

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

"INSPIRATION."

BY THE REV. E. L. LANGSTON, M.A., Vicar of Emmanuel,
Wimbledon.

THE Archbishop of Canterbury at the C.M.S. Annual Meeting last month, in a very remarkable statesmanlike speech, caused us to realize the extreme solemnity of the days in which we are living. Reviewing the history of the past, and comparing it with the present situation, he said, "I firmly believe that the time which you and I are called upon to live in and to use is a greater crisis hour than any one of these. The world war has involved as its issue, the reconstruction and reconsideration on a gigantic scale of everything international and inter-racial, and you and I are called upon to be not the witnesses of that but the sharers in it, the carriers of responsibility, a trust from God, laid definitely upon us all, and realized by those who think."

The question in front of us is: what part in this great crisis are we as Evangelicals going to play? As Canon Wilson pointed out in his article in *THE CHURCHMAN* last April: "Again and again during the last few years, leading men who would not class themselves as Evangelicals have made confident prophecies that Evangelicals might or could, or even would lead the Church of England in the near future." Is this possible? There is not one amongst us who in his heart of hearts does not believe that we have a very real message and contribution for these days of crisis, but if we are to meet the present need there must be unity, and we are gathered here at such a time as this as a band of Evangelical clergy to do all in our power to make that unity effective, and to do so we must be frank the one with the other. It is no good baulking crucial questions. It may be that the future of the Church of God, as far as the Church of England is concerned, depends upon what will be the outcome of this Conference.

We Evangelicals at present are hopelessly divided, and suspicious and critical the one of the other, and at the root of all our dissension is this question of the "Inspiration of the Bible."

Is it possible for us to understand one another better than we do? I want as one of the old-fashioned conservatives to state our position clearly and frankly, for I believe at the root of our dissension there is much misunderstanding.

We have been called names perhaps rather thoughtlessly on the part of our brethren who differ from us; such remarks as "being out of date," "early Victorian," or "obscurantists" are neither kind nor Christian, for many of us hold the view we do out of clear, careful, prayerful and scholarly thought, having read books on modern criticism, and weighed them up, and yet in spite of all the scholarly marshalling of critical facts, we still adhere to the old traditional view, and it does hurt when we find ourselves in articles and in speeches referred to as unscholarly and hopelessly "old-fashioned."

From reading critical books and articles, we are conscious all the time that many of those who criticize us, do not appreciate our standpoint, and often make us out to believe things that we certainly do not believe. If the ordinary conception of a conservative believer were true, some of us are supposed to believe many crude and utterly foolish views. Consequently, I want to state very clearly, and as best I can, our attitude :—

1. With regard to criticism.
2. With regard to inspiration.
3. With regard to verbal inspiration.

I. THE CONSERVATIVE AND HIGHER CRITICISM.

We believe that one of the most important studies of theology is the science of Biblical criticism, which has for its object the investigation of the history and the texts of the various Books of the Bible. Biblical criticism to be really effective must be constructive, for the purpose of strengthening faith in the Bible as the Word of God.

Criticism, originally, had two distinct branches, viz. Higher Criticism and Lower Criticism. The term “ Lower Criticism ” was employed to designate the study of a text of the Scriptures, and included the investigation of ancient MSS. in order that we might have as nearly as possible the original words of the Divinely inspired writers.

Hence, Higher Criticism in the first instance was used in contrast to the phrase “ Lower Criticism ” and was employed to designate the study of the historic origin, authorship and dates of the various Books of the Bible. Such criticism we believe to be an extremely valuable branch of Biblical study, and is of utmost importance as an aid to the interpretation of the Word of God.

We want it to be perfectly clear that no study requires a more devout spirit and real faith in the supernatural as the pursuit of Biblical criticism, but I believe we are all here united on this point. Modernism, as it is presented to us to-day, none of us are in agreement with ; we do believe in the supernatural, and we do believe in the final authority of Scripture. We take that for granted. Without faith, it is impossible for us to understand and explain the Scriptures, and without real scholarship no one is equipped to investigate the historic origin of the Bible. True Biblical criticism ought then to be both reverent in tone, and truly scholarly in work. Alas, we have to criticize the critics. Biblical criticism has not always been pursued in this reverent spirit of scientific Christian scholarship.

The Bible is different from any other book. It is, we all believe, the Word of God, and therefore must be approached from that standpoint and that standpoint alone. It is impossible for scholars by mere human scholarship to unveil its mysteries and treasures. Just because a man is either a literary genius or scientific expert, he is not thereby equipped either to understand the integrity or the credibility of any books or passages in Holy Scriptures. For the

true perception of Biblical truth much more is needed than literary or scientific qualifications, viz. spiritual insight.

Surely we are right in demanding such fundamental principles in our method of Biblical criticism. We are all agreed, surely, that no one would dream of seeking to expound musical masterpieces unless he himself was musical, or to judge the work of an artist unless he himself was artistic. In just the same way we assert that merely scientific scholarly minds are absolutely disqualified for the study of the Bible, for the Bible has no revelation to make to the un-Biblical mind.

The mistakes of the past 50 years of Biblical criticism have been to a large extent that many Continental theological professors have lacked these necessary Biblical and spiritual qualifications. Men of great learning and noted ability have had a very strong bias against the miraculous and supernatural, and seemed to have very little faith in the God of the Bible.

We do not bring these accusations against the Higher Critics of Great Britain or America, but we do against many of the Continental critics, who have influenced tremendously both the English and American critical scholars.

II. THE BIBLE AND INSPIRATION.

I suppose we all of us agree that the Bible is a literary phenomenon containing a supernatural revelation, and that human science and philosophy cannot account for this Book. It is the one Book of the ages, absolutely unequalled and unrivalled. At a time when all literature was at its beginning, this Book began to appear. Human hands had indeed to do with it, all sorts of different writers contributed to its pages, but this instead of accounting for it deepens our perplexity, for behind and above these human composers and compilers some one true Author superintended and controlled the whole. As the late Dr. Pierson once said: "The Bible is a stately Cathedral; many human builders have in turn wrought on the structure. Who is the Architect? What One Mind was that, that planned and saw the whole building before Moses wrote those first words of Genesis, which by no accident, as though to carve the Architect's name on the vestibule, are these, In the beginning God? The Bible as a Book demands a Divine Author." Most of us I think are agreed on these points, therefore we believe that what the heart of the fortress is to its outworks and minor defences, that, to the Christian Faith, is the inspired Word of God, its central stronghold. To give up that, in any measure, is, therefore, in so far, to yield up the whole fortress to the foe.

Infidelity and irreligion seem to be organizing their united forces for a final assault upon the whole system of Christianity. There seem to be plots for the undermining of the very foundations of the Christian Faith and of belief in the supernatural. In the last analysis this Book becomes the very centre of both the attack and the defence for the fundamental truths of the Christian Faith. The Church of God needs men to-day with strong convictions; men who

know from their heart, and therefore speak with confidence concerning the positive proofs that the Bible is of God ; men who by prayer as well as by scholarship have positive proofs and convictions that this is no ordinary Book. We all of us believe it has nothing to fear from rational inquiry ; investigation must mean vindication, and the more searching the investigation, the more triumphant the vindication.

We Evangelicals in the past have been men of the Book, and it is upon this Book that we have based our doctrines and our faith.

I imagine that every one of us present would agree to the statement, that we believe in the full inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God. It is a literary phenomenon, unequalled and unrivalled, stamped with Divine authority from beginning to end.

III. THE BIBLE AND VERBAL INSPIRATION.

Now we come to the next question where we differ, and we ask ourselves the question " In what degree were the Bible writers inspired ? " Are we right in ascribing the whole Book, every chapter, every verse to be the Word of God ? Regarding this, there is much misunderstanding with regard to our view as conservatives. We do believe that inspiration is a miracle, and like all miracles there is a mystery about it, which our puny finite reasonings cannot always fathom.

We do believe in verbal inspiration. By that we mean that the writers were inspired to record what they wrote. This does not necessarily mean that every word was inspired of God, for we know very well in the Bible there are words recorded as being spoken by the Devil, spoken by men, e.g. Job's comforters, and that such words were not inspired by God, but the writer was inspired to record the things he wrote.

I have heard very able and scholarly men criticize some of us for believing " crude views of verbal inspiration," evidently thereby not understanding what we mean by verbal inspiration. I want to insist that our view of inspiration is that we believe that the people who wrote the Bible were at the moment of writing supernaturally inspired for the special purpose of writing the Scriptures. The exact manner in which the minds of the inspired writers worked when they wrote we cannot explain. We do not for one moment admit that they were mere automata, like typewriting machines, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, or like the Mr. Vale-Owen type of spirit writers amongst spiritists. Such a mechanical theory is open to many and grave objections ; but we do believe that in some supernatural way the Holy Spirit made use of reason, memory, intellect, style of thought, mentality and personality of each writer. How, none can explain. We do see this, however, that there is both a human and Divine element in this Book, and yet this Book is at one and the same time the Word of God, written by " men sent of God," and impelled by the Holy Spirit.

As we look back upon the past nineteen centuries of scholarship, we see how our Lord and His Apostles and the early Church Fathers,

to a large extent treated the Bible as verbally inspired from this standpoint—e.g. Clement of Rome said, in A.D. 90, "The Scriptures are the true words of the Holy Ghost." St. Augustine also contended for the infallible accuracy of the very words of Scripture, and the great Evangelical fathers of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries exercised their belief in the fully inspired Word of God, such as Bishop Jewel, Richard Hooker, Dr. Owen; and the late Dean of Westminster on September 3rd, 1904, said in Westminster Abbey, "If the Bible was inspired by a Divine Spirit, how can it record what did not actually take place? or if an element of human error and mistake is in the Bible, how can we regard it any longer as an inspired Book, or use it as an infallible guide of life? . . . behind and beneath the Bible, above and below the Bible was the God of the Bible." Bishop Wordsworth on inspiration says, "We affirm that the Bible is the Word of God, and that it is not marred with human infirmities. We do not imagine, with some, that the Bible is like the threshing floor, on which wheat and chaff lie mingled together, and that it is left to the reader to winnow and sift the wheat from the chaff by the fan and sieve of his own mind."

We assert that the Bible cannot be a perfect rule of life unless it is fully inspired in this way. We assert that the Bible is wholly useless as a weapon in modern controversies at home and abroad if such a view of inspiration is not believed in. We assert there could be no good in us Clergy taking texts or passages of Scripture and applying them to the hearts, minds, and consciences of those that hear, unless the Bible is thus inspired of God.

We assert that the denial of Verbal Inspiration of Scripture destroys all comfort and instruction in private reading and devotion.

I know there are many valuable objections to this attitude, and I am quite aware that there are occasional statements in the Bible which seem to contradict the facts of ancient history, but one must say at the same time that most scholars realize the difficulty of getting correct data as to very ancient history, but with the modern development of the study of Egyptology and Assyriology we begin to realize more and more that the Bible is in harmony with history.

It is a singular fact that practically all recent researches in Assyria, Babylon, Palestine, and Egypt have confirmed the Bible record and often proved other uninspired records to be inaccurate. There can be no doubt that Christ and His Apostles believed in the whole of the Old Testament as being fully inspired in every part. It was implicitly believed in as the Word of God.

It will not do for Modern Critics to say that our Lord, who said of Himself "I am the Truth," "I and my Father are one," was not a critical scholar and His knowledge was limited as to what was truth and what error. Even if our Lord was thus limited in His knowledge during His lifetime, and so emptied Himself that He was just like His brethren (I myself do not believe that He was thus limited), when He rose from the dead He was restored to the glory and knowledge that were His own before He took our flesh upon Him, and

after His resurrection He uttered these words : “ All things must be fulfilled which are written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms concerning me ” (St. Luke xxiv. 27). Such is the statement of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who had been declared the Son of God with power, and that for us all, surely, must be final and overwhelming ; for now in His resurrection glory He was not under limitations of the Kenosis, and in the full glory of His Deity He solemnly declares that those Books we have received as the product of Moses were indeed the Books of Moses, and He has set His seal upon the whole Old Testament as being the very Word of God.

In conclusion we all believe, surely, that this Book is no ordinary book, and is what it claims to be : the Word of God. Is it not possible, therefore, for us to unite, and with this Book in hand go to our day and generation and unveil its precepts under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with the message God has given to us Evangelicals of “ a personal faith in the living Saviour, Who is the living Word of God ” ? And so with the written Word of God in our hands, we must seek to heal the breach and unite our ranks into one fellowship in this day of crisis, and hasten forward the consummation of the Gospel, viz. the manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ with power and great glory, and the establishment of His kingdom here on earth.

Canon Douglas Maclean has a delightful way with him. He is in general a conservative in his outlook upon life, but he at times startles by the novelty of his suggestions and his revolt from anything like holding by traditions. On the other hand he sees very clearly the shallowness of much current idealism and has no regard for the sloppy stuff that passes for sound political philosophy in “ democratic circles.” In his treatment of equality in the Church he stresses the doctrine of Apostolical Succession. Is there not something more than a difference in wording between Hooker's contention, “ We hold that God's clergy are a state, necessary by the plain word of God Himself, whereunto the rest of God's people must be subject as touching things that appertain to the soul's health ” and what Canon Maclean holds to be the Established teaching of orthodox Anglicanism, “ The power of sacred order and of the keys is given by God immediately to those who are bishops and pastors, and by and through them belongs to the whole body, and not otherwise.” We are tempted to break many a lance with *Equality and Fraternity* (George Allen & Unwin, 7s. 6d.) ; but we refrain, and express our gratitude to its author for hours of amusing and suggestive enlightenment spent in his company. He provokes thought and challenges attention in every chapter.

