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Scripture

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BIBLICAL INSPIRATION: A CHRISTIAN RENDEZVOUS?

To the pagan the Catholic goes empty-handed ; to the Jew with half a book ; to other Christians with the whole of it. For it is the common consent of Christendom that the Bible is a locus of divine authority, a sphere of divine revelation. We can hardly overstate the significance of this common admission ; it is so much more important than many dividing differences. It is true that we appear to differ, even here, on the source and nature and effects of this Book's authority but, perhaps more often than not, our so-called differences are no more than variant emphases, interpretations peculiar to a theologian or to a school of theology, or even out-and-out misunderstandings of respective positions. It is the urgent business of this generation to break through all such barriers, hitherto so effective and yet so often illusory. After this operation there will no doubt be left what may be called a residue of incompatibility. I am cowardly enough to suggest that we bequeath this problem to our children, but sufficiently bold to prophesy that the incompatibility will be found elsewhere and not precisely here—that is to say, not precisely in our views of the nature of Scriptural Inspiration but in our varying conceptions of the nature and function of Christ's Church.

It would be idle and inconclusive to patch our quarrels without identifying their underlying cause. Now the rise of Protestantism coincided with a return to the Biblical text : this was to be expected as a result of the new Biblical perspective of the Reformers. Moreover, the refusal of the Vulgate version dictated recourse to the original languages. The results were far-reaching. It is scarcely extravagant to trace back to this development a perception—or, better, an assimilation—of the Hebrew mind denied to those whom historical accident had forced to accept Greek formulations that substituted the abstract for the Semitic concrete. Now—and this is directly to our purpose—the Hebrew does not think in propositions ; he certainly does not think of God in propositions ; nor does he think of God-given propositions. His God is the God who acts, not who argues. The Hebrew thinks in existential terms rather than in those of an

essentialist philosophy. To ask him, for example, what the pagan gods *were* is to ask a question he cannot understand ; for him it is the wrong question. Nor does he think of saying what the true God *is* —he thinks rather of what the true God *does* ; his monotheism is expressed in dynamic, not static, terms : he knows only that Yahweh is irresistibly powerful over all the gods of the nations. So also in the New Testament neither John nor Paul, for example, develops a theology of essences : they seek no metaphysical explanation of the mystery of Christ : their attention is focused on his mission, not on the analysis of his personality. So John gives to Jesus the names : ‘ Logos,’ ‘ Light,’ ‘ Life ’ ; his theology and Christology are functional.

For those with an exclusively Biblical outlook, an essential analysis of the *Verbum Scriptum* is no less unnatural and unscriptural than an essential analysis of the *Verbum Incarnatum*. Modern Protestantism, it is true, confesses that for centuries its adherents fell into the trap ; that what Brunner calls the ‘ frozen waterfall ’ of post-Lutheran Protestantism was a sad departure from the fresh intuitions of Luther and Calvin, and a subsidence into the *rigor scholasticus*. Nevertheless it claims, not unfairly, that this was a betrayal of its own nature and hails Barth and Brunner as its faithful and articulate exponents. It is held that Barth’s theology of the Word, the Word dynamic, operative, efficacious, is the needed corrective for the intellectualist approach. For Barth, the Word is an event (Brunner uses the term ‘ encounter ’), a divine impact upon the Bible reader ; the Word is not just an authority guaranteeing doctrine ; its primary quality is that of a living, a vital act by which God in person comes to us. It is creative and omnipotent and therefore free ; nor can it be conceived separately from the person of Christ. Against this background must be seen, and understood, the tendency to speak of Revelation¹ and Authority rather than of Inspiration. With this tendency there goes a fear that the Bible, regarded as a speech about God, may itself become the object of faith ; that the term ‘ revelation ’ be equated with ‘ doctrine,’ and the word ‘ faith ’ be identified with an assent of the intellect.

But where unmodified intellectualism operates, the only valid and real reason for distinguishing between revelation and doctrine, between the act of revealing and what the Church teaches, collapses. Ontologically they are indistinguishable. There is no longer a distinction to be drawn between the communication by God of Himself and the communication of truths concerning God ; revelation and doctrine are no longer different things. The path is thus neatly prepared for the identification of God’s revelation and the Church’s teaching.²

¹ It should be understood that by ‘ revelation ’ is meant not the communication of an abstract truth but a powerful and personal divine impact.

² J. K. S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture*, London 1957, p. 116

The complaint is thus diagnosed by A. G. Hebert :

The difficulty that has arisen over the conception of Revelation in the western tradition of Christendom has been due to the rationalising of the idea. Where the Bible gives us concrete eschatological imagery and existential thinking, western thought has tended first to a philosophical mode of rationalisation whereby imagery has been systematised into doctrines, and faith has been treated as an assent to doctrines. It has tended next to a scientific rationalisation which envisages only the 'literal' truth of natural science and history. In both cases Inspiration is necessarily rendered as Inerrancy. In the one case the inspired Scripture is incorporated into a theological system ; in the other, it is understood as an infallible record of events.¹

It is not difficult, therefore, to detect a haunting fear of Rome's 'intellectualism' in the Biblical realm and a mistrust of its analysis of the nature of the sacred books. And it may be that there is a salutary warning here. It is right that we should suspect emotionalism and individual intuitions, but no analysis of Inspiration should leave out of account the working of the Spirit through the Scriptures upon the soul. A philosophical analysis has indeed been enforced as a defensive measure ; it has served its purpose but we do not admire it for its own sake ; it was doubtless demanded by the nineteenth-century attack which (like so many others in the Church's history) scored successes it had never planned. I mean that the attack upon Biblical inerrancy, repulsed more or less successfully on the central front, so diverted the Catholic mind that the Bible may have seemed to become for it a series of propositions each anxiously awaiting vindication, and Inspiration an inflexible instrument of infallibility. What is taken to be the Catholic attitude on this matter of inerrancy is a source of such annoyance outside the Church that it is worth a little discussion.

It is commonly alleged that the scientific, historical and textual progress made in the last century left the Catholic unperturbed. He rode the crisis blandly, murmuring to himself : 'The Bible is without error,' as one who should say : 'My mind is made up ; please do not confuse me with facts.' Meanwhile, these facts were threatening havoc : notably evolutionary theory and Biblical literary criticism. The annoyance of those who watched the Catholic is easily explained : while they reckoned his position false, they envied his assurance in it, his confidence that all necessary guidance and interpretation were safe in the hands of Christ's society. With those who were not thus assured, it was otherwise. The appeal away from the Church which, whatever his original intentions, Luther eventually made, left his successors face to face with the danger of Illuminism and, ultimately, of Liberalism. The Bible was naked to its friends as well as to its enemies. It became vital for Protestant orthodoxy to defend it, and

¹ A. G. Hebert, *The Authority of the Old Testament*, London 1947, pp. 100-1

the Lutheran honeymoon was followed by the sterner business of housekeeping. Intellectualism established itself where it was least expected : Scripture became less and less a personal revelation from God and more and more a series of propositions about God : the dogma of absolute inerrancy, rigid to the point of absurdity, followed. As we have said, the modern Protestant reaction has been violent—indeed it has recoiled from a paper Pope as sharply as from a personal one. The Protestant of today demands that revelation be not reduced to syllogisms but left what it truly is—a personal impact of God. He is thus absolved from vindicating the Bible from error, for where there is no proposition there is neither error nor truth ; impact may be effective or ineffective, it cannot be true or false.

How does this compare with the modern Catholic view ? Here too there has been a revulsion, not from the principle of inerrancy but from abnormal preoccupation with it. There is a healthy movement away from what threatened to become an obsession, the result of an over-anxious defence. Catholics are now beginning to point out that inerrancy is not the purpose of Inspiration nor its only consequence, as it would have been had God inspired the sacred books solely with the purpose of teaching truths. But in fact the sacred writers, and therefore God Himself, more often than not set out to work upon the heart and emotions rather than to teach truth. And it is interesting that scholastic distinctions are now being employed to bring us back to the unscholastic Semitic mind of the original writers, to remind us that when we say : ' The Bible is true,' we mean primarily what the Hebrew would mean. For the Hebrew does not look at truth in exactly the same way as the Latin or the Greek. To the Greek mind, pursuing absolute clarity, that is true which is unveiled, delivered from darkness. For the Latin, soaked in juridical principle, that is true whose authority is guaranteed. For a Hebrew that is true which has been put to the trial and found solid ; for him, truth is not opposed to error but to lies, and to what he calls ' vanity,' that is to say, what is lacking in durability and solidity. It is in this sense that his God is the God of truth—the one upon whom he could always rely. In the Bible the symbol of truth is not so much ' light ' as ' rock,' and the Hebrew *'emeth* (from *'amen*) expresses security ; it is used of one who carries a child safely.¹ For the Hebrew, therefore, the truth of his Scriptures is their dependability as God's word, that is, as God's *pledged* word, His promise which He will certainly fulfil.

All this it is well to remember. Nevertheless the Catholic cannot accept the suppression of the intellect in the Barthian manner. True

¹ cf. J. Guillet, *Thèmes Bibliques*, Paris 1954, p. 39

to the basic principles of the Reform, or rather of what Bouyer calls their negative counterparts (denial of the efficacy of divinely informed work and sacrament ; refusal of substantial change in the soul of man), Barth's 'faith' is an affirmation, made in total darkness, of a God who cannot effectively come to men. God's word is therefore ineffable. This is more than paradox : it is dilemma. In reacting from intellectualism and seeking to recover the Semitic, integral outlook, we must not cut off man's head to save his heart. What has been called the 'embarrassing' adherence of Bultmann to the Barthian system shows us whither this system leads. There is no further need to verify any objective, historical working-out of a divine plan in the record of Scripture ; there are no supernatural realities revealing God's will ; man can receive no ideas of real value ; faith is an existential decision of total abandonment to a word which he cannot of his nature begin to understand ; but this unknown word he must accept in a blind act which is both liberating and saving. The Bible itself is a blind giant ; a Samson with his eyes out. We are reduced to complete agnosticism and Christianity is no longer a historical religion and therefore no distinctive religion at all.

On the other hand, it is well for us to be on our guard against so misreading Inspiration's purpose as to seek in the inspired books a corpus of propositional doctrine formulated in the scholastic manner. One may quote with some approval the words of Austin Farrer :

In the case of the Trinity, the old scholastic way was to hunt for propositions declaring the doctrine in philosophical form ; the new scholastic way is to classify texts with the same purpose. But all this is based on the false assumption that Paul and John, for example, had anything like a system on conceptual lines ; they lived in fact with images, not with concepts ; their interrelationships are those of images according to their own imagery laws and not according to the principles of a conceptual system. Moreover, the scholastic method is inconclusive in its results because it attempts to find the Trinity as a single scheme behind the images, whereas there is no scheme ; we know that Paul speaks of a personal divine action of the Father, Son and Spirit, and that he was not a polytheist—but it is a risky inference from here to say that Paul was speaking of divine persons in their own right, and not perhaps of instrumental modes of the Father's action. We must not logically infer from images. The right method is to seek the image of the Trinity and its relationship to other images. . . . Only after this can we ask what metaphysical comment the New Testament image of the Trinity provokes and which subsequent theological conceptualisations do least violence to it.¹

To these remarks we may add that, whatever certain manuals may regrettably imply, the Catholic Church does not claim merely to infer logically from the texts ; in virtue of the Word living in her, she claims to propound the doctrine in terms of the prevailing thought-

¹ A. Farrer, *The Glass of Vision*, Lecture III

framework in such a way that she expresses, not indeed adequately (for this is impossible), but expresses infallibly in terms of one culture the Scriptural thought that was originally conveyed in terms of another.

But it is in our divergent attitudes to, or identifications of, authority that our deepest division might be expected to lie. The division is perhaps not as deep as it appears. It might be thought that the Reformers, Luther and Calvin, localised this authority in the pages of the Bible—and a case could be made out for this view. Yet it might be more exact to say that, for Calvin at least, the authority lies not in the page but in Christ: the seat of the Bible's authority is outside itself. However this may be, the modern Protestant refuses either to identify Scripture with the Word of God or to invest the Scriptures with an external authority legalistically conceived. For him the Bible is the means elected by God's free grace for the operation of God's free grace; it is the chosen and accredited instrument of God. In Lutheran terms the Bible is the crib in which Christ is laid; its authority is Christ himself. Revelation (and by this, we repeat, is meant not intellectual enlightenment but divine impact) is not to be *identified* with Scripture. As Barth says, Revelation is the objective entity to which proclamation is related and without which, proclamation would be simply heart-searching—the 'endless monologue' which the Catholic Church is accused of holding with itself. In standing before Scripture, it is said, we do not stand before authority itself—rather we stand before that in which, as we hear it, we hear God Himself speaking. The authority of Scripture is not a possession of Scripture nor even a gift bestowed upon it by God Himself. Scripture is authoritative because God Himself takes it and speaks through it.¹

Behind all this, which may seem to us very anxious pleading, there are—I think—two disposing causes: one is a reaction from the fundamentalist Protestant Orthodox position which modern scholarship has made untenable; the other is a reaction from a mistaken view of the Roman claim. The first of these is not our immediate concern, though it may be suggested that here the recoil from Protestant Orthodoxy has perhaps gone a little too far—all that was needed was a more supple conception of Inspiration than the Orthodox Protestant would admit. The second disposing cause springs from a desire to safeguard the free sovereignty of God who can bind Himself to no printed page, and certainly not to any human institution. It is objected that the Roman Church, regarding the Scriptures as a *depositum* to be interpreted by the Church herself, sins against this sovereignty. Barth presents us with the choice between an auton-

¹ On this, cf. Reid, *op. cit.*, pp. 215 and 221

mous, self-governing Church, and a Church obedient to an authority over against itself, namely to God's authority wielded in the Scriptures. The Catholic will reply that a third alternative is possible, namely of a Church which is not simply a gathering of human beings either self-governing or acknowledging an authority outside itself, a Church that is itself the living and extended Christ whose authority remains, not because he commits it to men but because he gathers men into himself. In this, as in so many other disputes, we are brought back to the old statement that the problem perpetually unresolved in Protestantism is the problem of the Church. For the Catholic, the Scriptures are the voice of the Word preincarnate, incarnate, post-incarnate : the locus of authority has never shifted. The Church cannot usurp because the Church is Christ and Christ is the Word. This being so, it is surely wide of the mark to accuse Catholicism of turning the dynamic Word into a dead deposit or of turning impact into proposition : the Word is alive in the Church—too alive, according to some—becoming ever more articulate ; and the Word is lived in the Church, securing its impact by sacrament and sacrifice.

We may now come at last to the question of Inspiration's nature. Like certain other excursions into speculative theology the quest for a *definition* of Inspiration may be described as a regrettable necessity. But we cannot ignore the fact that, though the question may be the wrong one, it cries for an answer—whatever future ages have to say about the futility of the discussion. We have said that non-Catholic scholars are more eager to speak of Authority and of Revelation, that is to say, to speak existentially rather than essentially—and this is perhaps the more profitable way and may lead them to unexpected places in the end. Yet our different approaches cross from time to time and we meet attempts at essential definition. All are agreed, for instance, that Inspiration makes the Bible a unique book, though when we ask in what precisely this uniqueness consists we are answered variously. Barth explains that the Bible, which has no *efficacia extra usum*, is unique in this, namely that it is the sole God-chosen occasion of His self-revelation. In it from time to time God condescends to be the object of human language ; it is within this chosen sphere that the event-of-the-Word occurs : the Bible is God's Word only insofar as God lets it speak ; the Bible and Revelation are distinct but become one in the Event. The uniqueness of the Bible is not locked up in the past, it is bestowed freely by God in the present and will be in the future. This view is well expressed by Reid :

The Bible does not contain the Word of God as in a sack ; God marches up and down through the Bible magisterially, making his word come to life at any point through

its length and breadth. The Bible becomes the Word of God by stated and steady appointment. It is the named place where God confronts man.¹

We cannot but applaud Barth's positive contribution to the whole question. The Word is indeed not tied down to the past, nor restricted to cold print, nor primarily intellectual ; it is free, and its causality is physical and immediate. But in the Barthian position as a whole there appears to be a forced emphasis deriving from wider principles. In the first place the old Nominalism of the Reform period is lurking in it : it is held that, just as the *gratia gratum faciens* which we call sanctification can change nothing intrinsic in men, so the *gratia gratis data* that we call Inspiration is not, and cannot be, an insertion of the divine into the human : God cannot commit Himself to anything human (though we might observe that even in Barth's account God has committed Himself to a human *sphere* of activity, otherwise the uniqueness of the Bible goes altogether). This outlook cannot tolerate the idea of God assuming a human tool and making it truly His Own. Secondly, there is the old fear of a propositional deposit which might seem to be demanded if the Word is committed to every and each sentence of the Scriptures. Thirdly, there is—as Bouyer points out²—the immense political value of the Barthian perception : it extricates Institutional Protestantism from its dilemma : on the one hand, the concept of the Word imprisoned in a book without court of appeal (leading either to Illuminism or to Liberalism) ; on the other hand, the only alternative, an appeal to external authority. This external authority that might fatally have been the Church was in fact supplied by Barth—modern Protestantism at last had its *alibi* : Barth found the authority in neither page nor Pope but in the Word itself, or better 'Himself,' the Word not imprisoned nor identified with the Bible but utterly transcendent, ranging free.

How does the prevailing Catholic theory escape the charge of the Word contained in the Scripture as in a sack ? How does it escape the charge of a propositional deposit, of a Bible that is nothing less than a series of *ex cathedra* pronouncements, a block of dogmatic homogeneous density ? It may be that the Franzelin hypothesis of ideas from God, words from man, could so have been indicted. Indeed it is this theory, one fears, that may have misled some of our opponents ; but the theory has not in fact survived. Instead, most Catholics accept in its main outlines the theory of a willing and thinking tool preserving freedom and personality even in the act of being moved mysteriously by God ; not only do the words truly belong to the human author but the ideas too ; and these ideas, like

¹ J. K. S. Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 278

² L. Bouyer, *Du Protestantisme à l'Eglise*, Paris 1955, pp. 241-2

the words, retain their human limitations and their contingent character and, as a result, their potentiality for development. There is no imprisonment of the Word who freely moves his instruments ; it is true that he accepts the limitations of human language even as he accepted the limitations of human flesh, but he reserves the right of outstripping the limitations by miracle in one case and by spiritual impact in the other. The Word does not cease to dwell in the written word ; the writing is a continued incarnation and the written word is always the potent fringe of the garment. Here, too, the Word remains free, and virtue goes out from him only at his will. In this sense we can say with Barth that the Bible becomes the Word in the fullest sense when this impact-event takes place within this chosen sphere of revelation. The impact is upon the individual, of course, but it affects primarily the Society founded by and upon the Word. This impact touches and develops the living of that society which progressively penetrates the intentions of the Word, lives what it perceives and perceives what it lives—and what it perceives is not so much the single sentence as the total drive of the Word. Thus the sacramental system itself is the outcome of an integration of body and soul that is entirely characteristic of the Scriptures. Hence daily, and as it were domestically, the power of the Bible works upon those who may be ignorant of the text of the Bible, and the Word works freely upon the individual soul.

But as for the charism of Inspiration itself, one fears that behind the Protestant principle of Sacred Scripture as the decisive and unique expression of the Word of God there lies too narrow an understanding of what Inspiration is. For if we are to judge, as we must judge, from the phenomena of our revealed religion, a multiple issue of the Spirit's activity is to be observed. It is evident, for instance, and happily emphasised in these days, that our Synoptic gospels did not spring into existence, but rather crept. Their final committal to writing was the work of individuals moved by the Spirit : this movement we call Scriptural Inspiration.¹ But was the Spirit's activity so confined ? What of the thirty years and more when the necessary preliminary work was going on in the early community ? Can we not speak of Inspiration here ? And may we say to the Spirit : ' Thus far and no farther,' when the last Apostle dies ? Revelation—by which we mean here the divulging of new supernatural truths—doubtless reached its fulness at this point, but how could the Spirit be idle when there was so much of that profound revelation still to be understood ?

¹ On this, cf. Père Benoit's excellent review in *Revue Biblique* (1955), 258-64, and his recent lecture at the Catholic Biblical Congress in Brussels (August 1958), *Les analogies de l'inspiration scripturale*.

The question of criterion cannot, of course, be divorced from the problem of the nature of Scriptural Inspiration : to speak of ' a search for " x " ' is meaningless ; I must know what I am looking for if I am to recognise it when found. Different conceptions of Inspiration, therefore, will mean different views on its criterion. Let us then be content with a highest common factor, and ask : ' How do we recognise that the Bible is *unique* among books ? '

The historical fact that the Protestant movement sprang from Luther's ' vital intuition ' of the religious truth imposed by the Scriptures, in particular by the Epistle to the Romans, has proved to be the father of many unexpected children. Thus, there is an anxiety—which is not confined to Protestant circles—to exclude the fully ' extrinsic ' criterion with which Catholics (wrongly, as I think) are credited as seeking. It is true that there is a healthy movement away from purely subjective criteria : the *gustus internus* has been rejected as plainly inadequate. On the other hand, it seems to be fairly widely agreed that the authority of a Church cannot of itself adequately commend the Bible—this is an inevitable affirmation for those whose view of the Church is not integrated. Thus, to take what may be called the middle way, the Report for Doctrine in the Church of England reads :

Belief that the Bible is the inspired record of God's self-revelation to man and of man's response to that revelation is not for us a dogma imposed as a result of some theory of the mode of composition of the books,¹ but a conclusion drawn from the character of their contents and the spiritual insight displayed in them.²

It is to be noticed that the proposed criterion is evidently intrinsic to the Book, though it has a certain objectivity. To the same line of thought belongs Farrer's criterion of pregnant images. Where this leads may be seen from his answer to the objection that these images do not pervade the whole text of the Bible :

To complain that apostolic inspiration described as the germination of the image-seeds does not account for the whole text and gives no plain account of the inspiration of the text of Scripture comparable with the old doctrine of inerrant supernatural dictation, is surely no blemish. For a doctrine of the unchallengeable inspiration of the whole text is a burden which our backs can no longer bear. What is vital is that we should have a doctrine of Scripture which causes us to look for the right things in Scripture.³

From this it would seem that an intrinsic criterion is regarded as insufficient to guarantee the uniqueness of the *whole* Bible—and this, after all, is the common Christian datum. Nor is it true, as Farrer

¹ Apparently a circumlocutory indictment of what is taken to be the Catholic position

² *Doctrine in the Church of England*, London 1922, p. 27

³ A. Farrer, *The Glass of Vision*, Lecture III

seems to suggest, that the only alternative is that revelation was given in the form of propositions. 'Inerrant supernatural dictation' is far from being a definition of the supple Inspiration of which we have spoken and which issues in many non-propositional forms.

Barth's answer to the question of the Bible's recognisable uniqueness is that it is the work of witnesses, of prophets and apostles divinely appointed whose position cannot be usurped by anyone else. Brunner's reply is the same : the uniqueness of the New Testament consists in this, that it is the witness of the apostles who alone knew Christ without human intermediary. To this we might reply :

The charism of the Apostles as witnesses of Christ is indeed at the origin of all the fermentation of the faith in the apostolic generation, but the Holy Spirit was working in others than the Apostles, namely in all the believers who were already the Church, and especially in the leaders whom God had chosen to build the Church, and who, acting under the guidance and stimulus of the Apostles, already constituted its first magisterium. If we remember this concrete situation, we shall avoid making of the New Testament merely the written witness of the Apostles ; and, on the other hand, we shall understand how this text could not contain all the potentialities of the apostolic witness in all its living quality and richness.¹

One may add that a criterion drawn from the situation and function of the writer is inadequate, because these things are not always known ; indeed, the complex origin of the Bible makes them unknowable : do we in fact know that each writer enjoyed a commission from either Synagogue or Church ? Pressed by historical fact, Brunner says that the witness of the New Testament is borne by men some of whom were eye-witnesses and also by 'others who stand in temporal proximity to them.' It is therefore necessary to conceive of the witness offered by the New Testament as having a wider basis than direct sight or hearing of the pre-Resurrection Christ. The witness has to be extended to those who experienced Christ risen and ascended—Paul himself is one of these. But why should we stop at Paul ? The criterion is becoming very elastic, and Brunner is led to maintain that the Canon is neither final nor infallible, and that therefore the Church has the right and duty to revise it. He confesses, in short, the insufficiency of his criterion for the present accepted Canon.

Barth expresses his own conclusion thus :

If the Achilles' heel of the Protestant system is the question : Who guarantees the divine character of Scripture ? it may be said that the recognition of the authority of Scripture is a matter of confession and that, when this is realised, this very weakness is also Protestantism's greatest strength.²

Now this is interesting : this movement away from the old *gustus intermus*, and now from the more objective but still intrinsic criterion,

¹ P. Benoit, loc. cit., p. 263

² Quoted in Reid, op. cit., p. 218

may well give us hope of understanding. For the Catholic would be the first to admit that the authority of Scripture is a matter of confession, the object of an act of faith, unproved and unproveable—because an affirmation of the supernatural order is necessary and alone adequate to establish a fact of the supernatural order. Apostolicity of origin did indeed play its part in delimiting the Canon, but the definition is made on the authority of the Word in the Church. This being so, it may be that we are misleading others if we refer to an ‘extrinsic’ criterion ; for in fact it is the same Word that is the voice of the Scriptures and the voice attesting the Scriptures. Here again we return to the problem of the Church. The Scriptures are recognised to be unique by the fact that the Word speaking in the Church witnesses to the Word written in the Scriptures ; no historical criterion of apostolicity will suffice as witness.

We may ask, in conclusion, whether there has been in recent years any signs of a growth in mutual understanding, any approach to the rendezvous ? The answer is surely not in doubt. On the one side there has been a retreat from the fundamentalist interpretation of Orthodox Protestantism ; on the other side there has been a recovery from undue preoccupation with inerrancy. Moreover, if ever there was a Protestant principle of ‘private judgement’ it has gone for good : ‘Interpretation is the proprium of the Church as a whole.’¹ ‘It is now being understood that the Bible is the book of the Israel of God and that its several books must be read in the light of the Tradition.’² Now, matching this advance towards Tradition on the non-Catholic side there is a manifest return to the Bible on the part of Catholics—it would be strange if we did not meet on the way and perhaps begin to understand each other a little better.

To others we would not presume to dictate a course of action, but we may be allowed to make one or two suggestions for our own procedure. We may, for instance, be cautious with our words—mischief-makers as they are. ‘Verbal inspiration,’ writes C. H. Dodd, ‘maintains dictation by the deity. The books consequently convey absolute truth with no trace of error or relativity.’³ Now by ‘Verbal Inspiration’ we do not mean that at all, but since the phrase has served its turn—notably in the old Franzelin controversy—may we not allow it to drop out of its misleading existence ? And perhaps the most unfortunate word of all has been ‘revelation.’ That Biblical revelation is mediated neither by syllogism nor by proposition does not mean that it is not at all concerned with the intellect, but so long as we

¹ Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 106

² Hebert, *op. cit.*, p. 308

³ C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible*, London 1947, p. 35

continue to use the term for something primarily intellectual we shall not be understood by others and shall lose not a little ourselves.

And as for our doctrine of Scriptural Inspiration, it may be that analysis has done its defensive work and need go no farther. We must be sure, nevertheless, that our conception of it is not rigid ; in this way we shall respect the racial mentality and the individual personality that God Himself respected in His inspiring motion. We shall refrain from attributing to Paul or John a system of theology in line with a philosophy of essences ; we shall allow for development of thought not only in the Old Testament but also in the New. So, for example, if Paul's outlook on widows changes, or if the notion of the *parousia* in John is not that which we find in the Pauline epistles, we shall not align two static propositions whose contrast is to be explained away ; instead we shall see two converging reactions to the same revelation. And this revelation we shall see rather as an event than as a coherent system of doctrine, as a succession of divine impacts on history and on historical personages—of whom the Bible's devout reader is one. We shall learn to concentrate less on the Bible as history (though this has its minor place), and more on the Bible as theology ; less on the Bible as theology, more on the Bible as the story, and stories, of God's ways with men ; less on the Bible as this story, more on the Bible as (by means of this story) the quasi-sacramental tool of God. For the Catholic Biblical revival must not be allowed to exhaust itself in historical inquiry, equipping the enthusiast for Scriptural crossword puzzles—as well take Baptismal water for the purification of pots and pans as so abuse this sacrament of the letter. We must read the Bible as it were on our knees.

And, finally, we must know the Church for what she is—the Body of the Word. She is most persistently accused of usurping what has in fact been given her, or rather what Christ has made her. It can only mislead those who misunderstand if we contrast the Word with the Body. One may therefore deprecate sentences like this : 'The Church is superior to the Bible in the sense that she is the living voice of Christ,' for the Bible is the living voice of Christ, too, and so the living voice of the Church. The voice of the Word speaks in the hierarchy and masses of the living Church whose daily life, much more than the occasional pronouncement, is a continuing utterance of the Word whose Body she is.

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