

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.

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Logology

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Evangelicals speak much of the Word of God. To most of us, the phrase denominates the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. As a result, any attack on the Bible's credibility strikes us very close to home. If we cannot trust the book, are we allowed to trust its author? Or, more pointedly, is there any distinction between trusting the book and trusting its author? If one doubts the Word of God, is not one doubting the Word of God? We call both the Bible and Christ the Word of God (as indeed the Bible does), and yet some give no thought to this somewhat startling usage.

In the present "battle for the Bible" (to borrow a phrase from Harold Lindsell), the heirs of Protestant Christianity are pitted against the heirs of nineteenth-century higher criticism. The intellectual movement of twentieth-century Christianity has been largely one-way. Whereas many contemporary "evangelical" scholars are moving or have moved in the direction of accepting at least some of the views of the critics, Christianity seems to have gained ground only by converting the unchurched and the unevangelized. Few, if any, of those who have accepted the views of the higher critics have returned to an inerrancy position. Certain institutions have changed their coloring in recent years, Fuller Seminary being the most noticeable.

Why this is so is difficult to say. It is probably too facile simply to accuse the Protestants of being "unloving" or to accuse the defectors from the faith of accepting "bribes" in the form of the prestige

accompanying association with an older and better established institution. Part of the problem may lie in the fact that "evangelicaldom" really consists of *two* major camps, rather than one. One camp, to which most of the great writers expounding inerrancy belong and have belonged, represents the Reformation and post-Reformation view of *sola Scriptura*; while the other represents a more mystical strain running from the Anabaptists and Pietists to the present-day Charismatics. I shall call the first group the rationalists, and the second group, the mystics.

Although the mystics are usually uppermost when the average American thinks about Fundamentalism, they have not always coexisted easily within the Protestant tradition. The great theologian of the older Princeton, Dr. B. B. Warfield, pointed out that the early mystics shared a common subjectivism with the naturalistic modernists, differing from them chiefly in temperament.¹ Warfield wrote against this party as he wrote against modernism, seeing it as a threat to the health of the Church. Today's mystics, as we shall see, share an anti-intellectualism with the neo-orthodox as well.

Throughout this writer's pilgrimage in the evangelical (and even Reformed) world, he has observed that many people are fertile fields for the

¹ B. B. Warfield, "Mysticism and Christianity," *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1952), 450-451.

seeds of mysticism. There is frequently a great hunger for a "deeper" experience and for freedom from the demands of the Bible for study and discipline. Although the view soon to be discussed does not usually find its way into print, it is nonetheless common. This view sees the "Word of God" as somehow distinct from the words of Scripture. Comparing such passages as *John* 1:1-18 and *Hebrews* 4:12 with the Biblicism of the Protestants, such people are ready to posit a distinction between "power Word" and "text word," the "text word" being seen as inferior.

It is for this reason that this study of the logology (study of the *logos*, or word) of the later New Testament writers is undertaken. By going to the pages of Scripture, the author reveals himself to be far more sympathetic to the evangelical rationalists' position. Nonetheless, the honor that some mystics pay to the Bible is taken into account in the hope that this article may provide a challenge to them.

The later New Testament writers—*Peter*, *James*, *Jude*, and the unknown author of *Hebrews*—were chosen for several reasons. One is that they present us with a relatively brief corpus of material compared with Paul or the synoptic Gospels. These writings also demonstrate very clearly the fundamental unity that exists between God's Word of Power and the written word. Finally, they show us how Biblical writers used and interpreted earlier Scriptural texts. In short, they are the Bible's own key to its proper use.

Mention was made above of the unity between "power Word" and "text word" found in these writings. It is the writer's conviction that this unity should govern the Church's understanding of the nature of the Word of God—its logology.

The Uses of Logos and Rheema

Logos is obviously the source of our English word *logic*. Most readers of the New Testament are probably familiar with *logos* as it is used in the prologue to the *Gospel of John*. We learn there that in the beginning was the *logos*. This one passage has invested the word with great dignity. In the standard Chinese Bible, for instance, *logos* is

translated by the word *Tao*, which in traditional Chinese thought denominates the Way that governs and underlies all reality. Although I do not wish to quarrel with the men who produced the Chinese Bible, I would nonetheless like to point out that they did provide an instance of how reverence to *logos* can obscure its simple and basic meaning: "speech"(as in verbal communication).

In *Hebrews* 12:19 and *1 Peter* 1:22-25 we may note that the words *logos* and *rheema* appear interchangeably. It has been suggested that *logos* indicates God's Word of power active in creation and regeneration, while *rheema* indicates the simple grammatical words found in the Bible, and never the twain shall meet. In the light of their uses in these two passages, however, it is difficult to see how this theory can stand. These two words are virtually synonymous, and seem to parallel the Old Testament words *dabhar* and *ehmer*.

Logos appears some 27 times in the epistles of *Peter*, *James*, *Jude*, and *Hebrews*, while *rheema* appears 8 times. The list of the 35 appearances is as follows:

Hebrews 1:3: "...upholding all things by the *rheema* of his power..."

Hebrews 2:2: "...if the *logos* spoken through angels proved steadfast..."

Hebrews 4:2: "...the *logos* of hearing did not profit them..."

Hebrews 4:12: "...the *logos* of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword..."

Hebrews 4:13: "...all things are naked...before the eyes of him to whom we must give *logos*..."

Hebrews 5:11: "Of whom we have many things to *logos*..."

Hebrews 6:1: "...leaving the beginning of the *logos* of God..."

Hebrews 6:5: "...and tasted the good *rheema* of God..."

Hebrews 7:28: "...the *logos* of the oath..."

Hebrews 11:3: "...the worlds have been framed by the *rheema* of God..."

Hebrews 12:19: "...and the voice of *rheemata* (plural); which they that heard entreated that no *logos* more should be spoken unto them..."

Hebrews 13:7: "...men that spoke unto you the *logos* of God..."

Hebrews 13:17: "...as they that shall give *logos*..."

Hebrews 13:22: "...bear with the *logos* of exhortation..."

James 1:18: "...he brought us forth by the *logos* of truth..."

James 1:21: "...receive with meekness the implanted *logos*, which is able to save..."

James 1:22: "...be ye doers of the *logos*..."

James 1:23: "...if any one is a hearer of the *logos*..."

James 3:2: "If any stumbleth not in *logos*..."

I Peter 1:23: "...have been begotten...through the *logoi* of God which liveth and abideth."

I Peter 1:25: "But the *rheema* of God abideth forever. And this is the *rheema* of good tidings which was preached to you."

I Peter 2:8: "...for they stumble at the *logos*, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed."

I Peter 3:1: "...even if any obey not the *logos*, they may without the *logos* be gained by the behavior of the wives..."

I Peter 3:15: "...ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a *logos* concerning the hope that it is in you..."

I Peter 4:5: "...who shall give *logos* to him that is ready to judge the living and the dead."

2 Peter 1:19: "...we have the *logos* of prophecy more sure..."

2 Peter 2:3: "...in covetousness shall they with feigned *logos* make merchandise of you..."

2 Peter 3:2: "...that ye should remember the *rheema* which were spoken before by the holy prophets..."

2 Peter 3:5: "...there were heavens from of old, and an Earth...[created] by the *logos* of God..."

2 Peter 3:7: "...the heavens that now are, and the Earth, by the same *logos* have been stored up for fire..."

Jude 17: "...remember ye the *rheema* which have been spoken..."

At a glance at the passages listed above, we can see several salient facts emerging about the logology of the New Testament. One is that by comparing Johannine and Petrine uses, logology connects Christology (the doctrine of Christ) with Bibliology (the doctrine of Scripture).² There is no indication of a distinction between Christ, the *logos*, and his words.

There are, however, two passages which may seem to lend support to the idea that there is an "Inner Word" in the Christian. One is *James* 1:21 where the addressees of the letter are encouraged to receive the "implanted word"; and *Hebrews* 13:7, where it would seem to suggest that the ordinary Christian leader can be expected to speak the Word of God without apparent distinction from the prophetic and apostolic ministries of the Word.

On examination, however, the support that these passages seem to give to the mystic disappears. In *James* 1:21, the message concerning the implanted *logos*—"which is able to save your souls"—appears in the context of an exhortation to receive it as something coming from outside the hearers, and to be doers rather than mere hearers. The key to understanding the passage may be found in the exhortation to be a "doer," which is also the thrust of the whole epistle. It is readily granted to the more orthodox of the mystics that the ministry of the Holy Spirit in salvation brings the Word of God to dwell in us, and that the law of God is written on our hearts. But what this means is that we are guided in obedience to the intellectual truth revealed in Scripture, and are aided in obedience to

² On this point see especially Gordon H. Clark, *The Johannine Logos*, 1972.

the law of God. We believe the propositions of Scripture. Hence, argues *James*, the absence of scripturally defined ethical fruit from a person's life calls into question the truth of his professed salvation. We are to understand the implanted word not as an ability to speak messages immediately inspired by God (this has been a common denominator of mystical movements from the Quakers to the Charismatics), but as the belief of true propositions that forms the foundation of obedience. In order to obey, we must *know*. It is the *logos*, the word, theology, doctrine, that one knows.

Hebrews 13:7 might seem to suggest that a certain class of Christians—those who rule in the Church—are somehow gifted with a ministry similar to that of the prophets and apostles. Certainly an "inspired utterance" is expected by many Christians in some circles. Yet when reading any passage in *Hebrews*, we should remember that the writer makes a distinction between those who heard the word of salvation immediately from Christ and the "second generation" (*Hebrews* 2:2-4). But with the number of apostles immediately commissioned by Christ (the twelve, possibly the seventy, and Paul), very few churches would have received the ministry of an apostle. Does this mean that subsequent generations of Christian ministers could be expected to give "inspired utterances"?

The verse does not demand this understanding. It does, however, demand that every Christian minister be skilled in and devoted to the exposition of the Scriptures given by the prophets and apostles. Even if it is received "secondhand" from a teacher who expounds rather than from a prophet or apostle who received it first, the Word of God is still the Word of God.

The Petrine Logos

The key to Petrine logology is found in *1 Peter* 1:23-25. There *Peter* speaks to the Christian community as... having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the *logos* of God, which liveth and abideth. For

All flesh is as grass,

And all the glory thereof as the flower of grass.

The grass withereth, and the flower falleth:

But the *rheema* of the Lord abideth forever.

And this is the *rheema* of good tidings which was preached unto you.

Although mentioning the eternality and power of the Word to regenerate, this passage is important chiefly for its revealing the identity of the Word.

The noun *evangelion*, *evangel*, *good news*, or *Gospel* does not appear here as a noun, but it is present in the verb "to evangelize" in verse 25. The Gospel is that message of redemption in Jesus Christ that was announced by Christ himself and the apostles. This is also the Gospel that is expounded by *Peter's* letter and by the Epistle to the *Hebrews*. In *Hebrews*, it is described as the message of the great salvation to which the Church must pay attention (*Hebrews* 2:3). It is this word which gives life to those dead in sin. Much contemporary theology tries to separate the words (*rheemata*) from the word (*logos*). For example, Wilhelm Niesel, in his recently republished *The Theology of John Calvin*, writes:

First, we might point out that in the Scriptural exegesis of Calvin there is nothing to suggest a belief in literal inerrancy.... Jesus Christ is the soul of the law, the focal point of the whole of Holy Scripture. When we hear Calvin assert as much we realize how misleading it is to regard him as the exponent of a literal theory of inspiration. As though the living Lord could be identified with the written words of the Bible! In that case he would simply be an idea or some other thing, but not the Christ Himself. The Word of God the incarnate *Logos* must be distinguished from the words of Scripture.

Such a separation between the *logos* and *rheemata* stumbles on this passage in *1 Peter*. It is both the *rheema* and the *logos* that abide forever. This teaching that the Word regenerates is echoed in *James* 1:8 as well. It provides a link to the logology of John through Christ's identifying the life giving spirit with the words which he speaks (*John* 6:63,

68). Here the power of the word is linked to redemption.

The eternity of the *rheema* and its power is also evident from *2 Peter*:

For this they [the enemies of the faith] will fully forget, that there were heavens from of old and an Earth compacted out of water and amidst water by the *logos* of God; by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens that now are, and the Earth, by the same *logos* have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (*2 Peter* 3:5-7).

Here we see a link with the thought of John and of the writer to the *Hebrews*. The word's power is not only great to effect salvation, but upholds the world as well.

Although the vocabulary differs somewhat, a parallel to the Wisdom in *Proverbs* 8 and God's creative activity in *Genesis* 1 is found. In *Genesis*, we do not so much see the word as the act of speaking. It is intelligent speech that created the universe and now sustains it. There is no hint in Biblical cosmology of faith in impersonal and unguided forces. Nor is there any romanticism that says life is deeper than logic. God rules providentially through his wisdom, which wisdom has been communicated to man in Scripture.

This power of God's word to create and sustain the universe does not distinguish it from the word of Law and Gospel. It would be rather helpful if we were to see the Law's power to expose the sins of men and the Gospel's power to bring them salvation as identical to the word that was active in creating and is now active in sustaining the universe.

The Hebraic Logos

In addition to *Peter*, the author of *Hebrews* provides us with a considerable body of evidence on the use of *logos* and *rheema*. Let us turn to *Hebrews* for a

study of the Hebraic *logos*. The major one is 4:12-13:

For the *logos* of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of the soul and the spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him to whom we must give *logos*.

This passage appears in a wider context of recounting the experience of the Old Testament church in the wilderness and under Joshua, and the implied exhortation to the New Testament church to do better. Both communities were called into being (like the heavens and the Earth) by the Word of God, only the Word also exposed the older people to be a disobedient nation unworthy to enter the Promised Land. The writer reminds the New Testament church that the Word of God is still active and ready to do the same.

Commentators have differed on how the first *logos* is to be understood. Should it be understood to mean Christ or the Bible? Augustine thought Christ; Calvin thought the Bible. What is important to realize is that either is correct. Christ's words are the Word; they are Spirit and they are life. They are the power of God that lives and abides forever. In short, they are Christ.

Another passage is *Hebrews* 1:1-3: "God...hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things...and upholding all things by the *rheema* of his power..." Here the writer and the Holy Spirit have chosen *rheema* to express the thought. The word upholds all things because the word is the Word. Christ is what he thinks; he is his mind. The distinction between believing a doctrine and trusting a person is false. It is the word, the doctrine, the theory, the theology, that upholds the universe.

In *Hebrews* 11:3, the idea is repeated: "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the *rheema* of God." *2 Peter* 3:5 says that the heavens

and the Earth were created by the *logos* of God. Creation was accomplished by the word of God.

Conclusion

From the examination of the way in which Peter, James, Jude, and the author of *Hebrews* use the words *logos* and *rheema*, it is clear that there is no gap between the Word and the words, between doctrine and life. It is the *rheema/logos* that upholds the world, creates and sustains it, and which pierces and saves the soul. The words are not pointers; the Bible is not the conduit through which revelation and truth come; the Bible is the truth itself.

A. W. Tozer, a minister of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, wrote, "There is something behind the text that you've got to get through to.... Textualism is as deadly as liberalism."³ The neo-orthodox also assert that the words are mere pointers to the truth. But such a position is foreign to the Bible. There is no trace of this anti-intellectualism in the Bible. It is anti-Christian to the core, and yet it is commonly accepted by some who call themselves Evangelical.

One commissioner to a Presbyterian general assembly remarked: "There is a silent majority in our churches who do not want specific theories. These persons do not believe they are saved by words, but by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.... Our unity proceeds from Christ and not from words or phrases."⁴ But there is no separation between Christ's words and his person, and Peter and James explicitly say that the word is able to save. The words, doctrine, theology of Christ is his mind; and his mind is himself.

In the current battle for the Bible, the defenders of the classical Protestant position should be wary of a mystical fifth column that disparages doctrine, exalts "experience," and separates the Word from the words. Perhaps the current instability among some who call themselves evangelical, but are not, stems from the presence within the evangelical movement of the mystics, who share a common premise with the opponents of evangelicalism. To

win the battle, we must recall the root of our name. "Evangelical" means those who accept *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*. The Gospel is the propositions of Scripture as written in the Bible. A cursory reading of the Bible reveals the Word to be intellectual, theological, ethical, and historical, not mystical or experiential. Without the Word, the church is powerless, inarticulate, and confused. Thus the keynote of *James, Peter, Hebrews, and Jude* is that we must be "the people of the Book." Only by trusting the Book can one trust God. The words are Spirit and life, and he who guards them will not see death, ever.

³ A. W. Tozer, *The Presbyterian Journal*, February 11, 1970.

⁴ *The Presbyterian Journal*, June 10, 1981, 5-6.