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## REFORMATION & REVIVAL JOURNAL

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A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

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1. To encourage *reformation* in the local Christian churches worldwide,
2. To promote the cause of *revival* and spiritual awakening through prayer and the provision of resources to aid Christian leaders.

## INFORMATION

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The conviction of the staff and editors of the *Reformation & Revival Journal* is that awakening, of the kind seen in the First Great Awakening in America, wedded to the doctrinal concerns of the historic Protestant Reformation as expressed in the terms *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*, is needed in our generation.

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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*John H. Armstrong*

O Word of God incarnate, O Wisdom from on high,  
O Truth unchanged, unchanging, O light of our dark sky;  
We praise Thee for the radiance that from the hallowed page,  
A lantern to our footsteps, shines on from age to age.

The Church from her dear Master, received the gift divine,  
And still that light she lifteth o'er all the earth to shine.  
It is the golden casket where gems of truth are stored;  
It is the heav'n drawn picture of Christ, the living Word.

It floateth like a banner before God's host unfurled;  
It shineth like a beacon above the darkling world.  
It is the chart and compass that o'er life's surging sea,  
'Mid mists and rocks and quicksands, still guides, O Christ,  
to Thee.

O Make Thy Church, dear Savior, a lamp of purest gold,  
To bear before the nations, Thy true light as of old.  
O teach Thy wand'ring pilgrims by this their path to trace,  
Till, clouds and darkness ended, they see Thee face to face.

William How, the author of these familiar words found in his hymn, "O Word of God Incarnate," understood correctly that "the Word of God" has several meanings within a balanced and correct Christian theology. Plainly, and *primarily*, the Word of God must always refer to Jesus Christ, the one who is the living Word of God (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; and Revelation 19:13). The apostle John makes this abundantly clear (the Old Testament *implies* it; cf. Psalm 119:89) that the eternal Word is *not* a book but the personal expression of God himself. This one who is the living Word sustains creation and works out God's purpose according to his own will. It is a actually a Muslim claim, not a Christian one, that written truth is

*eternal* since the Quran is itself believed to be an actual transcript of a tablet preserved in heaven *before* it ever came down to mankind.

When Christians enter the world that is to come they will no longer need the written Word. But why? The living Word himself will be the light of that glorious realm. In the presence of this living eternal Word, the person of Jesus Christ, we have all the revelation of God we could possibly need. The riches of this personal revelation will be inexhaustible and beyond imagination.

But the Holy Scriptures, the written Word, as William How notes in his insightful hymn, is "the gift divine" received "from her dear Master" as a light to the Church, and through the Church the truth is given to the whole earth. Scripture, How poetically writes, is a "golden casket where gems of truth are stored . . . the heav'n drawn picture of Christ the living Word." By this he means that the Bible is the account of, and the result of, God's personal revelation to this world. Therefore it is correct to say that "Through this very personal disclosure by God the Bible was written. Unless we use the Bible to receive knowledge of the eternal Word we will never really understand it."<sup>1</sup>

As Christians our *primary* emphasis must always be upon Christ, the living Word, the divine *logos*. This has not always been the case within some evangelical settings. Where this is the case, reformation is still necessary. The term *logos* had numerous uses in secular Greek but the biblical writers clearly intend for us to understand the *logos* to be a divine person, "a living Principle, a personalized instrument by which God fashions and governs the world."<sup>2</sup> To read secular Greek philosophical ideas into the term is unwarranted, even sub-Christian. To identify *logos* too closely with logic, as either a philosophy or a concept, is a further mistake. (Sadly, it is one especially made by some Reformed authors.) The Gospel of John, which estab-

lishes the use of the term *logos* in biblical revelation, is sufficiently Jewish in tone to suggest that the *logos* idea must be more clearly interpreted by the Old Testament itself. The apostle John's major contribution "was to declare that the divine co-Creator became incarnate: 'the *Logos* became *sarx*.'"<sup>3</sup> The claim being made here is simple, but staggering. The light of God brings salvation to all, but only in and through the *flesh* of Jesus of Nazareth.

Having noted this important truth it is plain that this is not the only use of the term Word in the New Testament. *Logos* further denotes the *message* of God's saving grace, a message confirmed in history (Mark 16:20). It is in the second sense "that 'ministers of the *logos*' are preachers of the Gospel (Luke 1:2), and in which hearing of the *logos* is said to lead to saving 'belief'" (Acts 4:4).<sup>4</sup>

When the apostles spoke of the Word of God there should be no doubt that their *primary* reference was to Christ, the incarnate Word. Jesus is God in the flesh (John 1:1, 14; 14:25; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:2; 1 John 2:1; Revelation 19:13) and he alone speaks the words of the Father (John 8:40; Matthew 22:16) openly and plainly. His words have sovereign authority and power (Matthew 8:8, 16; Hebrews 1:3).

Further, when the apostles preached the Word (*logos*) this word *is* the preaching of the Gospel in the New Testament. The Word of God and the written Holy Scriptures have this intimate relationship precisely because the Scriptures are the *instrument* God uses, as his divinely given and inspired (God-breathed out) Word, to bring us into relationship with the living incarnate Word *through* the Gospel. "Christ was the *Logos* and He preached the *logos*. He was the Sower and the Seed (Mark 2:2; 4:14). The synoptic evangelists seem reluctant to name Jesus explicitly as the Word, as St. John does, but they make the fact clear enough, and for them Jesus is the one in Whom the *logos* (the Gospel) 'deci-

sively encounters mankind.'"<sup>5</sup>

Thus the Holy Scriptures, as the Word of God, are a record and testimony of divine revelation. We could never know God, either about him or how to properly relate to him, unless God revealed himself to us. He has done this once for all in Jesus Christ, the living, abiding Word. He now discloses this once-for-all revelation of Christ *through* the sixty-six books of the Bible, which "are together the record, interpretation, expression, and embodiment of his self-disclosure."<sup>6</sup>

Theologian J. I. Packer is thus correct to note:

From one standpoint, the Scriptures (Scriptures means "writings") are the faithful testimony of the godly to the God whom they loved and served; from another standpoint, through a unique exercise of divine overruling in their composition, they are God's own testimony and teaching in human form. The church calls these writings the Word of God because their authorship and contents are both divine.<sup>7</sup>

It is by this written Word, the Holy Scriptures, that God now governs his people. Therefore the behavior of God's people and Christ's Church must always be profoundly rooted in these sacred writings. God's authority belongs, properly speaking, to God alone. But the *means* by which we come to know and understand this authority is the revelation of God in Christ, *mediated* to us through the written Word, that Word which the Spirit uses to reveal Christ to us. Protestant Christians have always affirmed, as did the fathers of the early church, that the Holy Scriptures are inspired (*God-breathed*, i.e., the *product* of God's breathing out), sufficient and perspicuous. By this they understood that the Scriptures told us everything we need to know for life and true godliness. And the Scriptures are clear, self-interpreting and straightforward.<sup>8</sup>

These points are simply made by the Bible itself. God's Word is true (Psalm 33:4), flawless (2 Samuel 22:31), infallible (1 Kings 8:56), eternal (Psalm 119:89), and exalted above all things (Psalm 138:2). It is, furthermore, irrevocable (Isaiah 45:23), the sword of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), the living and active truth of God (Hebrews 4:12), and that which endures (1 Peter 1:23).

The Holy Scripture, as the Word of God, is the theme for this issue. We address our theme from several standpoints. We consider what the term "the Word of God" actually means by developing the above theology more fully. We look at the history of revelation and then show how the Scriptures were used among early Baptists to develop a true and balanced spirituality. Robert Kolb, a Lutheran scholar, helps us look at the thought of Martin Luther's view of the Scripture as "a means of grace." We consider how we lost what Michael Glodo calls the sixth *sola* of the sixteenth century Reformers. David Moore, a wise student of these times, questions one particular modern abuse of the authoritative Scripture while Andrew Sandlin, a first-time contributor, offers two paradigms for those who would affirm *sola scriptura*. Finally, we look at the preaching of the Word of God.

#### Notes

1. Howard Taylor, "The Nature and Origin of the Bible," *Quodlibet Journal*, Volume 2, Number 1, January 2000.
2. Nigel Turner, *Christian Words* (Nashville: Nelson, 1982), 495.
3. *Christian Words*, 496.
4. *Christian Words*, 496.
5. *Christian Words*, 496.
6. J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 1993), 3.
7. *Concise Theology*, 3.
8. *Concise Theology*, 17.