

# THE FAITH

A SYMPOSIUM

Edited by

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## The Scriptures

F. F. BRUCE

THREE hundred years ago the Assembly of Divines at Westminster introduced their best-known summary of Christian doctrine, the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, with the following three propositions: (1) 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever'; (2) 'The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him'; (3) 'The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.'

If it be true, as these three propositions declare, that the Bible is the only means by which we can know and achieve the true purpose of our being, then no special argument is needed to justify giving a statement of the Bible's authority a prominent place in a symposium on the Christian faith. For the Holy Spirit speaking through the Bible is acknowledged by us, in common with all heirs of the Protestant Reformation, as the supreme judge by whom all questions of doctrine are to be adjudicated, and as the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

It might have been expected *a priori* that if God wished to communicate a knowledge of His will and character to men He might have done so in a series of propositions. But in fact He has not done so. We may draw up statements of doctrine and confessions of faith, article by article in logical sequence, and base them firmly on the Bible; but the Bible itself does not take this form.

At first glance, the Bible is seen to fall into two parts of unequal length, known respectively by the not very illuminating names of the Old Testament and the New Testament. But if for the misleading word Testament we substitute the word Covenant,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gk. *diathēkē* may mean either 'covenant' or 'testament.' In early Latin Christian literature it was represented by both *instrumentum* and *testamentum*, but the rendering that prevailed was *testamentum*, whence 'testament' became the regular equivalent of *diathēkē* in English.

and then think of the Bible as divided into the Books of the Old Covenant and the Books of the New Covenant, we shall come to a much closer realization of what the Bible is. It is, in fact, a record of God's revelation of Himself among men, culminating in the incarnation, death and exaltation of Jesus Christ His Son, and intimately bound up with the relations established by God with His covenant-people—the nation of Israel in earlier times, and the Christian community in the new age which was inaugurated by Christ. There is an organic unity between these two groups of people, in that Jesus (who is the very embodiment of God's revelation) is both Israel's Messiah and Head of the Christian Church, while His first followers represent both the last faithful remnant of the old covenant-people and the nucleus of the new covenant-people.

Professor A. M. Hunter, in his book *The Unity of the New Testament*, finds that this unity consists in the fact that the New Testament tells the story of God's salvation, in relation to the Bringer of salvation, the way of salvation, and the heirs of salvation. And this is equally true of the Bible as a whole. 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary for salvation,' runs the sixth of the Thirty-nine Articles. It does not contain all things necessary (say) for a knowledge of the physical universe (although it insists that the physical universe is itself the work of God and a witness to His everlasting power and divinity: cf. Rom. 1. 20); but then that was not the object for which the Biblical revelation was given. It was given to fallen humanity in order that we might come to know God as a just God and a Saviour. And God revealed Himself thus by personally intervening in the course of human history through mighty acts which declared His nature and His will, and which found their consummation in the accomplishment of the world's redemption through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

The Bible therefore begins by telling of the preparation of the world for the emergence of a chosen people with whom God entered into an intimate covenant-relationship in order that they might know Him personally and communicate His knowledge to other nations. This nation (the Bible goes on to narrate) He redeemed for Himself in the mighty events of their deliverance

from Egypt and their entry into Canaan, and in spite of their general unfaithfulness to the terms of His covenant He dealt with them in mercy and judgment, preparing the way for the advent on earth of His Son, Who on the human plane was to be born of that nation. To them also from time to time He sent His messengers, from Moses, their first lawgiver, through Samuel and all the prophets. These men interpreted to them the significance of God's mighty self-revealing acts, and taught them the knowledge of His will in further ways, interpreting from the divine angle the events of their own time and pointing forward also to the time when God would fulfil His promises to them by sending the Messiah-Saviour. In the words of the prophets, then, God revealed Himself as well as in His mighty acts; and it is worth noting that in the Hebrew Bible most of the historical books of the Old Testament are enumerated among the prophetic books equally with the books which directly record the words of the prophets. The history of Israel in the Old Testament is told from the prophetic viewpoint. History and prophecy alike are recorded with a forward-looking view. The prophets, who were the authors of histories and prophecies alike, composed both under the inspiration of God with a view to that day of fulfilment of which they were dimly aware when they predicted, as Peter puts it, 'the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory' (1 Peter I. II, R.S.V.).<sup>1</sup>

The Old Testament is indispensable for a proper understanding of the New, but it cannot be understood itself except in the light of the New. Emil Brunner has compared the Old Testament to the first half of a sentence and the New Testament to the second half; each half requires the other and both are necessary for the meaning of the whole sentence. The mighty deeds and prophetic words by which God made Himself known to Israel, and which have been recorded for our learning in the Old Testament, were the earlier stages in a series of deeds and words which were destined to be summed up in the deeds and words of Christ. And as the Old Testament is the record of the preparatory revelation, the New Testament is the record of the fulfilment in Christ. The mighty deeds of God wrought through Christ are His supreme revelation to men: in them His salvation, concerning which the

<sup>1</sup>R.S.V.—American Revised Standard Version, 1946.

prophets inquired and searched diligently, has been brought near. And in the words of Christ we have the message of 'a prophet mighty in deed and word' (Luke 24. 19), who was more than simply the last of the series of Israel's prophets, being Himself the One of whom the prophets spoke and the One whose Spirit spoke through them. They *uttered* the word of God; He *is* the Word of God. They said, 'Thus saith *the Lord*'; but He said, 'I say unto you.' He is the One to whom law and prophecy bear witness; at His advent they recede, for in Him their witness is completed. Moses and Elijah conversed with Him on the holy mount touching His coming decease at Jerusalem—that greater Exodus of which the Exodus of Moses' day was a foreshadowing, just as the redemption associated with the blood of the paschal lamb pointed forward to the cosmic redemption achieved when Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. Then, having conversed with Him thus and crowned their witness to His glory, Moses and Elijah disappeared into the cloud, which passed to reveal to the disciples no man save Jesus only. For He is the sum and substance of Old Testament revelation (Luke 9. 28-36. The Gk. word translated 'decease' in verse 31 is *exodos*. The subject discussed on the holy mount was the subject which had formed the burden of O.T. Scripture).

The story of 'all that Jesus began both to do and to teach' (Acts 1. 1) was the burden of the apostolic testimony after His ascension. The apostolic preaching (*kērygma*) was the good news of God's saving activity in the passion and triumph of His Son; the apostolic teaching (*didachē*) which was imparted to those who had believed the good news was based on the teaching of Jesus Himself.

But He told His disciples plainly that while He was with them on earth He could not teach them all that they needed to know. The great saving events themselves had to take place before they would be able to receive all that He desired to teach them. And for this purpose, among others, He sent them His Spirit. On the eve of His betrayal He promised His disciples that after His departure from them He would send His *alter ego*, the Holy Spirit, to bring to their remembrance all that He Himself had told them; to guide them into all the truth, and to show them things to come (John 14. 26; 16. 12-14). While these promises are not restricted to any one generation of His followers, they found a special

fulfilment in the first generation, and as a result of this special fulfilment we have the Books of the New Covenant. Our New Testament is the written deposit of the apostles' witness to Christ—their narration both of the events which accompanied and followed His coming into the world, and of all that He taught, including not only what He began to teach them in the days of His flesh, but also what He continued to teach them later from heaven by His Spirit. 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' in Old Testament and New Testament alike (Rev. 19. 10: 'The Spirit of prophecy is the Spirit of Jesus, Who must needs testify of Jesus.'—H. B. Swete, *in loco*). The prophets of Old Testament times testified to Him in advance; the apostles in New Testament times testified to Him as the One whom they had seen and heard and touched—the incarnate Word of life. The prophets knew but dimly the circumstances under which their words would be fulfilled (1 Peter 1. 10-12); the apostles, who lived at the time of their fulfilment, spoke unhesitatingly as those upon whom the end of the ages had come: 'This is that which was spoken by the prophet' (Acts 2. 16).

If we ask how the Holy Spirit so controlled those prophets and apostles as to give their words the unique quality of inspiration which they possess, we must answer in the opening words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'in many and various ways' (Heb. 1. 1, R.S.V. The words so translated, Gk. *polymerōs kai polytropōs*, are the first words of the Epistle). And in all the variety of these ways their individuality of thought and diction remained unimpaired. The paradox of Biblical inspiration has been well expressed in these words of Bishop Handley Moule:

'He who chose the writers of the Holy Scriptures, many men scattered over many ages, used them each in his surroundings and in his character, yet so as to harmonize them all in the Book which, while many, is one. He used them with the sovereign skill of Deity. And that skilful use meant that He used their whole being, which He had made, and their whole circumstances, which He had ordered. . . . He can take a human personality, made in His own image, pregnant, formative, causative, in all its living thought, sensibility and will, and can throw it freely upon its task of thinking and expression—and

behold, the product will be His; His matter, His thought, His exposition, His Word, living and abiding for ever' (*The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans*, Expositor's Bible, 1893, pp. 7 f.).

The Biblical writers were not mere penmen or secretaries; they were authors in the full sense of the word, yet authors under the overruling influence of God the Holy Spirit, the Primary Author. Divine control does not suppress a man's faculties and talents, but raises them to their highest capacity.

The Holy Spirit, who spoke through the prophets and who indwelt Jesus in permanent fulness, is the same Spirit whom Jesus, after His ascension, bestowed upon His disciples to reveal to them more fully the things concerning Himself. And these things He also reveals to us as we read the witness of those men of old who spoke from God as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is not only the Primary Author of Scripture, but also, in Abraham Kuyper's phrase, the Perpetual Author, continually speaking through the Word to the believing reader and unfolding fresh meaning from it. This abiding vitality is one of the outstanding evidences of the Bible's divine character. No one generation can exhaust its significance. It is as true in our day as in John Robinson's that 'the Lord has more truth yet to break forth out of His holy Word.'<sup>1</sup> Every Scripture, says the apostle (2 Tim. 3. 16), is 'God-breathed' (Gk. *theopneustos*), and just as Adam became a living soul when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2. 7), so the 'God-breathed' writings are also living, and life-giving as well. The Spirit who spoke in ancient days to and through the prophets and apostles still speaks to us through the written record of that revelation, saying, 'Hear, and your soul shall live.' In the Bible, therefore, we find not only what the Spirit said to the Churches of the first century, but what He is still saying to those of the twentieth. But what He says to us is in perfect harmony with what He said to them. 'The Holy Ghost,' as John Knox said to Queen Mary, 'is never contrarious to Himself' (*History of the Reformation in Scotland*, ed. C. J. Guthrie, 1898, p. 280).

<sup>1</sup> From the address to the Pilgrim Fathers on the eve of their departure from Leyden in 1620, reported in D. Neal, *History of the Puritans*, ii (1732), p. 129, on the basis of Edward Winslow's 1646 account, and frequently quoted since; see article 'John Robinson' in *Dictionary of National Biography*.



The Scriptures, then, inspired and interpreted by the Holy Spirit, are the rule of faith, by which everything that is commended to our belief with regard to ultimate realities is to be tested. And as they are the rule of faith, so they are also the rule of practice, being 'profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3. 16 f., R.S.V.). But when we call the Bible the rule of faith and practice, we do not mean that any part of it can be taken and applied in this way, without regard to its context. The inspiration of the Bible does not imply that all the actions recorded in it, even those of good men, have the divine approval, or that all the words reported, even those of wise men, have the divine authority. Abraham's equivocation about his relationship to Sarah, for example, is not a model for us to imitate, nor is every argument of Job's friends an utterance of the Most High. There are many such deeds and words preserved in the Biblical narrative which are not part of God's revelation of Himself; they are, however, part of the context in which that revelation was given, and they were written down for our instruction.

Much harm has been caused by isolating parts of the Bible from the whole. *All Scripture* is the context in the light of which *any Scripture* is to be understood and applied; the earlier stages in the revelation appear in their true perspective when viewed in the context of the completed revelation in Christ. The Scriptures, in fact, cannot be properly interpreted or used apart from Christ and the testimony which they bear to Him. 'It is they,' He said Himself, 'that bear witness to Me' (John 5. 39, R.S.V.); and only by remembering that shall we be able to handle the Word of truth aright.

Holy Scripture, we believe, is sufficient for the purpose for which it was given—to teach us the way of salvation through faith in Christ and to show us how we ought to live as those who have received this salvation. Is it then immaterial whether it is accurate or not in other matters, which it touches incidentally? This question has been raised, for instance, with regard to questions of physical science and general history. In the former case, the relation of the creation narratives of Genesis to the ascertained

conclusions of scientific research is still debated from time to time. It is obvious, at any rate, that the Biblical account of the origin of the world is notably free from the grotesque and polytheistic features which mark most ancient cosmogonies. That the *language* in which it records the beginning of things should differ from the language of modern science goes without saying. When the Biblical language on these matters is criticised as 'pre-Copernican,' one can only ask in wonder what else could be expected. Again, to imagine that we should expect (say) complete conformity between the creative days of the first chapter of Genesis and the geological order as commonly reconstructed nowadays would be to attribute to twentieth-century science a finality which no reputable scientist would wish to claim for it. The Genesis cosmogony has a dignity all its own; and if we could go back through time to the birth of the world we should find ourselves passing in reverse through stages not dissimilar to those successively described in the first chapter of the Bible. It is noteworthy, too, that the origins of matter, life and mind, for which no satisfactory explanation has yet been given by scientific investigation, are all three ascribed in the Genesis narrative to the creative act of God. (This is not to say that God's creative power must be sought only in the gaps unbridged as yet by scientific discovery—gaps which may be closed in our faces to-morrow. 'His tender mercies are over all His works,' and His activity extends continuously throughout all space and time.) Above all, these opening verses of the Bible have their chief value for us in that they emphasize that the God of the Bible, who in the fulness of time sent forth His Son, is the Maker of heaven and earth, and that the race of men, in which the Son of God in due course became incarnate, was in the beginning created in God's image and after His likeness.

As for the historical element which bulks so largely in the Bible, it is particularly important to know how far we can regard it as a trustworthy account of events that really happened, for the simple reason that the Bible represents God as a God who has revealed Himself in history. Our faith is an historical faith; it is based on something which God is said to have done at a particular point in time, when 'Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord . . . suffered under Pontius Pilate.' People who say that the Christian

religion would not be greatly affected even if it could be proved that Jesus Christ never lived are not talking about a religion of which the Bible knows anything.

There is one event above all others where the supernatural claims of Christianity are so interwoven with the historical process that, if once the historicity of that event is established, the whole of Christianity is logically established at the same time; whereas, if that event could be proved unhistorical, the whole fabric of the Gospel would collapse. That event is the resurrection of Christ. Some theologians regard this as a purely 'theological' event which cannot be proved by historical evidence but must be received by faith alone; others characterize it as a 'myth' (in the proper and not the popular sense of the word) which embodies certain eternal values. But these conceptions of the nature of Christ's resurrection are quite inadequate to convey the true significance of that event, and fall far short of the way in which it is presented in the earliest apostolic preaching. The apostles, who claimed to be eye-witnesses of their Lord's resurrection, described it as something that really happened, and they appealed to the recognized laws of evidence in support of their claim. The circumstances of the event were so public in character that the resurrection narratives of the New Testament lend themselves particularly well to examination of this kind; and we should welcome the closest scrutiny of the record, as the apostles themselves did, by the severest canons of literary and historical criticism. The apostles staked everything on the reality of this event—not only the truth of the message they preached but life itself. And indeed, the more the whole matter is sifted, the more convincingly does it appear that the only account which satisfies all the evidence is the account which the Bible gives—that Jesus of Nazareth, who died on the cross, returned to life the third day thereafter.

But if this is so, the other supernatural features in the Bible story present no great problem. The resurrection is presented as the crowning instance of God's mighty self-revealing works; no reader need be stumbled by the presence of the miraculous in the record of those works once he has accepted the truth of this supreme miracle.

The whole Biblical record, in fact, responds astonishingly well

to historical research. We grant that the presentation and proportion of Biblical history differ from those of ordinary history, in view of the distinctive purpose for which Biblical history was written. But Biblical history has had an ever-increasing flood of new light thrown upon it in recent years, mainly from archaeological and similar research, and while such research is in the nature of things incapable of confirming the details of the narrative, it does confirm the general picture which the Bible gives us of Near Eastern history, from the first century A.D. back to the fourth millennium B.C., to the picture of antediluvian civilization which we find at the end of the fourth chapter of Genesis.<sup>1</sup>

We welcome all the help which can be given in these ways to the understanding of the Scriptures. We shall appreciate the Biblical record all the more for being able to read it against its contemporary background. While it has a message for every age, we shall be all the better able to learn its message for our own age by seeing the various parts in the light of the age in which each appeared. We wish to be as sure as possible, too, of the faithful transmission and translation of the original text, and we highly value the selfless labours that so many have expended on these important matters. We acknowledge that historical, philological and textual studies have a necessary and honourable place by way of introduction to the exegesis of the Scriptures. It is all to the good that studies like these should throw light on the sacred narrative and help to dispel difficulties which for some readers appear to stand in the way of their accepting the Biblical testimony. But it is not by these means that the real authority of the Bible is established.

God is His own interpreter; He also can best vindicate Himself. If God speaks, His word must be self-evidencing; we cannot suppose that He is dependent on anything other than His own authority to establish His word as being indeed His word. When the prophets spoke for God, the divine origin of their message

<sup>1</sup> Cf. such a statement as this by W. F. Albright: 'There can be no doubt that archæology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament tradition' (*Archæology and the Religion of Israel* [1941], p. 176). This confirmation goes back through patriarchal times, upon which a flood of light has been thrown in the last 25 years, to the Deluge and even earlier; for archæological evidence bearing on Gen. 4. 16-22 cf. J. G. Duncan, *New Light on Hebrew Origins* (1936), pp. 15 ff. As regards the N.T. period I may be permitted to refer to my little book, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?* (3rd ed., 1950).

was discerned by those who had the requisite spiritual capacity; when the apostles wrote, they challenged similar recognition in words such as these: 'If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord' (1 Cor. 14. 37, R.S.V.). The Spirit of God, under whose inspiration the words were first spoken or written, is the One who imparts the power to recognize in these words His word. The things of the Spirit of God are spiritually discerned (cf. 1 Cor. 2. 14), and one of the gifts of the Spirit is 'the ability to distinguish between spirits' (1 Cor. 12. 10, R.S.V.). The Reformers thus rightly maintained that the final and convincing proof of the divine authority and truth of Scripture is provided by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. (Cf. Calvin's *Institutes*, I, vii. 4, 5.) The Spirit of God, that is to say, bears witness within the believing heart, with an assurance that no counter-argument can shake, that this is indeed His own word. This He does both in the individual believer (which is the justification of the Protestant insistence on the right and duty of private judgment) and in the believing community. It is plain that, in according unique recognition to the books of the New Testament canon, the early Christians were guided by a wisdom higher than their own. The test of canonicity is this testimony which the Spirit bears, within the Church, to the Scriptures as being His own word. This is as true in principle of the Old Testament canon as of the New Testament canon, but in the case of the Old Testament canon there is the further consideration that it is confirmed by the direct testimony, in word and practice, of our Lord and His apostles.

How right and appropriate, then, are the words which, in the British coronation ceremony, the Primate of All England uses when he gives the sovereign a copy of the Bible: 'Our gracious King; we present you with this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is wisdom; this is the royal law; these are the lively oracles of God.'

We began with a quotation from the *Westminster Divines*. When these men drew up the *Westminster Confession of Faith* in 1647, they devoted their first chapter to the theme 'Of the Holy Scripture'; and that chapter is so admirable an embodiment of

'what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed' that we cannot conclude our own discussion of this subject in any better way than by reproducing its ten theses:

'1. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation: therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare His will unto His Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the holy scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.

'2. Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these [here follows a list of the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament]. All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.

'3. The Books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.<sup>1</sup>

'4. The authority of the holy scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

'5. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the holy scripture; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the

<sup>1</sup> The 'apocryphal' books never formed part of the Hebrew Bible, and were not treated as authoritative by our Lord and His apostles, as the books of the Hebrew Bible were; they were not regarded as canonical by the Palestinian Jews, nor yet (contrary to what is generally believed) by the Alexandrian Jews. The first people to accord them canonical status were Greek-speaking Christians, who probably did so because they found them in close association with the O.T. books in the Septuagint version.

majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God; yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts.

'6. The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.<sup>1</sup>

'7. All things in scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

'8. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But because these

<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that the light of nature and Christian prudence can serve as substitutes for the directions of Scripture in these matters, but that they serve as guides in our application of these directions to varying times and circumstances, that the details of church government and divine service may be carried out decently and in order.

original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto and interest in the scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship Him in an acceptable manner, and, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, may have hope.

'9. The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.

'10. The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the scripture.'