

*How Scotland Lost Its Hold of the Bible*¹

Iain H. Murray

Man is now thinking out a Bible for himself; framing a religion in harmony with the development of liberal thought; constructing a worship on the principles of taste and culture; shaping a god to suit the expanding aspirations of the age. ... The extent of the mischief no one can calculate. A soul without faith, a church without faith, a nation without faith, a world without faith – what is to be their future? What is their present? When faith goes, all good things go. When unbelief comes in, all evil things follow.

—HORATIUS BONAR.²

There are times when Christians are conscious that a book has come to them just when it was specially needed. It was so with me one February day in 1954 when, as a student at Durham University, a second-hand book came into my hands with the title *A Critical History of Free Thought in Reference to the Christian Religion*. The author was Adam S. Farrar and the volume was one of the famous series of Bampton Lectures delivered at Oxford in 1862. The date is significant. It was before the authority of Scripture was discounted in British universities, and Farrar, an evangelical, spent nearly 700 pages reviewing man's opposition to the word of God across the centuries.³

I was then having my own experience of opposition to the trustworthiness of Scripture, and this book showed me that this was no new thing. Attacks on the word of God are as old as the time when the

¹ The substance of an address given at the Inerrancy Summit, Grace Community Church, Los Angeles, March 2015. All the addresses at this conference are to be published by Crossway (March 2016) as John MacArthur, ed., *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives*.

² *Our Ministry: How It Touches the Questions of the Age* (Edinburgh: MacNiven, 1883), pp. 54-5.

³ A. S. Farrar, *A Critical History of Free Thought in Reference to the Christian Religion* (London: John Murray, 1862). Dr Farrar, born 1826, became Professor of Divinity at Durham, dying on 11 June 1905. He is not to be confused with Dean Farrar of Westminster Abbey.

unregenerate mind of fallen man became ‘enmity against God’ (Rom. 8:7). I needed to learn this key to an understanding of history. It is the explanation for the hostility of the heathen nations to Israel in the Old Testament. The unique difference of Israel lay not in themselves, but in the revelation they received from heaven. God gave them prophets who affirmed, ‘The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me, and his word is on my tongue’ (2 Sam. 23:2). ‘He shows his word to Jacob, his statutes and judgments unto Israel. He has not dealt so with any other nation’ (Psa. 147:19-20). ‘What advantage then has the Jew?’ the apostle asked (Rom. 3:1) ‘Chiefly’ – in the first place – ‘because to them were committed the oracles of God.’ At its heart, the assault on Israel was war on the word of God.

Move on to the New Testament. Why the 300 years of persecution of Christians? John on Patmos tell us it was ‘for the word of God’. Sufferers are described by Christ as those who ‘have kept my word’ (Rev. 3:8), and those put to death are said to be ‘slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held’ (Rev. 6:9).

The same thing is repeated at the Reformation. Why was William Tyndale burned to death in 1536? It was because he had attached himself to the word of God and translated it into English. Twenty years later, John Rogers, his friend and helper, was also on trial for his life. Bishop Gardiner, his Roman Catholic judge, challenged him to specify one doctrine which the pope taught contrary to the word of God. Rogers at once pointed to the papal enforcement of all services in the Latin tongue contrary to 1 Corinthians 14:19. When he offered to explain the passage, Gardiner exclaimed: ‘No, no, thou canst prove nothing by the Scripture: the Scripture is dead and must have a lively exposition.’ To which Rogers replied, ‘No, no, the Scripture is alive ...’ But as he offered to say more he was interrupted with, ‘Nay, nay, all heretics have alleged the Scriptures for them, and therefore must we have a living exposition for them.’⁴ In other words, the church must determine the truth, explain Scripture, and say what is to be believed. A few days later Rogers wrote a final testimony. He declared that the message recovered by the Reformation was that Parliament must ‘give place to the Word

⁴ This was a crucial difference between Protestant and Catholic. The latter argued that our faith comes to us on the authority of the church; Protestants asserted that Scripture alone is the rule of faith. See, for example, William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture, against the Papists* (1610; repr, Cambridge: Parker Soc., 1849).

of the ever living God, and not God to the act of Parliament: of God's Word there shall not one tittle perish, but it shall be all fulfilled and performed that is therein contained, and unto it must all men, king and queen, Emperor, Parliaments and general councils obey – and the Word obeyeth no man – it cannot be changed nor altered, neither may we add or put anything thereto, nor take nothing therefrom.' For this faith Rogers was also burned to death in London on February 4, 1555.

Move on again to the Puritan period. In the 1620s under Puritan preaching in Ulster in the north of Ireland, there was a remarkable revival, with many hundreds coming to faith in Christ. Twenty years later there was a Catholic uprising in the same place, supported by priests, and large numbers – possibly thousands – of Protestants were put to death. A report at the time tells us that 'the Bible, in a particular manner was an object on which the Romanists vented their detestation of the truth. "They have torn it in pieces, they have kicked it up and down, treading it under foot, leaping and trampling thereupon; saying, 'a plague on it, this book has bred all the quarrel,' hoping within three weeks that all the Bibles in Ireland should be so used, and wishing they had all the Bibles in Christendom, that they might use them so.'"⁵

In the Reformation period attacks on the Bible commonly took the form of physical persecution and they came from false religion.

In the eighteenth century the attack came in a different way. It came from the world and in the form of philosophy. Many of its leaders claimed to believe in God, but not the God of the Bible. They rejected revelation given from heaven. It is said of Voltaire, a leader in the period which was falsely called the 'Enlightenment', 'that the sole object of all his efforts was to destroy belief in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, and the divine origin of revelation which is attested by them. There is hardly a book in Scripture that he did not attack ... he tried to show absurdities and contradictions in them all.'⁶

The popularizer of Voltaire, and other philosophers, was Tom Paine, whose books, *The Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason*, had enormous sales on both sides of the Atlantic. Paine boasted, 'I have gone through the Bible, as a man would go through a wood with an ax and felled trees. Here they lie and the priest may replant them, but they will never grow.'

⁵ Quoted in J. S. Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, vol. 1 (Belfast: Mullan, 1867), p. 330.

⁶ Farrar, *Critical History*, p. 246.

But the attack I want to consider more particularly is one which has had more devastating effect on our contemporary world than anything written by Voltaire or Paine. And it came from a different source. Not now from the Roman Church, and not from the philosophy of the world, but from within the Protestant churches. Further it was a great deal more subtle, because, commonly, it did not present itself as an attack at all. Rather it came with the claim to be for the Bible, and for Christianity.

The nineteenth century was an age which saw great progress in many departments of knowledge for which we should be thankful. Instead, however, of attributing this to the providence of God, there were those who explained it in terms of the supposed evolutionary progress of mankind. They claimed that geology proved the Genesis account of the beginning of the world to be impossible. The authenticity of the Pentateuch was denied. It was doubted whether man even knew how to write in the time of Moses. When Christians were first confronted with such ideas they recognized them as the products of unbelief. The Protestant churches all believed the authority of the word of God. But by the 1880s a different response had arisen. Prominent teachers came forward in the churches who argued that there was no need to defend every part of Scripture. Some concessions could surely be made to modern scholarship, and Christianity would be better defended by holding only to what is essential and fundamental. Here was a new movement, setting out, it said, not to destroy faith but to put it on a firmer basis, only leaving aside the less important and incidental matters, and concentrating on the preservation of what is most vital. The teaching took the name, 'the New Apologetic', an 'apologetic' that is, not for unbelief but for Christianity.

For a closer look at this development I want to concentrate on Scotland, and particularly on the Free Church of Scotland, the denomination which became the power-house for ideas which would reach all parts of the English-speaking world.

The Free Church of Scotland was formed in 1843 by some 500 ministers who separated from the Church of Scotland on account of the state's interference in the church. It was a movement born out of a revival of evangelical faith, and was marked by prayerfulness, by outreach and missionary zeal, both at home and abroad. Its leaders were

revered across the Protestant world. Some spoke of the denomination as the most apostolic church in the world.

But go on forty years, and it is from this church that the New Apologetic entered the scene.

Leaders

William Robertson Smith, pupil of A. B. Davidson and Julius Wellhausen (who was to call him ‘the cleverest man in Britain’), was the first in the Free Church to make public a programme to put an understanding of Scripture on a new basis. From the start his career was extraordinary; gifted in speech, knowledge, and languages, he was already a phenomenon when, from theological college, he moved straight to being Professor of Hebrew at Aberdeen at the age of 23. But in the next seven years his published writings raised an increasing concern. He so disregarded admonitions to be more circumspect that in 1881 he was removed from his post. Robert Rainy, Principal of New College, Edinburgh, who would increasingly shelter the new school of teachers, sought to prevent that decision, giving as one of his reasons that such action against Professor Smith could promote the same action against others. Rainy lost his defence of Smith by one vote, but he was right in warning that the matter did not concern one man alone. Others were already in the wings.

Marcus Dods (1834–1909) was one of the first to come forward. In a sermon, ‘Revelation and Inspiration’ (1877) he had presented the view that an acceptance of inaccuracies in the Old Testament need not affect the substance of the faith. The next decade was to show how quickly the position of the church was changing. In 1889, despite opposition, Dods succeeded George Smeaton as Professor of New Testament Exegesis at New College. ‘A new life’, it was claimed, ‘seemed to breathe through the College from the day that Dr Dods was appointed.’ But in his inaugural lecture Dods described belief in the plenary inspiration of the Bible as ‘a theory of inspiration which has made the Bible an offence to many honest men, which is dishonouring to God, and which has turned inquirers into sceptics by the thousand, – a theory which should be branded as heretical in every Christian Church.’⁷ The next year when an attempt was made to try him for heresy at the General Assembly, the

⁷ Quoted in H. F. Henderson, *The Religious Controversies of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1905), p. 238.

case against him was dismissed. It was proof that caution for supporting of the New Apologetic was no long necessary.

In close support of Dods was George Adam Smith (1856–1942), born in India of evangelical and missionary-minded parents. It seems strange that he had, for a while, been allowed to succeed the deposed Robertson Smith at Aberdeen, for he was also an enthusiastic pupil of A. B. Davidson and German theologians. But how far G. A. Smith would go was not yet anticipated. Between 1882 and 1892 he built a reputation as a dynamic preacher in Aberdeen, and was then appointed Professor of Old Testament at the Free Church College, Glasgow. Opposing what he called ‘dogmas of verbal inspiration’, G. A. Smith acknowledged that he handled the Old Testament in a way ‘revolutionary in respect of methods of interpreting Scripture hitherto accepted among us’. This was made clear when he gave the Yale Lectures on Preaching in 1899 under the title *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*. For him, the Old Testament showed man’s evolutionary advance upwards from primitive religion. The early chapters of Genesis were not historical but composed ‘from the raw material of Babylonian myth and legend’. ‘The god of early Israel was a tribal god.’ The existence of Abraham was questionable. When an attempt was made to call the professor to account for his teaching at the General Assembly of 1902, Rainy was again the defender of the accused and this time his motion of no action was carried by 534 votes to 263, indicative of the changed times since the deposition of Robertson Smith twenty years earlier.⁸

These men, and others who supported them (including A. B. Bruce, Henry Drummond, and James Denney) were to change the whole direction of the church. On the question how they gained such influence and popularity there are several things to be said:

1. All the leading spokesmen for the New Apologetic, or ‘believing criticism’ as it was called, presented themselves as definite evangelicals. When the young Robertson Smith was appointed to teach, there were said to be sure ‘guarantees of his orthodoxy’. He ‘proved’, William Robertson Nicoll believed, ‘that an advanced critic might be a convinced and fervent evangelical’.

Nicoll’s opinion, as editor of the widely read *British Weekly* carried weight. It was he who described Marcus Dods as ‘the most Christlike

⁸ Patrick C. Simpson, *Life of Principal Rainy* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909), vol. 2, p. 273.

man I have ever known’, and Dods himself spoke of his calling as that of an ‘evangelist’. Henry Henderson said of Dods, ‘His aim was high and worthy, to restore to men faith and joy in the truths of the Divine Word.’⁹

G. A. Smith claimed that he and his colleagues were all evangelicals and that they were providing a basis for ‘faith more stable than ever the old was imagined to be – richer mines of Christian experience, better vantage grounds for preaching the Gospel of Christ ... infinitely wider prospects of the power of God’.¹⁰

2. The abandoning of what G. A. Smith called ‘the older orthodoxy’ seemed to promise great spiritual success. Consequently the young were for the new. The leaders of the new movement knew how to speak effectively to ‘the modern mind’; some of their publications had wide circulation, and the future seemed to lie with them. They were impervious to the criticism that, ‘The young bloods in the ministry let go the Faith of their fathers.’¹¹ Such words from the defenders of ‘the doctrine of verbal inspiration’ came only from yesterday’s men – ‘traditionalists’ – who they saw as doing much damage, for they led ‘many earnest and pure spirits to give up Christianity because they have ignorantly thought that it is identified with everything in both the Testaments’.¹² They represented an evangelicalism ‘beset by narrowness, inaccuracy and the fear to acknowledge some of the healthiest and divinest movements of our time’.¹³

3. The new teaching, it was claimed, was bringing a closer attachment to Christ. Certainly, it was said, the Bible helps, ‘as sign posts help a traveller on the road’, and it could be praised as ‘an exceptional, a divine book’. But it cannot be the last word because Christians have something greater and better than sign posts – they have Christ as a living guide! However much help may be found in the Bible, faith rests on personal experience of Christ, not in the text of a book. Faith in the Saviour and the New Apologetic could go forward together!

⁹ *Controversies of Scotland*, pp. 247-8.

¹⁰ G. A. Smith, *Life of Henry Drummond* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), pp. 243-4.

¹¹ John Macleod, *Scottish Theology, In Relation to Church History* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974; to be reprinted in new edition, 2015), p. 314.

¹² *Life of Drummond*, p. 371. Smith agreed with Drummond in saying that the old belief in all Scripture ‘wrecked’ Christian faith.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

So a reduced view of Scripture was not to be seen as loss, it was a spiritual gain. Thus R. W. Dale sought to encourage preachers with the thought that, ‘There is now no authority to come between us – to come between the congregations to which you and I have to minister, and Him who is the very truth of God.’¹⁴

For such reasons, spelt out by attractive and able speakers, the new teaching had mighty and persuasive influence. Those of us who never felt the spell may wonder how the large numbers it won included such evangelicals as Alexander Whyte, and W. Y. Fullerton (a biographer of Spurgeon), yet such was the case. Whyte gave vigorous support to Robertson Smith. When T. R. Glover was made President of the Baptist Union in 1925, Fullerton acclaimed him as ‘a prophet whom God has sent us’. But Glover was the man who said, ‘Verbal inspiration is a monstrous belief.’¹⁵

Error can be made to look exceedingly attractive, so attractive that we are already deceived if we think we can preserve ourselves from it. ‘That good thing which was committed unto thee *keep by Holy Ghost* which dwelleth in us’ (2 Tim. 1:14).

The fatal mistake

The process may be slow, yet disbelief in Scripture leads inevitably to disbelief in Christ himself. The foundation principle of the New Apologetic was that the substance of Scripture can be maintained and promoted without defending it in every part. Scripture is ‘infallible’, these teachers said, but not everywhere infallible. This thinking contained a flawed assumption, namely, if the question be asked, ‘What part of Scripture *is* the word of God?’ it can be answered. Until this point in history the fundamental question for Christians was, ‘What does the word of God say?’ The new question had to be, ‘How much of the Bible *is* the word of God?’

At first the answer which was offered looked simple enough. Such things as Noah’s flood, Jonah in the belly of a great fish, and the authorship of the book of Daniel, could be set to one side as not involving the substance of the faith. Christian belief, it was said, did not depend on such matters. But it did not take long for people to see that those

¹⁴ *The Living Christ and the Four Gospels* (1890).

¹⁵ On Glover, see B. B. Warfield, *Critical Reviews* (New York: OUP, 1932), p. 388. ‘This Jesus is to Mr Glover no more than a good man, who was not a “mediator between God and man, making atonement” in His blood.’

very particulars were all treated by the Lord Jesus Christ as authentic history. Similarly, the new scholarship said that the Pentateuch did not come from Moses, but Christ believed that it did (Mark 7:10; 12:26; Luke 24:27).

So this raised another question: How much that Christ said is to be believed? He believed 'the Scripture cannot be broken'. He believed that marriage originated as declared by God in Genesis 2. He taught that not one 'jot or tittle' of the law would fail; that his life and death had been according to 'all that the prophets have spoken' (Luke 24:25), for 'the Scripture must be fulfilled'.

The only escape from such texts was to accept that not all that Jesus taught is trustworthy. He said, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away' (Matt. 24:35), but this had to be corrected to say that only 'some' of his words would not pass away. Which ones depended on the ability of scholars to find 'the historical Jesus'. This was the quest which German theology had attempted to answer, and it was not successful. Strauss, one of the originators of that quest, came to the conclusion, 'It may be doubted indeed, whether a real knowledge of the historical Jesus be now possible.'¹⁶ Other German theologians were more optimistic but their supposed findings only led to the advancement of a whole succession of different 'Christs'. Warfield has a powerful review of one of the books of Marcus Dods in which he addresses this point. Dods, he says, is willing to give up the inspiration of Scripture so long as Christ is preserved for us. But which Christ? he asked. Was it to be Dods's Christ? 'What about the Christ that Wernle gives us? or Wrede? or Oscar Holtzmann? or Auguste Sabatier? or Réveille? or Brandt? or Harnack? Which Christ of the fallible Scriptures shall we be ultimately forced to put up with?'¹⁷

In the end Dods had no answer. The confidence of his youth had gone when in 1907, two years after that Warfield review, in a private letter he opened his heart to a friend with a chilling forecast of how he saw the future of the church in Scotland: 'The churches won't know themselves fifty years hence. It is to be hoped some little rag of faith may be left when all's done.'¹⁸

The New Apologetic had not only been a failure, it was a failure at a tremendous cost. One of the old men who, a quarter of a century earlier

¹⁶ Quoted in Henderson, *Controversies*, p. 258.

¹⁷ *Critical Reviews*, p. 125.

¹⁸ *Later Letters of Marcus Dods* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1911), p. 67

had protested against the new teaching, was Moody Stuart, who had been M'Cheyne's pastor in earlier years. He wrote:

The word of the Lord is pure, and out of this trial it will come forth in all its brightness as silver out of the furnace. But, meanwhile, an unutterable calamity may overtake us, for our children may lose the one treasure we were bound to bequeath them; and for long years they may wander 'through dry places seeking rest, and finding none', before they recover their hold of the word of life, and regain their footing on the rock of eternal truth.¹⁹

I shall always have in my mind's eye the church in which I grew up. It is an outstanding building of red sandstone, an auditorium to seat at least a thousand, with a spacious adjoining hall and many rooms. It was opened in 1900 and the preacher invited for such an important occasion was Professor G. A. Smith, ready to speak with confidence for the new church and the new century. What happened? Today that fine building stands deserted and closed. Preachers and hearers are all gone, but they were not the first to go. First the word of God was lost, the light was lost, until only an empty monument remained.

That is the history of not one but thousands of church buildings in Britain today. There was recently published a large volume on Nonconformity in England. Nonconformity is another word for what are also called, south of the border, the 'Free Churches', the name covering all the historic, main-line denominations outside the Church of England. In it there is a book quoted by Christopher Driver, published in 1962, entitled *A Future for the Free Churches?* The emphatic question mark following the title is significant. Describing the contemporary scene, Driver writes,

Over large tracts of the country ... behind the peeling facades and the plaintive wayside pulpits there is nothing left but a faithful, ingrown remnant, whiling away its Pleasant Sunday Afternoons and its Women's Bright Hours in dingy rooms from which whole generations and classes have long since fled.²⁰

¹⁹ A. Moody Stuart, *Our Old Bible: Moses on the Plains of Moab* (Edinburgh: Maclaren, 1880), pp. 70-1.

²⁰ *T&T Clark Companion to Nonconformity*, Ed. R. Pope (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 24. The same volume reports that Leslie D. Weatherhead, one of the most popular leaders of Nonconformity, who denied the resurrection of Christ, became an advocate of re-incarnation and frequently attended séances, at which he claimed to have met John Wesley (p. 699).

What language is more applicable than the words of Jeremiah: ‘Lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them ... Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people (Jer. 8:9; 9:1).

World-wide disaster

Tragic although the effects of this have been in British history, there is something worse. Horatius Bonar was Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland in 1883, when the New Apologetic was taking hold of his denomination. He pleaded that the General Assembly should stop and think about what the world outside was hearing from them:

Brethren in far India and farther Australia are listening to us. Brethren in America, in Africa, in Europe, and in the distant islands of the far south, are watching us ... A hundred newspapers going out into all parts, not only of the land, but of the globe, will print your words.²¹

The Church did not listen to old Bonar. Instead of disciplining erroneous teachers, it honoured them. Backed by the evangelical reputation of the Free Church, the message went out to all the mission fields of the world that to be an evangelical it is not necessary to believe *all* Scripture. Slowly the great missionary expansion of the nineteenth century came to a stop; unbelief was destroying its roots.

In England, in the 1920s and the 1930s, attempts were made to require leading missionary agencies to employ and send out only such missionaries as believed in all Scripture. In 1922 an appeal was made to the Church Missionary Society of England, to examine where its candidates stood on Scripture. Its Board refused any such test.

In 1933, through the Presbytery of New Brunswick, J. Gresham Machen appealed to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the USA, that the personnel of their Foreign Missions Board should only contain men who held to ‘the full trustworthiness of Scripture’. To support the appeal, Machen produced a publication of 110 pages, which gave evidence of the extent to which unbelief was being tolerated and promoted on the mission field. He showed that the ‘inclusivist policy’, which was being allowed in the churches at home, was proving

²¹ *Our Ministry*, no ref.

a disaster in China where some church leaders had come to deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. He cited the literature of liberals then being published in Chinese. In one of these books, the author spoke of how a mother was reading part of the Old Testament where the destruction of the Amalekites is commanded. The mother sought to explain the judgment to her daughter by saying ‘that revelation was progressive, and now in Jesus we were told to love our enemies and to do good to them that spitefully use us. The little girl thought for a moment and then her face lighted up and she said, “Now I understand ... this back here was before God was a Christian.”’²²

Despite all that Machen wrote and said, the General Assembly gave the personnel of the Board of Foreign Missions ‘whole-hearted’ support. The inclusivist policy was upheld. When Machen and others then formed an Independent Mission Board, the General Assembly ordered it to be disbanded and forbade any of its church to be members. Machen did not obey the direction, upon which, he was tried, not allowed to question the legitimacy of the Assembly’s order, found guilty, and suspended from the ministry.

The so-called inclusivist policy was in reality an anti-biblical policy. Machen had quoted teachers in China who expressed the hope that modernists and not fundamentalists would come to that mission field. The likes of Machen would not be welcome; and now he was not to be welcomed in the church which he had served all his life.

What is the controversy over Scripture really about?

It is common for those who oppose evangelicals to present this controversy as being for or against what they call the ‘traditionalist view’ of the Bible. But that representation ignores the real issue. The fundamental objection is not so much what the Bible teaches about its inspiration; it is about what it teaches about God, man, and the way of salvation. It teaches that since the fall of man, the human mind is enmity to God, ‘it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be’ (Rom. 8:7). ‘Why do ye not understand my speech?’ Jesus asked unbelievers, ‘even because ye cannot hear my word’ (John 8:43). ‘The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually

²² *Modernism and the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA*, J. G. Machen (privately published, 1933), pp. 74-5.

discerned' (1 Cor. 2:14). To receive spiritual truth a man has first to be born of the Spirit. Only then does he have 'the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him' (John 14:17).

What the Bible reveals about God and ourselves is the last thing that the non-Christian wants to believe. He does not wish to believe it is true. Do I want to be told not only that I *do* wrong, but that I *am* wrong at the centre of my being? that my heart is deceitful and desperately wicked? Do I want to hear that there is none righteous, no, not one? and that to live for self, and not my holy Creator, deserves his righteous anger and condemnation? Do I like learning that I cannot save myself, and that if God does not deliver me I am lost in hell forever? Is the natural man pleased to hear that Christ alone must save, and that it is only by repentance and faith in him that any will reach heaven? No! We are all offended. We have no heart for it. It contradicts my good opinion of myself. The natural man does not want Christ. When Lord Rochester came to repentance towards the end of his profligate life he is reported to have said to Gilbert Burnet: 'It is not reason, but a bad life which is the great argument against the Bible.'²³

So, to the question, 'What has to be done to make the Bible acceptable to modern men and women?', the true answer is very different from the one which the New Apologetic proposed. Much more than one doctrine (biblical inerrancy) needs to be laid aside. Leave out all that humbles man, take out the supernatural, suppress God's word on what sin deserves – do this, and the church and the world can live in peace. The New Apologetic proposed to save the substance, only leaving aside the incidental: in the outcome it did nothing of the kind. Where it was accepted it left churches with the debris of many 'Christs' and a message often the opposite of the truth. The gospel was no longer God being reconciled by the death of his Son, but God, the Father of all men, helping us to make ourselves better, and the world better. 'By grace are ye saved ... not of works, lest any man should boast' (Eph. 2:8-9) disappeared. 'The Christian ethic', and following the example of Christ, became the message – not the offence of what Christ has done to deliver sinners from the wrath to come, but the congenial message of what we can decide for ourselves.

²³ Quoted by J. C. Ryle, *Principles for Churchmen* (London: Hunt, 1884), p. 434.

This is no misrepresentation. Wherever the rule of Scripture is set aside this is the way human nature always goes.²⁴ It has been true in every country, whatever the date.²⁵ But there is another question: ‘Was this consequence *intended* by those who in the nineteenth century undermined the trustworthiness of Scripture? Was the present state of the churches and the country what they *planned*?’

Unintended consequences

I know no reason to believe that it was. The teachers of the New Apologetic were the unconscious instrument in a great deception, and the author of that deception was one whose existence they did not seem to recognize. The scholars who undermined Scripture excluded a vital part of Scripture from their thinking: they had nothing to say about angels or demons; nothing about Satan’s revolt against God; nothing about Christ’s words, ‘then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved’ (Luke 8:12); nothing about ‘the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience’ (Eph. 2:2).²⁶

These omissions changed the mind-set of Protestantism as they continue to do at the present day. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, ‘I am certain that one of the main causes of the ill state of the Church today is the fact that the devil is being forgotten.’²⁷ Ignorance of history plays a part in this forgetfulness. The attacks on the Bible, although taking different forms, have throughout the ages similar characteristics because they originate from the same source. Certainly, there are variations at the human level, yet even at that level there are characteristics of the

²⁴ What Adam Farrar listed as the ‘three great truths ... the very foundation of the Christian religion’ are the very truths most absent wherever the authority of Scripture is set aside: ‘(1) the doctrine of the reality of the vicarious atonement of Christ provided by the passion of our blessed Lord; (2) the supernatural and miraculous character of the religious revelation in the book of God; and (3) the direct operation of the Holy Ghost in converting and communing with the human soul. Lacking the first of these, Christianity appears to him to be a religion without a system of redemption; lacking the second, a doctrine without authority; lacking the third, a system of ethics without spiritual power.’ *Critical History*, p. xv.

²⁵ Biblical truth is not time-bound. Paul explains the persecution of Jews by Christians by what was true in the time of Abraham: ‘As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now’ (Gal. 4:29).

²⁶ Robertson Smith confessed to believing in neither angels nor demons. Even James Denney did not believe in the demonic.

²⁷ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), p. 292.

demonic which ought to be discerned. Satan's fingerprints are on the page. Consider two of those characteristics in the period we have been discussing:

1. *Satan ever prompts and supports the idolizing of men.* Given his objective, which is the overthrow of biblical belief, it could not be better done. Elevating men, acclaiming their brilliant gifts, admiring their amazing scholarship, this is his strategy. The last thing he wants is men of contrite spirit who see the need to 'tremble' at God's word (Isa. 66:2). Rather he still tempts with the promise, 'You shall be as gods' (Gen. 3:5), and appeals to the pride which belongs to our fallen nature. John Owen, in dealing with *The Nature and Causes of Apostasy*, puts pride first in the list of causes. The Free Church of Scotland came to see itself at the forefront of the evangelical world; she led in preaching, in foreign missions, and now wanted to lead in theological scholarship. The best way to do that seemed to be to send its brightest students to Germany where prestige for theological learning was second to none. But the apostolic warnings were forgotten: 'Thou standest by faith. Be not high minded, but fear' (Rom. 11:20); 'Try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world' (1 John 4:1). So great was the ability of the German teachers that there was no need of any warnings. They were praised, applauded, and their disciples brought back to Scotland the habit of praising one another as they took up positions in theological colleges. They, too, were heralded and flattered. If they had asked for endorsements for their books they would have had them in abundance. Certainly they were gifted men, and the idolizing of men commonly comes from a blinding admiration of gifts. Yet Satan has intellectual gifts far above any to be found in man. Where pride is evident we can be sure he has found entrance. It is the devil who wants men idolized and regarded as celebrities.

Speaking of the history of the Free Church of Scotland, Principal John Macleod has written: 'It was so much of the irony of history that a Church which had prided itself on the place that it gave to the Reformed Faith so soon became the home of that revolutionary movement in Theology which has transformed the whole aspect of the religious life of Scotland. The other churches, too, were feeling the changed spirit of the age. But it was reserved for the younger ministers of the Free Church to take the lead in the abandonment of the Faith of their fathers.'²⁸

²⁸ *Scottish Theology*, p. 309. I have written more fully of this decline in *A Scottish Christian Heritage* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006), chap. 11.

2. *Satan works by the underhand, the subtle, the evasive, and the devious.* His chief weapon is what Scripture calls, the ‘deceivableness of unrighteousness’ (2 Thess. 2:10). It is a way of working which is the opposite of the openness and straightforwardness of Christianity. Luke says of the gospel history, ‘this thing was not done in a corner’. The truth has nothing to hide; but error is like a serpent which prefers the dark. This element was to be found in the years when the Free Church was embracing the new teaching. The undermining of Scripture at first went on slowly; it was introduced quietly in the theological colleges before it was ever read or heard in the church at large. I do not mean that its teachers were all intentional deceivers, but from the outset the openness to be expected of Christians was lacking. For example, Marcus Dods was not alone in expressing the fear that in fifty years only ‘some little rag of faith may be left’. There is a record of a conversation between Robert Rainy, the leader of the Free Church, and Professor D. S. Cairns, in the Aberdeen home of the latter in 1892. Cairns put the question whether ‘to hold one’s mind open on the infallibility of Scripture’ (as Rainy professed to be doing), would not lead to doubt over the whole system of doctrine which had been built on that foundation. Dr Rainy replied that the effect of the removing of the old basis would produce a species of ‘land-slide’ in many minds with respect to evangelical beliefs. No such admission was made by him in public. Rainy’s biographer only disclosed this conversation in 1910, adding that Rainy believed that, from the land-slide, the evangelical doctrines ‘would re-emerge’.²⁹ How that would happen, without the foundation on which those truths stood, was not explained. Yet the idea that criticism of Scripture would advance Christianity was still believed in 1910 and for many years after.

The most fundamental prevarication had to do with the underhand way that the doctrine of Scripture came to be revised. This is directly related to the current controversy in the Church of Scotland which has seen thousands of its members leave. For the background to this it is necessary to understand what took place in the two major unions of Scottish denominations early in the last century. The first was the union of the Free Church of Scotland with the United Presbyterian Church in 1900, which saw the majorities in both those denominations reconstituted under the name the United Free Church.³⁰ The second

²⁹ Simpson, *Principal Rainy*, vol. 2. p. 116.

³⁰ Both unions saw minorities continuing separately.

major union was in 1929, and brought the United Free Church back into the national Church of Scotland.

These two mergers were brought about by a relaxation of the earlier Articles of Faith which ministers were required to affirm. Before 1900, Free Church ministers vowed commitment to ‘the *whole doctrine of the Confession of Faith*, approved by the General Assemblies of this Church, to be the truths of God’. After 1900, the wording became, ‘*the doctrine of this Church* set forth in the Confession of Faith’. The difference between the words I have italicized will be clearer below. After this revision was accepted in the United Free Church, the Church of Scotland made preparation for a Union with her, and, with that in view, revised her own Articles in 1921. This paved the way for the Union of 1929 when the revised Articles of 1921 became authoritative for the enlarged Church of Scotland. Article 1 declared:

The Church of Scotland adheres to the Scottish Reformation; receives the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as its supreme rule of faith and life; and avows the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith founded thereupon and contained in its own Confession.

These words remain part of the constitution of the Church of Scotland today. How then can it be that its doctrinal purity has descended to the level of permitting and upholding ministers who are practising homosexuals? How can that be? How can it be believed that marriage between individuals of the same sex is approved of God? How can the General Assembly now allow what Scripture plainly condemns?

The answer is that the Articles of 1900 and 1921 were framed *so as to permit compromise*. True, at those dates, no one considered the possibility of homosexual preachers and pastors, but a door was opened which would make even that possible. It had to do with the seemingly innocent use of the word ‘contained’. The faith to be upheld, said the Article, is in ‘the Word of God which is *contained* in the Scriptures’. But ‘contained’ can mean two things. When you are carrying home a bag of shopping, you may tell me that it contains potatoes. You may mean that you are only carrying potatoes, or, perhaps, potatoes along with some other items. The promoters of the New Apologetic deliberately made use of this ambiguity.

It may sound uncharitable to suggest that an evasion was deliberately allowed by Article 1 of the Church of Scotland in 1929, but the evidence appears incontrovertible. The use of ‘contain’ in the broad sense was in wide use well before that date. In the 1890s, J. C. Ryle protested against the introduction of the ambiguous use of the word, saying, ‘I hold that the Scripture not only *contains* the Word of God, but *is* the Word of God.’³¹ At the same period, a Free Church promoter of the New Apologetic spoke in the language to which Ryle objected when he said: ‘The Bible contains the Word of God; it records a revelation which came from him; its inspiration is the highest of all literature.’³² This sounds like praise of the Bible, but the writer was by no means asserting the trustworthiness of *all* Scripture. His teaching showed that his words were an evasion.

As this sense of ‘contained’ was common knowledge before 1929, is it believable that the Church of Scotland would choose to speak of ‘the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures’ if it did not mean to allow the legitimacy of the broad usage?

But the evidence goes beyond supposition. Article 1 *had to be drawn up* in language permitting the ambiguous usage of ‘contained’ because numbers of the leaders and teachers in the United Free Church, with which the Church of Scotland wanted to unite, openly rejected the older belief. Both in the Free Church (after 1881), and then in the United Free Church, none was silenced for denying the inerrancy of Scripture. When, as already mentioned, a charge was brought against G. A. Smith on those grounds in 1902, he was exonerated, and it was those who brought the charge who were criticized. In the words of one of the United Free Church’s most popular professors, James Denney, ‘when an unlearned piety swears by verbal, even by literal, inspiration’ it ‘takes up an attitude to mere documents which in principle is fatal to Christianity’.³³ After 1902 there were

³¹ J. C. Ryle, on ‘Inspiration’ in *Old Paths* (1898; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2013), pp. 17-18.

³² Quoted by B. B. Warfield in ‘Evading the Supernatural’, *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), vol. 2, p. 681.

³³ James Denney, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (5th ed., London: Hodder & Stoughton, nd.), p. 126. He held not the infallibility of Scripture but of Christian experience. It is to his credit that when a Confession of Faith committee, on which he served, wanted to present what looked like the old and untenable (as he believed) view of the Bible, he called their motion ‘two faced’ and ‘equivocal’. See James M. Gordon, *James Denney* (1856-1917) (Milton

no further attempts in the United Free Church to uphold the Confession's position on Scripture.

The plain fact is that the Union of 1929 could not have been effected without wording that permitted compromise over the authority of Scripture. So when the Church of Scotland sanctioned the appointment of a homosexual minister in 2009, to the question how could this be in the light of Article 1, there was a ready answer, 'Oh, the Bible contains error as well as the Word of God! The Church never undertook to uphold *all* Scripture as the Word of God.'

It may be objected that this response cannot be justified from the wording of Article 1, because that Article, quoted above, also 'avows the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith ... contained in its own Confession', and surely the inspiration of Scripture is a fundamental doctrine of the Westminster Confession. Therefore it has to be part of the faith which the church is committed to uphold.

To this there have been two answers. First, it was not accepted by the advocates of the New Apologetic that the Westminster divines professed belief in the inerrancy of Scripture. It strains charity to believe that this was their sincere understanding of the Confession, for the Confession clearly teaches that Scripture is God-given truth *written*: 'it pleased the Lord for the better propagating of the truth ... to commit the same wholly unto writing, which maketh the holy scripture to be most necessary' (1:1). Again, in the Shorter Catechism, Q. 2: 'The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.' This is the *only rule* of faith and practice. Simpson in his *Life of Rainy* admits that 'the verbal inspiration of the Bible had remained unchallenged in the Scottish Church since the Reformation', yet, oddly, he wanted to deny that the belief is in the Confession which came from that Reformation.³⁴

Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), p. 136. Denney's decline from historic Christianity did not stop at his doctrine of Scripture. See the words of his editor and friend, William Robertson Nicoll, over his concern that Denney, in 1908, was apparently ready to allow Arians and Unitarians into the ministry of the Church. Nicoll commented, 'I know quite well what the end of such a Church would be, for all history points it out.' T. H. Darlow, *William Robertson Nicoll, Life and Letters* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), p. 364, 'Religion died under their teaching' (*Ibid.*, p. 362). For the disintegration of Denney's teaching on the atonement, see C. Wistar Hodge, *Princeton Theological Review*, October 1918, p. 626.

³⁴ *Rainy*, vol. 1, p. 311. For detailed examination of this subject, see 'The Westminster Doctrine of Holy Scripture', in B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster*

Yet, supposing that the Confession does teach the trustworthiness of all Scripture, does it follow that it is one of the ‘fundamental doctrines’? The framers of the Articles of 1929 had a built-in escape to avoid that conclusion. It had come down from the pre-1900 Free Church where Rainy popularized the principle that the church has the authority to determine its own faith, to decide what are ‘fundamental doctrines’ and what are not.³⁵ This principle was implicit in the changed wording, already noted, of 1900, which no longer committed ministers to ‘the whole doctrine of the Confession of Faith’, but to ‘the doctrine of this Church set forth in the Confession of Faith’. The significance of this was expanded in the Articles of 1921, carried into the Union of 1929. These left it free for the church to decide how the Confession should be interpreted and what was ‘fundamental’. ‘This Church has the inherent right’, Article 5 reads, ‘to declare the sense in which it understands its Confession of Faith, to modify the forms of expression therein, or to formulate other doctrinal statements ... but always in agreement with the Word of God, and the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith

Assembly and Its Work (New York: Oxford, 1931). Simpson, disciple of Marcus Dods, claimed that the Confession did not teach the inerrancy of Scripture, rather it ‘carefully avoids committing itself to any theory of the mode or degree of inspiration’, *Rainy*, vol. 2, p. 114. But this was a subterfuge. Scripture’s own claim to infallibility does not rest on questions of the ‘mode’ of inspiration, just as our believing that Christ spoke ‘the words which the Father gave him’ does not depend on our knowing the manner of that giving. There was much prevarication in the Free Church of the 1890s on Scripture. A deliverance of the General Assembly affirmed ‘their full and steadfast adherence to the doctrine laid down in the Confession as to the great truths of the inspiration, infallible truth, and Divine authority of Holy Scripture’, yet James Denney was applauded when he said, ‘for verbal inspiration he cared not a straw’, and the Assembly refused an amendment stating that the Bible ‘as originally given, contained no error or mis-statement, either of fact or doctrine, in any part of it’. See M. Macaskill, *The New Theology in the Free Church* (Edinburgh: Hunter, 1892). It would have been more honest to argue, as was later done, that the Westminster divines’ understanding of Scripture was due to their lack of ‘modern scholarship’. But such an admission would have put the advocates of change in collision with the Confession they had vowed to maintain. Yet by this date some of the leaders had ceased to avoid a collision. A. B. Bruce was already in print saying, ‘What we do with our creeds has become, for all our churches, a burning question. That these creeds, centuries old, no longer express perfectly, or even approximately, the living faith of the church, is being frankly acknowledged on every side.’ A statement deplored by Spurgeon in commenting on Bruce’s *The Kingdom of God* (see *The Sword and the Trowel*, 1889, p. 660). James Gordon gives documentation for his statement that James Denney ‘viewed the Westminster Confession as a “perplexity and an oppression”’. *James Denney*, pp. 174-5.

³⁵ See *Rainy*, vol. 2, pp. 123, 130.

contained in the said Confession, of which agreement *the Church shall be sole judge*' (italics added). Article 8 claims the same right for the church to 'modify or add to' its Articles, 'but always consistently with the provisions of the first Article'. Given the ambiguity present in Article 1, the proviso contains no safeguard at all. The upshot of the matter is that *the church may determine that the plenary inspiration is not fundamental*, or even that it is not part of 'the Word of God'. Here the door was opened wide enough to permit the church to uphold homosexuality.

In brief, I have sought to show that a change in the creedal basis of the churches of Scotland was being introduced in language by no means straightforward. Yet the change was momentous. Orthodoxy would no longer mean believing the Bible but believing whatever the church tells its people to believe. The claim of Article 1 of the church adhering to the Scottish Reformation was false. It had been a primary object of the Reformation to overthrow the belief that the church is the rule of faith. The whole Reformation conflict had to do with the reassertion of Scripture against human authority in the spiritual realm. Yet in justification of the church's right to revise her own faith, the example of the reformers was pleaded. The Scots Confession of 1560 worked on a contrary principle, stating its readiness to accept any revision of its statements, not by the decision of a church, but if anyone will note anything 'repugnant to Scripture'. Scripture *alone* was authoritative in determining faith. In the words of the Westminster Confession which Article 1 professed to follow:

The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined ... can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture (1:10).

All synods or councils, since the Apostolic times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice; but to be used as a help in both (31:3).

The outcome of the changed basis of faith was an inclusivist church, with a radically different ministry. Within a hundred years the Scottish Church was permitting the *opposite* of what had once been held to be fundamental.³⁶ With reference to the mid-nineteenth century, Robertson

³⁶ There were those who continued in the remnant of the Free Church who saw the danger. Alexander Stewart and J. Kennedy Cameron wrote of the United

Nicoll wrote, ‘Any Free Church minister who asserted the existence of errors in the Bible would have been summarily deposed.’ Yet before the end of the following century a Church of Scotland minister, Peter Cameron, could say of his colleagues, ‘very few of them believe in the literal truth and inerrancy of the Bible’. Appointed Principal of St Andrew’s College, Sydney, in 1991 – where the principal had to be a member of the Presbyterian Church – Dr Cameron believed himself free to assert that Paul was ‘wrong’, and that the words attributed to Christ in Matthew 23 were ‘a masterpiece of vituperation’ and not the words of Jesus at all. He was astonished when the Presbyterian Church of Australia made his rejection of inerrancy grounds for a heresy charge. He wanted to know, ‘If the Westminster Confession of Faith does require a Fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible, how is it that so many Presbyterian Churches outside Australia manage *both* to have a majority of non-Fundamentalist ministers *and* to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith?’³⁷

I believe I have provided an answer to that question above. It may not have been heralded in 1929, but the Union of that year allowed an amalgamation of truth and error. In the contemporary words of the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, John Chalmers, ‘I have no doubt that the modern day Church of Scotland, carefully carved out by the architects of the 1929 Union, was designed to be a broad church holding together the wide range of theological ferment that filled the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.’³⁸

* * * * *

Free Church revised Articles: ‘In seasons of spiritual quickening, when the edge of loyalty is keen, and the investigation of truth is regulated by the spirit of reverence, “the living faith of the Church” may doubtless be accepted as a reliable guide with regard to questions of creed. But in times of critical unsettlement and spiritual decadence the consequences are likely to be disastrous.’ *The Free Church of Scotland, A Vindication* (Edinburgh: Hodge, 1910), p. 123.

³⁷ Peter Cameron, *Heretic* (Sydney: Doubleday, 1994), p. 117. The case against Cameron being carried in his presbytery and by the General Assembly of New South Wales; he appealed to the General Assembly of Australia but then chose to resign before it met. He had entered the ministry ‘to explore the possibilities of a god’. Now he believed it was ‘not the purpose of either the Bible or of Christianity to offer certainties’, but he was certain that ‘the God of Fundamentalism does not exist’ (pp. 200-1).

³⁸ ‘We Are on the Same Team.’ *Life and Work*, the magazine of the Church of Scotland, March 2015, p. 19.

As an example of how ambivalent language on Scripture was used on the mission fields, I would instance what happened on the island of Tangoa, part of the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), in the South Pacific, on 1 July 1948. That date saw the Presbyterian Church of the New Hebrides gaining independence from the oversight of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. For a century the islands of the New Hebrides had been evangelized by faithful Bible-believing missionaries (Scots Presbyterians), aided by the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. But with the passing of years, the New Zealand church (under direct influence from Scotland) turned liberal, while the native Christians of the New Hebrides continued to hold to the Bible. This led to an incident on 1 July 1948 which threatened the granting of independence by the senior body. The New Zealand church ordered that the churches of the New Hebrides would only be granted their independence on condition that their new constitution had the words, ‘the Scriptures which contain the Word of God’.

The native Christians did not understand the ambiguity which the word deliberately allowed, and when one missionary, J. Graham Miller, himself a New Zealander, protested that the wording ought to be, ‘the Scriptures which are the Word of God’, he was overruled. Miller was a strong, athletic man, but that day for the first and last time in his life, he broke down in public under the stress of the emotion. However, he was a Christian greatly revered by the local believers, and the next year, when he was the first Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of the New Hebrides, he moved in the General Assembly that the church change its statement of faith to remove the words ‘contained in’. He was not commonly a man to use visual aids on such occasions, but at this crucial moment he did. The native Christians had to understand what the difference meant. So he had brought with him a disused and worn-out Bible. As he stated his case, he held this Bible up before the Assembly, and proceeded slowly and solemnly to tear out a page here and a page there, explaining as he did so that this was what ‘contained in’ meant. The native Christians saw something they were not to forget, and in 1949 their young church was brought back to the historic Christian belief in all Scripture as the word of God.³⁹

³⁹ *A Day's March Nearer Home: Autobiography of J. Graham Miller* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010) pp. 96-100.

Our response

1. *A serious mistake is made when as evangelicals we do not draw a definite line between those who uphold the authority of all Scripture, and those who do not.* In Britain in the last century a faithful stand by the Inter-Varsity Fellowship kept this line firm in the student world, despite much opposition. But, then, when evangelical students went into denominations where the inerrancy of Scripture was dismissed and treated as a closed question, they found themselves pressurized to be silent. A hearing might be given on other subjects but not on this.

Dr J. I. Packer makes an insightful comment on failure in Britain on this point. He writes that in the on-going North American debate between evangelicals and liberals, many evangelicals

took the name ‘fundamentalists’ as a badge of honour, signifying their stand for Christian fundamentals, biblical inerrancy was from the first made the touchstone more directly and explicitly than was ever the case in parallel debates in Britain. This, I now think (I did not always think so), argues for clear sightedness in the New World, for without inerrancy the structure of biblical authority as evangelicals conceive it collapses.⁴⁰

It seems to me that this statement puts Packer in principle close to the words of Lloyd-Jones: ‘There is a call today to separation. It is the only distinction in the Church which I recognize at all: those who submit to the Word of God, and its revelation, and its teaching, and those who do not.’⁴¹

The evidence is that when debate is engaged on church issues between parties which do not share in a common recognition of the rule of Scripture much time is lost and nothing gained.

2. *On the relationship between Christian unity, denominational membership, and commitment to Scripture, a distinction needs to be made.* The position of ministers and church members at this point is not identical. The case against Scripture described above was largely led by men who were public teachers and preachers of Christianity. ‘By their fruits ye shall know them’ (Matt. 7:20). They brought the opposite of what they promised, in the words of Machen, ‘a movement which is

⁴⁰ J. I. Packer, *Truth & Power, The Place of the Bible in Christian Life* (Guildford, Surrey: Eagle, 1996), p. 91.

⁴¹ *Revival* (Westchester, Ill: Crossway, 1988) p. 152.

anti-Christian to the core.⁴² The Christian response to such false teachers ought to be clear, they should not be heard or received (John 10:8; 2 John 9-10). ‘Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness’ (Eph. 5:11). But this is not to say that all who hesitate over the plenary inspiration of Scripture are to be treated as non-Christians. There is a difference between hesitancy and hostility. There are those who have surrendered their lives to Christ and yet been affected by liberal teaching on Scripture. To such Machen refers in his words, ‘There is sometimes a salutary lack of logic which prevents the whole of a man’s faith being destroyed when he has given up a part.’⁴³

While this is true, and a narrowness in Christian fellowship is to be avoided as much as a false broadness, it is not an argument for the toleration of *teachers*. No one should be recognized as sent by Christ to preach who does not believe with him that ‘Scripture cannot be broken’.

3. *History provides us with a very humbling view of our common human nature.* How weak we are! How fallible the opinions of the ablest of men! Yet how easily trust is put in men, and Christ’s warning to ‘Beware of men’ is neglected. Whole generations have been led astray by the persuasive, attractive personalities of men, and sometimes women, who promise great things and yet lead many away from godliness and truth. ‘Let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.’

4. *The demonic dimension should make it clear that we need the supernatural to fight against the supernatural.* Of necessity, ‘the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power’ (1 Cor. 4:20). Only superior spiritual power can attain success in a warfare which is ‘not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world’. Hence the nature of the weapons: ‘Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God’ (Eph. 6:12-17). It is not with opinions or words, or doctrines alone, that we can resist the devil. The fate of the Jews we read of in Ephesus is a salutary lesson for all times. Luke says, they ‘took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom

⁴² *Christianity and Liberalism* (repr. 1997, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), p. 178. This has to remain one of the most important books of all times.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 172-3.

Paul preaches.’ But ‘the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you? And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them, and overcame them’ (Acts 19:13-16).

It is surprising today when paganism increases, and interest in magic is fashionable, that not many seem interested in thinking how the early church survived and overcame through three centuries of persecution. Certainly there were apologists who spoke for Christianity, but the main battle was not on the intellectual level. The victory came through the moral power of the gospel, transforming lives, and breaking into darkness. Today we have much for which to be thankful. There has been some recovery of preaching and of biblical truth. *But these alone are not enough.* Our greatest want may be our lack of a deeper sense of need, and a clearer recognition of ‘Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory’.

We need more prayer, more humility, and more devotion to Scripture. God has promised: ‘To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word’ (Isa. 66:2). This is where every spiritual advance begins. The turning points of history have been when Christians so loved the word of God and the souls of men that they were ready to lay down their lives for Christ.

I urge young men to guard your time well. It will be all too short. Let nothing distract you from that apostolic resolution, ‘We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word’ (Acts 6:4). I commend to you the resolution of John Wesley,

I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I want to know one thing: the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach that way; for this very end he came down from heaven. He has written it down in a book! O give me that book! At any price, Give me the Book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be, ‘a man of one book’.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Preface to *Sermons on Several Occasions* (London: 1825), p. vii.

Note from C. H. Spurgeon on the Free Church of Scotland

For the Free Church of Scotland Spurgeon had high regard. He commended her best authors and published reviews of the biographies of her leaders. But the theological change which he saw among the professors in that denomination in the late 1880s therefore filled him with concern. On G. A. Smith's commentary on Isaiah he noted, 'Mr Adam Smith has, in somewhat veiled language, taken away from the Holy Scripture the inspiration which is the foundation of our faith. We are too grieved to say more about his learned book' (*Sword & Trowel*, 1889, p. 291).

In a leading article of that same year, Spurgeon wrote:

The Free Church of Scotland must, unhappily, be for the moment regarded as rushing to the front with its new theology, which is no theology, but an opposition to the Word of the Lord. The Church in which we all gloried, as sound in the faith, and full of the martyrs' spirit, has entrusted the training of its future ministers to two professors who hold other doctrines than those of its Confession. This is the most suicidal act that a church can commit. It is strange that two gentlemen, who are seeking for something newer and better than the old faith, should condescend to accept a position which implies their agreement with the ancient doctrines of the church. In the Free Church there is a Confession, and there are means for carrying out discipline; but these will be worth nothing without the personal action of all the faithful in that community. Every man who keeps aloof from the struggle for the sake of peace, will have the blood of souls upon his head. The question in debate at the Disruption was secondary compared with that which is now at issue. It is *Bible or no Bible, Atonement or no Atonement* which we have now to settle ... From the exceeding boldness of Messrs. Bruce and Dods, we gather that they feel perfectly safe in ventilating their opinions. They evidently reckon upon a majority which will secure their immunity; and our fear is that they will actually gain what they expect. Unless the whole church shall awake to its duty, the Evangelicals in the Free Church are doomed to see another reign of Moderatism (*Sword & Trowel*, 1889, p. 634).

Pray for Scotland

In the nineteenth century some 80% of the people of Scotland had connections with the Presbyterian churches. Then Scotland became caught up in the movement which encircled the English-speaking world and established disbelief in the Bible as the word of God. In 2009 the move away from Scripture led to a major crisis in the national Church of Scotland, when the General Assembly allowed the appointment of a homosexual minister to a congregation in Aberdeen. The issue crystallised into the question whether ministers in ‘civil partnerships’ should serve local churches where that is the will of the kirk session. When the question was referred to all presbyteries in 2014, 32 out of 45 presbyteries answered in the affirmative. The decision was then finalised at the May 2015 Assembly by a vote of 309 to 182. The next step for the promoters of this change is to secure recognition (already implied in the legislation now passed) that the single-sex relationship is the same as marriage, and therefore single-sex marriages should be performed in churches.

Several things are clear about this division: a majority party believe that Christian teachers are free to contradict Scripture. This same party is at some pains to prevent a major exit of Christians from the Church of Scotland, to minimise fears, and to represent as insignificant the number for whom this is a step too far. It is said that out of some 1,400 congregations only one has now left, which is a very misleading statement. Numbers have left and there is an even larger number still in the church but out of sympathy with what has been done. If the voting at presbytery level had been in terms of the votes of individual members, the figure would have been 1,391 (54.6%) in favour, and 1,153 (45.4%) against. The issue is on-going and we hope that this article will have wide circulation. The underlying issues are world-wide.

* * * * *

© The Banner of Truth Trust 2015

First published in *The Banner of Truth*, No. 623-624 (Aug-Sep 2015).

This article may be freely printed and distributed.

The Banner of Truth Trust

3 Murrayfield Road, Edinburgh EH12 6EL, United Kingdom

* * * * *