

THE BIBLE, OURSELVES AND OTHERS

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W Graham Scroggie, DD

This is our subject. We have the Bible. Nothing that we think about it can alter the fact of it, or its meaning and value. But there are endless interpretations of it and this is what we call Ourselves. Those whom we reach with it, may be affected by our views and hence we should be wise for our sakes and those we may influence.

I would like us to think of five attitudes, two on the left two and two on the right and one in the middle. Let me name these. On the right are the modernist and Liberal positions. On the left are the Obscurant and Fundamental attitudes and in the middle there is the Conservative position which is related to the position on the left. The Obscurant and Fundamental attitudes are hostile to the position on the right, the Modernist and Liberal attitudes

The Modernist position is infidel as it is not Christian at all for it denies what Christianity affords and is a separate religion. It argues with the Bible and so is another religion. It produces its own doctrines.

The Fundamental claim that the Modernist position is a grave one. To the Fundamentalist, Christianity is the one true religion

Blest be the tie that binds may be sung until Doomsday but it will not bring these two camps together. The Bible of the Fundamentalist is one Bible; the Bible of the Modernists another.

The Liberal position is a Higher Critic. Higher Criticism is a legitimate and necessary branch of Biblical criticism but that does not mean that the Bible is criticised unfairly. No one can be a Bible student without examining the Scriptures but the expression has come to suggest a destructive attitude to the Bible. The Liberal position become subordinated to human views.

The obscurant is opposed to intelligent study of the Bible and refuses its enlightenment and is therefore, ignorantly orthodox. He imagines that the spiritual and intellectual are in conflict and dismisses the intellectual since he may have to modify his own views. They complain about trivial matters.

The Fundamentalist is contending for the truth and may disregard the findings of sound scholarship and, perhaps, with militancy. He recalls that truth came by Jesus Christ but forgets that grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Sometimes Fundamentalists have been marred by an uncharitable spirit and are suspicious of others who have the truth and are equally loyal to it.

The Conservative rejects Modernism, Liberalism, and the bigotry of Obscurantism and does not emulate the sometimes carping attitude of Fundamentalism. Conservatism is informed, temperate, gracious and Christian. We should be more modest and moderate in our utterances without any sacrifice of loyalty or conviction.

I would like to reflect on a few things. Firstly, the distinction between Revelation and the Record of it. Revelation would still be a fact if there had never been a record of it. We have a record in the Old Testament of the fact that God spoke to Abraham but that does not constitute the fact of His speaking to Abraham. If there had been no record of it, it would still be a fact. The four

Gospels record but do not constitute the fact of the Incarnation. It is an historical fact even if there had been no record of it.

Secondly, the Bible is both human and divine. It is written in a human language. Human modes of thought are used. Not a little of it is the expression of merely human thought as in Ecclesiastes and the talk of Job's friends. The Book of Nathan, the Book of God, the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and the Book of Jasher are not parts of Scripture as they are outside sources of information. But the Bible is also Divine in which God has revealed Himself to man and of His saving purpose, truth which we would never have unless there was a revelation which was consummated in Jesus Christ who Himself was both human and divine.

Thirdly, Revelation and Inspiration must be carefully distinguished. As for inspiration, it may not be easy to clearly define. There is the theory of mechanical dictation and the writers were as penmen in the hand of the Divine Spirit, but the Spirit did not set aside human individuality but employed it and the personality of the authors is evident. Inspiration is the manner and the means of communicating and conserving for all time that immanence in human history of the redeeming God who is revealed in the Scripture. Dr Griffith Thomas said, "Revelation is the proof of inspiration and in turn the inspiration guarantees the revelation."

Fourthly, we must recognise that Inspiration does not extend to the sources of information nor to the transmission or translation of the writings.

Think of the sources of information. Take the Book of Nathan and the Book of God and other material from outside sources for which no Inspiration is claimed but which are brought into the very warp of it.

Transmission makes it inevitable that in making many manuscripts by copying, errors may have crept in, but we have no reason to believe that inspiration for such copying was given to those who did the work. Bishop Westcott has said that the variations in the manuscripts have not affected any doctrine.

Take the matter of translations. Inspiration cannot be claimed for any version of the Bible.

Can you say that the Authorized Version is Divinely Inspired whereas the Revised version is not? What inspiration can be claimed for the original manuscripts? Can Inspiration be claimed for the Hebrew Old Testament translated into Greek some two hundred years BC, the version known as the Septuagint, yet the translation is taken into the New Testament by quotation by the Lord and the apostles.

Fifthly, we should distinguish between the Word of God and the words of God. The words of God are in the Scriptures but not all the Scriptures are words of God. There are the words of the devil, words of mistaken people like Job's friends and God said that they have not spoken that which is right. There are also traditions, state records, genealogies and written narratives which are not words of God but are in the Word of God.

Sixthly, the Biblical writings must be interpreted in harmony with the literary mode of the Writing. No reasonable person would read and understand poetry as he would history or philosophy. So when we approach Scripture, it is of great importance to understand the mode of writing and to interpret it accordingly. Deuteronomy is oratory, Kings is history, Job is history and drama, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes is philosophy, Revelation is apocalypse, Psalms are lyrics and the Epistles are doctrine. You cannot approach them with the same angle as they are utterly different categories.

Lastly, the Bible is the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever. After every subject has been considered, it is the providentially inspired record of the divine redeeming purpose, wholly to be trusted and proclaimed.

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