

The Unity of the Bible

Frank E. Gaebelien

[p.401]

The perennial debate about the inspiration and authority of the Bible is a strong, though indirect, evidence of the uniqueness of the book. Other writings have been studied with the most minute care—witness, for example, the Variorum Editions of Shakespeare, although even such close study of the greatest of English authors can hardly compare with the microscopic scrutiny to which Scripture has been subjected by scholars of all shades of theological conviction. As Karl Barth has said of his own work, when it comes to the writing of his commentaries, such as the Römerbrief, he has to take every word of the Bible seriously. And so also all responsible scholars, whether liberal or orthodox, must take every word seriously if they are to deal fairly with Scripture.

Not only has the Bible been more closely studied than any other book; it has also been the subject of a kind of inquiry quite different from that directed toward other works of literature. It is important to establish the most reliable text of the classics like Plato and Aristotle. But no one asks about Plato or Aristotle, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, or any other great writer the questions that are persistently asked about the origin and authority of the Bible. The plain truth is that the Bible is studied in a way and for a purpose that puts it in a class by itself.

The reason for this is clear. Whatever else may be said of it, we must admit that the Bible makes certain self-claims. Over and over it represents itself as being the Word of God. (For a marshalling of the Biblical evidence see the article, "Inspiration," by B. B. Warfield in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, pp. 1473-83.) Within its pages Christ and

[p.390]

the apostles declare it to be of divine authority. And it is beyond dispute that throughout its long history the Christian Church has accepted these claims as true, and that Israel also accepted the Old Testament as the very Word of God. Until the rise of the higher criticism in the eighteenth century, there was such widespread agreement regarding the divine origin and veracity of Scripture that what has become an arena of controversy was almost everywhere taken for granted. Moreover it is significant that even now, at a time when all kinds of Biblical criticism flourish, the great questions about where the Bible came from, what it really is, and what relationship it sustains to the living God will not down. They are still being raised in books and articles; they are still being discussed in classrooms all over the world.

I. THE BIBLE'S OWN CLUE TO ITS UNITY

Now in all this discussion one of the crucial issues is that of the unity of the Bible. In the case of Scripture, unity and authority are closely linked, just as unity and inspiration are near relations (cf. J. K. S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture*, New York, Harper & Bros., 1957, pp.

18 f.). In a special sense, therefore, an understanding of the nature of the Biblical unity provides a clue to what the book really is.

How, then, do we go about investigating the unity of a literary work, whether Scripture or any other book? To this question there is an obvious answer. We investigate the unity of a work of literature by looking inside the work. In other words, we seek the integrating factor within the book itself. There is no other valid way to find the unifying principle of the Bible or of any other book. And if the charge is levelled that to do this is to reason in a circle, the answer is that internal evidence is always the essential subject matter of criticism. No one would accuse *The New York Times* book-reviewers of circular reasoning because they judge books on the basis of their contents. Nor would anyone question the right of a music critic to derive his evaluation of a new symphony from hearing the work, or the right of an art critic to look long and hard at a painting before writing about it.

But books are different from symphonies and paintings in that their authors may state within their pages what they intend to accomplish. Consider, for instance, such a work as Sir Winston Churchill's *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* with its preface making plain what Churchill is setting out to do. The responsible critic will take careful notice of the author's intention and will then decide whether it has been adequately fulfilled.

The same principle applies to the Bible, as Warfield pointed out (*The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 204 ff.). For Scripture contains its own doctrine about its nature and purpose—not, to be sure, in the form of a preface, yet in clear and definite terms. There is nothing ambiguous in the teaching of the Bible about itself. It is plainly stated within its pages

[p.391]

that Scripture is the Word of God and that through it God speaks to men. Moreover, the great, central subject of the Bible is clearly set forth throughout the book. Thus it is our responsibility to examine in the light of Scripture's self-claims the phenomena of Scripture, such as the manifold facets of its historical, philological, and stylistic characteristics; and then, on the basis of this examination, to study the relation of these phenomena to the self-claim. But always the self-claim has prior consideration.

II. THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL UNITY

So with the all-important matter of the unity of the Bible. When it comes to the identification of the integrating factor of the book, we must go to Scripture itself. As Pascal said in the *Pensées*, "He who will give the meaning of Scripture and does not take it from Scripture, is the enemy of Scripture" (*Pensées* [899], translated by W. F. Trotter, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1931, p. 266). But in doing this, we face several questions. What kind of unity is it that we are looking for in the Bible? Is it a unity of separate parts whereby the parts, as they are identified and classified, are recognized as fitting into the whole? Or is it a unity growing out of a single integrating principle that lies at the heart and center of the book?

Now there are those (e.g., Floyd E. Hamilton, *The Basis of Christian Faith*, Chapter IX; Arthur T. Pierson, *The Bible and Spiritual Criticism*, Chapters IV, VIII, IX), who have sought to formulate the unity of Scripture from an examination of such things as the consistency of

its literary emphases, the congruity of its typology, and the harmony of its symbolism. On such grounds they have shown that the Bible exhibits a measure of unity far beyond what might be expected of a collection of the writings of men separated from one another by many years.

Such an approach is akin to the argument from design which sees behind the order and purpose of the natural world the mind that planned it all. Thus it moves from the literary phenomena of the book to the divine Author behind it. But useful though this approach is in its place, that place is not the first place. For to attempt to ascertain the central unity of the Bible in this way is like trying to discover the basic structure of a cathedral from the ornamentation of its exterior. Not that the two—basic structure and ornamentation—are wholly unrelated, but simply that there is a better clue than this.

Therefore, we go on to ask what other approaches to the unity of Scripture are possible. Now there are several answers to the question. There is the approach by way of doctrine, the approach through what is sometimes called "the drama of redemption," and the approach through a central person. Let us look at these with a view to identifying the one that is most in accord with Scripture.

First, then, the approach by way of doctrine. The Bible is the primary

[p.392]

source-book of Christian doctrine. The great theologians, as distinguished from the religious philosophers, have all based their systems upon Scripture. But by the same token the Bible does not fully systematize its own doctrine. It presents the material out of which theologies are constructed. Not that doctrine as found in the Bible is haphazard; the New Testament epistles, especially the major Pauline letters, show the error of such a misconception. On the other hand, the doctrinal element in Scripture is not presented under a systematic theological unity. Actually the Bible is much too living a book for its unity to be centered in doctrinal formulation, however vital and dynamic the doctrines are. To say this does not imply that doctrine and theology are unessential; nor does it suggest that the Bible is not implicitly doctrinal and theological. It simply means that doctrine by itself is not the integrating factor within the Bible.

This being the case, we look next at "the drama of redemption," by which is meant the saving activity of God revealed in the Bible. To refer to this record of the redemptive history as "drama" does not necessarily mean that it is mythical or fictitious; rather is it a vivid term for the divine acts leading up to and culminating in all that God did for man through the crucifixion and resurrection of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. While to speak of these mighty works as "the drama of redemption" may seem to avoid certain contemporary prejudices against authoritative doctrinal and theological formulation, behind the phrase there still remain the essential historical facts upon which Christian doctrine rests. This approach does indeed bring us to the threshold of the unifying factor we are seeking, but it is not in itself that factor. Because it deals so directly with living persons, in contrast with the intellectual formulation of Biblical truth, it points us in terms of personality to the object of our search.

III. THE INTEGRATING PRINCIPLE CHRISTOLOGICAL

We turn, therefore, to the third approach to the unity of the Bible—that by way of the central person. And when we ask who that person is, we are confronted with what the apostle calls "the mystery of our religion" (I Tim. 3:16, RSV), using the word "mystery" in the special New Testament sense of something hitherto concealed but now revealed—i.e., "an open secret." What is this "open secret"? It is Jesus Christ himself, who, as Paul goes on to say, "was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."

The Bible is par excellence the book of human nature. No other work tells us so much about man as it does. Here is humanity uniquely portrayed with a realism that penetrates beneath what men seem to be to what they are. But although the Bible is unique in that it reveals human nature in the unclouded mirror of truth itself, it is first and foremost the book of the divine Nature. Therefore, its unifying principle is nothing less than the Per-

[p.393]

son of our Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God and the Saviour of the world of men whose lost condition in trespasses and sins is so faithfully disclosed within its pages. It was Luther who, in commenting on the words of the 40th Psalm—"In the volume of the book it is written of me"—asked "What Book and what Person?" and replied by saying, "Scripture; and only one Person, Jesus Christ" (quoted by Adolph Saphir, *Christ and the Scriptures*, p. 7). So all the Bible, both Old Testament and New, is integrated in Christ.

To this fact the strongest witness is our Lord himself. Engaged in controversy with the Jews, he said to them, "Search the scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). And in the same context he went on to say, "Had ye believed in Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me" (John 5:46). Not only so, but he constantly referred to the Scriptures as pointing to himself. For example, in Matthew 21:42-46, he climaxed the parable of the householder, with its indictment of Israel for rejecting their Messiah, by applying to himself Psalm 118:22, 23, "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes?" Likewise after the Last Supper he said to the disciples, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered" (Mark 14:27), thereby showing himself to be the subject of Zechariah 13:7.

But these are only a few of numerous incidents in which Christ made clear the fact that Scripture finds its unity in his Person. For it is beyond dispute that he knew that the Old Testament Scriptures were centered in him. To the two disciples whom he met on the Emmaus road the first Easter afternoon, he said: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:25 f.). Whereupon, Luke tells us, "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (vs. 27). In the appearance that night to the ten in Jerusalem he made the definitive statement regarding his centrality in the Old Testament: "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and in the

prophets, and in the psalms concerning me" (Luke 24:44). To which the evangelist adds the significant statement, "Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the scriptures," indicating that apart from Christ there is no real comprehension of the Old Testament.

That the apostles follow our Lord in seeing him as the center of the Scriptures is evident from the sermons recorded in Acts. At Pentecost Peter used Psalm 16:8–11 and Psalm 110:1 as the basis of his proclamation of the risen Christ (Acts 2:25–36); and in his second sermon he identified him

[p.394]

with the prophet of whom Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 18:15, 18, 19 (Acts 3:20–22). When the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip the Evangelist the meaning of Isaiah 53, Philip "began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:30–35). At Antioch in Pisidia Paul preached Christ (Acts 13:32–37) from Psalm 2, Isaiah 55 and Psalm 16. And that his preaching was based upon the centrality of Christ throughout Scripture is plain from the description of his method in Acts 17:2, 3, which reports that "Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and this same Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." As for his wider ministry to the churches with their preponderance of Gentile members, the same appeal to Christ in the Old Testament is part of the very warp and woof of the Pauline epistles.

What was true of Paul was true of others also. So we read that when the Alexandrian Jew, Apollos, had been instructed by Paul's pupils, Aquila and Priscilla, he "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:24–28). Peter in his epistles, John in his epistles, the writer of Hebrews; James and Jude and the Revelation—all have this Christocentric orientation. Indeed, the statement in Revelation 19:10, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," relates not just to the prophetic books but to the Bible as a whole.

It is significant also that this principle of Christ as the unifying center of the Bible was at the heart of the Reformation with its dynamic recovery of the Word of God. Said Luther: "All Scripture teaches nothing but the cross." And Calvin's undeviating conviction was that "Christ cannot be properly known in any other way than from the Scriptures" (quoted in *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, Ronald S. Wallace, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957, p. 98). As a recent writer concludes, Calvin "makes Christ central in the whole of Scripture in a way that is scarcely possible to a modern thinker [a revealing admission]. This made it appear as a unity incapable of contradicting itself...." (A. Dakin, *Calvinism*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1946, pp. 193 f. Quoted by J. K. S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture*, p. 52).

But enough has been said to demonstrate that the integrating principle of the Bible is unquestionably Christological. The key to Biblical unity is not its consistency of literary phenomena, not its doctrine and theology, not its redemptive history. It is nothing less and none other than a Person, the living Lord, who only among the world's religious leaders dared say: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). The integrating factor of the Bible is, in the words of Pascal, "Jesus Christ, whom the

two Testaments regard, the Old as its hope, the New as its model, and both as their center" (*Pensées* [739], p. 223). Or, to paraphrase a greater thinker than Pascal, "There is neither Old Testament nor New, prophetic writings nor apostles, but they are all one in Christ Jesus."

[p.395]

The moment we see this, we pass from a theoretical unity to an organic. unity. For integration in a person means integration in life. And when that Person is Jesus Christ, the unity, quite in keeping with the eternal horizons of the Bible, takes on infinite dimensions. Consequently, we see that Scripture, in the light of its Christological unity, is more than a combination of 66 sacred books, closely knit in theme and structure. As Francis L. Patton said, it is "an organism and not a miscellaneous collection of writings" (*Fundamental Christianity*, p. 169).

IV. IMPLICATIONS OF THE BIBLE'S UNITY

And now, having identified the unity of the Bible as being in the Person of Jesus Christ, we are ready to examine the implications of this unity. For implications there are, and they touch every aspect of the Bible and illuminate the deep questions regarding what kind of book it really is.

These implications involve first of all the crucial issue of the veracity of the Bible. Contemporary thinking about the Bible is haunted by the spectre of inerrancy. The orthodox view of Scripture held by the Church down through the ages has become the heterodoxy of the present; in most theological circles today, if there is one thing to be avoided like the plague it is the classical doctrine of verbal inspiration. Under the impact of world tragedy the modern theological mind has turned back, in part at least, to the great Biblical insights of the Reformation. But so scandalous has verbal inspiration become that some scholars feel obligated at all costs to remove the skeleton of inerrancy from the Reformers' closet, even though to do so requires prodigies of special pleading. Repelled by a certain kind of fundamentalism that has made for the Bible exorbitant claims, the contemporary theological mind persists in equating the view of the Bible held by scholarly conservatives today with the crudest forms of mechanical dictation. When it comes to those who are committed to the doctrine of Scripture believed by Christ and the apostles, taught by the Reformers, and expounded in a former generation by meticulous scholars like B. B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen, both neo-orthodoxy and liberalism represent conservative belief by a strawman. Not only so, but the strawman is of such frightful, obscurantist mien as to scare even his makers!

The situation would be amusing were it not so serious. Here, for example, is Dean Bernhard W. Anderson of Drew Theological Seminary, writing a book on *Rediscovering the Bible*. In it he refers to the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship as bringing "crusading fundamentalism" to the college campus. "The key 'fundamental' of the faith, according to this group, is," he says, "the inerrancy of Scripture. In the words of a representative statement, it is 'an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that the Holy Spirit did so inspire, guide, and move the writers of the Holy Scripture as to keep them from error'" (Bernhard W. Anderson, *Rediscovering the Bible*, New York, Association Press, 1951, p. 15).

[p.396]

So far Dean Anderson's statement is fairly objective. Now observe the strawman he immediately sets up: "This means," he continues, referring to the definition of inerrancy he has quoted, "that the words of the Bible are the very words of God himself. The writers of the Bible were mere passive secretaries who mechanically transcribed the divine words.... Because God is literally the author of Holy Scripture, the whole Bible 'from cover to cover' is held to be absolutely infallible. In popular practice fundamentalists have Claimed infallibility for a particular version of the Bible: the King James Version of 1611!" (p. 15).

But the Inter-Varsity view of the Bible does not mean mechanical dictation. Nor is it justly mentioned in the same breath with the obscurantism that attributes inerrancy to the King James Version. It would not be difficult for a writer like Dean Anderson to consult such a work as *The New Bible Commentary*, recently published by Inter-Varsity, a cooperative endeavor of some of the best conservative scholarship in Europe and America (London, 1953; Grand Rapids, 1953). Plain intellectual honesty demands admission of the fact that it is quite as possible for responsible scholars today to stand for the inerrancy of Scripture and at the same time recognize that it was not written by "passive secretaries who mechanically transcribed the words," as it was for Calvin constantly to affirm the verbal infallibility of Scripture and at the same time recognize its human element.

Surely the time has come for those who hold the modern view of the Bible to lay aside the ghost of mechanical dictation in respect to conservative scholarship and to make a serious effort to learn what those who are committed to plenary inspiration really believe about the Bible. In short, what is needed is for scholars of differing points of view to take the trouble really to understand what the other side thinks.

The foregoing discussion of the current confusion regarding inerrancy provides a background for dealing with the relation between the veracity of Scripture and its Christological unity. The fact of this unity is not, of course, the exclusive discovery of those who view the Bible from the traditional conservative position. On the contrary, it is common ground with others who, although differing about the nature and extent of inspiration, recognize the Bible as being in some special sense the Word of God. A case in point is J. K. S. Reid's recent volume, entitled *The Authority of Scripture*. This is a valuable study of the Reformed view of the Bible, in which the author clearly sees Christ to be the center of the book (p. 236 ff.). But the significant thing is that in his thinking he combines this strong insistence upon the centrality of Christ in the Scriptures with a repudiation of the inerrancy of the written Word.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that our Lord placed complete reliance upon the full veracity of the Word. For it is simply not possible to read back into Christ's handling of Scripture anything less than his full recognition of its supreme trustworthiness, as Warfield has shown by examina-

[p.397]

tion of all the passages in which Christ uses the Old Testament (*op. cit.*, pp. 138 ff.). This being the case, the only way in which Christ's authority can be reconciled with a fallible Old Testament is through resorting to a strongly kenotic view of his Person, whereby he is seen as a child of his age, sharing the mistakes and superstitions of his people. But this accords ill with the crucial issues our Lord made to hang upon the very words of Scripture, and it certainly is inconsistent with a high view of his Person.

On the other hand, the difficulties attendant upon an acceptance of our Lord's estimate of Scripture as the unbreakable Word of God (John 10:35) must be faced. There are discrepancies; there are historical problems and ethical and spiritual questions that stubbornly resist the most thoroughgoing efforts to reconcile and solve them. What, then, of the veracity of Scripture? Is its inerrancy to be scrapped?

The answer is twofold. In the first place, there is the attitude of suspended judgment toward Bible difficulties. Such an attitude is constantly being vindicated, as archaeology has solved one Biblical problem after another, and as painstaking re-examination of discrepancies has finally led to answers. Illustrations of the former are too numerous to specify, but these words of Dr. Nelson Glueck will show the trend of archaeology: "The reviewer has spent many years in biblical archaeology, and, in company with his colleagues, has made discoveries confirming in outline or in detail historical statements in the Bible. He is prepared to go farther and say that no archaeological discovery has ever been made that contradicts or controverts historical statements in Scripture" (*The New York Times* "Book Review," Oct. 28, 1956. Dr. Glueck, a distinguished Jewish archaeologist, points out in his review of Keller's *The Bible As History* that the Bible, being essentially a theological document, does not, accurate though it is historically, depend on external proof). For the latter, recent research affords a striking illustration in the solution by Dr. Edwin R. Thiele of one of the thorniest problems in Old Testament chronology—that of discrepancies in the parallel accounts of the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah (*The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1951).

In the next place, there is another way of dealing with Biblical veracity as it is involved with the Christological integration of Scripture. And that is nothing less than a rethinking of the whole concept of inerrancy and verbal inspiration. Truth is truth, absolute and unchangeable. Yet truth is bigger than our knowledge of it, which should never be static but always growing. Our Lord, who claimed to be the truth, is far greater than our understanding of who he is. Just as the final formulation of the mystery of his Person, based upon the inspired data of Scripture, has not yet been made, so the perfect solution of the tension between Christ's own view of the Bible and the difficulties inherent in certain portions of the written Word is still beyond our grasp. This is not to say, however, that progress

[p.398]

toward solution cannot be made. Instead, one of the great needs of the day is for scholars to re-examine in the light of all the data the concept of inerrancy as applied to Scripture. Moreover, such re-examination cannot be done hastily. If there is valid ground for criticism of the prevalent attitude of much contemporary theology toward a high view of inspiration, it is that the question has been disposed of prematurely. But the same criticism must be made of conservative theology when it insists upon what may be a rigid formulation of a position that, though accepted on faith, yet needs clarification and redefinition.

Furthermore, the Christological unity of the Bible requires the believer to take his stand with his Lord when it comes to the full reliability of the Word. Truth, although it has innumerable facets, belongs to God. And because Christ is one with God, he who said, "I am the truth," is the Lord of truth. And because Scripture finds its unity in him and is inspired by the Spirit

whom he called "the Spirit of truth," it is the Word of truth. Therefore, the Christological integration of the Bible guarantees its veracity.

Bishop H. C. G. Moule, who was both a distinguished exegete and a humble saint, put in noble words the ground for our reliance upon the utter truthfulness of Scripture when he said: "He [i.e., Christ] absolutely trusted the Bible, and, though there are in it things inexplicable and intricate that have puzzled me so much, I am going, not in a blind sense, but reverently to trust the Book because of Him" (John Battersby Harford and Frederick Charles MacDonald, *The Life of Bishop Moule*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 1922, p. 138). To which should be added that the Christian who in his view of the Bible stands on any lower ground than that on which his Lord stood does so at his spiritual peril.

V. THE SPIRIT'S WITNESS IN SCRIPTURE

Once the master-principle of the Christological unity of the Bible is grasped, all Scripture may be seen in the perspective of the central Person. And it is here that the Holy Spirit plays an indispensable part. According to our Lord's own declaration in the *locus classicus* of John 16:13-15, the function of "the Spirit of truth" is to "guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

The discernment, therefore, of the far-reaching application of the unity of the Bible in Christ is more than an intellectual discipline; it is a spiritual adventure. This is not to say that it is irrational, but simply to point out that, along with the use of the mind in understanding the Word, there is available for the believer the guidance of the Spirit who inspired it. The Reformers recognized the inner witness of the Spirit (*Testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*) to the truth of Scripture, a principle that fundamentalism

[p.399]

in its preoccupation with defending the formal inerrancy of the Bible has too largely overlooked. Yet the reality of this witness of the Spirit urgently needs recovery today.

When we come to particular applications of the integration of the Bible in Christ, limitations of space permit only brief mention of certain significant areas. There is, for one thing, the panorama of Biblical history. Here Christ is the master-key, because in one way or another he is the focus of God's dealings with men through the ages. From the dawn of history in Eden, where the Redeemer is promised in the protevangel (Gen. 3:15), down through the arrival of Paul in Rome (Acts 28) to the picture of the early Church derived from the later epistles, Christ is central. Israel is important not just for Israel's sake, but for the sake of the Messiah who is to come from within her and of whose truth she is to be the vehicle. The nations surrounding Israel are important because of their relation to the chosen people from whom Christ was to Come. The Roman Empire is important because it was the locale of the incarnation and the beginnings of the Church. The whole world is important because it is the field in which the gospel must be preached. Always the essential frame of reference is Christ.

Or consider the great doctrines of the Bible, having to do with such subjects as man, sin, sacrifice, redemption, love, judgment, heaven, hell. Just to think of them in relation to Christ

immediately brings to mind the fact that they too have their focus in him. Without doubt the doctrines of Scripture, even though not, as we have already seen, systematically organized within Scripture itself, find in Christ their orientation. Even more, it is true in doctrine as in everything else, that "by him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17).

So also with prophecy and eschatology. Again the focus is Christ. What has been called "the harmony of the prophetic word" is nothing less than a harmony in and through Jesus Christ (cf. *The Harmony of the Prophetic Word* by A. C. Gaebelin). The scope of prophecy is vast; not only Judah and Israel, but also Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Ethiopia, Persia, Greece, and Rome, to say nothing of the lesser nations, have their place in the prophetic Scriptures. Yet towering over the kings and empires of the Bible is the King of kings and Lord of lords, in whose pierced hands is the ultimate destiny of all men and of all nations. In him prophecy is centered; in him it has been and will yet be fulfilled in the consummation of all things when he comes again.

Likewise with the literary phenomena of the Bible. To take a particular instance, typology has its Christological orientation, either directly or indirectly. Abel's "better sacrifice" points to the "full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world" (*The Book of Common Prayer, Service of Holy Communion*) made by Christ. The ark, bearing Noah and his family through the flood, portrays safety in

[p.400]

Christ from judgment. Abraham, the founder of the nation of whom Christ came, prefigures the atonement in the story of his willingness to offer Isaac on Mount Moriah. So with incident after incident in the lives of the other patriarchs and in the great succession of Old Testament heroes. To mention only two, there is no more perfect individual type of Christ than Joseph, while Jonah, with his unique experience, is on the authority of Jesus himself the great Old Testament type of his death and resurrection (Matt. 12: 38-42). The elaborate system of sacrifices and offerings set forth in the Pentateuch typifies Christ in various aspects of his redeeming work; yet leprosy, which is the type of sin, speaks, through the eloquence of need, of the One who only can cleanse the sinner from his spiritual malady. The wilderness experiences of Israel contain definite Messianic types—"They did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (II Cor. 10:4). Even the furniture of the tabernacle has its Messianic reference (Heb. 9:1-10).

But, as every Bible student knows, these are only a few instances of the way in which Scripture is unified in Christ. To see him in all parts of the Word, from Genesis to Revelation, requires no labored exegesis. It asks only the willingness, through careful study and the leading of the Spirit, to recognize him who is already there.

VI. THE LIVING UNITY OF THE GREAT BOOK

The time has come, however, to step aside from a close examination of our subject and to look at it in the large. And there is probably no better way to do this than to conclude our discussion of the unity of the Bible by facing the accusation of bibliolatry that is so often made against those who hold to the complete reliability of Scripture. Such biblicism and literalism are, we are told, nothing short of turning the Scriptures into a "paper pope."

Putting aside such things as the assumption, which we have already considered, that all views of inerrancy necessitate mechanical dictation, let us ask ourselves whether there ever has been or is now on the part of those committed to a highly conservative view of Scripture any tendency whatever toward bibliolatry. And if we admit, as in common honesty we must, that there are those who have with the best of motives sometimes veered in this direction, let us also ask what can be done to correct the recurrence of such a tendency,

In a book (*Christ and the Scriptures*) published over half a century ago, Adolph Saphir, the distinguished Presbyterian Hebrew-Christian who had a notable ministry in England, saw this tendency with prophetic insight. He wrote:

The charge of Bibliolatry (worship of the Bible) has been of late frequently preferred against those who maintain the supremacy of Scripture. As far as this objection is urged by those who do not

[p.401]

fully and clearly acknowledge the divine authority and inspiration of Scripture, it is easily refuted. But... we may do well to consider whether our opponents are not giving utterance to a truth which they themselves do not fully see, and [which] warns us against a danger the existence of which we are apt to overlook. In other words, never mind whence and for what purpose the charge of Bibliolatry is made,—consider the thing itself; is there such a tendency, such an evil, such a danger? I know that many Christians will reply at once, "We cannot value, and reverence, and cherish the Bible sufficiently." And this is quite true. The danger is not of a reverence too deep, but of a reverence untrue and unreal (pp. 115 f.).

These are discerning words. And Dr. Saphir goes on with the same clearness of sight to say, "By Bibliolatry I understand the tendency of separating, in the first place, the Book from the Person of Jesus Christ, and in the second, from the Holy Spirit, and of thus substituting the Book for Him who alone is the light and guide of the Church" (pp. 116 f.).

The quotation has been given at length because it comes from a man who held with passionate conviction to the utter reliability of the Bible, and because it points not only to the problem but also to the solution. The solution is, plainly enough, the principle of the unity of the Bible in Christ. If the Bible finds its true and vital integration only in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, then there can be no bibliolatry in any form, shape or manner on the part of any of us, no matter how stoutly we adhere to the inerrancy of Scripture. For Scripture, great as it is, is never to be equated with Deity. In all its perfection and truth, it is still a creature, albeit unique among books. According to its own self-witness, it is an instrument of the living God—the sword of the Spirit, the seed incorruptible whereby we are born again, the law of the Lord that converts the soul, the mirror in which we see ourselves in the blazing light of God's truth, the hammer that crushes our hardness of heart. But, great as it is, it is an instrument, an inspired and unique means to an end, not an end in itself. As such it can never in and of itself be the object of worship any more than God's other great book, the Book of Nature, can ever be the object of worship.

The center of the Bible is the living Christ. Throughout its pages God the Holy Spirit who inspired it bears witness to the Person who unites all the manifold strands of history,

Frank E. Gaebelein, "The Unity of the Bible," Carl F.H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible. Contemporary Evangelical Thought*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958 / London: The Tyndale Press, 1959. pp.389-401.

prophecy, poetry, symbolism, and doctrine to bear witness to him and his saving work. Let us, therefore, rejoice that Christ is the center of the Bible, that in him alone it finds its living unity. Let us reverence the Bible as the only written revelation of God, the only completely truthful book, realizing that we reverence it most fully and honor it most highly when we see within its pages the Lord Jesus Christ and when we make him in whom its unity is centered the center of our own life and service.

[p.408]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. C. Gaebelein, *The Harmony of the Prophetic Word*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1905.

Floyd E. Hamilton, *The Basis of Christian Faith*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948.

Francis L. Patton, *Fundamental Christianity*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926.

Arthur T. Pierson, *The Bible and Spiritual Criticism*. New York: The Baker & Taylor Co., 1905.

Adolph Saphir, *Christ and the Scriptures*. London: Morgan, n.d.

B. B. Warfield, "Inspiration," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. III, pp. 1473-83.

© 1958, 1986 Carl F.H. Henry. Reproduced by kind permission of Dr Carol Henry Bates.

Prepared for the Web in April 2009 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>
