

*Special Study*Some Contemporary Attitudes Toward the Biblical
Doctrine of the Word of God

I recently heard a lecture by J. V. Langmead Casserley in which he raised the four fundamental problems in the contemporary analytic attack on the possibility of a rational religious discourse (since Kant, Hume, the Vienna Circle, Wittgenstein, Austin, Ayer, and all the creative spirits in contemporary Logic of Science). The four questions were—(1) What is Revelation?; (2) Is God knowable?; (3) What is the relation of the knowledge of God to knowledge in the sciences and other academic disciplines?; (4) Does religious language express truth? This line of thought has had many progenitors and many set backs but it is now the predominate Anglo-Saxon Philosophical position. In order to better appreciate the issues involved, let us provide a brief historical perspective.

Nathan Söderblom took the initial steps in his *Gifford Lectures, The Living God* which blazed the trail for those who thought that propositional-revelation had become an untenable thesis. He laid the ground work for the contemporary attitude that extra-biblical revelation exists and continues to this hour. Söderblom did this by developing Justin Martyr's *logos spermatikos* idea. William Temple, in his *Nature, Man, and God*, develops the lethal distinction between Revelation and the proposition which speaks of revelation. Martin Buber's emphatic epistemology is utilized by practically every protestant theologian who has written on the subject of revelation. John Baillie, Emil Brunner, *et al.*, recognize their debt to the Jewish Existentialist - Buber. Dr. Austin Farrer declares in his *The Glass of Vision* - "We now recognize that the propositions on the Scriptural page expresses the response of human witnesses to divine events, not a miraculous divine dictation." (p. 36f).

The profound and prodigious efforts of Barth, Tillich, Berdyaev, *et al.*, are efforts to work out a theory of revelation, once propositional revelation is repudiated in the name of scientific logic and the supposed demonstrations by way of a scientific study, that the Bible is a fallible record of human response to the original revelation which came in the person of Christ, and is therefore personal encounter of subject to subject, and not propositional information about God. But the revelation is God himself, not information about Him mediated through the words

and sentences of a book—the Bible (which provides true affirmation about the will and purpose of God in Christ). God is therefore not available to discursive reason! This contemporary attitude would not be too difficult to handle, if it were not for the persistent assertions by contemporary theologians, that this is the biblical view of revelation.¹

We hear and read much of the thesis that God reveals Himself in *acts* and *events* and not by *words* and *propositions*.

We must pass by any discussion of the Hebrew and Greek vocabulary for truth, knowledge, faith (e.g., or as in the case of the Hebrew *ēmana* which means truth, faith, and trust). Martin Buber's *Two Types of Faith* tries to show that the Old Testament understanding of Faith was trust and that the New Testament presents a Christianized Greek-view. The most serious flaw in Buber's thesis is that it is not correct, either for the Hebrew or New Testament views. The biblical view does entail trust, but trust based on evidence which is the ground of the faith and not merely an irrational trust. Under this circumstance, there would be no justification for trusting in God any more than in man or some non-Christian religious object, etc.

Any adequate analysis of the biblical doctrine of revelation would necessitate that we understand the nature of Language (Linguistics and Semantics) and its relationship to *thought* and *reality*, if there is to be any extensive impact made on our generation on behalf of Christ. The very best Evangelical Literature (Henry, Carnell, Ramm, *et al.*) is seriously deficient in light of the problems raised by rejection of the total Christian perspective, which alone makes sense of *The Restoration Movement* and *The Plea* to restore biblical Christianity. Many misunderstand the relationship of words and propositions to the content of revelation. Even well meaning N.T. Christians and others of Evangelical persuasions believe that this line of reasoning makes the Bible and not Jesus, etc., the revelation of God. We cannot state too often that all we know of Christ and the will and purpose of God for time and eternity depends on the nature of the record which bears witness to Him. The New Testament does declare that Jesus is the final revelation, but

1. Martin Buber's "Emphatic Epistemology" has revolutionized contemporary Protestant Theology, which is not built upon propositional revelation but rather upon an uncognitive ineffable person to person encounter. The thesis maintains that we know "persons" differently than we know "things." Buber's classic statement if found in his *I-Thou* and *Two Types of Faith* (Jewish and Greek).

we would not have access to this information unless spirit filled men also inscribed the Word of God. The biblical doctrine of the "Word of God" is *not* exhausted in the Incarnation of the Living Word! The biblical doctrine of the Word entails the Word Incarnate, the Word Inscribed, and the Word Proclaimed, and only if we possess a propositional revelation can we correlate this trichotomy.²

There are several Hebrew terms which are translated word in our English Bibles, but the primary term is "*Dabar* means matter or affair in the sense of the thing about which one speaks. It is not true that Hebrew thought subordinates words to events. The reverse is more nearly true, particularly in the case of the Word of the Lord, for his Word determines all events, and no Word of God is void of power. Cf. Genesis 18:14; Jer. 32:17-27, in Hebrew and Septuagint with Luke 1:37. The use of *rhemata* in Luke and Acts furnishes interesting examples of the colorlessness of translating "things" where "sayings" is required by the contextual reference to the spoken word. See Luke 1:65; 2:17-19, 50, 51; Acts 5:32, 13:42."³

The Word

Jesus is the *Logos* of God in the New Testament Scriptures. The same effort to manipulate the records into saying that "Jesus" is the revelatory word and the New Testament scriptures are merely fallible-human reports about the original revelation. We must not lose sight of the fact that all we really know of Jesus Christ is contained in the biblical records. Many are still searching for the historical Christ. But he has never been lost by those of us who accept the Bible as the Word of God. If we possess only a fallible human response to original revelation which did not come in propositional form, then we have no authoritative message from God. If we have no authoritative message, then the Restoration Plea is absurd, and we are of all men most miserable.

The modern theologian speaks quite extensively of communicating the gospel, but he must first have something to convey. The church of the first century had "the Word." "The

2. Barth makes these distinctions, but cannot correlate them, because he will not permit the Bible to have the status of propositional revelation - see his *Dogmatics* and for beginners, G. C. Berkouwer's, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Eerdmans, 1956. Now in paperback.

3. Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*; Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1961, p. 26

Word was made flesh" (John 1:1-18) is the one force which can stabilize the souls of men. A vast amount has been written about the term *word* in philosophical literature. A thorough examination would find us comparing its use of Heraclitus, the Stoics, and Philo Judaeus, with the application we find made only by John. We are not concerned with its repeated use, but with the implications of its meaning as it is used by these various authors.

The term has significantly different connotations in Hebrew and Greek and Latin. This should make it plain that there is no single term adequate for an English translation. The Greek word *logos* contains two elements—"speech" and "reason." The vocal utterance plus the thought content of the utterance is synthesized into the term *logos*. As the term is used in the New Testament, it does not imply one or the other, but both. The Word made flesh is unique in context.

The Latin Christians debated over the use of three words in translating this one Greek term. They were *verbum*, *sermo*, or *ratio*; but when the Latins selected *verbum*, they deprived *logos* of half of its implications.

Philo did use the term in both senses. And he maintained this conception as he linked it with "The Word of the Lord" of the Old Testament, but the stoic implication was also present. The distinctive features of John's use imply eternal, personal, divine, and transcendent existence. John's phraseology is not found in the other gospel records. (Hebrew 4:13 where "in his sight" (*autou* - his) identified the Word of vs. 12 as personal.)

It is this "Word" that we must communicate by proclamation and dedicated lives. It must go forth in the power of the Spirit with no uncertain sound.

But thanks be to God we need not succumb to the contemporary mind nor its satanic attacks upon the Scriptures. There are no easy answers to the most serious threats to biblical Christianity in the history of the Church, but we pray that many will take up the challenge and labor in the highly technical and specialized areas of contemporary science, philosophy, and theology so that our message can be placed on the offensive instead of the defensive. The coming generation to whom many of us will preach "Christ and Him Crucified" must be challenged at the academic level where the contemporary mind and its animosity to Biblical Christianity is being forged. I pray God that we rally to the challenge - now beginning with you!

Some of the above points were delineated in the author's 1962 Missouri Christian Lectureship on the *Origin and De-*

*velopment of the Contemporary Mind and Its Significance
for Biblical Christianity.*

See the present author's very superficial treatment of the problem of Revelation in the Popular presentation— *What is Revelation*, parts 1 and 2, *The Christian Standard*, April 22 and 29, 1961; and the keen insights which are evident in the article by H. Daniel Friberg, *The Bible and Propositional Truth*, *Christianity Today*, July 5, 1963. His remarks are even more appropriate in view of the various theories of the *Proposition* and how they differ from the types of *sentences* which are under scrutiny in contemporary Logic. The following works will also be of great benefit to the serious student of this problem.

G. H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*; Presbyterian Reformed Publishing Company, Nutley, New Jersey,

G. H. Clark, *Karl Barth's Theological Method*; Presbyterian Reformed Publishing Company, Nutley, New Jersey, 1963.

H. D. MacDonald - *Ideas of Revelation: A Historical Study*, A.D. 1700 - to A.D. 1860, MacMillan Pub. Co., New York.

Note: *Problem of Education and Evangelism!*

We are not winning the world! The attitude outlined above is not merely an academic affair; it is an attitude which is rapidly permeating the mind of mass-man.

The kind of preparation we provide in our Bible Colleges should be determined by the mind of the age in which it lives. All Bible and nothing else - precludes winning the world!

Is it possible that we are preparing a ministry for a past generation? How shall we defend our Faith in view of the comprehensive, satanic attack on biblical revelation? The areas which call for immediate attention by all concerned N.T. Christians are: 1. *A Philosophy of Language* which sustains the theistic view of language which is necessary for a defense of propositional revelation. The dominate thrust in the rapidly developing field of Linguistic is naturalistic. If this view of the nature and origin of Language is correct a special revelation from God to man is impossible (we need a thorough understanding of *Semantics* - problem of meaning); 2. *A Christian View of History* (A Christian Theology of History) which understands and answers all species of naturalistic, humanistic views of history, the articulation of a Christian-theistic view of a historical fact, historical causation, problem of verifying or falsifying any given assertion about historical reality; 3. *Philosophy of science* (concepts of cause, explanation, fact, etc.) Courses in these three areas should replace the traditional apologetic materials still being taught in our Bible Colleges. The traditional courses are powerless before the contemporary mind, and do not prepare the student to defend the faith against the barrage of attacks, verbal and inscribed, coming from the pens of the contemporary critics of biblical Christianity, and its claim to a special revelation.

SECTION 65

Text 20:1-3

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time.

Initial Questions 20:1-3

1. If Christ's work on the cross actually defeated Satan and his powers of darkness, why do we read in vs. 1 that Satan is being bound for "a thousand years" (a limited period of time)?
2. Is Satan to be found with finality according to vs. 3?

The Thousand Years of Satan's Captivity
and the Martyr's Reign
Chapter 20:1-6

In this chapter men have supposedly found the biblical justification for millennial theories (see the *Special Study* after this chapter). We have just finished the section in Revelation 19:19-21 in which John's vision carried us to the end of sin dominated human history and the day of the wrath of God. It cannot be shown by merely examining the text (or any other way) that the material in the Seer of Patmos' visions are chronological. In fact, if we were entering a technical discussion, we would assert that most of the material in *The Revelation* is repetition which develops in intensity of judgment, i.e., the three series of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls of wrath. Chapter 20 is a more detailed description of the final judgment than was given in the last verses of chapter 19. We must not be led astray by the chapter and verse divisions. Basically their purpose is to show a change in the content of what is being discussed; but John wrote *The Revelation* under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and he used no such divisions. We must therefore be most careful in our evaluation of the materials. Millennial theorists assume that the materials in *The Revelation* are also chronological and this assumption enables them to claim that the imagery of chapter 20 does not reveal the same final judgment as does Rev. 19:19-21. (If available, always consult