concurrence on this point therefore gives it considerable importance, for it furnishes a test that extends beyond the views of one man.

The vulnerable point of Brightman's empirical method, and of all contemporary Empiricism, is the professed derivation of genuine values from

experience. That there are factors in experience which people actually enjoy is not to be denied. But the problem is to go from the actual and diverse enjoyments to values that have a legitimate claim upon all people. One man enjoys prayer; another whiskey. One man enjoys the life of a retired scholar; another enjoys being a brutal dictator. Can experience show that these are anything more than personal preferences? Can experience furnish a ground for a universal moral obligation? It is my conclusion, supported by detailed argument in the volume just cited, that this is impossible. For such reasons, then, these remnant philosophies fail to undermine Biblical revelation.

Post-Hegelian philosophy is an important factor in arriving at this negative judgment on the “reason” of Spinoza, Hume, and Hegel. The criticisms of Marx, Nietzsche, and the contemporary instrumentalists have damaged this reason beyond repair. Insofar as these men have signalized the failure of modern philosophy to solve the epistemological problems, their conclusions seem incontrovertible. But since they are violently opposed to revelation, they have been forced to adopt a skepticism so deep that not even reason in the sense of the laws of logic is exempt.

In anticipation of Freud, Nietzsche tells us that all thinking is controlled by biological functions. The distinction between truth and falsity as such is unimportant: A false opinion that sustains life is better than a truth that does not. In fact, truth might well be defined as the kind of error without which a species cannot live. Logic, with its law of contradiction, is the result of a blind evolution which might have been different. At any rate, logic falsifies nature; it puts different things into the same category by ignoring their differences; and the coarser the organ, the more similarities it sees. The fact that we use logic merely signifies our inability to examine more closely, and the result is that logic holds good only for assumed existences which we have created and not for the real world.

F. C. S. Schiller, A. J. Ayer, Jean-Paul Sartre – each in his own way attacks the necessity of logic. Thus the typical philosophic position of the twentieth century is not so much to be designated skepticism as outright irrationalism.

The Neo-orthodox Compromise

Although these men are openly anti-Christian, there is also a twentieth-century

form of irrationalism, derived directly from Hegel's student Kierkegaard, that clothes itself with Christian terminology and tries to avoid the excesses of Nietzsche by an appeal to revelation. It sometimes claims to be a return to the Reformation point of view. One must ask not only whether this claim can be historically justified, but more particularly whether this philosophy provides an adequate validation of the Christian concept of revelation.

This so-called Neo-orthodox or existential movement willingly admits that reason has come to grief. Even inanimate nature is beyond intellectual understanding because there is no motion in logic and no logic in motion.

Becoming is open and reality is chance. If logic founders on physical motion, it is all the more impotent in the issues of life. What is needed is not conclusions but decisions. We must therefore make a leap of faith and accept a revelation from God.

To many devout people disturbed by the popularity of secular scientism, oppressed by the deadening influence of Modernism, and (unjustifiably) frightened by the negations of Higher Criticism, Neo-orthodoxy seemed like manna from on high. Revelation had now been saved; reason had been defeated!

However, before the heirs of Luther and Calvin can properly rejoice, they must know precisely what this revelation is, what sort of faith is meant, and whether anything of worth remains after reason's defeat. The failure of seventeenth-century rationalism causes no alarm; the fate of Hume and Hegel can be taken in stride; Brightman's concrete and empirical reason can well be dispensed with – but what remains if reason, in the sense of the laws of logic, has to be abandoned? Of what value would be an irrational or illogical revelation?

The chief law of logic is the law of contradiction, and it is this law that maintains the distinction between truth and falsity. If this distinction cannot be maintained, then (as the ancient Sophists showed) all opinions are true and all opinions are false. Any proposition is as credible as any other. If therefore Nietzsche or Freud have used reasoning in coming to their position, and if reasoning distorts reality, and if one theory is no more true than another, it follows that these men have no good ground for asserting their theories. To deny reason, in the sense of the laws of logic, is to empty conversation or argument of all meaning.

Now, this is what Neo-orthodoxy (as well as Nietzsche) does. In his *Concluding*

Unscientific Postscript, Kierkegaard says that it makes no difference whether a man prays to God or to an idol, provided he prays passionately. Truth, he says, lies in the inward How, not in the external What. If only the How of the individual's relation is "true," then the individual is in truth – even though he is thus related to untruth.

Brunner also abolishes the distinction between truth and falsity. First, he refers to a kind of "truth" that cannot be expressed in words or grasped in intellectual concepts. What this truth is, no one can say. Second, the words and sentences, and intellectual content that "point to" this hidden truth may or may not be true. God can reveal himself through false propositions as well as through true ones (*Wahrheit als Begegnung – Truth As Encounter*, 88). We can never be sure, therefore, that what God tells us is true. Falsehood and truth have equal value.

Surely such value must be very little. For one thing, it relieves us of the responsibility of being consistent. Our creed can contain contradictory articles. Brunner argues that "straight line inference" must be curbed. We dare not follow out our principles to their logical conclusions. Not always, at any rate. Brunner, indeed, points out Schleiermacher's contradiction in insisting both on the absoluteness of Christianity and the discovery of a common element in all religions. He is also consistent when he argues that man must have been created righteous, for otherwise there could have been no Fall. But when Brunner comes to *Romans 9* and finds its obvious meaning distasteful, he declares that election is illogical and that if we drew inferences from it, we would conclude that God is not love. One cannot have love and logic both. Hence the Bible is consistently illogical.[\[2\]](#)

But if the Bible is illogical and if Brunner is illogical, do we not have a logical right to ignore them, for there is no illogical necessity that our faith should leap in their direction?

The purpose of the whole argument to this juncture has been to make three points: Neo-orthodoxy's irrational defense of revelation is self-destructive; modern philosophy's rational attack on revelation left itself without an epistemological foundation; and the kind of reason Thomism used to defend revelation was beset with fallacies. But now, to continue the argument, the general procedure of Reformation thought provides another possibility for a rational revelation.

The Reformation Way

In this case, a rational revelation is one that preserves the distinction between truth and falsity. It is in its entirety self-consistent. In other words, reason is identified as the laws of logic. Christianity is under no obligation to justify itself as rational in any other sense, for the history of philosophy has shown that all the other senses result in skepticism. Therefore, to claim that election, or the atonement, or any other doctrine is “irrational” is nothing more than to assert that these doctrines are distasteful to the objector. The accusation is not a substantiated intellectual conclusion, but an emotional antipathy. If the Biblical doctrines are self-consistent, they have met the only legitimate test of reason. This test of logic is precisely the requirement that a set of propositions be meaningful, whether spoken by God or man. And if propositions have no meaning, obviously they reveal nothing.

It is now fair to ask whether this construction is historically the Reformation viewpoint. Did Martin Luther and John Calvin accept the Bible as self-consistent, and did they recognize the sole test of logic?

The first of these two questions is the easier to answer. That the Bible presents a self-consistent intellectual system, and that Calvin was convinced of it, has been made sufficiently clear in his *Institutes* and *Commentaries*. The *Westminster Confession* is additional testimony. The Calvinistic love of logic is well known; and, as has been seen, it was a distaste for Calvinism that led Brunner to reject logic. This point, therefore, is characteristic of the Reformed Faith.

The second of these two questions is more complicated because the Reformers did not explicitly discuss logic as the sole test of a rational revelation. Their silence is understandable, however, for irrationalism is mainly a twentieth-century phenomenon that they did not anticipate. Nevertheless, that the preceding construction is implicit in their views may be plausibly inferred from their methods. They abandoned the scholastic philosophy; they spent no time attempting to prove the existence of God, much less the sensory origin of knowledge; the contrast between the *Institutes* and the *Summae* of Thomas is unmistakable. Hence they could not have used any “concrete and empirical reason.” Then, too, the principle that the Scriptures are their own infallible interpreter, and that what is unclear in one passage can be understood by a comparison with other passages, is nothing other than the application of the law of

contradiction. Logic therefore must have been the only test that the Reformers could have used.

I freely admit that some passages in Calvin seem to allow for a less skeptical reaction to the course of philosophy than this chapter presents. They must, however, be understood in the light of other very definite statements found in the same contexts.

One of Calvin's most generous acknowledgments of pagan learning is made in the *Institutes*, II.ii.14ff. The following summary and interpretation can easily be compared with the original. After rejecting the Platonic pre-existence of the soul, Calvin asserts that human ingenuity constrains us to acknowledge an innate intellectual principle in the human mind. Since this could not possibly be Brightman's concrete empirical reason, is it not more likely that Calvin had the laws of logic in mind? With this innate equipment, Roman lawyers delivered just principles of civil order; philosophers described nature with an exquisite science; those who by the art of logic have taught us to speak rationally cannot have been destitute of understanding; pagan mathematics could not have been the raving of madmen. No, the writings of the ancients are excellent because they proceeded from God.

This is indeed high praise. In fact, it is such high praise that its object can hardly be the absolute theoretical truth of pagan philosophies. Admittedly, Calvin was unaware of how mistaken the ancient learning was; nor can it be supposed that he had elaborated an instrumental theory of science. Yet his admiration of the physics, logic, mathematics, and other arts and sciences of antiquity can comfortably and more plausibly be divided between the intellectual brilliance displayed and the practical applications made possible. It is the energy, the ingenuity, the exquisiteness of the ancients that he admires, rather than the truth of their systems.

In the immediate sequel, Calvin corrects some misapprehensions of his intention. With respect to the kingdom of God and spiritual wisdom, the most sagacious of mankind are blinder than moles. The most apposite of their observations betray confusion. They saw the objects presented to their view in such a manner that by the sight they were not even directed to the truth, much less did they arrive at it. Fortuitously, by accident, some isolated sentences may be true; but human reason neither approaches, nor tends, nor directs its views toward the truth of God.

That Calvin did not base the truth and rationality of Scripture on external supports is better seen in an earlier chapter (I, viii). The title is: “Rational Proof to Establish the Belief of the Scripture.” In a twentieth-century setting this title is misleading. Today such a title would suggest an appeal to the superior authority of, perhaps, religious experience. This was not Calvin’s intention.

He says that without a prior certainty of revelation – a certainty stronger than any judgment of experience – the authority of the Scripture is defended in vain by arguments, by the consent of the church, or by any other support. Faith is founded, not in the wisdom of men, but by the power of God. The truth is vindicated from every doubt, when, unassisted by foreign aid, it is sufficient for its own support. The thought of this significant sentence is repeated at the end of the same chapter. While there are many subsidiary reasons by which the native dignity of the Scripture may be vindicated, he says, such alone are not sufficient to produce firm faith in it till the heavenly Father – revealing his own power therein (that is, in the Scripture itself) – places its authority beyond all controversy.

To these words of Calvin I should like to add only that the law of contradiction, or reason, is not an external test of Scripture. Logical consistency is exemplified in the Scripture, and thus the Scripture can be a meaningful revelation to the rational mind of man. Self-contradictory propositions would be meaningless, irrational, and could not constitute a revelation.

Some Contemporary Problems

If now Calvin could not have addressed himself explicitly to twentieth-century problems, the obligation lies the more heavily on us. Of course there are many, but there is one immediate attack on the possibility of a rational revelation that ought not to be ignored.

Theories of the origin, nature, and purpose of language have been recently developed that would prevent God from speaking the truth to man on the ground that language cannot convey literal truth. Some writers say that all language is symbolic or metaphorical. For example, Wilbur Marshall Urban (*Language and Reality*, 383, 433) asserts, “There are no strictly literal sentences...there is no such thing as literal truth...and any expression in language contains some symbolic element.” Other writers make more restricted claims and say only that

all religious language is metaphorical; from which it follows that if God uses language, he cannot tell the literal truth, but must speak in symbolism or mythology.

Those who defend the Bible as a true revelation must insist that it conveys literal truth. This does not mean that God cannot sometimes use symbolism and metaphor. Of course there is symbolism in *Ezekiel*, there are parables in the *Gospels*, and there are metaphors scattered throughout. God might have used even mythology and fable. But unless there are literal statements along with these figures of speech – or at the very least, unless figures of speech can be translated into literal truth – a book conveys no definite meaning.

Suppose the cross be selected as a Christian symbol, and suppose some flowery speaker should say, Let us live in the shadow of the cross. What can he mean? What does the cross symbolize? Does it symbolize the love of God? Or does it symbolize the wrath of God? Does it symbolize human suffering? Or does it symbolize the influence of the church? If there are no literal statements to give information as to what the cross symbolizes, these questions are unanswerable.

Let a person say that the cross symbolizes the love of God. However, if all language or all religious language is symbolical, the statement that the cross symbolizes the love of God is itself a symbol. A symbol of what? When this last question is answered, we shall find that this answer is again a symbol. Then another symbol will be needed, and another. And the whole process will be meaningless.

This contemporary theory of language is open to the same objections that were raised against the Thomistic notion of analogical knowledge. In order to have meaning, an analogy, a metaphor, or a symbol must be supported by some literal truth. If Samson was as strong as an ox, then an ox must literally be strong. If Christ is the lion of the tribe of Judah, then something must be literally true about lions and about Christ also. No matter with what literary embellishment the comparison be made, there must be a strictly true statement that has given rise to it. And a theory that says all language is symbolic is a theory that cannot be taken as literally true. Its own statements are metaphorical and meaningless.

Furthermore, a theory of language has to be taken as a part of a more general philosophic system. While some linguists may study a few minute details, a theory that concerns the origin, the nature, and the purpose of language

presupposes some overall view of human nature and of the world in which mankind exists. The contemporary theories are often based on an evolutionary philosophy in which human language is supposed to have originated in the squeals and grunts of animals. These evolutionary theories of language, and some that are not explicitly evolutionary, reveal their connection with epistemology by making sensory impressions the immediate source of language. The first words ever spoken were supposedly nouns or names produced by imitating the sound that an animal or a waterfall made; or if the object made no noise, some more arbitrary method was used to attach a noun to it.

When this view is accepted by Thomists, they inherit the problem of passing from a sensory-based language to a proper mode of expressing theological propositions. The logical positivists, on the other hand, conclude with more show of reason that this cannot be done, and that theological language is nonsense. But in any case, a theory of language must be set into a complete system of philosophy. It cannot stand in isolation.

Both the naturalistic evolutionist and the evangelical Christian have their guiding principles. The former has no choice but to develop language from animal cries – no matter what the difficulties may be (and they are insuperable). The latter, by reason of the doctrine of creation, must maintain that language is adequate for all religious and theological expression – no matter what the difficulties may be (but they are not very great). The possibility of rational communication between God and man is easily explained on theistic presuppositions.

If God created man in his own rational image and endowed him with the power of speech, then a purpose of language – in fact, the chief purpose of language – would naturally be the revelation of truth to man and the prayers of man to God. In a theistic philosophy one ought not to say, as a recent Thomist has said, that all language has been devised in order to describe and discuss the finite objects of our sense-experience (E. L. Mascall, *Words and Images*, 101). On the contrary, language was devised by God; that is, God created man rational for the purpose of theological expression. Language is, of course, adaptable to sensory description and the daily routine of life, but it is unnecessary to invent the problem of how sensory expressions can be transmuted into a proper method of talking about God.

This immediately overturns the objection to verbal inspiration that is based on the alleged finitude and imperfections of language. If reason, that is, logic, which

makes speech possible, is a God-given faculty, it must be adequate to its divinely appointed task. And its task is the reception of divinely revealed information and the systematization of these propositions in dogmatic theology.

To sum up: Language is capable of conveying literal truths because the laws of logic are necessary. There is no substitute for them. Philosophers who deny them reduce their own denials to nonsense syllables. Even where the necessity of logic is not denied, if reason is used in some other sense as a source of truth, the result has been skepticism. Therefore, revelation is not only rational, but it is the only hope of maintaining rationality. And this is corroborated by the actual consistency that we discover when we examine the verbally inspired revelation called the Bible.

[1] Some Romanists take the cosmological argument, not as logically demonstrative, but as a method of directing the attention to certain features of finite beings from which the existence of God can be seen without a discursive process. Compare E. L. Mascall, *Words and Images*, 84. But, I judge, this is not standard Thomism.

[2] For a thorough analysis of Brunner's thought, see the excellent volume, *Brunner's Concept of Revelation*, by Paul King Jewett, James Clarke & Co., 1954

Revealed Religion

Few questions, if any, are as important as the status of revealed religion. From an immediately practical point of view, revelation is the divide separating Bertrand Russell's unyielding, atheistic despair from the Christian hope of eternal life.

Even such a positivist as Herbert Feigl, in the opening sentences of his important *Logical Empiricism*, writes:

Probably the most decisive division among philosophical attitudes is the one between the worldly and the other-worldly types of thought.... Very likely there is here an irreconcilable divergence. It goes deeper than disagreement in doctrine; at bottom it is a difference in basic aim and interest.... The very issue of the jurisdictional power of the appeal to logic and experience (and with it the question of just what empirical evidence can establish) is at stake.

Now the hope of eternal life in another world depends on God; and to deny the existence of God is to reduce the universe to a pitiless inhuman machine, or, since scientific mechanism cannot in reality be sustained, to a purposeless chaos in which human life is a tragic futility.

From a more academic viewpoint, yet immediately just as practical, the status of revelation determines the specific nature of religion. In doing so, it not only sets the ethical standards of daily living but also modifies or controls the theory of psychology and of politics and the philosophy of history. For example, a good argument can be framed to show that in political theory, atheism and even some forms of religion imply tyranny, whereas the justification of minority rights and the authority of a limited government depend on a specific type of revelation (see my *A Christian View of Men and Things*, chapters 3 and 4).

These few paragraphs are sufficient to indicate the importance of revealed religion. No effort will be made here to prove the existence of God or the possibility of a divine revelation, though insofar as objections are removed, the following argument will have an indirect bearing upon these questions. What the

contemporary situation requires is that the term *revelation* be explained. In good English the word is used in several senses. Each has more or less content. One meaning may prove to be virtually worthless; another may serve as the basis for a multitude of detailed conclusions; and a third may be placed midway between the two in fruitfulness.

What follows begins with this third type of meaning – a meaning, however, that is chronologically early. Then come some contemporary views of revelation that turn out to be logically sterile. And finally there will be an examination of one that is both chronologically early and satisfactorily productive both logically and practically.

That God reveals himself to man in nature is a very early view of the mode of revelation. It is found in Aristotle and other pagan philosophers, with whom we shall not have much to do, and of course it is expressed in many parts of the Bible. But the acknowledgment that the heavens declare the glory of God has been developed in two rather different formulations.

Strict Natural Theology

The first of these may be called natural theology in the strictest sense. Thomas Aquinas and the Roman Catholic church hold, not merely that God can be known in nature, but that the existence of God can irrefragably be demonstrated without any *a priori* equipment from the data of sensory perception. To make good this claim, Thomas, following the lead of Aristotle, worked out an amazingly intricate system of philosophy.

This tremendous achievement merits professional and meticulous examination. The limits of the present argument, however, preclude any such elaborate analysis. In another volume (*Thales to Dewey*, 274-278)[\[11\]](#), I have tried to show that technical analysis can indicate several points (for example, the concepts of potentiality and motion, the circular argument on infinite regress, the theory of analogy) at which the chain of Thomas' syllogisms breaks down. Surely it is extreme to claim, as the Thomists do, that the Apostle Paul in *Romans* 1:20 guarantees the validity of the complete argument. Now, if the Thomistic proofs are fallacious, as many non-Romanists are willing to admit, this would eliminate natural theology from any further consideration.

But for those who are suspicious of or unfamiliar with philosophy, there is a more obviously theological objection to Thomism. Karl Barth in our day has become well known for his stringent opposition to all natural theology; and a part of his argument, in the form of a destructive hypothetical syllogism, maintains that if the theistic proofs were in fact valid, they would quite demolish all Christianity.

Significant knowledge of God cannot be had, argues Barth, if “we reserve the question to which the doctrine of the Trinity is the answer (namely, Who God is) and deal first with his existence and his nature, as if this That and What could be determined otherwise than on the presupposition of the Who” (*Church Dogmatics*, I, 345). On the next page he continues, “If we do not know God in the way in which he reveals himself as the one, namely, *distincte in tribus personis*, the inevitable result is that *nudum et inane duntaxat Dei nomen sine vero Deo in cerebro nostro volitat*” (Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xiii.2). Or, in English, if we do not know God as one substance in three Persons, the inevitable result is a blank, empty name floating in our brains without any idea of the true God.

A third reference to Barth, in which he quotes C. J. Nitzsch with approval, takes us a step further. “So long as theism ‘only distinguishes God and the world and never God from God, it is always caught in the reversion or transition to the pantheistic or other denial of absolute being. A perfect protection against atheism, polytheism, pantheism, or dualism there can only be with the doctrine of the Trinity” (*Church Dogmatics*, I, 347).

If it seems strange to accuse Thomas of aiding and abetting atheism and pantheism, the direction of natural theology can better be seen as it worked itself out in Hegel and the theologians who followed him. The connection with Thomas lies in the fact that his terms denoting God are all neuters: *ens perfectissimum*, *primum movens*, and so on. This Aristotelian construction, essentially pagan, obscures the personality of God, with the result that an elevation of this neuter to the status of the Christian Trinity becomes an insuperable difficulty. With the advent of Hegelian absolutism, a person becomes an individual mode of the Absolute Spirit; while the Spirit, being Absolute, cannot be a person.

Theologians such as Rudolph Siebeck, Hermann Lotze, Richard Rothe, and Albrecht Ritschl, who attempted to preserve the personality of God, found their principles unequal to the task God became merely the content of the highest human values, so that in Modernism the object of worship became man himself

(compare *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, 286-97).

At this point three conclusions may be drawn: (a) The theistic proofs are destructive of Christianity; (b) but fortunately they are invalid, so that Christianity escapes this danger; and (c) insofar as natural theology is an impossibility, the need of a revealed religion becomes clearer.

Less and More

Friedrich Schleiermacher represents a type of theology that is less strict logically than Thomas' claimed to be but that at the same time hoped to extend itself to more doctrines. Thomas, of course, added Biblical revelation to his natural theology; and only in that could he find the truth of the Trinity, creation, atonement, and so on. Schleiermacher turns from the Aristotelian apparatus of motion and prime mover and expects to uncover the whole of Christianity by an analysis of human nature, or, more accurately, the Christian consciousness.

Influenced by Pietism, Schleiermacher made emotion the essence of religion. Whereas the Reformers had based Christian experience on ideas and doctrine, for him theology is precisely the description of religious experience. The center of this experience is a feeling of absolute dependence, and God exists because we feel dependent on him. It is not that the feeling is dependent on a prior knowledge of God but rather that the knowledge is dependent on the feeling. Doctrines, to say it again, are descriptions of this feeling.

Schleiermacher was in fact a pantheist, and his influence combined with that of Hegel to deny the personality of God, as explained above. Karl Barth shows how Modernism developed from Schleiermacher, and why this type of religion substituted man for God as the object of worship. The empirical nature of his theology led away from the original "Christian" consciousness to a nondescript psychology of religion and became the foundation of contemporary humanism. The story is interesting and complex.[\[2\]](#)

So far as logical status is concerned, however, the procedure of Schleiermacher, since it cannot be classed with the alleged irrefragable demonstrations of Thomas, must either be judged more glaringly fallacious or be classified with the loose form of natural theology in the next paragraph.

Loose Natural Theology

There is another and looser sense of natural theology to which the preceding arguments do not seem to apply. Instead of attempting an irrefragable demonstration of the existence of an *ens perfectissimum*, one might claim merely that the heavens declare the glory of God. Certainly this is natural, though perhaps it should not be labeled theology. Theology is commonly supposed to be somewhat systematic, and this is a most unsystematic knowledge of God.

Not only is it unsystematic; it is also quite inadequate and minimal at best. Without examining too closely the logic involved, let us ask what may be known of God by an examination of nature. First of all, it will be said that the planets as they move according to Kepler's three laws show that God is a great mathematician – at least as good a mathematician as Kepler, and perhaps even better.

Since this amount of knowledge does not equal omniscience, someone may claim that the creation of the planets and stars is evidence of omnipotence. This claim, however, must be disallowed – not because creation would be insufficient evidence of omnipotence, but because we have no empirical evidence of creation. We do indeed see the stars, but we did not see God create them. If, now, instead of relying on observation, the claimant attempts to argue that the visible existence of the stars proves that they were created, we would have to return to an examination of natural theology in its strict sense. And we should have to do this with even less hope of success, for an argument that proves creation is considerably more difficult to construct than one that proves only the existence of some God. In fact, Thomas Aquinas himself, who worked out in such detail and laid such stress on and was so certain of his theistic proofs, says explicitly, “That the world did not always exist, we hold by faith alone: It cannot be proved demonstratively” (*Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 46, Art. 2).

If, of course, we have some other source of knowledge – a bona fide revelation – that assures us of divine creation, we can then ascribe to the Creator the amount of power displayed in the heavens. But even so – and aside from the fact that we are now depending on special revelation – this amount of power, great as it is, cannot be omnipotence. Beyond the amount we observe, there can always be more.

Observation of nature is a very unsatisfactory method of obtaining knowledge

of God. Christians are often unwilling to face the difficulties involved, and they sometimes try to ignore what their opponents see so clearly. The theory of evolution has described nature as red in tooth and claw. How can we see God in animal pain? Human beings are a part of nature, too; and the brutalities of Hitler and Stalin, the Red Chinese massacre of the Tibetans, and nearly all the rest of human history make a sorry picture. On such observations as these, Voltaire wrote his outlandish *Candide*; Hume his restrained *Dialogues on Natural Religion* (chapters 10 and 11); and Julian Huxley, with an air of superiority, his *Religion Without Revelation*.

Again, let us insist – if we have some source of information other than observation of nature, if God has revealed some parts of a philosophy of history – we can handle these unpleasant facts. Candid opponents of Christianity admit this possibility. But natural theology cannot handle them, and candid Christians ought to admit it.

To do the best for this loose form of natural theology, we may well say that the heavens make some display of God's power and glory; that the brutality of tyrants elicits a disaffection that attests the existence of a dim and feeble conscience that can serve as the ground of moral responsibility; but that nothing in the way of practical plans for amelioration is forthcoming.

Though dim and restricted, this natural knowledge of God is not to be denied. *Romans* 1:20 may not guarantee the validity of the theistic proofs, but it plainly asserts some knowledge of God derived from “the things that are made.” *Romans* 2:15 shows a minimal *a priori* knowledge of moral principles. On such natural knowledge human responsibility depends. When Karl Barth argues that the heathen which Paul has in view are not the heathen generally but only those to whom he had preached the Gospel, so that all the others have no knowledge of God at all, we regret that his exegetical powers failed him (compare *Church Dogmatics*, II:1:119ff). Yet this natural knowledge is minimal in extent and practically useless in communicating the way of salvation. Who can deny that the savage tribes of the jungles know very little about God?

In view of these considerations, the position of orthodox Protestantism seems soundly based, as expressed in the *Westminster Confession*, which – combining observation of nature with what I take to be a reference to innate moral ideas – pronounces this definitive judgment on natural theology in its opening sentence: “Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far

manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation.” It would seem, therefore, that some sort of revealed religion is a necessity.

Encounter

Such is the flexibility of the English language that there is nothing improper in a Thomist’s or a modernist’s assertion that nature (physical or human) is a “revelation” of God. This meaning of revelation, however, gives rise to a dry scholasticism and barren deism that, even if the validity of their arguments is not questioned, seem at best to enervate true and vital religion. Hence, without disallowing the usages of English, some devout writers prefer to indicate by the term *revelation* something more direct and personal. Having repudiated natural theology, they equate revelation with “encounter.”

This contemporary idea of revelation – revelation as a living encounter – is foreshadowed in earlier movements. The Pietists sought a more personal religion than intellectual theology seemed to offer. The Quakers spoke of an inner light and waited for the Spirit to move them to speak in meeting. Even Biblical terminology allows for a testimony of the Holy Spirit, which could be construed as a living revelation. There have always been individuals who sought God’s immediate guidance both for the practical details of daily conduct and for the proper forms of divine worship. Some people saw visions and dreamed dreams, while Joan of Arc heard voices.

Then there were the outright mystics who fell into trances. The droplets of their personality were poured out into the ocean of God’s being. Like air when it is so impregnated with light that it is more light than air, and like iron, that in the fire looks more like fire than iron, so the mystic soul becomes ineffably divine. No conceptual information is thus received, but it is a deeply satisfying experience.

This mystic or pietistic type of mind, exemplified in all ages, provides a fertile ground for the more recent developments. However, the contemporary movement that hangs its vital religion on event or encounter is not a lineal and direct descendant of mysticism or pietism. Certain modern complications must be taken into account. These will be considered later on. But first a most important point of similarity between the earlier and the current movements requires

emphasis. The similarity is their anti-intellectualism. As Bernard was distressed by the “rationalism” of Abelard, so Søren Kierkegaard reacted against the omniscience of Hegel.

Hegelianism purports to furnish us with a completely rational explanation of all the universe. The philosopher had begun his system with the most empty and most general of all concepts. An analysis of this concept gave rise to its opposite or contradictory. Then Hegel's genius discovered how to harmonize the contradiction in a higher synthesis. The synthesis in turn gives rise to its contradictory, and these are then harmonized, and so on until the Concrete Absolute Universal synthesizes everything. In Hegelian philosophy, no problem escapes this dialectic solution.

Kierkegaard rejects the thesis-antithesis-synthesis scheme in favor of a two-term dialectic. Each concept has its contradictory, but no synthesis is possible. The final word is not Absolute, but Paradox.

The motivation for the attack against Hegel was supplied by the hypocrisy, the complacency, and the stupidity of the State church. Kierkegaard was fed up with the sawdust fare Hegelian pastors were feeding their parishioners. Literally and symbolically, the pastors reduced Christ's miracle of the loaves and fishes to an ordinary picnic; original sin became an inherited stomach disorder that was caused by Adam's eating some poisonous food. In such a theology, God and supernaturalism play no part. The spirit of the age had replaced the Holy Spirit and time had swallowed up eternity. One got his Christianity as one got his citizenship – by being born in Denmark. Piety was conformity to custom, and society had submerged the individual. It was in opposition to hypocrisy, citizen-Christianity, and socialism that Kierkegaard cried for a passionate, individual decision. Hegelian philosophy had magnified conceptual abstract knowledge; but true religion, says Kierkegaard, does not consist in understanding anything: Religion is a matter of feeling, of anti-intellectual passionateness. What one believes is of no importance; how one believes it makes all the difference in the world.

In one passage Kierkegaard describes two men at prayer. One is in a Lutheran church and entertains a true conception of God. But because he prays in a false spirit, he is in reality praying to an idol. The other man is in a heathen temple praying to idols; but since he prays with an infinite passion, he is in truth praying to God – for truth lies in the inward How, not in the external What.

Two quotations from Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* state the general position:

An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.

If one asks subjectively about the truth, one is reflecting subjectively about the relation of the individual; if only the How of this relation is in truth, then the individual is in truth, even though he is thus related to untruth.

Kierkegaard spoke in vain to his generation. No one paid any attention. Everyone remained complacent and hypocritical. It took events of another character – events that had no parallel in the days when Bernard opposed the rationalism of Abelard – to force the meaning of Kierkegaard on the twentieth century. Today the modernistic optimism of the nineteenth century, a modernism that viewed original sin as a stomach disorder to be cured by the advances of medical science, has been shattered by the incredible devastation of two world wars. Complacency has given way to anxiety. Tragedy, torture, and death have been our lot, and a still worse World War III looms over us. Despairing of intellectual solutions in a world of insane chaos, the theologians of the twentieth century remembered the iconoclastic Dane.

The first of these was Karl Barth, who seized upon the notion of paradox and emphasized the opposition between time and eternity, but whose later writings toned down the themes. Emil Brunner was his early companion, though late there was a rift between them. Brunner made more of paradox and remained more outspoken against logic. Rudolf Bultmann, profoundly influenced by the philosopher Heidegger, is a still different color on the same spectrum. Bultmann may rather properly be called an existentialist, though Barth explicitly rejects Existentialism. And finally one ought to mention Jean-Paul Sartre, who exemplifies the atheistic wing of this movement.

The differences among these men make it impossible to frame any summary that would apply accurately to them all. But there is a basic thesis that unites them. They are all anti-Hegelian; they all agree that intellectualism is superficial; they or their followers are apt to use the slogans of Romanticism – such as, life is deeper than logic, and, experience is more real than thought; and finally they all

more or less explicitly put paradox and contradiction at the heart of reality and assert that some problems are inherently insoluble.

This Neo-orthodoxy, this Neo-supernaturalism, or – in philosophic language – this Existentialism is not to be defined simply as an interest in matters of ultimate concern. Some existentialists try to do this and then claim that Augustine and Luther were existentialists. This is bad logic and bad scholarship. The important thing is that Existentialism repudiates rational thought, as Augustine and Luther never did. Sometimes Pascal is called a forerunner of Existentialism; but Pascal wrote, as Brunner and Sartre never could write, “All our dignity consists in thought.” The essential point about these twentieth-century theologians is that they repudiate thought and extol non-intellectual experience.

Jean-Paul Sartre attempts to give a more positive and more technical summary of Existentialism. He asserts its common thesis to be “existence precedes essence.” This anti-Platonic and anti-Hegelian phrase means that the Aristotelian That precedes the Aristotelian What. For example, if a carpenter wishes to make a cabinet, he must first know what a cabinet is and what particular size and shape of cabinet he intends to make. Here the What precedes the That: Essence precedes existence. So too the Christian idea of God includes the notion that God knew what he was going to create before he created it. The doctrine of Providence ascribes to God a knowledge or plan of history that antedates the events. This is what Sartre denies. There is no pre-existent plan of history, nor even a determinate human nature that all men must have. Each man makes himself what he becomes. The What follows the That.

There are good reasons for selecting this as the definitive principle of Existentialism even in its theological forms. These authors emphasize human freedom, an open universe, and an indeterminate nature in such a way that – by implication at least – God can have no plan. For example, Langdon Gilkey, although he is not a thoroughgoing existentialist, has absorbed enough of it to write:

Existence, while revealing an ultimate coherence and meaning, will not be completely reduced to any clear and precise sequence of relationships. There are depths of freedom of creativity, and even of incoherence, within the mystery of being, which defy the attempt to organize life into simple rational patterns. Thus the very goal of philosophy is fatal to full understanding.... The insistent intuitions that

our purposes are effective and our individuality is of value, belie systems in which all is determined from beyond ourselves.... (Maker of Heaven and Earth, 145)

In spite of the phrase “an ultimate coherence,” and the word “simple” in the phrase “simple rational patterns,” the thought denies ultimate, all-inclusive order and refuses to acknowledge a God beyond us who has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. Similar and perhaps even stronger denials of providence and predestination can be found in other writers.

Whereas Sartre sees clearly the atheistic implications’ of his definition of Existentialism and his defense of freedom, the theologians attempt to escape them. To repeat, Karl Barth in particular asserts that he will have no part in “existential screaming and the like.”

Yet Barth can hardly escape the charge of anti-intellectualism, and still less can Brunner. These men and those whom they have influenced argue that the intellect deals with abstractions and class concepts; it cannot handle the unique. But every individual, especially every human individual, is unique. We do not know persons the way we know things. There is an It-Truth and a Thou-Truth; there is knowledge about and there is knowledge by acquaintance. Now, God is a person. Therefore, we cannot know about him; we must encounter him in a face-to-face confrontation. As Kierkegaard said, truth – non-intellectual truth, real truth – is subjective. It is not knowledge, but a passionate experience.

These characterizations – though they give scant information on the details of Barth’s twenty volumes of *Church Dogmatics* or on Sartre’s long *Being and Nothingness* – are, I believe, about as accurate as possible. With them in mind it is now time to examine more closely the idea of revelation as encounter. First, let us return to Kierkegaard for a moment.

Kierkegaard’s type of religion faces an obvious and inevitable question. If it makes no difference what one believes, if only the How is important, and if praying to idols is satisfactory, would not a passionate appropriation of the Devil be as praiseworthy as a decision for Christ?

Kierkegaard notices this question and makes a feeble attempt to answer it. He tries to distinguish between the inwardness of infinity and the inwardness of the finite. The former is a Christian inwardness and is based on God; the latter relates

to some other object.

This answer, however, is upside down. If there were a prior objective knowledge of God, a person could use this objective knowledge as a basis to judge that his passionate appropriation was infinite. But if there is no prior objective knowledge of God, and if therefore one is limited to the introspection of his own feelings, no qualitative difference between the two passionate acts of appropriation can be discerned. If, further, an idol is as satisfactory as God, why would not the socialism of Hegel and Marx be as acceptable as Kierkegaard and individualism? Communists are rather passionate, are they not?

It is this inability to justify one decision in contradistinction to the opposite decision, it is the equal value of encounter with God and encounter with an idol, it is the emphasis on the How and the rejection of the What, that has in one form and another plagued the existentialist movement down to the present. For example, the defects in Kierkegaard's subjectivism have not been removed in Emil Brunner's development of the same theme. Brunner doubtless improves upon Kierkegaard in that he interprets the passionate appropriation and moment of decision to be, what Kierkegaard did not clearly say, a personal encounter. Yet this religious experience gives no theological knowledge. It differs from ordinary cognition because of the distinction between It-Truth and Thou-Truth. In the religious field this bifurcation of knowledge was anticipated by Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber; in secular philosophy Brunner strangely finds himself in the company of Moritz Schlick, who separated *Erleben* from *Erkennen*, and Bertrand Russell, who distinguished between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description.

In fact the religious form of this bifurcation is more devastating to knowledge than the secular form. It prevents us from even thinking about God. Brunner writes,

God and the medium of conceptuality are mutually exclusive. God is personal and discloses himself only in the medium of personality, hence in a personal way, not through being thought.... One cannot be related to God by way of thinking.... To know God does not mean merely to know about God, but to be personally encountered of him (Philosophie und Offenbarung, 50)

How little of thought and knowledge Brunner leaves to religion can be seen in

tracing through his argument in *The Divine-Human Encounter*. He opens with the lament that the early church succumbed to the evil Greek influence that made revelation a communication of truth, and made faith an acceptance of these truths; then nearly a hundred pages later he concludes: “All words have only an instrumental value. Neither the spoken words *nor their conceptual content* are the Word itself, but only its frame” (19, 110, italics mine).

In this anti-intellectualism, faith – if there be such a thing – becomes a paradox. The paradoxes of faith, Brunner says, are not merely problems difficult to solve but are “necessary contradictions in themselves and therefore also contradictions against the fundamental law of all knowledge, the law of contradiction, *ergo* no knowledge” (*Philosophie und Offenbarung – Philosophy and Revelation*, 34). Specifically, he identifies the Trinity and the two natures of Christ as “logical monstrosities” – precious possessions of the church, no doubt, but nonetheless logical monstrosities. Theology – that is, Brunner’s theology – is not concerned with the univocal truth of reason; revelation must not be equated with a system of revealed doctrine; rather, theology has to do with the incomprehensible personal unity that binds its contradictions together.

In other words (my words), faith is insanity.

A criticism of the encounter theory of revelation need not spend much time on the philosophic intricacies of Martin Heidegger or Jean-Paul Sartre, because every detail is subject to the all-encompassing theory of knowledge and truth. The bifurcation of truth into It-Truth and Thou-Truth makes the term *truth* equivocal; and besides this, if it preserves anything at all on the side of encounter or *Erlebnis*, it preserves it as an unknowable *Ding an sich*. Confusion or deception then arises by talking about truth and by making believe that the talk, or the books published, are in some sense intelligible. They are not intelligible, for truth as encounter just is not truth at all.

In addition to the untenable and unresolved dualism, the evidence adduced actually tells against the conclusion. Phraseology such as, “We rationally analyze things, but we meet people,” may be good rhetoric; but to deny that a person can be an object of thought flies in the face of our everyday procedures. Granted that although our best knowledge of persons comes not from our observation of them as physical objects but from their voluntary self-disclosure, this self-disclosure is best made by speaking and by speaking intelligibly. If a person should refuse to talk, what good would it do to meet him? This is equally true in the case of God.

Granted again (or, rather, demanded and insisted upon) that any knowledge a man may have of God depends on God's voluntary self-disclosure, what good would it be – for religion, for daily conduct, for theology or philosophy – to meet God if he disclosed nothing? Of course persons should be met, but they should be met in order to converse with them.

For this reason, the seemingly pious notion that Jesus Christ is God's revelation and that all our religion and theology derives from meeting Christ precludes systematic theology and all definite religion as well.

Of course Jesus is the living Word of God. We do not for a moment deny it. Of course God has in these last days revealed himself to us in his Son. But if the person of Christ is divorced from what Jesus of Nazareth said, and if the person of Christ is divorced from what God said about him through the apostles, how can we know what Christ has done for us? A mere encounter would leave the terms *regeneration*, *imputation*, and *justification* meaningless. Indeed, if there were no intelligible speech or thought, we could never know whether an encounter was an encounter with Christ the Son of God or whether it was Kierkegaard's encounter with an idol. The very identification of Jesus as the Son of God cannot possibly be made without intelligible thought.

Knowledge by acquaintance, in the anti-intellectual sense of encounter, *Begegnung*, or *Erlebnis*, will result in no religion other than some emotional entertainment. Theology there cannot be.

This point needs some emphasis and repetition. A meeting in which no conceptual knowledge or intellectual content was conveyed would not give the subject any reason for *thinking* he had met *God*. Nor could such an inarticulate experience point to anything definite beyond itself. Though the experience might still be stubbornly called religion by those who think or, better, feel that emotion is the essence of religion, it could never be identified as Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. These three require ideas – a *What*, and not merely a *How*.

That Existentialism is a new religion completely different from Christianity is unwittingly made clear in *Pittsburgh Perspective*, a publication of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. In an article, "The Bible, Orthodoxy, and Karl Barth" (March 1963), the author, after giving various detailed reasons in opposition to the orthodox doctrine of inspiration, brings his argument to its culmination by contrasting two types of religion. The one is "rationalistic": Its conception of

“personal knowledge is painfully barren”; “the character of the revelatory word as an existential address is almost entirely overlooked in favor of the idea that the word provides true information”; one orthodox writer mentions the need for worship and for ethical conduct, and “these help to mitigate the intellectualism of his concept of theology. But they do not yet carry his thought into the range of problems that arise in the existentialistic-personalistic way of thinking.” The author is obviously contrasting two types of religion, and the type he prefers is not historic Christianity.

The existentialistic phraseology about encounter and personality seems attractive to many who do not think beyond the language of propaganda. Examples of impressive but completely empty phrases abound. Another author insisted that religion is an “intensely personal” affair. No doubt it is. So is the study of calculus – no one can do it for you. So is brushing your teeth. But no conclusions as to the nature, characteristics, value, or importance of the activity – or as to what we should properly do about it – can be drawn from the phrase “intensely personal.” Such language is merely an emotional outburst. It is an empty phrase from an empty mind.

That Existentialism and the personalistic way of thinking, or, better, the personalistic way of not thinking, are the antithesis of Christianity needs to be impressed upon all. The fact that Nietzsche was one of the forerunners of Existentialism, the fact that Heidegger was a Nazi who ended his speeches with “Heil Hitler,” and the fact that Sartre is an atheist may fall short of full proof that Existentialism is anti-Christian. But strictly theological considerations do not fall short of full proof.

The fundamental antagonism between Existentialism and Christianity is substantiated by examining the relation between encounter and the belief in a future life. Existentialism, in its reaction against abstract, eternal truths, has emphasized death – my death – the death of the individual. Heidegger speaks of death as the end whereby a man’s existence becomes complete. His capacity to anticipate death, not as a common phenomenon but his own death, is the basis of his ability to grasp his existence as a whole. So far as society is concerned, one man can be replaced by another. When a banker retires, another continues the same functions. But man is not a function, and I must do my own dying. Without anticipating death, a man cannot live “authentically.”

But what can revelation as encounter tell us about death and a future life?

Particularly, what can encounter tell us about a bodily resurrection from the dead? A non-conceptual, unintelligible encounter could never give us the information that Christ will return to raise the dead. It cannot even give us the minimum assurance of some sort of future life. Suppose with infinite passion I commit myself to freedom or decide to live authentically instead of committing suicide or submerging myself in the masses: How could this emotional experience possibly inform me that I shall be conscious one hundred years from today and what the quality of that consciousness will be? In the face of death, what we need is not infinite passion but definite information.

Other details of Christian theology and ecclesiology vanish. How does *Erlebnis* convince me of infant baptism or of the immersion of adults? By what standard do I determine the number of the sacraments and the forms of their administration? Apart from revealed information, can papacy, episcopacy, Presbyterianism, or congregationalism be defended or attacked? Is it not rather clear that anti-intellectual religion can settle the nature of the church only by an arbitrary decision on the part of its human officers?

And for a final point, the same difficulty is found in questions of morality also. That this should be true of Sartre's atheistic Existentialism need not be surprising. What is surprising is Sartre's explicit recommendations of one type of life above another. If all is permitted, if man is the sole source of his values, if he is responsible even for his physic-psychological makeup and for the situation in which he finds himself (all of which Sartre apparently asserts), then how can Sartre implicitly require all men to choose freedom and live authentically?

The attenuated theism of the other Neo-orthodox writers gives no better foundation for the distinction between right and wrong. It is true that Brunner says, "God...discloses himself...through actual address, summons, command." In fact, he says this in the very passage in which he asserts, "God and the medium of conceptuality are mutually exclusive," and where he also says, "One cannot be related to God by way of thinking." But thinking is required if God is to address us by way of command. A God who speaks intelligibly can issue the Ten Commandments, but an encounter commands as little as it informs. Once more, all the forms of worship are left to ecclesiastical politics (and all forms of morality too).

The great difficulty, as should now be clear, is the refusal to accept the law of contradiction. *Erlebnis*, faith, or encounter curbs logic. The result is inconsistency

beyond excuse. Only the people Alice encountered in Wonderland can believe contradictions and logical monstrosities.

Verbal Revelation

It is now time to turn to something logical, consistent, and intelligible. The Christian view of revelation – while it admits to an empirical display of God's power in astronomy, and requires the *a priori* of the divine image in man, and while it above all makes possible an “encounter” with the mind of God – mainly identifies God's revelation with the words of Scripture. God has told us some things; he has spoken; he has given us information.

In several of the Neo-orthodox writers there are statements that the idea of a verbal revelation, according to which God gives man true information, was an invention of a late Protestant scholasticism that had lost the original religious fervor of the Reformers.

Now, it is to be admitted – indeed it is to be insisted upon that the later creeds, which (scholastic or not) represent the most authoritative and most mature conclusions of Reformation thought, teach the doctrine of Biblical infallibility. Of all the creeds, the *Westminster Confession* is the longest and the most carefully composed. The official doctrinal position of all Presbyterian denominations, it states that the Holy Scripture or Word of God (which it defines by naming the sixty-six books) is to be believed and obeyed because of the authority of God, its author. The Bible is to be received, continues the *Confession*, because it is the Word of God, who is truth itself. Since the whole counsel of God is found in the Bible, nothing whatever is to be added to it. In all controversies the church is to make its final appeal to the Bible, and the Supreme Judge by which all councils and opinion are to be examined is no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures. To avoid the hypocritical objection that the Spirit may speak in some parts of the Bible but not in others, the *Confession* not only defines the Word of God as the sixty-six books but also later explains saving faith as follows: “By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true *whatsoever* is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein.”

An earlier confession, the *Belgic Confession* of 1561, states the same doctrine of Scripture: “We believe that the Holy Scriptures are contained in two books,

namely, the Old and New Testaments, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged.” This is an assertion of inerrancy; and to make it clear that inerrancy characterizes all the Bible and not just some portions, the *Belgic Confession*, after naming the sixty-six books, adds the words, “We receive all these books...believing, without any doubt, all things contained in them....”

The *Second Helvetic Confession* reads: “*Credimus et confitemur Scripturas Canonicas sanctorum Prophetarum et Apostolorum utriusque Testamenti ipsum verum esse verbum Dei.... Nam Deus ipse loquutus est Patribus, Prophetis, et Apostolis, et loquitur adhuc nobis per Scripturas Sanctas...ne ei aliquid vel addatur vel detrahatur.*” (“We believe and confess that the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments are the very Word of God.... For God himself spoke by the fathers, prophets and apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures...to which nothing may be added or subtracted.”)

These creedal positions are clearly and explicitly incompatible with the Neo-orthodox view of the Bible. But is it true that this creedal position can be properly referred to by the derogatory term “scholasticism”? Do the creeds add artificial doctrines that differ from the preaching of Calvin and Luther? Did the Reformers deny that the Bible is the very Word of God? Did they deny the inerrancy of verbal inspiration?

First, let us look at Calvin. Since the truthfulness of Scripture was not formally denied by the Romanists, the subject is less thoroughly treated in the writings of the Reformers than is the doctrine of free grace. But Calvin’s incidental remarks are clear enough.^[3] In one place he says,

God is its Author. The principal proof therefore of the Scriptures is everywhere derived from the character of the Divine Speaker. The prophets bring forth the sacred name of God to compel the submission of the whole world.... This use of the divine name is neither rash nor fallacious.... The Scripture exhibits the plainest evidences that it is God who speaks in it. (*Institutes*, I.vii.4)

Indeed, instead of attributing to Calvin a looser view of Scripture than that of the *Westminster Confession*, it is easier, to understand or misunderstand him as holding a more stringent view. In describing the method of inspiration Calvin uses the much maligned word “dictation.” He says, “The Holy Spirit dictated to the prophets and the apostles” exactly what he wanted the finished writing to contain.

And this is not a lone reference. Calvin's work abounds with references to the divine dictation of Scripture.

Some samples of Calvin's phraseology, which may be checked in Kantzer's work, are these: "God was pleased to commit his word to writing.... Historical details were added, which are also the composition of prophets but dictated by the Holy Spirit." "For the Word of God is not distinguished from the words of the prophet, as though the prophet had added anything of his own." Calvin refers to Scripture as the "sure and infallible record" and as the "unerring standard," "free from every stain or defect." With regard to the imprecatory *Psalms*, Calvin says, "David did not rashly or unadvisedly utter curses against his enemies, but strictly adhered to what the Spirit dictated."

Calvin's view of the nature of dictation and the orthodox doctrine of verbal inspiration have so frequently been misunderstood, and the misunderstanding has been so frequently pointed out, that one is forced to surmise that the misrepresentation is deliberate. Those who attack the orthodox Protestant doctrine try to reduce divine dictation to the so-called mechanical dictation of a business office. The liberals would have us think that orthodox theologians never even dreamed that God could use a prophet's personality. They, the liberals, constantly and mistakenly argue that verbal inspiration makes stylistic differences inexplicable. But this contention is historically false, as anyone can see by reading the orthodox theologians from Warfield in this century all the way back to Calvin himself.

Yet the misunderstanding would only go to show that the later confessions were not "scholastic additions" to the Reformation doctrines. Which way do the liberals want it? Did Calvin teach mechanical dictation or are the creeds scholastic? They cannot have both.

On the other hand, Calvin's acknowledgment of textual criticism and his remarks on canonicity have been used to attribute to him a looser view of inspiration. This might keep the creeds scholastic, but it flies in the face of all his emphasis on dictation. However, this attribution to Calvin of a looser view is also based on a misunderstanding. The type of passages from which the alleged evidence is taken show clearly that Calvin taught the verbal and plenary inspiration of God's Word.

The same is true of Luther. J. Theodore Mueller writes,

When church historians ascribe to Luther the merit of having established the *Schriftprinzip*, that is, the axiomatic truth that Holy Scripture is the sole principle by which divine truth is truly and unmistakably known, they do this in full justice to the Wittenberg Reformer, whose alleged “liberal attitude” toward Scripture theological liberals, contrary to historical fact, in vain are trying to demonstrate. [\[4\]](#)

Quenstedt, whom the liberals cite as a theologian who corrupted the freer Reformation doctrine of inspiration, wrote,

The canonical Holy Scriptures in the original text are the infallible truth and are free from every error; in other words, in the canonical sacred Scriptures there is found no lie, no falsity, no error, not even the least, whether in subject matter or expressions, but in all things and all the details that are handed down in them, they are most certainly true, whether they pertain to doctrine or morals, to history or chronology, to topography or nomenclature. No ignorance, no thoughtlessness, no forgetfulness, no lapse of memory can and dare be ascribed to the amanuenses of the Holy Ghost in their penning the Sacred Writings.

In spite of what the liberals say, these assertions of Quenstedt are not later corruptions. Everything in the above quotation can be found in Luther himself. For example, “The Scriptures have never erred,” and “It is impossible that Scripture should contradict itself; it appears so only to the senseless and obstinate hypocrites.” Further examples are: “The Scriptures are divine; in them God speaks and they are his Word,” and

Unless I am convinced by testimony from Scripture or evident reasons – for I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils alone, since it is established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves – I am conquered by the writings cited by me, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Therefore I will not and cannot recant anything since it is neither safe nor honest to do anything against conscience.

Detached from its context, this last quotation may seem to show that Luther could appeal to “evident reasons” in addition and out of relation to the Bible. An

examination of the context and the historical situation requires us to acknowledge that “evident reasons” means correct deductions from Scripture, and that conscience means his conscience as bound by the Bible. The famous declaration therefore is an assertion of *Sola Scriptura*.

If this is sufficient to convince one of what the Reformers’ position actually was, the next step is to see whether the doctrine was a new invention or whether it can be found earlier. Or, more pertinently, the next step is to see whether the doctrine of verbal inspiration is the teaching of the Bible itself. If the Neo-orthodox claim to be Biblical theologians, if their theology is called the theology of the Word, it is most important to see what the Word says about itself. Fortunately this is one of the easiest Biblical doctrines to determine. Assertions or implications of plenary and verbal inspiration abound from *Genesis* to *Revelation*.

The best known, of course, is, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” A better and more literal translation would be, “All Scripture has been breathed out by God.” It is to be noted, as orthodox theologians have repeatedly pointed out, that what God breathed forth were the words written on the manuscript. The verse does not say that God inspired the thoughts of the authors, nor even their speech. It is Scripture, the written words, that God breathed out.

Of course the verse does not deny that God inspired the thoughts of the authors. The point simply is that, whatever else God did, he also breathed out the written words. Because of the liberals’ persistent misrepresentation of verbal inspiration as mechanical dictation, it might be well at this point to repeat that the prophets’ mental processes remained normal throughout. The idea that verbal inspiration would conflict with a prophet’s literary style depends on a deistic conception of God, which the liberals either hold for themselves or wrongly attribute to the orthodox theologians. This deistic conception of God pictures him in the role of a business executive whose control over the stenographer is external and limited. He did not direct her education nor does he control her every thought. None of her personality is transferred to the typed wording. But the Christian view of God is of one in whom we live and move and have our being. He creates our personality and forms our literary style. He foreordains our education and guides our every thought. Hence God, from all eternity, decreed to lead the Jews out of slavery by the hand of Moses. To this end he determined the date of Moses’ birth and arranged for his princely training and so on until, when the time came,

Moses' mentality and literary style were the instruments precisely fitted to speak and write God's words. Between Moses and God Omnipotent there was an inner union, an identity of purpose, a cooperation of will such that the words Moses wrote were God's own words and Moses' own words at the same time.

Sometimes it is objected that the verse in *2 Timothy* applies only to the Old Testament. Perhaps it does, but it is amusing to see the liberals so determined to exalt the authority of the Old Testament in order to debase the New. At any rate, the New Testament repeatedly asserts the truth of the Old. One can examine our Lord's treatment of Scripture, that is, the Old Testament. He defeats the devil, confounds the Sadducees, and reduces the Pharisees to angry silence by quoting Scripture.

The Old Testament also teaches its own infallibility, and this pushes the doctrine well into the past. In addition many instances of phrases such as "The Lord has spoken" and "The mouth of the Lord has spoken," a composite *Jeremiah* 1:9 and *Deuteronomy* 18:19 will say, "I have put my words in your mouth," and "whoever will not hear my words, which he speaks in my name, I will require it of him."

So much for the Old Testament. The question now is whether the New Testament makes the same claims for itself. In the first place, the New Testament pervasively presupposes its superiority to the Old. Explicitly, John the Baptist is said to be a greater prophet than those of the Old Testament, and the New Testament prophets are greater than John.

The superiority, of course, did not lie in a greater truthfulness, for this they could not have. However, had they been less truthful, they could not have been superior. Note that Peter says, "our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in *all his epistles*...in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (*2 Peter* 3:15, 16). Here Peter puts all of the epistles of Paul into the category of Holy Scripture. Paul himself claims to be a prophet: "When you read [what he had written before in a few words], you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ...as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets" (*Ephesians* 3:4, 5). The term "prophet" puts Paul on a level with Old Testament prophets; the term "apostle" puts him above them, for "God has appointed some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers..." (*1*

Corinthians 12:28).

If an almost exhaustive list of similar claims for the Scripture is desired, one may read Louis Gaussen's *Theopneustia*. The small number quoted here only bespeaks confidence in the extremely large number easily located.

But if anyone would prefer to have a final quotation, let it be *2 Peter* 1:21: "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Verbal and plenary inspiration – that is, infallibility, inerrancy – is the claim the Bible makes for itself; and if the Bible does not correctly represent itself, there seems to be no good reason for taking it very seriously on any other subject.

Yet this doctrine on which all other doctrines depend is the one most viciously attacked of all. By a satanic instinct, the battle against Christianity is directed against its citadel. Barth writes, "The prophets and Apostles as such, even in their office...were...actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word" (*Church Dogmatics*, I:2:528, 529). Brunner asserts that the Bible "is full of errors, contradictions, erroneous opinions concerning all kinds of human, natural, historical situations. It contains many contradictions in the reports about Jesus' life, it is overgrown with legendary material even in the New Testament" (*Philosophy of Religion*, 155). Bultmann leaves even less uncontested than Brunner. With such a derogatory opinion of the Bible, their use of it for any religious purpose is another of their insoluble paradoxes.

But are their accusations true? Is the Bible really "full of errors, contradictions, erroneous opinions"? Is the Bible so utterly untrustworthy as Brunner and Bultmann say?

So far as accusations of doctrinal error are concerned, no general reply can be made. One would have to know on what philosophic ground the accusation was based. For example, the doctrines of original sin and total depravity were largely denied by Modernism on the basis of an evolutionary optimism. The nineteenth-century theologians thought that evil was almost eradicated from the face of the Earth and that socialism, perhaps national socialism, would usher in the Kingdom of God. The ideas of original sin and total depravity, therefore, were errors in doctrine. Likewise attempts are sometimes made to undermine the doctrine of predestination either through a particular interpretation of divine love or by an appeal to the principle of indeterminacy that Heisenberg tried to introduce into

physics.

A full argument to show that these Biblical doctrines are true and that the liberals are wrong cannot be included here. In the case of predestination, surely no one wants at this spot a discussion of theoretical physics. So far as the liberals depend on their interpretation of divine love, it would be necessary to examine what source of information they use to obtain their concept of god. It is not the Biblical concept. Do they then have another revelation? It ought to be a better one, since they consider the Scriptures so untrustworthy. In the case of total depravity versus the inherent goodness of human nature, an argument might try to disprove biological evolution; or it might deny that the principles of biological evolution can be extended to society and religion; or it might show that evolution, far from being optimistic, portrays nature red in tooth and claw. Since the backgrounds of the accusation are so varied, full arguments would be too long for the present purpose, and the matter of doctrinal error must rest with these hints.

If, however, the Bible is charged with error on the basis that it contains accounts of miracles, a different reply would be required. Although the denial of miracles impugns omnipotence and returns us to the source of our knowledge of God, the more common argument against miracles is that science has disproved their possibility. Here is needed a philosophy of science to question the finality of Newtonian mechanics. Such an argument I have published elsewhere. [\[5\]](#)

When, next, Brunner claims that the New Testament is false because it is overgrown with legendary material, one can indicate that the early dates of the Gospels allow no time for legends to grow. If the Old Testament is criticized on this ground one may ask, What is a legend? If a legend is distinguished from history simply by reason of its fragmentary character, Brunner will have to prove that whatever is fragmentary must be false. Press this consistently and the result is that all history books are false because all are fragmentary. No book contains everything.

In the next place, destructive criticism of the Wellhausen type has been a still more popular basis for charging the Bible with error. The alleged errors are historical and cultural in nature, though they are sometimes loosely called contradictions.

In general, replies to these accusations are not difficult to make. Some of the "contradictions" clearly exist only in the critic's mind. For example, Edwin A.

Burt, professor of philosophy at Cornell University, in his *Types of Religious Philosophy* (2nd edition, 311) – a book that was acclaimed for its fairness of presentation – alleges the following contradiction:

In *Ezekiel 26* the prophet proclaims as a divine revelation the message that the city of Tyre is to meet destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon.... After a hard assault, however, Nebuchadnezzar failed to capture Tyre.... Accordingly, in *Ezekiel 29* the prophet announces another revelation in which God promises the conquest of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar as a recompense for his defeat by the Tyrians. There is no hint in the later of these passages that he now doubts the authenticity of the earlier revelation because the prophecy it contained failed to be verified as and when he expected. Apparently, what is essential to a divine revelation, in his mind, is not its factual infallibility, but the truth of the moral lesson it embodies.

If this is impartial scholarship, scholarship and impartiality are both in a bad way. Burt's charge is based on complete ignorance of what the Bible says. *Ezekiel 26* nowhere prophesies that Nebuchadnezzar will conquer Tyre.

In fact, it definitely implies that he will not, for *Ezekiel 26:3* reads, "Behold I am against you, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against you." Then follows a description of the damage (considerable enough) that Nebuchadnezzar will inflict (verses 7-11), after which they – the many nations – will so complete the destruction that the site of Tyre will be a bare rock. Hence the contradiction between *Ezekiel 26* and *Ezekiel 29* exists only in Burt's impartial and scholarly mind.

Or, again, the critics' assertion that the Hittite nation never existed, that camels were unknown in Egypt in the time of Abraham, that seven-stemmed lamps were first made in the late Persian Empire, and numerous other denials of Biblical statements have been so thoroughly refuted by archaeology that the liberals should hang their heads in shame.

Different in nature from these historical and cultural items are the cases where the term "contradiction" is used in its strictly logical sense. For example, if one *Gospel* says there was one angel and no more at the tomb on Easter morning and another *Gospel* says there were two, this would be a logical contradiction. Or, again, if two passages differ as to the exact number of Jacob's family that went

down to Egypt, the two passages would produce a formal logical contradiction.

Such alleged contradictions, however, can be easily handled, even though in some cases we may not know which of two or three possibilities is the correct one. They are easily handled because in most instances the actual texts are not in formal contradiction. No *Gospel* says there was only one angel at the tomb all Easter morning.

Even the two genealogies of Christ can be shown not to be contradictory, however difficult it may be to reconstruct the actual history (see J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth*, Harper and Brothers, 1932).

These considerations and the several volumes referred to are sufficient to show good reason for accepting the Bible as true; they are conclusive against the plausibility of the liberal theory on these points.

We must now consider a different type of objection to the verbal inspiration of Scripture. Briefly the objection is that God cannot speak.

Once again this objection to verbal inspiration depends on a non-Biblical concept of God. With its inheritance from Friedrich Schleiermacher and G. W. F. Hegel, the older Modernism denied that God could speak because it held an essentially pantheistic view of God. God was entirely immanent in or actually identified with the processes of nature. He was prohibited from interrupting these processes by any miracle, any intrusion into history, any once-for-all event, of which speaking would be an example.

The new liberals are not so fond of Hegel; they talk of God's transcendence; they try to find a divine action somewhere in history, even if only at an unextended point. But they shy away from the idea that God can use words, such as, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive," and "whom God set forth to be a propitiation by his blood, through faith."

What they assert is that God produced some emotional or vaguely defined state of mind in the prophet, and then the prophet relied on his own wisdom to talk about his experience.

Since this denial that God can use words is another denial of his omnipotence, the question of religious knowledge must again be raised with increasing emphasis. Where do these theologians obtain their information as to what God

can or cannot do? Their ideas do not come from the Bible. Have they then another “revelation,” or have they with Schleiermacher reduced “God” to a description of their own state of consciousness? Orthodox theologians do well to press this question and prevent the liberals from evading an answer. This orthodox strategy is sound because the liberal answers, when spelled out, are so obviously inadequate.

In addition to entailing a non-Biblical concept of God, the thesis that God cannot speak depends on a theory of language. Human language, on this theory, is supposed to have evolved from the chirping of birds and the grunts of pigs, or at least to have had a totally sensory origin. Since, therefore, all terms derive from the visible and tangible things of the material universe, language is inadequate to express divine truth. When language is highly developed by figures of speech, metaphors, and analogy, words like *atonement* or *justification* can be used symbolically to suggest or point to something divine. But their literal meanings are spiritually false because they can never be completely detached from their origin in sensation. Wilbur Marshall Urban has a most interesting 700-page volume along these lines, and E. L. Mascall is a noted English thinker who vigorously supports such views.

To defend the Bible as the Word of God, a reliance on God’s omnipotence is sufficient. It takes a very brave man to deny that God can speak. But it is more persuasive if a conservative theologian also furnishes an alternate theory of linguistics. The Scriptures lay down the principles of such a theory. Instead of language being an evolutionary extension of the chattering of monkeys, Scripture teaches that man was created in the image of God. Basically this image is human reason. And language is its expression. No doubt God intended language to be applicable to the visible and tangible parts of nature; but there is also no doubt that God intended language to be used in worshiping him, in conversing with him, and in his conversing with Adam and the subsequent prophets. Naturally a non-theistic linguistic theory has difficulty with a verbal revelation. Naturally also there is no difficulty on a theistic basis.[\[6\]](#)

Now, finally, the thesis that God cannot speak entails not only a non-Christian concept of God and of language but also a non-Christian form of religion. It is a religion without truth. The prophet had his emotional experience and he describes it to us. His description may be very much mistaken. But no matter, Brunner assures us that God can “speak” his word to man even through false doctrine. The

only trouble is that the doctrine is false and God does not speak. In agreement with the theory of language just discussed, Brunner writes: "All words have only an instrumental value. Neither the spoken words nor their conceptual content are the Word itself, but only its frame" (*The Divine-Human Encounter*, 110).

This type of religion is anti-intellectual and thoroughly irrational. It may consist of an emotional jag, an aesthetic experience, or a mystic trance; but it is totally devoid of knowledge. What Brunner calls the Word of God has no conceptual content. It despises logic, glories in contradictions, and deifies paradox.

But Christianity claims that God is the God of truth; that he is wisdom; that his Son is his *Logos*, the Logic, the Word of God. Man was created a reasonable being so that he could understand God's message to him. And God gave him a message by breathing out all the Scripture, having foreordained the complete process – including the three stages of the thoughts of the prophet's mind, the words in his mouth, and the finished manuscript. Christianity is a rational religion. It has an intellectually apprehensible content. Its revelation can be understood. And because God speaks in intelligible words, he can give and has given commands. We know what these commands mean, and therefore we should obey them.

If, now, anyone prefers a symbolism that points to some unknowable, if anyone takes pleasure in irrational paradox, if anyone enjoys wordless encounters, further words and ideas will not change his emotions.

[1] 217-221 in most recent edition of *Thales to Dewey*. – Editor.

[2] Compare Richard B. Brandt, *The Philosophy of Schleiermacher*, Harper and Brothers, 1941; Edwin A. Burt, *Types of Religious Philosophy*, revised edition, chapter 2; and for a summary of Barth's criticisms, Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method*, [1963] 1997.

[3] For a fuller account of the matter see "Calvin and the Holy Scriptures," by Kenneth S. Kantzer, in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, edited by John W. Walvoord, Eerdmans, 1957,

[4] *Inspiration and Interpretation*, 88; see all of Chapter 3 for justification of the following details.

[5] *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God*, The Trinity Foundation, 1987

[1964]; now included in *Modern Philosophy*, The Trinity Foundation, 2008.

[6] See my *Religion, Reason and Revelation*, chapter 3, “Inspiration and Language”; 3rd ed., The Trinity Foundation, 1995 [1961]; now included in *Christian Philosophy*, The Trinity Foundation, 2004.

Holy Scripture

For the philosophic problem of the knowledge of God, for the construction of a theology, and as well for religious stability, a view of the Bible as revelation is most important. Currently many authors both in Europe and America are trying to meet the need.

In the December 24, 1962, issue of *The Presbyterian Outlook*, four southern professors join forces to propagate a particular view. The four are: Dr. Kenneth J. Foreman, Professor Emeritus of Doctrinal Theology at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary; Dr. James H. Gailey, Jr., Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Seminary; Dr. James L. Mays, Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Union Seminary (Virginia); and Dr. John F. Iansen, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Austin Presbyterian Seminary. They write under the general title "Do We Need an Infallible Bible?"

The four articles are part of the widespread contemporary attack on the truthfulness of the Bible. It is instructive to see how their arguments are constructed.

Dr. Foreman, in the first article, addresses himself mainly to the question of the (alleged) need of an infallible Bible. He asks, "Do I need an infallible Bible to convict me of sin?" In all plausibility the answer is No. Of course, a man may be convicted of sin without ever having seen a Bible; he may simply hear an evangelist and the Holy Spirit may convict him. Such a consideration indicates that the initial question is not quite the correct question to ask if we are interested in the truthfulness of the Bible.

After a few more slightly irrelevant questions, Dr. Foreman asks, "Is it necessary for the Bible's geography to be above reproach before I can put my trust in the God of the Bible?" The series of irrelevant questions with their plausible negative answers has supposedly conditioned the reader to continue with a negative here also. But if the question is examined a little, the negative is not so plausible. If the Bible is mistaken on geography, which ought to have been easy for the writers to put down correctly, it might very well be mistaken on theology, which is much more difficult than geography. To this question an affirmative

answer is at least as plausible as the negative answer was to the first question.

There is another part of this first article that depends more on innuendo than on logic. The author writes concerning (alleged) discrepancies in the Scriptures: "Many believers in this theory (of inerrancy) about the Bible, when such discrepancies are pointed out as they cannot explain without arguments that sound suspiciously twisted, resort to the proposition that whatever errors may be found in our Bibles, there was none in the original manuscripts. This affirmation cannot be proved; it cannot be disproved. It will be worth discussing when we have the originals." The implication seems to be that it is not worth discussing now, and we are left with the fallible Bibles that we have.

This argument is an excellent example of begging the question. The innuendo begins with the suggestion that attempts to explain discrepancies are (usually always) suspiciously twisted. Thus the mind of the reader is prejudiced against the truthfulness of the Scripture. The author hides the fact that the burden of proof lies on the critic to show that no explanation is possible. So many alleged discrepancies have by now been removed by archaeological discoveries that the person who accepts the Word of God needs no longer be terrified by the unsupported doubts of the unbelieving critic.

There is also another flaw in the argument. The author suggests that there is no use discussing whether the alleged error was missing from the original until we have the original. This seems to betray a forgetfulness of textual criticism. The differences between the Greek New Testament which we have and the autographs are few in number and of slight consequence. Most of them are differences in spelling, or in word order, or in some small detail that does not affect the sense. To suppose that we are so ignorant of the original wording as this argument requires is to cast aside the whole science of textual criticism.

It may be that we cannot prove true some particular statement in the Bible, but the reason is not that the autograph is missing. What is missing is corroborative evidence from historical or archaeological sources, without which the unbeliever refuses to accept the statement of the Bible. Therefore we do not acquiesce in Dr. Foreman's desire not to discuss these matters until the original is found – a requirement he is safe in making. On the contrary, we shall remind the world that the critics once asserted that the Hittite nation never existed.

Let us grant that archaeology can never prove the truth of every statement in

the Bible, not even every historical statement. But our assurance of the truth of the Bible does not depend on the sort of proof these professors want. It depends on a consideration found in chapter one, section five, of the *Westminster Confession*, which these Presbyterian professors have not seen fit to refer to. This excellent summary of Biblical teaching says, “Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.”

Dr. James L. Mays, ostensibly asserting the “authority” of the Bible, attacks its infallibility. And what is strange for a professor in a Presbyterian seminary, he does so by recourse to a Roman Catholic argument. “If we had a book whose value consisted in its infallibility, we could not use this value unless there were infallible men to go along with it.” This is essentially the claim of the Pope that an infallible text requires an infallible interpreter. But what honest Protestant ever accepted this popish dictum? Where is the compulsion in the assertion? How does the Pope or the professor justify his demand for an infallible interpreter? Have Protestants forgotten their heritage to the extent of being deceived by old Romish superstitions?

Suppose it were true that an infallible text required an infallible interpreter. Then, of course, the Bible would require a papal encyclical for its interpretation. But since the encyclical, on this theory, is itself an infallible text, it too requires an infallible interpreter. Whoever this might be, his interpretation, also infallible, would require another infallible interpreter; and so on *ad infinitum*. Obviously the papal claim of this Presbyterian professor is absurd. When, then, the professor concludes, “The authority of the Bible is best commended to the world, not by a fearful defense of its infallibility, but by lives which show the reality of that authority,” we reply, without minimizing the lives of any saints who obey the Bible, that we are not fearful of our defense of infallibility against this fallacy of false disjunction. The professor ought to be fearful of his lack of logic.

Indeed, we wish to ask these men what authority the Bible can have, if it is not true. The Neo-orthodox, or whatever name best suits them, talk a good deal about the Bible and its authority. But they are not at all clear as to why we should believe, submit to, or honor a book that is marred with discrepancies and errors. Karl Barth, it will be remembered, attributes to the Bible not only geographical mistakes and number mysticism, but errors in theology. But if a doctrine is false, why should it be authoritatively preached? The logic of such a position is more

than puzzling.

Now, Dr. Mays asserts that the Bible is authoritative. And in doing so, he makes some statements that are so commendable that he himself ought to pay attention to them. He says

Presbyterians are supposed to build faith on the Bible, to get what is said in theology from Scriptures. And that includes belief about the Bible. We have to look at it and examine it to learn what it is right to say in faith. It is presumptuous to refuse to look and to tell God what we need without considering what he has, in his grace and wisdom, given us.

This is excellent advice. But none of the four professors follows it. As is the case with Barth also, their theory of the Bible is not what the Bible says about itself. It is something they have imposed on the Bible from without. The quotation just made says that we should frame our view of the Bible – its inspiration, its authority – from what the Bible itself says. What then does it say?

The Bible says that all Scripture, that is, all the words that were written down in the Old Testament (at least), is breathed out by God. Holy men spoke – they spoke words – as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The Old Testament has many instances of the phrase, “the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Many other times we read, “The word of God came to.” *Deuteronomy* 18:18 says, “I...will put my words in his mouth,” and a similar phrase occurs in *Jeremiah* 1:9. Everywhere the Bible speaks of itself, it teaches verbal inspiration. The words are the words of God. It is nowhere said that the words contain geographical discrepancies and theological errors. No examination of the text itself can produce evidence that the words are not inspired. If we take our belief about the Bible from what the Bible says about itself, we must conclude that the words are the words of God who cannot lie.

Verbal inspiration is an unpopular doctrine in many seminaries today. Of the many distasteful things that the Bible says, its teaching of verbal inspiration is perhaps the most distasteful of all. Ingenious attempts are made to avoid it, deny it, or replace it with something else. It is castigated as mechanical – though how God’s speaking can rightly be called mechanical is hard to see. It is called static, and presumably static is a noise that obscures the message. Instead of static and verbal inspiration, a theory of dynamic inspiration is proposed. The only trouble

is that it is not a theory. It is simply a word that carries an appealing connotation, so that the unwary reader may be deceived into thinking poorly of verbal inspiration without having any definite view to replace it. In brief, the Neo-orthodox views on inspiration are un-Biblical. They are not arrived at by listening to what the Bible says, but by imposing on the Bible preconceived notions of what revelation must be.

In particular, the Neo-orthodox views of the Bible are a denial and contradiction of the teaching of Jesus Christ himself. Did Christ ever admit errors – geographical or otherwise – in the Old Testament? Did he ever make complicated attempts to harmonize the divine infallibility of the Bible with its human fallibility? Did he ever teach that God can reveal himself in false statements as well as in true statements, as Brunner does? What was Christ's view of the Bible?

Christ's view of the Bible can very quickly be indicated. Christ said: It is written! If you do not believe Moses' *writings*, how will you believe my *words*? For the Scripture cannot be broken.

Do we need an infallible Bible? We need an infallible Bible, unless we are willing to contradict the teachings of Christ. We need verbal inspiration if we are to believe the call to repentance and the doctrine of justification. We need inerrancy if we are to have any confident knowledge of God. For, if the Bible is mistaken in its doctrine of inspiration, why should we think it correct in its doctrine of God, repentance, or anything else? Our only alternatives would be to believe nothing of what the Bible says, or as most liberals and Neo-orthodox thinkers do, to adopt some principle by which we determine what in the Bible we choose to believe and what we prefer to reject. In either case, we must admit that the Bible itself is no *authority* for us. We do not believe a doctrine because the Bible teaches that doctrine, but because on some other ground – rational, mystical, or otherwise – we acknowledge its truth.

Our Lord held to a very different view of the Bible. He commanded his disciples to believe all of it (*Luke 24:25*). And if Christ does not tell us the truth when he says that the Scripture cannot be broken and that the words of Moses are as true as his own, why should we believe him when he says, Come to me, all you who labor?

By all means we should take our view of the Scripture from our Lord Christ

and from the authority of the Scripture itself. And this is what the liberal critics refuse to do, even while saying that it should be done.

The Concept of Biblical Authority

In 1924 a group of Presbyterian ministers published a document called the *Auburn Affirmation*. It affirmed that the Bible contains errors. These 1300 Presbyterians differed among themselves on the unessential and peripheral doctrines of the virgin birth, miracles, the atonement, and the resurrection. They were in complete agreement that the Bible was not infallible. In 1977 Paul Rees, Jack Rogers (editor), Clark Pinnock (a peculiar exception), Berkeley Mickelsen, Bernard Ramm, and David Hubbard published the book *Biblical Authority* with the purpose of defending an erroneous Bible. Obviously their concept of “authority” differs from that of historical Evangelicalism, for it is hard to see how falsehood can be authoritative.

The battle for the Bible in this twentieth century (plus the previous decade) may be schematized into three periods. First (1893) was the condemnation by and suspension from the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. of Charles Augustus Briggs for maintaining that the Bible asserts falsehoods. Second was the *Auburn Affirmation*. The third is the renewal of these positions in the book now under consideration. This book was stimulated by the publication of Harold Lindsell’s *The Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan, 1976). But the present attack on the Bible began with the reorganization of Fuller Seminary and the resignation of all or most of its orthodox faculty members.

What Is Authority?

Such in brief is the historical schema. The first substantial point in the analysis of the Rogers’ book is the meaning of authority. What precisely their concept of authority is, an authority that comports with falsehood, is hard to determine. One would expect a book of this title, and one so out of accord with the views of the Protestant Reformation, to make crystal clear what is meant by the fundamental term. Yet only one author even attempts to define it.

Berkeley Mickelsen’s chapter has the title “The Bible’s Own Approach to Authority.” The nearest the book as a whole comes to explaining the term

authority is found on page 89 of this chapter. “Authority, power, right to exercise rule.... God’s authority or power includes” a number of things that Mickelsen mentions as examples, such as regulating the eternal destiny of all persons, showing love, holiness, and wrath. Doubtless all this is true, and it is good so far as it goes. But the passage is hardly a formal definition. More to the point, it is not a definition of Biblical authority at all. It is an enumeration of some of God’s authority, and this is not sufficient for the purpose of the book. What the book needs is a definition of Biblical authority, for this omission leaves the reader wondering how a book containing errors can be authoritative. Among the examples Mickelsen gives, he did not list the right to tell falsehoods. But if – as these authors assert – the Bible is not inerrant, either it is not God’s Word or God has the authority to tell us what is not so.

This is the fundamental defect of the volume as a whole. Even on the assumption that the other authors accept Mickelsen’s definition – and they do not explicitly do so – they never show how falsehoods can be authoritative. They never really clarify their notion of authority. Their use of the word is a sort of propaganda device that depends on vagary and ambiguity. Not only does this fundamental term remain meaningless, but the arguments are pervasively vague. An analysis of the several chapters will make this evident.

The first point in this analysis is the definition of another term: *evangelical*. Historically this term was used in the titles of several Lutheran bodies. It was applied to the Reformed theology and was claimed by the Methodists, though perhaps there might be a doubt as to its applicability to the Remonstrants. The first use of the term aimed to distinguish these churches from Romanism. The distinction did not rest upon Biblical infallibility, for Romanism agreed on this point. Note well that the Romanists agreed both that the Scripture was infallible and that justification comes by means of faith. The disagreement lay in the denial by the Romanists and the assertion by the evangelicals of *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola Fide*. These two points define evangelicalism. Only those who believe in the infallibility of Scripture – without any appeal to pope, tradition, or other non-Biblical source – and who also believe in justification by faith alone, can properly be called evangelical. To deny either of these is to renounce the Protestant Reformation.

Since the truth of Scripture was not a matter of contention between Romanism and evangelical religion, the earliest Protestant creeds did not emphasize it as

much as later theologians did in their fuller documents. Yet even the earliest creeds do not tolerate any assertion that the Bible teaches falsehood. For example, the *Augsburg Confession* (1530) has no article at all on the Scripture as such, but, in the context of the conflict, contents itself with a denial of other authority in religion, particularly tradition (Article V). Its authors saw no need to insist that Scripture was the Word of God because such was not at issue. The *Formula of Concord* (1576), however, is more explicit: “We believe...that the only rule and norm to which all dogmas...ought to be esteemed and judged, is no other whatever than...the Old and New Testaments.” This is not so full as later creeds are, but there is no hint that the two Testaments might teach error. How could they be the only norm of doctrine if they taught some falsehoods?

The Reformed creeds were from the first more systematic, and even the earliest profited from a study of the Lutheran struggle against the Papacy. Thus the *First Helvetic Confession* (1536) says, “*Die heilige, göttliche, biblische Schrift, die da ist das Wort Gottes, von dem heiligen Geiste eingegeben...ist die allerälteste, vollkommenste und höchste Lehre (omnium perfectissima...sola perfecte).*”^[1]

The *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566) is somewhat more explicit. But to say the later creeds are more explicit is not to say that the earlier creeds view the Bible as fallible. Chapter I of the 1566 creed is: “*Credimus et confitemur Scripturas Canonicas...ipsum verbum Dei.... Nam Deus ipse loquutus est Patribus, Prophetis, et Apostolis, et loquitur adhuc nobis per Scripturas Sanctas.*”^[2] Note that this creed or confession presents Scripture as the very Word of God, for God himself spoke to the Apostles and still speaks to us by the Scripture.

The *French Confession* of 1559, a few years before the above, in paragraph five said, “We believe that the Word contained in these books [paragraph three had enumerated the sixty-six books]...is the rule of all truth....” If it is the rule of all truth, it must be the rule of truth for the geographical, chronological, and historical details it contains.

Two years later the *Belgic Confession* said, “We receive all these books...believing without any doubt all things contained in them....” The word *inerrancy* is not used, nor the word *infallible* (which, until lately when some have pretended otherwise, is its synonym) but the idea is clear: “believing without any doubt all things contained in them.” The reign of Pekah is one of the things contained therein.

These sixteenth-century creeds suffice to show that the truthfulness of the Scripture in all that it asserts was not an invention of seventeenth-century “scholasticism,” malevolently foisted on an innocent church by that servant of Satan, Francis Turretin. Francis Turretin, on the contrary, was a saint who merely expanded the precise meaning of the early Reformers.

The great seventeenth-century creed, which to this day has no equal, has a well-known paragraph in chapter one: “The authority of Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed [with numerous exceptions?] and obeyed, dependeth...wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the Author thereof; and, therefore, is to be received, because it is the Word of God.” The next paragraph speaks of its “infallible truth.” There is, however, a later chapter not so widely known. The first two sections of chapter XIV are as follows: “The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ.... By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true *whatsoever* is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein.”

In view of this last quotation from the official position of Presbyterianism, one cannot avoid the solemn and disturbing question whether those who deliberately deny the complete truthfulness of the Bible really have saving faith. These men, we hope, have never perjured themselves by subscribing to the *Westminster Confession*. They are free to choose a creed or religion to their liking. The book under scrutiny nowhere states how much of the Bible they believe, or on what grounds or by what authority they reject one doctrine or another. One thing, however, is certain: aside from the question whether saving faith includes a belief that “whatsoever is revealed in the Word” is true, the unanimous position of both Lutheran and Reformed bodies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the infallibility, the inerrancy, the truth of Scripture. Therefore these men have no right to call themselves evangelicals.

The official documents of the evangelical churches, just quoted, are thus the dogmatic and historical basis for condemning the Rees-Rogers-Ramm-Hubbard volume. The analysis will now be twofold: (1) the dogmatic contrast between the two theologies, and (2) the explication of the fallacious reasoning of the opponents.

Inerrancy and Infallibility

The “Foreword” of the volume tries to distinguish between inerrancy and infallibility. At the very least this is a misuse of the English language. *Merriam Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary* says: “Infallible...not capable of erring, exempt from liability to mistake...Syn....inerrant, unerring.” Hence Dr. Rees makes a false statement when he says, “the deceased B. B. Warfield and the living G. C. Berkouwer...both are committed to the infallibility with which Holy Scripture reflects and reveals God’s saving purpose.” Dr. Rees maintains that the difference between Warfield and Berkouwer is “a difference of understanding as to the way and form in which God has worked to give us...the authority of the Word.” But these terms *form* and *way* “which Scripture *reflects*” are too vague. Dr. Rees may possibly believe that the form of infallibility reflected in Scripture is not the *Merriam Webster* and historical *infallibility* of the English language and the evangelical creeds. But it would be rash so to argue. If it were maintained, the implication would be that the Reformed creeds have seriously misinterpreted the Bible. The book then could indeed claim to be Biblical, but it could not claim to be evangelical. If Dr. Rees is not so rash, then on the basis of the creeds and the dictionary one must declare false his statement that the authors of this book “are classically evangelical” (10), for it is clear that the difference between Warfield and Berkouwer is that the former believes the Bible to be true and the latter does not.

Faulty reasoning accompanies this faulty English. Dr. Rees deprecates the “mentality” and the “brand of reasoning” that argues, “if you can find one inaccuracy in the Bible you are using, then in one stroke you have made it impossible to say with assurance that anything in the Bible is dependable” (12). This is the language of propaganda. Note well the phrase, “the Bible you are using.” This phrase includes a *King James* translation with a misprint, an *RSV* with its altered Hebrew radicals, and even the hippie-type paraphrases. But no evangelical creed asserts that translations or misprints are infallible. Therefore, two things: The sentence is a misrepresentation of Reformation Theology, and it is also a means of confusing the reader. An evangelical would say, if the original manuscripts published by the prophets themselves contain one falsehood, then they may contain others. This is a perfectly good inference. If a witness in a criminal trial is detected in one falsehood, his whole testimony is suspect. Possibly much of what he says is true, but it can only be believed if some other witness or evidence clearly supports it. Hence, if the apostles in their canonical writings did not tell the truth, here or there, everything they wrote would need external corroboration. Those who adopt the position of the book in question must

explain the criterion by which they decide which Biblical statements are true and which are false. They cannot permit their beginners in Sunday school to sing, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” On their position, more or less of the Bible is false, and we cannot accept anything merely because the Bible tells us so. But the authors do not state their criterion of truth. This is a serious omission. Not only have they failed to indicate whether or not they believe the virgin birth; the miracles; the Trinity; or the pre-, mid-, or post-tribulation rapture; but what is worse, they have failed to tell their readers on what basis they believe one and not the other.

Dr. Rees’ views lead him on the next page to say, concerning a conference held at Wenham, Massachusetts, in 1966, “It comes, however, as a surprise to read in Harold Lindsell’s *The Battle for the Bible* (32): ‘Some of the greatest stalwarts who have defended biblical inerrancy backed out of the conference. They felt that their presence would serve no useful purpose and that little was to be gained by discussing inerrancy with those in attendance whose minds already had been made up against it.’”

Why should Dr. Rees be surprised? Lindsell just told the truth. Though I am not one of the “greatest stalwarts,” it was precisely for Lindsell’s stated reasons that I declined the invitation to attend.

Once more Dr. Rees’ assertion concerning Warfield and Berkouwer, in his final paragraph, that their “*attitude* toward the Bible is identical,” is just plain false – unless I do not know the meaning of the word *attitude*. But if Dr. Rees’ usage of the word *attitude* is somewhere near ordinary English, it seems to me that the attitude toward an inerrant revelation and the attitude toward a book full of errors are not by any means identical. Or is it the word *identical* I do not understand?

Jack Rogers

After the Foreword, the first main chapter in the book has Jack Rogers as its author. His first sentence is, “Evangelicals believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God,” and immediately admits that among them “there is a significant disagreement [as to] the nature of the Bible’s authority.” The reader then expects him to state the two definitions or theories of the term *authority*. He does not do so, at least not clearly. He remarks, “The Bible was authoritative for Origen,” and quotes him as saying that the Bible was “supernaturally perfect in

every particular.” These words can hardly mean anything other than inerrant; but since Dr. Rogers rejects inerrancy, Origen’s phrase cannot be taken for Dr. Rogers’ definition of authority. Furthermore, to dilute the force of Origen’s words, Dr. Rogers also quotes his statement that God “condescends and lowers himself... talking ‘little language’ to his children” (19). One should note, however, that “little language” used by a father to his children is not false language. Many of us “talk down” to little children, but we do not thereby tell them falsehoods. Chrysostom said much the same thing; and we make much the same observation, noting in addition that these two examples show that the early church fathers believed in inerrancy, not the reverse. The underlying suggestion, read between the lines, that a restricted revelation must contain errors, is an invalid inference.

Dr. Rogers also attempts to minimize Augustine’s commitment to Scripture. His example, peculiarly enough, is Augustine’s famous statement, “I believe in order to understand.” This, says the author, is where “the integration of biblical data and Platonic philosophy can be seen” (20). Now, no one denies that Augustine was rescued from skepticism by the philosophy of Plotinus, before his conversion. No one ought to deny that Augustine, as he studied the Scriptures, moved further and further away from Neo-platonism. But what is pertinent is the complete absence of Augustine’s motto from the Plotinic *Enneads*. This attempt to make the early church fathers – however much they fell short of a full Reformed theology – advocates of an erroneous Bible is a failure. The author quotes Augustine, “Not even John himself has presented those things just as they are, but only as best he could...but because he who was inspired remained a man, he could not present the full reality, but only what a man could say about it” (22).^[3] This begs the question. We agree that God did not reveal all truth to the apostles. The question is, was the given revelation altogether true or partially false? We agree that “the secret things belong to the Lord our God,” and that therefore the apostle could not present the full reality. But we insist that “Those things which are revealed” could be said, were said, and are true. Recall also that even some of God’s intelligible revelation “could not be said,” for God commanded Paul not to write it down nor disclose it to others. The words God said to Paul, God did not permit him to repeat. The point is not that God’s truth becomes false in human language, nor even that it so transcends the human mind that it is unintelligible to man, but simply that God did not choose to reveal it to anyone but Paul. Hence, whatever condescension or restriction revelation exhibits, it in no way impugns the truth of what God makes public.

Whether the earlier church fathers believed the Bible to be inerrant, or whether the early Reformers did or not, is, however, a secondary question. Hence, if Luther be cited as an exponent of the book's view, we may disagree with Luther. Certainly we do not hold Luther to be inerrant. But Augustine, Luther, and Calvin were important theologians and we are more indebted to them than to most others. Even if we were not so greatly indebted to them, they deserve historical justice; and this they do not receive in Dr. Rogers' chapter. He tries to connect Luther with "the imperfect form in which the Bible comes to us" (24). By *us*, does he mean Christians throughout the ages to some of whom the revelation came directly in oral form? Or does he mean by *us*, the twentieth-century Christians with their several English translations? This sort of ambiguity, where the answer in the one case is different from the answer in the other case, permeates the volume. It is intolerable to use Luther as a defense for asserting errors in the Bible. Dr. Rogers says, "When Luther said of Scripture, 'There is no falsehood in it,' he was speaking not about technical accuracy"; and he quotes the context. But there is nothing in the context to justify the inference that Luther rejected the "technical accuracy" of the Bible. Is the word *technical* used to avoid the charge of misrepresenting Luther, allowing the reply that Luther did indeed admit the accuracy of Scripture, but not the "technical" accuracy? At any rate, Dr. Rogers gives no evidence of Luther's rejection of even technical accuracy. The context says only that accepting the Word in faith does away with unrighteousness. It even says "In this doctrine there is *no falsehood*." What purpose, then, can Dr. Rogers have for calling Luther as one of his witnesses?

Of course the fact that Dr. Rogers failed to prove his point, namely, that Luther denied inerrancy, does not of itself prove that Luther accepted inerrancy. A little more is required. J. Theodore Mueller, in a chapter "Luther and the Bible" (*Inspiration and Revelation*, edited by John W. Walvoord, Eerdmans, 1957), rebukes the liberals' appeal to Luther:

When church historians ascribe to Luther the merit of having established the *Schriftprinzip*, that is, the axiomatic truth that Holy Scripture is the sole principle by which divine truth is truly and unmistakably known, they do this in full justice to the Wittenberg Reformer, whose alleged "liberal attitude" toward Scripture theological liberals, contrary to historical fact, in vain are trying to demonstrate. (88)

After quoting various historians who agree with this condemnation of liberalism, Dr. Mueller himself says that one of them “fails to do justice to Luther, *to whom the whole Bible was God’s inspired, inerrant Word*” (95). Then he quotes several passages from Luther himself, one of which is, “I make use of the secular writers in such a way that I am not compelled to contradict Scripture. For I believe that in the Scriptures the God of truth speaks” (99). And on the same page, “The Scriptures *have never* erred.” With such quotations as these, Dr. Mueller is bold to rebuke the liberals

who shamefully pervert historical facts, misquote Luther, misrepresent his statements, refuse to read and examine Luther’s writings honestly and conscientiously, but quote gleefully and uncritically what liberal purveyors of untruth have falsely written before them, in order to make Luther a champion of their own teaching. (102)

Of course, Dr. Mueller did not have Dr. Rogers in mind. He spoke of a large number of earlier liberals. Not all of his charges apply to Dr. Rogers, but one certainly does: He “misrepresents his statements...in order to make Luther a champion” or at least a proponent of his own teaching.

If it is a matter of counting votes, we count Luther on the side of Biblical inerrancy: “The content of Scripture is true and certain *per se*” (108). Holy Scripture is “God speaking to man” (110). But let the interested reader read the whole of Dr. Mueller’s chapter.

Next, Dr. Rogers devotes four pages to Calvin. Why? Must it not be in order to cast doubt on inerrancy? Another chapter in Walvoord’s book quotes Calvin in favor of inerrancy, but surely this is not Dr. Rogers’ intention. He must wish to show that Calvin at least hesitates and has doubts as to the truthfulness of the Bible. He does indeed quote the *Institutes* (I. vii. 2), “Scripture exhibits as clear evidence of its truth as white and black things do of their color.” Perhaps white and black things are not very good evidence of their color, but Calvin did not have twentieth-century theories of light in mind. If Dr. Rogers had quoted some of the previous paragraphs on the authority of Scripture, he would have still more undermined his position. It says,

Since we are not favored with daily oracles from heaven, and since it

is only in the Scripture that the Lord has been pleased to preserve his truth in perpetual remembrance, it obtains the same complete credit and authority with believers, when they are satisfied of its divine origin, as if they heard the very words pronounced by God himself...the eternal and inviolable truth of God. (I. vii. 1)

In I. vii. 5, Calvin says, “the prophets were certain that God had spoken without the least fallacy or ambiguity.” Does this sound as if Calvin thought the Bible teaches falsehoods? No; Calvin bases the *authority* of Scripture on its *truth*.

It is useless for Dr. Rogers to claim Calvin for his views on the ground that the prophets used anthropomorphisms. He says, “God’s method, for Calvin, was ‘to represent himself to us, not as he is in himself, but as he seems to us.’” The footnote in the back of the book radically modifies, actually removes, the generality in the text. The quotation comes from a section on anthropomorphisms. But page 28 by itself makes it seem as if nothing in the Bible represented God as he really is. To cite Calvin as a witness to, a precursor of, or an exponent of a theory of Biblical fallibility is unwarranted.

Now comes a section entitled “Post-Reformation Scholasticism.” Since the term *Scholasticism* has long had a bad odor among Protestants, present-day liberals have frequently used this term to belittle the seventeenth-century Protestants. It is true that Turretin’s style can be called scholastic. It is very systematic, and his arguments are clearly (some would say painfully) delineated. The style, however, is not the important thing; it is the content that matters. On this point no one dare assert that Turretin’s theology reproduces Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, or much less the Romish theologians who wrote after the Council of Trent. Even Dr. Rogers, perhaps unwittingly, certainly inconsistently, quotes Turretin to the effect that Scripture is “the sole principle of theology” (30). This is not scholasticism, for the Romanists always held that tradition was also authoritative. If Turretin thus is no scholastic, whatever his crabbed style might be, he is a liberal even less. Dr. Rogers himself on the same page twice acknowledges that Turretin held the Bible to be inerrant: Its human writers “were so acted upon and inspired by the Holy Spirit, both as to the things themselves, and as to the words, as to be kept free from all error.... The prophets did not make mistakes in even the smallest particular.”

Why then does Dr. Rogers cite Turretin? Surely not as a precursor to his own views. To the present writer the only way to understand the inclusion of Turretin

in this book is the unexpressed argument: Turretin believed in inerrancy; Turretin was a scholastic; scholasticism is bad; therefore the Bible is not inerrant.

Dr. Rogers can indeed score one point against Turretin, as many liberals have done; namely, that he believed the Hebrew vowel points were inspired. But Turretin did so because he thought the vowel points were found in the original manuscripts. This was a common defect of ignorance in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But the fact that Turretin, Voetius, and Owen (on page 36) did not know what was only discovered in the next generation is no argument against inerrancy.

There is no need to comment on the section in which Dr. Rogers discusses the *Westminster Confession*. Most of what he says is true and irrelevant. His last four lines are a subtle misinterpretation. One can read the *Confession* itself, previously quoted.

The section on “The Princeton Theology” is most interesting. Of course, like Turretin, Princeton with its Alexander, the Hodges, and Warfield maintained the full truthfulness of Scripture, until 1929. Dr. Rogers notes that Princeton was then reorganized (37, 41). He gloats, “Thus the false equation of the theory of inerrancy with the position of the *Westminster Confession* was never repudiated. Rather, the church simply agreed not to make any interpretation of the *Westminster Confession* binding” (41).

This is most interesting on several counts. First, the heresy trial of Charles Augustus Briggs shows that the church at that date, as it always had, understood the *Confession* to require acceptance of the truthfulness of the Bible. Second, though the explicit words “We repudiate inerrancy” do not occur in the official documents of 1929, inerrancy was indeed repudiated. Note that the Philadelphia Presbytery refused to permit even the filing of charges against the Auburn Affirmationists. Third, the reorganization of Princeton Seminary included not only the dismissal of its orthodox Board of Directors, but the installation of a new board with a representative from the *Auburn Affirmation* list. Thus the church and the seminary proceeded on the basis that the Scripture is not infallible and that the virgin birth, the miracles, the atonement, and the resurrection are not essential. Dr. Rogers apparently thinks this is progress. Why else does he use it in support of his position? This position is not *evangelical*, and his Bible is not *authoritative*.

Bernard Ramm

The chapter by Bernard Ramm, a gentleman of considerable scholastic ability (with me *scholastic* is not a term of opprobrium) begins with a question concerning the *essence* of Christianity. He refers to both Feuerbach's and Harnack's *Wesen des Christentums*. Ramm's first subtitle is: "Is *sola scriptura* the *Wesen* of Christianity?"

This is a rather misleading question. Ramm aims to show that Biblical infallibility is not the *Wesen* or essence of Christianity. But such, taken strictly, is misleading and irrelevant. Suppose someone should ask, Is the virgin birth the essence of Christianity? Presumably many of the most orthodox would say, No. Is the atonement the essence of Christianity? Many would doubtless say, Yes; but others would say, No. Is the resurrection the essence of Christianity? How would they answer those who said the atonement was the essence? The important question is not the essence of Christianity; but is inerrancy, is the virgin birth, is the resurrection *essential* to Christianity? And these questions must all be answered, Yes. The *Auburn Affirmation* answered, No.

It should be clear that the essence or definition of a religion, a philosophy, or a political party may be complex. A single part of a definition is not the definition. Surely Christianity is a complex theology. Many factors are essential, though not one of them by itself is *the* definition. Ramm's question therefore is misleading.

After quoting a dozen of Warfield's expressions – such as "absolutely infallible," "absolutely errorless," "absolute freedom from error," *etc.* – Ramm comments, "It would be impossible to say that he identified the *Wesen* of Christianity with his view of Holy Scripture. He was enough of an historian of theology to avoid saying that" (112). This last sentence indicates a flaw in Ramm's method. It is not an *historian*, it is a *logician* who determines the essence or definition of his subject of study. It is the logician also who determines what is basic in a complex system of thought. The dialogues of Plato and the Bible contain many assertions. Both contain historical assertions. Of the latter too, not all are on the same logical level. What then is the definition of Platonism? What was Plato's fundamental belief? A Christian may think that the doctrine of the Trinity is the single basic Christian doctrine. But even if a Christian makes inerrancy basic – for unless the Scripture is true, no one can arrive at the doctrine of the Trinity – there are other matters that, though not *das Wesen*, are indeed

wesentlich – essential. Hence two questions, though closely related, must be distinguished: Is inerrancy basic? Is inerrancy essential? What is the essence of Christianity? is not the question. The essence is indeed essential, but not all that is essential is the essence.

Ramm's proclivity toward historicism, rather than toward logical analysis, results in some irrelevancy and misapprehension. He notes that the history of the church doctrine of inspiration includes divergent theories: "To affirm that there is one highly specialized theory of inspiration which runs unbroken through church history is an argument that cannot be maintained" (113).

Now it is true that the history of the visible church presents us with various theologians who differed on many points. This is true, not only of the doctrine of inspiration, but also of the atonement. For example, Bernard held that Christ's death was a ransom paid to Satan who rightfully demanded the allegiance of sinners; but Abelard held that Christ's death was a ransom paid to the Father. Such individual or unofficial differences, however, are irrelevant. The Auburn Affirmationists made similar claims. They tried to defend themselves by saying that they accepted the *fact* of atonement, but not the *doctrine*. This historicism, however, faces two objections. First, the atonement is not a fact, an historical event. The atonement is itself a doctrine. Christ's death is the fact or event. Second, the Auburn Affirmationists had all subscribed to the doctrine of the *Westminster Confession*. The doctrine of the atonement was included in their ordination vows. To reject the eight paragraphs of Chapter VIII, of Christ the Mediator – or simply to dismiss them as unessential – was a violation of their solemn commitment.

This is church history. There have indeed been discordant theories of the atonement and inspiration. But the official position of the church, or the churches, is found – not in the views of individual theologians – but in the official creeds of the denominations. Which creed, at least which creed prior to 1967, denies inerrancy? If there is none, and if they all agree with the creeds quoted earlier in this article, it can be maintained, contrary to Dr. Ramm's assertion, that there is an unbroken theory throughout church history.

Perhaps, however, some organization which calls itself a church may possibly deny the inerrancy of Scripture. In this case one must remember that churches themselves, as well as individuals, must be judged by Scripture. One must judge, not on the basis of history, but on the basis of a verbal revelation. This is why the

Westminster Confession identified the papacy as the Antichrist, the Roman church as a synagogue of Satan, and its members as idolaters (24.3; 25.5 and 6). History as such, the mere occurrence of events, gives no normative principle of evaluation. If this “reduces to a very small group the number of people really true to Christianity,” so be it. Shall we say, in order to increase the number, that Mormons and Moonies are really true to Christianity? Both are found in history.

The defects of historicism are evident on the next page also. Ramm says, “All the doctrines based on events in history then rest for their reality in the bed of history, whether they are ever recorded or not” (114). On the contrary, all the doctrines rest for their reality or truth on the eternal mind of God. There are no doctrines based on history; especially there are no doctrines based on unrecorded events of history. The physical death of Christ is an event of history; it is essential to the truth of Christianity; but the doctrine of the propitiatory sacrifice is not based on the event; the event is based on the doctrine eternally in God’s plan. To say that “Christ was crucified for our sins whether that was ever recorded in a book or not” is hardly to the point. The *ordo essendi*, which Ramm so much wishes to distinguish from the *ordo cognoscendi*, begins with the eternal decree, not with events in time. But so far as Christianity in history is concerned, so far as the application of salvation to individual persons is concerned, the *ordo cognoscendi* is decisive. If faith is necessary to salvation – allowing that faith is a gift of God – then a person must know the Gospel in order to believe it. An unwritten atonement would not allow the possibility of faith. These liberals regularly contrast a heartfelt “faith,” an encounter, or something, with an inerrant Bible. But of what use would be a Bible of blank pages? Does Ramm mean that the heathen can be saved without ever learning of Christ? Does Ramm assert any doctrine? If he does, one may ask, How does he know? The *ordo cognoscendi* is essential for a Hindu, a Muslim, and a Christian too.

The confusion in this part of Ramm’s argument is pervasive. Look carefully at the middle paragraph on the page:

To make a certain view of Scripture the *Wesen* of Christianity means that all such doctrines are second order doctrines. For if the *Wesen* of Christianity is a certain theory of inspiration then all doctrines are only as good as our theory of inspiration is. (114)

This paragraph repeats the fundamental misunderstanding exemplified in the

term *Wesen*. But beyond this the phrase “second order doctrines” is pejorative. It gives the impression that the atonement and the resurrection are somehow unimportant – they are not the *Wesen*, but only nonessential. This is, of course, a complete misrepresentation of the views of those who, like Hodge and Warfield, hold to inerrancy. However, although the wording might be improved upon, it is indeed true that the doctrine of the atonement is only as good as the doctrine of inspiration is. An assertion that the Scripture contains mistakes allows the possibility that the atonement is one of them. The doctrine of inerrancy implies the truth of the atonement. The doctrines of the death and resurrection of Christ cannot be asserted with any greater degree of assurance than the assertor’s view of inspiration permits. If one believes that the Bible is true, he asserts the resurrection as a truth. If one believes the Bible teaches falsehoods here and there, then he cannot base the truth of the resurrection on the Bible alone. In fact, many people have believed, and many people now believe, that the accounts of the resurrection are erroneous.

Ramm’s next paragraph is a logical fallacy. He says, “If a certain view of Scripture is the *Wesen* of Christianity, and cultists and sectarians believe that view of Scripture, by logic we are compelled to admit that they are evangelicals.” Is it not amazing that a recognized scholar can make such an elementary blunder in logic? The whole is a fallacy. There are two requirements, not just one, in order that the term *evangelical* may be properly applied: *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola Fide*. A person who accepts one but not the other is not an evangelical. “Cultists,” therefore, whoever they may be, who accept inerrancy but who also deny justification by faith alone are not evangelicals.

Ramm does indeed say some things that are true and important, but he states the truth to ridicule it. At the bottom of the page we read:

Conversely, if a theologian accepts all the great affirmations we usually associate with the title evangelical but has a view of inspiration divergent from his critic, then his entire theology is suspect and by definition he is not an evangelical.

Ramm thinks that this is ridiculous. No, with one exception it is true. The person referred to is indeed not an evangelical. The exception is that his theology itself may not be suspect, for the evangelical may accept it on the basis of the infallible

Bible. But the person is suspect, and his hold on that theology is unfounded because he recognizes no infallible basis for it. If a Mormon believes in the resurrection of Christ, that does not make the resurrection suspect. But we suspect the Mormon because of his rejection of *Sola Scriptura*.

Ramm continues:

Again this leads to the oddity that in theology some person of mediocre mind and education is to be trusted, but a man with a brilliant mind and evangelical faith like Thomas Torrance is suspect because his view of Scripture is essentially Barthian. (114)

Thomas Torrance is not an evangelical and is not to be trusted. Brilliance is no substitute for doctrinal truth. Of course, we do not give complete trust to a mediocre mind either; for although the mediocre mind here envisaged operates on a solid basis, he may both be ignorant of some things and also make mistakes in reasoning. Thus Ramm makes confused comparisons; that is a second reason for not trusting Dr. Ramm.

The confusion deepens. On page 116 Ramm writes, "*Sola Scriptura* did not affirm that, with reference to the writing of theology, all knowledge other than biblical knowledge is unnecessary." Presumably he means that a knowledge of Greek grammar is useful in writing theology. So it is; but since the New Testament is written in Greek, one may include Greek grammar in the sphere of Biblical knowledge. If he means a knowledge of archaeology or the sociology of Hittite culture, we reply that Protestants accept Scripture as perspicuous and sufficient. "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*" Writing theology, orthodox theology, is a good work. Extra-Biblical knowledge is therefore unnecessary, even if it has some value of its own.

Probably Ramm believes he has guarded his view sufficiently by adding, "*Sola Scriptura*...meant that when it came to decision-making in controversy, the appeal to Scripture was the highest appeal possible, and that, where Scripture spoke on a point, the verdict of Scripture is final." This is excellent, but I have doubts that Ramm believes it. This book in general does not specify how much of the Bible the authors believe and how much they do not. But we can use an example from Dewey Beegle. One of his points to show error in the Bible is the

reign of Pekah. The Bible speaks on this point. There is a controversy. Each person interested in the controversy must eventually make a decision. But Beegle does not take Scripture as the highest appellate court. He decides against Scripture. So does Ramm, if not on this point, then on some other. The denial of inerrancy is *ipso facto* a denial that the verdict of Scripture is final.

Ramm continues to slur “the Bible-only mentality.” It “makes the record of revelation more primordial than the original revelation.” Now, we agree that God spoke to Abraham. This will serve as an example of a “primordial revelation.” Some five centuries later, Moses recorded that revelation. No evangelical denies this, though the *ordo cognoscendi* gives us the information through Moses. However, Moses does more than report primordial revelations of earlier centuries. Nor is the Bible a mere report. The Bible is itself revelation. God wrote the Ten Commandments on stone. Moses wrote them on some vellum. These two writings are, unless Moses was a liar, identical. They are both revelation, but the latter is the only revelation we have. Not all primordial (?) revelation was as direct as that to Abraham and Moses. The historical books are revelation, even primordial revelation, because God did not first write the events on stone; they are revelation therefore, and not reports of a prior revelation. But Ramm makes the Bible only a report, an erroneous report, of an otherwise unknowable revelation, so that the Bible is just a pointer or witness to an unrevealed reality. We therefore press the question: If the Bible is not revelation, but only a fallible witness, how does one discover what in the Bible is true and what is false?

David Hubbard

This article does not discuss every chapter in the book, and now concludes with Dr. Hubbard’s “The Current Tensions: Is There a Way Out?” Since Fuller Seminary (Dr. Hubbard is its president and Dr. Rogers is one of its faculty) seems to be the initiator and most powerful factor in this recent attack on Scripture within the groups which have commonly been thought of as evangelical, this chapter is of great importance.

Dr. Hubbard’s chapter is perhaps more insidious than even Dr. Rogers’ because he speaks of the Bible and even of Hodge and Warfield in such laudatory terms. But a careful reader, before he finishes these pages, will see that Dr. Hubbard does not believe that the Bible is God’s Word: “How do we read the Bible so as

truly to hear God's Word through it?" (153). Thus God's Word is identified with something other than the Bible. The Bible is some sort of conduit through which the Word comes to us. But conduits are not what flow through them. The pipe that brings the water is not the water. An evangelical would say, The Bible is the Word of God. As evidence one may cite the doctrinal platform of the Evangelical Theological Society: "The Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs."

President Hubbard, on the contrary, thinks that the Evangelical Theological Society, Charles Hodge, Benjamin Warfield, Harold Lindsell, Carl Henry, and others muffle its message and obscure its purpose. Or, more accurately and more absurdly, he holds that a belief in the truth of the Bible tends to muffle its message or obscure its purpose. Does this not mean that the more firmly one holds to the truthfulness of what the Bible says, the less interested he is in that truth? Who in his right mind can charge Hodge with tending to muffle the Bible's meaning or restrict its scope? Think not only of his three large volumes on *Systematic Theology*, but also of his commentaries and numerous articles. What really muffles the Bible's message is the belief that parts of it are not true. It is easy to accuse Origen and even Augustine of having made mistakes in interpretation or exegesis, but the cause of such mistakes was not their belief in inerrancy. Allegorizing is indeed a mistake; it was not the right answer to Marcion, but truth does not imply allegory.

Similarly, the president of Fuller repeats Rogers' misguided remarks on the Hebrew vowel points. Inerrancy does not require one to believe they were inspired. What required the idea that they were inspired was the belief that the vowel points are parts of the autographs. This was a mistake, but it was due to general ignorance; it is not a consequence of inerrancy.

It is not hard to list numerous errors that Bible-believers have made. We all make mistakes. Anyone with a little knowledge of the history of doctrine could list more than Dr. Hubbard does. But the argument is fallacious. One might as well argue: The Romanists and Greek Orthodox have made fatal blunders in their theology; they believe in the doctrine of the Trinity; therefore a belief in the Trinity tends to apostasy.

Dr. Hubbard likewise contends that a belief in inerrancy and therefore in the Bible's internal consistency has led to foolish attempts "to harmonize all biblical statements with each other and with the results of scientific and archaeological

discovery” (156). Of course, no one need deny that the results of such attempts have sometimes been mistaken and even foolish. Even attempts to preach the Gospel and explain the atonement have sometimes been foolish. Does this imply that no one should preach the atonement?

With regard to attempts at harmonization, foolish or wise, the two points to be considered are logical consistency and the archaeological and sociological findings of scholarship.

Harmonization is attempted to discover or preserve the logical consistency of Scripture. The aim is to show that the Bible does not contradict itself; for if it did, one side of the contradiction would necessarily be false. Why then does Dr. Hubbard deprecate harmonization? He himself says,

Difficult passages are to be studied in comparison with other passages – similar and different; clear passages were to be used to shed light on less clear portions.... Any interpretation should be questioned that did not accord with the central themes of the faith.... Petty doctrines and doubtful moral teachings were thus to be avoided. (169)

The past tenses of these verbs refer to the *Second Helvetic Confession*, with which Dr. Hubbard seems to agree on these particular points. But with these admissions, why does Dr. Hubbard object to making clear the self-consistency of the Biblical text? Is there any reason other than the supposition that inconsistencies prevent this harmonization? With regard to Biblical consistency, it seems that Dr. Hubbard wants some, but not complete, harmony in the Bible. For this reason he should not have quoted the *Second Helvetic Confession*, for, as was indicated earlier in that article, this confession says, “We confess the canonical Scriptures to be the very, and true, word of God...for God himself spoke to the fathers and still speaks to us by the Holy Scriptures.” There is no room for falsity in God’s speech. Therefore an evangelical must of necessity try to harmonize all Scriptural statements with each other. He may sometimes fail, either because he sees no solution or because his solution is a blunder. But he must try, unless he wishes to charge God’s own words with falsehood.

Now, secondly, although on this page Dr. Hubbard also berates evangelicals for trying “to harmonize all biblical statements...with the results of scientific and archaeological discovery,” on a later page he berates them for not being

interested in archaeology. According to him they lack scholarly interests and refuse to interpret the Bible in its “historical, social, cultural, and linguistic contexts” (161). He insists that “where a rigid system of apologetics [the belief that the Bible is true] becomes the basic definition of orthodoxy, true biblical scholarship becomes difficult if not impossible” (176). In other words, to be a scholar one must believe that the Bible teaches some falsehoods.

It is amusing to see how liberals accuse evangelicals of a lack of scholarship and at the same time are provoked when the evangelicals use archaeology to expose the liberals’ mistakes.

Now the authors of this book have been careful not to say how much of the Bible is in error. But Fuller Seminary, in the person of one of its professors, shows how sociological, if not linguistic and archaeological considerations, impugn the practical and normative Scriptural directions for Christian living, particularly how they conflict with Christian living in the church itself. Dr. Jewett understands what role Paul assigns to women in the church. His exegesis is all that a Bible believer could demand. In this he is more honest, certainly more accurate than that section of women’s lib which takes a modicum of interest in the New Testament. But Dr. Jewett simply insists that Paul was wrong. Paul imposed on the church the cultural and sociological customs of his age. He had no authority to make rules for the church in the twentieth century. Our customs differ from those of ancient Israel, Greece, and Rome. Hence in this age the church must repudiate the New Testament’s norms. The authors of this book are careful not to list the contradictions of Scripture, nor to indicate how much is “culturally conditioned,” but their associates are more open. Why does not President Hubbard apply to Professor Jewett his own words? “The theology that weds itself to the philosophy of its age ends up a widow in the next age” (166). He says, “In the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, *truth* was the concern.” Is truth of no concern in the twentieth? If it is not, no one need consider whether the views of this book are true or not. But if truth is of eternal concern, then we must condemn these views as false. Speaking of truth, it is wrongheaded to say, “The Holy Spirit is not plagued by such limitations” (166).

Similarly on the next page, it is wide of the mark to say, “the Hodge-Warfield brand of Reformed Theology...comes close to jeopardizing the solid principle that Scripture is sufficient.” Quite the reverse: What jeopardizes – indeed denies – the sufficiency of Scripture is its rejection on the basis of “cultural conditioning.”

The most amazing accusation of cultural conditioning, however, is not directed against the Bible, but against Hodge and Warfield and twentieth-century evangelicals.

One form in which this danger [jeopardizing the sufficiency of Scripture] shows itself in the current questions over Scripture is in the definition of *error*. As used in the *delicate* [note the terminology of propaganda] discussions in which evangelicals are now engaged, error should surely be defined in theological terms derived from and limited to the Bible itself. Yet time and again in the arguments presented by those who purport to follow the Hodge-Warfield position words like *error*, or *inerrancy*, or *infallibility* are defined by secular, twentieth-century standards, sometimes with an appeal to Webster's dictionary for support. *Error* theologically must mean that which leads us astray from the will of God or the knowledge of His truth. (167-168)

According to this the general populace, as well as Hodge and Warfield, do not know what the term *error* means. We common folk use Webster's dictionary. My copy says, "Error: Belief in what is untrue...a moral offense, sin.... An act involving a departure from truth or accuracy." Hence people who use ordinary English, if they think that the Bible departs from the truth, say that the Bible contains errors. Since the Bible is a book, we do not say that the Bible sins. If the term *error*, contrary to both the dictionary and the New Testament, is restricted to overt sinful actions, obviously the Bible cannot be accused of error, because books do not sin. But if error includes any departure from truth, then a book can assert erroneous propositions. Dr. Hubbard does not want to speak in the ordinary English of the dictionary. He supposes that the Bible has a different definition of error; so that if it departs from the truth, it contains no error.

Dr. Hubbard substitutes another definition and gives some examples. "Error theologically must mean that which leads us astray from the will of God or the knowledge of his truth." He quotes the Bible: "But who can discern his errors? ... Whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way...beware...the error of lawless men.... You are wrong [you err] because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God" – these are the scriptural uses which give us clues as to what error means" (168).

That the Bible uses the term *error* to denote sin is something not even Webster

denies. But this is only a partial definition. In this sense no book errs, because inanimate objects cannot sin. But even Dr. Hubbard bears witness, maybe unwittingly, to another form of error; namely, a departure from the knowledge of God's truth. Now, one of two things: Either he means that a book as it cannot sin, so also it cannot know, and hence it cannot be "led astray"; or else, what the Bible says about Pekah and the history of Israel is not God's truth. Dr. Hubbard does not mention Pekah. He has not thought it necessary to point out the "technical inaccuracies" of the Bible. He simply, in general terms, dismisses the "minute details of chronology, geography, history, or cosmology." Then he adds,

The false alternatives often posed between biblical inerrancy and biblical errancy are not themselves biblical choices. They are imposed from without in a way that tries to force the Bible to give answers that God, who inspired the Book, apparently had no intention of giving. (168)

This is far from apparent. If it was not God's intention that we should know the history of Israel, including a multitude of "minute details" in *Kings* and *Chronicles*, why did he inspire all of these chapters? Or are these four books not a part of God's revelation? If we believe one of these details, and the detail is false, are not we and the Bible both in error? Has not the Bible, under such a supposition, led us astray from God's truth?

Error is not simply overt acts of sin. Error and sin can be inward and mental. This is not just *Merriam-Webster*: It is the Bible as well. Even the verses Dr. Hubbard quotes include a reference to an incorrect inference based on a misunderstanding of the Scriptures. The error was a thought that was false. It seems strange that in this twentieth century, after two millennia of Bible study, that one must labor to show that the Bible approves of truth and disapproves of falsehood. But the situation demands a reference to verses that Dr. Hubbard does not quote. Abraham twice told a half-truth and half-lie about his wife. God's disapproval is evident. The Ten Commandments prohibit false witness. In *1 Kings* 13:18 a false prophet lied and death resulted. Two verses in *Job* make an interesting comparison. *Job* 6:24 says, "Cause me to understand wherein I have erred." Since this most probably refers to some alleged misconduct, Dr. Hubbard could use it as an example of his sense of error. But four verses below, Job insists that he is telling the truth: "For I would never lie to your face." Indeed in verse 25 he says, "How forceful are right words!" It is clear that lies and falsehoods are

reprehensible. And can we suppose that the Holy Spirit inspired his prophets to tell lies? Jeremiah condemns the prophets who spoke lies (5:31; 14:14; 20:6; 23:25). Conversely, God is a God of truth. Christ said, "I tell the truth." Paul said the same thing in reference to a chronological detail (*Galatians* 1:18-21). Ananias and Sapphira lied about a financial transaction. And John says, "There shall by no means enter [into the New Jerusalem] anything that...causes...a lie."

Dr. Hubbard appends an amazing footnote to the quotation last made. He had spoken of "false alternatives...not themselves biblical choices." The footnote reads in full, "The recent interplay between Harold Lindsell and Robert Mounce illustrates my point that the key issue among evangelicals is not errancy or inerrancy, but what do we mean by error? Lindsell baits Mounce in a letter to *Eternity* (November 1976, page 96): 'Let Dr. Mounce say clearly that he believes that "the Bible is free from all error in the whole and in the part," or let him say he believes there are some errors, however few, in the Bible.' Mounce, perceptive theologian that he is, refuses to bite: 'The Bible is without error in whole and in part. The controversy is over what constitutes an error.'"

This footnote is amazing for its falsehood and deceit. The key issue – not among evangelicals, but between Bible believers and liberals – is precisely whether or not all that the Bible teaches is true, including historical details. We know what we mean by *error*. False statements are errors. This is good English usage, and good Greek and Hebrew usage. When Wellhausen denied the historicity of the Hittites, he was accusing the Bible of error. The key issue is certainly the question of truth versus falsehood. Then Dr. Mounce has the effrontery to say, "The Bible is without error in whole and in part." If this is not deceit, there is no such thing as deceit.

Consider the effrontery of this language. Though the authors of this book refrain from giving examples of falsehoods in the Bible, we are justified in supposing a particular case. If Hezekiah were one of their unexpressed examples, they would say something like this: *2 Chronicles* 32:30 says, "This same Hezekiah also stopped the outlet water of Upper Gihon." Of course Hezekiah did no such thing. The alleged event did not occur. However, this is not an error in the Bible, for the statement is *true* to the extent it fulfills and expresses the Bible's main message.

Harold Lindsell asked Dr. Mounce a straightforward question in plain English. Dr. Hubbard says, "Mounce, perceptive theologian that he is, refuses to bite."

Rather the contrary; one might well say he bit much harder than he had any right to do. Ask any Georgia cracker, any Indiana Hoosier, any northwest lumberjack, any graduate of Vassar or Bryn Mawr – would they answer that “The Bible is free from error in the whole and in the part” means it contains historical, chronological, and geographical falsehoods? Probably InterVarsity Fellowship permits its officers to deny inerrancy; “The National Association of Evangelicals chose the word ‘infallibility’ rather than inerrancy,” though as we have seen the two words are synonyms: But what could better exemplify the deceptive propaganda than the suggestion that Moody Bible Institute somehow ruled out inerrancy when it said, “The original autographs – were verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit” (179)? Such a suggestion can only be made by a consistent misuse of ordinary English.

In view of this book’s lack of forthrightness, its pervasive propaganda devices, its begging and dodging the question, its twisting the meaning of words, the question of its morality cannot be evaded. J. Barton Payne brought this question clearly to the fore in his “Ethical Issues in the Responses to *The Battle for the Bible*” (*Presbiterian*, III, 2, 95ff). His argument should be considered very seriously and solemnly. Are these responses compatible with Christian standards of truthfulness?

On the back cover of the book the advertisement reads, “The ‘battle for the Bible’ today threatens evangelicalism with schism.” In a sense it does. This is about what the Auburn Affirmationists said, too. It reminds one of *1 Kings* 18:17: “When Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, ‘Is that you, O troubler of Israel?’”

[1] “The holy, divine, Biblical Scripture, which is the Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit...is the most perfect and loftiest teaching and alone deals with everything that serves the true knowledge, love and honor of God, as well as true piety and the making of a godly, honest and blessed life” (translation from augmented German edition by Arthur C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, Westminster John Knox Press, [1966] 2003, 100). “Canonical Scripture is the Word of God, given by the Holy Spirit...the most perfect and ancient philosophy; it alone perfectly contains all godliness [and] all reasonable manner of life” (translation of Latin text in Niemeyer by James T. Dennison, Jr., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, Volume 1, 1523-1552, Reformation Heritage Books, 2008, 343). –Editor

[2] We believe and confess that the canonical Scriptures...are the very Word of God.... For God himself spoke by the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures. (See above 137). – *Editor*.

[3] For Augustine, compare *Ep.* 82, 4, 3; 137: *De Doctrina Christiana* 1:39; 2:8; 2:42; *De Civitate Dei* 11:3, *Enchiridion* 1:4; *De Utilitate Credendi* 6.

Hamilton's Theory of Language and Inspiration

Kenneth Hamilton, author of *Words and the WORD*, begins his study of language and inspiration by contrasting Empiricism and Idealism. The empirical theory restricts words to the function of describing physical things, and, as in Logical Positivism, makes nonsense of theology. The idealistic theory extends language to transphenomenal reality, but as a result loses the world of sense where history takes time and space.

In chapter two, the author expounds how these two theories evaluate myth. Obviously, Empiricism holds that myth is a mistake to be outgrown, serving only some childish subjective demands of an insecure self. For the idealist, with his different view of the nature of reality, myth is the method by which an alienated people remember an original wholeness that has been lost, and not merely a primitive language to be outgrown. It is a sort of pointer to transphenomenal Being.

In opposition to the empirical and the idealistic theories, Hamilton proposes an historical theory. But one must be careful not to speak of Empiricism, Idealism, and then conclude that Hamilton accepts *Historicism*. Language seems to fail the author at this point.

There is also another failure. Hamilton has throughout treated Empiricism and Idealism as mutually exclusive. It is as though he were a zoologist classifying animals as either pachyderms or mammals. The classification is poor because some animals are both. Similarly some philosophers are both. The best known (probably) of all modern idealists was a vigorous empiricist – Bishop Berkeley. In the present century Edgar A. Singer published *Empirical Idealism* (Part II of *Mind as Behavior*, 1924).

Not only does the classification fail because some philosophers are both empiricist and idealist, it fails also because the two classes are not exhaustive. This remains a flaw even when “historical” is added as a third class. Presumably Leibniz is a non-empirical idealist, but he is also “historical,” as his definition of Alexander the Great shows. Descartes and Spinoza are neither empirical, nor idealistic, nor “historical” either. This failure in classification throws the whole

study off balance, resulting in a pervasive ambiguity that the superficial reader is not likely to detect.

Myth

Although the author rejects Idealism, he retains a somewhat similar view of mythical language. On page 87, where he has left off his descriptions of other views and is totally engaged in explaining his own, he says, "Nevertheless, as we have seen, all language grows out of mythic thinking and still bears the marks of its origin." This is a surprising statement for two reasons. The first is in the words "as we have seen." This is surprising because the reader has nowhere seen it. In chapter two, Hamilton expounds the view of Ernst Cassirer "without following him all the way," and later turns for three pages to Mircea Eliade. If this material is pure exposition, it cannot serve as proof for his later statement that "all language grows out of mythic thinking." But if these expositions are included because Hamilton adopts them as his own, what can one make of his qualification, "without following him all the way"? The author gives us no definite statement of how much he accepts. Therefore we must assume that he accepts all he reports. Even so, it is far from clear that Cassirer, with Eliade's help, has produced a plausible argument for the mythical origin of language. There are many assertions, but few reasons.

For example, Hamilton, expounding Cassirer, says,

Intelligence...is not man's decisive characteristic. What really distinguishes him from other animals is his ability to construct symbols.... He does not first understand the world, and then learn how to put his knowledge into words. Rather his invention of verbal symbols provides the possibility of his having knowledge.... Cassirer argues therefore that myth (as the primal form of thinking) and language go hand in hand in educating man to make sense of his existence. (45)

Since the author through the remainder of his book seems to depend wholly on Cassirer, immediate attention should be given to this quotation. In the first place, this reviewer does not see that "Cassirer argues." He simply asserts and his assertions are implausible. One at least is also anti-Biblical. Cassirer tries to construct an intelligent man from a non-intelligent but symbolizing man. Now

aside from the fact that this contradicts the Biblical doctrine of the divine image in man and renders the view anti-Christian, it supposes that an unintelligent or non-rational being can construct words or symbols to refer to objects. This is patently backwards. It takes intelligence to construct symbols, and in particular before constructing the symbol the man must have something in mind to symbolize. A primitive man would never invent the sound or vocal symbol *cat*, unless he had first seen a little tail and heard its other end say, "meow." Does anyone believe that he said to himself, "*Cat* is such a nice sound; I shall use it to symbolize whatever I see tomorrow at noon?"

Hence the assertion that "all language grows out of mythic thinking" is baseless. Baseless also is the assertion that language "still bears the marks of its origin." Hence Cassirer's assertion on which Hamilton depends, namely, "invention of verbal symbols provides the possibility of having knowledge," is quite implausible. Certainly the truth is what Cassirer denies: Man first understands the world and then invents symbols to express his thoughts.

In the second place (and here we need not simply guess at how much Hamilton accepts from Cassirer, for these are his own words), it is equally implausible to assert, without evidence, that all language still bears the marks of its mythological origin. True enough, Hamilton admits that scientific thought "tries as much as possible to escape from the subjectivities of language by using the sign-language of mathematics" (87). But it is not enough to brush mathematics aside with such a brief admission. What is needed is evidence that the words *two* and *three* bear the marks of their mythic origin. What are these marks? They should be specified.

It might seem to belabor the matter overly much, if mention were made also of the square root of minus one. But this is not only devoid of marks of mythological origin, it also reinforces a previous point, for the symbol $\sqrt{-1}$ was not first invented and then later some object found to apply it to. The mathematicians first understood that all quadratic equations should have two roots, and this understanding caused them to invent (an extremely simple task) a symbol to denote the roots of $x^2 + 1 = 0$.

But to annoy non-mathematical minds no further, be it noted that Hamilton makes no effort to show that even the word *cat* has a mythological origin and still bears discernible traces of the same.

Chapter two, where Hamilton apparently tries to justify his mythical view, is replete with ungrounded assertions. Examples are: (1) “Myth then is not in the first instance a fiction imposed on one’s already given world” – I should think it is. (2) “Each life reenacts in part the history of the human race” – sufficiently vague to be true in some sense or other, but does Hamilton mean “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny”? or that each boy sometimes suffers a Napoleonic complex? (3) “The close relationship between the mythic and the religious consciousness is very visible *here*” [italics mine], that is, in the fact that children’s “personal excursions into myth making result in their being accused of being deliberate liars!” – where is there *here* any relationship between the religious consciousness and myth? Does the conjoined quotation from Wordsworth’s poetry suffice as a reason or argument? (4) Similarly to a previous thought, “Before some thing [like a cat] has been given a name, it remains unknown.... Naming it causes it to ‘be’ in the sense that it now enters into human consciousness as an entity existing in its own right” – was this true of the planet Neptune after it was discovered and before it was named or the continent now named America?

Here then are four instances in which Hamilton has given no reasons for asserting that “all language grows out of mythic thinking and still bears the marks of its origin.”

Although mythology is the basis of Hamilton’s theory of language and inspiration, one must not suppose that he is a simple “mythologist.” He is far from endorsing Bultmann’s program of demythologization. To arrive at Biblical language, two steps away from mythology must be taken. The first is to dilute, or refine, myth into poetry. This advance, he says, gives us a God who really exists, as opposed to mythological gods who do not.

Here again is a classification with the same defect that vitiated his empirical-idealistic-historical division of philosophers. He speaks as if poetry and mythology are mutually exclusive – poetry is a higher form of language than mythology. Obviously such is not the case: Homer and Hesiod wrote poetry and their poetry is mythology. Because of the false disjunction, Hamilton’s thought is hard to disentangle. He seems to think that mythology was first expressed in prose (which might very well be true) and then poetry was a refinement away from myth. But then must there be something other than prose and poetry to give a proper and mature expression of religion?

In any case, poetry cannot give us any literal truth about God. It still retains too

much myth. Of course, the retention is not all bad. Myth, says the author, is not merely superstition (63). “The true religion is born in the midst of the many false religions.” From which the reviewer concludes that mythology had to work toward a concept of Jehovah before Adam could have had this idea. No evidence for the quoted statement is given. It apparently depends on the evolutionary principle that monotheism is a late social development.

Even so, the influence of the old mythological language continues, either in poetry or in Hamilton’s second step. “The Scriptures did not fall down from heaven” (63). Well, of course. The manuscripts (except the tables of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments) did not fall down from Heaven. Moses used a pen to write them. Therefore what the author expressly says is literally true. But does he not mean to suggest that the verbal message of the Scriptures did not come from Heaven? “The Word of God comes to us as the words of men, men rooted in their times and speaking the language of their country.” Again, true literally, apart from its context. The Scriptures come *to us* in the twentieth century translated into English. They did not fall down from Heaven to us in our lifetime. But what about revelations to Adam, Abraham, and even to Moses before he wrote them down? Could not God have used Hebrew? Must God have used language formed by mythology? Is God incapable of revealing the literal truth? Hamilton clearly holds that human language is incapable of expressing literal truth about God. His last sentence in chapter two would have been unnecessary and impossible if he had thought that Scriptural language was literal. The last sentence is: “How human language, formed on patterns that have grown out of myth, can convey to us the truth of God’s own revelation: this is the subject of my next two lectures” (63).

Human Language

Before summarizing chapters three and four, one can well pause to consider the phrase *human language*. When Paul in human Greek says that God justifies believers, did he speak the literal truth or some other, unknowable kind of truth that is not truth at all? A phrase similar to “human language” occurs frequently in other authors. They contrast “human logic” with “divine logic.” But do they dare make explicit what this phrase means? Human logic says, If all men are mortal, and if Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal. But if divine logic is different, then all men can be mortal and Socrates can be a man, yet Socrates will not be

mortal. Or, again, if human mathematics says that two plus two is four, and if divine truth differs from ours, then for God two and two are five or ten or anything but four. The point here is that human logic and divine logic are identical. Human logic is a part of the divine image in man. It is God's trademark stamped upon us. Only by rejecting the Biblical doctrine of God's image can one contrast human language with divine language and divine logic with human.

Finally, if human language cannot be literally true, any assertion "language is not literal" cannot be literally true. The position is self-refuting, and one can have little hope of explaining how "language formed on mythical patterns" can convey God's truth.

Chapter three starts with a resume: Empiricism gives us actuality without God. Idealism has God without actuality (chapter one); Empiricism makes myth a dead end road on the journey from ignorance to knowledge, while Idealism makes myth the basic form of human speech that cannot describe the phenomenal world but instead symbolizes the transcendental world of meaning (chapter two).

At this point, Hamilton begins to take his second step away from myth. He goes from myth to poetry to parable. "Christian faith...gladly admits that better knowledge of the objective world has made religions founded upon the literal acceptance of myth untenable" (67).^[1] Yet he will have man, by reason of symbolic language, remain a "myth-making creature." Then, he continues, Christian faith gives "no privileged instruction about 'what the case is' in the created world," for example, that David was King of Israel, "nevertheless [it] gives him essential knowledge about the world as divinely created. It also gives him assurance of the human meaning of his existence. It mediates this meaning beyond the reaches of his own consciousness."

But if faith or revelation cannot tell us about David, how can it tell us about the divine creation of the world? Surely the latter is harder to discover. Then too, how can faith "mediate" any meaning beyond consciousness? Is not faith an element of consciousness?

But let us get on with the second step away from mythic language to parabolic language that supposedly reveals divine truth better than plain literal statement can. Why and how does Hamilton arrive at parable? The how is not at all clear. No theory is worked out to show that language, assumed to originate in myth,

must by the laws of evolution become poetry and then by those same laws become parabolic. Hamilton's *why* is clearer than his *how*. The reason is that he does not want to get so far away from mythology as to arrive at literal truth. He wants to prepare the ground by rejecting plenary and verbal inspiration. " 'Dictation' theories of revelation sometimes seem to assume that God communicates His Word through vocables,^[2] so that understanding the exact sense of an aggregate of propositions is to receive the Word of God. This is surely to bind the divine Word to the measure of human words."

Here again evolutionary theory is assumed. Human words and human logic are naturalistic products of society. They are not recognized as the image of God in man. No doubt Hamilton calls them gifts of God, but only as finger nails and the United States Constitution are gifts of God. The element of divine normative imposition is lacking. This type of argument is essentially similar to the Pentecostalist charge that those who repudiate speaking in tongues "bind the divine spirit to the measure of their human theology." The Reformation answer is that the Scriptures describe the Spirit's function in tongues and miracles as limited to certain ages. To say what the Spirit does is not to limit God's power. Therefore emphasis on the propositions of Scripture does not prevent God from saying anything he chooses to: It only indicates what he has chosen to say.

Revelation

Hamilton, on the other hand, apparently wants revelations in addition to Scripture. The remainder of his sentence half quoted above is: "for it is to say that we already have the words that can state all that God can possibly want us to know." "Can possibly" is the language of propaganda. The question does not concern what God can possibly do: It is a question of what God has actually done. The Reformation view is that the Scriptures give us all the information about salvation that God wants us to know. As *2 Peter* 1:3 says, God's "divine power has [already] given to us *all things* that pertain to life and godliness." And the well-known *2 Timothy* 3:16-17 say that the Scripture furnishes a man *completely* for "every good work." Nothing else is needed. For this reason Hamilton's word "state" is also a propaganda device. It was never the Reformation view that the Bible *states*, explicitly, all that God wants us to know. But as the *Westminster Confession* says, "The *whole* counsel of God, concerning *all things* necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is *either expressly* set down in

Scripture, or by *good and necessary consequence* may be deduced from Scripture,” that is, by human logic that is logical because it is first divine logic.

Therefore, what Hamilton objects to seems to be Biblical divine truth, namely, “faith in God consists essentially in the believing reception of” not perhaps of “each and every scriptural statement,” for this would require a prodigious memory, but at least of the basic theology “as objectively true” (75).

It is quite clear that Hamilton does not accept the Bible as the Word of God: “The fact that words are in the Bible...does not mean that our reading of them necessarily must yield authoritative statements that we can proceed forthwith to identify with the Word of God.” Well, of course, not *necessarily*, for some people some of the time do not understand the words they read; so that “our reading” the words, if we are such people, does not necessarily yield correct propositions. The phraseology here is again propaganda, for the important question is not whether some people misread the Bible, but whether the words and sentences of the Bible are authoritative statements because they are true because they are the words of God. It is obviously poor thinking to attack a theory of the inspiration and truth of the Scriptures on the ground that some people do not understand the words. Must one take a textbook on calculus as mythological, poetic, or parabolic and not literally true because some high school students cannot understand it? It is by such invalid reasoning that Hamilton rejects the Scripture as revelation. He says, “Were this the case [identifying the words of the Bible with the Word of God] then the Bible, rather than being that inspired record...would be the written law of God.”

Now there is a sense in which the Bible is an inspired record. It inerrantly records God’s revelation to Abraham and the wars of David, King of Israel. But in addition to being a record of divine revelations, it is itself the complete revelation. As the opening section of the *Westminster Confession* (determinative of the evangelical position) says, “it pleased the Lord...to commit the same [earlier revelations] wholly unto writing...those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.” Thus in contrast with Hamilton’s denial, the Bible is indeed the written law of God.

Hamilton’s use of the term *law* instead of the term *word* may be pejorative. The *law* of God carries restrictive connotations in opposition to grace. A careless reader might well be impressed because he would not want to limit the Bible by excluding the message of grace. But if *law* is used in a broader sense – if it means

the written message of God, if, as Hamilton says in the next paragraph, law is “something set, placed, fixed, laid down,” – then an evangelical would accept his statement as true, and not as false as he intended it. The Bible most certainly is something fixed and laid down. Thus Hamilton’s reason for rejecting the Reformation view turns out to be a reason for accepting it.

Before that next paragraph is finished, however, Hamilton reverts to the narrower and more usual sense of law as an enactment prescribing certain conduct and specifying a punishment for disobedience. Grace is left out. Therefore the author misinterprets *2 Corinthians* 3:6 to mean that Paul “was speaking of himself as a minister of...a covenant not of the written word but of the Spirit” (77). This is a false disjunction, for the covenant of grace is both a covenant of the written word – in *Genesis*, *Ezekiel*, and *Galatians* – and a covenant of the Spirit. Obviously, arguments dependent on false disjunctions are invalid. A similar example of fallacious reasoning is the use of a universal statement that is only sometimes true. Hamilton asserts, “Worship in spirit and in truth includes the recognition that human words are inadequate, so that our prayers must be given by the Spirit a meaning that we cannot verbalize.” But can anyone seriously believe that all worship must include such recognition? Or that *all* prayers *must* be given a different meaning that we cannot verbalize? For my part I rather suppose that the woman at the well worshiped Christ in spirit and in truth without any such recognition. It also seems to me that when I pray God to ease the sufferings of an elderly friend, the Spirit does not change the meaning into something I cannot verbalize. But then it may be that when I pray that a friend may be relieved of suffering or that God would grant repentance to millions that I am not worshiping in spirit and in truth. But I pray to do so, and for this purpose I find literal language completely adequate.

John Calvin

It must be emphasized that Hamilton has rejected the historical position of Protestantism and in doing so has misunderstood what that position is. He speaks of “a lapse into legalism among those followers of Calvin who had gone beyond Calvin’s robust practical grasp of Christian faith to erect, *as he did not* [italics mine], theories of verbally inerrant inspiration.”

Now, besides the pejorative use of the words *lapse* and *legalism* in contrast with *robust*, one must note the historical reference in the words “as he did not.”

Calvin's position, which is somewhat different from what Hamilton would have us believe, is set forth at length by Kenneth Kantzer in the Evangelical Theological Society publication, *Inspiration and Interpretation* (edited by John F. Walvoord, Eerdmans, 1957). In chapter four, "Calvin and the Holy Scriptures," Kantzer quotes Calvin's *Institutes*,

God was pleased to commit and consign his Word to writing.... He commanded also the prophecies to be committed to writing, and to be held part of his Word. To these at the same time were added historical details, which are also the composition of prophets but dictated by the Holy Spirit. (137)

In fact, as Kantzer points out, Calvin frequently asserted that God "dictated" the text. True enough, Calvin did not use the verb as it applies in a modern business office. But its frequency should warn everyone against attributing to Calvin a view that God dictates errors. Kantzer refers to Calvin's calling the prophets "clerks" and "penmen," "sure and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit; and therefore their writings are to be considered as the oracles of God." He also calls them "organs and instruments." He refers to Scripture as the "sure and infallible record," "the unerring standard" – here is inerrancy – "the pure Word of God," and "the infallible rule of his holy truth." Quoting no less than thirteen other passages, Kantzer remarks, "The merest glance at Calvin's commentaries will demonstrate how seriously the reformer applied his rigid doctrine of verbal inerrancy to his exegesis of Scripture" (142).

May I also add a quotation from the *Institutes* I.vii.1: "Believers...are satisfied of its divine origin, as if they heard *the very words* pronounced by God himself."

Because of all this, the reader can surmise that the reviewer will be less than enthusiastic about Hamilton's fourth and concluding chapter.

Here Hamilton notes that the Old Testament's denunciation of idolatry (and he might have added *2 Peter* 1:16, "We have not followed sophisticated myths" [*KJV*]) requires the rejection of myth. Christian "revelation must have a propositional aspect to it."^[3] Yet "all language...bears the marks of its mythological origin.... The Bible does not remove us out of the reach of mythic language, yet it allows us to avoid the untruth of myth" (86).

How the Bible, or Xenophon for that matter, allows us to avoid the untruth of

myth may not be too important. For if Paul and Herodotus simply substitute some other type of untruth for the untruth of myth, and if we never arrive at literal truth, why should we not dismiss the whole thing as fanciful stories?

Literal Truth

In spite of the fact that Hamilton wants to escape myth through poetry to parable, he continues to say, “The language of Scripture...would have been incomprehensible otherwise,” that is, unless mythic patterns had been used. Ananias would not have understood the directions to Straight Street, had it not been mythological in form. “Sumerian, Babylonian, Phoenician, and Egyptian myths [were] taken up into the biblical accounts of creation” and “Gnostic myths [are] present in the N.T. descriptions of Christ.^[4]... The biblical language employs the imagery of myth, while transforming its content.^[5] Creation myths in which the gods wrested apart earth and heaven out of the body of the monster Chaos account for some of the phrasing of the biblical account of creation” (89).

Clearly, however much Hamilton may want to go beyond myth, he does not seem to get very far away, for on the next page he says, “Lacking the mythic pattern [of Gnosticism] that originally produced the necessary terminology, we should not be able to speak of Christ’s death and resurrection” (90).

Is this not complete nonsense? Am I dependent on Gnostic or other myths when I speak of Roman soldiers laying Jesus on a cross and pounding nails into his hands and feet? Certainly I understood this in childhood long before I ever heard of Gnosticism. Nor am I at all sure that Matthew knew anything about Gnosticism. If any one now replies that Matthew and I did not need to have known Gnosticism because we use language already formed, let him explain to us how mythology formed the words *nails*, *soldiers*, *cross*, *spear*, and *death*. Similarly, what mythology is needed for Peter to see that the tomb was empty and later to see Jesus in Galilee and talk with him? Is it not therefore complete nonsense to say that we could not talk about Christ’s death unless mythology had given us these words?

At this point someone will likely object that since Hamilton does not allow literal language, he does not really mean what he says. He said we could not talk about Christ’s death. What he meant (though not literally) was that Paul could not explain the atonement without depending on Gnosticism. Paul’s explanation

begins by stating that men exchange the glory of God for idols. Well, of course, Paul could not have said this (truthfully) unless there had been idolatry. In this sense some assertions of Scripture depend on false religions. But this is far from proving that monotheism is a late social product, and equally far from proving that this is mythic, non-literal language. When, further, Paul says that God set forth Christ as a propitiation so that God might be both just and the justifier of some sinners, the fact that there were pagan sacrifices neither proves that they antedated the animal sacrifice in Eden and Abel's later sacrifice, nor that any of this language is other than literal. That God should be satisfied with Christ's death is just as literal as that soldiers drove nails through Jesus' hands and feet.

One hardly escapes the impression that the author does not treat his opponents fairly. He says,

Yet because revelation is given in human words, it cannot be more precise than language allows. [How true! A perfect tautology. But is God, who produced language, unable to use it with perfect precision?] The belief that the Bible consists of statements of *literal truth* [italics his], therefore, is ill-conceived. [The *therefore* is a logical fallacy.] The notion of literal truth is quite correct if we oppose literal to the mythical.... In this sense we must say that God *literally* created the world.... It is quite another matter, though, if we insist that all the statements of Scripture are literally true. (91)

This sort of argument is hardly fair to the Reformation view because no one from the time of Moses to the present ever said that all statements are strictly literal. Did Luther, Quenstedt, Gausson, or Warfield ever say so? Of course there are figures of speech, metaphors, anthropomorphisms, and the like. But these would be meaningless if there were no literal statements to give them meaning. For example, *2 Chronicles* 16:9 – “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth” – is ludicrously ridiculous if taken literally: little eyeballs rolling over the dusty ground. But unless the statement, God is omniscient, is literal, the figure has nothing to refer to. Surely Hamilton did not publish his book to remind us that the Bible contains some figures of speech. And yet his argument here depends on the alleged fact that someone said “all the statements of Scripture are literally true.”

Consider the footnote on this page:

“Literal” is not synonymous with “historical.” Inspiration does not imply that what is inspired must be understood literally, and even less that everything must be viewed as having actually happened.... To put it bluntly, to accept everything reported in the Bible as having actually happened, one must tamper with the text.

These words which Hamilton with approval quotes from H. M. Kuitert are unclear. The language is typical of liberals who want to appear conservative to orthodox people while they undermine the truth of the Scripture. When Kuitert says “everything reported,” does he refer to metaphors? To statements made by Satan? Does “everything reported” refer to everything reported as having actually occurred? The first two possibilities are puerile. The third is a repudiation of evangelical religion. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the latter is the meaning intended. For example, *2 Peter* claims that it was written by Peter. About such a claim Hamilton writes, “For a long time now, every author has been considered to have a proprietary right over his works. But the biblical books came out of a milieu in which such a concept was unknown, and where there was no issue of truth or falsehood involved in using a revered name in connection with writings by other hands.” This statement is not true even of pagan scholarship, for the Alexandrian philosophers carefully distinguished between thirty-six genuine Platonic dialogues and ten spurious. See also E. M. B. Green, *Second Peter Reconsidered* (Tyndale Press, 1960), where he writes to the effect that forgeries were not cordially received as the critics maintain, but that the subapostolics distinguished themselves and even Apollon from the apostles, and deposed the author of *Paul and Thekla* for his imposture. Another instance was Serapion, who banned the *Gospel of Peter* from his church because by careful investigation he had discovered it was a forgery.

Parable

After his remarks on the authorship of spurious writings, Hamilton comes quickly to his solution to the problem of how language with its mythical inheritance can express divine truth. It is done by parable. The book of *Jonah*, he says, does not report actual occurrences. Its literary form shows that it is a parable. (There never was a Jonah. I guess there was no Nineveh, either.) Everyone acknowledges that Christ taught in parables. [\[6\]](#) Not everything in the

Bible, Hamilton acknowledges, is a parable; the apocalyptic visions are not. But “if we are to look for a ‘key’ mode of language-usage in Scripture, then parable fits this position much more suitably than myth does” (100).

Let us immediately agree. There are also other sentences in the book, which, if detached from their context, can be understood in an orthodox sense. So, it is true that parable is more suitable than mythology. But is parable more suitable than and a substitute for literal language? Hamilton has made the wrong comparison. He has here avoided mentioning the weak link in his argument; for if there is no literal truth of which the parable is an illustration, it has no referent and becomes pointless.

It would indeed seem that Hamilton has made parables pointless and meaningless. He says,

A parable...assumes that the divine reality its human words open to us, though literally beyond our comprehension, can actually be revealed to us by means of human words. Thus many of the parables of Jesus begin, “The kingdom of God is like....” Certainly the comparison is no more than a comparison. The kingdom of heaven cannot be brought down to earth for our inspection; it remains always a mystery. Yet Jesus could say... “It is given unto you to know the mysteries....” (96)

This quotation is peculiar. It begins by saying that the sense of the parable, that is, the divine reality it reveals, is literally beyond our comprehension, but ends with Christ’s assertion that the disciples should understand it. In the middle is the word *mystery*: The kingdom remains always a mystery. But mysteries are not necessarily impossible or even difficult to understand. One might even say that they are usually easy to understand. In the New Testament, *mystery* does not refer to something we call *mysterious* in English. For example, *1 Corinthians* 15:51 states a mystery: It may be hard for some people to *believe*, but there is no difficulty in *understanding* it.

Then too it is false to say that “the kingdom of heaven cannot be brought down to earth for our inspection.” Christ did just that. Also the kingdom remains with us, and we inspect it daily.

But once more, if “the comparison is no more than a comparison,” or, better, if

it is as much as a comparison, the particular truth illustrated by the comparison must be understandable, for otherwise the parable's language would not reveal the truth to us.

In conclusion, first, Hamilton's theory of language is destructive of Christian truth. Surely language, as God's gift to Adam, has as its purpose, not only communication among men, but communication between man and God. God spoke words to Adam and Adam spoke words to God. Since this is the divine intention, words or language is adequate. To be sure, on occasion – even on frequent occasions – sinful man cannot find the right words to express his thought; but this is a defect of man, not an inadequacy of language. The Bible does not countenance a theory that originates language in pagan mythology with the result that divine truth is unintelligible.

Similarly, second, on Hamilton's theory God remains unknowable. The chief difficulty with myths is not that they are literally false, but rather that their alleged non-literal "truth" is meaningless. Hamilton fled from myth to poetry to parable in order to arrive at some sort of revelation, but he never succeeded in showing how parables convey truth or what truths parables convey. Their "message" remains unintelligible.

Third, Hamilton has rejected the doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration and places himself outside the bounds of historical Evangelicalism.

Fourth and last, it is most appropriate for the Evangelical Theological Society to make note of this and reaffirm by its constant practice that "the Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs."

[1] By *objective world* here Hamilton seems to mean *sensory world*, as if the world of meaning or intelligibility were subjective. Yet on page 68 he speaks of the Word Himself – surely not a sensory object – as objective. It is hard to say precisely what his argument is on these two pages

[2] For instance, God directed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, or, God directed Ananias to go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man named Saul of Tarsus. Or are not these passages, with their specific directions, the Word of God?

[3] This sort of assertion is meaningless. Mythical statements are also

propositional. The important distinction should be true versus false, or literal and exact versus fantastic and inaccurate. But all statements have a propositional “aspect,” whatever aspect might mean.

[4] For a definitive refutation see *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, by J. Gresham Machen.

[5] Does it? How? With what result?

[6] A common criterion for distinguishing a parable of Christ from something he reports as having happened is the absence in the first and the presence in the second of names: A man that was a householder went out early to hire laborers, or a certain king made a marriage feast for his son, versus the blood of Abel...of Zechariah, son of Berachiah, whom you murdered, or other references to Old Testament events.

What Is Truth ?

The *Reformed Journal* of May 1980 (pages 27ff) carries James Daane's review of Carl F. H. Henry's *God, Revelation and Authority*. Its rejection of Henry's views circles around certain theses, allegedly held by Gordon H. Clark, and adopted or adapted by Henry. Surfacing once or twice in the review, but underlying the whole, is the conflict between the Henry-Clark defense of Biblical inerrancy and the Daane-Fuller assertions that what the Bible teaches is sometimes false. Unless this conflict is clearly understood, Daane's review will easily be misinterpreted.

The title of the review is well-chosen: *What is Truth?* No other three words could better express the question at issue. Henry and Clark rather definitely say what they mean by truth, or at least they define the form of truth. Daane clearly rejects their view. The conclusion of this rejoinder will be that Daane – while he intends to defend a radically different form of truth – nowhere describes the form of truth he defends, nor does he even outline a supporting epistemology.

Epistemology

Daane's attack on Henry begins very plausibly: "In theology as in any science, what is to be known dictates the terms by which it can be known." Though plausible, Kant denied it. But let us assume that it is merely ambiguous, or at least incomplete. Physicists (for Daane mentions science) have often thought they knew an object, when their method of knowing – the limitations of which they did not recognize – gave them an entirely different object. Because of such complexities, and even simpler ones, Daane's application of his principle to Henry's method carries no weight. Daane inferred that therefore, Henry – instead of beginning with epistemology – should have written his theology first and his epistemology last. On the contrary, in any subject – physics or theology – not only may the method be explained first, but it is best to do so. Suppose a physicist says that space is curved, or a botanist says that an ocotilla is not a cactus. The inquiring student will ask, How do you know? The student or critical colleague will wish to know whether the method used could possibly arrive at the

conclusion stated. Physicists used to say that light consisted of ether waves. Today it is generally agreed that the methods used were defective, and that light is something else (they don't quite know what). Hence even if botany or theology is written first, it cannot be accepted by a scholar until the crucial question is answered: How do you know? In a systematic treatment, the methodology ought to come first. Instead of asking, What is a cactus? or What is light? someone asks, What is God? How can one go about answering that question? Do we consult the *Koran* or the *Vedas*? Do we study the stars? Do we send a questionnaire to a thousand college professors? A method must be chosen (or used unwittingly) before any answer is forthcoming. Henry's method is to consult the Bible and from it deduce that God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable. We cannot start with God; we must start with the Bible. Why not say so first and then proceed to the theology the Bible teaches.

Daane's confusion at this point is considerable. The premise of his inference is, "If to *understand* God we must *stand under*, and *submit* to the terms by which he can be known." The reader stumbles at this premise even before he arrives at the conclusion. How can one *stand under* or voluntarily submit to terms before he knows what the terms are? Daane completely ignores the problem of discovering the terms. To use his crude literalism, a decision to stand under certain terms rather than others raises the problem of how to select the terms. As Daane so well insists, "This is no mere methodological quibble"; had Daane rather than Henry "complied with this requirement, he might not have given us what is in my judgment a quite [confused non-]evangelical theology and apologetic." To state the point more clearly, Daane's confused premise cannot convince us of the truth of his conclusion.

Ideas and Propositions

However, the basic and determinative disagreement between Daane and the Henry-Clark view is the nature or form of truth. To quote (page 27, column 3, bottom): "For Henry as for Gordon Clark the nature of truth is that of an idea."

Here a parenthetical clarification is necessary. The term *idea* is too vague and in the Platonic sense incorrect. In *Thales to Dewey* Clark argued against Hegel's view, and by implication against Plato's, that reality consists of concepts or Ideas. Daane is indeed right that this is not a mere methodological quibble. It is no quibble: It is nonetheless methodological, and it distinguishes Plato and Hegel

from Augustine and any others who rely on propositions or truths. So much for the parenthesis; let us now return to the previous paragraph.

For Henry as for Gordon Clark the nature of truth is that of an idea. Biblical truth is what God thinks.... This ideational content of the divine mind...became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. For Henry this means that Jesus *disclosed* or *revealed* truth, but not that he is himself the truth.

Presumably this is not a true statement of Henry's position, and it is certainly false in Clark's case. The last few paragraphs of the present article will explain in greater detail why it is false. And if, besides, Daane's statement was intended as a conclusion of an inference, the inference is invalid.

Daane's next sentence is also false, unless it is unintelligibly ambiguous. The sentence is, "The fact that this Logos *became* flesh does not mean that this becoming is itself an essential ingredient of truth." Since Henry and Clark accept the Bible as infallible truth, and since the Bible says "The Word became flesh," we both accept the statement as an essential "ingredient" of the truth – that is, as a particular and essential truth in the complete system of truth.

The underlying point of contention is the nature of truth. Although Daane quotes correctly, he does not seem to understand the implications of Henry's and Clark's words. On page 28 at the top of column one Daane writes, "Henry agrees with Gordon Clark that only propositions are the object of knowledge. 'Only propositions have the quality of truth,' he says, explaining further that 'the only significant view of revelation is rational-verbal revelation' (430). He quotes with approval what Clark says: 'The word *truth* can only be used metaphorically or incorrectly when applied to any thing other than a proposition.'"

In *Thales to Dewey* (455) Clark, after some pages of technical detail, arrives at the subhead "Propositions and Concepts." But the simplest reason why truth must be propositional is that a noun all by itself can be neither true nor false. Suppose someone says, without any implicit context, "Two," or "Cat," or "Star." No one could understand; neither truth nor falsity has been spoken. Only when a predicate is attached to a subject by a copula can the expression be true or false. "Two is an even number" is true; "Two is an odd number" is false; but just plain "Two" is unintelligible. Therefore, Clark insists that when a botanist says, "A cactus has no true leaves," he uses the word *true* in a metaphorical sense, contrasting the spines of a cactus with the ordinary leaves of an ocotilla or rose

bush. What the metaphor means, a good botanist can explain in literally intended propositions.

That anyone should take umbrage at a metaphorical use of the word *truth* is rather strange because both the Bible and our ordinary everyday language contain frequent metaphors. Yet when Daane's next sentence says, "What then of Jesus' claim, 'I am the truth,'" he seems to mean that this could not possibly be metaphorical. But does not Jesus' sentence also contain the phrase, "I am the way"? Surely *way* is metaphorical, for Jesus was not a dusty road strewn with stones. If, then, *way* must be metaphorical, why is it impossible that *truth* be so too? Yet, by way of anticipation, *truth* in this instance may be literal in a sense Daane has overlooked.

To proceed and develop this sense and to compare Daane's sentences with Scripture, note first that he says, "The truth of the [Biblical] propositions is not that the proposition is, say, the resurrection and the life.... Not to acknowledge this is on the one hand to deny that Jesus is the truth, and on the other to reduce truth to language, to verbal propositions, to thought that can be written." Here Daane both contradicts Scripture and falls into systematic confusion. Scripture says, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (*John* 6:63). This verse is all the more conclusive because John's or Jesus' word for *words* is *rhemata*, not *logous*. The latter could have been interpreted in some metaphysical sense, such as is found in Philo or Heraclitus; whereas *rhemata* carries the more literal connotation of words, exemplified by *two*, *cat*, or *star* – that is, as sounds in the air or ink spots on paper. Not that Jesus actually meant ink marks on paper, but that Daane's insistence on literalism is more embarrassed by *rhemata* than it would have been by *logous*. Obviously, Henry and Clark do not "reduce" truth to language, especially not to sounds in the air and ink marks on paper. (See Clark's quotation from Abraham Kuyper in *Language and Theology*.) Before truths or thoughts can be "written," that is, symbolized on paper, the thoughts must be thought. Different literal words can express the same thought. For example, "Das Mädchen ist schön," "La jeune fille est belle," and "The girl is beautiful," are three different sentences with all different words, but they are the same, single, identical proposition. Daane's argument seems to be based on inattention to the distinction between thoughts and their symbolic surrogates.

The Bible

With this misunderstanding of the Henry-Clark position Daane can say,

Henry's view...reduces the supreme, final, personal form of the Word of God, namely Jesus Christ, to the same level as the Bible. Such a Bible is not a witness to the fact that Jesus Christ is the ultimate and final form of the Word of God to man, but is *itself* the ultimate form and true nature of the Word of God. Such a view of the Bible is the source of the insistence that the original Bible must be absolutely inerrant. If the Bible as propositional is a higher form of truth than Jesus, then the sinlessness of Jesus is less important than the inerrancy of the Bible. (28)

This important paragraph elicits four observations. First, Daane's argument depends on and seems to be initiated by a denial of Biblical inerrancy. Second, it contains one or two unfortunate confusions. Third, one of its inferences is a logical fallacy. Fourth, Daane nowhere explains the so-called personal form of truth which he opposes to the Henry-Clark view.

First, like the Auburn Affirmationists of 1924, Fuller Seminary professors Jack Rogers and David Hubbard – with the cooperation of World Vision's Paul Rees and Berkeley Mickelsen of Bethel Seminary in their book *Biblical Authority*, and Dewey Beegle of Wesley Seminary in *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility*, plus Jack Rogers again in a criticism of Carl Henry – and now James Daane formerly of Fuller Seminary, have vigorously attacked the truthfulness of the Bible. This current cooperative effort – for the several contributors to *Biblical Authority* were certainly cooperating, even if Beegle and Daane acted independently – is noteworthy because nothing like it has occurred since the *Auburn Affirmation*. In those days J. Gresham Machen found few to support him in his defense of Scripture, the virgin birth, the miracles, the atonement, and the resurrection. Today, in defense of the truthfulness of the Bible, there stand about a thousand members of the Evangelical Theological Society, a recently formed committee in which James Boice of Philadelphia is prominent, and a few individual authors such as Carl Henry and Harold Lindsell. In evaluating Daane's article on *What is Truth?* one must keep this larger scene in view.

Second, there is some lack of clarity when Daane speaks of different forms and levels of truth. At least five times on page 28 he uses the term "form." These five instances may differ slightly in their connotations, but in two the phrase is "a higher form of truth," and in one "a lesser form of truth." Since propositional

truth has the form of subject-copula-predicate, which Daane considers the lesser form, his higher form must be devoid of subjects, copulas, and predicates. The difficulty with a truth that has no subject becomes a major consideration in point five below. If Daane had said, a higher truth and a lesser truth, instead of a higher and lesser form, and if by these phrases he had meant that one truth may be logically subordinate to another truth, and Euclid's tenth theorem is subordinate to his fifth and to his axioms, there would have been no confusion. No matter how subordinate a theorem may be to another, they not only have the same form, but they are also equally true. Hence when Daane accuses Henry of implying that "the Bible as propositional is a higher form of truth than Jesus," a reader stumbles at the confusion, for Daane never explains what this strange form is.

In the third place this confusion, not unexpectedly, leads Daane into a fallacious inference. If the Bible is a higher form of truth, he says in effect, then the sinlessness of Jesus is less important than inerrancy. How Daane gets from his premise to his conclusion is by no means evident. Nor is the meaning of his word "important." Whether a statement is more important than another depends on its particular application. A principle of engineering is more important for an engineering problem than a principle of organic chemistry, but the latter may be more important for cancer research. In any case, the only method by which we could learn that Jesus was sinless is the method of Biblical revelation. Neither Josephus, nor Tacitus, nor some "personal truth" tells us that Jesus was sinless. And if the Bible contains errors here and there, as those who deny inerrancy hold, we cannot trust the Bible's assertions of Jesus' sinlessness, for these could be some of its errors. If those who reject inerrancy claim that these verses are not errors, we ask, How do you know? By what epistemological criterion do you distinguish between the Bible's truths and the Bible's mistakes? For if the Bible makes false assertions, there must be a criterion independent of and superior to the Bible by which its assertions must be judged. We challenge our opponents to state their epistemological criterion. Unless we know their method first, we cannot accept their theology.

The four points indicated above are all closely related. Points two and three, confusions and fallacies, are together exemplified at the top of column two, page 28: "This reductionism is the consequence of a theological method which first decides the nature of our knowledge of God and then decides that God must be of such nature to be knowable by us." The idea here, a confusion and an invalid inference condensed in the term "reductionism," seems to be that the Clark-

Henry method requires one to determine first, apart from any revelation, the nature of knowledge and then, again apart from revelation, to conclude that the nature of God must conform to it. Not at all; the actuality is completely different. One of the frequent criticisms against Clark, even by those who accept inerrancy, is that he restricts the scope of knowledge by limiting it to what “is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture” (*Westminster Confession*, I.vi). Did Daane fail to notice this rather prominent thesis? At any rate, when a man begins to read the Bible, he finds that it contains many propositions – propositions about the stars, about Abraham, the Levitical law, the conquest of Canaan. He cannot go far, however, without learning something about God and man. He learns that God is a rational spirit, a God of truth, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He learns that man – in contrast with the animals – is a rational creature, that man sinned, and that God has provided a method of atonement.

But to return to the main subject: What one learns first from the Bible and what he learns second and third varies from man to man. One person begins with *Genesis*; another begins with *Matthew*. Similarly, a man may learn several propositions about God without reflecting on the method by which he learned them. Musicians and painters usually produce good works of art before they understand the theory. Hence in temporal psychology a knowledge of God precedes a knowledge of method. But to explain this process an apologist ought to start with the methodology. For while the unreflective reader may be unaware of the methodology – he may not realize how he does what he does – he nonetheless uses the method. And for Clark and Henry the method is Scriptural.

Suppose a reflective and intelligent person begins with *Matthew*. He comes across the words *genealogy*, *Abraham*, *begat*, *fourteen*, and so on. He will then perceive that every sentence, indeed every word, in the Bible depends on the logical law of contradiction for its intelligibility. Without this law every word would have an infinite number of meanings: *David* would not only mean Moses and Judas, it would also mean sling, stone, atom, and typewriter. And *God* would mean devil. Apart from logic, a noun would mean what it does not mean; and if a word means everything, it means nothing. In order to mean something, a word must also not mean something. There is no meaning without the law of contradiction. Hence, in acquiring the knowledge that God is knowable, God’s rational creature – so far as he can escape the misunderstandings and fallacies of the noetic effects of sin – must use the laws of logic. Dr. Daane should try to

answer the question, How can we know that God is knowable, or that he is omniscient, without using the rational laws of logic? If we did not (first) use the laws of logic, how could we know anything about God? And *first* is the wrong word, for knowing God and using logic are the same identical act.

We now come to point four where the unintelligibility of Daane's criticism is most evident. Daane utilizes a sort of theory of two-fold truth. It is not precisely the medieval theory of that name, but rather derives from Kierkegaard, Buber, Brunner, the Neo-orthodox and existentialists. But Daane does not give us much theory: He is satisfied to assert a great difference between propositional truth and personal truth. Two points should be made: First, personal truth is unintelligible; and, second, Daane seems to have no clear idea of what a person is.

First, one can easily state and explain the form of propositional truth. As said above, it consists of a subject connected by a copula to a predicate. By a clearly defined method we can arrange propositions into valid syllogisms and easily distinguish them from invalid syllogisms. But what is the form of personal truth? Are there universals and particulars? Are there valid and invalid inferences? Presumably not, for no one has ever derived twenty-four valid personal syllogisms nor 232 invalid ones. Personal truth can have no subjects, predicates, or copulas. What is it then? How does one distinguish between a personal truth and a personal falsity? When with Brunner one says that God and the medium of conceptuality are mutually exclusive, one makes God completely unknowable. If we talk *about* God, we are not talking about *God*. This is not what the inerrant Bible teaches.

Then, second, underlying the above is a deficient or completely lacking concept of a person. For Plato a human person was a soul who knew the Ideas. The World of Ideas was itself a living mind, as he explained in *The Sophist*. For Aristotle, the soul was the form of the organic body, and its individuality depended upon its unknowable matter. Locke made the soul an abstract idea, a spiritual substance, also unknowable; he called it "something I know not what." Hume "reduced" the person to a collection of sensations and memory images – a collection which, according to Kant, had never been collected. For it, Kant substituted his transcendental unity of apperception – also unknowable. Which of these does Daane prefer? Or does he have a different theory? I am afraid this is unknowable too.

In *1 Corinthians* 2:16 Paul says "we have the mind of Christ." The word *mind* is

nous. How is it possible for us to have Christ's *nous*, unless his mind is the truth? We have Christ's mind insofar as we think his thoughts. Of course we are not omniscient; we do not think all his thoughts; and worse, we think some false propositions too. We are what we think, just as Christ is what he thinks. His doctrine or teaching saves us from eternal death (*John* 8:51). He is the truth! Is this not what Scripture teaches? Christ is the *Logos*, his *rhemata* are truth; he is God's Wisdom; and *1 Samuel* 2:3 says, "the Lord is the God of knowledge." Daane's theory seems to imply that these propositions are some of the errors in our untrustworthy Bible. Henry and I believe that the Bible is trustworthy. [\[1\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) Though Henry and I are in extensive agreement, I do not intend to bind him to any of the above material beyond what he has explicitly stated in his publications.

The Reformed Faith and the Westminster Confession

By the invitation of *The Southern Presbyterian Journal* I have the privilege of addressing this distinguished and consecrated audience on the subject of “The Reformed Faith and the *Westminster Confession*.” This title is not to be interpreted as introducing an exposition of the *Confession*’s thirty-three chapters with their several articles. Nor does it announce an historical account of the Westminster Assembly and the later role of its great creed. On the contrary, I propose to speak of the significance of the *Westminster Confession* as an existing document, a document to which ministers and churches subscribe as defining their policy and stating their reason for existence, a document that distinguishes Biblical Christianity from all other forms of thought and belief. Moreover I hope to indicate, all too briefly, its significance with reference to contemporary circumstances. For this purpose it seems best to divide the document into two parts, Chapter I and all the rest.

Chapter I of the *Westminster Confession* asserts that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God written. Its sixty-six books are all given by inspiration of God. The authority for which Holy Scripture ought to be believed and obeyed depends wholly upon God, the author thereof. In these books the whole counsel of God for man’s salvation is either expressly set down or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from its statements. Therefore, concludes Chapter I, the Supreme Judge, by whom all decrees of councils and doctrines of men are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other than the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

One day I stood beside a small lake in the Rocky Mountains of Wyoming. Water flowed out of the lake from both ends. The water that flowed out one end descended into the stifling canyons and blistering deserts of Utah and Arizona; the water that flowed out the other end of this lake went through the fertile fields of the Midwest. I was standing on the great continental divide.

Metaphorically the first chapter of the *Westminster Confession* is a continental divide. Although the written Word of God has been the touchstone of pure

doctrine in all ages, the twentieth century shows still more clearly that this chapter forms the great divide between two types of religion, or to make it of broader application, between two types of philosophy. Perhaps it would be plainer to say that the acceptance of the Bible as God's written revelation separates true Christianity from all other types of thought. In order to be specific and in order to face our immediate responsibilities, let us select two contemporary schools of philosophy, each of which in its own way contrasts sharply with the first chapter of our *Confession*.

Atheism

The first of these two – and the more obviously anti-Christian movement – is variously called naturalism, secularism, or humanism. These names are simply more complimentary titles for what formerly was bluntly called atheism. The purpose of this meeting may not seem to call for a discussion of atheism; with its denial of God and therefore of revelation, naturalism may appear to be a philosophical development that the church can afford to ignore. But a church that ignores secular humanism is simply shutting its eyes to the situation around about and failing to maintain the first chapter of the *Confession* against all opponents. Unfortunately brevity is required, and therefore without any reference to Communism, the most blatant form of atheism, mention will be made only of certain political and certain educational events on the American scene.

In recent civil and public life there has developed an opposition to the practice of Christianity. According to reports by the National Association of Evangelicals, an adoption agency stamped "Psychologically Unfit" on the application papers of a wide-awake minister and his wife. A navy chaplain tells of attempts, successful attempts, to discharge active Christian young men as psychotic. In another public field, the city of Indianapolis refuses the use of its parks to Christian groups if they so much as intend to ask a blessing at mealtime or sing a hymn. Other groups may hold their programs, but Christian groups are discriminated against. Then again the released time program for religious instruction is the object of attack. The strategy of the humanist is to occupy the time and the attention of children to such an extent that they will have no opportunity to hear the Gospel. The public schools with their compulsory attendance are to be used for the inculcation of secularism. And those who oppose secularism and who want to give their children Christian instruction are

branded as antisocial, undemocratic, and divisive. Such events are straws in the wind that show how the humanists are using government agencies to curtail religious liberty.

Behind these particular events stands the naturalistic philosophy that is taught – I mean, that is inculcated – in a number of American colleges and universities. Let it not be thought that professors are uniformly objective and indifferently teach all views alike. Secularism is actively forced upon the students. For example, consider the statement of Millard S. Everett, a professor in Roosevelt College, Chicago, quoted in *Philosophy in the Classroom*, page 27, by J. H. Melzer:

Our course is built and conducted along liberal lines. Moreover, we have not confused liberalism with indifferentism or neutrality on basic issues, but we have organized the course definitely for the purpose of increasing the student's acceptance of the scientific attitude, liberal and secular morality, and the democratic goal of liberty and equality. We...leave no doubt in the student's mind by the end of the term that we stand with the forces of democracy, science, and modern culture.

With this espousal of secularism in black and white, one can more easily give credence to the rumor that there are two universities which will not knowingly graduate a student who is a fundamentalist.

From our benighted Christian viewpoint these humanists do not seem to have much understanding of the laws of logic. They take the principle of the separation of church and state and consider it reprehensible to use public school facilities for released time education. The American Civil Liberties Union will go to court against released time, but I have never heard of their opposing the use of tax money for anti-Christian instruction. They have never sued a university for teaching secularism. They will defend Communists; they will defend the publishers of obscene comic books; but when have they ever defended religious liberty or protested against the inculcation of humanism in tax-supported institutions? Consistency does not seem to be one of their virtues.

Christian opposition to humanism has ordinarily been ineffective politically and has often been worthless philosophically. In attacking a materialistic or mechanistic worldview, Christians have sometimes pontificated that no one can believe the universe to be the result of chance. Unfortunately this is not true.

There are many people who do so believe; and until Christian thinkers face the realities of the situation, improvement cannot reasonably be expected.

Not every minister, not every church, has a profitable occasion of combating the sources of humanism. Only in exceptional cases can a minister come face to face with naturalistic professors and authors. Only rarely can a minister answer these men in print. There are some churches, situated in university towns, that have opportunities of working with students. It is to be hoped that they also have the equipment to be effective. Each of us should examine his own situation to see what his possibilities are. Most unfortunately, shortsightedness or selfishness sometimes produces a tragedy. There was one church in a university city whose minister wanted to work with the students. There was also a group of students willing to help him. The situation was ideal – but for one thing: The congregation could not see the university as a mission field, complained that their minister was neglecting them, and forced his resignation.

All the more honor to those congregations and pastors who take this part of their responsibilities seriously. And all honor to the few colleges that are Christian, not in name only, but in actual instruction. And all honor to those who are founding Christian primary schools where God is not ignored or treated as unimportant or non-existent. The opportunity and responsibility of establishing Christian grade schools is one that I should like to urge upon you, but time and my subject forbid.

Neo-Orthodoxy

At the beginning of this paper I stated that the first chapter of the *Confession*, on divine revelation, is the great divide between two types of thought. On the one side of this divide stands naturalism, secularism, or humanism. But it does not stand alone. Also on the same side of the great divide is another system of thought. This system asserts, even vigorously asserts, the existence of God – at least some kind of god – and goes so far as to speak of revelation; but what it says about God and revelation is so opposed to the first chapter of the *Confession* that Christianity, far from welcoming its support, must regard it as a most subtle and deceptive enemy. I refer to what is often called Neo-orthodoxy.

The originator of Neo-orthodoxy was the Danish thinker Søren Kierkegaard. With his penetrating mind he saw that the Hegelian Absolute was not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. With his passionate nature he revolted against the

stolid ecclesiastical formalism of his day. The Lutheran State church was dead. Some might describe the situation as dead orthodoxy. But Ludwig Feuerbach, Kierkegaard's contemporary, diagnosed the situation, not as dead orthodoxy, but as lively hypocrisy. The people went to church on Sunday and paid lip service to what they did not believe. They were not orthodox but pagan at heart. Yet the empty form remained. Against this deadly disease, Kierkegaard stressed passionate appropriation and personal decision. With biting sarcasm he flayed hypocrisy, contrasted the despised Christians of the first century with the respectable sham of nineteenth-century Europe, urged more emotion and less intellect, more suffering and less complacency, more subjectivity and less objectivity.

No doubt Kierkegaard was substantially correct in viewing the church as too formal, too Hegelian, too pagan. And no devout person can quarrel with the need of personal decision and appropriation. But, and this is the important point, if a person is to appropriate, there must be something to be appropriated. Kierkegaard and his present-day followers, for all their talk about God and revelation, offer us little or nothing to appropriate. Kierkegaard himself said, "Christ did not propose any doctrine; he acted. He did not teach that there is redemption for men; he redeemed them." Now, it is true that Christ redeemed his elect; it is true that he acted; it is even true that his chief mission was not to teach; but it is untrue that Christ proposed no doctrines. Kierkegaard wrote a book called *Either-Or*, and he too often practiced such a principle. A better principle is Both-And. Christ both acted and he taught. Moreover, he especially commissioned his disciples to teach, to teach a great many doctrines found in *Romans*, *Corinthians*, and the rest of the New Testament.

Because Kierkegaard offers us nothing to appropriate and puts all his stress on the subjective feeling of appropriation, it makes no difference whether we worship God or idols. In his engaging literary style Kierkegaard describes two men: One is in a Lutheran church and entertains a true conception of God, but because he prays in a false spirit, he is in truth praying to an idol. The other man is in a heathen temple praying to idols, but since he prays with an infinite passion, he is in truth praying to God. Once again Kierkegaard acts on the principle of Either-Or instead of Both-And. Both the Lutheran who prays in a false spirit and the heathen who prays to idols are displeasing to God. Just because a heathen has some intense passionate experiences, it does not follow that he is worshiping the true God. But for Kierkegaard the truth is found in the inward How, not in the

external What. What a man worships makes no difference. It is his passion that counts. "An objective uncertainty," says Kierkegaard,

held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.... If only the How of this relation is in truth, then the individual is in truth, even though he is thus related to untruth.

However peculiar this type of philosophy may be, contemporary Protestantism is largely dominated by it. The Neo-orthodox ministers may talk about god and revelation, but they do not have in mind the objective God and the objective revelation of the *Westminster Confession*. They do not believe that the Bible tells the truth. For example, Emil Brunner, who through his books and through his one-time position in Princeton Theological Seminary has become popular in the United States, is so far removed from the *Confession* that he holds neither the words of Scripture nor the thoughts of Scripture to be the truth. To quote: "All words have merely an instrumental significance. Not only the linguistic expressions but even the conceptual content is not the thing itself, but just its framework, its receptacle, and medium." A few pages later he continues, "God can...speak his word to a man even through false doctrine." God then reveals himself in falsehood and untruth. What a revelation!

This type of theology is to be explained partly as a reaction to the immanentism of Hegel, for whom God or the Absolute is nothing other than the unity of the total universe. For Hegel, without the world there could be no God. Kierkegaard, Brunner, and their disciples want a transcendent god. Either immanence, or transcendence; not both-and. By insisting on the transcendence of god, they are able to cloak themselves with the pseudo-piety of their infinite passion and to deceive many Christians who know little about German theology. They can quote Scripture: Of course it may be false, but it is still a revelation. For example, in exalting god above all human limitations they remind us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts. Therefore, they say, the divine mind is so far above our finite minds that there is not a single point of coincidence between his knowledge and ours. When a Calvinist attempts to reason with them logically, they disparagingly contrast human logic with divine paradox. God is Totally Other. He is never an object of our thought. In one ecclesiastical meeting I heard a minister say the human mind possesses no truth at all. And last year in Europe I visited a certain professor who asserted that we can have no absolute truth

whatever. When he said that, I took a piece of paper and wrote on it, We can have no absolute truth whatever. I showed him the writing, the sentence – We can have no absolute truth whatever – then I asked, Is that sentence absolute truth? Do you not see that if the human mind can have no truth, it could not have the truth that it has no truth? If we know nothing, we could not know we know nothing. And if there is no point of coincidence between God's knowledge and ours, it rigorously follows, since God knows everything, that we know absolutely nothing.

With such skepticism, it is not surprising that their religion consists in a passionate inwardness that appropriates nothing objective. Unfortunately skepticism, particularly when discussed in such an academic tone as this address, does not provoke as passionate a reaction among the evangelically minded as it ought. But one ought to realize that even the most gentle and innocuous skepticism is sufficient to defeat the Gospel. To speed the dissolution of Christianity, it is not necessary to say that we know a contrary philosophy is true; it is equally effective to say that we do not know anything is true. The Gospel is a message of positive content, and whether it is dogmatically denied or merely silenced makes little difference.

What is more unfortunate is that the skepticism of Neo-orthodoxy is especially insidious. Men who adopt the position of Kierkegaard and Brunner not only make use of terms such as *God* and *revelation*, but they also talk of sin and justification. Some of them might even preach a tolerably good sermon on imputed righteousness. This deceives simple-minded believers. When people hear the familiar words, they naturally assume that the familiar ideas are meant. They fail to see that the Neo-orthodox consider neither the words nor even the intellectual content to be the truth. Although the sermon may be on Adam and the Fall, the Neo-orthodox minister understands the words in a mythological sense. Adam is the myth by which we are stimulated to an infinite passion.

Although it is to be expected, it is still discouraging to see right-minded people deceived by this sort of talk. At the meeting of the World Council at Evanston, the European theologians supported the notion of an apocalyptic return of Christ. In contrast with the American theologians who place their hope in a future socialistic government, the talk of an apocalypse sounded refreshing; and the poorly informed, those who had not studied the history of German thought in the last century, congratulated themselves on signs of a return to Biblical thinking. In this vain imagination the evangelicals are completely deceived. They need to be

alerted to the wiles of the devil.

But if it is unfortunate to be deceived, what can be said about the deceivers? Ever since Arius twisted Scriptural language to avoid the crushing arguments of Athanasius, unbelievers in the church have used Scriptural phraseology to disguise their underlying meaning. What a contrast with the policy of the Westminster divines. They spared no effort to make their statements clear, unambiguous, and completely honest. Their purpose was not to deceive or conceal, but to explain and clarify. And so carefully did they define their terms that it is almost impossible for a normal intelligence to mistake the meaning. Not only was the intellectual content plainly put forward, but it was made plain and intelligible by a careful attention to the words they chose.

The Reformers and their successors in the following century were honest; many of the ecclesiastical leaders of the present century are not. They take solemn ordination vows, subscribing to the *Westminster Confession*; but they do not believe it is the truth. Perjurers in the pulpit! What a tragedy for the people in the pews! And what a tragedy also for those ministers!

The late J. Gresham Machen was an honest man and a brilliant scholar. In 1925 he published a salutary volume titled, *What Is Faith?* Although he was not particularly concerned with Neo-orthodoxy at that time, his first chapter is an incisive attack on skepticism and anti-intellectualism. He stressed the truth, the objective truth of the Bible and the primacy of the intellect. Today, thirty years later, the book should be re-read, for Neo-orthodoxy is even more anti-intellectual than the old modernism. And if skepticism prevails, if there is no truth – no Gospel that the human mind can grasp – we might as well worship idols in a heathen temple.

Arminianism and Calvinism

On the other side of the continental divide, the water flows in the opposite direction. Instead of the stifling deserts of Arizona, the Mississippi Valley with its wheat and corn come into view. Here we have life and the fruits of the soil. However, not all the soil, not all the rivers on the east of the divide are equally fruitful. Had there been time today, it would have been possible to give an ample description of two rivers; but as it is, only an indication can be attempted. There is

one stream which, accepting the Scripture as the only and infallible rule of faith and practice, does not accept all the other thirty-two chapters of the *Confession*. Though it may accept several, and be called broadly evangelical, it rejects chapter three and other chapters which are definitely Calvinistic. The waters of this stream flow in the same general direction, and we rejoice that they eventually reach the same heavenly ocean; but they flow through stony ground with sparse vegetation, or sometimes they ooze through swamps where the vegetation is dense enough but unhealthful and useless. This stream in its rocky course babbles about faith and repentance being the cause instead of the result of regeneration; and it claims that its swampy “free will” can either block or render effective the almighty power of God. All there is time to say of this stream of thought is that its inconsistencies make it an easy prey to the attacks of humanism. It cannot defend the principle of revelation because it has misunderstood the contents of revelation.

On the other hand, that blest river of salvation, flowing through the land of tall corn and sturdy cattle, is to be identified with the doctrines of the great Reformers. These men and their disciples in the following century studied out and wrote down the system of doctrine which the Presbyterian and Reformed churches still profess. The *Westminster Confession* is no abbreviated creed written by men of abbreviated faith. On the contrary it is the nearest approach men have yet made to a full statement of the whole counsel of God which Paul did not fail to declare. The Westminster divines were the best Biblical scholars of their time and as a group have not been surpassed since. For a full five years or more they labored unremittingly to formulate their summary of what the Bible teaches. And so successful were they that their document is justly the basis of many denominations. The factual existence of the *Westminster Confession* testifies to several of these convictions of our spiritual forebears, and three of these convictions may serve as a conclusion to this talk.

First, our forefathers were convinced, the *Westminster Confession* asserts, and the Bible teaches that God has given us a written revelation. This revelation is the truth. As Christ himself said, “Your word is truth.” It is not a myth, it is not an allegory, it is no mere pointer to the truth, it is not an analogy of the truth; but it is literally and absolutely true.

Second, our forefathers were convinced and the Reformed Faith asserts that this truth can be known. God has created us in his image with the intellectual and

logical powers of understanding. He has addressed to men an intelligible revelation; and he expects us to read it, to grasp its meaning, and to believe it. God is not Totally Other, nor is logic a human invention that distorts God's statements. If this were so, as the Neo-orthodox say, then it would follow, as the Neo-orthodox admit, that falsity would be as useful as truth in producing a passionate emotion. But the Bible expects us to appropriate a definite message.

Third, the Reformers believed that God's revelation can be formulated accurately. They were not enamored of ambiguity; they did not identify piety with a confused mind. They wanted to proclaim the truth with the greatest possible clarity. And so ought we.

Dare we allow our Biblical heritage to be lost in a nebulous ecumenicity where belief has been reduced to the shortest possible doctrinal statement, in which peace is preserved by an all-embracing ambiguity? Or should we ponder the fact that when the Reformers preached the complete Biblical message in all its detail and with the greatest possible clarity, God granted the world its greatest spiritual awakening since the days of the apostles? May we not similarly expect astonishing blessings if we return with enthusiasm to all the doctrines of the *Westminster Confession*?

The Crisis of Our Time

Historians have christened the thirteenth century the Age of Faith and termed the eighteenth century the Age of Reason. The twentieth century was called many things: the Atomic Age, the Age of Inflation, the Age of the Tyrant, the Age of Aquarius. But the modern age deserves one name more than the others: the Age of Irrationalism. Contemporary intellectuals are anti-intellectual. Contemporary philosophers are anti-philosophy. Contemporary theologians are anti-theology.

In past centuries, secular philosophers have generally believed that knowledge is possible to man. Consequently they expended a great deal of thought and effort trying to justify their claims to know. In the twentieth century, however, the optimism of the secular philosophers all but disappeared. They despaired of knowing.

Like their secular counterparts, the great theologians and doctors of the church taught that knowledge is possible to man. Yet the theologians of the twentieth century repudiated that belief. They also despaired of knowledge. This radical skepticism has penetrated our entire culture, from television to music to literature. The Christian at the beginning of the twenty-first century is confronted with an overwhelming cultural consensus – sometimes stated explicitly but most often implicitly: Man does not and cannot know anything truly.

What does this have to do with Christianity? Simply this: If man can know nothing truly, man can truly know nothing. We cannot know that the Bible is the Word of God, that Christ died for his people, or that Christ is alive today at the right hand of the Father. Unless knowledge is possible, Christianity is nonsensical, for it claims to be knowledge. What is at stake at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not simply a single doctrine, such as the virgin birth, or the existence of Hell, as important as those doctrines may be, but the whole of Christianity itself. If knowledge is not possible to man, it is worse than silly to argue points of doctrine – it is insane.

The irrationalism of the present age is so thoroughgoing and pervasive that even the Remnant – the segment of the professing church that remains faithful – has accepted much of it, frequently without even being aware of what it is

accepting. In some religious circles this irrationalism has become synonymous with piety and humility, and those who oppose it are denounced as rationalists, as though to be logical were a sin. Our contemporary anti-theologians make a contradiction and call it a Mystery. The faithful ask for truth and are given Paradox and Antinomy. If any resist swallowing the absurdities of the anti-theologians who teach in the seminaries or have graduated from the seminaries, they are frequently marked as heretics or schismatics who seek to act independently of God.

There is no greater threat facing the true church of Christ at this moment than the irrationalism that now controls our entire culture. Totalitarianism, guilty of hundreds of millions of murders – including those of millions of Christians – is to be feared, but not nearly so much as the idea that we do not and cannot know the literal truth. Hedonism, the popular philosophy of America, is not to be feared so much as the belief that logic – that “mere human logic,” to use the religious irrationalists’ own phrase – is futile. The attacks on truth, on knowledge, on propositional revelation, on the intellect, on words, and on logic are renewed daily. But note well: The misologists – the haters of logic – use logic to demonstrate the futility of using logic. The anti-intellectuals construct intricate intellectual arguments to prove the insufficiency of the intellect. Those who deny the competence of words to express thought use words to express their thoughts. The proponents of poetry, myth, metaphor, and analogy argue for their theories by using literal prose, whose competence – even whose possibility – they deny. The anti-theologians use the revealed Word of God to show that there can be no revealed Word of God – or that if there could, it would remain impenetrable darkness and Mystery to our finite minds.

Nonsense Has Come

Is it any wonder that the world is grasping at straws – the straws of experientialism, mysticism, and drugs? After all, if people are told that the Bible contains insoluble mysteries, then is not a flight into mysticism to be expected? On what grounds can it be condemned? Certainly not on logical grounds or Biblical grounds, if logic is futile and the Bible unintelligible. Moreover, if it cannot be condemned on logical or Biblical grounds, it cannot be condemned at all. If people are going to have a religion of the mysterious, they will not adopt Christianity: They will have a genuine mystery religion. The popularity of Roman Catholicism, Eastern mysticism, mind-altering drugs, and religious

experience is the logical consequence of the irrationalism of the twentieth century. There can and will be no Christian reformation unless and until the irrationalism of the age is totally repudiated by Christians.

The Church Defenseless

Yet how shall they do it? The official spokesmen for Christianity have been fatally infected with irrationalism. The seminaries, which annually train thousands of men to teach millions of Christians, are the finishing schools of irrationalism, completing the job begun by government schools and colleges. Many of the pulpits of the conservative churches (we are not speaking of the obviously apostate churches) are occupied by graduates of the anti-theological schools. These products of modern anti-theological education, when asked to give a reason for the hope that is in them, can generally respond with only the vocal analogue of a shrug – a mumble about Mystery. They have not grasped – and therefore cannot teach those for whom they are responsible – the first truth: “And you shall know the truth.” Many, in fact, explicitly deny it, saying that we can possess only “pointers” to the truth, or something “similar” to the truth, a mere analogy, but not the divine truth itself. Is the impotence of the Christian church a puzzle? Is the fascination with Pentecostalism, ritualism, faith healing, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Roman Catholicism – all sensate and anti-intellectual religions – among members of conservative churches an enigma? Not when one understands the pious nonsense that is purveyed in the name of God in the religious colleges and seminaries.

The Trinity Foundation

The creators of The Trinity Foundation firmly believe that theology is too important to be left to the licensed theologians – the graduates of the schools of theology. They have created The Trinity Foundation for the express purpose of teaching believers all that the Scriptures contain – not warmed over, baptized, non-Christian philosophies. Each member of the board of directors of The Trinity Foundation has signed this oath: “I believe that the Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the Word of God and, therefore, inerrant in the autographs. I believe that the system of truth presented in the Bible is best summarized in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. So help me God.”

The ministry of The Trinity Foundation is the presentation of the system of truth taught in Scripture as clearly and as completely as possible. We do not regard obscurity as a virtue, nor confusion as a sign of spirituality. Confusion, like all error, is sin, and teaching that confusion is all that Christians can hope for is doubly sin.

The presentation of the truth of Scripture necessarily involves the rejection of error. The Foundation has exposed and will continue to expose the irrationalism of the modern age, whether its current spokesman be an Existentialist philosopher or a professed Reformed theologian. We oppose anti-intellectualism, whether it be espoused by a Neo-orthodox theologian or a Fundamentalist evangelist. We reject misology, whether it be on the lips of a Neo-evangelical or those of a Roman Catholic Charismatic. We repudiate agnosticism, whether it be secular or religious. To each error we bring the brilliant light of Scripture, proving all things, and holding fast to that which is true.

The Primacy of Theory

The ministry of The Trinity Foundation is not a “practical” ministry. If you are a pastor, we will not enlighten you on how to organize an ecumenical prayer meeting in your community or how to double church attendance in a year. If you are a homemaker, you will have to read elsewhere to find out how to become a total woman. If you are a businessman, we will not tell you how to develop a social conscience. The professing church is drowning in such “practical” advice.

The Trinity Foundation is unapologetically theoretical in its outlook, believing that theory without practice is dead, and that practice without theory is blind. The trouble with the professing church is not primarily in its practice, but in its theory. Professing Christians and teachers do not know, and many do not even care to know, the doctrines of Scripture. Doctrine is intellectual, and professing Christians are generally anti-intellectual. Doctrine is ivory-tower philosophy, and they scorn ivory towers. The ivory tower, however, is the control tower of a civilization. It is a fundamental, theoretical mistake of the “practical” men to think that they can be merely practical, for practice is always the practice of some theory. The relationship between theory and practice is the relationship between cause and effect. If a person believes correct theory, his practice will tend to be

correct. The practice of contemporary professing Christians is immoral because it is the practice of false theories. It is a major theoretical mistake of the “practical” men to think that they can ignore the ivory towers of the philosophers and theologians as irrelevant to their lives. Every action that “practical” men take is governed by the thinking that has occurred in some ivory tower – whether that tower be the British Museum; the Academy; a home in Basel, Switzerland; or a tent in Israel.

In Understanding Be Men

It is the first duty of the Christian to understand correct theory – correct doctrine – and thereby implement correct practice. This order – first theory, then practice – is both logical and Biblical. It is, for example, exhibited in Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*, in which he spends the first eleven chapters expounding theory and the last five discussing practice. The contemporary teachers of Christians have not only reversed the Biblical order, they have inverted the Pauline emphasis on theory and practice. The virtually complete failure of the teachers of the professing church to instruct believers in correct doctrine is the cause of the misconduct and spiritual and cultural impotence of Christians. The church’s lack of power is the result of its lack of truth. The Gospel is the power of God, not religious experiences or personal relationships. The church has no power because it has abandoned the Gospel, the good news, for a religion of experientialism. Modern American Christians are children carried about by every wind of doctrine, not knowing what they believe, or even if they believe anything for certain.

The chief purpose of The Trinity Foundation is to counteract the irrationalism of the age and to expose the errors of the teachers of the church. Our emphasis – on the Bible as the sole source of knowledge, on the primacy of truth, on the supreme importance of correct doctrine, and on the necessity for systematic and logical thinking – is rare. To the extent that the church survives – and she will survive and flourish – it will be because of her increasing acceptance of these basic ideas and their logical implications.

We believe that The Trinity Foundation is filling a vacuum. We are saying that Christianity is intellectually defensible – that, in fact, it is the only intellectually defensible system of thought. We are saying that God has made the wisdom of

this world – whether that wisdom be called science, religion, philosophy, or common sense – foolishness. We are appealing to all Christians who have not conceded defeat in the intellectual battle with the world to join us in our efforts to raise a standard to which all men of sound mind can repair.

The love of truth, of God's Word, has all but disappeared in our time. We are committed to and pray for a great instauration. But though we may not see this reformation in our lifetimes, we believe it is our duty to present the whole counsel of God because Christ has commanded it. The results of our teaching are in God's hands, not ours. Whatever those results, his Word is never taught in vain, but always accomplishes the result that he intended it to accomplish. Gordon H. Clark has stated our view well:

There have been times in the history of God's people, for example, in the days of Jeremiah, when refreshing grace and widespread revival were not to be expected: The time was one of chastisement. If this twentieth century is of a similar nature, individual Christians here and there can find comfort and strength in a study of God's Word. But if God has decreed happier days for us, and if we may expect a world-shaking and genuine spiritual awakening, then it is the author's belief that a zeal for souls, however necessary, is not the sufficient condition. Have there not been devout saints in every age, numerous enough to carry on a revival? Twelve such persons are plenty. What distinguishes the arid ages from the period of the Reformation, when nations were moved as they had not been since Paul preached in Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome, is the latter's fullness of knowledge of God's Word. To echo an early Reformation thought, when the ploughman and the garage attendant know the Bible as well as the theologian does, and know it better than some contemporary theologians, then the desired awakening shall have already occurred.

In addition to publishing books, The Foundation publishes a monthly newsletter, *The Trinity Review*. Subscriptions to *The Review* are free to U.S. addresses; please write to the address on the book order form to become a subscriber. If you would like further information or would like to assist us in our work, please let us know.

The Trinity Foundation is a non-profit foundation, tax exempt under section

501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 You can help us disseminate the Word of God through your tax-deductible contributions to The Foundation.

John W. Robbins

Intellectual Ammunition

The Trinity Foundation is committed to bringing every philosophical and theological thought captive to Christ. The books listed below are designed to accomplish that goal. They are written with two subordinate purposes: (1) to demolish all non-Christian claims to knowledge; and (2) to build a system of truth based upon the Bible alone.

Philosophy

Ancient Philosophy

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$24.95

This book covers the thousand years from the Pre-Socratics to Plotinus. It represents some of the early work of Dr. Clark – the work that made his academic reputation. It is an excellent college text.

Christ and Civilization

John W. Robbins

Trade paperback \$5.95

Civilization as we know it is a result of the widespread proclamation and belief of the Gospel of justification by faith alone in the sixteenth century. Christ foretold this result in the Sermon on the Mount: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” This brief overview of the history of western civilization makes it clear that our cultural debt is to the Gospel, not to Greece and Rome.

Christian Philosophy

Gordon H. Clark

Hardback \$29.95

Trade paperback \$21.95

This book, Volume 4 in *The Works of Gordon Haddon Clark*, combines three of his most important works in philosophy: *Three Types of Religious Philosophy*; *Religion, Reason and Revelation*; and *An Introduction to Christian Philosophy*. Together they constitute Dr. Clark's principal statement of his Christian philosophy.

A Christian Philosophy of Education

Gordon H. Clark

Hardback \$18.95

Trade paperback \$12.95

The first edition of this book was published in 1946. It sparked interest in Christian schools. In the 1970s, Dr. Clark thoroughly revised and updated it, and it is needed now more than ever. Its chapters include: The Need for a World-View; The Christian World-View; The Alternative to Christian Theism; Neutrality; Ethics; The Christian Philosophy of Education; Academic Matters; and Kindergarten to University. Three appendices are included: The Relationship of Public Education to Christianity; A Protestant World-View; and Art and the Gospel. It is Volume 12 in *The Works of Gordon Haddon Clark*.

A Christian View of Men and Things

Gordon H. Clark

Hardback \$29.95

Trade paperback \$21.95

No other book achieves what *A Christian View* does: the presentation of Christianity as it applies to history, politics, ethics, science, religion, and epistemology. Dr. Clark's command of both worldly philosophy and Scripture is evident on every page, and the result is a breathtaking and invigorating challenge to the wisdom of this world. This is Volume 1 in *The Works of Gordon Haddon Clark*.

Clark and His Critics

Gordon H. Clark

Hardback \$29.95 □

Trade paperback \$21.95

This book, Volume 7 in *The Works of Gordon Haddon Clark*, combines two separate books: *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, first published in 1968, and *Clark Speaks from the Grave*, first published in 1986. In this volume Clark answers all objections to his philosophy of Scripturalism and chides his critics for their incompetent defenses of the Christian faith.

Clark Speaks from the Grave

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$3.95

Dr. Clark chides some of his critics for their failure to defend Christianity competently. *Clark Speaks* is a stimulating and illuminating discussion of the errors of contemporary apologists.

See also *Clark and His Critics*.

Ecclesiastical Megalomania: The Economic and Political Thought of the Roman Catholic Church

John W. Robbins

Hardback \$29.95

Trade paperback \$19.95

This detailed and thorough analysis and critique of the social teaching of the Roman Church-State is the only such book available by a Christian economist and political philosopher. The book's conclusions reveal the Roman Church-State to be an advocate of its own brand of faith-based fascism. *Ecclesiastical Megalomania* includes the complete text of the *Donation of Constantine* and Lorenzo Valla's

exposé of the hoax.

Education, Christianity, and the State

J. Gresham Machen

Trade paperback \$10.95

Machen was one of the foremost educators, theologians, and defenders of Christianity in the twentieth century. The author of several scholarly books, Machen saw clearly that if Christianity is to survive and flourish, a system of Christian schools must be established. This collection of essays and speeches captures his thoughts on education over nearly three decades.

Essays on Ethics and Politics

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$10.95

Dr. Clark's essays, written over the course of five decades, are a major statement of Christian ethics.

Freedom and Capitalism: Essays on Christian Economics and Politics

John W. Robbins

Hardback \$29.95

The Biblical model for limited government and a free society – the state the Holy Spirit describes in *Romans* 13 and *1 Samuel* 8 – is despised by both Christians and non-Christians, who think they have a moral mandate to force others to be “charitable” and “Christian.” This book is a collection of 31 essays that defend *laissez-faire* capitalism and constitutional government, the only moral system of economics and government. Topics covered include the draft, foreign policy, health care, taxation, monetary policy, faith-based welfare, the separation of church and state, and much more.

Gordon H. Clark: Personal Recollections

John W. Robbins, Editor

Trade paperback \$6.95

Friends of Dr. Clark have written their recollections of the man. Contributors include family members, colleagues, students, and friends such as Harold Lindsell, Carl Henry, Ronald Nash, and Anna Marie Hager.

Historiography: Secular and Religious

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$13.95

In this masterful work, Dr. Clark applies his philosophy to the writing of history, examining all the major schools of historiography.

Language and Theology

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$9.95

There were two main currents in twentieth-century philosophy – Language Philosophy and Existentialism. Both were hostile to Christianity. Dr. Clark disposes of Language Philosophy in this brilliant critique of Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Rudolf Carnap, A.J. Ayer, Langdon Gilkey, and many others.

See also *Modern Philosophy*.

Logic

Gordon H. Clark

Hardback \$16.95

Written as a textbook for Christian schools, *Logic* is another unique book from Dr. Clark's pen. His presentation of the laws of thought, which must be followed if Scripture is to be understood correctly, and which are found in Scripture itself, is both clear and thorough. *Logic* is an indispensable book for the thinking Christian.

Lord God of Truth, Concerning the Teacher

Gordon H. Clark, Aurelius Augustine

Trade paperback \$7.95

This essay by Dr. Clark summarizes many of the most telling arguments against empiricism and defends the Biblical teaching that we know God and truth immediately. The dialogue by Augustine is a refutation of empirical language philosophy.

Modern Philosophy

Gordon H. Clark

Hardback \$29.95

Trade paperback \$21.95

This book, Volume 5 in *The Works of Gordon Haddon Clark*, combines five separate books: *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God*, *Behaviorism and Christianity*, *Language and Theology*, *William James*, and *John Dewey*.

The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$8.95

In opposing the contemporary idolatry of science, Dr. Clark analyzes three major aspects of science: the problem of motion, Newtonian science, and modern theories of physics. His conclusion is that science, while it may be useful, is always false; and he demonstrates its falsity in numerous ways. Since science is always false, it can offer no credible alternative to the Bible and Christianity.

See also *Modern Philosophy*.

The Scripturalism of Gordon H. Clark

W. Gary Crampton

Trade paperback \$9.95

Dr. Crampton has written an introduction to the philosophy of Gordon H. Clark that is helpful to both beginners and advanced students of theology. This book includes a bibliography of Dr. Clark's works.

Thales to Dewey: A History of Philosophy

Gordon H. Clark

Hardback \$29.95

Trade paperback \$21.95

This is the best one-volume history of philosophy in print. It is Volume 3 in *The Works of Gordon Haddon Clark*.

William James and John Dewey

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$8.95

William James and John Dewey are two of the most influential philosophers America has produced. Their philosophies of Instrumentalism and Pragmatism are hostile to Christianity, and Dr. Clark demolishes their arguments.

See also *Modern Philosophy*.

Without A Prayer: Ayn Rand and the Close of Her System

John W. Robbins

Trade paperback \$19.95

Ayn Rand has been a best-selling author since 1957. *Without A Prayer* discusses Objectivism's epistemology, theology, ethics, and politics in detail. Appendices include analyses of books by Leonard Peikoff and David Kelley, as well as several essays on Christianity and philosophy.

Theology

Against the Churches: The Trinity Review 1989-1998

John W. Robbins, Editor

Oversize hardback \$39.95

This is the second volume of 77 essays from *The Trinity Review*, covering its second ten years, 1989-1998. This volume, like the first, is fully indexed and is very useful in research and in the classroom. Authors include Gordon Clark, Charles Hodge, J. C. Ryle, Horatius Bonar, and Robert L. Dabney.

Against the World: The Trinity Review 1978-1988

John W. Robbins, Editor

Oversize hardback \$34.95

This is a clothbound collection of the essays published in *The Trinity Review* from 1978 to 1988, 70 in all. Fully indexed, it is a valuable source of information and arguments explaining and defending Christianity.

The Atonement

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$8.95

In *The Atonement*, Dr. Clark discusses the covenants, the virgin birth and incarnation, federal headship and representation, the relationship between God's

sovereignty and justice, and much more. He analyzes traditional views of the atonement and criticizes them in the light of Scripture alone.

The Biblical Doctrine of Man

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$6.95

Is man soul and body or soul, spirit, and body? What is the image of God? Is Adam's sin imputed to his children? Is evolution true? Are men totally depraved? What is the heart? These are some of the questions discussed and answered from Scripture in this book

By Scripture Alone

W. Gary Crampton

Trade paperback \$12.95

This is a clear and thorough explanation of the Scriptural doctrine of Scripture and a refutation of the recent Romanist attack on Scripture as the Word of God.

Can the Presbyterian Church in America Be Saved?

Sean Gerety

Trade paperback \$9.95

This book demonstrates the PCA's failure to deal with the Federal Vision heresy in its midst. This failure stems from the Vantilianism of most of its leaders.

Can the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Be Saved?

John W. Robbins

Trade paperback \$3.95

This small book, which demonstrates the central errors of OPC history and theology since the 1940s, is an alarm to awaken members of the OPC from their slumbers.

The Changing of the Guard

Mark W. Karlberg

Trade paperback \$3.95

This essay is a critical discussion of Westminster Seminary's anti-Reformational and un-Biblical teaching on the doctrine of justification. Dr. Karlberg exposes the doctrine of justification by faith and works – not *sola fide* – taught at Westminster Seminary for the past 30 years, by Professors Norman Shepherd, Richard Gaffin, John Frame, and others.

Christianity and Neo-Liberalism: The Spiritual Crisis in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Beyond

Paul M. Elliott

Trade paperback \$19.95

This massively-documented book details the influence Westminster Theological Seminary has had on the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and other churches and organizations. It is both a work of theological analysis and a call to action.

The Church Effeminate

John W. Robbins, Editor

Hardback \$29.95

This is a collection of 39 essays by the best theologians of the church on the doctrine of the church: Martin Luther, John Calvin, Benjamin Warfield, Gordon Clark, J.C. Ryle, and many more. The essays cover the structure, function, and purpose of the church.

The Clark-Van Til Controversy

Herman Hoeksema

Trade paperback \$9.95

This collection of essays by the founder of the Protestant Reformed Churches – essays written at the time of the Clark-Van Til controversy in the 1940s – is one of the best commentaries on those events in print.

A Companion to The Current Justification Controversy

John W. Robbins

Trade paperback \$9.95

This book includes documentary source material not available in *The Current Justification Controversy*, an essay tracing the origins and continuation of this controversy throughout American Presbyterian churches, and an essay on the New Perspective on Paul by Robert L. Reymond.

Cornelius Van Til: The Man and The Myth

John W. Robbins

Trade paperback \$2.45

The actual teachings of this eminent Philadelphia theologian have been obscured by the myths that surround him. This book penetrates those myths and criticizes Van Til's surprisingly unorthodox views of God and the Bible.

Counterfeit Miracles: A Defense of Divine Miracles Against Pagan, Medieval, and Modern Marvels

Benjamin B. Warfield

Trade paperback \$19.95

This book contains the 1918 lectures delivered by Professor Warfield of Princeton Seminary. It is more timely today than it was 90 years ago.

The Current Justification Controversy

O. Palmer Robertson

Trade paperback \$9.95

From 1975 to 1982 a controversy over justification raged within Westminster Theological Seminary and the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. As a member of the faculties of both Westminster and Covenant Seminaries during this period, O. Palmer Robertson was an important participant in this controversy. This is his account of the controversy, vital background for understanding the defection from the Gospel that is now widespread in American Presbyterian churches.

The Emperor Has No Clothes: Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr.'s Doctrine of Justification

Stephen M. Cunha

Trade paperback \$9.95

This book exposes Richard Gaffin's erroneous teaching on the doctrine of justification.

For the King: The Trinity Review 1999-2008

Thomas W. Juodaitis, John W. Robbins, Editors

Oversize hardback \$39.95

This is the third volume of 83 essays from *The Trinity Review*, covering its third ten years, 1999-2008. This volume, like the first two, is fully indexed and is very useful in research and in the classroom. Authors include Gordon Clark, W. Gary Crampton, J. Gresham Machen, Robert L. Raymond, and John W. Robbins.

God and Evil: The Problem Solved

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$5.95

This volume is Chapter 5 of *Religion, Reason and Revelation*, in which Dr. Clark presents the Biblical solution to the problem of evil.

God-Breathed: The Divine Inspiration of the Bible

Louis Gaussen

Trade paperback \$16.95

Gaussen, a nineteenth-century Swiss Reformed pastor, comments on hundreds of passages in which the Bible claims to be the Word of God. This is a massive defense of the doctrine of the plenary and verbal inspiration of Scripture.

God's Hammer: The Bible and Its Critics

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$12.95

The starting point of Christianity, the doctrine on which all other doctrines depend, is “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and, therefore, inerrant in the autographs.” Over the centuries the opponents of Christianity, with Satanic shrewdness, have concentrated their attacks on the truthfulness and completeness of the Bible. In the twentieth century the attack was not so much in the fields of history and archaeology as in philosophy. Dr. Clark’s brilliant defense of the complete truthfulness of the Bible is captured in this collection of eleven major essays.

The Holy Spirit

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$8.95

This discussion of the third person of the Trinity is both concise and exact. Dr. Clark includes chapters on the work of the Spirit, sanctification, and Pentecostalism.

Imagining a Vain Thing: The Decline and Fall of Knox Seminary

Steven T. Matthews

Trade paperback \$10.95

This exposé by a former Knox student demonstrates how neglecting the historical grammatical interpretation of the Reformation can lead to all sorts of fanciful eisegesis and ultimately heresy. A case in point is Warren Gage and the controversy surrounding his medieval interpretation taught at Knox Theological Seminary.

Imperious Presbyterianism

Kevin Reed

Trade paperback \$5.95

Contemporary Presbyterianism, even “conservative” Presbyterianism, is not historic Presbyterianism. Instead, it is an authoritarian substitute for the system of church government taught by the Bible and the Reformers. Reed discusses the nature of the church, the ministry, church membership, and ecclesiastical authority.

In Defense of Theology

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$9.95

In this book Dr. Clark addresses several groups of people who oppose Christian theology: atheists, the Neo-orthodox, and the Uninterested. All three hold a common opinion: Truth and theology have nothing to do with each other. Dr. Clark demonstrates that theology is truth, and as thoroughly intellectual as astrophysics – and a lot less speculative.

The Incarnation

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$8.95

Who is Christ? The attack on the doctrine of the Incarnation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was vigorous, but the orthodox response was lame. Dr. Clark reconstructs the doctrine of the Incarnation, building and improving upon the Chalcedonian definition.

The Johannine Logos

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$5.95

Dr. Clark analyzes the relationship between Christ, who is the truth, and the Bible. He explains why John used the same word to refer to both Christ and his teaching. Chapters deal with the Prologue to John's Gospel; *Logos* and *Rheemata*; Truth; and Saving Faith.

See also *What Is Saving Faith?*

Karl Barth's Theological Method

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$18.95

Karl Barth's Theological Method is perhaps the best critique of the Neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth ever written. Dr. Clark discusses Barth's view of revelation, language, and Scripture, focusing on his method of writing theology, rather than presenting a comprehensive analysis of the details of Barth's theology.

Logical Criticisms of Textual Criticism

Gordon H. Clark

Trade paperback \$3.25

Dr. Clark's acute mind enables him to demonstrate the inconsistencies, assumptions, and flights of fancy that characterize the science of New Testament criticism.

See also *Commentaries on Paul's Letters*.

Not Reformed at All: Medievalism in "Reformed" Churches

John Robbins and Sean Gerety

Trade paperback \$9.95

This book is a response to and refutation of Douglas Wilson's book *"Reformed" Is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant*. Wilson, one of the leading figures in the Neolegalist movement in Reformed and Presbyterian circles, attacked covenant theology and proposed a "visible, photographable" covenant that one enters by ritual baptism, making one a Christian. Wilson's "salvation" can be lost by one's own lackluster performance or nullified by actions of authorized representatives of the organized church. This refutation of Wilson is a defense of the Gospel and the Covenant of Grace.

Not What My Hands Have Done

Charles Hodge, Horatius Bonar

Trade paperback \$16.95

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