

Contemporary Ideas of Inspiration

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The contemporary mood in theology makes room for supernatural revelation but not for supernatural inspiration that gives to the record of revelation its divine authority and validity for us. Despite its advance on the classical liberal position of but a few decades ago, the present theological position still stops short of the historic faith of the Church. For it leaves the Christian religion without authoritative content, and the Christian believer without an intelligent basis for his faith.

Several streams of philosophical and theological thought rising in the early nineteenth century, from Schleiermacher to Kierkegaard, have given thrust and direction to present-day opposition to the evangelical doctrine of inspiration. Hegel's divorce of faith from reason was further defined by Ritschl's divorce of religious from theoretic knowledge; and, grafted on to the extreme mysticism of Schleiermacher, this movement away from the Reformed tradition gathered momentum in Kierkegaard's teaching and in our day has reached full spate in the dialectical theology of Karl Barth.

The displacement of the authority of Scripture by that of human experience and enlightenment—a characteristic of this movement—has never been seriously challenged even by theologians who are ready to disown its most extreme conclusions. From this soil sprang classical liberalism, and in this soil all the branches of present-day liberalism have their roots. The underlying presuppositions of both neo-liberalism and neo-orthodoxy are derived from this source; however diversely they interpret the meaning and function of revelation, they unite in rejecting the identification of God's truth with

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any formulation given in the Scriptures. For that reason, we can group them together in opposition to the evangelical doctrine of inspiration. While in common with us they believe that God has intervened to save men in the Person of Jesus Christ, they do not believe that he has interpreted his redemptive action in a divinely mediated record bearing for us the authority of the Word of God.

I. THE MEANING OF INSPIRATION

The present anti-intellectual outlook in theology avoids a definition of inspiration. Much of the argument of opponents of the traditional doctrine of inspiration is based on a misunderstanding, and at times even on misrepresentation, of the position held by present-day evangelical theologians. Such terms as revelation, inspiration, and illumination, as widely used in Reformed circles, are then misapplied.

By revelation Protestant theology historically has understood the act of God by which he communicated to men a knowledge of himself and his will. By inspiration is meant that influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of selected men which rendered them organs of God for the infallible communication of that revelation. By illumination is understood the divine quickening of the human mind in virtue of which it is able to understand the truth so revealed and communicated.

Modern theologians tend to confuse these terms and to use them interchangeably in a manner that does less than justice to any of them. Thus J. K. S. Reid speaks of "degrees of inspiration" when, we would think, a reference to degrees of revelation would be more accurate; inspiration as such does not admit of degrees, though obviously the light of revelation does. Inspiration keeps pace with the revelation and it is not its function to add to the light bestowed, nor to create the fact-materials that it handles. Dr. John Baillie similarly confuses inspiration with enlightenment. Of inspiration he says: "Its meaning and scope have often been misconceived through its being applied primarily to the prophetic and apostolic witness, and withal their written witness, to the revelation rather than to the illumination of the prophetic and apostolic mind which is an integral part of the revelation to which such witness is borne" (*The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*, p. 66). This enables Dr. Baillie to put revelation and inspiration on different levels, as when he says: "In what is given of God there can be no imperfection of any kind, but there is always imperfection in what we may be allowed to call the 'receiving apparatus'" (*ibid.*, p. 34). But the prophets never claimed that revelation came to them by way of personal illumination or in the form of a personal insight. Indeed, evidence occurs that their spiritual enlightenment enabled them only partly to understand what the revelation had conveyed to them and what inspiration enabled them perfectly to record (cf. I Peter 1:10 f.). Revelation has thus to do with the

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disclosure of truth; inspiration with its communication; and enlightenment with its understanding and interpretation.

By many contemporary writers "verbal inspiration" is frequently identified with dictation and mechanical writing. We presume this is because it is easier to challenge it in this form. Reformed opinion has never promulgated a doctrine of merely mechanical or automatic inspiration in which the Holy Spirit is the exclusive agent and the human writer a mere machine recording the communication. Peter asserted that "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And the Church accepted the twofold truth that holy men of God spoke and that they spoke as they were borne along by the Holy Ghost. Both a divine and a human agency are recognized. While God is the moving Agent and responsible Author, the human writer is his free and conscious instrument, so that the words of Scripture are at one and the same time the consciously self-chosen words of the human writer and the divinely inspired words of the Spirit of God. Thus Scripture is all human and all divine, and this perfect harmony between the divine authorship and the human authorship is secured by inspiration.

The linking of inerrancy with "bare literalism" is another allegation that conservative theologians disown. Reverence for the text of Scripture as inspired does not mean that evangelicals are bound to a literal interpretation of it. The science of hermeneutics developed

freely within the premises of verbal inspiration, and principles of interpretation—whether literal, allegorical, or typological—were determined on grounds proper to the mode of revelation in each case. J. K. S. Reid's assertion that "the new doctrine of infallibility" is based on a literalism "allied to the expectation of finding in the Scriptures the same kind of thing that is so successfully applied by science" must be met by the retort that the doctrine actually makes imperative an acceptance of the teaching of the Bible as authoritative in whatever form it has pleased God to communicate it, and an application of those principles of interpretation that bring us closer to the mind of the Spirit in the Word. If literalism means that we insist, because of our belief in revelation and inspiration, on maintaining the literal sense of the great historical facts on which the Christian faith is founded, then we accept the imputation. It also means, moreover, that we repudiate inferences from the text of Scripture unsupported from the plain sense of Scripture but adduced to harmonize the Bible with twentieth century thought. If, with exegesis based on knowledge of both the principles of grammar and the facts of history, we interpret the text within the context of Scripture and the analogy of the faith, and not within the context of modern thought, we think we are dealing honestly with the Bible both as literature and revelation.

There is further misconception as to what conservative theologians understand by "verbal" inspiration. The term may be unfortunate inasmuch as it may appear to single out each separate word of the text as the proper subject of inspiration. No literature, however, can be subjected to such a process.

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Words, in all literature, must be accepted as the vehicles of thought, and the arrangement of words that gives adequate expression to the thought is correct to the exclusion of any other arrangement that fails to do this. Only if the thought is verbally correct is the communication what it was intended to be. If the content of revelation is of God, its communication in writing obviously must ensure that it is given as God would have us receive it. In this case, writing communicates the content of revelation, and inspiration guarantees its veracity. But that does not mean that each word is inspired out of relation to all other words in the context. To deal with words in this arbitrary and abstract form is, of course, to destroy the organic unity of any book.

Forgetfulness of this fact permits J. K. S. Reid to assert that the evangelical doctrine of inspiration means that "God's word is petrified in a dead record" (*The Authority of Scripture*, p. 279). This is surely a misconception of the inspiration that is the living breath of the Spirit and that makes the Word of God "quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword." The Spirit has an abiding relationship to the inspired word so that his vitalizing presence makes its words spirit and life. This living presence pervades the translated Word as truly as the original text. For this reason our Lord and his apostles did not scruple to quote, as possessing divine authority, what the Seventy of Alexandria had written in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. This does not indicate that verbal inspiration petrifies or deadens the letter, though it does stabilize the content of revelation and give its communication permanent significance.

It is obvious, therefore, that inspiration must provide everything necessary for the communication of the truth. Since the Bible is a written revelation, it must be a revelation in

words, and each word shares in the inspiration of the whole. Words are inspired in their proper relations to other words, not to ensure a "mechanical transmission" or to form a "petrified text," but to ensure that the revelation gains permanence in an authentic and authoritative record. Whether we use the word "verbal" or "plenary" matters little, for it is difficult at the end of the day to escape the conclusion of Bishop Westcott that "we come nearer to the meaning of Scripture by the closest attention to the subtleties and minute variations of words and order" (*The Epistles of John*, p. vi).

II. MODERN ANTITHESES

A study of modern theology suggests that its central ideas of inspiration are based on certain antitheses derived from the existential philosophy and dialectical theology basic to both neo-liberalism and neo-orthodoxy. These antitheses would not have arisen to create the tensions that disturb contemporary dogmatics if the Biblical account of the origin of Christianity

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and its exposition of redemptive revelation had been accepted in the obedience of faith.

The Scriptures and Divine Revelation

The first of these is the antithesis between the Scriptures as witness to the truth, and the divine revelation. For this antithesis the Biblical doctrine of inspiration provides not a synthesis but a solvent.

Neo-orthodoxy asserts that Scripture is not itself revelation, because by its very nature revelation, it is supposed, does not allow of inscripturation. That which is inscripturated, it is said, is put under the control of man, as if, to use Emil Brunner's words, the Spirit of God were "imprisoned within the covers of the written word," For that reason, whatever our doctrine of inspiration, we are told, there can be no "inspiredness" of the Biblical documents.

To understand the basis of this antithesis, we must recognize how modern theories of religious knowledge distinguish sharply between conceptual and existential knowledge. The claim that knowledge is always from subject to subject means that any objective knowledge of God is impossible. "All revelation," says John Baillie, "is from subject to subject, and the revelation with which we are concerned here is from the divine subject to the human." This means that "in the last resort it is not information about God that is revealed, but God Himself" (*op. cit.*, pp. 27 f.). Revelation must not, therefore, be equated with revealed doctrine, and there is no deposit of truth on which a system of theology can be built. Only existentially can we know God. All the events of revelation are thus placed outside the cognitive apprehension of man.

"The recovery of this fundamental insight," says Dr. Baillie, "is the first thing we notice as running broadly throughout all the recent discussions, marking them off from the formularies of an earlier period." He complains, indeed, that "from a very early time in the history of the Church the tendency has been manifested to equate divine revelation with a body of information which God had communicated to men" (*ibid.*, p. 29). Here neo-orthodoxy strikes a note neither new nor orthodox. Schleiermacher had already voiced this complaint and affirmed, moreover, that the "ideal dogmatic" would have nothing to say directly about either

God or the world or anything outside us, but ought to confine its affirmations to what goes on in the Christian soul. And the position has been reasserted by liberal theologians often since his day. This theory completely destroys the intellectual aspect of evangelical faith as embracing a divine message containing information about God and man. It means that the Bible cannot be conceived as teaching any system of truth, and that no internal consistency can be looked for even in its testimony to Christ. This Emil Brunner makes very clear: "At some points," he says, "the variety of Apostolic doctrine, regarded purely from the theological and

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intellectual point of view, is an irreconcilable contradiction" (*Revelation and Reason*, p. 290). This in the last resort would seem to destroy all possibility of the knowledge of God by placing the events of revelation in the realm of the transcendental and outside our rational apprehension. It need scarcely be pointed out that this refusal to identify revelation with events that are accessible to the historian has very serious consequences for religion. It deprives that revelation of the capacity to teach anything about the world of everyday phenomena, to which man most immediately belongs. If he asks to be told authoritatively concerning his place in the divine scheme of things and the destination to which he and all history are moving, the Bible is disallowed to answer in terms of divine revelation. On these vital matters, though it may speak with authority, it is held to be fallible and erroneous in theology and ethics as well as in history and science. Most serious of all, God himself cannot then be objectively known. Propositions about him which the Bible presents must be discussed as non-divine and non-authoritative. God's self-disclosure is in no sense identical with the representation given in the record of Scripture.

This antithesis between special revelation and its Biblical witness the conservative theologian dismisses as false. The assumption that the revelation is divine and the witness to it merely human, or, put otherwise, that the revelation is infallible and its record fallible, raises the question whether the infallible revelation is of any consequence to man if it must be approached through a fallible record. Why God should "inspire" the revelation, and yet be unable or unwilling to inspire the witness sufficiently to make it a trustworthy bearer of revelation, does not admit of easy explanation. Dr. Baillie puts the case this way: "We cannot believe that God, having performed the mighty acts and having illumined the minds of prophets and apostles to understand their true import, left the prophetic and apostolic testimony to take care of itself. It were indeed," he impressively adds, "a strange conception of the divine providential activity which would deny that the Biblical writers were divinely assisted in the attempt to communicate to the world the illumination which, for the world's sake, they had themselves received." He concludes, therefore, that "the same Holy Spirit who had enlightened them unto their own salvation must also have aided their efforts whether written or spoken to convey the message of salvation to those whom their words would reach. That is what is meant by the inspiration of the Scriptures" (*op. cit.*, p. 34). We agree that it would be indeed strange if God had "inspired" the prophets and apostles to receive a revelation which was for all the ages and yet not inspired them to communicate that revelation to all for whom it was intended. But if inspiration, as here appears, is defined broadly as the "aid" which the Holy Spirit gave to those who received the revelation to enable them to communicate it, then the issue narrows to this: what manner of aid did the Holy Spirit give? We reply, as indeed we must, since we are dealing with God, that he gave all the aid

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necessary for correct transmission in a completely trustworthy record. To stop short of this is surely to limit the Holy Spirit and render such aid as he gave nugatory.

Even more serious is the charge that the believer in the infallibility of Scripture frustrates the function of faith. Heinrich Vogel of Berlin states the position thus: "The old Protestant doctrine of verbal inspiration transforms the living word of God into a sacred text, and its consequent denial of the human character of Scripture evades and fails to appreciate not only the possibility of offense, but at the same time the reality of faith" (*God in Christ*, p. 139). We do not trouble ourselves to reply to the erroneous contention that the Protestant doctrine of inspiration denies the "human character" of Scripture. But when the believer in the infallibility of Scripture is charged with "failing to appreciate the reality of faith," is this not tantamount to saying that faith cannot properly be exercised unless and until we recognize that there are fallible elements in the Scripture? If this defines the only condition in which faith can be exercised, then the Christian has seriously misread his New Testament. This tendency to put a premium upon credulity is all too common in modern thinking on religion. We find the late Dr. William Temple's mind working along the same lines when he wrote of Jesus Christ: "It is of supreme importance that He wrote no book. It is even of greater importance that there is no single deed or saying of His of which we can be perfectly sure that He said or did precisely this or that." Of the Bible as a whole he has this to say: "No single sentence can be quoted as having the authority of a distinct utterance of the All-Holy God" (*Nature, Man, and God*, p. 350). This indicates how far neo-liberalism has had to go in its attempt to divorce revelation from Scripture and to denigrate the Bible as the source of any adequate and reliable knowledge of God. Presumably, what makes it "of supreme importance" to Dr. Temple that we have no certainty regarding any "single deed or saying" of Christ is the allegation, just noted, that this gives greater scope for the exercise of faith. To us faith based on such uncertainties is mere presumption. Indeed, Dr. Temple's confidence that God is the "All-Holy" rests upon epistemological considerations that require the trustworthiness of the scriptural revelation.

That the truth cannot be communicated in propositional form is a reflection of the present-day anti-intellectual revolt against doctrinal theology. We may well ask: why should God not put propositions in our minds about himself if he is indeed the Truth and the goal of man's quest? Can man ever dispense with truth revealed in this form? The fact is that man falls back upon the propositional revelation of God in order to interpret the eventual or factual revelation.

The fallacy behind the modern theory of religious knowledge in its application to God is its failure to recognize the sovereignty of God in his self-disclosure. It too readily assumes that God and man are partners walking together on a plane of equality. Whatever validity the subject to subject

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theory may have in relations of subjects meeting on the same plane, it is not adequate in divine-human relations. Man is finite, fallen, and a sinner. To be a sinner means that his understanding is darkened, his heart is alienated, and his will impotent. His place is prostrate

at the feet of his Lord, asking: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The only adequate response to God's self-disclosure is self-surrender as an act of man's whole being.

Revelation—Encounter or Communication?

The second antithesis created by the modern school of theology, both neoliberal and neo-orthodox, is that between revelation as encounter and revelation as communication. This has led modern theologians to postulate a discontinuity between Scripture and authority which has driven neoliberalism and neo-orthodoxy into sheer mysticism, if not indeed into religious agnosticism.

The evangelical position can recognize no such antithesis inasmuch as our encounter with God rests upon the mediation of his truth to chosen prophets and apostles. In virtue of divine inspiration that communication is for us completely trustworthy, introducing us to the living and true God.

Neo-liberalism, in its attempt to shift the basis of authority from what Scripture says from without to what experience says from within, avers that the doctrine of verbal inspiration is based on failure to recognize the operation of the Holy Spirit and his testimony within. We think Coleridge has put the position in classic form: "Whatever finds me bears witness for itself that it has proceeded from a Holy Spirit" (*Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, Letter I). Negatively, this would mean that what does not find me cannot be accepted as from a Holy Spirit. In either case, the norm of what is or is not of the Holy Spirit is within myself. It is thus the active response to the record of revelation that guarantees its validity, and so a man creates for himself, as H. Wheeler Robinson puts it, a Scripture within a Scripture. He substitutes an inspired experience for an inspired Scripture, and a truth is inspired only when it is inspiring. Not without point does Theodore Engelder twit the Barthians with "refusing to believe that God performed the miracle of giving us by inspiration an infallible Bible, but... ready to believe that God daily performs the greater miracle of enabling men to find and see in the fallible word of man the infallible Word of God" (*Scripture Cannot Be Broken*, p. 129).

This form of reasoning can be seen to lead, all too easily, to an irrationality that lands us in the quagmire of mysticism. When we are told that, in the giving of revelation, inspiration is "an effect of the operation of the Spirit of God through which a man learned to understand the nature of the facts given to him," we are asked also to believe that only to the extent that inspired knowledge can be gained from a fact or a word is that fact or word guaranteed for us as actual. Let us illustrate by applying this to the facts of the Gospel records. If, for example, the apostles through God's Spirit gained

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inspired knowledge from the resurrection of Christ, then the actuality of the resurrection is established for everyone who feels the witness of the Spirit in the Scriptures. Or again, if the words of Christ and the oracles spoken through the prophets have become the objects of inspired understanding, then for the religious point of view their reality is proved. This, incidentally, is the argument, in practically identical terms, used by Reinhold Seeberg in a recent volume (*Revelation and Inspiration*, p. 112). Kierkegaard has put it more tersely in his maxim: "only the truth that edifies is truth for thee." But of what use is it for us that "for the religious point of view" our experience of religious effects arising from the apostles' narrative

of the resurrection guarantees for us the reality of the event, if critical disparagement of the historical records should convince us that, in point of fact, Christ did not rise from the dead from the scientific point of view? We cannot long continue to believe on the authority of our religious experience what we know to be contrary to the finding of our scientific investigation (cf. Cornelius Van Til on this point in his Introduction to B. B. Warfield's *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*).

Similarly, Martin J. Heineken, who, in a most superior tone, disparages the "naïve fundamentalist," dismisses the historical basis of the virgin birth and resurrection of our Lord as of no interest to faith, for "just as with the virgin birth, such an occurrence as the resurrection is highly improbable but not impossible." Whether probable or possible is apparently an irrelevance to faith inasmuch as "he who means to establish an objective certainty only confuses the issue." The "fact to which faith witnesses is a final and complete victory over death" (*The Moment Before God*, pp. 264 f.). Can naïveté, we ask, go further? If Christ did not in fact rise from the dead, even if disciples then and now credulously believe that he did, while in fact he is still in Joseph's tomb, then his "resurrection" cannot be "a victory over death," complete or otherwise. This divorce of faith from factual reality lands us only in the cloudland of make-believe, and the Christian faith is as unsubstantial as a daydream.

It can be seen that in reality this is an attempt to recover a basis of confidence in certain of the spiritual facts and ideas of the Bible without accepting its divine authority or even its historical trustworthiness. It implies that Christian experience has a sufficient basis for confidence in the Christian facts and events, while dispensing with the inherent authority of the Bible, and confining its "authority" at best to its practical effectiveness as a means of grace. J. K. S. Reid presses this point: "Its authoritative character... lies not in itself... but finally and quite securely in the fact that it is the means elected of God's free grace for the operation of God's free grace" (*op. cit.*, p. 217). Thus when the Bible is not actively a means of grace it has little or no authority for us as Christians, and none at all for the non-Christian who approaches it.

All this does not explain how, if the Bible record is untrustworthy, we can

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accept the trustworthiness of a spiritual experience that is based on it. We are left in the impossible position of having to accept as true as a matter of religious experience what we must reject as false as a matter of objective reality. In no other department of human thought or research is truth based on subjective experience that lacks objective reality, yet this is what is offered us as the basis of religion.

Our only escape from this dilemma lies in the recognition that our experience is a testimony to the trustworthiness of the Biblical record only because our experience has roots in that inspired record. By the living encounter in the Word there comes the flash of identification between the written Word and Jesus Christ the Living Word. This is what Paul commends in his converts at Thessalonica to whom, as he tells us, he preached a very factual gospel: "For this cause we thank God without ceasing, because that when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of man but, as it is in truth, the word of

God which effectually worketh also in you who believe" (I Thess. 2:13). In this case, obviously, credence to the written or spoken word led to an experience of the Living Word, and this identification of the written Word with the voice of God is what we understand by "finding Christ" in the Scriptures. Thus a dual confirmation results: our experience confirming the authority of the Scriptures, and the Scriptures confirming the validity of our experience. But our experience would have nothing to confirm if we had not previously received and believed the facts contained in the Biblical record. In other words, the truth which becomes real to our subjective experience has its objective foundation in the written Word. We dare not reverse this order, because to see the facts first of all through the medium of our experience is not necessarily to see them aright. In many cases the facts are distorted as they pass through our own distorted personality, and without appeal to the Scripture norm we are left at the mercy of every hallucination that may possess us. The subjectivism that cannot be tested by the reality of Scripture truth thus opens the door to many spiritual perils, not least of all the possibility that the human personality may be invaded by influences within the spiritual world that are not of God. For that reason, were there none other, it would become necessary for us, as it was necessary for the first disciples of Christ, to refer back from the most exalted experiences to "the more sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:17 f.). But this we cannot do if we lack a firm doctrine of inspiration. Invocation of the authority of the Spirit to contradict the authority of the Scriptures threatens, in fact, to become the particular blasphemy of the present age!

The Word of God and the Text of Scripture

The third antithesis postulated by modern theology is that between the Word of God and the text of Scripture.

Not only is a sharp distinction drawn between the Word of God and the

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text of Scripture, but they are conceived as discontinuous and placed in different categories. To think of Scripture as the Word of God is, Professor Reid remarks, an infringement of the sovereignty of God. While Barth draws a parallelism between God present in the Person of Christ and the Word present in the Scriptures, he claims that the analogy breaks down in that there is no corresponding unity between the Word of God and the Scripture witness. Man's "subordination" to Scripture is, therefore, strictly limited to its witness. The "absolute surrender," as in the seventeenth century, led to the setting up of a "paper Pope."

We are told that textual criticism has made infallibility untenable. To the evangelical scholar it is not a little perplexing to have the modern objection to inspiration thus placed in the realm of textual criticism. The text of Scripture he never regarded as sacrosanct: it derives its sacredness from the fact that it conveys the revelation of the true God to the souls of men. That is to say, the inspiration of the text is derivative and arises from the fact that the message it conveys is inspired. Since we are completely dependent upon the text, in the first instance, to understand the message, it follows that text and message stand or fall together. It is singular perverseness to put the Living Word and the written Word in sharp antithesis. The written Word bears testimony to the Living Word, Jesus Christ, in such an intimate way that to discredit the Scriptures is virtually to blot Jesus Christ out of the knowledge of men.

Therefore, as Calvin puts it, "we owe to the Scriptures the same reverence which we owe to God, because it has proceeded from Him alone."

It is difficult, indeed, to understand why textual criticism should be supposed to make infallibility untenable. Brunner goes so far as to claim that the fundamentalists, confronted by the contradictions and inconsistencies unearthed by the critics, have had to resort to "an infallible original." This original he speaks of contemptuously as "an infallible Bible of which two things only are known; first, that it was the infallible Word of God, and, second, that although it was very different from the present one, it was still the same Bible." This he condemns as descending to "apologetic artifices." This is, of course, a gross misrepresentation. We are not appealing to a Bible of which we know little or nothing, or which "is very different from the present one." That original is all but identical with the text we possess, the margin of difference being so small that only one text in one thousand is open to uncertainty on textual grounds, while, moreover, no doctrine of the faith is thereby involved in uncertainty.

It is common knowledge that we do not possess the autographs of any of the books of the Bible. But even if the autographs were discovered that would not in the least affect the principle on which infallibility is claimed for the Scriptures. What we contend is that an infallible revelation has actually entered into history, and the existence of an infallible and perfect original text—even if not discoverable—is the grand presupposition of the science of textual criticism. We do not claim divine inspiration for the formation of the

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Canon as we have it, nor for the preservation of the text, though we are ready to recognize a divine providence of a very impressive kind in both. The text of the Bible must, therefore, be subject to the same scientific analysis as that of any other literature, and the very highly developed state of this science is itself a tribute to the value placed upon the words of the original text as being the *ipsissima verba* of inspiration. The men who employ their skill in the tasks do so in the confident faith that they are on the road to discovering ultimate and final truth. In like manner, even Luther's somewhat reckless criticism of the Canon is a tribute, not to any laxity in his doctrine of inspiration, but rather to a high doctrine of inspiration to which, in his opinion, certain books in the Canon did not attain.

It is strange to hear believers in the infallibility of Holy Scripture described as "bibliolaters." Fundamentalism, we are told, deifies the Book and speaks of it as if "the Spirit of God were imprisoned within the covers of the written word." The fundamentalist, says Brunner, is "in bondage to the Biblical text," and this "makes the Bible an idol and me its slave." This is what is meant by calling the Bible the paper Pope of Protestantism. We can conceive of the applicability of this charge to the Pharisees as a class in our Lord's day. They searched the Scriptures, revered them as the final judge of all controversy, but they refused to bring their lives into conformity to their demands. We cannot conceive of the charge being applicable to evangelicals of the present day who are seeking to bring their lives to the light of the Word as to the judgment of God himself. But the sacredness of the Bible is to them, as we have already indicated, a derived quality and is not resident primarily in the pages of the Book. We recognize it as the words of men who were given a divine revelation and were inspired to communicate it to their fellows, and so, as Calvin puts it, "it is beyond all

controversy that men ought to receive it with reverence." The Bible is for us the only sure and accessible repository of divine revelation and so of the knowledge of God that makes us wise unto salvation. Without it we would be in the position of the pagan world, left to grope after God if haply we might find him. We believe that if the living and true God revealed himself at all he revealed himself infallibly, and if he willed that the revelation should be in the possession of his Church for all time, we must believe that he had it in his power to give an infallible record of it. This he has done in the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures. And so we recognize and reverence the Bible as the Word of God written, and we bow before its authority as before the authority of its Lord. In so doing we think we are following the example of our Lord and Saviour who interpreted his mission, waged his conflicts, Comforted his heart, and guided his steps, in dependence upon the written Word.

What we must reject, however, with the utmost emphasis, is the oft-repeated assertion that this doctrine of inerrancy is "a new doctrine." When A. G. Hebert says, in the strain of many modern writers, that "modern fundamentalism is asserting something that no previous age has under-

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stood in anything like the modern sense" (*The Authority of the Old Testament*, p. 98), we point out that history is utterly against his contention. The inspiration which we claim for the Scriptures is the inspiration which the Scriptures claim for themselves, which the Apostolic Church claimed for them, and what the Reformed Church understood by the Word of God written.

It is a historical fact that not till the rise of the School of Saumur in the mid-seventeenth century did any question arise within the Calvinistic or Reformed Group as to the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. And the violence of the reaction to it is the measure of the shock it administered to the Reformed tradition. Karl Barth began his meteoric career with the slogan: Back to Calvin. The early Reformers, especially Luther, are frequently appealed to in order to give Reformed sanction to the modern approach to the Scriptures by which revelation is emptied of its doctrinal content.

But Luther's insistence on the inner witness of the Spirit as opposed to the dead letter must be read in its historical setting as an insistence upon personal faith in Christ as opposed to the mere intellectual homage to the letter of Scripture deemed sufficient by the Roman Church. While it is true that the Reformer saw no reason for elaborating a doctrine of inspiration, there is nothing in his works that denies the verbal and plenary inspiration of the canonical books of the Bible. On the contrary, we find in several places in his writings that he equates the Scriptures with "the words of God," and it was his custom to use the terms "Scripture says" and "God says" interchangeably. Nor is there any evidence that he recognizes degrees of inspiration.

As for Calvin, he makes this recognition of the divine authority of the written Word the distinctive mark of true Christianity. "This is a principle," he says, "which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God has spoken to us and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion; but that being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they have been commissioned from Heaven to declare. Whoever then

wishes to prosper in the Scriptures let him first of all lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit" (*Commentaries* on II Timothy 3:16).

The modern hostility to inspiration must be sought for in another direction than that of Reformed tradition. And Martin J. Heineken, writing of the place of Kierkegaard as the forerunner of Barth, puts the case as succinctly, perhaps, as any. "Without Kierkegaard," he writes, "there would have been no Barth, no dialectical theology, no return to the Bible that would preserve any kind of scientific respectability" (*The Moment Before God*, p. 19). Without doubt "scientific respectability" is the *raison d'être* of neo-orthodoxy. Has it attained it? Rather, its rearguard action involving retreat into

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personal mysticism actually places it beyond the reach and interest of modern science. It has severed the Christian faith from its roots in history; bringing it down to the level of mystical experience, it has emptied Christian faith of its revealed doctrinal content and obliterated the distinction between truth and error, between orthodoxy and heresy, between faith based on knowledge and mere credulity. Most serious of all, it has impugned the trustworthiness of the historical Christ, and changed the heart-throbbing words of his message to the world into the mere echoes of other men's experience. Under its solvent the Person of Christ becomes elusive and illusionary, a mere intruder into history, as someone has put it, who has troubled men with his message but left no sure word for posterity. For it must be clearly understood that the battle being waged against the inspiration of the Bible is, in the last resort, an assault upon historic Christianity and its foundation, Jesus Christ. This is an impressive acknowledgment of the fact that Scripture is recognized to be the supreme bulwark of the historic Christian Faith.

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