CHAPTER II

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Modern man is faced with a perplexing array of varying Christian doctrines. To the extent that each doctrine is Christian, it is based on the authoritative Christian book, the Bible. No Christian group can be charged with insincerity, deceit or ignorance and yet the extremely vital differences stand as barriers to the unity of fellowship which would seem to be desirable and probably extremely necessary today. The differences of opinion on doctrinal issues, as great as they may be, are of less concern than the fact of the barriers to a united Christian voice which ought to be raised against the anti-Christian forces in the world and which ought also to be winsomely speaking of Christ, the Saviour of men. We are told that the world, in its confusion, is asking for that guiding voice and is ready to listen to it.

There can be no doubt that the church today has to carry a great responsibility in public life. . . . Men outside the Church are searching for some authoritative guidance in social and political matters. . . . Do the churches possess any answers to their concrete questions? . . . Until the churches can speak with something more like a united voice, men will not listen very seriously to what they say.¹

¹Alan Richardson and Wolfgang Schweitzer (eds.), Biblical Authority for Today. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955, p. 9. This book is the first major tangible result of the desire of the World Council of Churches to provide an ecumenical answer to the question, what is the legitimate source of our common testimony to the world?
There are major differences which make the possibility of that united voice difficult, if not impossible. The most serious difference of opinion is in connection with a doctrine of the Church. That barrier separates the East from the West, Romanism from Protestantism and the hierarchically centered denominations from the congregationally directed churches. Even within congregationalism, the differences of opinion in regard to the nature of the church, raises barriers, sufficient to restrict communion fellowship between them. Another perplexing difficulty is the matter of orthodoxy. One can scarcely call himself an orthodox Christian unless he names which orthodoxy he means. Fundamentalism, in its widest sense, specifies which of all the views held by the church are the basic and essential ones. The Greek Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic communion, the Lutheran and the Reformed bodies, the Baptist churches and the Methodist denomination, the Anglical and Episcopal Churches and the Congregationalists, to name a few of the more widely known groups, together with a host of smaller though equally active and equally self-conscious churches and/or sects, each represents a fundamentalism, or an orthodoxy. The difference of opinion as to what an essential may be, is wide indeed.

It is manifested particularly in various views of soteriology, which is to be expected in the face of the broader ecclesiastical divisions, but which also break into many unexpected factions. Men are saved by grace channeled through the church, or by personal
experience of the grace of God, without regard for the church. Sal-
vation is by an objective ritual act, or by a subjective attitude
only. It is of sovereign grace, forensic in nature and unrepeatable
(impacting an indelible character on the soul), or it is moralistic
in nature and contingent upon the faithfulness of the believer. It
is a social regeneration, mainly, or it is an individual rebirth
demanding no social responsibility. In some cases correct belief
as evidenced by an intellectual acceptance of rigidly defined propo-
sitions are necessary to salvation, in other cases, a rigidly defined
code of conduct is the test, or a spectacular psychological experience
may be the requirement entailing little or nothing in the way of
intellectual commitments. There are, of course, many modifications
and degrees between these extremes.

Of far less basic doctrinal importance (in the opinion of the
writer), but of more divisive consequences are such matters, among
others, as patterns of dress and adornment, food restrictions,
Sabbatarianism and details of eschatological teaching. It is not
suggested that any of these things is unimportant, nor is it supposed
that Christians will or can or ought to surrender that facet of truth
which is most precious and meaningful to them. The most (or the least),
that can be expected is that each Christian come to appreciate the
context of his brother's faith and the mutual humaneness out of which
springs individual understandings of the Word which is common to all
of Christendom. Differences of opinion are not to be deplored, for out of the sharing of such differences have come most of the richest intellectual and spiritual insights in the world, but only that is to be deplored which lifts a human opinion to the status of revelation. It is a psychological problem, Ramm tells us. "So many Christians fail to differentiate interpretation from inspiration," he says, "one must realize that revelation is not interpretation, and conversely, interpretation is not revelation. Revelation is the communication of divine truth; interpretation is the effort to understand it."¹

Underlying all the differences of opinion that fragment the Christian witness is a varying attitude toward the Bible. That the Bible is inspired of God is almost an unanimous opinion. In what that inspiration consists is not so uniformly understood. It is to be expected, therefore, that interpretation procedures will vary in accordance with that which is considered to be a proper view of inspiration. That the Bible is authoritative for the Church and the Christian is scarcely ever a matter for debate, particularly among the more Biblicistic groups, but the ground of that authority and the extent of it occasions honest and earnest polemic. If one were

to characterize the most universal view of inspiration by the title
given to the Christian Book, the "Word of God" would undoubtedly
describe it. The "Bible" or "Scripture" would be a sort of generic
or family name, a definitive term, but the "Word of God" is specific
and particular and testifies to a faith in its divine origin and
the obligation of men to it as to God himself. Interpretation sustains
a definite relationship to these terms or at least to the concept back
of them so that whatever is involved in them is reflected in the doc-
trines which emerge from it. This study is an inquiry into the meaning
these terms and concepts had and have for Christians.

The fact of a contemporary difference of opinion about the
Bible is accepted as a given. We live in the midst of such tensions.
We do not need to prove that they exist, nor do we condemn them. But
we desire to know whether these differences of opinion regarding the
Bible, at least within conservatism, are local in time and religious
culture or whether they have roots in history which may justify them.

The Problem of Interpretation

Interpretation stands between the inspired word and its appli-
cation to personal needs. We are aware that this statement could be
challenged at least on two counts. If one says that the Bible requires
no interpretation, the burden of proof that it does, rests upon us.
This matter shall be examined. Should another say that the Bible has
no relevance for today's world we would have to admit that such a
claim is perfectly reasonable and requires defense if it is maintained. This will be attempted later. But for the moment, we will assume that interpretation is needed and possible and that by means of it the Bible becomes a contemporary book speaking afresh to the modern man in his dilemma. This assumption is made on the strength of the almost universal faith of Christians in this possibility. Whenever we say that the Bible is authoritative, we must also say how it is so, and in doing that we interpret it and admit its relevancy.

But how can interpretation provide an authoritative message? The Catholics have an answer. What did the church do during the early years before there was a written record of any kind, and what did it do for the next about fifteen hundred years when there were but a few handwritten copies of the Bible or a few fixed-type prints, each of which would have cost, had they been procurable, far more than a man could possibly earn in an entire lifetime? The answer is simple. The Church interpreted the Bible message just as Christ intended that it should. He never asked men to read or write but he did ask them to believe the preaching which he authorised.

Believing that the Catholic Church is the living voice of Christ, Catholics accept it as the Supreme authority for determining with infallible assurance what is the Word of God. . . . They believe that the Church alone has been qualified by Christ to teach men what must be believed and what must be done according to God's revelation.¹

¹But Can It Be Found in the Bible? (St. Louis, Mo.: Supreme Council, Knights of Columbus, Religious Information Bureau, no. 12), p. 7.
If the Bible is inspired, the Catholic argues, and was produced by the Church under the Holy Spirit's guidance, interpretation is only possible through the same media. In the pamphlet quoted above, the anonymous author quotes Adolph Harnack's conclusion, with full approval:

An inspired document is not only untranslatable without the same Divine assistance that created it, but it is also uninterpretable. Catholicism is, therefore absolutely right in its claim that the power of interpreting Holy Scripture lies only in the Church, which alone has the promise to be led by the Holy Spirit into all truth. Inspiration and a sacred court of interpretation necessarily hang together.

Scripture is kept contemporary to every age by way of this authoritative and living voice. "From the Scripture, he who is assailed and oppressed by adversity and misfortune will draw comfort and superhuman strength to suffer and to endure with patience."2

"Among the reasons for which the Holy Scripture is so worthy of commendation . . . — the chief of all is this, the innumerable benefits of which it is the source, . . ."3 There is no static interpretation recognized by the Catholic Church. Either the Pope or the General Council as living representatives of Christ — yes, as Christ himself, keeps ever new and dynamic the message

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1Ibid., p. 14, (quoting Harnack: Bible Reading in the Early Church, p. 9).
2Ibid., p. 16, (quoting Pope Pius XIII).
3Ibid., p. 47, (quoting Pope Pius XIII).
of Scripture and Tradition. Charles Finney recognized the logic of this when he said that if authoritative interpretation were necessary he would prefer the voice of a living Pope than that of a dead Council (meaning the Westminster Assembly) which had fixed meaning in the tomb of some past era. ¹

Wolfgang Schweitzer has analyzed the ecumenical Protestant mind very well in his article, "Biblical Theology and Ethics Today."² The critical and historical interpretation of the past century has not proved adequate. It must advance to a theological interpretation of Scripture. Scripture must be "put at the service of the Christian proclamation." While exegetical theology recalls us to Scripture, it does not lead into the past, but shows "in what sense the Bible contains a message that is valid today."³

However, without rules, everyone will hear the Gospel differently. We must ask, then, "What are the methods of interpretation that are best fitted to the whole of the Biblical message?" It is necessary to know the message as a whole before individual texts can be interpreted. Interpretation and rules for interpretation

¹Finney, Systematic Theology, p. iii.
²Biblical Authority Today, pp. 129-154. Schweitzer is the Secretary in the Study Department of the World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland.
³Ibid., p. 131.
must mutually enrich and correct each other.¹

If some understanding of Scripture is necessary to its interpretation a clue must be found to its meaning. The historicoliterary school could not find, by its analytic methods the role that Jesus played in the emergence of the Christian faith. The religion of Jesus was said to have been the climax of religious evolution, but this forced every subsequent teaching and event into a retrogression which is out of harmony with the direction of evolution. Albert Schweitzer revolutionised liberal thought by showing that Jesus and the eschatological message were inseparable. This eventually led to the form-critical method of Biblical research, which asked: What led the New Testament authors to compose their writings? The written Gospels developed out of preaching (the Kerygma), and the preaching arose out of the confessional formulas. What occasioned the baptismal formulas? Significantly, all of them are Christo-logical. Christ is the living unity of the documents and the faith behind them. There is no separation between event and meaning as it was once thought there might be. The demand, now, is to locate theology, or the faith of the community in events and in the person of Jesus. The events may be denied, but the Biblical

¹Ibid., p.131.
faith in them cannot be. And thus, Christ becomes the clue to the interpretation of the New Testament. ¹

The Old Testament now is considered to contribute the idea of Covenant, as its central fact, rather than that it teaches monotheism, in a unique way, or presents a new and superior law. It is the charter of the New Covenant and is to be interpreted in that light. If we read the Old Testament as Jesus read it, the difference between the Old and the New "withers away," and we see the Old Testament witnessing to him. If there is an objection to this the question is asked "whether a Christian theologian can even for a moment work as if Christ were not yet born?" The question is more penetrating yet; "What meaning has Jesus for us if he had not applied the Old Testament to himself and so fulfilled it?" In this respect the Old Testament cannot be understood apart from the idea of Heilsgeschichte. It was preparation. The theological unity of the whole of Scripture lies in this concept of preparation-fulfillment, centered about the Christ.²

Now, what about rules for interpretation? We must, first of all determine what connection is in the Bible between the Word of God and the word of man. Freedom of critical research, once thought to

¹Ibid., pp. 131-134.
²Ibid., pp. 135-137.
endanger the authority of the Bible, is now welcomed almost everywhere, as actually reinforcing it. The deeper question is regarding the freedom and authority of Scripture as ever against human interpretations.

This sovereignty of the Word of God cannot be defended where the theologian, before he even opens the Bible, is already committed to an obligatory doctrine of the Church about the truth of the Word of God, whether it be the resolutions of Councils, Papal encyclicals or Protestant confessional documents. The question is whether we open the Scriptures without expecting that the will of God, perhaps in a new and unprecedented way, will be revealed to us in his word. Who is Lord in the Church?¹

The Catholic, as we have seen, simply identifies Christ and the Church, and so the authority of the Church coincides with the authority of Christ and the Word. It is true that this provides a freedom of adjustment to changing situations and cultures but it is not the freedom which permits a genuine listening to the Gospel.

Actually, the loss of distinction between the Lord and his Church, succeeds in putting the word of man in place of the Word of God, and it is this substitution which Protestantism rejects.²

Schweitzer feels that the extreme fundamentalists err in a similar way. Their maxims of verbal inspiration determines rules for exposition. The historical methods of interpretation is inconsistent with this view because the original historical circumstance and the human writer, according to the fundamentalist’s theory, is neutral

¹Ibid., p. 139.
²Ibid., p. 140.
so far as the purpose of God is concerned. One does not analyse the
words of men to find the message of God. As much as they feel they
tie themselves purely to the Word of God, in truth it becomes the
word of man that bears the authority because the interpretation of
a text, once made in a certain way, is tenaciously maintained as
itself the very word of God.

As the fundamentalist declines to take the Bible as a
human word seriously it has little or no importance for
him that the Bible proclamation should be transferred into
the thought of the present day. Accordingly there is here
fundamentally no interpretation but at most only a systema-
tising and harmonising of Biblical affirmations.¹

Interpretation, to the liberal, is a proclamation of the human
word. The Bible is a record of evolutionary religious development
culminating in the admirable Jesus of history. He is an example for
us to emulate in principle, but his teachings are not to be taken
seriously as maxims for the ethics of any other age. Liberalism has
nothing to contribute to the problem of interpretation because it
cannot find a real place for the relevancy of the Bible for today
in its evolutionary world-view.

Existentialist philosophy offers a solution in the teachings
of Rudolph Bultmann, by eliminating the unacceptable Mythos in
which the New Testament Kerygma is buried, and stressing the genuine
decision which gives meaning to the Cross and the Resurrection and

¹Ibid., p. 142.
a new understanding of the self and new power for living. The ques-
tion in this view is whether the myth which Bultmann deplores is not
the very heart of the New Testament Lerygma.

The Christological solution of dialectical theology is a far
cry from the fundamentalist's idea. It is not a desire to hold to
a revelation transmitted in the past, but to find a fresh revelation
today. In the Bible God speaks ever new to those in despair. The
Word of God is not the letter of Scripture, but the literal fact of
God's act of speaking to us. The Bible, as a book, is a human word.
Literary and historical criticism is a legitimate part of interpre-
tation. Whenever we hear God speak in the human word, the message
is no longer something out of the past but an event in the present.
When we hear the Word we accept the message of Jesus Christ. Christ
and His mercy is the word of God. The influence of this theology is
wider than the limits of the dialectical school. It has won many
away from the thought of fulfillment as the end of religion, to the
realisation that it is obedience to God Himself. It has made the
modern world aware of the divine and human aspects of Scripture and
the resultant tension is in contrast to both extreme fundamentalism
and liberalism neither of which can know this tension since one
affirms the pure word of God and the other the simple word of man.¹

¹Ibid., p. 147-149.
The lack of the historical sense of God's revelation as a succession of events, vitiates a large measure of true interpretation in this system.

Schweitzer believes that the general trend in theology today is its "struggle for the recognition of the liberty and sovereignty of the Word of God against historicism." Those who have been influenced by Kierkegaard should be the first to break the ban on historicism and determine "the meaning of the historical for the fundamentals of theology." The Scriptural understanding of history has been clarified in large measure by Oscar Cullmann, in his book, Christ and Time, but the full implication of it for interpretation has not yet been developed.¹

The modern theologian knows that Biblical ethics apart from the Gospel of forgiveness, has no relevancy for the present day. The ecumenical Study Conferences in London (1946), in Bossey (1947), and in Wadham College, London (1949) were unanimously agreed "that every Biblical interpretation has to set out from Jesus Christ."²

It is now, no doubt, obvious why interpretation is the bridge between an inspired word and the man of today. The Catholics have thrown the Church over the otherwise fixed gulf and in so doing hold open the door to the new revelation. But at the same time the

¹Ibid., pp. 149-150.
²Ibid., p. 151.
Bible as the Word of God is never heard by the common man. Only the Church speaks. Extreme fundamentalism and liberalism, each in its own way, has isolated the Bible from serious consideration for today's world. Both are rationalistic and approach the Bible with a priori pre-suppositions, one, that fulfillment is for a future age, the other that its day is past. Each "interprets" historically, and both lose thereby the ability to relate the Bible to today. Fundamentalists have fixed interpretation in past creeds and dogma, the liberals have lost the power to interpret because of their evolutionary theories. The unhistorical Christ of the dialectical theology and its beyond history eschatology leaves doctrine and ethics hanging in midair with no Biblical support. None of these major religious disciplines, then, has found a way to bridge the gulf between the Word of God and the need of man. If the Bible is not a human word, intrinsically, it is no more authoritative for us than a passage from Shakespeare or Homer. If it is the supernatural, pure Word of God, it is untranslatable and must have an authorised and inspired interpreter who is then some human voice only, not that of God directly.

The key problem is in a theory of inspiration which makes interpretation possible. The relevancy of the Bible depends upon a theory of inspiration which permits and authorises interpretation. The matter of inspiration in this connection will be examined later in the study. Just now, we must note the testimony of responsible
people to the strange power of the Bible and some of the suggestions which have been made as to how to come to grips with it. In spite of the difficulties with which rationalistic approaches to the Bible have faced us, the message and vitality of the word of God comes through to all kinds and conditions of men. One of the most striking expressions is found in the author's Preface to Letters to Young Churches.

The present translator who has studied these letters for several years is struck by . . . their surprising vitality. Without holding fundamentalist views of "inspiration," he is continually struck by the living quality of the material on which he is working. Some will, no doubt, consider it merely superstitious reverence for "Holy Writ," yet again and again the writer felt rather like an electrician rewiring an ancient house without being able to "turn off the mains." He feels that this fact is worth recording.1

Dean Farrar, whose writings have been utilised in this study, though tending toward the liberal view, extols Scripture in majestic language throughout his works.

A Book less sacred would have been discredited by the dangerous uses to which it has been presented; but no aberrations of interpreters have suffered to weaken, much less abrogate the essential revelation which has exercised from the first, and will, to the last syllable of recorded time continue to exercise unique power over the hearts and consciences of men.2


Even more rhetorically but none the less truly, he says again,

    Men may still continue to misunderstand and to mis-
    represent it; to turn it into a grim idol or a mechanical
    fetish; to betray it with the kiss of false devotion, and
    to thrust it between the soul and the God whom it was
    designed to reveal; . . . but . . . and herein consists
    its divine authority — it shall always guide the souls
    of the humble to the straight gate . . .

Howard Euist, after retelling the story of Sir Edwin Landser's
painting which was characterised by a glowing color in his painted
fire, but which in time lost its living quality because he had used
a "fugitive pigment," makes the application by way of contrast

    Human words fade but the Bible, although made of the
    stuff of common life, nevertheless is pervaded by a
    spirit whose flame is as deathless as the needs of men.

Scripture has two sides, he says, one, the literary form, to be
approached as literature, but it has another side which men look
for in moments of deepest need, when they do not think of it in
literary categories, but when "he turns to Scripture for what it
can do to lift him out of his earth-bound experience into the pure
light of God." This vital principle is not its code but its motive
its power to "require the response of the whole man."

1{Tbid., p. 303.

2{Howard Tillman Euist, "Scripture and the Common Man,"

3{Tbid., p. 208.

4{Tbid., p. 220.
These, of many who could be quoted, would be considered as representing the more "liberal wing" of Christianity, but the point in mind is precisely made in-so-far as this may be true. Liberal Christianity was largely a revolt against the sterile Biblicism of the nineteenth Century which had robbed the Bible of the spiritual power which it had exercised over the lives of men. However, liberalism, as such, went too far in rejecting the objective integrity of the written Scriptures and making "experience" the norm of truth. As a deep reaction to consciousness theology Karl Barth, who had discovered the strange new world of the Bible, proposed uncompromisingly a theology of the Word of God which put God's revelation of Himself entirely in His own initiative and took it out of the manipulating hands of sinful man. That this view suffers by virtue of being (1) an extreme reaction and hence over stated, and (2) by resting on a metaphysics (or anti-metaphysics) un congenial to the historic Christian faith does not discount the fact that it has served to shatter the comfortable optimism of old liberalism and has forced this age to a new and more vital appraisal of Scripture and the Word of God. There is a new demand for a Bible-centered theology, which betrays neither the grammatical and historical methods of interpretation, nor the spiritual vitality which constitutes its authority. Alan Richardson, the English Church canon, puts it squarely before us; we do not, he says, anymore merely want
to know about God, we want to know Him.

To say that the Bible contains the highest idea about God which men can attain does not satisfy us, we do not want ideas about God, we want God. . . . Can the Bible give us that?1

In a significant editorial in *Interpretation*, the matter is made very clear as the author presents the controlling conviction of that journal — the reason for its existence. "Protestant vitality today must be rooted in a renewed discovery of the relevance of the Bible to the intellectual and spiritual quest of our time." "Only a truly *biblical* theology can produce an ecumenical theology." The reason for the faith in a Biblical theology is that "biblical categories are dynamic, not static." The Bible has fresh relevance for every age. The wineskins of the post-reformation theology cracks, but the wine of Biblical truth fits every age — even this one.2

In the publication noted above containing the results of some of the preliminary studies preparatory to the "Evanston Meeting" of the World Council of Churches, the matter of Biblical authority for today's social and political activities received attention. Men outside the Church are seeking authoritative guidance and are asking

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the Church for an answer, especially an agreed answer, for, "until the Churches can speak with something more like a united voice, men will not listen very seriously to what they say."1 The Church has always been drawn nearer together as it went to its Bible so

To look for guidance in the Word of God is, it seems to us, especially urgent in a time like ours ... Thus we hope that our common approach to the Bible will not only bring us nearer to each other, but will also enable us to make a common witness to our faith ... 2

All these men, and many more, ask for that approach to the Bible which will not only do it justice as a literary work, but that will also speak to our contemporary need, personally and collectively. Men like H. E. Rowley in England, and Floyd Filson in America, say quite frankly that the evolutionary hypothesis which once separated the Bible from us as a serious book, has been quite abandoned. Something is in the Bible which is "charged" with divine power.

There is a growing recognition that only a biblical religion, founded on and nourished by the Bible, can suffice for this or any other day. 3

It is of first importance that our historical sense should not be vitiated by pre-conceived ideas, that we should not approach the evidence with an evolutionary or deterministic theory. 4

1Biblical Authority for Today, p. 7.
2Ibid., p. 7.
4Ibid., p. 9.
Rowley says that Biblical interpretation is more than an intellectual pursuit. Men are asking for commentaries more profoundly theological. "We need a more dynamic view of the Bible." But even the theological interpretation is not quite sufficient.

For the Bible is more than a theological book. It is a religious book, and religion is more than theology. Its study should do more than develop right views about God, man and duty, it should nurture right relations to God.¹

Interestingly enough, this same demand is recognised by the Reformed theologian, Louis Berkhof. He will be asked to speak for his segment of the Christian church.

Many writers on Hermeneutics are of the opinion that the grammatical and historical interpretation meet all the requirements for the proper interpretation of the Bible.²

But there is a third element needed. He said Kuyper emphasised the necessity for recognising the mystical factor, Bavinck, Klausen and Landerer, insisted on the theological factor and that he, himself, followed Callierier and Sikkell in adding a Scriptural interpretation. Whatever each of these men meant by these terms, it remains true that in the "third element" which was needed, is a recognition of a lack in the simple literal interpretation suggested by the historico-grammatical method.

¹Ibid., p. 16.

It is this researcher’s belief that the "third element" sought by all these Bible scholars is related to a theory of inspiration. Berkhof defends the right use of the mystical interpretation, because Scripture itself suggests its propriety, particularly in some of the Messianic passages. There is a symbolical relationship between different spheres of life, as for instance, marriage being a mystery pointing to Christ’s relation to the Church, and there is a typical relationship suggested in similar historical events which the book of Hebrews shows.\(^1\) Of particular significance in Berkhof’s stress on the implied sense of Scripture, beyond the literal content of any verbal composition. He says, "The Bible as the Word of God contains a fulness and wealth of thought that is unfathomable."\(^2\)

Even in human compositions we distinguish between the expressed and implied meaning. In "writings of a superior order" language leaps over the strict dictionary definition.

Great minds contain a wealth of knowledge, and whatever they communicate of it is related to and suggestive of that vast store, so that it becomes quite possible to read between the lines. And if this is true of the literary production of men, it applies much more to the infallible Word of God.\(^3\)

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 141.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 157.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 158.
Most specifically Berkhof says, in italicized type, "Not only the express statements of Scripture, but its implications as well, must be regarded as the Word of God."\(^1\) Any theory of inspiration which exalts the word unduly, or ends in the literal word of the text, will result in a theory of interpretation that is unsatisfactory, which does not do justice to the Bible as a religious book, nor does it confront men with the living God in daily existence. The very purpose of the Bible as men of all ages have conceived it, and as experience proves it to be, demands a theory of inspiration which adequately preserves that purpose. According to the testimony of the Christian thinkers quoted, and according to the tenor of a mass of similar sentiments from no less representative theologians, the contemporary Christian need is a view of Scripture which will give spiritual authority in the realm of personal and social experience, one that will give a Living, Working God, to living, sinful men.

Dr. A. B. Michelson senses this when he said

> Those who believe in verbal inspiration must not stress words to such an extent that people will think that words are ends in themselves . . . Words have but one purpose and that is to convey thought . . . Words without thoughts are nonsense syllables . . . This is why I often use the term "conceptual-verbal" in regard to inspiration.

This does not eliminate, in Dr. Michelson's mind the need for the

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 159.

correct word, but it seems to indicate the recognition of the need for looking beyond the word, to the thought which required the word, and to the spiritual dynamic which characterizes Christian religion.

A Christian professor in a conservative theological seminary adds an urgent word. There is "no subject more vital to our Christian faith," he says than the inspiration of Scripture. Without that inspiration "the whole superstructure of Christian faith must inevitably collapse." In facing the problem of the verbal differences in the Synoptics, as a New Testament scholar, he concludes that since the Bible is both human and divine, we need to acknowledge both freely. He says,

The point that seems to me all important is that the inspiration was not at the point of a pen, . . . Rather, it was in the minds and hearts of the writers. They thought the thoughts of God after Him and recorded them as best they could in their own words . . . This does not rule out the possibility that the Holy Spirit did, when the communication of divine truth required it, . . . guide the writer to use the proper form of the word employed.¹

H. H. Rowley, the British Baptist conservative Old Testament scholar quoted above, gives an instructive and significant analysis of the status of Biblical theology today. In 1944, he said in a preface to one of his books,

What I have tried to show in this little book is that the Bible is relevant to our modern world, which so largely

¹Ralph Earle, "Verbal Differences in Parallel Passages in the Synoptics," The Asbury Seminarian (Spring-Summer, 1954), p. 28.
ignores it, and that modern scholarship is not inimical to the spiritual understanding and use of the Bible . . . . It is not merely relevant to our age, but urgently relevant, and that the pressing need of the hour is for men and nations to receive the divine revelation mediated through the Bible, and culminating in the unveiling of God in Jesus Christ, and to base all their life on that revelation.¹

Rowley feels that not all the Biblical scholars in the critical schools were enemies of the Christian faith. Today's studies seek to accept the best of that study and transcend it to seek the abiding significance of the Bible for this generation.² It recognizes all the human processes that went into the book, yet knows it is not merely a human document. It understands that there was progress in revelation, but does not reduce revelation to discovery.³ The new attitude is completely frank. Where problems exist it acknowledges them. Archeological light is welcomed, but it sees real peril in trying to establish Biblical trustworthiness by means of it.

That the Bible has a far greater measure of historical trustworthiness than any other literature of comparable antiquity can be established without difficulty, but it is quite impossible to establish the historical inerrancy of the Bible.⁴

²Ibid., p. 15.
³Ibid., p. 17.
⁴Ibid., p. 18.
This does not discredit the message of the Bible. The new attitude gives full recognition of the religious quality of the Bible and its desire not alone to recover ancient situations, cultures and beliefs, but to find behind and through them the unchanging God, revealing Himself in all the Scripture. This ancient Book is God's word to us, relevant to the modern world and to our hearts.

Rowley's article on "The Relevance of Biblical Interpretation," stands as the first article in the first issue of Interpretation (1957), and in it he rings a clear note for the authority of the Bible for today and its basis in the fact of certain events. But those facts must be interpreted. And "biblical interpretation is more than an intellectual pursuit," he warns us, it is spiritual as well, and out of the material given us we must determine what is God's enduring word for us.

If this seems to be a compromising view from a conservative, note what one of the leading spokesmen for the Fundamentalist movement had to say in answer to the question, "Is the Bible the word of God or does it contain the word of God?"

If by the former is meant that God spoke every word in the Bible, and hence every word is true, the answer must be no; but if it be meant that God caused every word in the Bible, true or false, to be recorded, the answer is yes.

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1 Ibid., pp. 19-20.
As conservative a scholar as Dr. Merrill C. Tenney, asks that conservative critics "face squarely" several issues. Among them are two pertinent questions.

What is the relation of the Synoptic problem — and the Johannine problem as well — to the doctrine of inspiration? (and) Can a theory be propounded that will meet the conditions necessary to give a correct evaluation of the literary and spiritual qualities of these writings (italics are mine)?

In the author's opinion, Tenney has failed to come to grips with his own question but however that may be, the fact remains that this discussion is another significant segment in a growing body of literature from every quarter of the Christian Church, asking that a theory of inspiration be formulated which will provide an authoritative basis for the spiritual message which is widely felt to be the core of the Word of God, written.

Dr. Seeberg's comment suggests obliquely the relation of Biblical translations to the whole matter.

Everywhere in our day we are confronted by the great task of preserving Christianity to the modern mind. This can be accomplished only if the modern world can be brought to the consciousness that even at the present day the deepest wants, needs, and problems which move man find their answer in the Gospel, and that the Gospel need fear no progress of science and culture. But for this purpose no pains must be spared in translating the thoughts of the Christian revelation into the speech and modes of thought of our time.2


Unless the Bible is directly applicable to individual, contemporary need, translations are a foolish waste of time and money. The presupposition back of a translation, or back of a sermon in which the preacher "explains" the Hebrew or Greek, or back of a course in English Bible, or even one in the original languages, is that the Bible is relevant.

This chapter has suggested that the differences in Biblical interpretation are due in large measure to how inspiration is regarded. The problem of interpretation is the problem of inspiration on the one hand and the problem of the Bible's applicability on the other. If one believes that the Bible is relevant for today, a theory of inspiration which is congenial to interpretation as a working reality, is demanded. If one holds to the interpretability of the Bible, it is necessary to come to a satisfactory decision as to who may interpret, and whether the interpretation or the Bible itself is authoritative. If the Bible is special revelation and inspired by God, its interpretation is thereby taken out of the class of human writings. Another dimension of interpretation will have to cope with that aspect of the Bible which makes it special revelation. The next chapter will examine the attempts of Christianity in history to find a solution to these problems.