

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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Beware of Men

Edited by John W. Robbins

We live in an age of unprecedented ecumenical acceleration. This is the result of three great movements on the current religious scene-- Pentecostalism, Roman Catholicism, and Neo-evangelicalism. Ecumenical and religious optimism is at an all time high. Many see the "awakening" of today as the greatest religious awakening since Pentecost!

Surely one of the important aspects of any religious movement is its opinion of the Bible. "The baptism of the Spirit" is said to give a greater love for the Bible; the "charismatic experience" is said to have unlocked the Bible for many. Some find that the "real presence" in the Mass and the traditions of the Roman Church stimulate greater interest in the Bible. Few have not heard about Rome's "new approach" to the Scriptures, her new "open attitude" even to the fundamental tenets of Reformation theology. What do these claims mean?

The general position of the ecumenical movement with reference to the Scriptures is Antichristian. The Bible is subordinated to experience. The Scriptures are regarded as both

fallible and insufficient. This is anything but a sound foundation for the future of the church.

Roman Catholicism

Contemporary Romanism views the Bible differently from the older Roman Catholic view of the Scriptures-or at least its views are stated more frankly. Although the Bible was subordinated to the Church in traditional Romanism, and that has not changed, nevertheless Rome once held a higher view of the inspiration of the Scriptures than it does today. Contemporary Romanism ascribes only limited authority to the Bible. This contemporary view is stated in official publications of the Roman Church-State.

If the Bible has only a qualified authority, limited to matters of religion, what has absolute and universal authority? In order to come to grips with this question, we recommend that interested readers study the influence of the nineteenth century John Henry Cardinal Newman on Vatican II's approach to the Bible and revelation. We can only state the crux of his view here: Newman believed that Scripture has reduced (we would say "elevated") only part of special revelation to

written form. There is also revelation that is not found in Scripture—non-propositional revelation. The mind enables the Christian to come to grips with the written revelation, whereas “*intuition*” (also called “*insight*”) allows access to non-propositional revelation. The revelation grasped by intuition “fills the gaps and puts flesh on the bones of that which has been committed to writing.” The Roman Catholic theologian Hans Kueng reflects the same qualification of Biblical authority. Not all the Bible is the Word of God for Kueng. In fact, he speaks of “the infallibility of religious encounter” rather than the infallibility of the Bible. For Kueng the Bible is the nearest that the theologian can come to describing the reality of God and of Christ. This being the case, both the words of the Bible and the theologian are defective. To sum up, if the Bible does not have *absolute* and *universal* authority, then absolute authority must be placed in man. *Despite the differences between new-face and old-time Catholicism, positing final authority outside the Bible is common to both. Religious experience judges the written Word.*

Pentecostalism

As mentioned earlier, claims of greater love for the Bible are not infrequently heard among charismatics (and sometimes outside the charismatic movement). “The baptism of the Spirit” is said to “unlock the Bible” for charismatics. To what does the evidence point when we look into charismatic literature? It points to the subordination of the Bible to the experience.

Frequently passages from the Bible are quoted out of context. When this takes place, a meaning from without is imposed on a text or passage. The word of man is placed over the

Scripture and is then called the Word of God. But falsification of the Word has taken place. In charismatic writing there is superficiality evident in the use of Scripture. A lack of careful consideration of a text or passage is not the sign of preoccupation with its meaning. A meaning, which comes from a framework other than the Bible, is imported into Scripture. For instance, consider the frequent use of *Acts* 5:32 to show that obedience is a condition for the gift of the Spirit. In fact, the meaning is exactly the opposite of what the charismatics seek to show. The text says God has given (past) the Holy Spirit to those who are now obeying him (present). Obedience is the sign of the Spirit, not his precondition! Many other passages could be quoted along with references from charismatic literature. Superficiality with regard to the Bible is hardly a sign of increased devotion to God’s Word.

A third and tragic aspect of the charismatic approach to the Bible is that the Bible is simply ignored. This ignoring of the Bible is done with a show of spirituality, but it is arrogant and antichristian. Frequently, ignoring the Bible takes place under the guise of an appeal to the Spirit. This appeal, however, is an appeal to the Spirit apart from and even contrary to the Word.

J. Rodman Williams, former president of Melodyland School of Theology, wrote:

[W]e often in the past argued the nice points of the “Real Presence” among ourselves. Such now is completely done away, and in the fellowship of the Spirit we sit down together at the Lord’s Table not to discuss the Real Presence, but to enjoy it.

I can recall occasions of full participation at the Lord's Supper in traditions as widely different as Roman Catholic and Assembly of God, Episcopalian and Church of Christ.

Williams is saying that the Baptism in the Spirit has rendered meaningless the old disputes. It appears as though there is a fellowship of the Spirit that is apart from the Word. Yet nowhere in the Scriptures can we find love for the Bible expressing itself by deliberately ignoring the Word. The crime is that such quotations as those just given could be multiplied *ad infinitum*.

The final point concerning charismatics and the Bible is that, essentially, the charismatic method of handling the Word is derived from Neo-evangelicalism. The charismatic uses a Neo-evangelical approach to the Bible and comes up with a slightly different account of the Christian life.

All the things we have said about the charismatic's use of the Bible are applicable to Neo-evangelicalism also. It is impossible to raise serious questions about the way the charismatic uses the Scriptures without at the same time questioning well-entrenched Neo-evangelical methods.

Neo-Evangelicalism

Many "evangelical" churches have their theology molded by popular convention speakers and authors and not by solid, sober theologians and exegetes. The big names in popular "evangelicalism" are not the names of scholars.

We repeat for emphasis that what has been previously said about the Charismatics and the Bible is true of the "evangelical" Christian. Frequently the Bible is treated as a contextless repository of information supportive of false and un-Biblical views of Christian theology and life. Superficiality marks most of the influential speakers and writers in "evangelical" circles today. Frequently the Bible is simply ignored, in deference to psychology or whatever the deviance *du jour* is.

When we say the Bible is so much ignored in Pentecostalism and "evangelicalism," this raises the question, Where does their information come from? In many instances they claim it comes directly from the Lord himself—or His Spirit!

Sometimes "evangelical" leaders will even lay claim to special visions and revelations as the source of their (sometimes quite bizarre) views. "Evangelical guruism" is quite persistent. This is appealing to the Spirit apart from the Word. If such a position is challenged, there is even appeal to the Spirit *over* the Word!

This leads us to a third characteristic of so much popular "evangelicalism" – the determinative role of experience. If the Pentecostal or the "evangelical" has experienced it, then the Bible must teach it! This appeal to experience over the Word takes different forms.

For example, one of the most frequently encountered forms is "the changed life criterion." How difficult it is to suggest something may not be Biblical if it has changed the person's life! Have you ever tried to get a charismatic to re-think his views when he

keeps telling you how great a change it has brought into his life? How much more he loves Jesus because of the experience? This is the pragmatic approach: It works; therefore, it must be Biblical. Of course, a changed life is not a criterion of Christianity at all: Alcoholics Anonymous has changed lives. Meditation and Yoga have changed lives. Christianity will indeed change lives. But it is fallacious to argue the converse: Changed lives demonstrate Christianity.

Another form is "the great numbers criterion." If a particular "evangelical" teacher has great crowds flocking to hear him, then surely this is a sign that the Lord is endorsing his message. Would the charismatic movement be endorsed so heartily were it not so huge and widespread? Would Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts seem so true if it were attended by only 200 people in an obscure part of California, rather than 18,000 in the Los Angeles coliseum? "Might means right" is more a part of our mentality than we realize! It amounts to the fact that great crowds are seen as the blessing and endorsement of the Lord. The basis of this false conclusion is a legalistic premise—the Lord gives huge memberships and audiences only when we are right. Actually, the church growth mentality leads straight to Rome: the Pope has the largest following of all, so he must be the most blessed.

Romanism, Pentecostalism, and Neo-evangelicalism are fundamentally agreed in the subordination of the Bible to human experience. They are all empirical religions. Though there are outward differences, the centrality and authority of experience is common to all three.

When we speak of experience over the Gospel, we are asserting that the *message* of the Bible is subordinated to the message of man. And when we speak of experience over the Word, we are saying that the *meaning* of the Bible is subordinated to the meaning which man imposes on the Word.

Beware of Churchmen

"Beware of men," Jesus warned his disciples. He did not say, "Beware of bad men." The warning might just as well include good men. In things divine, in things that concern the worship of God, "beware of men" (*Matthew 10:17*). Martin Luther remarked that true religion was never more endangered than when it was in the company of "reverend" men.

When God spoke the law on Mount Sinai, the very mountain was fenced in from the people. No human hands were permitted to touch even the Mount, much less the law itself. Uzzah was slain when he put his hand on the ark. There is a place for human authority—whether it be church authority, parental authority, business authority, or civil authority; but when it comes to binding and loosing the conscience with moral and spiritual law, only God can legislate. He declares, "You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish any from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (*Deuteronomy 4:2*). The church is not called to be a legislature, but an ambassador (*2 Corinthians 5:20*). An ambassador must not impose his own laws or even express his own opinion. He represents only the will of the government that sends him.

Unto no man or body of men has Christ delegated authority to legislate on doctrine. No authority other than God himself can or should pass laws that can bind or loose the consciences of men. Christ said, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (*Matthew* 28:20). The disciples were to teach what Christ had taught – that which He had spoken, not only in person, but through prophets and apostles. Human teaching is shut out. There is no place for tradition, for man's theories and conclusions, human experience, or for church legislation. No laws ordained by ecclesiastical authority are included in the commission. None of these are Christ's servants to teach. This is the regulative principle of evangelism and doctrine.

Replying to those who wanted to make the decrees and deeds of the church articles of faith that were binding on the conscience, Luther said:

No one should believe even the church itself when it acts or speaks without and beyond Christ's words. In Christ's words it is holy and certain, while beyond Christ's words it is surely a poor, erring sinner, although undamned for Christ's sake, in whom it believes.

I wanted to say this in rebuttal to those stiff-necked boasters who constantly chatter about the church, the church, the church, although they do not know what the church or its holiness is. They simply pass over that and make the church so holy that Christ has to become a liar on account of it, and His words are robbed of all their validity. Against this,

we in turn must shout exultantly, "Say what you will about the church, let it be as holy as you please, still Christ cannot become a liar on that account." In its teaching, praying, and believing the church confesses that it is a sinner before God and that it often errs and sins; but Christ is truth itself and can neither lie nor sin. Therefore, insofar as the church lives and speaks in the word and faith of Christ, it is holy and (as St. Paul says [*1 Corinthians* 7:34]) righteous in spirit. And insofar as it acts and speaks without Christ's word and faith, it errs and sins. But whoever makes an article of faith out of the sinful deed and word of the church defames both church and Christ as liars. (*Luther's Words* [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955] Vol. 34, 76)

When the Word of God is mixed with faith, it will profit the receiver. But when it is mixed with human opinions and experiences, it becomes like the bread which Ezekiel was commanded to eat. The Lord said to the prophet:

Take also unto yourself wheat and barley and beans, and lentils, and millet, and fitches...and you shall bake it with dung that comes out of man, in their sight. And the Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread. (*Ezekiel* 4:9, 12, 13)

Luther wrote: "I want to have the pure unadulterated Scriptures in all their glory, undefiled by the comment of any man, even the saints, and not hashed up with any earthly seasonings. But you [the schoolmen] are the

very people who have not avoided profane and vain babblings (to use Paul's words, *1 Timothy 6:20*), and have wanted to cover these holy and divine delicacies with human glosses and pep them up with earthly spices. And like Ezekiel (*Ezekiel 4:12*) my soul is nauseated at having to eat bread baked with human dung. Do you know what this means? The word of man when added to the Word of God serves as a veil to the pure truth. Nay, worse as I have said, it is the human dung with which the bread is baked, as the Lord figuratively expresses it in *Ezekiel*" (*Answer to Latomus*, Library of Christian Classics [Philadelphia: Westminster Press], Vol. 16, 344-345).

The writer of *Hebrews* makes special mention of Moses for being faithful in all the affairs of God (see *Hebrews 3:5*). It was his faithfulness to do exactly what the Lord commanded. When he built the tabernacle, it is repeatedly said that he did everything "as the Lord commanded Moses" (see *Exodus 40*). Moses added no specifications of his own. He did exactly "as the Lord commanded Moses." In His diligence to keep self out of sight and to make the will of God supreme in everything, Moses was a type of Jesus. In the garment of Christ's perfect character, there was not one thread of human devising. He did the will of Him who sent Him. Thus, Christ's work bore the image and superscription of God.

The Image of a Man

In *Daniel 2* history is presented under the figure of an image of a man. The kingdoms of this world are kingdoms of men. They are the result of man's genius, ambition, and arrogance. The feet of the image are a mixture of iron and clay.

The "little horn" power of *Daniel 7* is represented as having eyes "like the eyes of man" (*Daniel 7:8*). This power was formed when members of the church of Christ began to do that which was right in their human eyes. Christ established a pure church. It had a pure government and a pure faith. But when churchmen began to look at the problems of church government through the eyes of their own understanding, they gradually developed echelons of church office and a hierarchy of human authority that resulted in the papacy. When human scholarship and man-made theology tried to explain the incarnation and sinlessness of Jesus, the result was the Roman doctrine of Mary, the Mother of God, her perpetual virginity, her Immaculate Conception, and her bodily assumption into Heaven. When reason unaided by revelation attempted to explain how an immature Christian who had not reached a state of sinlessness could enter Heaven, it came up with the teaching of purgatory. There was a gradual substitution of human teaching for divine revelation. As were the "eyes" of the "little horn," so was its "mouth that spoke very great things" (*Daniel 7:20*). Its words—its dogmas and decrees—were the doctrines and commandments of men. In *Revelation 13* the same power is represented as a beast having the number of a man's name. Paul calls it the "man of sin." All this demonstrates that it is the product of human nature.

The Danger of Good Men

The oppressive ecclesiastical system portrayed in Bible prophecy came into being because God's professed people did not give due heed to Jesus' warning: "Beware of men." We will fail to learn the necessary lesson unless we realize that those who helped form this system

were not all wicked, scheming men. Many good men helped form the Papal system. For instance, Augustine (AD 354-430) was the greatest of the Latin theologians. After a riotous youth, he was converted to Christianity. He became a brilliant Christian scholar. When it came to upholding the Christian faith against Pelagius, Augustine was the man for the hour. Christian historians point out that he was a spiritual father of the Reformation. Yet the astonishing thing is that this same Augustine was also a father of the Inquisition. He justified the use of force against the Donatists, arguing that compulsory worship was implied by the Lord's parabolic command, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in." Augustine's most famous work, *The City of God*, took him seventeen years to write. It presented a heady concept of the role of the institutional church in the world. He saw the institutional church as the great stone of *Daniel* 2, which would subdue the whole world to Christ. *The City of God* was the product of Augustine the saint at his best. In it his imagination of what the church could do for Christ soared to lofty heights. (Augustine, as so many before and since him have done, confused the Church with the institutional church or with the Roman Church-State.) Yet the very genius of its human philosophy inspired the creation of the papacy and the apotheosis of the institutional church. It was Augustine who conceived the idea of the church developing into a type of Jewish theocracy. He advanced the idea that the church was infallible, and that salvation was available only to those who would submit to its discipline. In the eyes of this great man, the church would be greatly blessed and greatly honored if she fulfilled the role outlined in *The*

City of God. But after Augustine died, it was his idea that played a vital role in the creation of the most oppressive religious system in world history.

Sacred history justifies the Master's warning: "Beware of men." Especially beware of religious men – churchmen – for their corruptions of the truth of Scripture lead to perdition. The three religious movements today—Roman Catholicism, Neo-evangelicalism, and Pentecostalism—are movements of men, not the Spirit, for the Spirit magnifies Christ and His Word alone.