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GOD'S WORD

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The biggest change in the Christian religion this century compared with all previous centuries has been the change in the attitude of Christians to the Bible. In the past the Bible has always been regarded as God's infallible word. What the Bible says God says. But nowadays in many of the denominations this has changed and is changing and this change is having very widespread effects. In a word, the Christian religion cannot survive where the Bible is not regarded as God's book, even though the shell, that is the organisation, remains much the same. For Christianity is a supernatural religion, and this requires a supernatural word from God, telling us of Himself, and of His purposes and will for men. Nowadays, however, Christian leaders teach not a supernatural God but a God in nature, the ground of our being, and Christian ministers and church programmes are concerned with bettering this world rather than proclaiming a message about the next. The reason for this change is a simple one, namely, loss of faith in the Bible as God's Word. For without a supernatural word from God it is impossible to maintain a supernatural view of life and supernatural expectation of the coming of Christ in His kingdom. That is unless the Bible is believed to be God's infallible word Christianity cannot survive, though the name and the church organisations will survive though their content will be changed, for Christianity is a supernatural religion. It believes in a supernatural God, One Who stands over and above nature, Who created us and the whole universe, by calling it into existence simply by a decision of His Will. Science tells us a little of the process which God used in bringing the world to its present form, but the fact remains (on which science is unable to make any comment) that God is the originator and director of that process.

God is a supernatural God standing above nature, not only as its Creator, but also as its Controller. Not a single event takes place in the universe which He does not control; not even the movement of the smallest electron in the most distant star. The thought is, of course, too stupendous for us to apprehend. Our minds are stupefied by the concept, for we are inclined to think of God in terms of things we know, thinking of Him as a general manager of a department store who has to delegate detail to his subordinates.

Of course this is not so. God Who created all the details knows and controls them all.

God is the Controller, not only of inanimate things but also of the minds and wills of men, even of sinful men. You may find this a difficult thought, but we act on its truth every day, when we trust God to protect us.

God's control of nature is through nature. He is the Author of nature. Therefore it is not surprising that He should work in accordance with the laws of His own creation rather than against it. God does not find the laws of nature something intransigent, which get in the way and thwart His will, but rather He works through nature, which He designed for this purpose. Thus when He carried out His will through men, He works in what we would say is a natural way; nevertheless it is God who is carrying out His Will exactly as He wills.

The all-sovereign God is our Heavenly Father who loves and cares for His creation and who wills to enter into fellowship with us, even though we are rebels against His sovereignty and love. Thus, we believe in a supernatural God, not only as Creator and Controller, but also as revealer of Himself. He has made Himself known unto men. Centuries ago He called Abraham and Moses and sent His prophets to the children of Israel in order to make Himself known to men, to show what His character is, and to call men into fellowship with Himself. God's supernatural revelation of Himself reached its climax and acme in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ the divine Son of God. His name is 'Emmanuel' which means 'God with us'. His perfect life, the sublimity and truth of His teaching, His powerful miracles of love, and His own claims and teaching about Himself all testify to the truth reflected in that name Emmanuel. He was indeed God with men, His coming a most remarkable supernatural event, but entirely in keeping with our supernatural God, and, of course, our salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ is supernatural.

The inspiring of the Bible by the Spirit of God is part of this same movement of God in revealing Himself to men in order to save them by restoring them to fellowship with Him. It is a super-

natural book. Although written by men and faithfully reflecting the divergent characters and historical situations of the authors who wrote the sixty-six books that made up the Bible, the most important fact and the fact which gives the Bible its unity, is that the Holy Spirit of God was the true author. He used the writers, not forcing their wills or their minds or their thoughts, but working through these things of which He Himself was the creator, so that what they wrote was not only their own words but more importantly God's words; words infallible for the purpose for which God inspired them, which was to teach us about Himself and about His relations with men.

I do not think we need spend time considering whether God could give us a book which, though written in a perfectly natural way, by men, sinners and ignorant of many things though they were, yet would in every point exactly reflect the perfect mind of God for us. God's sovereignty over His own creation sufficiently answers this. The question remains whether He has done so, and to what extent, and for what purpose. St. Paul in II Timothy 3:16-17 sums up the traditional Christian answer: "Every Scripture is inspired of God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work".

There are many reasons why traditionally Christians have believed the Bible to be a supernatural book and the true Word of God. Of course, the final reason is that they hear God's Word in it, for when God speaks to the conscience which He has created, it would indeed be strange if His voice was not recognised by His children, to whom He has given His Spirit. As Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice and they follow Me". But before we reach that final reason there are some preliminary considerations worth noting. To start with, the Bible itself claims in many places to be the Word of God. How frequently there occurs in it this introductory phrase: "Thus saith the Lord". Then, too, the Lord Jesus Christ's testimony to the divine inspiration of the Bible is very clear, and for Christians who believe that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God, that in itself should be quite sufficient. Jesus knew His Bible thoroughly. He had plainly read it regularly and carefully. He based His teaching

on it and regarded it as of final authority. Thus, when He was tempted by the devil, to each temptation He simply quoted a phrase from Scripture saying "It is written", or as we might put it today, "The Bible says". For Him this was final. Jesus testified to the infallibility of Scripture by saying in John 10:35 "The Scriptures cannot be broken". After His resurrection (in Luke 24) He reproved the disciples for their slowness to believe all that the Scriptures said and He spent the last hours of His fellowship with them expounding to them the Scriptures.

A very interesting illustration of Jesus' view that whatever the Bible says, God says, is found in Matthew 19:5 where Jesus quotes a verse from Genesis 2, reminding His hearers what God the Creator had said in the beginning, with regard to husbands and wives, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife and they two shall become one flesh". Now in Genesis this verse is actually the comment of the writer, but Jesus said unequivocally that God is the author of the sentence. So we see that for Jesus the words of the Bible, no matter who was the human writer, are the words of God.

Another interesting verse is Matthew 22:31. Jesus is replying to the Sadducees who denied the resurrection and He was establishing the truth of the resurrection by a verse from Genesis. He prefaced the quotation of the Old Testament with the question "Have you never read what was spoken unto you by God?" By this sentence Jesus showed that He regarded the Bible as the Word of God. "Spoken by God". And it is the written words of Scripture, not merely the thoughts or events behind them, which Jesus called the Word of God, for he asked "Have you not read what was spoken to you by God?" It is the written word which we read, the sentences and propositions of Scripture, which Jesus designated as the Word spoken by God. And thirdly, note that the written Scripture is revelational. It is not merely the record of a revelation from God to the reader. Jesus asked "Have you not read what was spoken to you by God?" God speaks to us as we read His Word. For the Word of God is a living word, never merely a thing of the past.

The same attitude to Scripture is reflected in the rest of the New

Testament; for example in Hebrews 3:7 a verse from the Old Testament is introduced by the words "Even as the Holy Ghost saith" making clear that the New Testament writer realised that though the verse was written by the psalmist the ultimate author was God. Similarly in Acts 1:16 a quotation from the Bible is introduced by the phrase "The Scripture which the Holy Ghost spoke by the mouth of David". This is an interesting illustration of the two-sided truth. David wrote the words naturally and freely, drawing on his experience, yet the true author was the Holy Spirit Who was infallibly directing those faculties which He Himself had given to David. Cf. Acts 4:24, 25 where there is a very similar introductory formula.

There is an important verse in II Timothy 3:16 where St. Paul commends Timothy because he had known the Bible from his earliest years. The Apostle affirmed that the Bible is able to make the reader wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, adding "Every Scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work".

The Greek word here translated 'inspired of God' is 'theopneustos', that is, breathed out by God. It is the final written Word, the end-product, which is under consideration and which is said to be God-breathed.

We sometimes think of God's inspiration as being confined to inspiring thoughts or controlling events of history. But the Apostles speak of God's inspiration always of the finished product, the spoken or written Word. Of course, such inspiration includes inspiring the thoughts or directing the actions but it does not stop there. It is the Scripture, the final written Word that is breathed out by God, according to the Apostles.

Thus, St. Paul speaks of the Bible as the oracles of God (Romans 3:2), i.e., infallible utterances, infallible sentences, for this is the meaning of the word 'oracle'. Similarly in II Peter 1:19 we read of Scripture that "men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost". The Bible is from above essentially. God the Holy Spirit is the prime author. God is able to control His creation so as to fulfil His purposes without destroying His creation, therefore the words

of Scripture can be divine words without ceasing to be human words. The church, the Christian community, witnesses to the Bible that here is indeed the Word of God.

Sometimes it is contended that the church has given us the Bible and so the church is superior or at least equal to the Bible in authority. This is the position of the Second Vatican Council and the Council of Trent which said that Church tradition was to be received with equal veneration as the Holy Scriptures. But although the church witnesses to the Bible as the Word of God and hands it on to us, it does not give us the Bible in the sense of originating it, but itself receives it as a gift from God. The books of the Bible were written to the church, not from the church. For example, the prophets were sent by God to his church. Sometimes the words of Scripture were received in a very hostile manner by the church. For example, Jeremiah's prophecy was rejected by the Old Testament church to which it was sent. So, too, the New Testament was written to the church by the Apostles. Then again, we need to remember that when the Christian gospel was first preached, the preachers brought the Bible with them in that they handed over to the new converts the Old Testament which comprises the greater bulk of our Bible and which the preachers had themselves received as God's infallible Word, and by which they asked their hearers to check the gospel they were now preaching. In the same way today the church, often in the person of parent or Sunday School teacher, hands on to us the Bible which it has itself received, adding its word of testimony that in the Bible the voice of God is to be heard.

Again it is sometimes argued that the Bible is incomplete, and that it needs to be supplemented by church tradition as a source of revelation. But the Scripture itself contradicts this. In II Timothy 3:16 St. Paul three times over affirms the sufficiency of the Bible "that the man of God (i.e., the Christian) may be complete, completely furnished to every good work". Thus, Scripture establishes that when God gave the Bible as a source of revelation He gave what was complete and sufficient and which does not need to be supplemented. St. John says the same in John 20:30,31. He comments that there are many other things which he could have included in his gospel but what he had included was sufficient. His

words are "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and believing you might have life in His name".

Sometimes it is said, in support of the notion that the teaching of the church is as infallible as is the teaching of Scripture, that God has promised the guidance of His Spirit to the church (which is, of course, true) and that as a consequence the church's teaching must be infallible. But this does not follow, because the guidance of the Spirit is not given for the purpose of leading us to infallibility. The Holy Spirit's guidance is promised to the individual Christian as much as to the church as a group, for example, Romans 8 tells us that whoever is not led by the Spirit of God is not a child of God, so that all God's children are led by His Spirit. But it is quite plain that we are not led infallibly in the sense that we can rely on our conclusions without needing to examine them. The same is true of the Holy Spirit's guidance of the group or the church. The result of this guidance (i.e., church tradition) is not in itself infallible but needs to be examined, and, of course, the rule by which we examine our own conclusions or church tradition is the written Word of God because this written word of Scripture is testified to quite clearly that it is infallible and that God's power in guiding the writer of His Word was exercised in a way that makes these words infallible in order that they might indeed be the Word of God and the means by which the Holy Spirit guides the individual Christian as well as the whole church.

Primitive Christianity and church tradition are helpful in understanding the Bible, but we should not have recourse to them to supplement what God has given us in Scripture.

It is sometimes said that the teaching of the Bible is obscure so that the ordinary reader cannot understand it but needs to rely on the official interpretation of the church. But the fact is that the teaching of the Bible is clear and perspicuous. It is not hard to understand. In the passage in II Timothy 3, St. Paul congratulates Timothy on having known the Bible from a baby. He had been taught the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother. Anyone who

reads the Bible in a modern translation can test the matter for himself, and he will find that like any other book, the Bible was written to be understood by the reader.

It is true, of course, that self-willed people will twist the Bible to support their own views, to which Peter refers in II Peter 3:16, but in actual fact there is a very wide agreement amongst Christians about the essential teachings of the Bible. You will find that most of the differences amongst Christians are on matters about which the Bible has very little to say. It is we who are at fault in this. We ought not to erect grounds of separation, and break the bond of love and duty of fellowship, over matters not important enough to be included by God in His revelation in Scripture.

You will have noticed that I have quoted the Bible to establish the authority of the Bible. This may be thought to be arguing in a circle; but in fact this is not so, for, firstly, Scripture may be treated simply as an historical account of what Jesus taught and what His Apostles taught. For Christians the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles about God is of final authority and what this was may be discovered from the New Testament simply treated as an historical record; and so to quote the Bible to show what this teaching was, although in fact it establishes the authority of the Bible, is not arguing in a circle. Secondly, it must be remembered that God's Word is self-authenticating. It would be strange if this were not so, and if God needed witnesses from outside Himself to testify to His authority.

Consequently, Christians in recognising the Bible as God's Word use it as the source for Christian doctrine. In fact, all Christian doctrines must be drawn from Holy Scripture. There is therefore no reason why we should not use Scripture as a source not only for such doctrines as the Second Coming, but also for the doctrine of revelation. It is inconsistent to take the Bible's teaching about sin and judgment and Incarnation and salvation but yet refuse to accept its testimony as to what is the nature of God's revelation through its written pages.

It is contradictory to acknowledge Christ's authority as a teacher on divine matters and reject His teaching about God's relationship to part of His creation, namely His relationship to the words of Scripture. For Christ clearly taught that the Bible is God's Word and cannot be broken.

Again it is contradictory to accept the Bible as a source of doctrine, believing for example such amazing things as the Incarnation, the Resurrection and the Second Coming solely on the ground of the testimony of Scripture to them, and yet reject the doctrine of the Bible in its testimony about the character of Scripture, especially when there is such an immense weight of evidence as to what the apostolic view of Scripture was. We know nothing (and can know nothing) about the future, about such doctrines as heaven and hell, Christ's coming and future judgment, apart from the teaching of the Bible. If we accept these basic Christian doctrines, on the authority of the Bible, we are hopelessly inconsistent if we reject the teaching of the Bible on the doctrine of inspiration.

We may conclude then that the Bible, being God's book, is utterly reliable in all matters in which He intended it should be our teacher. If you reflect, you will see why God should have given us a book of this supernatural character. For had He not done so it would not have been possible for us to have the same religion as the disciples had or as Abraham or as those who heard the Old Testament prophets had. The disciples and the Israelites were in a position to hear God's Word directly, and with certainty, either from the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself or from a prophet filled with the Spirit of God. But what of us? If we are to have the same religion of trust and obedience we must be in a position to hear the same sure direct Word of God. But how can this be, now that Christ has returned to Heaven and prophecy has ceased? God has provided for it by inspiring in a supernatural way the Holy Scriptures which are His direct and infallible Word to those who will read them prayerfully.

There is a further consideration. The Christian religion is essentially one of faith and trust in God, but it is not possible to have true, utter trust and calm, confident faith unless we have

been given a reliable word or promise in which to trust. If we sense any element of unreliability in that in which we are trusting, then to that extent trust becomes impossible and we are forced back on our own resources; prudence takes the place of trust. But the Christian religion calls upon us to have utter trust in God, which implies that we must have an utterly reliable word. And this God has given to us in the Scripture, which is utterly reliable because He has inspired it through His Spirit in a supernatural way so that its words are His words, without ceasing to be the words of the writer.

Again, Christianity is an acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ. To take Jesus as Lord is the test of a Christian; but now that Christ is returned to heaven how does He exercise His Lordship over our hearts, or over the church except through His clear and true Word? If He had not left us His Word, we could not obey Him, or if that Word were doubtful or unreliable, our obedience would to that extent be less than full and we would have to have reservations in our obedience. But Christ calls for complete obedience which in turn necessitates a completely reliable Word from Him. This has been given to us in the Bible.

Again the Christian life is a life lived waiting for the completion of God's purposes (Titus 2:12,13; I Thess. 1:9,10; Phil. 3:20; I Cor. 1:7; Rom. 8:24,25; etc.) The future is unknowable unless God tells us about it. Man cannot predict even the weather of the next few days with any certainty. Yet the Christian life as laid down in the New Testament is a life lived in the light of the certainty of the world's future according to God's purposes. This is impossible unless the Bible is the infallible Word of God. If we are to live the life of hope and not be found fools, God must give us His reliable Word about His purposes. This He has done in the revelation of Jesus Christ and the apostles, preserved for us reliably in Holy Scripture through the work of God's Spirit in the writers. Any view of the Bible which mingles it up with unreliable elements strikes at the very basis of the Christian religion. We may be thankful that God has given us in the Bible His inerrant Word, the instrument through which He calls us to faith and obedience, and through which He moulds in us the character of Christ. It is our duty to believe that word and to read it

regularly and prayerfully and through it to trust God completely and to obey Him gladly and thus grow into Christlikeness, as we wait in confidence for the promise of our Lord's return and the coming of His kingdom.

QUESTIONS ASKED FOLLOWING THE ADDRESS BY MR. D.B. KNOX ON THE
AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD

Question 1:

If the Bible is the true revelation of God, why is there a difference in God in the Old and New Testaments? The Old Testament God is a harsh judge punishing sin, lobbying for the Jews alone. The New Testament God as revealed by Christ is a forgiving Father, forgiving repented sin and for all people.

Answer 1:

The question reflects an erroneous hear-say view of the Old Testament. We must remember that the God of the Old Testament is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Apostles. The Apostles did not change their religion when they accepted Jesus as the Messiah. On reading the Old Testament it will be seen that God is there revealed as essentially a God of love. For example, in the very beginning in Exodus 34 He reveals His name, i.e., His character, as "A God of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"

The ethical injunctions of the Old Testament are fully in keeping with Jesus' teaching, e.g., Exodus 23:4 "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again", and Jesus' summary of our duty, i.e., "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself", are simply two quotations from the Old Testament, and to give only one further instance, the Psalms are full of praise for God's steadfast love and mercy. Yet at the same time both in the Old and New Testaments, God has revealed that He is also a God of judgment. He does not ignore unrepented sin and rebellion.

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Question 2:

Did God stop writing when He finished the Bible? Are the writings of saints who have lived since then in any way inspired? And can they further reveal God's purpose?

Answer 2:

In Christ God has fully revealed Himself for "in Him the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily" (Colossians 2:9). It is therefore inconceivable that there should be anything more that God wants to reveal to us about Himself than what He revealed when He Himself was present Incarnate. The lives of the saints illustrate God's work in men's lives, that is, they illustrate (but do not add new revelation to) what God tells us in Scripture of Himself, and of His relations with us. For this reason good Christian biography is most valuable reading.

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Question 3:

If God controls every atom, electron, etc., in the universe, and if we are made up of electrons, atoms, etc., why do we have free-will?

Answer 3:

It is true that we have free will (which is, of course, synonymous with 'will', the adjective 'free' adding nothing to the concept; for a will that is not free in some sense is not a will). But our wills do not have the sort of freedom that some people think we have, e.g., sinners are slaves to their sin because they are blinded by the devil and cannot choose but to sin. Though they always retain a 'formal' alternative, they have not 'material' alternative. Those who have been redeemed by Christ are set free from the external tyranny of sin so that they are now free to follow their own natures of which God is the author; and so the regenerate person, insofar as he is free from sin, naturally loves to do God's will; but all of us whether regenerate or unregenerate exercise our freedom within the sovereignty of God. This relation of a sovereign will to a true secondary will is unique. There is nothing to which we can compare it but we can see it illustrated in our experience of prayer for guidance, and in our trust for protection. For we never imagine God saying to us in reply to our prayer, "So sorry I can't help you, for the man you fear has free will". The Holy Bible teaches clearly that God is sovereign, working all things after the counsel of His

own will and a clear appreciation of this doctrine sets us free for energetic Christian service. The Inspiration of Holy Scripture is an example of God's sovereignty which though controlling the event does not destroy the free working of the natures He has made.

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Question 4:

Must you be certain of something before you have faith?

Answer 4:

Faith is exercised towards that which is not seen but not towards that which is not known. Faith is not an uncertain venture 'on spec', but St. Luke says in Acts 1:3 It has its own infallible proofs.

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Question 5:

Is no direct revelation possible at any stage of Christian growth between God and His creature?

Answer 5:

The Holy Spirit is in direct fellowship with the believer but He mediates this fellowship through God's Word, that is, the Bible. The Bible also serves as a test of experience, in order that we may detect spurious experience which does not come from God but perhaps from our own psychic nature, from experience which comes from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. If what we experience does not conform to the Word of God it does not come from God. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3).

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Question 6:

Is it not true that the New Testament is the product of the church?

Answer 6:

No part of the Bible is a product of the church. For example,

St. Paul says in I Corinthians 2:12 "We speak not in words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Spirit teacheth", and in II Peter 1:21 "The Scriptures were written by men borne by the Holy Spirit." The Bible was written by members of the Christian community but written to it, not from it. The community sometimes was most hostile. Jeremiah's prophecies are an illustration, where the words that the prophets wrote were burnt by the head of the community.

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Question 7:

If the Bible is infallible and inspired from beginning to end, what answer is to be given to geologists and the like who have disproved the story in Genesis concerning the time of the formation of the world?

Answer 7:

God has given us the Bible for certain purposes and has used the natural faculties and gifts of learning of men in doing this. Since God is its ultimate author, it is infallible and perfect for His purposes. He has over-ruled so as to exclude any mistakes that would mar it. This does not imply that God of necessity must inspire it in such a way as to exclude what we would regard as imperfections if the Bible is used for other purposes, e.g., as a source book to learning Greek grammar. In inspiring Genesis to teach us about God as Creator and man as sinner, etc., God has obviously used a writer who thought in ways not unlike his contemporary cosmologists. I do not think that we can require of necessity the Holy Spirit to have inspired Genesis so that it conformed to today's science, but to final science, whatever that might be. What we may say is that in Genesis 1-3 all errors with regard to God and His relation to the world and to man have been excluded, for it was to give a knowledge of these things that God caused the Bible to be written. All truth which the Bible was written to give a knowledge of, that is, all truth which the Bible teaches, it teaches infallibly. Thus if we read it in a straightforward way we will form a true concept of God's relation to the world and of our relationship to Him and to one another.