

# The Christian Book

by Olin Alfred Curtis

*The Christian conception of the supernatural and the authority of the Bible are rooted in the dynamic process of spiritual influence and the moral dynamic of God's will.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 30:5, Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 24:35, John 5:39, Romans 15:4, Ephesians 6:17, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 1:23

**Topics:** "Biblical Authority", "Divine Inspiration"

## Description

Olin Alfred Curtis delves into the deep theological discussions surrounding the authority, inspiration, and extent of the Bible. He explores the different theories of biblical inspiration, emphasizing the importance of the Bible as the ultimate authority on Christ, redemption, and Christian conduct. Curtis highlights the dynamic stages in the authority of the Bible, from moral experience to Christian fellowship, and addresses the regions of liberty in biblical interpretation. He concludes with a comprehensive indorsement theory, asserting that the Bible is the Word of God due to its integral role in the historic process of redemption and its ongoing relevance to Christian consciousness.

## Transcript

Weil denn Eure Kaiserliche Majestät und Eure Gnaden eine schlichte Antwort begehren, so will ich eine Antwort ohne Härter und Zorn geben diesermassen: Es sei denn, dass ich durch Zeugnisse der Schrift oder durch helle Gründe überwunden werde -- denn ich glaube weder dem Papst, noch den Konzilien allein, dieweil am Tag liegt, dass sie öfters geirrt und sich selbst widersprochen haben -- so bin ich überwunden durch die von mir angeführten heiligen Schriften und mein Gewissen ist gefangen in Gottes Wort; widerrufen kann ich nichts und will ich nichts, dieweil wider das Gewissen zu handeln unsicher und gefährlich ist.

-- Martin Luther, Sein Leben und Seine Schriften, Julius Kästlin, i, 452.

You easily observe, I therein build on no authority, ancient or modern, but the Scripture. If this supports any doctrine, it will stand; if not, the sooner it falls the better.

-- John Wesley, from a letter dated February 5, 1756.

When it comes to be a question of psychological analysis, no doubt the distinction of subjective and objective is a difficult thing. Still, we can as a rule tell in a rough and rude way what is our own and what

we owe to others. And if ever there was a case in which there was clearness of conviction on this head it was in the case of the prophets and apostles. They knew perfectly well, and they make the distinction perfectly clear, when they are speaking their own thoughts, and when they are speaking thoughts and delivering a message which is not their own.

-- W. Sanday, from a sermon preached before the University of Oxford, October 21, 1894.

We are Christians and therefore occupy a -- position with regard to Holy Scripture quite different from that which we take toward the Homeric poems, the Nibelungen, or the treasures of the library of Asurbanipal, Holy Scripture being the book of the records of our religion, our relation thereto is not merely scientific, but also in the highest degree one of moral responsibility. We will not deny the human element with which it is affected, but will not with Hamitic laughter discover the nakedness of Noah. We will not with vandalic delight destroy that which is holy. We will not undermine the foundations of Christianity for the sake of playing into the hands of Brahmosamajic, that is, of Brahmanic or Buddhistic, rationalism, For the notes that are struck in German lecture halls and books are at last reechoed from distant Asia, and make vain the efforts of our missionaries. We will not give up what is untenable without replacing it, wherever possible, by that which is tenable. We will interpret Genesis as theologians, and, indeed, as Christian theologians, that is, as believers in Jesus Christ, who is the end of all the ways and words of God.

-- Franz Delitzsch, from the Introduction to his New Commentary on Genesis.

## The Miracles of the Bible

Outside the range of conservative theology there are three pronounced attitudes toward the miracles of the Bible:

1. The attitude where all miracle is regarded as impossible. The whole case is settled beyond recall by an *a priori* assumption. The criticism of Hume by Professor Huxley is sometimes quoted to show that Huxley did not deny the possibility of miracle, but merely demanded adequate evidence. Such, however, was not his position. What he did not deny was that any given thing might exist, or any unusual event might take place; he only asked for sufficient evidence; but had you furnished the sufficient evidence, he would have said that the thing or event proven was not miraculous, but purely natural, only formerly not understood.

Within the province of biblical criticism, this first attitude toward the Scripture miracle is represented by Professor Wellhausen, who, in his crude, frank rationalism, often reminds us of Paulus. Here is a passage taken from the Sketch of the History of Israel and Judah: "The Hebrews, compelled to abandon the direct eastern road (Exod. 13.17, 18) turned toward the southwest and encamped at last on the Egyptian shore of the northern arm of the Red Sea, where they were overtaken by Pharaoh's army. The situation was a critical one; but a high wind during the night left the shallow sea so low that it became possible to ford it. Moses eagerly accepted the suggestion, and made the venture with success. The Egyptians, rushing after, came up with them on the further shore, and a struggle ensued. But the assailants fought at a disadvantage, the ground being ill-suited for their chariots and horsemen; they fell into confusion and attempted to retreat. Meanwhile the wind had changed; the waters returned, and the pursuers were annihilated."

2. The attitude where the miracle is obnoxious to the person. Some of the Ritschlians belong to the first class, but some of them do not hold that a miracle is impossible; and their extreme hesitation can be fairly

explained, I think, by saying that to them the miracle is obnoxious. Of course, we shall be required, sooner or later, to explain our explanation; for some one is sure to ask: "Why is the miracle obnoxious to them?" Even in answering this question, though, I am not willing to call these men, as some have called them, "rationalists in disguise." Rather would my own answer be this: Like a large number of other thinkers who are alert and sensitive to modern tendency, they are dominated by the scientific conception of natural law, and they feel that a miracle is incongruous, out of keeping with the quiet, steady majesty of the universal order, an event unlike God, an event which can be tolerated only by an immature mind -- in short, miracle means to them lawlessness, and so it is an offense to their scientific habit of mind.

3. The attitude where the miracle is considered burdensome in Christian apology. There are men who have not themselves given up the miracles of the Bible at all; but they are looking for something "strategic in apologetics." At the front as teachers or writers or preachers, they feel the reality and sorrow of the fact that faith after faith is yielding, that man after man is going down into hopeless skepticism. They thus come to a full realization of the entire strain upon thoughtful men in this, the most critical period in Christian history. And they try to relieve this strain; they try to see how much they can give up, and yet save the essential content of the Christian religion. As one writer stated it, in an editorial on "The Recession of Miracle," "We still hold to the miracle, but we are looking for our lines of retreat." Once filled with this apologetic purpose, it is not strange that the Christian miracle seems burdensome to these men. And once burdensome it is not strange that the miracle is rejected outright or refined away.

The first of these three attitudes does not merit the serious consideration of any real Christian theist; for if there is an infinite personal God the question of miracle cannot be one of inherent possibility, but must be merely a question of method, or divine intention. The second attitude results from a failure to appreciate the ethical dignity of a Christian miracle. It is not incongruous for God to break the universal order, if such a rupture can be made to contribute to righteousness. There is majesty in the natural law, but there is still greater majesty in the moral law. As Cardinal Newman once said, "Miracles, though they contravene the physical laws of the universe, tend to the due fulfillment of its moral laws." The third attitude is a most serious misapprehension from several points of view: First, it is a misapprehension of the present situation. The stress of the situation is not caused by science, but by a superficial ethical life, which has no force sufficiently to ethicalize the lordly demands of science. Given a profoundly moral situation, and the Christian miracle would not be burdensome in the least. Science has not proven anything which tends in any way to weaken man's moral openness toward the literal resurrection of our Lord's body. Again, there is a misapprehension of man's nature. A man is a moral person, and he wants a great personal task. Arrange your accommodations, plan out your compromises, exhibit your mediating theologies, and at last they will be rejected by men. The very hope of the Christian faith, in relation to conquest, is the enormous demand it makes upon personality. Again, and last, there is a misapprehension of the Christian religion itself. The miraculous cannot be taken out of Christianity, for the simple reason that it is fundamental in the Christian structure. Christianity is an organized miracle. Suppose you could get rid of the smaller miracles, you would still have to deal with the Incarnation and the Resurrection. And if you tried to get on without these, there would be remaining the peculiar person of Jesus Christ, and he is the most stupendous Miracle of all, "the Grand Miracle of Christianity about which all the others play as scintillations only of the central fire."

The Christian Conception of the Supernatural. In our discussions of morality and of religion we treated the supernatural superficially, from the standpoint of man's nature and development. To man, in his development, that is supernatural which belongs to the infinite mystery beyond nature, that is, beyond the

realm of ordinary individual seizure. In the Christian conception there is no contradiction of this purely anthropological view; but there is a deeper interpretation of the facts.

To obtain this deeper interpretation, the standpoint is changed from man to God. Both the natural and the supernatural now have significance only as expressions of the divine will. In one sense, the old dualism disappears, for there is but one universe, of which God is creator, upholder, and ruler. At the bottom of things, there is one organism, working out one sublime intention. "The one God shines in a star and whispers in a conscience." All this can be readily and eagerly admitted.

And even more can be admitted. Had sin never come into the world, the divine bearing in the universe, and toward men, would be ever one, and that one bearing normal; natural. But sin has come into the world, and that awful event changes everything. God's relations with us, his plans for us, all are no-longer entirely normal. With sin once a reality, there comes into God's method a kind of dualism. There are now two divine bearings, one toward the lower individual, and one toward the higher moral person.

Thus, God makes, in a perfect manner, precisely the same distinction that man (as we found) makes in an imperfect manner. These two bearings of God may properly be called the natural and the supernatural. Whatever comes by the ordinary volitions of God, whatever expresses the divine habit, is natural; and whatever comes by the extraordinary volitions of God is supernatural. The Christian supernatural, therefore, is not a bare expression of the purpose of God, but is an expression of his unusual volitions in carrying out his purpose.

This point is of extreme importance. Sometimes the saint so easily finds God everywhere, so clearly discovers the larger intention of God even in the most common objects and events, that he is quite inclined to obliterate the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, and to seek a philosophy which recognizes such obliteration. But the moment such obliteration is lifted into a philosophy of life, not only is the philosophy practically unwholesome in relation to the religious experience, but also it fails to make adequate provision for the costly feature of divine self-sacrifice in redemption.

If the Incarnation was normal, if there was behind it only an ordinary volition, that grants an event as philosophically inexpensive as the making of a continent. But if the Incarnation was beyond the normal unfolding of God's relation to man, if there was behind it an extraordinary volition, that grants an event which can be charged with a sacrifice ethically and intrinsically costly to God. It is because of this moral and redemptional bias that we must regard the supernatural as much more than a mere wonder, as much more than that which is temporarily extraordinary to man. Forever will it be extraordinary to man, for it is extraordinary to God himself. "It is extraordinary at both ends."

The Christian Miracle. It remains to place the Christian miracle. It is not only supernatural, but also a peculiar kind, we might say a peculiar degree of the supernatural. When God so wills beyond his habit that his volition is contrary to his habit; when the ordinary volition is not only outclassed but actually held in abeyance; when the habit must yield to make way for the extraordinary volition -- then the result is a miracle. Thus, a miracle is intrinsically, and may be ethically, the most expensive action possible to the Infinite God. The more important features of my entire view can be gathered up as follows: The supernatural is to be considered only from an ethical standpoint, if we are to understand its meaning in the Christian system. For moral ends, a man's conscience is extraordinarily vitalized and protected -- this is the first degree of the supernatural. For further moral ends, for definite Christian experience, a believing person is converted and assured and sanctified -- this is more extraordinary, is a higher degree of the

supernatural. Up to this point the action is beyond the divine habit, but in no instance a contravention of that habit. Now we come to the miracle, and we will first take one which is as meager ethically as a Christian miracle can be. To make his personal influence more immediately efficient, and thus prepare the way for his redemptional message and work, our Lord turns water into wine. This is not only supernatural, but also contraventional -- it is actually against the divine habit to make wine in that manner. To urge, as so many timid apologists do, that the miracle was done under a "higher law" does not touch the reality of the miracle at all, for this "higher law" is nothing whatsoever but a contravening action for higher ends. Now we can sweep on to the Incarnation. To render possible the moral salvation of mankind, the only Son of God actually becomes man. This is beyond the divine habit and against the divine habit, but it is more than all that -- it is a continued contravention, a breaking forever of the normal life of the Godhead, an everlasting miracle. The whole ethical intensity of Christianity can be expressed in a sentence: The redemption of man has cost God a miraculous sacrifice which is never, never to end.

### The Authority of the Bible

The possibility of the authority of the Bible lies in the fact that a need for an objective standard is created by the process under which the Christian experience is reached and enlarged and completed. This need is an important feature of the development of the moral person himself. The nature of biblical authority, therefore, is not arbitrary but inherent, not artificial but intrinsic. The Bible, in a word, is in authority because it is a moral dynamic.

The Dynamic Element in the Obtainment. When we examine the steps by which we have obtained the Bible we find a dynamic element in every step.

First step: Our Lord himself started the Christian community, but he did not do this in any arbitrary, artificial way. He made himself morally necessary to a number of men who were open to his spiritual influence. His relation to his disciples was that of a moral dynamic, constantly enlarged, until it mastered their total manhood. In this spiritual manner the authority of Christ became at last for the Christian community, exactly and in all matters, the authority of God.

Second step: After the death of our Lord a peculiar authority fell to the apostles. In a sense they were, in the Christian community, to take the place of Christ. They were regents in authority. They were chosen and inspired, not mainly to organize the church, but to interpret and apply the message of redemption from the standpoint of a finished work, that is, from the standpoint of our Lord's death. It is an evident mistake to teach that the entirety of Christian doctrine may be seen in the blessed words of our Saviour. Before his death only germs, hints of the full doctrine, could be wisely revealed. The Sermon on the Mount should always be supplemented with the deed of atonement and its interpretation by the apostles. But their interpretation, all their teaching, was dynamic. The ultimate reason why it took hold of a Christian man was that it vitally entered into, and fitted into, all the Christian experience the man had. Of course, there was often shown a formal authority; but without the inner dynamic little power would formal authority have had in any time of test.

Last step: It was the death of the apostles which made the Bible necessary to the Christian community. In the profoundest sense the apostolic office was not continued. Since the close of the apostolic interpretation not one, not even the smallest item, has been added to the biblical organism. The apostles completed once for all the body of fundamental Christian truth; and, through all the complications and upheavals of the coming centuries, this body of truth was to take their place. Notice, for a moment, the

profound method which is suggested here. Christianity is to triumph by reaching and satisfying and mastering the free moral person. But with such extreme recognition of personal freedom there needs to be some objective check -- no coercion, but a check -- or there will appear vagaries as individual and countless as the grains of sand. The needed check is provided in precisely the suitable strength. The moral person is to live under the check of a brotherhood, and the brotherhood is to live under the check of the inspired Word of God. The fullness and efficiency of the Christian life depend upon the perfect interplay of these three features, the personal, the social, and the biblical. Now the obtainment. The Bible was not obtained in any arbitrary manner. The criterion of canonicity was essentially spiritual. It is true that there was, in considering any given writing, the question of historical connection; but the historical question was really a means to an end. What the Christian church was after all the time was to discover and sanction those writings which to the Christian consciousness revealed the person of Christ and the doctrines and facts of redemption. Had any writing whatsoever antagonized Christian experience, had any book failed to win the inner Christian amen, such a book would have been rejected. Therefore we can affirm that every step in the obtainment of the Bible was not arbitrary but dynamic.

The Dynamic Stages in the Authority. A thorough treatment at this point would take us over the ground already covered in our discussion of the Christian religion in its relation to the moral person. We will, therefore, barely outline the case. In reaching full authority for the Christian man and the Christian community, the Bible passes through three stages; and just as each step in the obtainment of the Bible was essentially dynamic, so here each stage in the process of influence is dynamic.

These stages are, we say, three in number: 1. The stage of moral experience. The Bible, by its revelation of God and Christ, by all its tremendous ethical insistence, by its vista of final things beyond the grave, is precisely adapted to effect man's conscience. "It burns a man." No moral person can read the Bible and hide, away from moral requirement. There is no other instrument which lends such ethical opportunity to the Holy Spirit. To any moral person, at whatever place he may be in moral development, the Bible is absolute authority as to his immediate moral life.

And it is to him thus absolute in authority, not because some man, or some church, has declared it to be so, not for any artificial reason, but simply because it creates a moral urgency, because it urges the man along the very course he was planned to take. It is always to be granted that the moral influence of the Bible can be augmented by true men, and especially by a true church; but what is done by the men, or by the church, is to furnish an opportunity for the normal working of the influence of the Bible.

In any situation the greatest moral thing which can be done is to give the Bible a fair chance at men. 2. The stage of Christian experience. I am now thinking of the isolated fact of Christian experience. Why is the Bible authority to the one man who has been converted? The answer is three fold: First, the Bible is profoundly involved in the whole process by which the man has come to moral peace; second, the Bible is the supreme means by which the Christian experience is now nourished; and, third, the Bible is the expression, the objective capture, of man's entire subjective life.

This last point needs, perhaps, a word of amplification. Our inner world is subtle and flashing; our finest moods are often as evasive as the delicate perfume of a wild flower; after they are gone, we can hardly believe that we had them at all. But when we read the Bible we are certain that we had such moods, for there they all are, caught in God's Word as minutely as a mirror catches the lines of a face. Thus, the Bible serves not only to urge the moral nature, not only to connect the Christian experience with all our moral development, not only to nourish that experience with rich facts and doctrines, but also as a sort of

Christian memory, to hold, and keep real to us, all that has taken place in our inner life. 3.

The stage of Christian experience in brotherhood. This is but a social enlargement of the second stage. In his new relation to his brethren, the Christian man looks at the Bible through their combined experience, and its dynamic influence upon him is increased by them. If the Bible is dynamic in authority to one man with a Christian experience it is more comprehensively so to two men bound together in Christian fellowship and service. The total philosophy of Christian certainty springs in here.

A doctrine might not carry one man alone; but to two men, in their conjoined experience, it might appeal; and to a thousand men it might be morally self-evident. Once lift the social Christian organism out of formality and secularity, and the Bible will take care of itself. But we have not said enough. The Christian brotherhood itself is not a thing merely of today. It has, under the operations of the Holy Spirit, a most vital connection with the past. We have not only a Christian experience, but also a Christian inheritance.

Could we bring together all the men, in this world and in the other world, who form the one Christian kingdom, the one organic brotherhood in Christ our Saviour; and could we secure a perfect expression of their Christian consciousness in its relation to the Word of God, we would find that consciousness to be a deposit of all the Christian experience of all the Christian centuries.

The pith of the matter can be given as follows: The Bible is an ultimate authority to men because it appeals to them with spiritual cogency. This is the basal principle. This appeal is cogent to the moral person, because it fits into and stimulates and enlarges his own moral ideal. This appeal is cogent to the Christian man, because the Bible, as used by the Holy Spirit, has largely produced his Christian experience; and also because the Bible now nourishes and expresses that experience. This appeal is more widely cogent to the Christian man in actual Christian fellowship and service, because he now apprehends the Bible through the combined experience of his brethren. The Bible is ultimate authority to the Christian church for several reasons: first, because it has come down to the church by a cogent spiritual method; second, because it is authority personally to every real member of the church; and, third, because it has been made a part of the Christian organism. This last point will be more clearly seen in another connection. Here I wish only to glimpse the idea that the Bible is something more to the organic Christian church than it can be to an isolated Christian, or even to all separate Christians added together. To have the profoundest relation to the Bible, Christians must so come together in Christ as to live in full communion with him, in full fellowship with each other, and in full service for mankind.

The Extent of Biblical Authority. In the very nature of the case, if our dynamic view is the true one, the extent of the authority of the Bible is not the same in all situations. To a moral struggler the authority is not the same that it is to a converted man. To a converted man with a meager religious experience the authority is not the same that it is to a saint. To a saint living in holy isolation, like some of the famous anchorites, the authority is not the same that it is to a saint giving his whole being to the joys and sorrows and activities of the church. To a formal church, half breathing under endless ceremonies and ecclesiastical ambitions and worldly conceits and compromises, the authority is not the same that it is to a church with a present Christ and a penetrating Holy Spirit. Not to waste our time in these situations of spiritual poverty, let us say at once that to the real Christian brotherhood, or to any man in organic relation to that brotherhood, the Bible is ultimate authority on precisely four things, namely: 1. On Christ. The Bible is reliable in its account of our Lord, as to his character, as to his teaching, and as to his deeds. The Christian consciousness can and does take this reliability for granted. 2. On the facts of redemption. The Old Testament preparation for Christ, the redemptional integrity of its history, the actuality of its

prophecies; the miracle of the Incarnation; the death and resurrection and ascension and session of our Lord -- all these redemptional facts are given in the Bible in absolute finality for the Christian brotherhood. 3. On the doctrines of redemption. But we must ever remember that a biblical doctrine is not the scientific doctrine of systematic theology. The biblical doctrine is merely a practical statement of the significance of a redemptional fact. For example, the Bible has much to say about the necessity for an atonement, to render possible the forgiveness of sin; but the Bible does not try to furnish a scientific theory of the atonement. Were we to work out this point completely you would see that Christian certainty may, as the Christian community develops, reach much further than biblical authority reaches; but the two, the authority and the certainty, can never be in conflict. The Bible must always supply the data for any doctrinal enlargement of which the Christian consciousness becomes certain. 4. The principles of conduct for -- the daily Christian life. The application of these principles is purposely left open; but the principles are binding, and they are so plainly taught that one can easily make out of them a practical system of Christian ethics.

In a compact statement of the practical significance of our view, we would say this: The scope of biblical authority exactly coincides with the scope of the biblical purpose; and the purpose of the Bible is to furnish in moral cogency all the data necessary to understand, to accept, to assimilate, and to preach the entire plan under which God redeems mankind. In a word, the Bible is authority on redemption. And let us complete the matter by adding -- to every moral person who is willing to be redeemed.

As to Science. It follows from what has been said that the Bible is not a final authority upon any scientific question. The opinions of the author of the book of Job on natural history are not, and, in the nature of the case, cannot be, binding upon the Christian church. There is, however, one clear exception, it seems to me: If a scientific question, like that of the origin of the race, has a real Christian entanglement, is bound up with a fundamental Christian doctrine (in this instance with the doctrine of sin), then the Christian doctrine must be protected. I will be plainer. As a man with a self-conscious Christian experience, in full and open relation with Christian men, I can allow no abiding antagonism between a Christian doctrine and a scientific theory. Always I have the right to reconsider the case, and I may be able to change my interpretation of the doctrine. But if I cannot change it, if the antagonism still remains, if one view or the other must go down, then for me the scientific theory must go down. For the theory, however generally held, is nothing but probability, and my experience in Christ is absolute self-certainty. For me, as one person, the experience is an ultimate, like self-consciousness itself. I am, first of all, not a scientist, but, first of all, and last of all, a man redeemed by our Lord and living a life of unspeakable reality in him. A Christian man should ever be open to all scientific discussion, but he will not empty out the content of his faith any more than he will try to stop breathing.

As to Inerrancy. Even on matters not scientific, absolute inerrancy in the Bible is not required, provided the portrait of Christ, the facts and doctrines of redemption, and the principles of Christian conduct are supplied in sufficiency for the Christian consciousness. For example, it is a matter of no great Christian moment what was the precise wording of the superscription of the cross. On the other hand, such -- an arbitrary and rationalistic reduction of the sayings of Jesus as that made by Professor Schmiedel is a serious modification of the portrait of Christ in the gospels and can therefore never be allowed by the Christian church. "But how are we to draw the line?" Christian consciousness, simply grant it time for comparison and practical test, will draw the line with unfailing clearness and firmness.

The Regions of Liberty. In biblical discussion, within the Christian brotherhood, there are four regions of liberty: 1. That of the canon. The question here is, Does this book really belong to the Bible? 2. That of the

text. The question here is, Does this text belong to the book? or, Does this word belong to the text? 3. That of the literature. The questions here are several: Who is the author? Is this passage or book composite? What is the style, poetry or prose? Is this quotation used precisely? What is the historic setting? 4. That of the interpretation. The question here is, What does this text, or passage, or total writing, mean? These four regions belong largely to Christian scholarship, which always in the Christian church is to have a place of appreciation and untrammelled service. Only we must insist that the scholarship be Christian. A Christian scholar is a scholar with a Christian experience, in full relation with Christian men, who does all his work with the profoundest sense of responsibility toward every other man with a Christian experience. With such an experience and with such a relation, and with such a spirit, the Christian scholar is constantly under a double check: First, the check of the entire brotherhood; and, second, the check of the Bible as a whole, or of the Bible taken as a redemptional organism of fact and doctrine.

Saying all this, still I have not given you any just appreciation of the steadiness of the biblical situation. Not merely is the Christian scholar under perpetual check himself; but his scholarship is a check upon the haste and crudeness in the thinking of the common man. It is this endless crossing of brotherly checks, this building a consensus of opinion out of every kind of man -- it is the vast democracy of Christianity which makes a general Christian attitude so reliable. Thus, while the regions of liberty are never arbitrarily closed, they are practically closed in just the degree that we have Christian agreement.

#### The Inspiration of the Bible

The inspiration of the Bible as a subject is often confused with that of the authority of the Bible; but the two involve very different questions, and very different discussions, the discussion of authority being much the more important, inasmuch as it presupposes the philosophy of Christian certainty itself. The question of inspiration is really this: How can we explain the power and peculiarity of this Christian Book which is final authority on Christ, and on the facts, the doctrines, and the moral principles of the Christian salvation?

The Typical Theories. The theories of biblical inspiration have become so numerous that they can be properly classified, and fully discussed, only in a history of doctrine. We can spare the space for only the bare mention of the four theories which are typical; and even with these we must save time by avoiding their incrustated terminology: 1. The theory that an inspired man is simply one with a natural genius for religious insight and leadership. According to this theory John Wesley was as really inspired as was Saint John. 2. The theory that an inspired man is simply one with an overflowing Christian experience. According to this theory, many an unknown man today is as really inspired as was Saint Paul. 3. The theory that an inspired man is one who is coerced by the Holy Spirit into a precise utterance. According to this theory, an inspired man is nothing more than a phonograph of God. 4. The theory that an inspired man is one who receives from the Holy Spirit extraordinary dynamic help, but without any violation of the integrity of individuality and without any interruption of the action of personality. According to this theory, the inspired message comes from the Holy Ghost and the free man in psychic conjunction - God speaks through the entire peculiarity of a man raised to a higher power.

The Probability. There is, I am convinced, no worthy reason for holding one of these theories to the exclusion of the remaining three. The probability is that the Word of God was given by a combination of all four methods; but it is not now possible for us to decide in every case precisely what took place. The data are not sufficient.

The Indorsement Theory. With this probability in mind, I will suggest a more comprehensive view of the inspiration of the Bible, as follows: 1. The standpoint is the process of redemption as an historic movement, beginning with the preparation for the coming of our Lord, culminating in the death of Christ, and completed by the work of the apostles. 2. In this long historic process men were chosen, each one in his own peculiar situation, to speak, or to write, or to do, whatever was essential to further the redemptional movement. 3.

For this furtherance, these chosen men received only such divine help as was needed. At one time it was necessary only to emphasize a common moral fact before the people, and any brave soul could do it. At another time it was necessary to lift a commonplace into spiritual ideality, a work which only genius can do. At another time it was necessary to organize a nation, and it required the highest order of statesmanship. At another time it was necessary to have a Christian testimony, and it could be given out of any overflowing Christian experience in the early church.

At another time it was necessary to catch and to express a doctrine of grace entirely beyond the possibility of natural discovery; and for this work a man was extraordinarily helped, raised to a higher power, without being erased as a free person. At another time it was necessary -- for the man of God to have an absolutely transcendent experience, an experience to which he could make no individual or personal contribution whatever; and he was, for the occasion, actually coerced by the Holy Spirit.

He had no more freedom than the sky has in accepting a sunset. Perhaps he is a prophet, and he looks down the centuries, in the swift, clear vision of God himself, until he can see "a man of sorrows" -- "smitten of God," "wounded for our transgressions." Or perhaps he is an apostle, and he is transported into a realm of immeasurable glory, and hears "unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." There are, too, some places in the Bible where the best explanation of the very phrase is that it came directly from God.

And when I say the best explanation, I mean the explanation which naturally grows out of the Christian conception of God's relation to man in redemption. How extremely absurd it is for any Christian thinker to hold that God could not or would not, in the furtherance of redemption, give a prophet or an apostle a message as definite as human speech. Even the most incipient Christian theist should be ashamed of such fundamental inconsistency. 4. This psychology of inspiration, however -- the precise psychic connection between agent and word or deed -- is not the important thing.

The important thing is that the Holy Spirit accepted the word or deed, and actually made use of it in the historic process of redemption. By indorsing it the Holy Spirit made the thing his own. It was inspired, or inblown, with his intention. As an illustration of my meaning, take General Washington's orders when Alexander Hamilton was on his staff. The psychology of those orders is a very interesting study. Closely we examine this order and that, to decide whether it came from Washington's mind entirely, or only in part, or not at all; and again and again we find it impossible to tell.

But the question is purely academic; for the one supremely important thing, in relation to the struggle for independence, is that Washington was there, with a plan, under which he considered every order and then signed it. It is the indorsement which makes the orders significant. 5. But there is more than this first indorsement by actual use in the history of redemption. The Holy Spirit was the deeper Will of that entire dynamic process by which the Christian church accepted and rejected writings and so gradually formed the canon.

The formation of the canon of Holy Scripture is a second indorsement. 6. And there is also a third indorsement. For, profoundly regarded, the present relation of Christian consciousness to the Bible is an indorsement by the Holy Spirit. 7. The Bible, therefore, is the Word of God, because all the parts of it were actually used by the Holy Spirit in the historic process of redemption, because he brought these parts together into an organic record of redemption, and because he lives in the whole Bible today, richly relating it to the Christian consciousness.

Holding this comprehensive indorsement theory, we never say, ' The Bible contains the Word of God.' We say, The Bible is the Word of God. Just as parts of the human body are less significant than other parts, and yet all are required to make a complete bodily organism, so portions of Scripture are less important than other portions, and yet all come together to furnish to the brotherhood in our Lord a full expression of the heart and mind and will of God in the salvation of man.

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