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# The Bible and the Authority of Reason

BY JAMES PACKER

**T**HIS title is in itself highly provocative. We may expect it to draw forth strong reactions from two quite different types of people.

On the one hand, those who speak for the post-Christian humanism of the West will not like it. They will object to it for seeming to imply that the Bible takes precedence over the authority of reason. This implication, they will say, is false; the authority of reason is absolute and sacrosanct, and is subject to nothing that is external to reason itself. And they will wish to change our title to "The Authority of Reason and the Bible", in order to make it express their view that reason ought to judge Scripture, but not vice versa.

On the other hand, the alert evangelical Christian will not like our title either. He will complain of it for seeming to imply that the authority of reason is a reality with which the Bible in some way comes to terms. But this, he will say, is not so: the authoritative Scriptures do not regard the authority of reason as any more of a reality than is the power of an idol, or the truth of a lie. And he will go on to tell us that the word "authority" in our title ought to stand in inverted commas, or be followed by a bracketed question-mark, so as to show that the real issue here is whether the Bible will allow us to speak of the "authority" of reason at all.

So here we have two diametrically opposed positions. The humanist asserts that all authority belongs to human reason; and if there be a god, his status is merely that of patron for the truths which reason determines. The evangelical Christian asserts that all authority belongs to God the Creator, and not, therefore, to human reason; for human reason is not God. The seat of authority is not in the minds of men, but in the Word of God, before which human reason must bow.

From this difference of principle flows a difference of intellectual method. The humanist subjects all things, the teaching of Scripture included, to his own critical judgment. The evangelical Christian subjects all things, including his own thoughts and those of other men, to the critical judgment of Holy Scripture. Hence, when the humanist and the evangelical Christian meet in discussion, head-on collisions are inevitable.

But someone will say: surely there is a way of avoiding them? Can we not eliminate these collisions by partitioning the fields of life and truth into two watertight compartments? Can we not mark off the realm of religion from the secular realm, and let the Bible hold sway in the first, while reason rules in the second? Can we not in this way arrange a working agreement—a limited mutual recognition, a concordat—between the Bible and reason? Can we not thus keep the two principles of authority from clashing, by ensuring that they are never both applied to the same subject-matter?

No, we cannot. The solution is not feasible, for two reasons. In the first place : how are we to fix the line of demarcation between the two realms? By appealing to the Bible, or to reason? The very act of appealing to one rather than the other is in effect a recognition that the one to which we appeal has authority over the other. Thus we cannot fix any time of demarcation without prejudging the very issue which we were trying to evade. And then, in the second place : neither the Bible nor reason will allow us to partition life and truth in this way. The evangelical Christian cannot concede that there is any department of life or thought in which the Creator does not demand to rule through His written word. The Christian will therefore wish to tell the humanist that the Bible, or, rather, the God of the Bible, claims to exercise authority over all human thinking, and all human conduct, and that nothing may be exempted from His sway. And our humanist friends will, I think, be equally anxious to assure us that reason claims to rule the whole of life, and that all we believe and do needs to be brought into line with its dictates. Discussion will show that each side is committed to a programme which includes the conversion of the other. Our humanist friends will tell us that they want to bring us to their way of thinking, because ours is obscurantist and outmoded. We shall reply that we want, under God, to convert them to our way of thinking, because theirs is sin. In other words, the conflict here is between two rival views of life, two totalitarian ideologies, each of which necessarily condemns the other and seeks to overthrow it. And the idea that one could stop this conflict by partitioning life between the two combatants is foolish. One might as well hope to stop two boxers from trying to knock each other out by drawing a chalk line across the ring!

The directness of the opposition between these two outlooks has become clearer in recent years than once it was. A century ago, in Europe and America, post-Christian humanism in its various forms was in an advanced state of growth, but for the most part it had not yet cut loose from the Christian Church. By and large, its status was still that of a cuckoo in the Church's nest ; it was still vaguely theistic, and represented its opinions as a reinterpretation of Christianity rather than as an alternative to it. Only a few bolder spokesmen of the humanistic movement, like Nietzsche, ventured as yet to challenge the Christian outlook as a whole ; and within the churches only a few prophetic spirits, like Abraham Kuyper, saw the magnitude of the ideological conflict which was brewing. Today, however, things are different. The humanists are now for the most part outside the Church, and attacking it ; and the trend of modern theology, with its renewed stress on divine revelation and man's bondage to sin, has been such as to make it clear that humanistic self-sufficiency and biblical Christianity will not mix. The conflict between Christianity and humanism in all its many shapes—idealist, materialist, and existentialist—is now generally realized to be a war to the death. It can only end with the collapse or capitulation of one or both of the contending parties.

What I have said has already shown that the Western humanist is in revolt against his Christian cultural heritage. Accordingly, his claim that final authority for life resides in human reason must be understood as a defiant denial of the historic Christian view on which the post-Reformation culture of Europe and America was founded—the view, namely, that final authority for man's life resides in the statements of Holy Scripture. Our humanist friend, whether he calls himself a theist or an atheist, will deny categorically that Holy Scripture is authoritative divine truth in writing. This denial is the foundation on which his whole position rests. It is worth our while to consider at this point how he would justify his view of Holy Scripture.

If faced with this question, our humanist friend will probably think it enough simply to say that the older view of Holy Scripture was overthrown a century ago by the literary, historical, and philosophical critique to which the Bible was then subjected. The Bible, he will say, emerged from this ordeal a discredited oracle, a fallen idol. The view that all biblical assertions were authoritative divine utterances presupposed that all biblical assertions were true. But the effect of criticism was to show that not all biblical assertions are true. The critics taught the Western world to see the Bible as a strange mixture of fact with fancy, and of truth with error. Thus they made it impossible for modern man to go on treating the Bible as God's infallible truth. And thus they made it impossible for modern man to regard biblical statements, as such, as possessing final authority; for final authority cannot attach to statements which are not certainly true. So our humanist friend will tell us that the old Protestant claim, that final authority for faith and life resides in the teaching of Holy Scripture, has now been exploded, just as the similar claim on behalf of the "teaching church" was exploded at the time of the Reformation. But this, he will say, compels modern man to make his own reason his final authority for determining belief and behaviour, since no valid external principle of authority now presents itself. As claimants to final authority, both the Church and the Bible have demonstrably failed; from now on, therefore, willy-nilly, modern man must find his principle of final authority in himself. This, our humanist friend will say, is as true of the modern Christian as it is of the modern atheist. Henceforth, the theist must ground his theism and the Christian his Christianity on the same appeal to the final authority of reason, as the arbiter of fact and the judge of truth, that the atheist makes. And the debate between Christians and non-Christians must henceforth be understood as a debate between two kinds of rationalists, two brands of subjectivists, two groups which, however much their tenets differ, do at least find common ground in their common appeal to the authority of the human intellect. And if our humanist friend is knowledgeable in the realm of theology, he may well try to clinch his point by observing that many theological leaders in Western Protestantism do themselves accept this, and are labouring accordingly to reinterpret the biblical faith on rationalistic lines: which observation is, alas, only too true.

It is beyond our present scope to discuss the phenomenon of nineteenth century biblical criticism in detail; but we cannot let this

view of its significance pass unchallenged. What we are being told here is that the historic view of biblical authority was refuted, and the final authority of reason as a judge of truth was established, by the (alleged) collapse of the Bible under critical probing. But this is a mistake. It cannot be said that these positions were established by the last-century critique of Holy Scripture, for the very good reason that they were in fact the concealed presuppositions of that critique itself. Let us demonstrate this.

Consider the two principles on which the critique was avowedly founded.

The first was that the biblical record needs to be tested by the ordinary methods of historical research, and that we should not accept them as true further than they can be verified by this means. What does this principle imply? It implies that it is an open question whether biblical assertions are true or not. It implies that we are under no obligation to accept what is in the Bible as truth guaranteed to us by the fact of the Bible's divine authorship. In other words, we may regard ourselves as free to discount the testimony of Scripture to its own inspiration, truth, and authority, and to evaluate Scripture in a way which involves denying these aspects of Scripture's evaluation of itself. So the first principle amounts to this: that we are to proceed on the presupposition—we are, in other words, to take it for granted—that the historic view of biblical authority is false.

Such was the first principle. What of the second?

The second principle was that the critical intellect of the scholar has power to discern where the biblical presentation of things is false, and to make a truer reconstruction of what "really" happened, or what God's thoughts and intentions "really" were. In other words, we may set reason to the task of correcting Scripture. So the second principle amounts to this: that we are to proceed on the presupposition—we are, that is, to take it for granted—that reason has final authority as a judge of truth, whereas Holy Scripture has not.

Thus it appears that the conclusions supposed to have been established by last century biblical criticism were really the presuppositions on which it was based. Therefore they cannot be held to have been proved by biblical criticism at all.

How can a presupposition be established? Only by showing that no other presupposition is possible, because all other presuppositions lead to self-contradictory conclusions. Have the presuppositions of the fallibility of Holy Scripture, and the final authority of reason, been established in this way? They have not. Conservative Protestant scholarship has shown abundantly during the past hundred years that the phenomena of Holy Scripture can be accounted for without recourse to these presuppositions, or to any other presuppositions which are not yielded directly by Holy Scripture. It cannot be maintained, therefore, that the presuppositions which underlay last-century biblical criticism were the only possible ones. They were neither necessary nor obligatory; and the mere use of them cannot be held to have established them.

So the significance of last-century biblical criticism was not that it refuted the principle of biblical authority and established the authority

of reason in its place. Its real significance was rather as a sign of the times. The fact that rationalistic criticism could establish itself in Protestant Christendom so triumphantly, and win so many of the best minds in the churches to its support, showed how deeply and thoroughly secular assumptions were permeating the nineteenth century Western mind as a whole. The truth is that secularism laid hold of the entire Western outlook during the last century; science, philosophy, politics, art, fell under its influence; and its grip has hardly been loosened yet. The appeal to the authority of reason is, of course, the root-principle of secularism. Hence our present subject has a direct relevance to the troubles of our times. For of this we may be sure: that the apostasy of the Western world will not be brought to an end till the authority of reason is rejected, and the authority of God in Holy Scripture is acknowledged once more.

Such, then, is the contemporary background against which our subject must be set. In the light of it, I want to devote the rest of my time to discussing three themes: (i): the idea of the authority of reason in religion; (ii): the appeal to the authority of reason in Protestant theology; (iii): the estimate of the authority of reason in Holy Scripture.

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### *The idea of the authority of reason in religion*

Our aim in this section is to analyse more closely what is meant by the claim that reason has final authority in the realm of divine things, and to show what is involved in making this claim. We begin by defining our terms.

First, then: what is *reason*?

In ordinary speech, reason means, first and fundamentally, the power of abstract, analytical thinking. When we speak of the possession of reason as distinguishing man from other animate beings, what we mean is not that animals have no mental processes at all, but that man is the only animate being that can form an abstract idea, construct a definition, analyse a concept, make a generalization, classify, draw inferences, make deductions, conceive hypotheses and means to verify them—in short, do all the things that we lump together under the umbrella-word *ratiocination*. Reason is the faculty whereby man *ratiocinates*.

Why does man ratiocinate? In obedience to the characteristically human impulse to gain knowledge, to find things out, to understand the how and the why and the wherefore of happenings and phenomena, to make sense of his environment, and, if possible, to learn to control it. The object of reason's quest, in a word, is truth. And the fundamental notion of truth is that of correspondence between man's thoughts and that which is objectively the case.

In the realm where statements can be verified by direct observation, the pursuit of truth presents no apparent theoretical problem. It is not hard, for instance, to verify assertions like "there are more than 80 people in this room", or "the date today is August 14th"; nor is it hard to find out the truth about, say, the way that a washing

machine works. But in the realm of ultimate meanings, explanations, and values—the realm to which, of course, all theological statements belong—direct observation cannot guide us, and the determination of truth becomes a theoretical problem at once. Is it possible, we ask, for human reason, unaided, to probe this realm? Here is our humanist friend, who regards the Bible as an exploded fairy story and approaches life without reference to the Word of God—has he a right to assume that his own unaided reason can lead him to truth, and keep him from error, in the realm of ultimate realities and values? I submit that two factors in his situation ought to convince him that he has no right to make any such assumption.

The first is his *lack of a criterion of ultimate truth*. He has no final rational test for truth and falsity in the realm of meaning and value. The principle of coherence—the principle, that is, that all truths are consistent both with themselves and with all other truths—is sometimes invoked as if it could provide such a criterion; but it cannot. It does not follow that because a statement, or set of statements, is internally consistent, and contradicts no truth that we know of, therefore it is true. For it is always possible that it contradicts other truths that we do not yet know of. There was a time when Newton's physics passed the coherence test and were regarded as final; but then further truths about planetary movements were discovered with which Newtonian formulæ were not consistent, and as a result Newton's physics had to be modified by Einstein. There is no guarantee that any man-made view of anything will not sooner or later share a similar fate. Thus it appears that, because we lack omniscience and so never know what facts we shall stumble on next, we are never entitled to regard the coherence test as a final criterion of truth. Later discoveries may force us to abandon the most seemingly solid hypotheses. But if this is so, our humanist friend is evidently left without any conclusive test of ultimate truth at all. Thus he has no right to assume that it is within his power to find out ultimate truth and avoid fundamental error.

Then, in the second place, he needs to bear in mind *the reality of non-rational influences upon his own thinking*, especially in the realm of morality, ideals, and religion. The point here is that reason is not an abstract cosmic principle, pure and inflexible in all its operations, as the Greeks and Hegel, and many after Hegel, supposed; the reason which operates is always some particular person's reason, and the way that each man thinks will depend to a greater or less degree—certainly more than he himself realizes—on the kind of man that he is. Professor Dooyeweerd of Amsterdam and his colleagues are not the only twentieth century thinkers to emphasize that each man's point of view and deepest convictions come out of his *heart*, and express and reveal his inmost being. Modern psychology, in its way, has taught us the same lesson. It has shown us that human ratiocination is profoundly conditioned by unrecognized non-rational factors: temperament and character, physical condition, traumatic experiences which scar the soul, repressions, complexes, reaction to one's upbringing, and the rest. It has made us aware that much of what passes for ratiocination is really rationalization of non-rational impulses. And it has

made it plain that no man living can assess adequately the influence which non-rational factors of this kind are exercising upon his total outlook and way of thinking. Freud interpreted Jewish monotheism as a neurotic obsession, but there are grounds for suspecting that it is rather Freud's own atheism that should be accounted for in this way. Who can tell how far his deepest conscious convictions about God and duty have been determined for him by unconscious factors over which in principle he could exercise no control? Our humanist friend, in particular, has no right to assume that he is exempt from such biasing and deflecting influences. And this is a further reason why he is not entitled to assume that the attainment of ultimate truth lies within his power.

But if there is substance in what we have just said, then the claim that final authority in religion belongs to reason begins to sound rather forlorn.

Consider what this claim means. The word "authority" expresses the idea of a rule that is exercised as of right. That which has authority is entitled to legislate and govern. So the claim that final authority in religion belongs to reason must mean this: that when questions arise concerning God, and our relationship to Him, each man should set up his own reason as judge, and bow to what it says. He must call before him the various witnesses whose testimony bears on the issue—the biblical authors, the Church's tradition, and such individual opinions as seem to him important—and hear them all. But he is to listen to them as a judge listens to evidence, giving no more credence to any of them than the quality of their testimony seems to merit. Man's reason—that is, the thinking individual himself—stands in an autonomous, critical relationship to all the opinions that pass before him. Having heard them, it is now his responsibility to make up his own mind, on the basis of his assessment of the views expressed, and in the light of any relevant convictions and principles of judgment that he may himself have brought to the inquiry. Then he must live by the conclusions he reaches. To claim that final authority in religion belongs to reason is to assert that this is the method by which religious truth is to be sought, and that no other method is legitimate. The claim, in other words, is a demand that every man should act in this way when religious questions press upon him.

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Upon this proposed intellectual method we would pass just four comments:

(i) *See what it presupposes.* It assumes that there is no such thing as immediately accessible revelation from God the Creator. For if there were, then it would at once become man's duty to believe and obey it, to renounce this recommended critical autonomy, and to become a humble pupil of the Word of God. In other words, the claim that reason has final authority in religion presupposes, as we pointed out earlier, that the Bible is not infallible and authoritative Divine truth, but something less.

(ii) *See where this method leads.* Sooner or later, it is bound to issue in a new authoritarianism. This sounds paradoxical, for the envisaged method purports to be the antithesis of all authoritarianism; but it is none the less an inevitable development. Why? Well, for this reason. Sooner or later, each individual thinker will reach the point where he has to acknowledge that in certain departments of religious study he is not expert enough to have a right to an opinion. Therefore he will resolve to defer to those who in his judgment are experts in it. So before long we shall find our champions of freedom from external authority coming to regard the professional biblical critic, or the religious philosopher, or the oracular ecclesiastic, or the confident preacher, or even the pontifical schoolmaster, in precisely the same way in which Roman Catholics regard the priest and the Pope: namely, as persons whose word is to be taken without demur, because they know what they are talking about. Here is a further illustration of the inexorable law that those who cast off the authority of the Word of God always end up in bondage to the thoughts and words of their fellow-men.

(iii) *See how little hope of success this method has.* From what has been said of the limitations of human reason as a tool for discovering truth, and without reference as yet to the mental effects of sin (that will come later), we are already entitled to ask: is it likely that those who trust to the critical authority of reason will be led by it into all religious truth? Is it not, rather, certain that at the end of their explorations they will find themselves in the state described in I Corinthians i. 21—"the world by wisdom knew not God"? And is it not, therefore, certain, too, that the only fruit of such experiments will be a collapse into scepticism and nihilism, under a crushing sense of reason's failure and bankruptcy? Indeed, we have only to look around us to see proof of this: for did not the intellectual heroics of last century philosophy in the realm of religion give rise to just such a temper of disillusionment in European culture? And is not that temper with us to this day?

(iv) *See how this method differs* from that which will be followed by the evangelical Christian, on whose heart God has sealed the authority of His own inspired Word by the testimony of His Holy Spirit. When facing religious questions, the evangelical Christian also will use his reason, and think hard; but he will not appeal to his own thoughts as in any way authoritative. In all his thinking, the part he seeks to play will be that of a pupil, not a judge. The whole purpose of his intellectual efforts will be to learn of God, to receive what the Bible teaches, to understand and apply Holy Scripture. He will listen to the words of the biblical writers, not as expressing merely human views of truth, possibly right and possibly wrong, but as God's own words, spoken through human lips: words to be believed, treasured, applied, and obeyed. In all this, he will not dare to lean to his own understanding, but will pray constantly for Divine teaching; and his hope of gaining truth from his study of Holy Scripture will rest, not on any confidence in the powers of his own critical intellect, but on his confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Bible, to interpret it to him. His critical activity in Bible study, therefore, will

take the form, not of judging Holy Scripture by his own thoughts, but of correcting his own thoughts in the light of what the Holy Spirit teaches him through the written Word. There could not be a greater contrast in the realm of intellectual method than that between the consistent evangelical Christian and the protagonist of the authority of reason. And it is now clearer than ever that no compromise is possible between them. To accept either is really to repudiate the other.

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This leads us on to the second of our three subjects :

*The appeal to the authority of reason in Protestant theology*

Clearly, from what we have said, no such appeal ought ever to be made by Protestant theologians. In fact, however, it has been made, and made in most far-reaching ways, almost since Protestant theology was born. The pattern each time has been the same : current philosophical principles have been taken as axiomatic, without being first tested and corrected by exegesis of Holy Scripture, and then the task of exegesis has itself been re-conceived as one of learning to read the Bible in the light of these principles. In other words, reason has been appealed to to provide the basic categories for biblical interpretation. Exegetes have brought to the Bible a philosophical strait-jacket and squeezed the Bible into it ; or—to illustrate differently—they have played Procrustes, building a bed of philosophical principles, compelling the Bible to lie on it, and ruthlessly twisting and hacking it about, if necessary, in order to make it fit.

The basic perplexities of modern Protestant theology are the direct result of three such episodes—three successive mutilations of the doctrine of God through the intrusion of philosophical principles into biblical exegesis. We may briefly sketch out what these were.

First, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, came the movement of thought which *made God stand back from man*. This was, of course, Arminianism, which read Scripture in the light of the philosophical axiom that man's moral freedom and responsibility are not compatible with divine control of his actions. The Arminians insisted that man acts independently of God, and that man has power to thwart God's plan for his life, and, indeed, for history as a whole, by non-co-operation with God. This was to deny what Reformed theology, following Scripture, had previously taught, namely, that God is Absolute Lord even of free and responsible human actions, as He is of all things beside.

Then, at the end of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth century, came the movement of thought which *made God stand back from His world*. This was English Deism, later exported to provide a theological foundation for the continental Enlightenment. The Deists presupposed the Arminian position, and went further. They read Scripture in the light of the philosophical axiom, drawn from current science, that the universe was to be conceived as a machine, running according to fixed, built-in laws. They pictured God as the Great Mechanic who built the machine, and now stands idle, watching it go. Not only does He not directly control man's actions ; He does not

directly control anything. His role in history is merely that of an interested spectator. This was to deny a further principle which Reformed theology, following Scripture, had previously taught, namely, that God actively energizes and controls all that comes to pass in His world.

This effective dethroning of God was not reversed when later theologians stressed God's immanent presence in His world rather than His transcendent separation from it; for they did nothing to restore His active lordship over it. The change, therefore, was no improvement. It does not, after all, make much difference in practice whether I bar an unwelcome guest out of the house, or lock him in the cellar: and this was really all that the change meant.

Then, in the nineteenth century, the third step was taken: *God was silenced*. This was the contribution of Kant, Schleiermacher, and the Liberals. Liberalism in effect abolished the idea of revelation. It read Scripture in the light of the philosophical axiom that religion is a universal human phenomenon, consisting essentially in a sense of God, having no communicated intellectual content, but evolving as man evolves, and producing in the course of its evolution sacred books, in which this sense of God finds more or less adequate expression. This was to deny the historic Reformed and biblical view, namely, that God has spoken to Man, and the Bible is, quite simply, His own written account of what, by word and action, He has said. For this view was substituted the idea that the Bible is a human testament of religion—a record of pious impressions and human thoughts about God, but no more.

Thus the authority of reason, intruding into Protestant theology, in effect forbade the Creator to do or say anything in His own world. And this was the intellectual legacy—the combined legacy of Arminianism, Deism, and Liberalism—that twentieth century theologians inherited. Hence their perplexities. The dominant figures in modern theology—men like Barth, Brunner, Niebuhr, and even Bultmann and Tillich—profess to have reconstruction as their aim, and to be recapturing the lost essence of the biblical faith. But to do this effectively, it is clear that they need to disown the authority of reason, and to repair these breaches in the walls of the Christian faith, which a sinful deference to reason has occasioned. Are they, we ask, successfully doing this?

It must be said with regret that on the whole they are not. If I may venture on some provocative generalizations, modern theology presents the spectacle of a kind of intellectual antinomianism. It recognizes its sins, but is not prepared to put them entirely away. It is attempting to recover faith without a complete repentance; to recover the ground that was lost through the three invasions mentioned above without properly repairing the walls, or turning out the invaders. Thus, modern theologians want to recover the reality of revelation in the Bible, and yet they do not want to break with the last century view of the Bible as a fallible and partly untrue record, nor do they want to part company with the philosopher Kant, whose teaching seemed to rule out propositional revelation as impossible. They want to recapture the knowledge of God's sovereignty in the world, and yet they

do not want to break with the accepted modern scientific world-view, although this view has no time, or is supposed, at least, to have no time, for any concept of miracle. In short, the authority of reason has not yet been thoroughly challenged in modern theology; and until it is, evasive interpretations of Scripture and ambiguous theological syntheses will inevitably continue to be the order of the day. No theologian can serve two masters, and not even Bultmann can convince us that it is possible to maintain faith in God the Redeemer while denying God the Creator and the Lord. But we cannot develop these thoughts here.

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We proceed, then, to our third and final subject.

*The Estimate of the Authority of Reason in Holy Scripture*

Here we raise three questions.

First: Whence comes the impulse, common, as we have seen, to our humanist friends outside the Church and to a great number of theologians within the Church—common, indeed, to us all, though some of us try to resist it—to trust and follow the leading of human reason in matters of religion, rather than be content simply to take God's word for things? Whence, in other words, comes the impulse to exalt reason over revelation, and the sense of outrage which is so widely felt when the authority of reason in religion is challenged?

Answer: This spirit springs from *sin*. To doubt revelation in favour of a private hunch was the sin into which Satan led Eve, and Eve's children have been committing the same sin ever since the fall. The impulse to indulge oneself in believing something other than what God has said is an expression of the craving to be independent of God, which is the essence of sin. The attempt to know all things, including God, by reason, without reference to revelation, is the form that this craving for independence takes in the intellectual realm; just as the attempt to win heaven by works and effort, without grace, is the form that it takes in the moral realm. Pride prompts fallen mankind to go about, not merely to establish their own righteousness, but also to manufacture their own wisdom. The quest all along is for self-sufficiency: our sinful arrogance prompts us to aspire after independence of God in the realm of knowledge. We want to be intellectually autonomous, intellectually self-made men. This is a sin of which we need to repent, and of which the Gospel commands us to repent. The Gospel not only tells us that it is useless to seek righteousness by works, and commands us to stop doing it, and to put faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as our righteousness with God; the Gospel also, and fundamentally, is a message that tells us that it is useless to seek the truth about God by speculation, and it comes to us as a command to stop speculating, and to put faith in what God has said, simply on the grounds that it is He, the God of truth, who has said it. The Gospel, in other words, repudiates absolutely the authority of reason, and demands implicit subjection to God's revealed truth. It is a summons to repentance on the intellectual plane no less than on the moral plane. And this is why it appeared "foolishness" to the Greeks (I Cor. i. 23), and why

it still appears foolishness to their intellectual descendants in the modern world.

Second : What results from setting up the authority of human reason in the realm of religion ?

Answer : The result is *ignorance of God*, and *idolatry*—nothing more, and nothing less. In the pagan Gentile world, possessing only God's general revelation of Himself through nature and conscience, this ignorance becomes complete, and this idolatry absolute. So it was in the pagan world of Paul's day, and so it is among unevangelized pagan tribes today. The formula that covers this state of affairs is that of I Cor. i. 21 : "The world by wisdom knew not God". "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Rom. i. 22f.). Whether the pagans are cultured, like the Greeks, or uncultured, like the South American Indians, makes no significant difference to the situation. Fallen man's reason is blind through sin, so that no amount of reasoning unaided by the Holy Spirit can find out God. Fallen man's reason is, moreover, the servant of a sinful heart, which does not like to retain God in its knowledge (Rom. i. 28), and labours accordingly to turn the light of general revelation into darkness. Thus men "hold down the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. i. 18, R.V.), and out of their hearts, through the perverting of general revelation, come false gods of all sorts. The hands and minds of men make gods in man's own image, or in the image of something lower than man ; and the service of such gods leads to self-debasement, and immorality, and crime, and shame (Rom. i. 26-32).

And in the churches, where Gospel light has shone, the only result of paying attention to speculative theology, and allowing private guesses and hunches to determine one's faith to any degree, is ignorance of God, misconceptions of Christ, misdirection of worship, and ethical aberrations, so that one's Christianity is more or less impoverished and distorted. The second chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians bears much pondering in this connection.

Third : What will break men of the habit of looking to the authority of reason in religion ?

Answer : Only *regeneration* will break it in the natural man, and only *revival* will break it in a degenerate church.

Fallen man cannot of himself escape from bondage to sin. Sin he must, whatever he does. It is not in him to acknowledge God's authority ; it is not in him to receive God's truth when it is presented to him. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. ii. 14). What can cure his condition ? Only *regeneration*. Only the man who is born again of the Spirit of God will repent of the sin of intellectual self-sufficiency, and consent to be taught of God through His written Word. As Calvin insisted, it is one of the marks of the Christian man that he is convinced, through the Spirit's inner witness, of the divinity and authority of Holy Scripture, and subjects his mind and binds his conscience to it.

But sin remains in the regenerate, in the mind no less than in the members. And when the fires of spiritual life burn low in the Church, the sinful lust for intellectual autonomy reasserts itself. The intellectual apostasy of Western Christendom in recent years is not unconnected with its spiritual lethargy and barrenness : each has both fostered, and been fostered by, the other. What can cure this condition? Only *revival*. Only a new outpouring of spiritual life can clear the spiritual vision, and bring home to the minds of Christians the power, the authority, and the meaning of " God's Word written ", and enable them to see their mental sins, their intellectual compromises and betrayals of truth, for what they are, and give them strength of mind to repent and cast the sinful ways of thinking out. Only revival will bring a moribund Church to subject its thoughts effectively to Holy Scripture, and enable it to apprehend truly and deeply the riches of Christ, " in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge " (Col. ii. 3), and to bring " every thought into captivity to Christ " (II Cor. x. 5). There is no question that this is the most urgent and crying need of Protestant Christendom today.

May God revive His work in His Church in this day of wrath, that His people may once again learn to think and live to His honour and glory.

