

appreciate them. He has to learn the language of the pulpit. He has to share in some conservative political opinions. He has to dress a bit old-fashioned. In brief, he has to step back two generations and undergo what one may call a painful cultural circumcision" (p. 206). In the East too and wherever a non-Christian religion dominates a country's culture, we need great wisdom to discern between what can be retained and what must be renounced. We cannot agree with Dr. M.M. Thomas' call for "a Christ-centered fellowship of faith and ethics in the Hindu religious community." Bishop Lesslie Newbigin is right to call this proposal "quite unrealistic" and to insist that "a man who is religiously, culturally and socially part of the Hindu community is a Hindu." But I think we can agree with Bishop Kenneth Cragg who, against a Muslim rather than a Hindu background, writes that "baptism . . . does not, properly understood, deculturalize the new believer; it enchurches him . . . conversion is not 'migration'; it is the personal discovery of the meaning of the universal Christ within the old framework of race, language and tradition."

Third, conversion is not the end. On the contrary, it is a new beginning. It is to be followed by the life of discipleship, by a growth into Christian maturity, by membership in the church (see Acts 2:40, 47) and by involvement in the world.

Such is the nature of biblical evangelism. It is part of God's mission through God's church in God's world. It is the spreading by any and every means of the good news of Jesus, crucified, risen, and reigning. It includes the kind of dialogue in which we listen humbly and sensitively in order to understand the other person and to learn how to present Christ to him meaningfully. It is the offer, on the ground of the work of Christ, of a salvation which is both present possession and future prospect, both liberation from self and liberation for God and man. And it invites a total response of repentance and faith which is called "conversion," the beginning of an altogether new life in Christ, in the church and in the world.

## BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND EVANGELISM

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### *Introduction*

The problem of authority is the most fundamental problem that the Christian Church always faces. This is because Christianity is built upon the truth mediated by God's revelation. Without revelation there would be no foundation for Christian faith and action. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that with the reality of revelation Christianity stands or falls.

However, today the very concept of revelation is under attack. Is there such a thing as what the church calls "the revelation of God"? asks modern man living in the present age of mass atheism and a completely secular culture. Usually his reaction to this question is quite sceptical or strongly negative. He believes a "modern myth" that all that lies beyond the world of senses, the conclusions of logic, and all that cannot be proved scientifically, is purely incredible. Hence, the Christian claim to have the revelation of the transcendent God stands in the sharpest possible antithesis to the claim of our age. The sense of transcendence and the consciousness of divine revelation has disappeared almost completely. What is allowed at most by modern man is a kind of religion of this world only, in which the very concept of revelation has no place.

But if there is a divine revelation as the church has believed through the centuries, what is its mode or form? Is it discoverable in all existing things or only in some? If in some, then in which? And by what criteria are they selected as its media? Where are they found? What is their authority? (cf. W. Temple: "Revelation" in *Revelation*, ed., J. Baillie and H. Martin, 1937). The church has to face all these questions, and it is certainly the duty of the church, both to itself and to the world, to make a clear theological statement about the fundamental issue of revelation on which her life rests.

### *General revelation and evangelism*

The opening verses of the epistle to the Hebrews inform us that it has pleased God to reveal himself in "diverse manners." In the course of the church's history God's revelation thus given in diverse manners came to be commonly understood under two categories, namely, *general* and *special* revelation. Down through the centuries it has been an integral part of the teaching of the church that the Scripture teaches the revelation of God in his works of creation. On the basis of the so-called "nature psalms" (Psa. 8, 19, 65, 104) as well as other passages such as John 1:4-9, Acts 14:17, 17:22ff., Rom. 1:18ff. and 2:14ff., the church has proclaimed that God always surrounds all mankind "like a theater"

(J. Calvin) (i) in the constitution of human existence, (ii) in the whole structure of nature, and (iii) in God's providential government of human history. And this general revelation has long been taken as the basis of the church's assertion of the responsibility of the whole human race and also as the *point of contact* for the evangelistic call to repentance. However, today, as we attempt to understand the exact *nature* and *meaning* of this general revelation, opinions differ and we find the situation isn't so simple.

#### *The "knowing God" of the natural man*

The first chapter of Romans has been regarded as good material for the confession of general revelation, but one must take care how he uses it. Romans 1:19 explains how it can be said that men suppress the truth in unrighteousness; they suppress the truth because there is a manifestation of truth to them (v. 18), and the truth manifested to them is described as "what can be known about God" (v. 19). The content of this knowledge is defined in v. 20 as "his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity." That is, the eternity of God and the divine attributes are manifest to men (i) *since* the creation of the world and (ii) *through* the works of creation. The cognitive perception elicited from the manifestation of divine glory in the visible creation is spoken of as "knowing God" in v. 21.

What does all this mean to us today? Roman Catholicism, by means of direct appeal to Romans 1:20, concludes that a *true* though incomplete knowledge of God is possible with certainty *through the natural light of reason*, apart from the revelation in Christ. According to this, we can know the one, only, true God, our Creator and Lord, from created reality by means of human reason. But, is this what Paul really meant by the "knowing God" of the natural man? Didn't Christ say, "And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (John 17:3)? Although we ought to appreciate its apologetic intent to seek to answer all forms of modern agnosticism and irrationalism, there are serious problems with this view. *First*, it is clear that a specific anthropology is involved here, a view of man that the ability of human reason is neither sin-depraved nor disturbed, so that reason can still function rightly and therefore reach God. But, isn't it a biblical fact that sin works a destructive effect not only in our moral motives but also *in our minds*, so that the things of God cannot be known by the natural man (I Cor. 2:14)? *Second*, this view of Rome is in conflict with the Pauline doctrine that the Gentiles are estranged from the life of God by the emptiness of mind and ignorance (Gal. 4:8; I Thess. 4:5; II Thess. 1:8). And it is in line with the teaching of the Old Testament that the heathen do not know the true God (Ps. 97:6). *Third*, in Romans 1 general revelation is placed in a specific context: Man — sinful and fallen man — is still surrounded by the light of general revelation, but this same man pollutes and misunderstands this light and suppresses it in unrighteousness (v. 18). This same man substitutes the image of a perishable man for the majesty of the eternal God (v. 23). This same man honors and worships the creature above the real Creator (v. 25). Because of this, therefore, man stands under the wrath of God, in the state of guilt (v. 18). Thus the context

in which Romans 1 is placed shows that it is not permissible to separate the knowing God of the natural man from the dark side of his exchange of gods, and it is not right to talk about the value of general revelation without considering the anger of God, which condemns man's holding back the truth in unrighteousness. What Romans 1 makes clear is that the light of general revelation does not lead man to the knowledge of the true God and the kind of knowledge which the natural man has is a knowledge which, as a fatal consequence of sin, is transformed into the illusion of idolatry!

Today in our evangelistic and apologetic effort the matter of how we view natural man is becoming more and more important. The Christian as God's prophet interprets the world according to his mind; as his priest he dedicates the meaning of the world to God; and as his king he rules over the world for his glory (II Cor. 5:17). In sharp contrast to this, the natural man, allowing no authority to stand over him, thinks of himself as the ultimate judge of what can or cannot be. And the facts of man's environment are not created or controlled by the providence of God. The universe is a *chance-controlled* universe! So as soon as there is any discussion between the Christian and the non-Christian about something which involves principle the radical difference between them immediately appears, as clearly pointed out by even a secular thinker: "If by religion one refers to an explanation of the universe and a derivation of moral norms from theological premises, then indeed there is logical incompatibility with the results, methods, and general outlook of science" (cf. C. Van Til: *The Protestant Doctrine of Scripture*, 1967, pp. 12ff.). Any evangelistic effort which does not reckon with this decisive difference will be routed, and concessions to please the mind of the natural man can be no part of real Christian strategy.

#### *The law written on man's heart*

In Romans 1 Paul makes clear that man even in his sinful state does not stand outside of any connection with the light of God's revelation. In chapter 2 he states that this same man in his practical life still has some discernment with respect to that which is contained in God's law and his ordinances for the preservation of human life.

In Romans 2:14 it is stated that the Gentiles are "without the law" and "have not the law" in the sense of specially revealed law (i.e., the Law of Moses); nevertheless, (i) they are confronted by the law of God in their consciousness by reason of what they natively and constitutionally are; (ii) they do things which this law prescribes; (iii) this doing is not external constraint but by natural impulse. In v. 15 it is further stated that not only does the doing of the things of the law prove the work of the law written in their hearts, but the witness of *conscience* does also. This conscience is certainly not to be viewed as an ever unchanging something (II Tim. 3:1f.), but Paul saw that even in the Gentile world people in one way or another are preserved from the full consequences of their alienation from God. In other words, there is still a witnessing of the law written in the hearts of men who neither know God nor serve him. And man, being compelled to take note of this, cannot escape from the goodness of the preserving and ruling God and his holy law.

Today, talk about nihilism is widespread. It seems to be a common thing to talk about the death of God and the subsequent disappearance of absolute moral standards. But it must be noted that human life even in its present radical estrangement from God has not completely passed into meaninglessness and lawlessness. By God's preserving grace some acceptance still stands for right and justice, for punishing evil and rewarding good (Rom. 13:3-4). There is still appreciation for community, love, and social welfare. There is still a searching for a new humanism (cf. R. Shinn: *Man: The New Humanism*, 1967). In Japan the fact that new religious sects have mushroomed to a remarkable extent since the war strongly witnesses to the unrest of peoples' hearts, which do not come to rest until they rest in God (Augustine). It also shows the fact of their searching for a way to truer humanness and more dependable values on the other. Hence, in the midst of the ongoing secularism and pluralism in our society, the church must use the doctrine of general revelation as a reminder of God who still holds fast human life and who does not abandon the world because of his love towards this world (John 3:16, cf. also Col. 1:17).

#### *The Gospel and other religions*

In connection with the matter of general revelation, today, the question of the relation between the Christian Gospel and other religions is becoming more and more urgent. This is because: (i) As an external impulse the extension of communication and the worldwide exchange of ideas have resulted in a general intermingling of various religions; (ii) Inside some parts of the church contemporary ecumenical theology, strongly influenced by the idea of one broad, universal revelation of God in the background of the various religions, tends to press the matter of interreligious cooperation and even interpenetration (in this "syncretism" is the key issue); (iii) An energetic effort on the part of the Third World churches to formulate an indigenous theology lead them to use their native religious sources as in equal standing with the Word of God and even to admit the possibility of salvation in their traditional religions. Might it not be possible for non-Christian religions to point to Christ in the same way as the Old Testament does? Is there anyone who comes to the Father except through him? (John 14:6). On these questions Paul's address at Athens seems to furnish some biblical guidelines.

At the beginning of his address Paul's attention is focused upon the religious devotion of the Athenians, "I perceive that in every way you are very religious" (Acts 17:22). What was prominently in view in Paul's mind was their *religiousness*. And his grappling with their religiousness was mainly due to his view of the nature of man as created in the image of God and therefore made to respond to his Creator (Gen. 1:26-27). According to Paul's understanding, however inadequate and even false the Gentile religion might be as a consequence of sin, its very existence is nevertheless a confirmation of the fact that man still retains his fundamental character as a religiously responsible being and man even in his most extreme aberrations does not release himself from the light of God's revelation. That is, in terms of a Reformer John Calvin, man possesses as man an indelible "sense of deity," so that no man might shelter himself under the pretext of ignorance.

Then it is tremendously important to note that Paul evaluates the religion of the Athenians as one of *ignorance* (v. 23). Here Paul says in effect, "That which you worship acknowledging openly your ignorance, I proclaim unto you." In saying so he does not mean to complete what the Athenians already possess of true religion. On the contrary, what they acknowledge as ignorance has a far deeper meaning for Paul. He clearly makes contact with the Greek mind by way of the altar and the unknown God; but his point of contact is the ignorance of the Greeks. He sees this ignorance more profoundly than the Athenians' own acknowledgment of it allows for. He calls them to repentance and conversion from this ignorance. Thus Paul maintains a clear-cut distinction between the Christian Gospel and pagan idolatry (cf. his same consistent attitude at Lystra in Acts 14:14f). In reality, Paul is neither accommodating his Gospel to the Hellenistic religiosity of his day, nor saying that the peculiarities of each religion are simply special forms of the common essence as the science of comparative religion teaches today.

Perhaps the most controversial part of Paul's address is 17:24-29. His proclamation of God as Creator and Ruler of the world is viewed by some as an affirmation of the Greek monotheism and consequently as an affirmation of a common ground with the religious outlook of the Greeks. Is this Paul's real intention? Was there really commonness in the view of God? As pointed out above, Paul proclaims this God as one who is fundamentally unknown to them. Paul well knows that the tendency to create gods in man's own image, as had occurred in the idol worship of the Old Testament, lies in all of the so-called religions of men. And what man achieves by religion is never the true knowledge of God, but only a fiction that has nothing to do with reality. As man cannot, dare not, see himself as he is, he cannot and will not see God as he really is. Rather, what underlies Paul's whole presentation in this section is the light of God's special revelation associated with his own apostolic authority and reinforced by his direct dependence upon the teaching of the Old Testament. Paul here is thoroughly on biblical ground when he speaks of God as the one "who made the world and everything in it" (v. 24), for this statement is a virtual quotation from Exodus 20:11 and has found expression repeatedly in both the Old and New Testament (Ps. 146:6; Isa. 37:16; Acts 4:24, 14-15). Likewise, the declaration that God is "Lord of heaven and earth," and "does not live in shrines made by man" (v. 24) is a reflection of I Kings 8:27 and is the very point which Stephen affirmed (Acts 7:48). Being keenly aware of the Greek's *monistic* view of the cosmos, that is, the cosmos as basically one without a clear distinction between the Creator-God and the creature, Paul here witnesses to the important fact that only in the biblical outlook the doctrine of the sovereign Creator and Ruler comes to the fullest expression without any compromise (cf. N. Stonehouse: *Paul Before the Areopagus and other New Testament Studies*, 1957).

Isn't it often the case that whenever sight is lost of the biblical revelation of the God of the Bible and man's creatureliness and his abnormality, man's religious imagination will eventually end up either

in blending God and nature (i.e., Shinto's polytheistic finite gods) or blending God and the self (i.e., self-deification in Buddhism)?

*The Bible is "most necessary"*

Hitherto the church has derived all her doctrines from the Bible. Whenever in the course of her long history the question, "What is to be believed?" arose, it was to the Bible that the church turned. Before we take up the question of the authority of the Bible, we ought to be clear about the fundamental factors which make the Bible, God's written special revelation, "most necessary" (cf. the first paragraph of the Westminster Confession). (i) Whence do we know our misery and the love of God in Jesus Christ? The answer which the Heidelberg Catechism gives is very simple, but also very penetrating. It simply says, "Out of the law of God" (Q.3). Since man has sinned, he has become a "willing slave" of sin and thereby totally incapable spiritually. But from the moment man sinned God began to manifest his saving grace. In order that men, thus blinded by sin, may learn correctly his will, works and ways with respect to this saving, restorative work, God's special communication to them became a necessity (II Tim. 3:17). (ii) The necessity of God's written special revelation appears also with respect to man's inability to interpret nature aright. I Kings 20:28 presents before us man's typical case that the attraction of nature, with its fascinating and terrifying aspects, leads to nature-worship when sight is lost of God's interpretative light. And we may listen to the "harmony of the spheres" as Pythagoras, and still not understand God's revelation in nature. Now we as sinners are in a position of need of a "glass" through which we understand again the real meaning and purpose of the creation of God. It should be remembered that with the so-called "nature-psalms" we touch upon the songs of praise of *the Lord's people*. For instance, Psalm 19 deals with nature, but also with the law of God. Psalm 93 deals with nature, but also with *the holiness of God's house* (cf. G. C. Berkouwer: *General Revelation*, 1955). (iii) The necessity of God's written special revelation must also be considered from the fact that since God is transcendent man cannot adequately think of God and properly describe him in human language (Job 36:26, I Tim. 6:15-16). Only in this revelation is God authentically known. (iv) The Christian view of *God as a person* or the personal God points to the necessity of God's special communication. Ramm describes as follows, "As man stands before this Person, the Person of God, he discovers that he cannot open up the discussion. Under what terms could such a conversation be opened up? . . . What are the connecting ligaments between the human and the divine mind? . . . If we are ready to converse, is God ready to listen? Perhaps God has called to us and we have not heard? If we call, must God answer? Here man stands before the sovereign Person, the transcendent Person! *If there is to be a conversation this Person must initiate it . . . In the divine readiness this sovereign Person does speak! He does open up the conversation! And this conversation springing from the readiness of this Person is special revelation*" (*Special Revelation and the Word of God*, 1961, p. 25). And we simply add that this conversation is now embodied in the Bible. (v) The church on the earth often comes under the temptation of evil forces to degenerate forms of faith and

worship, and therefore renewal is constantly needed. But by what could it be possible? Psalm 119:50 informs us that the way the Spirit of God renews the very life of the church is by applying to us the Word of God.

*All Scripture is "God-breathed"*

The real issue before the entire church and every individual Christian today is: What is to be our view of and attitude toward the Bible? The most popular approach to this question today is to submit the Bible to the so-called scientific examination of the "experts" and then abide by that testimony, or to judge the Bible by the standards of whether modern man thinks it relevant to his day. What is to be the evangelical approach to this question? To be sure, the evangelical approach should not be the one which precludes scholarly research and serious discussions about the contemporary relevancy of the Bible. But the evangelical approach will give to the *self-testimony* of the Bible the first priority over any other considerations. As every man has a right to speak for himself and testimony to oneself ought not be ruled out as improper, so it is with the Bible. And if men were not liars or deceivers, their own testimony about themselves would be sufficient. This same principle should be applied in our approach to the Bible. If the Bible is not to be depended upon when it speaks of itself, how do we know that it is trustworthy when it speaks about anything else?

It has been the faith of the people of God from the very foundation of the church until today that the Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that whatever it says God says. The biblical warrant for this attitude of entire trust in the Bible is the *inspiration* of God the Holy Spirit. In the well-known passage, II Timothy 3:16, Paul says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." The word which calls for our special attention is the Greek word for "inspiration." It is "*theopneustos*." What this word says of Scripture is, not that it is "breathed into by God" or is the product of the divine "inbreathing" into its human authors, but it is breathed out by God, "God-breathed," the product of the creative breath of God. The "breath of God" is in the Bible a symbol of the almighty and irresistible outflow of his power (Psa. 33:4). In a word, the text explicitly teaches the divine origin of "all Scripture." This same truth is expressed also by Peter. In II Peter: 1-16 Peter is assuring his readers that what had been made known to them of "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" did not come through "cleverly devised myths." He presents to them the testimony of eyewitnesses (vvs. 16-18). And then he says that they have better testimony than that of eyewitnesses. It is "the prophetic word" which is "more sure" (v. 19). Peter, of course, refers to Scripture. In v. 20 he emphatically states that Scripture does not owe its origin to "the impulse of man," but its origin lies in God, "Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." The Greek word, "*pheromenoi*," for "moved" is a remarkable word. It means "brought," "borne," or "carried along." That is, the Holy Spirit actually lifted them up and carried them along, and thus they spoke. They were borne or carried along under the determining influence of the Spirit and not by their own power. As a result of the inspiration by the Holy Spirit, the church has believed, the Bible possesses divine authority and trustworthiness. Further, we hear the most definitive word

about the authority of the Bible from the lips of our Lord himself. In Matthew 5:18 Christ says, "Not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." As the previous verse shows, Christ is here referring to the sacred writings of the Jews as a unit. But he says very positively that this book is perfect to the smallest detail. John's Gospel also gives many witnesses of Jesus' complete trust toward the Bible. One of the most striking cases is John 10:35, "The Scripture cannot be broken." The concept of breaking a law was well understood by the people of that day. If a man breaks a law, he is guilty and so liable to punishment. When one breaks the law, he treats the law as nonexistent, and in effect annuls it. The Scripture, however, possesses an authority so great that it cannot be broken. What the Scripture says will stand steadfast (cf. Heb. 2:2) and cannot be annulled. If the Scripture speaks, the issue is settled once and for all.

This high view of the Bible is not merely the creation of late Judaism nor the invention of the post-Reformation period. It was indeed held by the Jews, by the early Church, and through the centuries. Standing on the promises of God found in the revealed Word of God has certainly been the essential characteristic of the faith of God's people. And the prophets and the apostles could back their proclamation with a "thus saith the Lord" and could boldly say, "I declare unto you" (Acts 17:23), simply because they were sure that they stood on the Book in which divine authority resides.

In his recent book, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*, 1972, Dean Kelly warns concerning the dying churches, in which what he calls "strictness" of belief and practice are out of favor, and the qualities which are popularly esteemed are those that conduce, not to the strength of the quest for meaning, but to its weakening: relativism, diversity, dialogue, and leniency. And it is not accidental that a sociologist Peter Berger came up with the conclusion in *The Sacred Canopy*, 1967, that the loss of authority in the churches is fundamental to the process of decline!

*"Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth"*

In recent discussion the subject of the authority of the Bible and its role in evangelism is one about which there has been much confusion. The Bangkok Conference on "Salvation Today," for instance, revealed a crisis situation within the WCC-related churches. The Bible is viewed by many as merely a collection of fallible human witnesses to the experience of the so-called "authentic way of human existence" (a mode of living with true humanness). And correlative to this relativistic view of the Bible, it must be noted, is a strongly humanistic and socialistic view of the church's message and her mission. This is clearly demonstrated by the "political theology" which is now becoming one of the most influential voices in the ecumenical movement. In this, the newly discovered social and political dimension of the Gospel becomes its sole and entire content. All Christian elements tend to be swallowed up by incorporation into certain political thought and action such as the Marxist idea of social revolution. And this, as Heinz Zahrnt aptly points out, makes society the factor which determines everything, so that society itself becomes God — following the phenomenon of the "death

of God." The Bible then is considered only from the point of view of what it has to contribute to the carrying out of current social and political tasks (*What Kind of God?*, 1970, pp. 222-3). Thus, instead of the church changing the world, the world is changing the church and her message! All this reminds us that the choice the church makes regarding the foundation of her faith determines the road to be traveled all the way.

In the midst of the world in a mess and the "searching generation" now is the time for the Church of Jesus Christ to give heed to the truth expressed in the words of Christ's priestly prayer, "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Unless the church turns to the authoritative Word of the sovereign God as supreme authority, she will soon cease to be the church of the living God.