

# THE FOUNDATION OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

FRANCIS A. SCHAEFFER

JOHN H. GERSTNER

R.C. SPROUL

JAMES I. PACKER

JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE

GLEASON L. ARCHER

KENNETH S. KANTZER

Edited by  
**James Montgomery Boice**



*Pickering & Inglis*  
LONDON · GLASGOW

Copyright © 1978 by The Zondervan Corporation  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

**Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data**

Main entry under title:

The Foundation of Biblical authority.

I. Bible—Evidences, authority, etc. I. Schaeffer,  
Francis August. II. Boice, James Montgomery, 1938–  
BS480.F68 220.1'3 78-12801

Pickering & Inglis edition first published 1979

ISBN 0 7208 0437 X

Cat. No. 01/0620

This edition is issued by special arrangement with  
Zondervan Publishing House the American publishers.

The chapter by Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Evangelicals and the Doctrine of Inerrancy," is adapted from *Evangelical Roots*, edited by Kenneth S. Kantzer (Nashville: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1978) and is used by permission. It has also appeared in an adapted form in *Christianity Today* (April 21, 1978).

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher. Printed in Great Britain by Lowe & Brydone Printers Limited, Thetford, Norfolk, for PICKERING & INGLIS LTD., 26 Bothwell Street, Glasgow G2 6PA.

# GOD GIVES HIS PEOPLE A SECOND OPPORTUNITY

*Foreword: Francis A. Schaeffer*

*Francis A. Schaeffer is the founder of L'Abri Fellowship in the village of Heumoz in the Swiss Alps. L'Abri has branches in Italy, France, Holland, and Great Britain. For ten years prior to his work in Switzerland he was a pastor in the United States. He is the author of The God Who Is There; Escape From Reason; He Is There and He is Not Silent; Death in the City; Pollution and the Death of Man; The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century; The Mark of the Christian; The Church Before the Watching World; True Spirituality; Basic Bible Studies; Genesis in Space and Time; The New Super-Spirituality; Back to Freedom and Dignity; Art and the Bible; No Little People; Two Contents, Two Realities; Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History; No Final Conflict; Everybody Can Know (with Edith Schaeffer); and How Should We Then Live? The last-named book is also available as a ten-part film-and-television series. Dr. Schaeffer holds the following degrees: Hampden-Sydney College, A.B.; Faith Theological Seminary, B.D.; and Gordon College, LL.D.*

Foreword: Francis A. Schaeffer

## GOD GIVES HIS PEOPLE A SECOND OPPORTUNITY

**W**HAT WE have known as evangelicalism stands in chaos in the second half of the 1970s. What our children and grandchildren will have, if Christ does not return, depends on making the right, though difficult, choices that face us at this time.

While reviewing Carl Henry's book *Evangelicals in Search of Identity*, Richard Quebedeaux, author of *The Young Evangelicals*, says, "Evangelicals used to be easy to identify. . . . They believed that the Bible is inerrant because it is God's inspired Word, and God cannot lie or contradict himself. . . . But no longer. Since the emergence of the young evangelicals. . . ." <sup>1</sup> This defines the problem and shows where evangelicalism now stands in regard to the Bible. It is so accurate that one must wonder if the word *evangelical* will have meaning for much longer.

What is the historic background of all this? I would like to write my own conviction regarding the historic flow that is one of the factors bringing us to where we are in the 1970s.

In the 1930s Bible-believing Christians were united on a wide front. The old, preexistential liberalism was rising like a flood in most of the old-line denominations in the United States. Bible-believing Christians over a wide front agreed that this had to be met clearly. The old *Sunday School Times* under Philip E. Howard, Sr., and Charles G. Trumbull is a good example of a clear voice in a journal. The scholar who best represented this clear and united

stand against the rapidly growing liberalism in both the bureaucracies of the old-line denominations and in the seminaries was J. Gresham Machen. But other scholars in many denominations and many less-well-known people were united. Those united across many denominations for Bible-believing Christianity spoke of the fundamentals of the faith in contrast to the liberals' flood of pronouncements. They did not see inerrancy as an "ism" but for what it was—the historic Christian position; that is, that the Bible is God's Word, without error in all the areas of which it speaks. "All areas," and not just religious matters!

This was one of the points classical Roman Catholicism and the Reformation churches had in common and continued to have in common in the United States until the old liberalism took over in most of the Protestant denominations and seminaries between 1900 and the 1930s. (Later, after Vatican II, it became apparent that many Roman Catholic theologians also no longer hold what had always been the classical Roman Catholic view of the Bible.) Kirsopp Lake, no friend of the historic Bible-believing position, wrote:

It is a mistake often made by educated persons who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology to suppose that fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the kind; it is the partial and uneducated survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians. How many were there, for instance, in Christian churches in the eighteenth century who doubted the infallible inspiration of all Scripture? A few, perhaps, but very few. No, the fundamentalist may be wrong; I think that he is. But it is we who have departed from the tradition, not he; and I am sorry for the fate of anyone who tries to argue with a fundamentalist on the basis of authority. The Bible and the *corpus theologicum* of the Church are on the fundamentalist side.<sup>2</sup>

F.C. Grant, who taught at Union Seminary of New York, wrote in regard to the writers of the New Testament in his *Introduction to New Testament Thought*:

Everywhere it is taken for granted that what is written in Scripture is the work of divine inspiration, and therefore trustworthy, infallible, and inerrant. . . . No New Testament writer would dream of questioning a statement contained in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup>

To try to relate the Bible-believing position to something beginning only in the United States around 1900 simply is not to read the history of the church. Carl Henry is eminently right

when, in an interview in *Eternity* magazine, he said in regard to inerrancy: "It was Jesus' view, and that of the apostles, and of the church fathers, and of the Roman Catholic Church down to Vatican II. The recent effort to detach the Reformers from that view, and to place them on the side of scriptural errancy, is unpersuasive."<sup>4</sup>

In the 1930s, Bible-believing Christians across all denominational lines were united in confessing that the Bible is "not partly true and partly false, but all true, the blessed, holy Word of God—this warm and vital type of Christianity," as Machen put it.<sup>5</sup> Unhappily the old liberals gained control of the bureaucracies and seminaries of most of the old-line denominations.

At this point a tragedy occurred that is a part of the seedbed of our situation in the 1970s. Most Bible-believing Christians divided into two groups: 1) those who held to the purity of the visible church and felt the various old-line denominations had passed the point of reclamation and left those denominations, and 2) those who either gave up the concept of the purity of the visible church or thought their denominations could be reclaimed.

I represent the first group, for I left my denomination at that time and have stressed what I believe is the biblical position of the purity of the visible church ever since. Good things came out of this group, but I believe two things have minimized its influence even to the present day. First, when the men and women of this group left their denominations, many felt that those who stayed in had betrayed them; unhappily they then spent more time fighting (I choose the word sadly but carefully) the Bible-believing Christians who stayed in than standing against the liberals. Standing for the Word of God got lost in harshness and looking inward to such an extent that gradually some who still held as strongly as ever to the principle of the purity of the visible church felt that things were being done and said that negated the possibility of standing for the position of the purity of the visible church before reasonable men and women. These withdrew from what had come to be called "the separated movement," though continuing to maintain denominations and seminaries that taught and practiced the purity of the visible church.

Second, some who held to the principle of the purity of the visible church put (it seems to me) the chasm at the wrong point. They made absolute division at the point of their distinctives—Reformed theology, believers' baptism, a Lutheran view of the

sacraments, etc.—rather than between those who were Bible-believing Christians and those who were not, and then practicing their distinctives carefully on *this* side of the chasm.

So much for the weaknesses of those who left the liberal denominations.

But now, what about the other side, those who sought to follow a broader way? Many good things came out of this group also. But in the 1970s problems are evident. It is always difficult to take a broader way without the next generation carrying that broader way into a latitudinarianism of doctrine, especially a latitudinarianism concerning the Bible. This drift has occurred, and at the present time certain schools and individuals are attempting to make all evangelicalism over into a movement embracing their own view of the Bible—a view that the “broader group” in the 1930s would never have accepted. A leader of the broader group in the 1930s recently put the matter to me like this: “There are two points. First, I hate to see the movement divided. Second, anyone is naive not to see that the movement is already divided and that we did not divide it but that it was divided by those who have changed their view of Scripture.”

So here we are, both sides flowing out of the situation in the 1930s. And if I am right, we have only a short time to save an appreciable part of evangelicalism from the “slippery slope,” as one British journal called it.

How can we save it? I think we should see that at this moment God is giving his people a second opportunity. This time can be an optimistic, positive one. To take this opportunity means going back to the 1930s and picking up the pieces from the mistakes that were made then. It should be seen as an opportunity from God and not as a moment for despair or just drifting.

Those on both sides who continue to hold to the historic view concerning the Bible should say “I’m sorry” where it is needed. Both sides should let history be history and not reopen the old sores, except to learn not to repeat the same mistakes in an even more complicated and subtle age. The broader group should realize that a line must be drawn with love, yet drawn. The other side should realize that harshness is not to be confused with standing for holiness and that in an age like our own, surrounded by a relativistic culture and by a relativistic church, which bends the Bible to the changing whims of this age, the chasm should be kept in the right place, with all our strongly believed-in distinc-

tives on this side of the chasm, rather than making the distinctives the chasm.

None of us should want the ugliness of the 1930s repeated. We who stand for the Word of God as without mistake not only when it speaks of salvation matters but also when it speaks of the cosmos, history, and moral norms, must be careful to live under the Word we say we hold dear, and that very much includes love to those (many of whom are certainly brothers and sisters in Christ) who we think are at this time making a dreadful and destructive mistake in their view of the Bible. But love and personal fellowship does not mean allowing this view of the Bible to shape the next generation. If it does, the next generation will be swept away, and the church of Christ will have lost the absolute by which to judge or help the relativistic surrounding culture. Also, those who are taking the new view of Scripture tend to distract those who hold the historic view of a Bible that is without mistake when it speaks of history and the cosmos, as well as when it speaks of salvation, from a very real task that confronts them: a careful and prayerful determination as to what extent a Cartesian, positivistic, empiricist mentality has influenced the exegesis of that inerrant Bible. This is a task that should be confronting our scholars and seminaries. Those who are trying to use such questions as a springboard to force their own existential methodology on all evangelicalism must not distract us from it.

It must also be said lovingly that those who hold the new view of Scripture are not automatically free from the danger of a lack of love, as is shown by some of the things written by them. But that is their responsibility before God.

Those who continue to hold that the Bible is without mistake because it is God's inspired Word and that God cannot lie or contradict himself have a responsibility before God to take advantage of the second opportunity he has given us—to pick up the pieces all the way back to the 1930s. By the grace of God we must do better in order to stand in our generation with love, but with total clarity, for a Bible “not partly true and partly false, but all true, the blessed, holy Word of God—this warm and vital type of Christianity.”



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Richard Quebedeaux, in a review of the book *Evangelicals in Search of Identity*, *Radix* magazine (May-June 1977), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Kirsopp Lake, *The Religion of Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Boston: Houghton, 1926), p. 61.

<sup>3</sup>Frederick C. Grant, *An Introduction to New Testament Thought* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), p. 75.

<sup>4</sup>Carl F.H. Henry, "The House Divided: An Interview with Carl Henry," *Eternity* (October 1976), p. 38.

<sup>5</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *The Attack Upon Princeton Seminary: A Plea for Fair Play* (Philadelphia: Johnson and Prince, 1927), p. 37.