

# THE ATTESTATION OF SCRIPTURE

By John Murray

## I. THE OBJECTIVE WITNESS

CHRISTIANS of varied and diverse theological standpoints aver that the Bible is the Word of God, that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and that it occupies a unique place as the norm of Christian faith and life. But such general confessions or admissions do not of themselves settle for us the view entertained with respect to the origin, authority and character of Holy Scripture. A passing acquaintance with the literature on this subject will show that such propositions are made to do service in the expression of wholly diverse views of the nature of Scripture. It becomes incumbent upon us, therefore, to define and examine the statement that the Bible is the Word of God.

Diversity of viewpoint with respect to this proposition has generally, if not always, taken its starting-point from the recognition that the Bible has come to us through human instrumentality. Every book of the Bible has had its human author. The Bible did not come to us directly from heaven; in its totality and in all its parts it has come to us through human agency. Since this is the case, every serious student of the Bible has to take cognisance of the human factor in the preparation, composition and completion of what we know as the canon of Holy Writ.

If, then, human instruments have performed a function in producing the Bible, does it not necessarily follow that the marks of human fallibility and error must be imprinted on the Bible? Since the fall of our first parents, no perfect human being has walked upon this earth. It is true there was one, indeed human, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. But he was more than human; he was the eternal Son of God manifest in the flesh. If he had written the Bible, then the question with which we are now faced would not need to be asked. In any case, there would be at hand a very ready answer to the question. The infallibility of Christ's human nature would provide us with a simple answer to the very urgent and difficult question: How can the Bible be the Word of God and at the same time the work of man? The resolution of the apparent antinomy would be provided by the fact that the person who wrote it was himself perfect God and perfect man.

The Lord Jesus Christ, however, did not write the Bible nor any part of it. When he left this world and went to the Father, he left no books that were the product of his pen. So in every case the Bible and all the Bible was written by those who were mere men and therefore by men who, without exception, were themselves imperfect and fallible.

This plain and undisputed fact has led many students of the Bible to the conclusion that the Bible cannot be in itself the infallible and inerrant Word of God. Putting the matter very bluntly, they have said that God had to use the material he had at his disposal and, since the material he had was fallible men, he was under the necessity of giving us his Word in a form

that is marred by the defects arising from human fallibility. In the words of Dr. J. Monro Gibson:

"It is important at the outset to remember that the most consummate artist is limited by the nature of his material. He may have thoughts and inspirations far above and beyond what he can express in black-and-white or in colours, in marble or in bronze, in speech or in song; but however perfect his idea may be, it must, in finding expression, share the imperfections of the forms in which he works. If this very obvious fact had only been kept in mind, most of the difficulties which beset the subject of inspiration need never have arisen."<sup>1</sup>

And then Dr. Gibson proceeds to enumerate some of the limitations with which God had to deal, the limitations of human agency, human language, and literary forms.

It is by plausible argument of this sort that students of the Bible, like Dr. Gibson, have too rashly come to the conclusion that the human factor or, as we should prefer to call it, human instrumentality settles this question and that the Bible, though God's Word, must at the same time be errant and fallible, at least in scientific and historical detail, simply because it came to us through the ministry of men. Dr. Gibson is very jealous that we should follow the facts and let the Bible speak for itself rather than approach the Bible with a preconceived notion of divine infallibility. It is, however, just because we are jealous that the Bible should speak for itself that we must not take it for granted that human authorship necessitates errancy and fallibility.

The fact of human authorship does indeed seem to provide a very easy argument for the errancy and fallibility of Scripture. Or, to state the matter less invidiously, human authorship seems to provide a very easy and necessary explanation of what are alleged to be the facts of errancy and fallibility. We must accept the facts, it is said, rather than hide behind the theory of inerrancy.

Those who thus contend should, however, be aware of the implications of their position. If human fallibility precludes an infallible Scripture, then by resistless logic it must be maintained that we cannot have any Scripture that is infallible and inerrant. All of Scripture comes to us through human instrumentality. If such instrumentality involves fallibility, then such fallibility must attach to the whole of Scripture. For by what warrant can an immunity from error be maintained in the matter of "spiritual content" and not in the matter of historical or scientific fact? Is human fallibility suspended when "spiritual truth" is asserted but not suspended in other less important matters?<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, if infallibility can attach to the "spiritual truth" enunciated by the Biblical writers, then it is obvious that some extraordinary divine influence must have intervened and

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<sup>1</sup> John Monro Gibson, *The Inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture* (New York, n.d.), p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase "spiritual truth" is used here by way of accommodation to the views of those who in the discussion of this question stress the distinction between the outward form of the Bible and the religious content of which the Bible is the vehicle. Cf., e.g., W. Sanday, *The Oracles of God* (London, 1892), pp. 29f.; R. H. Maiden, *The Inspiration of the Bible* (London, 1935), Pp.5f.

become operative so as to prevent human fallibility from leaving its mark upon the truth expressed. If divine influence could thus intrude itself at certain points, why should not this same preserving power exercise itself at every point in the writing of Scripture? Again, surely human fallibility is just as liable to be at work in connection with the enunciation of transcendent truths as it is when it deals with the details of historical occurrence.

It is surely quite obvious that the appeal to human fallibility in the interest of supporting, or at least defending, Biblical fallibility is glaringly inconsequent, if it is maintained that God has at any point given us through human agency an infallible and inerrant Word. Either *a priori* argument from human fallibility has to be abandoned or the position must be taken that human fallibility has left its mark upon all of Scripture and no part of it can be called the infallible Word of God, not even John 3: 16. We cannot too strenuously press the opponents of Biblical inerrancy to the implications of their position. Human fallibility cannot with any consistency be pleaded as an argument for the fallibility of Scripture unless the position is taken that we do not have in the Scriptures content of any kind that is not marred by the frailty of human nature.

This plea for consistency does not mean, however, that Biblical infallibility is thereby proven. While it is necessary to remove any *a priori* argument, drawn from human fallibility, that would do prejudice to the evidence, the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy must rest upon the proper evidence. In this case, as in all other doctrine, the evidence is the witness of Scripture itself. Does the Scripture claim inerrancy for itself and, if so, must this claim be accepted?

It must be freely admitted that there are difficulties connected with the doctrine of Biblical infallibility. There appear to be discrepancies and contradictions in the Bible. Naturally we cannot be expected to believe what we perceive to involve a contradiction. Furthermore, disingenuous and artificial attempts at harmony are to be avoided, for they do not advance the cause of truth and of faith. The conscientious student has, therefore, great difficulty sometimes in resolving problems raised by apparent contradictions. It is true that many such resolve themselves when careful study is applied to them, and oftentimes the resolution of the difficulty in the light of the various factors involved becomes the occasion for the discovery of a harmony and fullness of meaning that otherwise would not have been recognised by us. But some difficulties, perhaps many, remain unresolved. The earnest student has no adequate answer and he may frankly confess that he is not able to explain an apparent discrepancy in the teaching of Scripture.

It might seem that this confession of his own inability to resolve seeming discrepancy is not compatible with faith in Scripture as infallible. This is, however, at the best, very superficial judgment. There is no doctrine of our Christian faith that does not confront us with unresolved difficulties here in this world, and the difficulties become all the greater just as we get nearer to the centre. It is in connection with the most transcendent mysteries of our faith that the difficulties multiply. The person who thinks he has resolved all the difficulties surrounding our established faith in the Trinity has probably no true faith in the Triune God. The person who encounters no unresolved mystery in the incarnation of the Son of God and in his death on Calvary's tree has not yet learned the meaning of I Timothy 3:10. Yet these

unanswered questions are not incompatible with unshaken faith in the Triune God and in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son. The questions are often perplexing. But they are more often the questions of adoring wonder rather than the questions of painful perplexity.

So there should be no surprise if faith in God's inerrant Word should be quite consonant with unresolved questions and difficulties with regard to the very content of this faith.

The defense of the foregoing position that faith is not inconsistent with unresolved questions is far more crucial in this debate than might at first appear. It lies very close to the vital question of what is the proper ground of faith in the Bible as the Word of God. The ground of faith emphatically is not our ability to demonstrate all the teaching of the Bible to be self-consistent and true. This is just saying that rational demonstration is not the ground of faith. The demand that apparent contradictions in the Bible should have to be removed before we accord it our credit as God's infallible Word rests, therefore, upon a wholly mistaken notion of the only proper ground of faith in the Bible. It is indeed true that we should not close our minds and researches to the ever-progressing resolution of difficulties under the illumination of the Spirit of truth, but those whose approach to faith is that of resolution of all difficulty have deserted the very nature of faith and of its ground.

The nature of faith is acceptance on the basis of testimony, and the ground of faith is therefore testimony or evidence. In this matter it is the evidence God has provided, and God provides the evidence in his Word, the Bible. This means simply that the basis of faith in the Bible is the witness the Bible itself bears to the fact that it is God's Word, and our faith that it is infallible must rest upon no other basis than the witness the Bible bears to this fact. If the Bible does not witness to its own infallibility, then we have no right to believe that it is infallible. If it does bear witness to its infallibility then our faith in it must rest upon that witness, however much difficulty may be entertained with this belief. If this position with respect to the ground of faith in Scripture is abandoned, then appeal to the Bible for the ground of faith in any other doctrine must also be abandoned. The doctrine of Scripture must be elicited from the Scripture just as any other doctrine should be.<sup>3</sup> If the doctrine of Scripture is denied its right to appeal to Scripture for its support, then what right does any other doctrine have to make this appeal? Faith in the Trinity does not have to wait for the resolution of all difficulties that the teaching of Scripture presents to us on this question; it does not have to wait for the resolution of all apparent contradictions in the teaching of Scripture on the Trinity. So neither does faith in Scripture as the inerrant Word of God have to wait for the resolution of all difficulties in the matter of inerrancy.

The real question then becomes: What is the witness of Scripture with reference to its own character? It is important to appreciate the precise scope of this question; it is to elicit from the Scripture the evidence it contains bearing upon its origin, character and authority. This approach is very different from the approach that too many claim to be the only scientific and

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<sup>3</sup> W. Sanday states this principle well enough when he says that "we may lay it down as a fundamental principle that a true conception of what the Bible is must be obtained from the Bible itself" (*op. cit.*, p. 47). But Sanday does not carry out this principle consistently in that he fails to apply it to the express witness Scripture bears to its own character.

inductive approach. It is often said that we must not go to the Bible with an *a priori* theory of its infallibility but we must go to the Bible with an open mind and find out what the facts are and frame our theory from the facts rather than impose our theory upon the facts. There is an element of truth in this contention. It is fully granted that we should never approach Scripture with an *a priori* theory of its character and impose that theory upon the evidence. We just as vigorously repudiate any such method as do others, and we have to impute to many liberal and radical students the very fault which they are too ready to impute to the orthodox believer. But while the *a priori* method of approach must on all accounts be condemned, it does not follow that the proper approach is that of the alleged inductive and scientific method. We do not elicit the doctrine of Scripture from an inductive study of what we suppose determines its character. We derive our doctrine of Scripture from what the Scripture teaches with respect to its own character – in a word, from the testimony it bears to itself.

This might seem to be arguing in a circle. It might seem analogous to the case of the judge who accepts the witness of the accused in his own defence rather than the evidence derived from all the relevant facts in the case. We should, however, be little disturbed by this type of criticism. It contains an inherent fallacy. It is fully admitted that normally it would be absurd and a miscarriage of justice for a judge to accept the testimony of the accused rather than the verdict required by all the relevant evidence. But the two cases are not analogous. There is one sphere where self-testimony must be accepted as absolute and final. This is the sphere of our relation to God. God alone is adequate witness to himself. And our discussion with respect to the character of Scripture belongs to this category. Our discussion is premised upon the proposition that the Bible is the Word of God and therefore premised on the presupposition that it is unique and belongs to the realm of the divine. For this reason the argument from self-testimony is in order and perfectly consistent. Indeed, it is the only procedure that is consistent with the uniqueness of the question with which we are dealing.

This position does not by any means imply that the believer in Biblical infallibility can afford to be indifferent to the difficulties that may arise in connection with apparent discrepancies nor to the attacks made upon infallibility from various sides on the basis of what are alleged to be disharmonies and contradictions. The believer cannot at any time afford to be obscurantist; and orthodox scholarship must set right criticism over against wrong criticism. The motto of faith must be: "prove all things, hold fast that which is good." The believer must always be ready to give a reason for the faith that is in him. But he must also remember that the character and content of his faith in Scripture as the Word of God must be dictated by the divine witness bearing directly upon that precise question. What then is the testimony of the Scripture regarding itself? For to this question we must now address ourselves.

First of all, there is the negative evidence. The Scripture does not adversely criticise itself. One part of Scripture does not expose another part as erroneous. It goes without saying that, if Scripture itself witnessed to the errancy and fallibility of another part, then such witness would be a finality, and belief in the inerrancy of Scripture would have to be abandoned. But it is a signal fact that one Scripture does not predicate error of another. It is true that the

Scripture contains the record of much sin and error in the history of men, of Satan and of demons. The Bible, of course, is to a large extent historical in character and, since history is strewn with sin, the Bible could not fail to record the dark and dismal story. Indeed, the frankness and candour of the Bible in this regard is one of its most striking features. The openness with which it exposes even the sins of the saints is one of the most signal marks of its authenticity. But the condemnation of the very sin and error the Bible records is not witness to its own fallibility. It is rather an integral part of the witness to its own credibility and, so far from constituting any evidence against itself as inerrant Scripture, it thereby contributes evidence that is most germane to the establishment of its infallibility.

It is also true that the Bible fully recognises the temporary and provisional character of many of the regulations and ordinances which it represents as imposed by divine authority. The most relevant case in point here is the temporary character of many of the regulations of the Mosaic law. That the observance of these preparatory and temporary precepts, rites and ceremonies has been discontinued with the advent and establishment of the Christian economy is the express teaching of the New Testament. But in such teaching there is no reflection whatsoever on the divinely authoritative character of such provisions under that economy in which they were operative and, far more, no reflection upon the infallibility of that Old Testament Scripture which embodies the revelation to us of that divine institution. For example, when Paul in the epistle to the Galatians writes, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing" (Gal. 5:2), he in no way casts any aspersion on the truth of those Old Testament books which inform us of the institution of circumcision and of its divinely authorised practice among the people of God from Abraham onwards. In fact, the same Paul lends the strongest corroboration to the truth of the Old Testament in this regard when he says elsewhere with reference to Abraham, "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised" (Rom. 4: 11).

Our thesis at this point will, of course, be vigorously challenged. It will be said that abundant evidence can be produced to show that Scripture does expose as erroneous the distinct representations of other parts of Scripture. To put the opposing argument otherwise, it is said that one part of Scripture says one thing and another part of Scripture dealing with the very same situation says something else. For example, the Pentateuch represents the Levitical laws with respect to sacrifice as ordained by divine revelation and authority after the children of Israel came out of Egypt and while they were sojourning in the wilderness. It cannot be questioned that this is the story of the Pentateuch. But the prophet Jeremiah writes as the word of the Lord, "For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you" (Jer. 7:22, 23).

It must be replied that the argument based on this antithesis in the prophecy of Jeremiah fails to appreciate one of the basic principles of Biblical interpretation, namely, that a relative contrast is often expressed in absolute terms. What is being protested against in Jeremiah

7:22, 23 is the externalism and formalism of Israel. Mere ritual, even when the ritual is of divine institution, is religiously worthless, indeed is hypocrisy, if the real religious import of that ritual is not understood and particularly when the moral requirements of God's law are trampled under foot. Ceremonial ritual without ethical integrity and particularly without regard to spiritual attachment and obedience to the Lord God is mockery. And it is just of this formalism and hypocrisy that Isaiah writes, "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them" (Isa. 1:14).

The objection arising from such passages, however, confuses the precise question of our present thesis. Such passages as these, however great may appear to be the discrepancy in the witness of Scripture, do not fall into the category with which we are now dealing. For they are not, even on the most radical interpretation of the discrepancy, exposures of error on the part of one writer of Scripture of statements made by another writer. Jeremiah in other words does not quote the Pentateuch and then say that the statement concerned is an error and must therefore be corrected. While Jeremiah 7:22,23 constitutes an apparent discrepancy in the testimony of Scripture, Jeremiah does not quote another writer and overtly or impliedly say that this writer was in error. It is in that particular question we are now interested.

The passages in what is generally called the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus appears to set up an antithesis between his own teaching and the regulatory statutes of the Pentateuch, might plausibly be appealed to in this connection as instituting criticism of some of the Mosaic ordinances. Even though Jesus did not write Scripture, yet the finality of his teaching would make an appeal to his authority quite relevant to the present phase of our discussion. If it could be demonstrated that these passages in Matthew do involve criticism of the Mosaic regulations which Jesus quotes, then the divine character of the Pentateuch would in these particulars be impugned.

It must be recognised at the outset that, even if Jesus could be shown to appeal to his own authority as setting aside the Mosaic provisions concerned, this does not establish the errancy of these provisions nor overthrow the fact of their divine authority and sanction under the Mosaic dispensation. We have already shown that the abrogation of the temporary legislation of the Pentateuch does not in the least impugn its authenticity, infallibility, or divine character and authority. So Jesus might well have abrogated the observance of certain Mosaic ordinances and yet not in the least reflect upon their divine origin and character nor upon their divine authority during the period of their application and operation.<sup>4</sup> Surely nothing more than this could with any reason be elicited from these passages in Matthew and it is obvious that such does not provide us with any evidence that Jesus taught the errancy or fallibility of the five books of Moses.

We must, however, insist that it is not at all apparent that the notion of abrogation is the key to the interpretation of these antitheses. It should be remembered that the preface to this whole section in Jesus' teaching is in these words:

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<sup>4</sup> The word "abrogated" in this sentence should not be interpreted as inconsistent with what will be later maintained with respect to the permanent meaning and validity of the law. We are speaking now simply of the discontinuance of the observance of certain ordinances.

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:17-20).

A careful reading of this passage will show that any reflection upon the character of the law and the prophets or any insinuation of their errancy is entirely out of the question. As we shall see later, the import of such references to the law and the prophets is to the very opposite effect. But, with more precise reference to our present discussion of the idea of abrogation, it would seem very strange indeed that Jesus would have made such an unequivocal appeal to the inviolability of every jot and tittle of the law and to the sanctions attending the breach of one of these least commandments as well as to the divine blessing accruing to the observance of them, and then have proceeded forthwith to teach the abrogation of these very commandments. There would be contradiction in any such view of the sequence and in such an interpretation of the import of the antitheses. We must therefore turn in some other direction for the meaning of Jesus' teaching in these verses. Dr. Stonehouse has admirably shown that

"Understood as illustrations of Jesus' fulfillment of the law, the antitheses then provide no support of the thesis that they involve an abrogation of the objective authority of the law. In the single instance where an enactment through Moses is set aside as provisional, namely, in the instance of the provision for a bill of divorcement, Jesus appeals decisively to the teaching of the law which is not circumscribed by reference to a temporary state of affairs. In the five other cases the design of Jesus is to show that current interpretations are inadequate as abiding by the externals or are in error as to the actual requirements of the law."<sup>5</sup>

These antitheses then constitute no evidence that Jesus taught or even insinuated that any part of the Pentateuch or of the Old Testament was in error and therefore calculated to misinform us as to fact or doctrine.

We must now turn, in the second place, to the positive evidence the Scripture contains with respect to the character of Scripture. However significant and important the absence of evidence calculated to deny the inerrancy of Scripture may be, it is upon positive evidence that the doctrine of Biblical infallibility must rest.

In the Old Testament we find a great deal of evidence that bears directly upon the divine character and authority of what is written. Much that is written by the prophets, for example, is, by introductory statements such as "Thus saith the Lord;" asserted to be divine in origin, content and authority. In the most express way the divine seal is attached to what is written. Obviously, if error could be discovered in or predicated of any of the passages bearing this seal, then there are only two alternatives. The claim to be the Word of the Lord must be rejected or fallibility must be predicated of the divine utterance. From the latter every Christian must recoil. The former must reject the testimony of Scripture with respect to the

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<sup>5</sup> N. B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ* (Philadelphia, 1944), p. 209.



character of its own content. If that is done then our argument is at an end. The premise of our whole thesis, indeed our thesis itself, is that the doctrine of Scripture must be based upon the witness of Scripture just as any other doctrine in the whole realm of Christian confession. So the adoption of this alternative means the abandonment of the witness of Scripture as the basis of Christian doctrine. If the witness of Scripture is not accepted as the ground of the doctrine of Scripture, if it is not reliable in this department of doctrine, then by what right can its witness be pleaded as the authority in any department of truth?

Again, in the Old Testament the way in which the later books of the Old Testament appeal to the laws enunciated in the Pentateuch presupposes the divine authority and sanction of these laws. For example, there is the indictment which the last of the Old Testament prophets, Malachi, brings against his people.

"Ye said also, Behold what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen" (Mal. 1:13, 14).

"Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from my ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" (Mal. 2:7, 8).

Such accusations are meaningless on any other assumption than that of the divine authority and obligation of the Levitical law (cf. Mal. 2:4-8). And the endorsement of Moses is put beyond all question when at the end of his prophecy Malachi writes, "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments" (Mal. 4:4). It is surely of the greatest weight that the long line of Old Testament prophetic witness should come to its close with so insistent an appeal for devotion to the law of Moses, the Lord's servant, and that the intertestamentary period should be bridged, as it were, by the retrospective and the prospective, the appeal to Moses, on the one hand, and the promise of the resumption of the prophetic voice in him than whom there should not have arisen a greater, namely, John the Baptist, on the other (cf. chap. 4:5).

It is not, however, in the Old Testament that the most cogent evidence of a positive character, relative to this question, appears. For we do not have in the Old Testament any reference on the part of its writers to that collection of canonical writings in its entirety. In the nature of the case this could not reasonably be expected. Consequently we should not expect in the Old Testament any express predication or witness with respect to the whole collection of Old Testament books looked at in their unity as a fixed canon of sacred writings. In the New Testament the perspective is quite different in this respect. When the New Testament era opens to our view, the Old Testament books comprise a fixed collection of sacred writings. They exist before the speakers and writers of the New Testament period as a distinct corpus of authoritative writings viewed not only in their diversity but also and very distinctly in their unity as the canon of faith. Consequently, we find in the New Testament

the most express and distinct estimate of the character of this body of writings viewed in their sum and unity as an entity capable of such characterisation. It is such witness that is most directly pertinent to the present subject. What is the witness of the New Testament to the character of the Old Testament?

When we say the witness of the New Testament we mean, of course, the authoritative speakers and writers of the New Testament. First and foremost among such authoritative witnesses is our Lord himself. His word is a finality; on any other supposition the whole superstructure of Christian faith must totter and crumble. What then is our Lord's testimony with respect to the Old Testament?

We have had occasion to quote and discuss the passage in Matthew 5:17-19 in another context. It is relevant to our present purpose in that it provides us with one of the most striking testimonies to the estimate of the Old Testament entertained by Jesus. It is highly probable that, when Jesus says "the law or the prophets," he denotes by these two designations the whole of the Old Testament, the law denoting what we know as the Pentateuch and the prophets the rest of the Old Testament. It is possible that by the prophets he means the specifically prophetic books of the Old Testament, and by the law he may have had in mind the law of Moses in the more specific sense of the legislative economy embodied in the Pentateuch. If he is using these terms in the more specific sense it would be wholly arbitrary, indeed casuistic and contrary to all of the evidence, to suppose that there is the least hint in such a specific use of the terms "law" and "prophets" that other parts of the Old Testament are in a different category in respect of authority. In this passage, then, Jesus gives us his estimate of at least a very large part of the Old Testament and his conception of the relation that it sustained to his messianic work. He came not to destroy the law or the prophets; he came to fulfill.

The word "destroy" (καταλύω) is peculiarly significant. It means to abrogate, to demolish, to disintegrate, to annul or, as J. A. Alexander points out, "the destruction of a whole by the complete separation of its parts, as when a house is taken down by being taken to pieces."<sup>6</sup> His emphatic denial of any such purpose in reference to either the law or the prophets means that the discharge of his messianic mission leaves the law and the prophets intact. He utters, however, not only this emphatic denial but also adds the positive purpose of his coming - he came to fulfill, to complete. And so his work with reference to both law and prophets is completory, not destructive. He who can speak in the immediately succeeding context with such solemn asseveration and imperious authority brings all that is involved in such asseveration and authority to bear upon the confirmation of the abiding validity, stability and authority of both law and prophets. And not only so, but he also grounds his own mission and task upon such permanent validity, and defines his work in terms of fulfillment of all that the law and the prophets provided.

In verse 18 Jesus proceeds to apply the general statement of verse 17 to the very minutiae of the law. It is this application of the general assertion to the minutest details that is

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<sup>6</sup> *The Gospel according to Matthew Explained* (London, 1884), p. 126.

particularly pertinent to our present topic. General statements may sometimes not cover, or provide for, certain exceptions in detail. But here Jesus precludes any possibility of discrepancy between the general and the particular. He is saying in effect, "This proposition that I came not to destroy but to fulfill applies not simply in general terms but also to the minutest particulars." And not simply is this the case; the connection expressed by the conjunction is also that the general statement of verse 17 is grounded in the fact that not one jot or tittle, not the minutest detail, will pass from the law till all be fulfilled. To enforce and seal the veracity of this, Jesus uses the formula that combines asseveration and authority, "Verily I say unto you."

The "jot" is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet and the "tittle" is the minute horn or projection that distinguishes consonants of similar form from one another. It would be impossible to think of any expression that would bespeak the thought of the meticulous more adequately than precisely this one used here by our Lord. In respect of the meticulous, our English expression "one letter or syllable" is scarcely equivalent. Could anything establish more conclusively the meticulous accuracy, validity and truth of the law than the language to which Jesus here attaches his own unique formula of asseveration? Many professing Christians recoil from the doctrine of verbal inspiration, the doctrine which means simply that the inspiration of Scripture extends to the very words as well as to the thoughts. It is difficult to understand why those who assent to inspiration should stumble at verbal inspiration. For words are the media of thought and, so far as Scripture is concerned, the written words are the only media of communication. If the thoughts are inspired, the words must be also. But whatever the case may be in the sphere of logic, the antipathy to verbal inspiration has little in common with the very obvious import of Jesus' representation in this passage. The indissolubility of the law extends to its every jot and tittle. Such indissolubility could not be predicated of it if it were in any detail fallible, for if fallible it would some day come to nought. And this is just saying that in every detail the law was in his esteem infallible and therefore indissoluble. It is indeed strange prejudice that professes adherence to the infallibility of Christ and yet rejects the clear implications of his teaching. Nothing could be plainer than this, that in the smallest details he regards the law as incapable of being made void and that in the smallest details it is taken up by him and finds, in his fulfillment of it, its permanent embodiment and validity. By the most stringent necessity there is but one conclusion, namely, that the law is infallible and inerrant.

In our discussion of Matthew 5: 17-19, we left open the possibility that Jesus was using the terms "law" and "prophets" in a more restricted and specific sense. It is far from being certain that this interpretation of the scope of his words is justifiable. It is far more reasonable to believe that he had the whole Old Testament in mind. But we must not prejudice the argument by insisting upon this, for the argument we are now pursuing does not rest upon it. The witness of our Lord to the character of the Old Testament is so copious that what is not supplied by one passage is supplied by another. If the books other than those of Moses and the prophets are not expressly alluded to in Matthew 5:17-19 they certainly are in other

places. One of the most striking of these is John 10:33-36, and to this part of his witness we may now turn.<sup>7</sup>

The occasion for his speaking these words was that created by the reaction of the Jews to his claim, "I and the Father are one." The Jews rightly interpreted this claim as meaning that Jesus placed himself on an equality with God. This they regarded as blasphemy and they took up stones to stone him. Jesus' claim was, of course, a stupendous one and there are only two alternatives. Either his claim was true or he did utter blasphemy. Here Jesus did not simply claim to be the Messiah; he claimed to be equal with the Father. The charge brought by the Jews was not a whit too severe if their conception of Jesus were correct. Quite logically on their own presuppositions their charge struck at the centre of Jesus' claim and therefore at the basis of his mission and work. The charge denied his deity and his veracity. If validated, it would have exposed Jesus' claim as the most iniquitous imposture.

It was a charge with such implications that Jesus had to answer. If ever the resources of effective rebuttal needed to be drawn upon, it was at such a juncture. How did he meet the charge? "Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said ye are gods? If he called them gods unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken, say ye of him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said I am the Son of God." As we read this reply, we are amazed at what appears to be the facility and composure with which it is given as well as at what appears to be its restraint. Indeed, on superficial reading it might appear to be weak and ineffective. But the facility, composure and restraint, which we believe are real, as well as the apparent weakness, which is not real, all converge to demonstrate the significance for our present purpose of his appeal to Scripture. He staked his argument for the rebuttal of the most serious allegation that could be brought against him upon a brief statement drawn from Psalm 82:6. It is this appeal to Scripture that is the pivot of his whole defence. This cannot be explained on any other basis than that he considered the Scriptures as the unassailable instrument of defence. For "the scripture cannot be broken."

Just as eloquent of Jesus' use of Scripture is, what appears to us, the obscurity of the passage to which he appeals. It would seem to have no direct bearing upon the question at issue. Yet Jesus uses this apparently obscure and less important passage as his argument to answer an attack that was aimed at the very centre of his person and teaching and work. And furthermore, this passage is drawn from that part of the Old Testament that possibly, so far as our argument is concerned, did not come within his purview in Matthew 5:17. Does this not show that his attitude to every jot and tittle of the Psalms was identical with that to every jot and tittle of the law? Upon any other supposition his appeal to a brief and relatively obscure statement of the book of Psalms would be quite forceless and inconclusive.

Finally, the force of the brief parenthetical clause, "the scripture cannot be broken," has to be noted. It might be plausibly argued that Jesus in his reply to the Jews was simply taking

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<sup>7</sup> It is not within the scope of this article to discuss the critical questions that have been raised with respect to the Gospel according to John and other New Testament writings which are appealed to in the subsequent argument.

advantage of an *ad hominem* argument. In the question, "Is it not written in your law?", Jesus is meeting his adversaries on their own assumptions. And so, it might be said, no argument bearing upon Jesus' own view of Scripture could be based on this passage. But Jesus' remark, "the scripture cannot be broken," silences any such contention. In this remark Jesus expresses not simply the attitude of the Jews to Scripture but his own view of the inviolability of Scripture. He appeals to Scripture because it is really and intrinsically a finality. And when he says the Scripture cannot be broken, he is surely using the word "Scripture" in its most comprehensive denotation as including all that the Jews of the day recognised as Scripture, to wit, all the canonical books of the Old Testament. It is of the Old Testament without any reservation or exception that he says, it "cannot be broken." Here then there can be no question as to how much of the Old Testament came within the purview or scope of his assertion. He affirms the unbreakableness of the Scripture in its entirety and leaves no room for any such supposition as that of degrees of inspiration and fallibility. Scripture is inviolable. Nothing less than this is the testimony of our Lord. And the crucial nature of such witness is driven home by the fact that it is in answer to the most serious of charges and in the defence of his most stupendous claim that he bears this testimony.

In passages such as those with which we have just dealt, our Lord's view of Scripture comes to explicit expression and exposition. It is not, however, in a few passages that his viewpoint is attested. There is a mass of evidence that corroborates the express teaching of the more explicit passages. Indeed, corroboration is too weak a word to do justice to the import of the mass of evidence bearing upon the question. Rather should we say that the teaching of our Lord is so steeped in the appeal to Scripture, so steeped in the use of the formula, "it is written," so pervaded by the recognition that what Scripture says God says, so characterised by the acceptance of the finality of the word of Scripture, that the doctrine of Scripture clearly enunciated in some passages is the necessary presupposition of the correlative evidence. The inescapable fact is that the mass of direct and indirect statement leads to one conclusion that, for our Lord, the Scripture, just because it was Scripture, just because it fell within the denotation of the formula, "it is written," was a finality. His attitude is one of meticulous acceptance and reverence. The only explanation of such an attitude is that what Scripture said, God said, that the Scripture was God's Word, that it was God's Word because it was Scripture and that it was or became Scripture because it was God's Word. That he distinguished between the Word of God borne to us by Scripture and the written Word itself would be an imposition upon Jesus' own teaching wholly alien to the identifications Jesus makes and to the reverence for the letter of Scripture so pervasive in all of his witness.

To institute a contrast between the teaching of our Lord and of his apostles on the question of Scripture would, of course, disrupt the harmony of the New Testament witness. The establishment of such disharmony would admittedly be a serious matter and it would have far-reaching consequences for the whole construction of Christian truth. Regarding the respective views of Scripture, discrepancy between Jesus and the writers of the New Testament could be sought in either of two directions. It could be sought in the direction of trying to find a more liberal view of Scripture reflected in the writers, or at least in some of the writers, of the New Testament, or it might be sought in the direction of showing that in

the writings of the New Testament there is a petrifying and mechanising process at work so that the more organic and elastic view of Jesus is transformed and brought into accord with the allegedly more scholastic and legalistic bias of later developments. We already found what our Lord's teaching was. We found it to be nothing less than that of the infallible character and authority of the Old Testament. A higher view of plenary or verbal inspiration we could not expect to find. If discrepancy between Jesus and the writers of the New Testament is to be sought it would not be reasonable, in view of the evidence, to seek it in the greater liberalism of Jesus. When we turn in the other direction, do we find any relaxation of the rigidity of Jesus' teaching in those who were his appointed witnesses?

Any adequate examination of this question would lead us far beyond our space in this volume. But is it not of the greatest pertinence that the books of the New Testament show that same characteristic which is so patent in the teaching of Christ, namely, appeal to what had been written? It surely is singular that the New Testament, not only in the reporting of Jesus' teaching but also as a whole, should as it were rest its case so frequently upon the adduction of Scripture proof and should authenticate the history of the Old Testament by such copious reference to it. Its witness in general is to the same effect as is summed up in the words of Paul. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4), an appraisal of the whole of the Old Testament that is preceded by a thoroughly typical appeal to the Old Testament as testifying beforehand to the example of Christ that he pleased not himself and as therefore not only witnessing to the fact that Christ pleased not himself but as also supporting the exhortation, "Let everyone of us please his neighbour for his good to edification" (Rom. 15:2). It is precisely in such estimation of the Scriptures and in such allusion to them, as not only prophetic of what took place in the fullness of time but also as having direct bearing upon the most practical and abiding of Christian duties, that the New Testament abounds. And this is just saying that the Old Testament is not simply true as history, prophecy and law but that it is also of abiding validity, application and authority.

But, just as we found in the case of our Lord that the high view of the inspiration of Scripture not only underlies the formulae and allusions in which his teaching abounds but also comes to explicit expression in specific passages, so is it in the case of the other authoritative New Testament witnesses. The doctrine of Scripture becomes in some passages the subject of express teaching. Perhaps most notable among these is II Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God."<sup>8</sup>

In the preceding context of this passage, Paul refers to the "holy writings" which Timothy knew from a child. These "holy writings" can be none other than the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament. It is with these Scriptures in mind that Paul says, "All scripture is God-breathed." The word that Paul uses predicates of all Scripture or of every Scripture a certain quality. More particularly, the predicate reflects upon its origin; it is the product of God's creative breath. The terseness of Paul's affirmation here must not be allowed to obscure its

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<sup>8</sup> See, for a thorough examination of the meaning of θεόπνευστος, B. B. Warfield, "God-Inspired Scripture" in *Revelation and Inspiration* (New York, 1927), pp. 229-280 and, for an exegesis of II Tim. 3:16, the same author in *op. cit.*, pp. 79ff.

significance. It is that Scripture, the denotation of which is placed beyond all doubt by the context, is God's mouth, God's breath and therefore God's oracle. Paul makes no qualifications and no reservations. Every Scripture is God-breathed and therefore, so far as divine origin and resultant character are concerned, there is no discrimination. And in respect of the benefit accruing to men, all of Scripture is, for the reason that it is God-inspired, also profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.

Paul was, of course, well aware that God used human instruments in giving us these Scriptures. In his epistles he makes repeated allusion to the human authors of the sacred books. But the recognition of human instrumentality did not in the least inhibit Paul from making the stupendous affirmation that all Scripture is God-breathed, which means that Scripture is of divine origin and authorship and therefore of divine character and authority.

The predication which Paul here makes is nothing less than the high doctrine of plenary inspiration. For Paul is not here speaking of an inbreathing on the part of God into the writers of holy Scripture nor even into holy Scripture itself. The term Paul uses represents the concept of "breathing out" rather than that of "breathing in" and is far removed from the notion that a human product or witness is so interpenetrated with divine truth or influence that it becomes the Word of God. The whole emphasis is upon the fact that all Scripture proceeds from God and is therefore invested with a divinity that makes it as authoritative and efficient as a word oracularly spoken by God directly to us.

In II Timothy 3:16 Paul says nothing with respect to the human authors of Scripture nor with respect to the way in which God wrought upon the human authors so as to provide us with God-breathed Scripture. The apostle Peter, however, though not by any means furnishing us with a full definition of the mode of inspiration, does go farther than does Paul in II Timothy 3:16 in stating the relation that obtained between the Holy Spirit and the inspired human witnesses. "No prophecy of scripture," he writes, "is of private interpretation. For not by the will of man was prophecy brought aforetime, but as borne by the Holy Spirit men spake from God" (II Pet. 1:20, 21). That Peter's statement here bears upon the agency of the Holy Spirit in the giving of Scripture is obvious from the phrase, "prophecy of scripture."

Peter's teaching in this passage is both negative and positive. Negatively, he denies that the prophecy of Scripture owes its origin to human initiative, volition or determination. It is not the product of individual reflection or imagination. Positively, human instrumentality is asserted. "Men spake from God." False inferences that might be drawn from the absolute terms of the preceding negations are obviated by the recognition of human agency. But while men spake, they spake from God, and it is this datum that harmonises the fact of human agency with the negations of private interpretation and the will of man. They spake from God because they were borne along or borne up by the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup> Here there is plainly the conjunction of human and divine agency. But the divine character of the prophecy is insured

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. B. B. Warfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 82f.

by the peculiar character of the Spirit's agency. He took up the human agents in such a way that they spoke God's Word, not their own.

In this context it is the stability of the prophetic Word that is being emphasised. The ground upon which this stability rests is that it came from God, that the Holy Spirit was not only operative in the writers of Scripture but carried them to his destination and that this prophetic Word is not a momentary utterance or passing oracular deliverance but the Word of God that has received through Scripture permanent embodiment and authentication.

Summing up the witness of the New Testament, we find that human authorship or instrumentality is fully recognised and yet human agency is not conceived of as in any way impairing the divine origin, character, truth and authority of Scripture. It is divine in its origin because it is the product of God's creative breath and because it was as borne by the Holy Spirit that men spoke from God. For these reasons it bears an oracular character that accords it an authority as real and divine as if we heard the voice of God speaking from heaven. This oracular character is a permanent feature and so Scripture has an abiding stability and application - it is unbreakable and indissoluble.

The witness with which we have so far dealt confines itself to the express testimony of the New Testament with reference to the Old. What then of the evidence on which may be founded a similar judgment with respect to the character of the New Testament? It must be acknowledged that the great mass of the evidence we possess bearing upon the inspiration of Scripture is the witness of the New Testament with reference to the Old. We do not have from the New Testament writers or authoritative witnesses the same abundance of testimony to the inspiration of the New Testament. That this should be the state of the case should not surprise us. When the New Testament witnesses spoke or wrote there was no finished New Testament canon to which they could refer as a unified and completed corpus of writings. Particularly is this true of our Lord himself. None of the books of the New Testament was written when he spoke upon earth. Witness to the character of the New Testament as a whole such as we find in the New Testament with reference to the Old would have been impossible for any writer of the New Testament except the last and only then as an appendix to his own last canonical writing. This type of witness it would be unreasonable for us to demand as the necessary seal upon the divine character and authority of the entire New Testament.

While we do not have the same mass of testimony to the inspiration of the New Testament as to the Old, and while the circumstances were such that we could not expect the same kind of inclusive characterisation, it does not follow that we have no evidence upon which to maintain the divine origin and character of the New Testament. We have sufficient evidence, and to such we now turn our attention.

The organic unity of both Testaments is the presupposition of the appeal to the authority of the Old Testament and of allusion to it in which the New Testament abounds. This fact of organic unity bears very directly upon the question of the inspiration of the New Testament. For if, as we have found, the authoritative witness of the New Testament bears out the unbreakable and inerrant character of the Old, how could that which forms an organic unit



with the Old be of an entirely different character as regards the nature of its inspiration? When the implications of organic unity are fully appreciated, it becomes impossible to believe that the divinity of the New Testament can be on a lower plane than that of the Old. Surely then, if the Old Testament, according to the testimony that in this matter has the greatest relevance or authority, is inerrant, the New Testament must also be.

This argument from organic unity has peculiar force when we properly understand the implications of progressive revelation. The New Testament stands to the Old in the relation of consummation to preparation; it embodies a fuller and more glorious disclosure of God's character and will. This is signalled by the fact that in these last days God hath spoken unto us by his Son who is the brightness of his glory and the express image of his substance (Heb. 1: 1-3). In Paul's language the glory of the New Testament is the glory that excels (II Cor. 3: 10, 11). The New Testament Scripture enshrines and conveys to us the content of that new and better covenant, established upon better promises. Is it at all consonant with the completory nature of the New Testament, with the more excellent glory inherent in the New Testament and with the finality attaching to the revelation of God's own Son to suppose that the Scripture of such an economy should be lacking in that inerrancy which the authoritative witnesses-our Lord and his apostles-predicate of the Old Testament? It would be contrary to all sound analogy and reason to entertain such a supposition.<sup>10</sup>

The cogency of this argument is made all the more apparent when we bear in mind the meaning of Pentecost. The Old Testament was God-breathed, possessing unshakable stability and permanent validity, because it was as borne by the Holy Spirit men spoke from God. Yet so much more abundant were the operations of the Spirit introduced by Pentecost that it can be described in terms of "giving" and "sending forth" the Holy Spirit. Are we to believe that this greater fullness and abundance of the Spirit's operation gave us a Scripture less reliable and less inerrant than the Scripture that the Spirit gave before the abundant effusion of Pentecost took place? Are we to believe that the Scripture that is the only abiding witness to and embodiment of the full and abundant administration of the Spirit is a Scripture less characterised by the very activity of the Spirit that imparted divinity and authority to the Old Testament? To ask these questions is to show that once the witness of the New Testament to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Old is accepted, once the relations which the two Testaments sustain to one another are understood and appreciated, the infallible character of the Old Testament furnishes us with the most cogent considerations in support of a similar judgment with respect to the character of the New Testament.

We must not think, however, that these considerations constitute the whole basis of faith in the New Testament as inerrant Scripture. For the New Testament is not without direct witness to its own character. It is true that we do not have the mass of testimony that we have in connection with the Old Testament. But, in a manner analogous to the witness the Old Testament bears to its own divinity, the New Testament not only bears the unmistakable marks of its divine origin but also bears direct witness to its own divine character and authority.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. L. Gaussen, *Theopneustia* (Cincinnati, 1859), pp. 74f.

If the New Testament is the Word of God with all the fullness of meaning that the authoritative witnesses of the New Testament ascribe to the Old, it must be by reason of that same plenary inspiration of the Holy Spirit operative in the writing of the Old Testament. The promises that Christ gave to his disciples with respect to the Holy Spirit have, therefore, the closest bearing upon this question. When Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the kingdom of God he said to them, "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you" (Matt. 10:19,20; cf. Mark 13:11; Luke 12:12; Luke 21:14,15). Such a promise assures to the disciples that in the "passing exigencies" and "to subserve interests of the narrowest range"<sup>11</sup> there would be afforded to them an inspiration of the Holy Spirit that would make their spoken words not simply their words but the words of the Holy Spirit. This same promise of the Spirit is given greatly increased scope and application when on the eve of his crucifixion Jesus said, "It is expedient for you that I go away. For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you, but if I depart I will send him unto you. ... He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:7, 13). After his resurrection Jesus performed what must be construed as the act of official impartation of the Holy Spirit when he breathed on his disciples and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John 20:22). And before his ascension he assured them, "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The work and functions of the disciples are therefore to be discharged, in accordance with the promise and commission of Christ, by the direction and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is no wonder then that we find in the writings of the New Testament a note of authority, of certainty and of finality that it would be presumptuous for men to arrogate to themselves, a note of authority that is consistent with truth and sobriety only if the writers were the agents of divine authority and the subjects of inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Relevant to the question of inspiration, this note of authority is one of the most significant features of the New Testament.

The passage in I Corinthians 7:10-12 is sometimes understood as if Paul were instituting a contrast between the authoritative teaching of Christ and his own unauthoritative judgment on questions bearing upon marriage and separation- "But to the married I give charge, not I but the Lord. ...But to the rest I say, not the Lord." A careful reading of the whole passage will, however, show that the contrast is not between the inspired teaching of Christ and the uninspired teaching of the apostle but rather between the teaching of the apostle that could appeal to the express utterances of Christ in the days of his flesh, on the one hand, and the teaching of the apostle that went beyond the cases dealt with by Christ, on the other. There is no distinction as regards the binding character of the teaching in these respective cases. The language and terms the apostle uses in the second case are just as emphatic and mandatory as in the first case. And this passage, so far from diminishing the character of apostolic authority, only enhances our estimate of that authority. If Paul can be as mandatory in his terms when he is dealing with questions on which, by his own admission, he cannot appeal for support to the express teaching of Christ, does not this fact serve to impress upon us how

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<sup>11</sup> L. Gaussen, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

profound was Paul's consciousness that he was writing by divine authority, when his own teaching was as mandatory in its terms as was his reiteration of the teaching of the Lord himself? Nothing else than the consciousness of enunciating divinely authoritative law would warrant the terseness and decisiveness of the statement by which he prevents all gainsaying, "And so ordain I in all the churches" (1 Cor. 7:17).

That Paul regards his written word as invested with divine sanction and authority is placed beyond all question in this same epistle (1 Cor. 14:37,38). In the context he is dealing specifically with the question of the place of women in the public assemblies of worship. He enjoins silence upon women in the church by appeal to the universal custom of the churches of Christ and by appeal to the law of the Old Testament. It is then that he makes appeal to the divine content of his prescriptions. "If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandment of the Lord. And if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." Paul here makes the most direct claim to be writing the divine Word and coordinates this appeal to divine authority with appeal to the already existing Scripture of the Old Testament.

In the earlier part of this epistle Paul informs us, in fashion thoroughly consonant with the uniform teaching of Scripture as to what constitutes the word of man the Word of God, that the Holy Spirit is the source of all the wisdom taught by the apostles. "God hath revealed them unto us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2: 10). And not only does Paul appeal here to the Holy Spirit as the source of the wisdom conveyed through his message but also to the Spirit as the source of the very media of expression. For Paul continues, "which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth, combining spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:13). Spirit-taught things and Spirit-taught words! Nothing else provides us with an explanation of apostolic authority.

Much else that supports and corroborates the foregoing position could be elicited from the witness of the New Testament. But in the brief limits of the space available enough has been given to indicate that the same plenary inspiration which the New Testament uniformly predicates of the Old is the kind of inspiration that renders the New Testament itself the Word of God.

Frequently the doctrine of verbal inspiration is dismissed with supercilious scorn as but a remnant of that mediaeval or post-Reformation scholasticism that has tended to petrify Christianity.<sup>12</sup> Such contempt usually accompanies the claim that open-minded scientific research has made adherence to Biblical inerrancy utterly inconsistent with well-informed honesty and therefore untenable. This boast of scientific honesty is plausible, so much so that

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<sup>12</sup> The criticism directed against the doctrine of verbal inspiration, namely, that it involves a theory of mechanical dictation is thoroughly unwarranted. The classic exponents of the doctrine of verbal inspiration have not attempted to define the mode of inspiration. It is true that the word "dictation" sometimes occurs. But it is also obvious that the use of this word was not intended to specify the mode of inspiration as that of dictation. Full allowance is made for the manifold activities and processes by which the books of Scripture were brought into being and full recognition is given to all the diversity that appears in those who were the human instruments in the production of Scripture. Cf. B. B. Warfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-106 and B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, pp. 62ff.

it is often the password to respect in the arena of theological debate. The plea of the present contribution has been, however, that the summary dismissal of Biblical infallibility is lamentably unscientific in its treatment of the very data that bear directly on the question at issue and that such dismissal has failed to reckon with the issues at stake in the rejection of what is established by straightforward scientific exegesis of the witness of Scripture to its own character. If the testimony of Scripture on the doctrine of Scripture is not authentic and trustworthy, then the finality of Scripture is irretrievably undermined. The question at stake is the place of Scripture as the canon of faith. And we must not think that the finality of Christ remains unimpaired even if the finality of Scripture is sacrificed. The rejection of the inerrancy of Scripture means the rejection of Christ's own witness to Scripture. Finally and most pointedly, then, the very integrity of our Lord's witness is the crucial issue in this battle of the faith.

## II. THE INTERNAL TESTIMONY

The thesis maintained above in our examination of the objective witness is that Scripture is authoritative by reason of the character it possesses as the infallible Word of God and that this divine quality belongs to Scripture because it is the product of God's creative breath through the mode of plenary inspiration by the Holy Spirit. The rejection of such a position has appeared to many to involve no impairment of the divine authority of the Bible because, even though the infallibility of Scripture has to be abandoned, there still remains the ever abiding and active witness of the Holy Spirit, and so infallible authority is fully conserved in the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. Scripture is authoritative, it is said, because it is borne home to the man of faith by the internal testimony of the Spirit.

That there is such an activity of the Holy Spirit as the internal testimony is beyond dispute, and that there is no true faith in Scripture as the Word of God apart from such inward testimony is likewise fully granted. It might seem, therefore, that it belongs to the very situation in which we are placed, relative to the Holy Spirit, to say that the divine authority that confronts us is not that emanating from a past and finished activity of the Spirit but rather the influence of the Spirit which is now operative with reference to and in us. Does not the positing of divine authority in an activity of the Spirit that to us is impersonal and external, as well as far distant and now inactive, do prejudice to the real meaning of that directly personal and presently operative address of the Holy Spirit to us and in us?

This question is that which defines what is the most important cleavage within Protestantism today. It is the cleavage between what is called Barthianism and the historic Protestant position. The Barthian view is that Scripture is authoritative because it witnesses to the Word of God; it is the vessel or vehicle of the Word of God to us. In that respect Scripture is said to be unique and in that sense it is called the Word of God. But what makes Scripture really authoritative, on this view, is the ever-recurring act of God, the divine decision, whereby, through the mediacy of Scripture, the witness of Scripture to the Word of God is borne home to us with ruling and compelling power. The Scripture is not authoritative antecedently and objectively. It is only authoritative as here and now, to this

man and to no other, in a concrete crisis and confrontation, God reveals himself through the medium of Scripture. Only as there is the ever-recurring human crisis and divine decision does the Bible become the Word of God.

It is apparent, therefore, that for the Barthian the authority-imparting factor is not Scripture as an existing corpus of truth given by God to man by a process of revelation and inspiration in past history, not the divine quality and character which Scripture inherently possesses, but something else that must be distinguished from any past action and from any resident quality. The issue must not be obscured. Barth does not hold and cannot hold that Scripture possesses binding and ruling authority by reason of what it is objectively, inherently and qualitatively.

An objection to this way of stating the matter is easily anticipated. It is that this sharp antithesis is indefensible. For, after all, it will be said, Scripture is unique. It is the Word of God because it bears witness to God's Word. It occupies a unique category because there was something unique and distinctive about that past activity by which it came to be. It differs radically from other books written at the time of its production and also from all other books. It can, therefore, have no authority in abstraction from that quality that belongs to it as the human witness to the revelation given by God in the past. So, it may be argued, the factor arising from past events and activities enters into the whole complex of factors that combine and converge to invest Scripture with that unique character which makes it the fit medium for the ever-recurring act of divine revelation. It is not then an *either or* but a *both and*.

The objection is appreciated and welcomed. But it does not eliminate the issue. After making allowance for all that is argued in support of the objection, there still remains the fact that, on Barthian presuppositions, it is not the divine quality inherent in Scripture nor the divine activity by which that quality has been imparted to it that makes Scripture authoritative. That past activity and the resultant quality may constitute the prerequisites for the authority by which it becomes ever and anon invested, but they do not constitute that authority. It is rather the ever-recurring act of God that is the authority-constituting fact. This ever-recurring activity of God may be conceived of as the internal testimony of the Spirit and so it is this testimony that constitutes Scripture authoritative.<sup>13</sup>

It is sometimes supposed that this Barthian construction of the authority of Scripture represents the classic Protestant or indeed Reformed position. Even the Westminster Confession has been appealed to as enunciating this position when it says that "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:V). A little examination of Chapter I of the Confession will expose the fallacy of this appeal. Indeed, the Westminster Confession was framed with a logic and comprehension exactly adapted not only to obviate but also to meet the Barthian conception. Section V, from which the above quotation was given, does not deal with the nature or ground of the authority of Scripture.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes*, Erster Halbband (Munich, 1932), pp. 189ff. English Translation (Edinburgh, 1936), pp. 207ff.

The preceding section deals with that logically prior question. It states clearly that the authority of Scripture resides in the fact that it is the Word of God. "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." In one word, Scripture is authoritative because God is its author and he is its author because, as is stated in Section II, it was given by inspiration of God. Nothing could be plainer than this: that the Confession represents the authority of Scripture as resting not upon the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit but upon the inspiration of the Spirit, a finished activity by which, it is clearly stated, the sixty-six books enumerated were produced and in virtue of which they are the Word of God written.

It is, however, by "the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts" that we become convinced of that authority. The authority of Scripture is an objective and permanent fact residing in the quality of inspiration; the conviction on our part has to wait for that inward testimony by which the antecedent facts of divinity and authority are borne in upon our minds and consciences. It is to confuse the most important and eloquent of distinctions to represent the former as consisting in the latter. The Confession has left no room for doubt as to what its position is, and in formulating the matter with such clarity it has expressed the classic Reformed conception.

What then is the nature of this internal testimony and what is the Scriptural basis upon which the doctrine rests?

If, as has been shown in the earlier part of this discussion, Scripture is divine in its origin, character and authority, it must bear the marks or evidences of that divinity. If the heavens declare the glory of God and therefore bear witness to their divine Creator, the Scripture as God's handiwork must also bear the imprints of his authorship. This is just saying that Scripture evidences itself to be the Word of God; its divinity is self-evidencing and self-authenticating. The ground of faith in Scripture as the Word of God is therefore the evidence it inherently contains of its divine authorship and quality. External evidence, witness to its divinity derived from other sources extraneous to itself, may corroborate and confirm the witness it inherently contains, but such external evidence cannot be in the category of evidence sufficient to ground and constrain faith. If the faith is faith in the Bible as God's Word, obviously the evidence upon which such faith rests must itself have the quality of divinity. For only evidence with the quality of divinity would be sufficient to ground a faith in divinity. Faith in Scripture as God's Word, then, rests upon the perfections inherent in Scripture and is elicited by the perception of these perfections. These perfections constitute its incomparable excellence and such excellence when apprehended constrains the overwhelming conviction that is the only appropriate kind of response.

If Scripture thus manifests itself to be divine, why is not faith the result in the case of everyone confronted with it? The answer is that not all men have the requisite perceptive faculty. Evidence is one thing, the ability to perceive and understand is another. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither

can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14). It is here that the necessity for the internal testimony of the Spirit enters. The darkness and depravity of man's mind by reason of sin make man blind to the divine excellence of Scripture. And the effect of sin is not only that it blinds the mind of man and makes it impervious to the evidence but also that it renders the heart of man utterly hostile to the evidence. The carnal mind is enmity against God and therefore resists every claim of the divine perfection. If the appropriate response of faith is to be yielded to the divine excellence inherent in Scripture, nothing less than radical regeneration by the Holy Spirit can produce the requisite susceptibility. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14). It is here that the internal testimony of the Spirit enters and it is in the inward work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart and mind of man that the internal testimony consists. The witness of Scripture to the depravity of man's mind and to the reality, nature and effect of the inward work of the Holy Spirit is the basis upon which the doctrine of the internal testimony rests.

When Paul institutes the contrast between the natural man and the spiritual and says with respect to the latter, "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no one" (1 Cor. 2:15), he means that the "spiritual" person is the person endowed with and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is only such an one who has the faculty to discern the things revealed by the Spirit. By way of contrast with the natural man he receives, knows and discerns the truth.

Earlier in this same chapter Paul tells us in terms that even more pointedly deal with our present subject that the faith of the Corinthians in the gospel was induced by the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. "And my speech and my preaching was not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, in order that your faith might not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:4, 5). No doubt Paul here is reflecting upon the manner of his preaching. It was not with the embellishments of human oratory that he preached the gospel but with that demonstration or manifestation that is produced by the Spirit and power of God. He is saying, in effect, that the Spirit of God so wrought in him and in his preaching that the response on the part of the Corinthians was the solid faith which rests upon the power of God and not that evanescent faith which depends upon the appeal of rhetorical art and worldly wisdom. It is in the demonstration of which the Holy Spirit is the author that the faith of the Corinthians finds its source. It is, indeed, faith terminating upon the Word of God preached by Paul. But it is faith produced by the accompanying demonstration of the Spirit and manifestation of divine power.

In the first epistle to the Thessalonians Paul again refers to the power and confidence with which he and his colleagues preached the gospel at Thessalonica. "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and much assurance" (I Thess. 1:5). In this text the reference to power and assurance appears to apply to the power and confidence with which Paul and Silvanus and Timothy proclaimed, the Word rather than to the conviction with which it was received by the Thessalonians. The gospel came in the Holy Spirit and therefore with power and assurance. But we must not dissociate the

reception of the Word on the part of the Thessalonians from this power and confidence wrought by the Spirit. For Paul proceeds, "And ye became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit" (vs. 6). The resulting faith on the part of the Thessalonians must be regarded as proceeding from this activity of the Holy Spirit in virtue of which the gospel was proclaimed "in power and in the Holy Spirit and much assurance." That the Thessalonians became imitators of the Lord and received the Word with joy is due to the fact that the gospel came not in word only, and it came not in word only because it came in the power of the Holy Spirit. Their faith therefore finds its source in this demonstration of the Spirit, just as the joy with which they received the Word is the joy wrought by the Spirit.

When the Apostle John writes, "And ye have an anointing from the Holy One and ye know all things. I have not written to you because ye do not know the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth" (1 John 2:20, 21; cf. vs. 27), he is surely alluding to that same indwelling of the Spirit with which Paul deals in I Corinthians 2: 15. This anointing is an abiding possession and invests believers with discernment of the truth and steadfastness in it.

Summing up the conclusions drawn from these few relevant passages, we may say that the reception of the truth of God in intelligent, discriminating, joyful and abiding faith is the effect of divine demonstration and power through the efficiency of the Holy Spirit, and that this faith consists in the confident assurance that, though the Word of God is brought through the instrumentality of men, it is not the word of man but in very truth the Word of God. We again see how even in connection with the internal testimony of the Spirit the ministry of men in no way militates against the reception of their message as the Word of God.

This witness of the Holy Spirit has been called the internal testimony of the Spirit. The question arises, why is the inward work of the Spirit called testimony? There does not appear, indeed, to be any compelling reason why it should be thus called. There is, however, an appropriateness in the word. The faith induced by this work of the Spirit rests upon the testimony the Scripture inherently contains of its divine origin and character. It is the function of the Holy Spirit to open the minds of men to perceive that testimony and cause the Word of God to be borne home to the mind of man with ruling power and conviction. Thereby the Holy Spirit may be said to bear perpetual witness to the divine character of that which is his own handiwork.

The internal testimony of the Spirit has frequently been construed as consisting in illumination or in regeneration on its noetic side. It is illumination because it consists in the opening of our minds to behold the excellence that inheres in Scripture as the Word of God. It is regeneration on the noetic side because it is regeneration coming to its expression in our understanding in the response of the renewed mind to the evidence Scripture contains of its divine character. Anything less than illumination in the sense defined above, the internal testimony cannot be.



The question may properly be raised, however, whether or not the notion of illumination is fully adequate as an interpretation of the nature of this testimony. On the view that it consists merely in illumination, the testimony, most strictly considered, resides entirely in the Scripture itself and not at all in the ever-present activity of the Spirit. And the question is, may we not properly regard the present work of the Spirit as not only imparting to us an understanding to perceive the evidence inhering in the Scripture but also as imparting what is of the nature of positive testimony? If we answer in the affirmative, then we should have to say that the power and demonstration with which the Holy Spirit accompanies the Word and by which it is carried home to our hearts and minds with irresistible conviction is the ever-continuing positive testimony of the Spirit. In other words, the seal of the Spirit belongs to the category of testimony strictly considered. If this construction should be placed upon the power and seal of the Spirit, there is a very obvious reason why this doctrine should be called, not only appropriately but necessarily, the internal testimony of the Spirit. We must, however, be content to leave this question undetermined. It should not perplex us to do so. There remains in this matter as in the other manifold activities of the Holy Spirit much of mystery that surpasses our understanding.

Whether we view the internal testimony as merely illumination or as illumination plus a positive supplementation construed as testimony in the stricter sense of the word, there is one principle which it is necessary to stress, namely, that the internal testimony does not convey to us new truth content. The whole truth content that comes within the scope of the internal testimony is contained in the Scripture. This testimony terminates upon the end of constraining belief in the divine character and authority of the Word of God and upon that end alone. It gives no ground whatsoever for new revelations of the Spirit.

When Paul writes to the Thessalonians, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and much assurance," he is surely making a distinction between the actual content of the gospel. and the attendant power with which it was conveyed to them and in virtue of which it was carried home with conviction to the hearts of the Thessalonians. In like manner in I Corinthians 2:4,5 the content of Paul's word and preaching will surely have to be distinguished from the demonstration of the Spirit and of power by which Paul's message was effectual in the begetting of faith in the Corinthian believers. And we are likewise justified in recognising a distinction between the truth which John says his readers already knew and the abiding anointing of the Spirit which provided them with the proper knowledge and discernment to the end of bringing to clearer consciousness and consistent application the truth which they had already received (1 John 2:20-27). In each case the illumining and sealing function of the Spirit has respect to truth which had been received from another source than that of his confirming and sealing operations.

The internal testimony of the Spirit is the necessary complement to the witness Scripture inherently bears to its plenary inspiration. The two pillars of true faith in Scripture as God's Word are the objective witness and the internal testimony. The objective witness furnishes us with a conception of Scripture that provides the proper basis for the ever-active sealing operation of the Spirit of truth. The internal testimony insures that this objective witness

elicits the proper response in the human consciousness. The sealing function of the Spirit finds its complete explanation and validation in the pervasive witness that Scripture bears to its own divine origin and authority. And the witness to plenary inspiration receives its constant confirmation in the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in the hearts of believers.



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