

**THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES AND THE  
HIGHER CRITICISM**

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## THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES AND THE HIGHER CRITICISM

### I.

The great question of the age in all moral matters is the question of a spiritual authority. It is not one which occupies the order for the day, but it does constitute the problem of time. The democracy is but little conscious how much it needs it, and it is not easy to secure its discussion in the forum of the Churches. But it is their standing or falling article all the same. Some of them resent the idea of authority in any real and effective sense; some overdrive it; while others consider they possess it in the canon of Scripture. Now it is as true that the canon is not the authority as it is that without an authority beyond itself no Church can go on existing.

Why may we not say that the final authority for Church and creed is the Bible? Because there remains the question, *Is there anything that is over the Bible?* And to that question may I at once reply in advance that there is, and that:

1. It is not something which comes up to the Bible from without, like the scientific methods of historic research. To make that supreme and final would be pure rationalism. As the Higher Criticism it has its place, but it is a subordinate place.
2. It is something which is in the Bible itself, provided by it, and provided nowhere else. We must go back to the Bible to find what the Bible goes back to.

In a word, *that is over the Bible which is over the Church. It is the Gospel.* The Gospel of God's historic act of grace is the infallible power and authority over both Church and Bible. It produced them both. They both exist for its sake, and must be construed in its service. For both it is the great canon of interpretation as well as of organization, of Scripture, creed, and praxis. It was not the Church

that produced the Bible, nor the Bible that produced the Church, but it was the Gospel that produced both. It is of the greatest practical moment to realize this at present. It is our Free Church answer to a plausible claim that is urged by the Episcopal Church to be the sole authoritative teacher of the Bible, because the Church produced it at the first, and has therefore a hereditary monopoly of the *charisma veritatis*. We deny the fact behind the inference. Even were the Anglican Church the Church that selected the canon, no Church produced the Bible. Both the Bible and the Church are products of the Gospel, which we preach as purely as they do, and mostly more so. Hence no Church has the control of the Bible, but only a stewardship of it. The Bible needs no warrant from the Church, only a witness. The Gospel needs no application by the sacraments, only a fresh appropriation where it has been long applied by the Holy Ghost. Of course the Bible, on its part, must not arrest the Church, but perpetually emancipate and inspire it. Luther by the Bible delivered us from the bondage of the Church. But there are ways of treating the Bible which make us welcome the man or the movement that by the Gospel will deliver us from the Bible.

But why not say that the something which is in and over the Bible is Christ? Because it is not quite certain what is covered by that word Christ. What do you mean by Christ? Is it Christ the character, chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely, or Christ the atoning Redeemer? *What is it that is authoritative in Christ?* Not His mere manner, as it subdued those who would arrest Him. Not His far more than Socratic dignity of soul and insight. There is something in Christ which is over Him. Well, you recognize that. It was His Father. You say readily, Christ was there not for His own sake, but His Father's. Yes, but that is far from enough. What was the relation between Christ and His Father? Was it a relation of the heart alone, of affection and rapt communion, as between the simple Madonna and the Child? That is a common idea, and it enfeebles much faith. It makes Christ's piety the work of God, but does it assure us that His Gospel was? The deeply devout or the wholly devoted may be lacking in the moral insight required for a real Gospel. Was Christ's death due to the fact that He was so purely and raptly pious? Was the cross simply the revenge of the coarse Israel on the fine? Surely it took more than that to make the death of Christ Israel's crime? His piety alone would rather have made the Jews honor Him as a finer rabbi. Surely His dealing with His Father was more than devout enjoyment, more than mystic union, more than the practice of the presence of God and the culture of His own soul? The personal unity had a practical, intelligible theme, an exchange of thought, work, and purpose in relation to the historic situation. It was not His Father's *love* He realized only, it was His purpose of historic *grace*. His age-long purpose with the nation, His world-wide purpose

with our race —just as it was not the simple love of His brethren that lay on Him, but their burden, their curse. His Father gave Him not only a faith to cherish, a love to enjoy, but a vast and old design to fulfill. Christ speaks far oftener of the will and Kingdom of God than of the heart of God. He was one with a God who had been working for historic Hebrew centuries to a certain holy and public purpose. And what was over Christ was not simply the Father but the Father's holy work with Israel for the world. What ruled His word and deed was God's old historic purpose and long prophetic Gospel. The authoritative thing in Him was God's *grace*, God's holy grace. When we go to the Bible we find it is to this the Bible goes. From this its breath comes; and its soul incessantly returns to the Gospel of grace that gave it. And this is the test, the standard, the authority over the Bible.

Of course you may say that Christ *is* God's Gospel, and purpose, and grace. And that is quite right, so long as we are not speaking of the Jesus of biography, of Jesus as a personal influence merely, but of the Christ of great history, the Messiah of redemption; so long as we are not speaking of the teaching and character of Christ only but of His work, which was the crisis of His person; so long as we live and move in Christ the Redeemer; so long as we do not begin with the incarnation but end there; so long as we begin with the redemption, atonement, reconciliation, and go on to end in such an incarnation as is demanded for the purposes of that gracious Gospel and that saving God; so long as we recognize that "His work was His person in action" and His person "His work in power." God was in Christ evangelically rather than metaphysically. He was in Christ reconciling. Faith believes in an Incarnation required by the Gospel, however thought may set forth an Incarnation required by the nature of a Divine idea. To begin with such an incarnation instead of with Redemption is one of the most cardinal and prolific errors of our time, as Bishop Creighton shrewdly said.

## II.

The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. The purpose of Jesus is the purpose of history; or rather it is God's purpose with history. The Gospel of grace in Christ, the purpose, and at last the act, of redemption is the key to the Bible. It makes the Bible not a mere chronicle, not a mere set of annals, but history of the greatest kind.

By history of the greatest kind I mean this. I mean something above even what we call the greater, the philosophic history. May I explain? *What is it that raises the historian above the annalist?* Is it not that the historian makes the dumb facts speak which the annalist compiles? lie sets the facts in a whole, in a science, in a process, a

principle, which He makes them serve. He explains the facts. He turns them into "signs." How? By some principle dawning out of them upon His insight. By some deep, wide, and happy induction. His spirit moves on the face of their chaos and elicits a world. In other words, He "*places*" the facts by means of a hypothesis they suggest, a theory. Of course, if He bring His hypothesis from some other set of facts, or some other kind, and force it on the facts under His eye, He is no true historian. But He is if He elicit it from the facts He handles. But you say, a true scientific historian is surely more than a hypothesis-monger. But really He is not. Are you not depreciating the place of hypothesis in life? It has not the value, of course, of absolute knowledge, but it has the value of explaining facts, of making them serve thought. And it is corroborated by all the subsequent facts. It is therefore, surer than the facts alone; and it paves the way for more certainty. What is science but a triumphal procession of hypotheses? In every science you have such a hypothesis or axiom as the base of fresh knowledge. The great law of nature's uniformity is a vast hypothesis which has on its side the whole of our knowledge and practice. But it is not an absolute truth. So with evolution, and with all the theories which set the world forth as an order or a process. And we conduct our life and business under such well-founded hypotheses as these, though it is *possible* they might not be true tomorrow. The sun might not rise. One day it will not. Now what the physicist does for nature the historian does for society. He interprets it by hypotheses which rank often among our great certainties as to the world's course.

But no hypothesis, no law of nature or history can give us the mind of God. God alone can do that. And when He does it is not discovery of ours, but revelation of His. It is not induction, not intuition even, but manifestation, the Word of the Lord. Christ's sense of God was not a vast surmise, sublime, but provisional and superable. It was not a great divination of His, behind which we may go and ask if He divined correctly. It was not man reaching God. The movement was quite otherwise. It was God reaching man. In Christ we have the culmination of the long revealing line of Old Testament prophecy. We have in a whole permanent personality what the prophets had but in their fleeting vision and burden. We have God seeking, and finding, and saving us. God tells us, through man's word, or by His own deeds, the secret of His purpose, His deep decrees and universal will. It is a purpose, will, and work of Grace, of Love, of redemption, of Salvation. To carry home this is the object of the Bible. For this the Bible exists. From this the Bible sprang. *The place that is taken in human histories by hypothesis, theory, or law of progress is taken in the Bible by Gods action, by revelation, by the Gospel.* In the Bible we have the movement of the great lines and designs by which God treats the race and guides its total career. And

especially we have the purpose and method of a Messiah, culminating in the Redemption by Christ. It is His redemption that makes Jesus the Christ, and precious. The fact of Christ's life would be valueless (except to the historian of religion); the fact of His death would be of little moment (except to the martyrologist), apart from its function between man and God, its revealed meaning, its theological meaning, as Atonement, Redemption, Reconciliation. These values are not got at by an induction. They are not won by flesh and blood, but revealed from the Father in heaven, as Christ Himself told Peter. They are God's word to man, not man's hypothesis about God. That is a unique thing about the Bible among books. The Gospel it contains is not a result of man's divining power over intractable facts, but it is the act and power of God unto salvation. The invisible realities are not guessed, they are actually conveyed through the things that appear. The Gospel message is not a product of biblical theologians inducting from a study of religious phenomena which they found and formulated from these records. But it seizes us out of the Bible, it descends on us from the Bible as a power. It descended on the men who wrote the Bible. It was with the Church that selected the Bible. It made the Bible in that way, and in that way it makes us from out the Bible. The soul of the Bible is not a crystallization of man's divinest idea; it is not even a divine declaration of what God is in Himself; it is His revelation of what He is *for us* in actual history, what He for us has done, and forever does. It contains God's gift, not of knowledge, but of His gracious self. Revelation is futile as a mere exhibition. It is ineffectual except as Redemption. God's Word is authoritative because it is more, it is creative. It is life from the dead. Its authority does not simply stand over us either as an imperative or as an ideal. It comes as a Gospel. It comes with power to bring itself to pass in our new life. The God who rules us in Christ is not a foreign power. Theonomy is not heteronomy. He, our law, becomes also our life. He comes with something more even than authority over us, He comes with power in us. His authority is not simply impressive, it is enabling. *Dat quod jubet*. It is the power of the Spirit, not revealing alone, but redeeming us to take in the revelation. His Spirit does not seize us but lives in us. The Saviour Son is revealed in us. Christ is our life who is also our Lord. His authority is not simply an external power, but a life-giving spirit within. We are redeemed into the power to know, to be, and to do what is revealed. And both the revelation and the redemption are one and the same act.

### III.

*To apply the Gospel as the standard of the Bible is something higher than the higher criticism. It is the highest. It was by this test of the Gospel that Luther dealt so boldly with the Epistle of*



James. It was not by literary criticism, where, like His age, He was not bold. And this is the only principle which gives the higher criticism, the literary and historic criticism, its true place. The Church will never give that criticism its rights till she feels she is not at its mercy, till she is set free to do so by her Gospel. You cannot secure freedom from a state or a Church in a panic. And panic is the state of mind produced by scientific criticism, especially on people who have long been putting the Bible narrative in the place which belongs only to the Bible Gospel. The critical treatment of the Bible must have its place. Let us not make fools of ourselves by denying it. We shall be fighting against God and resisting the spirit. It arises out of the sound principle of interpreting the Bible by itself. *Scriptura sui ipsius iudex et interpres* was the Reformer's maxim. But its place is secondary, ancillary. It has little place in a pulpit. Criticism is the handmaid of the Gospel—downstairs. The critical study of Scripture is at its best, and the higher criticism is at its highest, when it passes from being analytic and becomes synthetic. And the synthetic principle in the Bible is the Gospel. The analysis of the Bible must serve the history of grace. The synthetic critic is not the scholar but the theologian. The Book is a witness not of man's historical religion, but of God's historical redemption. It is not so much a record as a testimony. "Search the Scriptures. Ye do well. They testify of Me," not, record Me, not, report Me, not, evidence Me, but testify of Me, preach Me, present me as the Gospel. *The Bible is at its highest as the preacher.* And it does not preach itself, or its inerrancy, but the grace of God. It contains in this Gospel its own supreme principle of criticism and interpretation. The Church is the true interpreter of the Bible if it let the Bible interpret itself. And for this purpose it repudiates the modern mind, no less than the tradition of the Church, as its final court. The Bible comes to its own in the Gospel which made it what it is. This Gospel survives all our critical readjustments of the process by which it came. Indeed, it emerges the more clearly from many of these reconstructions. The critics have restored the prophets, for instance, to the service of the Gospel as well as to the interest of the Church. And they have inflicted eternal death on books like Keith and Newton, which made prophecy historical conundrums. But the Gospel is not at the mercy of scientific criticism, because the Bible is not a mere document. It is a sacrament. It is more than a message of grace, it is a "means of grace." It is more than a source of information, it is an agent of saving experience. It is the former only as it becomes the latter. That is to say, it is to faith rather than to research that its facts become certainties. What Christ did for us becomes sure by what He does in us. And *it is vain to try and establish the Bible's real value by historical canons without realising the experience of its grace.*

Our moral need cannot wait for our historical critics. *The Bible is*

*not merely a record of the revelation; it is part of the revelation.* It is not a quarry for the historian, but a fountain for the soul. Its first work is not a vouch for the fact of Jesus. As a voucher of that kind its value is secondary. We have nothing written by Jesus, nothing with absolute certainty written by an eye-witness of Jesus. In strict history Paul is nearer and clearer than Christ; but Christ is the greater certainty to us none the less. Nor is the Bible's first work to reflect the first Church. The New Testament, the Epistles of Paul, are not a set of ideas or sentiments stirred in certain minds by the historic contemplation of Christ, the mere reflection of Christ mirrored in the shining consciousness of those nearest Him. It is not adequate to say that in the New Testament we have the impression made by Christ upon the first Church. We have that, but we have more. We have Christ continuing to teach, and lead, and save. We have a finished Redemption, energizing as Revelation. We have the heavenly Christ revealing Himself to and through the first Church of the redeemed. Indeed, I would rather say through the first apostles. For they were not the representatives of the Church; they did not owe their place to its consent; nor were they its organs so much as Christ's organs to it. *That theory of impression is not the true full nature of inspiration.* The whole of the New Testament is a continuation of prophecy. It is the last of the prophets. It is not a document, but an appeal. It is a mighty sermon on Christ, not an image of Him, not a disquisition on Him. Doubtless Christ is the center. He is the fact. But the New Testament did not come into evidence to guarantee that fact to rigid inquiry. It is not an arsenal of Christian evidences. In that case the testimony would have been more careful. And then also the historic sense would take faith's place, and the historical experts would be the true Christian priesthood. The New Testament, like the Old Testament, is history with a purpose, a bias. It has in it not only reliable historical matter, but also the principle for construing it. It has the bias of the will to save and not only the will to believe. And it has the bias not only of the will to believe, but of the belief that wills, that urges itself, that acts from the will upon the evidence in a selective way, and forces it on mankind.

#### IV.

Christ came for something else than to be a statuesque fact, or even a teacher of supreme religious genius and personal influence. *It is not the fact but the meaning of the fact that matters.* He came for a practical crucial *purpose*, historic and divine. He is valuable, not like a work of art for what He is, but for what He means as God's gift. Indeed, He is precious not for what He means even, but for what He did in God's name. Nay, when we see this, when we realize that we have in Christ the manifestation of God's love, or its work, that is not

the whole of the revelation. *The manifestation, the work even, needs exposition.* The deed needs to be carried home. The God in Christ needs a prophet. God's son Jesus needed prophets, as God's son Israel needed prophets, to expound His divine meaning and purpose. The incarnation of God's love is too strange, original and incredible; it needs to be interpreted by inspiration. Otherwise it would have been missed (as the disciples during all Christ's life did miss it) and been lost. We do not call Christ Himself inspired. That is a term too poor for Him. Those were inspired in whom His Spirit dwelt, His work went on, and His purpose wrought. The Christ needs the apostle, the preacher. The Mediator upwards needs mediators downwards. For reasons I have gone into elsewhere, the divine doer of the divine work was somewhat reserved about the nature of that work. The task itself engrossed Him. He could not talk much about it. The Gospel He brought needed to become vocal by transmission through another experience as its prophet. And that other was the New Testament. *It is the inspired part of the revelation of which Christ was the incarnate redeeming agent.* It is not a direct document of Christ's biography, but of Christ's Gospel, of Christ as preached. *It is a direct record, a precipitate if you will, not of Christ, but of the preaching about Christ which made the Church.* It is of decisive consequence to realize this. *The Bible is not a voucher but a preacher.* The tradition of Christ we owe to a company of preachers, not to a jury of historians. The very Gospels are not biographies so much as pamphlets in the service of the Church and the interest of the Gospel. The only historical Christ which even the Gospels allow us to see is not a great figure Boswellized, but the *preached* Christ, the risen Messiah of the apostolic inspiration and the Church's first belief.\* The Bible is more of a sermon than of a source in the rigid historical sense of that word.

The story was history with a drift, seeking a verdict; it was history made preacher. Something else than sequence guided the selection of incidents. *It is a story on a theme, a story with a purpose.* It is inferior as art but mighty as action. The writers are evangelists in the sense of Gospellers. "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is Messiah, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (John 20:31). The object is life, not proof. These Gospels are homiletic biographies, not psychological. They were not compiled on what we should call critical principles, but on evangelical principles—to assist the Gospel. The evangelist with His narrative was but an acolyte of the apostle with His Gospel. It is

\* The Gospels (I keep saying) are not primary documents proceeding from Christ's hand. Nor can we be quite sure how far they come directly from apostles or even eye-witnesses. But I am referred to the preface of Luke. But it will be remembered that the author Himself describes Luke in the preface to Acts as a treatise. Luke founded His account on sources but He is not Himself a source in the same sense as His materials were. What He wrote is not a source but a history. He selected from sources on a certain principle, and treated them from a certain point of view—the view point of the risen, exalted, preached Christ as Saviour.

only thus that we can explain the fact that no apostle wrote a Gospel, with the possible exception of John, who wrote expressly for a theology. They were too much absorbed in the Gospel to write Gospels for what they deemed but a short-lived world.

## V.

The New Testament, then, is a record not directly of Christ but of the thing preached about Christ by those whose preaching made the Church; and made historic Christianity. *You can of course say, if you like, that they misapprehended Christ*, that, led by the rabbinic Paul, they squeezed Him into Jewish molds, and lost the real human, saintly Christ in a theological. You can say that, but what means have you to prove it? You are entirely dependent on the apostolic, the Evangelical, the large Pauline version of Christ, whether in Gospel or Epistle. Paul preached what He had from the text He received from the Church, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." That links His Gospel both to the other apostles and to the Old Testament. Every one of the Gospels is written in that interest of saving grace. What they go into is not a character, not an ethic, nor a dogma, but a Saviour. Whether you think they agree in every point with the Epistles or not, they are there not as mere memorabilia for the curious but as edification for the converted, not to save but to confirm the saved. They all set forth not a humanist Christ, sweet, sage, and influential, but one whose main and crowning function was to die for our sins according to older Scriptures. Is it not a most singular thing that there is no indication in the whole New Testament of an apostolic sermon with a saying of Christ for a text? And the kingdom, which fills the Gospels, does not appear in the epistles. What does that mean? It means that the form and particulars of Christ's precious teaching were not the staple of their message, not its starting point. These precious details were all fused up in the still more precious Gospel in which Christ Himself culminated through the cross.

Consider: *What were the apostles working with before there was a New Testament and while they were making the Church?* It was with a message, a Gospel, fact and act of God through Christ, an achieved deliverance, a historic redemption, crowning the long series of revelations and deliverances which were at once the salvation and the perdition of Israel. What was the great appalling thing revealed to Paul in His conversion? Not the miracle of a dead prophet's resuscitation. Not the idea of Redemption. That had long been the common burthen of Israel, and it was the source of all His zealotry. Like all earnest Jews He was waiting for that consolation of Israel. But it was this that staggered Him—that the Redemption was come and gone. It was past and at work. That was for Paul "the power of Christ's

“Resurrection,” the tremendous shattering, re-creating effect of it. The great thing to be done was already done. God’s Redemption was not a hope now but a fact—and a damnation. The Christians had a Gospel and not a propaganda, not a program, not a movement—merely a mighty Gospel. They had no book but the Old Testament, no system of doctrine, no institution. All these were to be made. What they had was what they called the *Κήρυγμα*, with all its foolishness (1 Cor. 1:21, where we hear of the scandal of the cross, the absurdity of what was preached, not of preaching as an institution). *The Gospel was an experienced fact, a free and living word long before it was a fixed and written word.* This is the manner of revelation. The inspired thing is not a book but a man. It was so first of all in the Old Testament. The prophets also first experienced their Gospel, then spoke or acted it. Only as an afterthought did they write it. The written form might be but a collection of their edited remains. The New Testament was the unfolding of this Gospel; but it was an unfolding due to the free growth and power of God’s saving act in the experience of certain men, and not to their examination of it and their conclusions. They were made by it rather than convinced. They were not students, critics of the Gospel, but its glorious captives and alert hierophants. The Gospel prolonged itself in them. That was the spirit’s work. It was only at the call of certain providential junctures that what saved them made them write. It was “occasional” writing. It was not due to an academic resolution to discuss or celebrate what saved them. They did not “demonstrate.” The Gospel worked in them mightily to will and do, to preach and write in a practical context. Their writing was their work running over. Christ and *His* work energized in *their* lives.

*The apostles, and especially Paul, form an essential part of Christ’s revelation of God’s grace.* He represents grace as incarnate, they as inspired. He is epic, they are lyric. The same Christ reveals in them from heaven the redemption He wrought on earth. He prolongs His own action in them. He unfolds His finished work. They make explicit His mind about His own work. And through them He reveals this revelation in a way limited on one side by their personality, but on the other released from some of the bonds and silences of His earthly humiliation. We have no evidence that the *explicit* conception by the earthly Jesus of His own work was all that appears in the epistles. It was in Paul and His fellows that its nature became explicit, as it has become still more explicit in successors of Paul, like the Reformers. It was in these that the *mind* of Jesus came to itself for us in history. It unfolded like a seed in the warm medium of the apostolic soul. It was the Lord the Spirit speaking of Himself in the Inspiration of the apostles, and speaking *to us* more directly than the Gospels do. Like the prophetic books in the Old Testament, the epistles are the authentic writings of the inspired.

They are not once removed, like the Gospels or the Old Testament histories. They are not editorial, but creative. They are evidence at first hand. They make a critical starting point, and not only a critical, but an evangelical. They give the key to the Gospels, just as the prophets in our new light form the basis for the interpretation and the evangelical interpretation of Old Testament history. *The epistles are essential, nay, normative, to the Gospels.* They are not by-products. I do not wonder that Luther laid more stress on them. Protestantism always must, for its life and Christian promise. It is not Paul who speaks, but the Christ living in Him. (We discount, of course, what is plainly contemporary in Paul, or idiosyncratic.) There is, therefore, an authority in the theology of the epistles which is in some ways greater than we have in the Gospels as Gospels, as writings, apart from the personality of Christ. There is more inspiration in a creative Paul than in a compiling evangelist. In the Gospels Christ appears as acting, in the Epistles the same Christ interprets His own action. And both the manifestation and the inspiration are necessary for the fulness of revelation as redemption, for its effect as a revelation *to us.*

We must not sharply contrast Paul and Christ. We cannot, as I have said. *All we possess is the evangelical Christ common to Paul, the other apostles, and the first Church.* We can compare the Epistles and the Gospels. Their view point is the same—the Gospel. They ply the same Christ the Saviour. But the service of the evangelists is supplementary to that of Paul. They sustain the Gospel He preaches. They, too, are preachers, but in a diaconal way. The Gospel story but serves the Gospel power, and the narrative is there to confirm the principle which the preaching reveals.

If this be so, then the most precious thing in Christ for the Church is not His life story but His deed of Gospel. It is not His teaching, not His personal influence, but His redemption. *It is a theological Gospel, but it is not authoritative as dogma, but as revelation, as redemptive action.* It is the Gospel, not in an exact theology, but in a theology of glow, and power, and range. It is this Gospel that has made the New Testament. What inspired the apostles was not Christ's legacy of teaching about God or grace; it was grace itself, as the large burden of His life, moving onward and upward to the death and resurrection which fixed Him as the Son of God in power. All this they found to be the agent of God's ancient purpose, and the gathering up for the world and for eternity of His gracious and active process of deliverance for Israel. What mastered and moved them for good and all in Christ was not mere personal affection, not appreciation of His discourse, nor the sense of His human kindness. These failed, and they left Him and fled. What was authoritative for them at last was that in His cross they came to recognize the fulfillment of the ancient promise, the culmina-

tion of the long grace and the manifold redemption which was the burthen of all Israel's history, the soul of its Scripture, and the world-purpose of its God.

## VI.

That this is the true relation of the Gospel to the Bible is shown by the case of Jesus Himself. His Bible was the Old Testament. It had more influence on Him at the center of His task than the contemporary Judaism, which affected but His form. How did He use it? That is a question that troubles some. He seems to shut the door in the face of modern scholarship by His uncritical use of the Old Testament. If He quotes the cx. Psalm as David's, criticism (it is said) cannot go behind Him. If He refers to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, the scholars may spare their pains; the question is settled for them. And so people become entangled in Christ's relation to the Old Testament as literature, and they miss His relation to the Old Testament as revelation. They commit the error of Rationalism. They put Christ at the mercy of critical considerations. They make them decisive instead of evangelical considerations. Let it be admitted that in all matters of science, literary or other, Jesus was the child of His time. He never claimed omniscience in that region. His reading of the Old Testament was certainly uncritical by the standards of our time and knowledge. In this respect He took it as He found it—like everybody round Him. It was not His knowledge that was perfect. He found God in nature, but did He escape the current belief that the sun went round the earth? He read His time as no man did, but did He know times and seasons in the sense of days and dates? Did He not leave them to the Father, content not to know, and diviner in that precious ignorance of trust than in all knowledge? It was not His knowledge that was perfect, but His judgment. And on the composition of the Old Testament He never passed a judgment. It never occurred to Him. If it had, it would not have interested Him. Historic sequences were naught to Him. What was infallible was not the views He inherited, but His grasp of the Father and the Father's purpose in Him. It was in regard to His own work and Gospel that He could not err. And no contemporary errors as to nature or the past affect the truth of His witness to God, or the power of His gracious saving work for man.

How then did Christ use His Bible? For we cannot be wrong if we use ours in the same central way. *He used it as a means of grace, not as a manual of Hebrew or other history.* His business was not to revise the story of the past or disentangle origins, but to reveal and effect the historic grace of God. He used His Bible as an organ of revelation, not of information, for religion and not science—not even for scientific religion. He found in it the long purpose and deep

scope of God's salvation, His many words and deeds of redemption in the experience of the chosen race. He cared nothing for the Bible as the expression of men's ideas of God. He prized it wholly as the revelation of God's gracious dealings with men. He cared for events only as they yielded His Father's grace. He belonged to a race which was not made like other races by an idea of God, but by God's revelations and rescues. "I am the Lord thy God that brought thee "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." He did not teach us ideas of God. He was not a sententious sage, full of wise saws or modern instances. He did not move about dropping apophthegms as He made them. He does not even tell us "God is "Love." It is an apostle that does that. But He loves the love of God into us. He reveals in act and fact a loving God.

"Sprich mir, wie redet Liebe?

"Sie redet nicht, sie liebt."

"And, tell me, what does Love say?

"Love doesn't say—it loves."

He saw the loving God in nature and in history; and within history it was not in what men thought but in what God had done. What He saw was the whole movement of the Old Testament rather than its pragmatic detail. He dwelt lovingly indeed on many a gracious passage, but He found Himself in the total witness of Israel's history as shaped by grace. *He cared little for what our scholars expound—the religion of Israel.* His work is unaffected by any theories about the Levitical sacrifices. What He lived on was God's action in His seers, God's redemption in His mighty deeds, as it rises through the religion of Israel, yea, breaks through it, shakes itself clear even of its better forms, and translates it always to a higher plane. What He found was not the prophets' thoughts of God, but God's action in Israel by prophet, priest, or king, God's invasion of them and their race by words and deeds of gracious power. It was the reality of God's action on the soul, and in the soul, and for the soul. Above all, it was the exercise and the growth of God's messianic purpose with the people, and through them on the whole race. It was in a Messianic God that He found Himself, and found Himself God's Messiah-Son. Abraham! "Before Abraham was I am." If Abraham ceased would He? And He grasped what His whole age was blind to, the Old Testament witness, deep in its spirit, to a Messiah of the cross. In a word, *the torch He carried through the Old Testament was the Gospel of Grace.* He read His Bible not critically, but religiously. He read it with the eyes of faith, not of science; and He found in it not the making of history by men, but the saving of history by God.

That is to say *He read His Bible as a whole.* For He was its whole. And He lived on its Gospel as a whole. Take the parables



for an illustration. The chief spoken revelation of God is in the parables of Christ. What is the true principle of interpreting the parables? It is to treat each as the vesture of one central idea for whose sake it is there. We refuse to be entangled in the suggestiveness of details, as if it were allegories that Christ uttered. So it is with the verbal revelation of God altogether, the Bible. All its vast variety is there for one central theme and one vital purpose, to which details may sit loose. It was so, I say, that Christ read His Scriptures. And it is only when we read the Bible in this way, as a whole, that we realize that it is not there for its own sake, or for the sake of historical knowledge, but for the sake of the evangelical purpose and work of God. We do not read our Bible as Christ did if we dissect out portions of it as the Word of God and reject portions that are not. I do not say that that is forbidden. I shall indicate later that Christ did it on points outgrown. I have no objection to part with Leviticus, Esther, and Canticles from a Gospel Canon, however valuable they may be in a Hebrew library.\* All I say is that the method of getting at the true Word of God in the Bible by dissection was not Christ's. And it is not decisive, and may be meticulous. The Bible within the Bible, the Canon of the Canon, is not to be dissected out, but to be distilled. What is most divine is not a section of it, but the spirit, the theme of it. God's great Word came less in fragments of writing than in His growing purpose through historic action and deeds of grace. The word of a prophet consisted in a kind of speech which was itself a deed, a practical revelation, relevant to the hour, of God's power, purpose, righteousness, judgment, mercy, and redemption.

## VII.

*It seems all but impossible to get out of the popular mind the idea that faith is faith in statements, and that the Bible is a compendium of truths about God, or a correct chronicle (or forecast) of history, Hebrew, Christian or cosmic. Almost all the uproar made against scientific criticism belongs to one or other of these irreligious positions. For it is irreligious to debase the Bible, the Book of Faith, to a repertory of truths, or a series of annals. It is irreligious to stake the divine value of Christ on the reality of pre-historic characters in Hebrew history, on the authorship of a Psalm, or the tracing of the atonement in Numbers. There are few perils to the Bible worse than the ill-tempered champions of late Protestant orthodoxy who pose as the monopolists and saviors of the Gospel. "A traditional Biblicism, hurled whole and harsh at the heads of those who read the Book*

\* While it may be granted that there are books in the canon that we could now spare, it ought to be owned also that there is no book known to us outside the Canon that ought to be in a Bible whose note is Redemption. We have nothing to do really with apostolic or non-apostolic distinctions, but only with books that carry the Gospel note, whatever their origin.

“otherwise, is not faith in God’s Word.” The unity of the Bible is a living, growing, suffusing unity. It is the unity of a body with a quick and mighty spirit. It is a unity that may come home through much defect and loss in its body. A great conqueror may have but one eye or one arm. There are women whose every feature is wrong, more or less, but they bring all men to their feet.

Faults she had once as she learned to run and tumbled:

Faults of feature some see, beauty not complete.

Yet, good people, beauty that makes holy

Earth and air *may* have faults from head to feet.

The mighty and glorious Gospel can speak freely from a vulnerable scripture Canon. The Canon, which is, so to say, the physical base of the Gospel, may contain elements as superfluous as the appendix, or it may have a part amputated. The unity of the Bible is organic, total, vital, evangelical; it is not merely harmonious, balanced, statuesque. It is not the form of symmetry but the spirit of reconciliation. Strike a fragment from a statue and you ruin it. Its unity is mere symmetry, of the kind that is ruined so. But the unity of the Bible is like the unity of nature. It has a living power always to repair loss and transcend lesion. *The Bible unity is given it by the unity of a historic Gospel, developing, dominant, but not detailed.* It transcends the vicissitudes of time, the dislocations of history, the frailties even of prophets and their proofs, and the infidelity of the chosen race. This is the unity that Christ found and answered in *His Bible*. His mastery of His Bible is not shown so much in His readiness with it as in His insight into it. It is not borne in on us by the command of it He showed in His irresistible dialectic with the Pharisees upon points; it appears rather in His grasp of its one historic grace; not in His ready wit with it but in the fact that He found Himself to be the true Lord and unity of Bible, Temple, Sabbath and Israel. *If we are to take the Bible as Christ did we may not feel compelled to take the whole Bible, but we must take the Bible as a whole.*

But we shall be told that that gives us leave still to pick and choose according to some fantastic inner light, some extravagant and perhaps heartless scholarship, some individual verdict of the Christian conscience. Not at all. All these things, even the inner light, come to the Bible from without, like its detailed infallibility (which is a rationalist importation). But *the Christian key to the Bible, and its authority, is within itself.* It is the thing that produced it, the thing it exists for, wherewith it is in travail, the thing that makes Jesus to be Christ. It is the regnant Gospel of a gracious God as moral Redeemer. This mighty word uses the text of the Bible simply as we use the elements in communion, as sacred but not sacrosanct. The concern of some scrupulists about the detail of our great sacramental Scripture is quite parallel to the meticulous care by other

scrupulists about the crumbs of the consecrated bread, or the dregs of the wine. The Gospel is not a hard taskmaster; and as the Lord of the Bible it sits lightly on its throne, as lightly as only secure power can. We hamper the Gospel if we case its subtle, lithe, and kingly spirit in a coat of literary mail. *The unity ami potcer of the Bible is sacramental, it is not mechanical.* It is dynamic and not documentary. Faith in it is something more than the historic sense. And the water of life issues from it none the less mightily because the orifice may be cracked or broken. The very force of the water did that, as the spirit rent prophet and apostle, as we may enter the kingdom of heaven maimed.

I read the story of the father who petitions Christ to heal His son. I seize the answer of the Lord, "I will come down and heal Him." The words are life to my sick self. I care little for them as an historic incident of the long past, an element in the discussion of miracles. They do not serve their divinest purpose till they come to me as they came to the father. They come with a promise here and now. They are to me the words of the Saviour Himself from heaven. And upon them He rises from His eternal throne, He takes His way through a lane of angels, archangels, the high heavenly host and the glorious company of the saints. These congenial souls keep Him not, and these connate scenes do not detain Him. But on the wings of that word He moves from the midst of complete obedience, spiritual love, and perfect praise, restless in search of me—me sick, falling, lost, desperate. He comes, and He finds me and heals me in these words of Gospel. I do not ask the critics for assurance that the incident took place exactly as recorded. I will talk of that when I am healed. It is a question for those who are framing a biography of Christ, or discussing the matter of miracles. The Gospel of the Christ does not make its crucial appeal to human healthy-mindedness. For me these words are more than historical, they are sacramental. They are a vehicle of the Gospel. Historically they were never said to me. I was not in Christ's thought when He spoke them. I was not in His thought upon the cross. But by the witness of the spirit to my faith they come as if they were said now to no one else. They come to me as they are in God. And I live on them for long, and I wait by their hope, and in the strength of them go many nights and days till I come to another mount of God.

Or when I read "He loved me and gave Himself for me," do I trouble (when these words are most precious to me) about their value as an index of Paul's religion, or their bearing on a theory of atonement? The Gospel leaps out of the Bible and clasps me. Who shall separate me, with all my wretched schism, from Christ's love? I have a measure now for the whole of Scripture in the living word which that embedded phrase has brought home to redeem my soul. The Bible has done its great work, not as a document of history, but

as a means of grace, as a servant of the Gospel, lame, perhaps, and soiled, showing some signs of age, it may be, but perfectly faithful, competent and effectual always.

### VIII.

And even if *my* faith were too poor to find in the Bible more than a witness to history, a document for the Church, a record of religious ideas; if I read it only for its interest to the modern mind, or its contribution to a noble humanism; or if I do not read it at all, but pursue a feeble, fanciful, subjective kind of piety, all this and more does not affect the authority of that Gospel which is the burthen of the Bible whole. *For the Gospel's last appeal is not to individual faith nor to groups, but to the faith of its other product, the Church.* The Bible as a great whole appeals to faith as a great whole. Deep calls to deep. The Gospel, whose revelation used up a long, eventful, national history, has also produced a history longer and more eventful still in the continuous faith of the whole Church. The grace which speaks from sundry portions of the Bible in diverse ways speaks to a manifold sum of Christian experience in the Church of all times and climes. There is not a Church that has not spoiled its witness in the telling, but there is none that has not told it, and told it because it knew it. As it is too great a Gospel to be perilled on a scriptural incident, text, or book, so it is too great to be measured by individual or sectarian response. That many find nothing in it means little when set against what has been found in it by the experience of such a Church, and done through it by the Church's faith.

The Bible, therefore, has to do not with a pictured Christ, but with a preached Christ. It does not stretch a figure but proclaims a Gospel. And even of that Gospel it is not a mere report. It is much more than a record, document, or source of information even about the first preaching. *It preaches that preaching.* It prolongs it. It is a source of power as well as knowledge. It is a living source in the religious sense. It is not only produced by the Gospel, it is a producing source in turn. *The Bible, as produced by the Word, becomes integral to the Word, and so in course a producer of the Word.* It generates the faith that generated it, and it sends forth by its preaching a company of preachers. Faith comes from the preaching (from the Bible, that is), and the preaching came from the Gospel Word of God. The Bible, from the nature of its origin, can never cease to produce preaching and preachers. Preaching must always be the supreme concern of a Church that gives the Bible its proper place for the Gospel. And it has been noted that probably more converts have been made by preaching from the Bible than by direct reading of it. Only, the

preachers must read it all the more, and habitually read it, and come to close quarters with it, and know where they are with it, and treat it as their chief means of grace, the constant source of their salvation, mission, and power. *Nocturna versate manu versate diurna*. If you would preach a classic Gospel, give your nights and days, your heart and head, to converse with the Bible. Our fathers had much to say about the *efficacy and sufficiency of Scripture*. And this was what they meant, its power to be a sacrament of the Word and pass the Church on from faith to faith; its power to be a producing source of the faith that produced it, to prolong the Word in which it arose, and speed the message to which it is hands and feet. *To this Gospel, which is the living totality of the Bible, the great witness is the faith which is the living totality of the Church*. If the Gospel of Christ's grace is the one authority set up among men, the seat of that authority is the Bible, and the witness is the faithful Church. But, as it is the God that sanctifies the temple and not the gold, so it is the authority that hallows its own seat and not the seat's pattern or structure. The King is King by something else than the art found in His throne. And the Gospel is supreme, not because it comes by a perfect, infallible Book or Church, but because it is the historic advent of the Saviour God to the Church's experience and faith.

## IX.

The Bible can never be detached from the Gospel, though it must be distinguished from it. *It is detachment from the Bible that is the mark both of Romanism at one end and of the religiosity of the modern mind at the other*. To take the latter first. The modern man feeds His religious nature on philanthropy, literature, journalism, pious booklets and sentiments, and writings generally meant for reading and not study—and all at the cost of the Bible. This happens even with preachers, whose eloquence and sympathy may but poorly cover the nakedness of their exegesis. And as to Rome's similar relation to the Bible, let me mention this. The great antagonist of Luther has been Loyola. Jesuitry is the real counter-Reformation. And the essential difference between the two causes is indicated from their start. Both Luther and Loyola were crushed at their outset by the mighty hand of God. But Luther found His release, Gospel and commission in serious contact with the Bible; while Loyola found His in visions, voices and fantasies, not essentially different from the subjective aspirations and intuitions of the modern heart. It is a far cry from the fierce ascetic Loyola to Mark Rutherford. But they join deep in their mystic frame. And the visions of the Jesuit are as subjective as the intuitions of the literary humanist,

or of the modern hero who is converted by falling in love, and sanctified by the Angel in the House. It would be useful to draw out the subtle and startling affinities between Jesuitism and the modern mind, between Catholic modernism and Protestant. There is no future for a Protestantism which shall be neither ritual nor sentimental, except it be founded directly on the objectivity of the Bible, and know how to use it. It is the Gospel alone that can teach Rome its place. No other Church can cope with Rome. Only the Gospel can, purified to the message of abounding grace. The critics help us in their way to that, and the theologians still more. They help us to the objective which is Rome's strength. An objective and positive Gospel is the only safety of our too subjective and fumbling faith. And it is the authority which above all others we need today, and especially in our pulpits. There is much fraternity, but there is too little mastery.

#### X.

The questions about the Bible are giving much trouble that finds expression, but much more that finds none. They are the source of much uneasiness that is felt, and of much decay of spiritual life that is felt but in part. They produce, among thousands that have never seriously faced them, *a vague sense of insecurity about the Bible*, and of its uselessness to the lay reader in consequence. It not only ceases to be an authority, but it ceases to be a means of grace for the soul and of support for the spiritual life. It becomes more of a problem than a stay. I am speaking of the effect within the Church, among Christian people, not among the public. Very likely there is more Bible reading in the Churches than we think; but, for all that, there is less than there used to be, when there should have been more. There is too little to maintain independent spiritual conviction, and vigorous spiritual life. There is a good deal of religious toying with the Bible, but there is not much real acquaintance with it, and not nearly what there should be in the pulpit. I am afraid this tendency will grow as the results of criticism filter down. And is it not certain that a Church where the Bible is not each member's manual in an intelligent way is doomed to spiritual decay? It is condemned to ineptitude against a Church or ministry making exorbitant claims for itself.

Is it not certain, further, that *the exit from the difficulty* lies in the direction I have indicated? It cannot lie in the way of ignorant denunciation of critical scholarship or the denial of its right. That right is now secure, both for the Old Testament and New. You may challenge certain results, but its method is now beyond question. It was historical criticism that destroyed the mythical theory of the

Gospels; it was not the scandalized resentment of mere orthodoxy. But what secures the right? The Church's own security in the Gospel. *Only the evangelical certainty of faith in grace can guarantee the freedom of theology and learning in the Church.* The Church can handle the Bible fairly and freely only through the conviction that Bible and Church are both there at the disposal of the Gospel they stand to preach. But the "Church's own security in the Gospel"! I know how that will sound to some. It will mean the soundness of the Church's views on such questions as Atonement, justification, and faith. It will mean evangelical orthodoxy. Alas, I am afraid evangelical orthodoxy has to answer for much decay in the Gospel's power and welcome. That is not what I intend. The fallacy lies in *the ambiguity of the word Gospel*. This means two things. It means the mighty saving act of God in Christ; and it means the news of that act by the word of apostolic men. It means, first, God's Word to man, not spoken but done, by a Saviour who spoke very little of it, and less and less as He drew near the doing of it. It means:

"the matchless deed achieved,  
Determined, dared, and done."

And it means, secondly, man's word under the influence of that deed of God, its expansion, its reverberation, so to say, in the souls it saved and inspired. It means the Church's preaching of God's mighty work. We have thus the Church's Gospel of God's Gospel. It is like the distinction between history and a history. The Bible is a living history of God's history in man. The one is not the other. The first draws all its value from the second. But the second without the first would be unknown. That preaching, that Bible which I call the precipitate of the first preaching of the Apostles, has no other object than this, to be the sacramental channel of the power of God's redeeming deed. When I speak of the Church's own security in the Gospel I do not use the word Gospel in the secondary sense. I do not mean the Church's self-complacency with the way she has long delivered the message. That is the sign of a Church dead and done with. And it is the badge of several Churches. But I mean her sole and central confidence and obedience towards *God's act of saving grace in Christ*. Our security in the Gospel is not our certainty of an evangelical creed, but our confidence in God's saving Son and grace. *That is really the one article of the Christian creed, God's grace redeeming from guilt in Christ*. And the response to it is the living, saving faith that alone makes a Church a Church. From this teeming center of Christian life there issues endless power and its endless freedom of thought and life, especially in regard to the letter and form of the Bible.

## XI.

*We have but one great sacrament. It is God's redeeming Word in Christ's cross. In this sacrament the Bible as a book takes the place of the elements. It is not the Bible that contains God's Word so much as God's Word that contains the Bible. These elements are involved in the sacrament, but they do not make its center of gravity. I have alluded to this aspect of the matter already; let me develop it. For us Protestants at least the virtue of the elements in a sacrament is quite independent of their chemical structure. We do not believe in Transubstantiation. The power would come to faith were the elements water and fruit just as surely as by bread and wine. And it is just as great whatever our views may be of their composition, or if we have none. Now the Bible is the element which mediates the one great Sacrament—the historic Grace of God in Christ. And the structure, the chemistry, of the Bible is a secondary matter in regard to the communication of that Grace. So long as it gives free course to God's Gospel we may reach very new and strange conclusions as to items in it, the order of it, and the way it came to exist. The question is not of the integrity of the Bible, but of its efficacy for grace, its sufficiency for salvation, just as the question is not as to the punctilio of the ritual in the sacrament, but as to its blessing for living faith. To stake the Gospel upon the absolute accuracy of the traditional view of the Bible, its inerrancy, or its authorship by Apostles, is just to commit, in a Protestant form, the Roman error of staking the sacrament on the correctitude of its ritual or the ordination of its priest. Both the Bible and the Church are living eucharistic things. But they draw their life solely from God's Word and act of institution in the cross, and from the spirit that proceeds from that God and Gospel there. God gives His Word a body as He will, and He keeps giving that body, and keeps it fit for the purpose of grace at a given time. He has continually revised and readjusted the form of His Church. There is not a Church that exactly reproduces the primitive Christian community. Shall we be startled if the same is true of the Bible and its form? We do not want in the case of the Church to restore the primitive form (or absence) of organization. We want to regain the first fine volume of faith and love through any Church form that in our Christian judgment of the situation serves that end. And so with the Bible. We are not absolutely wedded to the views either of the apostles about the Old Testament or of the fathers about the New. It is the power, the efficacy, the sufficiency of the Bible for the uses of grace that is our grand concern, because that was the purpose which called the Bible into being as a whole. We are paying a very heavy penalty for using the Bible for texts and in sections. We have come to treat it in an atomistic instead of an organic way.*



The Churches have almost lost the sense of its books as wholes, and of the book itself as a living whole submerging parts archaic or otiose. And yet it is there, in its corporate unity of grace, that the Bible's real power lies. There is its solidarity. We have lost our center of authority because we *would* construe the seat of authority as a document, a charter, a protocol, either for history or for orthodoxy, instead of a throne from which the charter issues and whose behests it serves. I would not insist on textual preaching if we had evangelical. I would not require the preacher to start from a verse, or a passage, or a creed, if He expound the great Gospel and true creed of faith, with any amount of scope in its treatment that seems to Him to light it up and carry it home.

## XII.

*The Charter of the Church is not the Bible but the Redemption.* The prophets repeatedly forced the Church of Israel back on the great redemption from Egypt which gave the nation its fontal call. It was by His grasp of Redemption that Athanasius saved the Church in His day; His metaphysics being but the dialect of the day. And it was the same with Luther. The Church's charter is a deed, not in the sense of a document but of an act of power reflected in the document. It is the power of God today in all the Churches with all their errors. It is a power which has survived ages when the Bible was much in abeyance, as in the medieval Church. It is a power which has dragged the Bible from neglect, and set it on high again as the Gospel's candlestick and the Gospel's pulpit. But the Bible can never be the surrogate of the Gospel. The letter of the trust deed should never submerge the bequeathing purpose it conveys. That is the paganism of law which a law-Church has drained of the Gospel and starved of intelligence. We never do the Bible more honor than when it makes us forget we are reading a book, and makes us sure we are communing with a Saviour. Secure in the Gospel of God, we can take our true, free attitude to its preaching by men, even by apostles. We cannot do without their word. A revelation without historic facts or personalities is no Christian, no real revelation. But we may weigh by their theme their arguments and their story, secure in our inheritance of grace by that word, in which they stood. They have not dominion over our faith, but they are helpers of our joy. There are sections of the Bible which are so unintelligible to many of the best Christians that for them they might as well not exist. There are facts that do not appeal to them, and are not used now, however useful once. It looks as if our Lord Himself exercised this spiritual selection on His

Old Testament. There were parts He found to have had their value only for their own passing time. "Ye have heard—but I say." Would it be fatal to the manner of His Gospel to find that there were similar parts for us even in the New Testament? But, you say, if criticism reduce Christ's "reliable sayings to half a dozen"! Well, that does not make critical scholarship anti-Christian. It only rouses other critics and scholars to correct such one-sided criticism, criticism where the scholar's memory has crushed His judgment, criticism with more pedantry than historic sense, and without the sense of the Gospel. And it also warns us off the fatal error of interpreting the work of Christ by His teaching instead of His teaching by His work. May we not select from among Christ's words as He selected from among those of the prophets? Surely. The evangelists did. And of those they give they nowhere state that it is a verbatim report exactly as it left His lips. Nor were all His precepts meant by Himself to be perennial. Surely we may and must discriminate and exercise a critical selection. But by what clue? Let us use the supreme principle supremely. *Those words of Christ are prime revelation to us, and of first obligation, which carry home to us the saving grace incarnate in His Person and mission.* The Holy Spirit which illuminates the Bible is the spirit which proceeds from the cross, the Spirit which made Paul, who was made by the Christ not only as He lived, but chiefly as He died and lives for ever the Son of God with power. It is Atoning Grace that is our sanctification.

And I say all this with a deep sense of both *curiosa felicitas* of the phrase of Scripture which made its verbal inspiration so plausible, and of that searching profundity which is in the teaching of Christ. I have felt, as every scriptural preacher must, the Bible's ἀνίριθμον γέλασμα and its πλούσιον βάθος, its endless charm and its wealthy depth.

### XIII.

The Bible not only provides but compels its own criticism by the Holy Spirit. It carries not only its own standard but the untiring spirit which from age to age compels us to apply that standard. This evangelical criticism is the most constructive of all. It is the kind of criticism which is a perpetual self-preservative. *There is no diviner feature of the Gospel than its self-preservative power in history by self-correction and self-recovery.* The Reformation is the most striking illustration of this action of the spirit, which has been active in all ages in the Church, though not successful in all. It is the correction, the sanctification of faith by faith, the reform of religion by religion, the re-reading of the Bible by the Gospel. What will remain of the Bible is whatever is essential to the Gospel. In the

Reformation the Gospel test was applied by the spirit to the Church. Today we apply it by the same spirit to its other vassal the Bible. We hear of the witness of the monuments to the Bible. But the great ancient monument that verifies the Bible is the cross, which stands in the Bible's own territory. The one criticism which is adequately just to the Bible is this, the Bible's inner self and final purpose of grace. Amidst all readjustments and dissolutions this must emerge freer and ampler than ever. The great test of a religion must be religious, after all.

The public mind is far too much and too ignorantly occupied with the higher criticism, and far too little, too faithlessly, with the highest. And *the higher criticism itself has gone too far alone*. I mean without the stamp and help of the highest. It has in quarters lost itself in literary acumen and philological detail. It is passing into a *μεριμνοφροντιστήριον*. In the German laboratories they split documents as minutely as the scholastics used to split hairs in dialectic, or the Puritans in the divisions of their preaching. Indeed, the situation is reproducing the feature that marked the downfall of scholasticism, Catholic or Protestant—the extreme insulation of a method useful in its place. Now, as then, the ruling scientific method breaks down of its own extravagant ingenuity and untempered acumen. When the Reformation came it applied religious criticism to religion. It rediscovered the Bible by means of that Gospel which made it challenge the Church. And today we carry the work on. The Reformation is reforming itself. It is in much need of reformation. In a century after its origin it had sunk to a new scholasticism. Orthodoxy took the place of faith for the Church, and inerrancy was inflicted more severely on the Bible. Powerful intellects went to work to systematize the great data of the Lutheran age. And it is this hard, keen theologizing, and not the large Reformation thought, that survives in much popular orthodoxy of a metallic sort today. The mighty stream was diverted into a thousand dialectic rills, and its old power was lost accordingly. A like thing has happened more recently to the speculative movement in philosophy. The great idealist age has been frayed out into an immense variety of scientific specialisms. The left of the movement won the day, and it has broken up into so many runnels on the field of mind that it can drive nothing. The meticulousness of orthodoxy on the one hand, and of criticism on the other, has joined with other influences in life, thought, and literature to make religion either vague or trivial. Criticism especially is now in danger of outstepping its high function, and, not being joined with faith, is moving to suicide after all it has so greatly done. It becomes the prey of the academic mind instead of the instrument of evangelical faith. The learned clergy becomes dons or humanists. The Bible scholars

become pedants. They get out of touch with the public and with the Gospel. The New Testament becomes an ancient text, dear to a scholarly Church but ineffectual for the living Word. The plowers plow upon its back and long their furrows draw. They provoke among the Christian public a reaction which is ignorant enough, perhaps, but which means more than it knows, and much that the critics should heed. In their native land even the liberal theologians grow impatient of them, and the public still more.

## XIV.

The great test, I have said, of a religion is religious. *Christianity will not stand or fall by its critical attitude to its documents, but by its faithful attitude to its Gospel.* It is its self-criticism that will decide its fate, not the criticism of the world, even of the learned world. Everything turns on the criticism of faith by faith, on the final authority of the Gospel, standing at the altar and receiving the sound contributions of the critical method. There are truths that need to be restated in this light. But criticism alone cannot do very much more. It has prepared for a higher reconstruction which is overdue, the serious use of a revised Bible for its revising Gospel. For instance, we do not need further histories of Israel, nor histories of the religion of Israel. That is not what the Church needs at least. What we need from a scholar equipped with the soundest results, however new, is what Jonathan Edwards gave His day, a history of Redemption, a history of the Revelation always welling up through the religion of Israel and of Christendom at once purifying it and condemning it. In the Old Testament we have a blended record both of Israel's religion and of God's revelation. In the New Testament there are traces of similar action. And it is very striking in the history of Europe, in the struggle (and infection) of Catholicism with the indigenous paganisms. We need now that the revelation which is vital to the Church that prolongs the Gospel be disentangled from the popular religion, ancient or modern, and shown on its conquering way.

## XV.

We need, in a closing word, that the Free Churches should do what they have not yet done, that they should really *face the spiritual situation created by the collapse of biblical infallibility for those communities that have long repudiated the final authority of the Church.* To come to terms with culture (in this sense of the word) is at least as necessary for the Churches in their action on society as to

come to an understanding with Labour or the Democracy. The High Church party began to do it in *Lux Mundi* by accepting critical results in the strength of the Church and Sacraments. To us that way is closed. But the one true and living way is open. It is the way of the Gospel and the sole authority of its grace, which is now, since the Catholic reaction, the special charge of the Free Churches of this land.

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