

"BAPTISTS AND BIBLICAL AUTHORITY"

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Introduction

The nature of biblical inspiration and the extent of its authority has been the center of a vigorous controversy amongst Baptists, as it has been in every major Christian body, for over a hundred years. Let me start off on an autobiographical note. I myself was brought up in a Baptist congregation in Toronto, Canada, which was under the influence of the progressive theological views which had swept through scholarly Baptist circles in North America in the first decades of the 20th century, and were being disseminated at that time from the Canadian Baptist Seminary at McMaster University. I do not owe my conversion in 1949, humanly speaking, to that congregation or its ministers, but rather to a teacher in our Sunday school who, though deeply troubled by the lack of sound biblical preaching in the pulpit, continued to teach the Word of God to his intermediate class of boys, aged 12-14. From the very beginning of my consciously Christian life given this church situation, I was aware of the need to be alert to defections from the true faith and to maintain a theologically sound testimony. I can well recall a lectureship on biblical subjects sponsored in one of the Toronto Baptist churches by the McMaster faculty in which higher critical theories regarding the Pentateuch, the Book of Daniel, and the Psalms were put forth to a congregation of laymen. I can remember feeling then at the age of fifteen, as I still do today, how destructive to our confidence in the reliability of the Bible some of these views were, and how, upon seeking out reaction from other laymen present, I found that they either shared my concern and horror or else regarded the whole matter as the province of biblical scholars whom they trusted meant no harm. (Trust is ordinarily a high Christian virtue. But on some occasions it can be quite dangerous. Alas, even Bible professors do not always deserve to be trusted, myself included, but must earn that right by being themselves faithful to Holy Scriptures and thus worthy of trust.) It was a source of puzzlement to me to see how the Baptist faith which I had been told rested squarely and solely upon the unique and final authority of the Bible would be able to survive the new view of that Book that was being presented. Even today I do not believe that the educated Baptists who espouse the doctrine of a fallible Bible have yet been able to allay the fears of the people in the churches completely as to what the new theology means and where it leads. I do not believe that they can.

In the first section of my paper (1) I wish to define the *Scripture principle* to which all Christian people, including Baptists, have tradition-

ally adhered, and which has always seemed indispensable to a sound and coherent theology. Following that, (2) I will describe the *crisis* of the Scripture principle since the rise of negative biblical criticism, and its effect on Baptist theology. Finally, (3) I will call upon Baptists to *maintain* the Scripture principle in our day without equivocation, for the good of our own movement and for the sake of Christ and the gospel.

1. The Scripture Principle

To confess the supreme authority of Holy Writ is to take a fundamentally Christian stand. Although it is a tenet of Baptist theology, it is likewise a historic Christian conviction which stands over and above merely sectarian interests. H.E.W. Turner has written, "No system of thought can be considered Christian which does not take the Biblical Revelation as its ultimate authority."¹ Christianity is after all a revealed religion, and as such has been given to us by God's grace. Its truth was not discovered by human genius, but delivered to us by God through the instrumentality of his apostles and prophets and deposited in the Scriptures. As Paul explained to young Timothy, the truth of the gospel, the 'pattern of sound words,' has been entrusted to us by the Spirit, and must be guarded (2 Tim. 1:13, 14). Great care is to be exercised to ensure that the message is faithfully handed down by a succession of reliable teachers (2:2). He asks Timothy to continue stedfastly in his own apostolic teachings, and to abide by the doctrine of the sacred and inspired writings of the Old Testament (3:14-17). It is important that he preach the Word faithfully, and not allow himself to turn away from listening to the truth (4:2, 4). (It has always amazed me when scholars have argued that 2 Timothy is primary evidence for nascent Catholicism in the New Testament. Surely a better case could be made for it as the earliest conservative evangelical tract!) In contending for the authority of the Bible we are simply asking that the truth that God gave in the history of salvation and definitively in Jesus Christ be granted undisputed priority and unlimited authority over us.

The historic Baptist doctrine of biblical authority is one with the historic view of the church. It is a simple historical fact that all the great doctors of theology as well as the mass of Christian faithful have maintained the highest possible regard for the written Word of God. Only for a hundred years or so has there been any significant dissent in this matter. As E. A. Litton put it, "If there ever was a general consent of the Church Catholic on any question, it exists on this. East and West, from the earliest to the latest times, concurred in assigning to Scripture a pre-eminence which consisted in its being—as no other collection of writings is—the Word of God."² We cannot help but wonder whether the reasons which led theologians like Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley to hold to the complete trustworthiness of Scripture might not be superior to the reasons which lead men today to reject it.

In order to refresh our memories as to how solid the historic doctrine of Scripture was, let us hear some eminent testimonies. In a letter to

¹H.E.W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* (London: Mowbray, 1954), p. 167.

²E. A. Litton, *Introduction to Dogmatic Theology* (London: Clarke, 1960), p. 19.

Jerome, Augustine wrote, "I confess to your charity that I have learned to defer this respect and honour to those Scriptural books only which are now called canonical, that I believe most firmly that no one of those authors has erred in any respect in writing."³ In a sermon on John 3:16 Luther said,

If a different way to heaven existed, no doubt God would have recorded it, but there is no other way. Therefore, let us cling to these words, firmly place and rest our hearts upon them, close our eyes and say: Although I had the merit of all the saints, the holiness and purity of all virgins, and the piety of St. Peter himself, I would still consider my attainment nothing. Rather I must have a different foundation to build on, namely, these words: God has given His Son so that whosoever believes in Him whom the Father's love has sent shall be saved. And you must confidently insist that you will be preserved; and you must boldly take your stand on His words, which no devil, hell or death can suppress Therefore no matter what happens, you should say: There is God's Word. This is my rock and an anchor. On it I rely, and it remains. Where it remains, I, too, remain; Where it goes, I, too, go. The Word must stand, for God cannot lie; and heaven and earth must go to ruins before the most insignificant letter or title of His Word remains unfulfilled.⁴

The *Institutes* of Calvin is likewise studded in the early chapters with references to Scripture as the true doctrine of God, from the mouth of God, given through the inspiration of the Spirit. And in his comment on 2 Timothy 3:16 he utters these remarkable words:

Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him first of all lay down as a settled point this—that the law and the prophecies are not teaching delivered by the will of men, but dictated by the Holy Ghost ... Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have from their hand, but since they spoke by divine impulse, they confidently and fearlessly testified, as actually was the case, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spoke ... we owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God, because it has proceeded from Him alone, and has nothing of man mixed with it.

Because they held this view of Scripture as the written Word of God, the leaders of the Reformation insisted that Scripture must rule the church and nothing must stand over it. *Sola Scriptura* is the Protestant principle, Tillich notwithstanding. Scripture must constitute, determine and rule the entire theological endeavor. What it does not determine is no part of Christian truth

This historic high view of Holy Writ is also the traditional Baptist view of it. Although the Baptist movement has not drawn up authoritative confessions of faith and used them as the basis of fellowship, still there are Baptist statements of faith which give us quite a clear impression of where Baptists have stood on this issue. Granted, some of the early brief statements lack altogether a paragraph on biblical authority, as is also the case in the great ecumenical creeds of Christendom. But the reason for this is a

³Augustine, *Epistolae*, 82. i. 3

⁴Luther, *Weimarer Ausgabe*, 10 III, 162

simple one. The inspiration and supreme authority of the Scripture was not being challenged then as it is today. Those who drew up the earliest statements had matters more pressing on their minds. Nevertheless, in the Second London Confession of 1677 and 1688, one of the most important of all Baptist statements, we read eloquent and extended testimony on Scripture, modeled closely on the Westminster Confession of Faith,

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience ... The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit, into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved. (Ch. 1)

More familiar to American Baptists is the masterful utterance of the New Hampshire Confession of 1833, taken over and repeated in the 'Baptist Faith and Message' of the Southern Baptist Convention, which reads:

We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried."

And, finally from the Continent we hear the confession of faith from the evangelical association of French-speaking Baptist churches, 1879:

We believe that the canonical writings of the Old and the New Testaments are the Word of God and constitute the only and infallible rule of faith and Christian life and the only touchstone by which every doctrine, every tradition and every religious and ecclesiastical system as well as every method of Christian action are to be tested. We believe that the Holy Scripture is a providential document and that the Holy Spirit presided in sovereign manner at its origin and at the formation of the biblical story. We believe that He has Himself assured therein the perfect teaching and the entire historic truth, despite the imperfection of the human instruments who, by His divine inspiration and under His control, have contributed toward communicating to us the divine oracles.⁵

Early in this century the great Baptist theologian E. Y. Mullins set down his reflections on our subject of Baptists and the Bible. He wrote, "For Baptists there is one authoritative source of religious truth and knowledge. To that source they look in all matters relating to doctrine, polity, the ordinances, worship, and Christian living. That source is the Bible."⁶ He went on in his article to discuss the sufficiency, certainty,

⁵These materials are recorded in W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1959).

⁶E. Y. Mullins, "Baptists and the Bible," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, I, 141-43.

dependability and divine authority of the Bible. Other important Baptist thinkers of the past, like John Smyth, John Gill, and Andrew Fuller, all agree that the Bible is God's written Word and the supreme authority in life and thought.⁷ Of course, being Baptists, they were individualists, and did not agree on all that was involved in the outworking and development of that doctrine. Nevertheless, they did agree on the divine origin and authorship of Scripture.

There is a historic view of the Bible, and Baptists have held to it. The conservative doctrine of inspiration has history on its side. It is a mistake often made by progressive theologians to suppose that belief in biblical infallibility is a recent aberration of fundamentalist thought. As a matter of fact it is *not*. It has been the position of all the Christian churches for eighteen hundred years. And there is no mystery why it is so. It is the doctrine which Jesus taught his church. The progressives in theology make much of Jesus and his authority over us. Yet it is more than strange how they seem to ignore the plain fact that Jesus himself trusted the Scriptures completely and without reservation. His own precept and practice is the firm foundation of the Scripture principle, and it is entirely natural that his disciples follow his example.⁸

2. The Crisis of the Scripture Principle

Having reviewed, if only superficially, the encouraging story of Christian obedience in the matter of the Scripture principle, the mood changes as we attempt to characterize the sad and melancholy history of a great defection. For there has been, as everyone well knows, a noticeable modification of views regarding the Bible on the part of large segments of Christian thought today, a change which has brought with it a theological crisis of great scope.⁹ Although Pannenberg is himself part of the problem, he is surely correct when he writes, "The dissolution of the traditional doctrine of Scripture constitutes a crisis at the very foundation of modern Protestant theology."¹⁰ The saying is true! A very large number of biblical scholars, preachers, and to a lesser extent Christian people have lost their confidence in the complete trustworthiness of Scripture. If it were a hesitating and reluctant change of mind, we might be able to feel better about it. But what we face instead is a strident, self-confident, and unabashed rejection of the view of the Bible which the Christian Church has always cherished. In the face of it our hearts are moved by both sadness

⁷John H. Watson, "Baptists and the Bible as Seen in Three Eminent Baptists," *Foundations*, 16 (1973), 239-54; See also James L. Garrett, Jr., "Representative Modern Baptist Understandings of Biblical Inspiration," *Review and Expositor*, 71 (1974), 179-95.

⁸See John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972). Our Lord's doctrine of Scripture gives us the norm for judging the so-called "phenomena" of the Bible. I do not agree with those evangelicals who reverse this order of things. Cf. B. Ramm, "Scripture as a Theological Concept," *Review and Expositor*, 71 (1974), 149-50.

⁹See Willis B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformity and Higher Criticism in the 19th Century* (London: Independent Press, 1954).

¹⁰W. Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), I, p. 4.

and indignation. As the Psalmist says, "My eyes shed streams of tears, because men do not keep thy law." (119:136). Our hearts should be saddened when people reject God's Word. But in the midst of sadness we cannot help but be appalled by the ingratitude of the human heart. For after God had given us His Word, to guide our minds and illumine our hearts, to teach us heavenly truths and lead us out of the darkness of our own fantasies, we find a company of so-called Christian leaders joining the chorus of unbelief in casting doubt upon the integrity and reliability of that priceless gift of the divine grace. The great defection from a high view of Holy Writ seems to us to be as perverse and ungrateful as it is disastrous.

Rather than describe the dreary story ourselves, let us listen to the words of Father Burtchaell who, although rejecting biblical infallibility himself, understands precisely what has happened.

Christians early inherited from the Jews the belief that the biblical writers were somehow possessed by God, who was thus to be reckoned the Bible's proper author. Since God could not conceivably be the agent of falsehood, the Bible must be guaranteed free from any error. For centuries this doctrine lay dormant, as doctrines will; accepted by all, pondered by few. Not until the 16th century did inspiration and its corollary, inerrancy, come up for sustained review. The Reformers and Counter-Reformers were disputing whether all revealed truth was in Scripture alone, and whether it could dependably be interpreted by private or official scrutiny. Despite a radical disagreement on these issues both groups persevered in receiving the Bible as a compendium of inerrant oracles dictated by the Spirit. Only in the 19th century did a succession of empirical disciplines newly come of age begin to put a succession of inconvenient queries to exegetes. First, geology and paleontology discredited the view of the cosmos and the cosmogony of Genesis. Next, archeology suggested that there were serious historical discrepancies in the sacred narrative. Later, as parallel oriental literatures began to be recovered, much of Scripture lay under accusation of plagiarism from pagan sources. Literary criticism of the text itself disclosed that the writers had freely tampered with their materials, and often escalated myth and legend into historical event. After all this, considerable dexterity was required of any theologian who was willing to take account of the accumulation of challenging evidence, yet continued to defend the Bible as the classic and inerrant Word of God.¹¹

Putting aside for a moment the fact that Burtchaell has grossly exaggerated the actual results of legitimate criticism, he has certainly not exaggerated the magnitude of the shift in modern theology away from the historic doctrine of Scripture. Whereas orthodox theologians have always insisted that we regard Scripture as God-speaking and God-teaching, modern negative critics consistently refuse to identify God's Word with the written text of the Bible. In his essay, "The Crisis of the Scripture Principle," Pannenberg expresses his scepticism about the history recorded in the

¹¹James T. Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration Since 1810: A Review and Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 1-2.

Gospels, and his pessimism regarding the possibility of applying the biblical text to present contexts. He speaks of "tendencies" in various biblical writers, and doubts the unity of the Bible. In his work on the Apostles Creed, he repudiates the miraculous conception of Jesus altogether, and in his book on Christology refers to legendary elements in the resurrection narratives and elsewhere. I mention Pannenberg because he is *not* radically unorthodox, holding even it seems to the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Yet even in his work we are confronted with deep scepticism about the Bible. On the Catholic side, we could mention Hans Küng who has brought joy and encouragement to many in the last decade for his expression of evangelical truth from within the Roman church. And yet he too has made it perfectly clear that he does not believe in any infallible authority, whether pope or Bible. The Bible contains, according to his judgment, numerous errors of every kind and cannot be trusted without reservation.

But the question that concerns us most in this paper is not the defection of Christians at large from the high view of biblical inspiration, sad though that is, but rather the extent to which Baptists have shared in this shift of conviction. Though we do not have a historical study on this subject comparable to Lefferts A. Loetscher's *The Broadening Church*, which traces the shift in the northern Presbyterian denomination from 1869, we are privileged to have a two-part article by Norman H. Maring, entitled "Baptists and Changing Views of the Bible, 1865-1918" contained in the first volume of the periodical *Foundations*, 1958. Although the article covers the very crucial years when liberalism entered into Baptist life and thought, we still need a further essay in which the research would be carried up to the present. Because the subject remains a hot and emotional one, perhaps it is not surprising why the work has not yet been done. Or it may be that contemporary Baptist theologians consider the matter settled and not in need of further controversy which such research would inevitably stir up. In any case it is a project for someone to attempt.¹²

To what extent did Baptists share in the great defection from belief in the infallible Scriptures? The answer has to be, at least in reference to the writing theologians of stature, to a *large extent*. This can be seen negatively from the almost complete silence of recent Baptist theologians to come out in defense of biblical infallibility in the face of the blistering attack on it (two important exceptions being C.F.H. Henry and Bernard Ramm). And it can be seen positively in the historical documentation which Maring supplies. In the 1860's almost all Baptists, leaders and laymen, shared the historic Christian confidence in the inerrancy of the Bible. But after that time the influence of negative biblical criticism from the Continent began to eat away and erode that conviction, and scholars began to voice their disbelief in it. In the 1860's, for example, Thomas F. Curtiss, who had taught theology at a Baptist College in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, and served for a brief time with the Southern Baptist Board of Domestic Missions, felt compelled to jettison belief in the infallibility of the Bible

¹²Garrett, in the article cited, does at least discuss H. Wheeler Robinson.

and publish that fact. Accepting documentary theories about the Pentateuch and other historical books, Curtiss found it necessary to revise his conception of inspiration. He began to emphasize instead the subjective experience of salvation and some of the ideas in the Bible he found to be experientially true, even though communicated in fallible human terms. This stress upon personal experience as a substitute for objective infallibility was characteristic of liberal theology, and would crop up again and again in later Baptist theologians like Ezekiel G. Robinson, president of the Rochester Seminary in the 1870's, and the justly famous William Newton Clarke (1841-1912), whose exegesis led him to conclude that his earlier confidence in the inerrancy of Scripture was untenable. He came to feel instead that the great ethical principles of the Bible, together with the person of Jesus, were enough to believe in. In his *Outline of Christian Theology* (1894) he wrote, "The Bible itself releases from all obligation to maintain its complete inerrancy, in the sense of freedom from all inaccuracy and incorrectness of statement, and shows us a higher quality, in which is manifest a higher purpose than that of inerrancy." (p. 35)¹³ Further south there was the case of Crawford H. Toy, professor of Old Testament at Southern Seminary in Louisville, who was one of the first Baptist professors forced to resign for his unorthodox views on the Bible. Though in the beginning of his teaching career he had held to strict biblical inerrancy, later on he felt the pressure of biblical problems, and the necessity of broadening his views. Being a very honest man, Professor Toy felt he could not suppress his views in the classroom as requested, and was compelled to resign in 1879. Although the departure was a sad one, Toy subsequently became much more radical in his theology, no doubt justifying the wisdom of that decision. Obviously our account would be much extended if we were to include mention of the famous Baptists associated with the University of Chicago whose liberal views of inspiration, and other Christian truths, were far more radical than those I have mentioned. I refer to Shailer Matthew, E. deWit Burton, and Shirley Jackson Case. On the British side of the Atlantic, one would have to mention H. Wheeler Robinson who openly rejected biblical infallibility. But the point is made, and is a matter of public record. A considerable number of important Baptist leaders and thinkers publicly and unequivocally rejected and sometimes denounced belief in the complete trustworthiness of the Bible. And this continues to be true today.

Before leaving the subject of Baptists and the crisis of the Scripture principle, we should express some sympathy with the reasons which led men to this conclusion. For we would be sadly deluded if we concluded that the factors causing these Baptists to change their doctrine of inspiration were insubstantial and of their own making. Conservative Christians have a definitive tendency to minimize the force of biblical difficulties, just as liberal Christians tend to exaggerate them. Often the orthodox stalwarts simply do *not* seriously confront well formulated critical issues. This cannot be excused. These difficulties cannot be swept aside in a flood of rhetoric. It should give conservatives pause to remember that one no less

¹³See also Clarke, *The Use of the Scriptures in Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1906); *Sixty Years With the Bible: A Record of Experience* (New York: Scribner's, 1912).

than A. H. Strong felt the force of modern criticism so keenly that he too felt compelled to modify his earliest definition of inspiration, and to speak of imperfections in the text. In the later editions of his *Systematic Theology* the whole idea of inerrancy and infallibility drops out of his discussion. He begins to write more of the religious efficacy of the Bible, and of the accuracy of things essential to its 'main purpose'.

Nevertheless, however sympathetic we wish to be in the agonies of soul which accompanied this shift of viewpoint, we would be foolhardy indeed not to recognize the extreme dangers implicit in the new understanding of the Bible, which is a bog with no firm ground in it. And we must say that this shift of opinion has caused an ongoing and serious split between a large majority of Baptist people who hold the traditional Baptist and Christian view of the Bible, and the majority of seminary and college professors who frankly do not.

3. Maintaining the Scripture Principle

What exactly is at stake in this discussion on the nature of the Bible? There are some who believe very little is lost when trust in Scripture is given up. I believe that this hopeful and optimistic opinion is badly mistaken. On the contrary I believe that *everything* is at stake. As Luther put it picturesquely, when men do not respect Scripture as God's Word, "everyone makes a hole in it wherever it pleases him, and follows his own opinions, interpreting and twisting Scripture any way he pleases." Even William Newton Clarke sensed the danger when he wrote:

I tell no secret—though perhaps many a man has wished he could keep it a secret—when I say that to the average minister today the Bible that lies on his pulpit is more or less an unsolved problem. He is loyal to it, and not for his right hand would he degrade it or do it wrong. He longs to speak with authority on the basis of its teaching, and feels that he ought to be able to do so. He knows that the people need its message in full power and clearness, and cannot bear to think that it is losing influence with them. Yet he is not entirely free to use it. Criticism has altered the book for his use, but just how far he does not know.¹⁴

On a much darker note still A. H. Strong warned Baptists in 1918 of the severe potential and actual dangers in radical biblical criticism. He wrote,

What is the effect of this method upon our theological seminaries? It is to deprive the gospel message of all definiteness, and to make professors and students disseminators of doubts.... The result of such teaching in our seminaries is that the student, unless he has had a Pauline experience before he came has all his early conceptions of Scripture and Christian doctrine weakened, has no longer any positive message to deliver, loses the ardor of his love for Christ; and at his graduation leaves the seminary, not to become preacher or pastor as he had once hoped, but to sow his doubts broadcast, as a teacher in some college, as editor of some religious journal, as secretary of some Young Men's Christian Association, or as agent of

¹⁴Cited by Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), p. 2.

some mutual life insurance company. This method of interpretation switches off upon some sidetrack of social service many a young man who otherwise would be a heroic preacher of the everlasting gospel. The theological seminaries of almost all our denominations are becoming so infected with this grievous error, that they are not so much organs of Christ as they are organs of Antichrist. This accounts for the rise, all over the land, of Bible schools, to take the place of seminaries.... We are losing our faith in the Bible, and our determination to stand for its teachings. We are introducing into our ministry men who have lost their faith in him and their love for him. The unbelief in our seminary teaching is like a blinding mist slowly settling down upon our churches, and is gradually abolishing, not only all definite views of Christian doctrine, but also all conviction of duty to 'contend earnestly for the faith' of our fathers.... We are ceasing to be evangelistic as well as evangelical, and if this downward progress continues, we shall in due time cease to exist. This is the fate of Unitarianism today. We Baptists must reform or die.¹⁵

These are powerful sentiments, and not, I think, exaggerated. What is at stake, quite frankly, is the possibility of normative theology, and with it the possibility of clear, bold preaching. If all that we have for revelational data is a Book tainted with errors, the extent of which no one can say, then we do not know what God has said and cannot pretend that we do. The alternative to a reliable Bible is human subjectivity, however we may define it. We are therefore faced with a choice between two versions of Christianity: one that depends on what God has spoken, and one which rests on human judgments. The crisis of the Scripture principle for theology is simply the fact that, if the new view of the Bible is correct, we do not know what constitutes revelational data, and, not knowing that, cannot speak confidently about the truth of God.

Let me ask, 'What doctrine is there that will survive this crisis?' None are safe from criticism, each and every one is up for grabs today. Pannenberg who accepts the bodily resurrection of Jesus, rejects his miraculous conception and is silent on the meaning of his death. There was a concerted effort only last year in Bangkok to define salvation in unbiblical terms, formally and materially. Eschatology is being reduced to naturalistic dimensions and pressed into the service of Marxist guerrilla movements. Hardly a single prominent Catholic or Protestant theologian today accepts the historical fall of Adam into sin, though Scripture plainly teaches it. We are regularly subjected to Christologies which show the 'human face of God' but do no justice to his eternal deity. The theory of universal salvation continues to undercut the necessity of world missions. The finality of Christ continues to be sacrificed in the name of a theology of world religions, and a new syncretism. In order to gain an appreciation of the demonic, one had better turn to a Hollywood film like the 'Exorcist' than to consult a modern theologian. Despite the fact that biblical religion is supernaturalistic in its essence, Bultmann's bare-faced and anachronistic naturalism continues to provide the starting point for scores of contemporary theologians. There is no point in going on with this dreary list

¹⁵A. H. Strong, *A Tour of the Missions: Observations and Conclusions* (Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland Press, 1918), pp. 170-74.

of modern heresies, except to conclude that *none* of these aberrations, some of them every bit as serious as anything faced by the early fathers, would have been possible if Christians had held faithfully to the truth of the written Word of God. Of course it is true that a person holding to a low view of the Bible could, and many do, subscribe to any or all of the vital biblical teachings. However, it would be *in spite of* his doctrine of Scripture and not *because of it* that he did so. This fatal dualism between a reliable and sure gospel or theology, and an unreliable and unsure Bible is intolerable, unbiblical, and unworkable. The Bible is a holistic book. Its 'real' message is not floating like soap on murky waters of human fallibility. It is not possible to distinguish the religious truth of the Bible from the errant human dross that allegedly surrounds it. Many have tried it. None have succeeded. None ever will, because it cannot be done. The Bible is a seamless garment which deserves our total trust. Let us not deprive the world of the gospel it so desperately needs by our theological foolishness.

It might seem surprising that Baptists, for whom the Bible alone and not some creed is final authority, would succumb to a low view of the Bible. Though from one point of view, their non-creedalism might seem to allow this defection, yet that very same fact that Baptists hold to Scripture alone, ought to wed them indissolubly to a high view of it, having no other recourse. But it is less surprising when we consider the strong tendency of Baptists to locate truth in the saving encounter with Christ, rather than in the objective truth outside themselves. (Cf. Strong's reference to a "Pauline experience" above!) The effects of revivalism upon them prepared the way, oddly enough, for them to be ravaged by liberal and later by neo-orthodox theology. For this simple reason. Liberalism and neo-orthodoxy also emphasize that the doctrines of Christianity are grounded in personal religious experience and not upon external authorities. Therefore, when untrained Baptists are confronted with subtle forms of liberal theology, classical or existential, they are not able to resist it intellectually, even though their instinctive reaction is hesitant. In the extent to which Baptists make their subjective experience of salvation, rather than the objective Word of God, the main weapon in their defense of the truth, in the same measure they are vulnerable to theological compromise. Needless to say, this is even more true of the world-wide Pentecostal movement whose emphasis on religious subjectivity is even more complete. It is this very same factor which explains how at the present time evangelicals in various traditions are finding it possible to define revelation in terms of "encounter" rather than objective inerrancy. History is repeating itself. It is terribly important to remember that the truth of our salvation lies *outside* the soul in the objective act and word of the gospel. If we do not remember it, we may very well lose our convictions about Scripture, and worse still our assurance of salvation itself. Luther's attitude seems much safer, at least to this Baptist, when he says,

Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures or evident reason (for I believe in neither the Pope nor councils alone, since it has been established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures that I have adduced, and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of

God; and I am neither able nor willing to recant, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. God help me. Amen.

As we have already mentioned we are not oblivious to the fact that

there is work to be done if we are to maintain the Scripture principle *intelligibly* in our day of radical criticism. There are many tasks to which we must dedicate ourselves. Obviously there is critical work to be done. It is not enough to suspect naturalistic biases at the root of various critical objections to Scripture, it is necessary to show specifically what they are and where they are. Like Augustine, Luther, and Calvin before us, we must work hard and long on the difficulties in the biblical text and seek to find intellectually satisfying solutions to them. As proof that this can be done, and done with magnificent finesse, we need only mention the *Introduction to the Old Testament* written by R. K. Harrison, a book as thorough and scholarly as any liberal introduction today, yet one which vindicates the integrity of the Word of God at point after point, a book which shows how vulnerable are those very critical theories which caused so many Baptist leaders to defect from a high view of Scripture a century ago.

Beyond that, we have to be working at a unitive theology of the Testaments. The opinion is widely held that the various writers of Scripture are moved by tendencies which are not mutually compatible and do not speak with a clear and united voice. Barr speaks of a multiplicity of theologies in the Bible, and he is not alone. The result of this would be to render impossible the use of the Bible as proof for anything, as criterion of anything. We must learn to replicate the method, if not the theology, of Calvin in whose commentaries, which are still valuable today, he repeatedly showed the unity, consistency, and coherence of the message of the Bible, whose ultimate author was God Himself.

And, on a more practical vein, we must begin to hear profounder preaching, preaching like Ezra's that gives the sense clearly, and sends the people away rejoicing because they have understood the Word. So much conservative preaching is a travesty of the doctrine of Scripture. While holding out for our belief in the complete reliability of the Bible, preachers continue to wrench texts, to use and abuse them for whatever purpose they happen to have in their minds, and fail to enlighten the people as to what God has to say to them. Similarly, although the Bible we love is militant against injustice, violence and oppression, somehow we never get around to announcing to the congregation what this means for those who live in a society where all these things are practiced. It is *not enough* to maintain an orthodox view of the Bible unless at the same time we hear and obey God's Word.

When King Josiah discovered the Word of the Lord in the temple there came to pass a reformation of true religion in the land. The church today needs the renewing impact of the Word of God. The Spirit wants to confront the church afresh today with God's truth and lead her on to reformation and revival. God wants His people to believe and trust in Him and all His promises. He has given us His written Word so that we might know His truth and walk in His light. Therefore, let us delight in the Word of God. Let us sustain a doctrine of it that will make it possible for us to say

with the Psalmist:

Oh how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.
Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine
enemies: for they are ever with me.
I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies
are my meditation.
I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.
I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy
word.
I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.
How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to
my mouth!
Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every
false way. [Psalms 119:97-104]