

# THE THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS' FELLOWSHIP

TERMINAL LETTER : SUMMER 1954

39 BEDFORD SQUARE, W.C.1

---

## THE NECESSITY OF MAINTAINING AN EVANGELICAL WITNESS

We are at last able to see the pendulum starting its return swing, away from a rationalist to a biblical approach to theology. This does not mean that we can summarily dismiss liberal theology as completely outdated, for though this system may be in a process of modification, it is still the same in principle. That principle briefly stated is: developing a system of theology from the standpoint of the world's wisdom, which in effect means doubting everything supernatural, everything repugnant to human reason. This is fatal for a Christian theology, since human reason is notoriously of a chameleon-like nature, and cannot be trusted as an authority for faith and practice. For that we need something we can trust, and only that which is divine is trustworthy, i.e. 'the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever'.

We need not be ashamed of such dogmatic statements in the propagation of our evangelical witness, since we believe that it is simply that which is believed and taught by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Most important is the attitude of Christ to the Scriptures, since all our doctrine is drawn from them. He certainly regarded them as the final authority, as time and time again He settled disputes by a quotation from the Old Testament. He set the Scriptures on this pedestal because He believed that the men who wrote them did so under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit, e.g. Mk. xii. 36, 'David himself said in the Holy Spirit.' Thus, because they are of divine origin, 'the Scripture cannot be broken' (Jn. x. 35). His teaching about prophecy is as clear as it possibly could be: He frequently refers to the Scripture being fulfilled (cf. Mt. xxvi. 53-56; Lk. xxiv. 25-27).

This is vastly different to the way in which many modern scholars speak of the Bible. We are told that the prophets had insight, but certainly not foresight: that the Bible is inspired, but our sermons are similarly inspired. The following quotation is typical, from *In the End, God . . .* by J. A. T. Robinson: 'How Jesus Himself viewed the matter can perhaps never be proved. There is too much secondary material in the Gospel apocalypses to warrant any dogmatic assertion.' Or as was once said to me after I had quoted Paul: 'Well, he was only human like the rest of us.' It is amazing what has been glibly swallowed in the almighty name of scholarship; it is no wonder that the Church is suffering from spiritual dyspepsia! Fundamentalists have been ridiculed for belief in a magical-book, but is that not a shade better than having no book at all?

We have seen for ourselves the 'assured results' of modern criticism — some admittedly are good and profitable, but there is some truth in the platitude that 'churches are emptied by degrees'. Our nation has often asked to hear the voice of the Church (as it does now, in relation to the hydrogen-bomb), but the Church rarely says anything largely because it has nothing to say of relevance to the modern man. More than ever today the world is in desperate need of the gospel, and when it is preached in all sincerity and the power of the Holy Spirit, people are convicted of sin and born again.

If we believe that we have some insight into the truth, then let us say so, even if people do call us bigoted, self-righteous and narrow-minded. We would not apologize if we discovered a cure for cancer; no more need we apologize for proclaiming the truth of God's Word. Is it not that same truth which has set us free, and alone is able to liberate others from the bonds of sin? Let us not forget that the Holy Spirit has revealed these things to

us, not just for our benefit, but for the blessing of others — we *are* our brother's keeper.

Paul told Timothy that the time would come when people would not endure sound doctrine but be turned unto fables, and we are, it seems, living in such a time now. But Paul has something else to tell us; therefore 'hold fast the form of sound words . . . The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.' Let us then be bold to identify ourselves afresh with the faith once delivered to the saints and ensure that we 'be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord'.

## HAVING EARS, HEAR YE NOT ?

I believe with all my soul . . . in the necessity of Christian apologetics, the necessity of a reasoned defence of the Christian Faith, and in particular a reasoned defence of the Christian conviction that the Bible is the Word of God.

Some years ago I attended a conference of Christian students. Various methods of Christian testimony were being discussed, and particularly the question was being discussed whether it is necessary to engage in a reasoned defence of the Christian faith. In the course of the discussion, a gentleman who had had considerable experience in work among students arose and said that according to his experience you never win a man to Christ until you quit arguing with him. Well, when he said that I was not impressed one tiny little bit. Of course a man never was won to Christ *merely* by argument. That is perfectly clear. There must be the mysterious work of the Spirit of God in the new birth. Without that, all our arguments are quite useless. But because argument is insufficient, it does not follow that it is unnecessary. What the Holy Spirit does in the new birth is not to make a man a Christian regardless of the evidence, but on the contrary to clear away the mists from his eyes and enable him to attend to the evidence . . .

Yes, I certainly do believe in Christian apologetics; I certainly do believe in the reasoned defence of the truth of the Bible . . . Neglect of this work will be to the loss of countless precious souls. Some years ago a kind of anti-intellectualism prevailed widely in the Church. Scholars were despised by evangelists; theological seminaries were regarded either as nurseries of unbelief or else as places where men engaged in dry-as-dust pursuits remote from living reality. Well, many theological seminaries today *are* nurseries of unbelief; and because they are nurseries of unbelief the churches that they serve have become unbelieving churches too. *As go the theological seminaries, so goes the church.* That is certainly true in the long run. Look out upon the condition of the world today, and you will see that it is true. But why is it that so many theological seminaries have become nurseries of unbelief and have dragged the churches that they serve down with them? It is partly because of that anti-intellectualistic attitude of pastors and evangelists, of which I spoke just now. Despising scholarship as they did, and leaving it in possession of the enemy, they discover today that in the long run they cannot get along without it. *When real revival comes in the Church, we may be perfectly sure of one thing. We may be perfectly sure that with it and as a vital part of it will come a revival of Christian learning.* That was true of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, and it will be true of every reformation or revival that does any more than merely scratch the surface . . .

Evangelism cannot do without Christian scholarship. I do not like to think of the relationship between Christian scholarship and evangelism as being a balance between the two things. I do not like to say: 'Let us have evangelism, but not so much evangelism as to crowd out Christian scholarship.' No, the true state of the case is that you can hardly have evangelism unless you have Christian scholarship; and the more Christian scholarship you have, so much the more evangelism. *Out of real theological seminaries, where the Bible is expounded and defended, come ministers and evangelists who know what they believe and why they believe it; and the preaching of such ministers and evangelists is graciously used of God for the salvation of*

precious souls. There is no guess-work about that. Look about you today, and you will see that it is simply a fact.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*  
(1936), p. 69 ff.

Reprinted by permission of the Trustees of Westminster Theological Seminary.