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TSF BULLETIN

Sweet, ed., *The Evangelical Tradition in America* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), p. 183.

[2] On these benefits, see Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Garden City: Anchor Press, Doubleday, Inc., 1973), esp. Chapter IV, pp. 103-135.

[3] See the early criticisms from James M. Washington, *Black Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). In his *Politics of God*, a later work (1967), Washington altered a few of his initial criticisms of the black churches, and also in his more recent "The Peculiar Peril and Promise of Black Folk Religion," in *Varieties of Southern Evangelicalism*, ed. by David E. Harrell, Jr. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1981), pp. 59-69.

[4] See the explication by Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*: Vol. I, God, Authority, and Salvation (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), Chapter II ("The Meaning of Evangelical"), pp. 7-23.

[5] See Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1983 Sec. Ed.), esp. pp. 172-177, 197-200.

[6] *Ibid.*, see pp. 451-453.

[7] For the text of these and other Tindley songs, see Ralph H. Jones, *Charles Albert Tindley: Prince of Preachers* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), App. B, hymns. See also *Gospel Pearls* (Nashville: Sunday School Publishing Board, National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., 1921), one of the earliest "ecumenical" collections containing black church songs.

[8] Earle E. Cairns, *The Christian in Society* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), p. 162.

[9] Carl F.H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964).

[10] Sherwood Wirt, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

[11] Personal reports about the Congress were published in books written by two of this group. See Bob Harrison, with Jim Montgomery, *When God Was Black* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), pp. 145-146; James Earl Massey, *Concerning Christian Unity* (Anderson: Warner Press, 1979), pp. 121-126.

[12] The full text of the Congress Statement is available in *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. I, Carl F.H. Henry and Stanley Mooneyham, editors (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1967), pp. 5-7.

[13] *White Questions to a Black Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975).

[14] *Black and Free* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968).

[15] *My Friend, the Enemy* (Waco, TX: Word Books, Inc., 1968).

[16] *Let Justice Roll Down* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books).

[17] *With Justice For All* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1982).

[18] *Christianity Today*, January 1, 1982, pp. 18-22, with his picture featured on the cover.

[19] William H. Bentley, *National Black Evangelical Association: Reflections on the Evolution of a Concept of Ministry* (Chicago: 1979), p. 67.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[21] (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975).

[22] See *Time* Magazine, December 26, 1977, feature story, pp. 52-58.

[23] The three preaching textbooks by black author James Earl Massey have had wide use in evangelical theological seminaries: *The Responsible Pulpit* (Anderson: Warner Press, 1974); *The Sermon in Perspective: A Study of Communication and Charisma* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976); *Designing the Sermon: Order and Movement in Preaching* ("Abingdon Preacher's Library") (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980).

The Authority of the Bible: What Shall We Then Preach?

by Paul J. Achtemeier

Let me begin with a passage of Scripture from Paul, and it concerns preaching. He writes to the Roman Christians: "Now how are people going to call upon one in whom they have not believed? But how are they going to believe in the one of whom they have never heard? But how then are they going to hear unless there is preaching?" (10:14). The importance of preaching is thus established: faith depends on it. But that passage also made clear earlier how preaching is to be shaped: to summon forth faith in Christ as Lord (see v. 9). Thus, preaching must be authoritative if it is to summon people to faith in Christ, and to be authoritative it must let God's own call to faith be heard through its words. What we are to preach, therefore, is the authoritative Word of God.

All that only raises the key and critical problem with which we must deal: where do we find authoritative witness to God's Word, so that we may responsibly conform our preaching to that Word, and so fulfill the mandate Paul put upon preachers? Obviously, to know something about Christ, we must turn to the place where we find witness to Christ, and that is in the Scriptures. Our problem is again solved: to preach authoritatively, we must preach the message of Scripture.

But our solution has raised a new question: how do we know Scripture is authoritative? Again our answer is to be found in the witness of the Bible to Christ. Since Christ is God's Word (John 1:14; note well, Christ, not Scripture, is God's Word), the witness to him will be authoritative because finally what we hear is God's own voice through the Scriptural witness to His Son.

Now another problem: how do we know it is God's voice? In the cacophony of culture, ancient as well as modern, how do we know it is God's voice we find in Scripture, and not the voice of an impostor, or even of Satan himself who, Paul tells us, can pose as an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14)? The solution to that problem must come from God himself, whose own Son, sent for the redemption of sinful humanity, is the center of the witness of Scripture. And the God who does not leave himself without witnesses has in fact sent his Spirit, to testify to our spirits what is the true voice of God. This has found its classical theological formulation in the phrase *testimonium internum spiritus sancti*; the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, who helps us in our weakness so we may both in our prayer and in our hearing recognize God's own voice.

How do we know that the Spirit that confirms to us that the voice we hear in Scripture is God's voice and actually comes from God? How do we know it is not some deceitful spirit, to whom we should not give heed? After all, we are warned not to believe every spirit we hear, since many are false; rather, we are to test the spirits, to see whether they come from God or from another source (I John 4:1).

What is the test? It is the confession that Jesus, come in the flesh, is our Lord and Savior (I John 4:2; I Cor. 12:3). But that very same Spirit that moves one to that confession is also the Spirit that is given to the Christian community, indeed that constitutes the Christian community through the variety of its gifts (I Cor. 12:4-13). We know we find God's authoritative voice in Scripture therefore when we hear it within the community which confesses Christ as Lord, the community which the Spirit of God has called into existence, which Paul can call the "Body of Christ." It is within the body of Christ, therefore, that we hear the voice of God who speaks through the Word that is his Son.

It is finally the Christian community, created and sustained by God's own Spirit, who determines what in fact constitutes the authoritative speaking and hearing of the Word of God. Such an exegetical and theological conclusion has confirmation of its correctness in the history of the Christian community, since the determination of the boundaries of the canon of Scripture, and hence of the authoritative witness of God's Son, that is to God's Word, is an act of that very community. It was a decision made over several centuries, and within the context of the life and worship of that community. The authoritative canon is therefore based on the collective confession of faith of the Christian community who, having been called into being and sustained by God's own Spirit, has at the prompting of that same Spirit recognized in those Scriptures the true witness to God's own word, namely his Son. The authority of Scripture, therefore, and hence the authority

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of what we preach, is grounded in the Christian community's trust in the faithfulness of God to speak to us, and to send his Spirit so we may hear and understand what God says to us in his Son. So long as the community is faithful to its own confession of faith in God's Son as his Word, that is, so long as it is faithful to Scripture, it can confidently preach the content of that Scripture as the authoritative witness to God's act of mercy for us sinners in his Son.

quest led not to certainty but to misunderstanding so destructive that Jesus could only label it satanic (Mark 8:33). If Mark is correct that it was God's will that such post-resurrection certainty about who Jesus was was not possible to obtain during Jesus' pre-resurrection life (cf. 6:52, with its divine passive, implying God has "hardened their hearts," that is, prevented them from understanding), then to seek comparable certainty now about the authority of Scripture through theories about

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The church will sicken and die from sermonic opinions which are not based on the authoritative canon of Scripture.

We are not finished; a few questions remain. How, for example, are we to listen to Scripture, to hear the voice of God witnessing to his Son for our own time and for our own culture? After all, our world is not the world of the New Testament. Few of us converse in Koine Greek, or feel the threat of Roman political power whenever we gather as Christians. How are we to find, and then use the authoritative Scriptures, so that what we preach may also share in that authority and that power?

It is at this point that our difficulties arise, as difficulties always arise at the point where theory intersects with hard reality. The desire to be faithful to the faith of the early Christian community which heard in the canon the authoritative witness to God's word to them in his Son, is a powerful and indispensable Christian desire. Such faithfulness is also necessary if we are to carry out the mandate implied in that passage from Romans with which we began, namely that for our preaching to be effective, it must summon those who hear it to confess of Christ as Lord of their lives. Such faithfulness also implies our confidence in the authority of Scripture, so we base our preaching on it; only in that way will our preaching truly summon to Christ. Anything else is to preach not Christ but ourselves as Lord. The church will sicken and die from sermonic opinions which are not based on the authoritative canon of Scripture.

It is precisely the mandate to summon sinful humanity to the confession of the Lordship of Christ, however, that can get those who preach from Scripture into trouble. For preaching to be recognized as authoritative, the authority of its source must be acknowledged. After all, to deny the authority of Scripture is to deny the authority of any preaching which takes that Scripture as its basis, and so it is quite easy to become preoccupied with insuring that our base of authority is recognized and recognizable. We want to secure the authority of Scripture as the authoritative basis of our preaching, so we may fulfill our missionary mandate. It is in the course of doing that that we tend to forget that even within the Christian community, we continue to walk by faith, and not by sight. We tend to forget that the authority of Scripture is not given into our hands to defend and use as we see fit. Its authority remains the Word of God, that is, his Son, to whom Scripture points.

We easily go astray when we seek to assure ourselves and others of that authority of God's Word, instead of letting that Word take its own course. How we would like to walk by sight at least one or two steps, at least in the matter of the authority of Scripture. How we would like at least a little post-parousial vision in our pre-parousial world of faith. Yet to seek such post-parousial certainty in the pre-parousial age is as likely to be successful as were the disciples, according to the Gospel of Mark, in their attempts to find post-resurrection certainty about Jesus during his pre-resurrection life. Their

the origin or composition of the text would also be unproductive. To press too far is finally the sin of idolatry, in this case seeking to take responsibility for Scriptural authority out of God's hands and to ground it in ways we find useful or even necessary.

The Historical-Critical Method: Two Propositions

All of that raises the question of how we are to listen to Scripture so its authority is preserved, without trying to make it an instrument of sight in a time when only faith is possible. To answer that question, I want to say something about a current method employed in studies of the Bible, the "historical-critical" method. I want to do that by means of two propositions. First: It was precisely the ongoing attempt to understand Scripture that made the rise of the historical-critical method inevitable, if not necessary. Second: The historical-critical method must now be redefined in such a way that it becomes a valid and useful tool for listening to the Scriptures in a way appropriate to their authoritative status.

A variety of historical influences came together to launch what is regularly called the age of critical study of the Bible. First, there was the way the Bible was being used in theology. In the age of Protestant Orthodoxy, which began about the mid-seventeenth century and continued as a dominant way of doing theology in to the mid-to-late eighteenth century,[1] Scripture was regarded as basically a collection of sentences, each having theological meaning in and of itself, a meaning which could be adequately determined apart from the literary context in which the sentence was found. The sentences could thus be used in any order, and indeed a basic task of theology was to arrange them in a systematic order, so the theological intent of Scripture might be unfolded in a coherent way. This demanded that all sentences bearing theological freight be regarded as having equal significance, and that that significance be regarded as remaining, regardless of any context into which they might be placed.

Second was the growing knowledge of the natural world, and a concomitant confidence on the part of secular sciences in their ability to reach final truth about the world. In the process, much of the cosmology and biology of the Bible was recognized as no longer conforming to new discoveries.

A third factor, which originated with the Enlightenment and its motto *ad fontes* ("back to the sources"), had to do with the increasing study of the sources of the ancient world, many of which were becoming available as a result of the beginnings of biblical archaeology. Discoveries of ancient, non-biblical Semitic texts showed that myths of creation and flood were common in the period of the composition of the Old Testament, leading to the perception that if the Bible shared the conceptual and linguistic world of its time, it should be treated as any other literature produced in that time. Again, discov-

eries of papyri from the period of late Greek antiquity showed that the Greek of the New Testament was not a special Greek written by those whose native language had been Hebrew or Aramaic, nor was it the language written by those inspired of the Holy Spirit. New Testament Greek was shown to be not special at all, but rather to be common language (Gk. *koine*) spoken by common people as the *lingua franca* of the ancient world of that period. These discoveries gave further impetus to the idea that one ought to approach the biblical literature in the same way one approached other literature from the same periods.

It was the confluence of these and other factors that led to the rise of the "historical-critical" method of study of the Bible. It meant scholars had to look with the same critical eye at the content of the Bible as they looked at the content of any documents from the same period, and subject them to the same canons of truth to which any other ancient writing was subjected. The confidence of secular science now dictated that what was unacceptable in *any* ancient writing (for example errors in history or natural science) was to be regarded as unacceptable in *all* ancient writings, and hence had to be explained in terms of its mythic origins or else explained away. The historical imperializing inherent in the dominant philosophy of the modern world, namely Hegelianism, dictated that what was old was wrong and the product of ignorance; the task of the modern world was to correct, not to learn from, earlier periods of history.

which need to be taken seriously in their interpretation. One does not treat poetry, for example, as one treats history, or a fable as one treats prophecy. Thus, the major service of the historical-critical method was to rescue us from imposing on ancient literature the suppositions we bring to contemporary literature, and from assuming ancient peoples thought just as we do, and had the same questions we do, and applied the same canons of truth that we do. It effectively demonstrated that the Bible was ancient literature, and came from a conceptual world different from ours.

In application, the historical-critical method eventuated into biblical "Introduction," which, when I went to Seminary, was the content of the required New Testament courses. Introduction in that sense freed Scriptural study from its imprisonment within the theological systems of Protestant Orthodoxy, and allowed it to assume its place within ancient writings among which it was produced. Yet just as one does not need repeated introductions to people, one does not need to continue freeing the Bible from an imprisonment it no longer suffers. A prisoner with a saw does not spend his time sawing all the bars of his cell into smaller and smaller pieces. Once the bars are sawed, it is time to get on with something else.

The same thing is true of the historical-critical method in its original formulation: once it achieved its task of allowing us to see Scripture as ancient documents, its task was finished. In its original configuration, therefore, the historical-critical method was necessarily a transitory phenomenon.

I want to urge that we retain the intention of the historical-critical method, but redefine it to make it more appropriate to a less imperializing attitude toward the past.

One can see all these attitudes to the biblical text being applied to the canonical Gospels, for example, in the lives of Jesus written during the latter two-thirds of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A look at A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, will demonstrate that. There it is evident what it meant that one had to apply the canons of historical truth to the content of the Bible, and subject it to the same critical scrutiny to which one would subject, say, the writings of the elder Pliny or the younger Seneca in their descriptions of the world, and of the gods.

In sum, the "historical-critical method," conscious of the historical periods within which biblical literature originated, applied to that literature the critical methods of study derived from examination of other documents and traditions of the same period, informed by a (Hegelian) attitude that as history moved forward, truth was disclosed which had been unavailable to earlier periods, and it sought to find the (reliable) "truth" behind the (basically unreliable) "forms" of biblical literature.

It is not my intention to condemn out of hand that method of biblical study. The results of the historical-critical method, for example, allowed scholars to recognize that biblical literature responded to the same kind of analysis of intention, authorship, readership, date, and provenance as did any other ancient literature of comparable type. It also allowed scholars to recognize different kinds of literature within the Bible; for example, poetry (Psalms), fable (Judg. 9:8-15), prophecy (Amos, Isaiah), history (I Sam.-II Chron.), dialogue (Job), novel (Jonah), letters (the Pauline corpus), "Gospels," (there is still much discussion of their genre; Luke for example seems to be a *bios*), and even a kind of account of the future (Daniel, Rev.).

With the recognition of different kinds of literature there came the realization that each type had different intentions

This brings me to my second proposition, namely, that the time has come to redefine the historical-critical method so it can continue to be a valid method of biblical study. The need for it surely continues; it is the need to protect Scripture from all attempts at domesticating it, as it was domesticated by Protestant orthodoxy. A good current example of that continuing need is the invidious system of apartheid, which basically has theological roots, and which resulted from the uncritical identification by the Boers with Israel, South Africa with Canaan as the promised land, and the indigenous population as the Canaanites. In that perspective, one reads the stories of the conquest in just the way as a part of the South African white population continues to do, seeing itself as the chosen people upholding God's righteousness against the threat of admixture with the Canaanites. Fundamentally, therefore, apartheid represents a hermeneutical error, and it displays the mischief that can result from an uncritical application of ancient traditions to a contemporary situation.

Therefore, I want to urge that we retain the intention of the historical-critical method, but redefine it to make it more appropriate to a less imperializing attitude toward the past, on the assumption that our task is to learn from that past, not to correct it.

First, let me suggest that we understand the term "historical" in the historical-critical method to mean the continuing necessity to recognize that the Bible is the product of another time, and that this must be taken into account whenever we attempt to use it to solve contemporary problems. It points to the distance between our situation and that of the text. Our world is different at least in degree from the historical world of the Bible, and we must keep that in mind. To ignore that fact means inevitably to misinterpret the Bible.

As a direct consequence of that, I would suggest that we regard the term "critical" in the historical-critical method as continuing to point to a critical attitude on our part, but a critical attitude to what *we* think a given passage of Scripture means. We are not to assume that what seems obvious to us as modern people is necessarily the meaning of that passage when seen in its total historical and literary context.

The point of such a "historical-critical" method is to protect the text from us through our own self-critical attitude toward what we find in this text. All ancient artifacts are fragile; they must be given special care or they will be destroyed. That is also true of the biblical text. History has shown, and continues to show, that interpreters can carry on a form of cultural imperialization that will blind us to what the text in fact can tell

us about the ways of God with humanity. In that case, the authority of the Bible for our task of preaching will be ignored, as we resolutely preach ourselves, rather than Christ as Lord, and as we bend our precious biblical heritage into forms we are sure it ought to have assumed.

What shall we then preach? We are to preach Christ as Lord, as the only authority for a God-starved world, and in a way that allows the text to speak its word of judgment and grace to us who preach, as well as to those to whom we preach.

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1. For a summary of this kind of theology, the best handbook for the Reformed positions is Heinrich Heppe, *Reformierte Dogmatik*, new ed. Ernst Bizer; Kreis Moers: Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins Neukirchen, 1935); for the Lutheran positions see Heinrich F.F. Schmid, *Die Dogmatik der Evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 7th ed.; (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1893).

The American Hour, The Evangelical Moment

by Os Guinness

Raymond Aron once remarked that few people are contemporaries of their own generation. Usually behind the times and largely gaining our understanding second-hand, most of us find it hard to keep up with what is happening and harder still to make sense of it. And the modern explosion of information only makes the problem worse. Most people therefore find themselves strung out somewhere between the extremes of the "Happiness-is-a-small-circle" philosophy and the phenomenon of Daniel Boorstin's "Homo-up-to-datum," the one irresponsible and the other both idolatrous and illusory.

How are we as followers of Christ to steer a course between these extremes and become unriddlers of our times? The challenge is to turn from the modern preoccupation with "know yourself" and to direct the alternative, "know your moment," toward the biblical task of "reading the signs of the times" and "interpreting the hour." In an era calling forth such claims as "an opportunity unprecedented in the twentieth century" for evangelicals (Ron Sider) or "the greatest opportunity since the Reformation" (Richard Lovelace), this goal is obviously vital.

Well aware of the perils of prediction, whether spiritual or secular, and renouncing all pretensions to be a prophet or futurist, I offer the following observations as one Christian's attempt to assess one aspect of the extraordinary times in which we live. The thrust of the argument is carried in raising three sets of questions—three preliminary ones, three main and three concluding.

Whose Moment?

For Christians the form of this first preliminary question must always be, "Whose?", and, "For Whom?" Quite different from current terms such as "window of opportunity" or being "on a roll," a biblical moment is never chosen or interpreted at will. It is essentially God's moment and a matter of his sovereign initiative.

Yet it is God's moment for someone, and one question today is, For whom? After his visit to the U.S. in 1921, G.K. Chesterton wrote, "So far as democracy becomes and remains Catholic and Christian, that democracy will remain demo-

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cratic. Insofar as it does not, it will become wildly and wickedly undemocratic." Six-and-a-half decades later, this comment appears prophetic rather than simply partisan or an instance of Chestertonian cleverness.

With Rome as the center of gravity in the Christian world, the Roman Catholic Church has become the largest community in Christendom and the largest single denomination in the U.S. Considering such strengths as its ancient tradition, its hierarchical structures, its aesthetic richness and its cogent (if somewhat delayed) defense of democratic pluralism, there is little wonder that many observers, such as Richard John Neuhaus and William Miller, have declared that this is "the Catholic moment."

Yet alongside this estimate, the present period is surely also an "evangelical moment." For, culturally speaking, it is no accident that evangelicalism has given rise to the strongest social, political and religious movements in the late Seventies and early Eighties while also representing the oldest, closest religious ties to American life and history. Through its capacity to rise to the challenge of this moment, the evangelical community will reveal its character and strengths or weaknesses today.

What Stage?

For Christians, an accurate answer to this question is virtually an impossibility. Since ignorance is insurmountable, humility is a necessity as well as a virtue. And because of the dire hunger today for a sense of meaning and belonging, false predictions are proliferating on all sides.

Yet no Christian is let off the hook. For running beside the biblical record of those who missed their moment is the relentless insistence on their responsibility for doing so. Further, the pages of history continue the biblical record right up to our day. So the challenge for faith and obedience is to recognize and seize the moment, however difficult that may prove. Speaking as an Englishman, and conscious of the sad genealogy of convictions in English evangelicalism between 1830 and 1900, this point is poignant as well as strong.

The answer to what stage has been reached depends of course on prior questions as to the character of the moment. But to preempt later discussion, I am arguing that the present developments are in the later stages of their unfolding. While still a remarkable and genuinely open opportunity, the present moment shows signs that it may be closing.