THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES AND THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

I.

The great question of the age in all moral matters is the question of a spiritual authority. It is not one which occupies the order for the day, but it does constitute the problem of the day. The democracy is but little conscious how much it needs it and how not easy to secure its discussion in the forum of the Churches. It is in their standing or falling article all the same. Some resent the idea of authority in any real and effective sense; some drive it; while others consider they possess it in the Canon, Scripture. Now it is as true that the Canon is not the authority as it is that without an authority beyond itself no Church can go existing.

Why may we not say that the final authority for Church and concrete is the Bible? Because there remains the question, Is there anything that is over the Bible? And to that question may I at once reply, advance that there is, and that:

1. It is not something which comes up to the Bible from without like the scientific methods of historic research. To the Higher Critic it has its place, but it is a subordinate plan.

2. It is something which is in the Bible itself, provided for and provided nowhere else. We must go back to the Bible to find what the Bible goes back to.

In a word, that is over the Bible which is over the Church. It is the Gospel. The Gospel of God’s historic act of grace is the final power and authority over both Church and Bible. It produced both. They both exist for its sake, and must be construed in it. For both it is the great canon of interpretation as well as organisation, of Scripture, creed, and praxis. It was not the Church that produced the Bible, nor the Bible that produced the Church, but the Gospel that produced both. It is of the greatest practical moment to realise this at present. It is our Free Church answer to a plausible claim that is urged by the Episcopal Church to be the sole authoritative teacher of the Bible, because the Church produced it at first, and has therefore a hereditary monopoly of the charisma scripta. We deny the fact behind the inference. Even were the Anglican Church the Church that selected the canon, no Church produced the Bible. Both the Bible and the Church are products of the Gospel, which we preach as purely as they do, and mostly more so. Hence no Church has the control of the Bible, but only a stewardship of it. The Bible needs no warrant from the Church, only a mess. The Gospel needs no application by the sacraments, only fresh appropriation where it has been long applied by the Holy Ghost. Of course the Bible, on its part, must not arrest the Church, but perpetually emancipate and inspire it. Luther by the Bible delivered us from the bondage of the Church. But there are ways of feeling the Bible which make us welcome the man or the movement that by the Gospel will deliver us from the Bible.

But why not say that the something which is in and over the Bible is Christ? Because it is not quite certain what is covered by that word Christ. What do you mean by Christ? Is it Christ the character, chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely, or Christ the atoning Redeemer? What is it that is authoritative in Christ? Not his mere manner, as it subdued those who would meet Him. Not His far more than Socratic dignity of soul and insight. There is something in Christ which is over Him. Well, you recognise that. It was His Father. You say readily, Christ was there not in His own sake, but His Father’s. Yes, but that is far from enough. What was the relation between Christ and His Father? Was it a relation of the heart alone, of affection and a lasting communion, as between the Mother and the Child? That is a common idea, and it enfeebles much faith. It makes Christ’s piety the work of God, but does it secure us that His Gospel was? The deeply devout or the wholly sacred may be lacking in the moral insight required for a real Gospel. Was Christ’s death due to the fact that He was so purely and rapidly holy? Was the cross simply the revenge of the coarse Israel on the fine? Surely it took more than that to make the death of Christ Israel’s crime? His piety alone would rather have made the Jews honour Him as a finer rabbi. Surely His dealing with His Father was more than devout enjoyment, more than mystic union, more than the practice of the presence of God and the culture of His own soul? The personal unity had a practical, intelligible theme, an exchange of thought, work, and purpose in relation to the historic situation. It was not His Father’s love He realised only, it was His purpose of historic grace. His age-long purpose with the nation, His world-wide purpose
with our race—just as it was not the simple love of His brethren that lay on Him, but their burden, their curse. His Father gave Him only a faith to cherish, a love to enjoy, but a vast and old proud to fulfill. Christ speaks far oftener of the will and Kingdom of God than of the heart of God. He was one with a God who had been working for historic Hebrew centuries to a certain holy and divine purpose. And what was over Christ was not simply the Father's holy work with Israel for the world. What ruled the word and deed was God's old historic purpose and long promised Gospel. The authoritative thing in Him was God's grace, God's grace. When we go to the Bible we find it is to this the Bible from this its breath comes; and its soul incessantly returns to the Gospel of grace that gave it. And this is the test, the standard of authority over the Bible.

Of course you may say that Christ is God's Son, and power and grace. And that is quite right, so long as we are not speaking the Jesus of biography, of Jesus as a personal influence merely, of the Christ of great history, the Messiah of redemption, so long as we are not speaking of the teaching and character of Christ only but of His work, which was the crisis of His work, so long as we live and move in Christ the Redeemer; so long as we do not begin with the Incarnation but end these long as we begin with the Redemption, Atonement, Reconciliation and go on to end in such an Incarnation as is demanded by the purposes of that gracious Gospel and that saving God; so long as we recognise that "His work was His person in action and His person in His work in power." God was in Christ evangelically rather than metaphysically. He was in Christ reconciling. Faith believes an Incarnation required by the Gospel, however thought may settle an Incarnation required by the nature of a Divine idea. To begin with such an Incarnation instead of with Redemption is one of the most cardinal and prolific errors of our time, as Bishop Gore shrewdly said.

II.

The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. The purpose of Jesus is the purpose of history; or rather it is God's purpose with history. The Gospel of grace in Christ, the purpose, and at last the act, of Redemption is the key to the Bible. It makes the Bible a mere chronicle, not a mere set of annals, but history of the other kind.

By history of the greatest kind I mean this. I mean something more even what we call the greater, the philosophic history. May I ask: What is it that raises the historian above the annalist? Is it not that the historian makes the dumb facts speak which the annalist compiles? He sets the facts in a whole, in a science, in a process of

For this the Bible exists. From this the Bible sprang. The that is taken in human histories by hypothesis, theory, or law of process is taken in the Bible by God's action, by revelation, by the will. In the Bible we have the movement of the great lines and turns by which God treats the race and guides its total career. And
especially we have the purpose and method of a Messiah, culminating in the Redemption by Christ. It is his Redemption that makes Jesus the Christ, and precious. The fact of Christ's life would be valuable (except to the historian of religion); the fact of His death would be of little moment (except to the martyrologist), apart from its function between man and God, its revealed meaning, its theological meaning as Atonement, Redemption, Reconciliation. These values are not got at by an induction. They are not won by flesh and blood, but revealed from the Father in Heaven, as Christ Himself told Peter. They are God's word to man, not man's hypothesis about God. That is a unique thing about the Bible among books. The Gospel it contains is not a result of man's divining power over intractable facts; but it is the act and power of God unto salvation. The invisible realities are not guessed, they are actually conveyed through the things that appear. The Gospel message is not a product of Biblical theologians induced from a study of religious phenomena which they found and formulated from these records. But it seizes us out of the Bible, it descends on us from the Bible as a power. It descended on the man who wrote the Bible. It was with the Church that selected the Bible. It made the Bible in that way, and in that way it makes us from out of the Bible. The soul of the Bible is not a crystallisation of man's divinest ideals; it is not even a divine declaration of what God is in Himself. It is His revelation of what He is for us in actual history, what He has done, and for ever does. It contains God's gift, not of knowledge, but of His gracious self. Revelation is futile as a mere exhibition, ineffectual except as Redemption. God's Word is authoritative because it is more, it is creative. It is life from the dead. Its authority does not simply stand over us either as an imperative or as an ideal. It comes as a Gospel. It comes with power to bring itself to pass in our new life. The God who rules us in Christ is not a foreign power. Theonomy is not heteronomy. He, our law, becomes also our life. He comes with something more than authority over us, He comes with power in us. His authority is not simply impressive, it is enabling. Dat quod jubeat. It is the power of the Spirit, not revealed alone, but redeeming us to take in the Revelation. His spirit does not seize us but lives in us. The Saviour Son is revealed in us. Christ our life who is also our Lord. His authority is not simply an external power, but a life-giving spirit within. We are redeemed into the power to know, to be, and to do what is revealed. And both revelation and the redemption are one and the same act.

III.

To apply the Gospel as the standard of the Bible is something higher than the higher criticism. It is the highest. It was by the test of the Gospel that Luther dealt so boldly with the Epistles. It was not by literary criticism, where, like his age, he was not bold. And this is the only principle which gives the higher criticism, the literary and historic criticism, its true place. The Church will never give that criticism its rights till she feels she is not at its mercy, till she is so free to do so by her Gospel. You cannot secure freedom from a slave of a Church in a panic. And panic is the state of mind produced by scientific criticism, especially on people who have long been putting the Bible narrative in the place which belongs only to the Bible Gospel. The critical treatment of the Bible must have its place. Let it not make fools of ourselves by denying it. We shall be fighting against God and resisting the spirit. It arises out of the sound principle of interpreting the Bible by itself. Scriptura est ipsius iudex e interprete was the Reformer's maxim. But its place is secondary, subsidiary. It has little place in a pulpit. Criticism is the handmaid of the Gospel—downstairs. The critical study of Scripture is at its best, and the higher criticism is at its highest, when it passes from being analytic and becomes synthetic. And the synthetic principle in the Bible is the Gospel. The analysis of the Bible must serve the history of Grace. The synthetic critic is not the scholar but the theologian. The Book is a witness not of man's historical religion, but of God's historical redemption. It is not so much a record as a testimony. Search the Scriptures. Ye do well. They testify of Me, not, record Me, not, report Me, not, evidence Me, but testify of Me, preach Me, present Me as the Gospel. The Bible is at its highest as the preacher. And it does not preach itself, or its inerrancy, but the Grace of God. It contains in this Gospel its own supreme principle of criticism and interpretation. The Church is the true interpreter of the Bible if it is the Bible interpret itself. And for this purpose it repudiates the modern mind, no less than the tradition of the Church, as its final court. The Bible comes to its own in the Gospel which made it what it is. This Gospel survives all our critical readjustments of the process by which it came. Indeed, it emerges the more clearly from many of these reconstructions. The critics have restored the prophets, for instance, to the service of the Gospel as well as to the interest of the Church. And they have inflicted eternal death on books like Keith and Newton, which made Prophecy historical conundrums. But the Gospel is not at the mercy of scientific criticism, because the Bible is not a mere document. It is a sacrament. It is more than a message of grace, it is a "means of grace." It is more than a source of information, it is an agent of saving experience. It is the former only as it becomes the latter. That is to say, it is to faith rather than to research that its facts become certainties. What Christ did for us becomes sure by what He does in us. And it is vain to try and establish the Bible's real value by historical canons without realising the experience of its grace.

Our moral need cannot wait for our historical critics. The Bible is
not merely a record of the revelation; it is part of the revelation, not a quarry for the historian, but a fountain for the soul. Its real work is not to vouch for the fact of Jesus. As a voucher of that fact its value is secondary. We have nothing written by Jesus, nothing with absolute certainty written by an eye-witness of Jesus. In strict history Paul is nearer and clearer than Christ; but Christ is the greater certainty to us none the less. Nor is the Bible’s first work to reflect the first Church. The New Testament, the Epistles of Paul, are not set of ideas or sentiments stirred in certain minds by the holy contemplation of Christ, the mere reflection of Christ mirrored in the shining consciousness of those nearest Him. It is not adequate to say that in the New Testament we have the impression made by Christ upon the first Church. We have that, but we have more. We have Christ continuing to teach, and lead, and save. We have a finished Redemption, energising as Revelation. We have the heavenly Christ revealing Himself to and through the first Church of the redeemed. Indeed, I would rather say through the first apostles. For they were not the representatives of the Church; they did not owe their place in its consent; nor were they its organs so much as Christ’s organs in the world.

That theory of impression is not the true full nature of inspiration. The whole of the New Testament is a continuation of prophecy. It is the last of the prophets. It is not a document, but an appeal. It is a mighty sermon on Christ, not an image of Him, not a disguise of Him. Doubtless Christ is the centre. He is the fact. But the New Testament did not come into evidence to guarantee that fact to right inquiry. It is not an arsenal of Christian evidences. In that sense testimony would have been more careful. And then also the historic sense would take faith’s place, and the historical experts would be the true Christian priesthood. The New Testament, like the Old Testament, is history with a purpose, a bias. It has in it not a reliable historical matter, but also the principle for construing it; the bias of the will to save and not only the will to believe. And it has the bias not only of the will to believe, but of the belief that the bias wills, that urges itself, that acts from the will upon the evidence in a selective way, and forces it on mankind.

IV.

Christ came for something else than to be a statuesque fact, or a teacher of supreme religious genius and personal influence. *It is the fact but the meaning of the fact that matters. He came for practical, crucial purpose, historic and divine. He is valuable, not like a work of art for what He is, but for what He means as God’s gift. Indeed, He is precious not for what He means even, but for what He did in God’s name. Nay, when we see this, when we realise that He has in Christ the manifestation of God’s love, or its work, that is the whole of the revelation. The manifestation, the work even, needs position. The deed needs to be carried home. The God in Christ needs a prophet. God’s son Jesus needed prophets, as God’s son Abel needed prophets, to expound His divine meaning and purpose. The incarnation of God’s love is too strange, original and incredible; it needs to be interpreted by inspiration. Otherwise it would have been missed (as the disciples during all Christ’s life did miss it) and been lost. We do not call Christ Himself inspired. That is a term too poor for Him. Those were inspired in whom His Spirit dwelt, His work was put on, and His purpose wrought. The Christ needs the apostle, the preacher. The Mediator upwards needs mediators downwards. For reasons I have gone into elsewhere, the divine doer of the divine work is somewhat reserved about the nature of that work. The task itself impressed Him. He could not talk much about it. The Gospel He taught needed to become vocal by transmission through another experience as its prophet. And that other was the New Testament. It is the inspired part of the revelation of which Christ was the sure ant redemptive agent. It is not a direct document of Christ’s biography, but of Christ’s Gospel, of Christ as preached. It is a direct word, a precipitate if you will, not of Christ, but of the preaching about Christ which made the Church. It is of decisive consequence to realise this. The Bible is not a voucher but a preacher. The tradition of Christ we owe to a company of preachers, not to a jury of historians.

The very Gospels are not biographies so much as pamphlets in the service of the Church and the interest of the Gospel. The only historical Christ which even the Gospels allow us to see is not a great person Boswellised, but the preached Christ, the risen Messiah of the apostolic inspiration and the Church’s first belief.* The Bible is more a sermon than of a source in the rigid historical sense of that word. The story was history with a drift, seeking a verdict; it was history made preacher. Something else than sequence guided the selection of incidents. It is a story on a theme, a story with a purpose. It is inferior as art but mighty as action. The writers are evangelists in the sense of gospellers. "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is Messiah, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (John xx. 31). The object is life, not proof. These Gospels are homiletic biographies, not psychological. They were not compiled on what we should call critical principles, but on evangelical principles—to assist the Gospel. The evangelist with his narrative was but an acolyte of the apostle with his Gospel. It is

* The Gospels (I keep saying) are not primary documents proceeding from Christ’s hand. Nor can we be quite sure how far they come directly from apostles to some eye-witnesses. But I am referred to the preface of Luke. But it will be remembered that the author himself describes Luke in the preface to Acts as a spectator. Luke founded his account on sources but he is not himself a source in the same sense as his materials were. What he wrote is not a source but a history. He selected from sources on a certain principle, and treated them from a certain point of view—the view point of the risen, exalted, preached Christ as Saviour.
only thus that we can explain the fact that no apostle wrote a Gospel with the possible exception of John, who wrote expressly for the church. They were too much absorbed in the Gospel to write Gospels for what they deemed but a short-lived world.

V.

The New Testament, then, is a record not directly of Christ but the thing preached about Christ by those whose preaching made the Church, and made historic Christianity. You can of course say, if you like, that they misapprehended Christ, that, led by the rabbinists they squeezed him into Jewish moulds, and lost the real, human, sainctly Christ in a theological. You can say that, but what proof have you to prove it? You are entirely dependent on the Apostle the Evangelist, the large Pauline version of Christ, whether in Gospel or Epistle. Paul preaches what he had from the text he received from the Church, “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture. That links his Gospel both to the other apostles and to the Old Testament. Every one of the Gospels is written in that interest: saving grace. What they go into is not a character, not an ethic nor dogma, but a Saviour. Whether you think they agree in every point with the Epistles or not, they are there as mere memorabilia of the curious but as edification for the converted, not to save but to confirm the saved. They all set forth a humanist Christ, saviour, and influential, but one whose main and crowning function was to die for our sins according to older Scriptures. Is it not a singular thing that there is no indication in the whole New Testament of an apostolic sermon with a saying of Christ for a text. And the kingdom, which fills the Gospels, does not appear in the Epistles. What does that mean? It means that the form and particular Christ’s precious teaching were not the staple of their message, not the starting point. These precious details were all fused up in the still more precious Gospel in which Christ Himself culminated through the cross.

Consider: What were the apostles working with before there was a New Testament and while they were making the Church? It was a message, a Gospel, a fact and act of God through Christ, an achieved deliverance, a historic redemption, crowning the long series of revelations and deliverances which were at once the salvation and the redemption of Israel. What was the great event in Paul’s conversion? Not the miracle of a dead prophet’s resurrection. Not the idea of Redemption. That had long been the common burden of Israel, and it was the source of all their zealotry. Like the earnest Jews he was waiting for that consolation of Israel. But he was not this that staggered him—that the Redemption was come and gone. It was past and at work. That was for Paul “the power of Christ’s Resurrection,” the tremendous shattering, re-creating effect of it. The great thing to be done was already done. God’s Redemption was not a hope now but a fact—and a damnation. The Christians had a Gospel and not a propaganda, not a programme, not a movement—merely a mighty Gospel. They had no book but the Old Testament, no system of doctrine, no institution. All these were to be made. What they had was what they called the σημεῖα, with all its foolishness (1 Cor. i. 21, where we hear of the scandal of the cross, the absurdity of what was preached, not of preaching as an institution). The Gospel was an experienced fact, a free and living word long before it was a fixed and written word. This is the manner of revelation. The inspired thing is not a book but a man. It was so first of all in the Old Testament. The prophets also first experienced their Gospel, then spoke or acted it. Only as an afterthought did they write it. The written form might be but a collection of their edited remains. The New Testament was the unfolding of this Gospel; but it was an unfolding due to the free growth and power of God’s saving act in the experience of certain men, and not to their examination of it and their conclusions. They were made by it rather than convinced. They were not students, critics of the Gospel, but its glorious captive and alert hierophants. The Gospel prolonged itself in them. That is the Spirit’s work. It was only at the call of certain providential circumstances that what saved them made them write. It was “occasional.”

The writing was not due to an academic resolution to discuss or elaborate what saved them. They did not “demonstrate.” The Gospel worked in them mightily to will and do; to preach and write in a practical context. Their writing was their work running over. Christ led His work energised in their lives.

The apostles, and especially Paul, form an essential part of Christ’s revelation of God’s grace. He represents Grace as incarnate, they as inspired. He is epic, they are lyric. The same Christ reveals in them from heaven the redemption He wrought on earth. He prolongs His own action in them. He unfolds His finished work; they make explicit His mind about His own work. And through Paul He reveals this revelation in a way limited on one side by their personality, but on the other released from some of the bonds and silences of His earthly humiliation. We have no evidence that the explicit conception by the earthly Jesus of His own work was all that appears in the epistles. It was in Paul and his fellows that its nature became explicit, as it has become still more explicit in successors like the Reformers. It was in these that the mind of Jesus led to itself for us in history. It unfolded like a seed in the warm medium of the apostolic soul. It was the Lord the Spirit speaking of Himself in the inspiration of the apostles, and speaking to us more directly than the Gospels do. Like the prophetic books in the Old Testament, the epistles are the authentic writings of the inspired.
They are not once removed, like the Gospels or the Old Testament histories. They are not editorial, but creative. They are events at first hand. They make a critical starting point, and not only critical, but an evangelical. They give the key to the Gospels, just as the prophets in our new light form the basis for the interpretation of the evangelical interpretation of Old Testament history. The Epistles are essential, not mere interpreters of the Gospels. They are not products. I do not wonder that Luther laid more stress on the Epistles in Paul, or idiosyncratic. This, therefore, is an authority in the theology of the Epistles which is some ways greater than we have in the Gospels as Gospels, as we are not apart from the personality of Christ. There is more inspiration in the creative Paul than in the compiling evangelist. In the Gospels Christ appears as acting, in the Epistles the same Christ interprets His action. And both the manifestation and the inspiration are necessary for the fullness of revelation as redemption, for its effect as a revelation to us.

We must not sharply contrast Paul and Christ. We cannot have said. All we possess is the evangelical Christ common to the other apostles, and the first Church. We can compare the Epistles and the Gospels. Their view point is the same—the Gospel, as they are the same Christ the Saviour. But the service of the evangelist is supplementary to that of Paul. They sustain the Gospel he preaches. They, too, are preachers, but in a diacritical way. The Gospel story serves the Gospel power, and the narrative is there to confirm the principle which the preaching reveals.

If this be so, then the most precious thing in Christ for the Church is not His life story but His deed of Gospel. It is not His teaching, not His personal influence, but His Redemption. It is a theological Gospel, but it is not authoritative as dogma, but as revelation, redemptive action. It is the Gospel, not in an exact theology, but in a theology of grace, and power, and range. It is this Gospel that made the New Testament. What inspired the apostles was Christ's legacy of teaching about God or Grace; it was Grace, as the large burthen of His life, moving onward and upward to death and resurrection which fixed Him as the Son of God, His power. All this they found to be the agent of God's own purpose, and the gathering up for the world and for eternity of His gracious and active process of deliverance for Israel. We mastered and moved them for good and all in Christ was not personal affection, not appreciation of His discourse, nor the sense of His human kindness. These failed, and they left Him and His Church. What was authoritative for them at last was that in His cross He came to recognise the fulfilment of the ancient promise, the culminating of the long grace and the manifold redemption which was the history of all Israel's history, the soul of its scripture, and the world-revelation of its God.

VI.

That this is the true relation of the Gospel to the Bible is shown by the case of Jesus Himself. His Bible was the Old Testament. It had more influence on Him at the centre of His task than the contemporary Judaism, which affected but His form. How did He use it? That is a question that troubles some. He seems to shut the door in the face of modern scholarship by His uncritical use of the Old Testament. If He quotes the ex. Psalm as David's, criticism, it is said) cannot go behind Him. If He refers to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, the scholars may spare their pains; the question is settled for them. And so people become entangled in Christ's relation to the Old Testament as literature, and they miss His relation to the Old Testament as revelation. They commit the error of Rationalism. They put Christ at the mercy of critical considerations. They make them decisive instead of evangelical considerations. Let it be admitted that in all matters of science, literary, or other, Jesus was the child of His time. He never claimed insufficiency in that region. His reading of the Old Testament was certainly uncritical by the standards of our time and knowledge. In his respect He took it as He found it—like everybody round Him. It was not His knowledge that was perfect. He found God in nature, but did He escape the current belief that the sun went round the earth? He read His times as no man did, but did He know times and seasons in the sense of days and dates? Did He not give them to the Father, content not to know, and diviner in that precious ignorance of trust than in all knowledge? It was not His knowledge that was perfect, but His judgment. And on the composition of the Old Testament He never passed a judgment. It never occurred to Him. If it had, it would not have interested Him. Historian, scribes wrote to Him. What was infallible was not the views He inherited, but His grasp of the Father and the Father's purpose in Him. It was in regard to His own work and Gospel that He could not err. And no contemporary errors as to nature or the past affect the truth of His witness to God, or the power of His gracious saving work for man.

How then did Christ use His Bible? For we cannot be wrong if we use ours in the same central way. He used it as a means of grace, not as a manual of Hebrew or other history. His business was not to revise the story of the past or disentangle origins, but to reveal and effect the historic grace of God. He used His Bible as an organ of revelation, not of information, for religion and not science—not even of scientific religion. He found in it the long purpose and deep
scope of God's salvation, His many words and deeds of redemption in the experience of the chosen race. He cared nothing for the Bible as the expression of men's ideas of God. He prized it wholly as the revelation of God's gracious dealings with men. He cared for it only as they yielded His Father's grace. He belonged to a race which was not made like other races by an idea of God, but by God's revelations and rescues. "I am the Lord thy God that brought the out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." He did not teach us ideas of God. He was not a sententious sage, full of wise sayings or modern instances. He did not move about dropping aphoristic maxims as He made them. He does not even tell us "God is Love." It is an apostle that does that. But He loves the love of God into us. He reveals in act and fact a loving God.

"Sprich mir, wie redet Liebe?  
'Sie redet nicht, sie lebt.'"

"And, tell me, what does Love say?  
'Love doesn't say— it loves.'"

He saw the loving God in nature and in history; and within history it was not in what men thought, but in what God had done. Why He saw was the whole movement of the Old Testament rather than its pragmatic detail. He dwelt lovingly indeed on many a gracious passage, but He found Himself in the total witness of Israel's history shaped by grace. He cared little for what our scholars expound the religion of Israel. His work is unaffected by any theories about the Leviticals. What He lived on was God's action in His people, God's redemption in His mighty deeds, as it rises through the religion of Israel, yea, breaks through it, shakes itself clear even its better forms, and translates it always to a higher plane. Why He found was not the prophets' thoughts of God, but God's action in Israel by prophet, priest, or king; God's invasion of them and the race by words and deeds of gracious power. It was the reality of God's action on the soul, and in the soul, and for the soul. Above all, it was the exercise and the growth of God's Messianic purpose with the people, and through them on the whole race. It was in Messianic God that He found Himself, and found Himself God Messiah-Son. Abraham! Before Abraham was I was unknown. If Abraham ceased would He? And He grasped what His whole people was blind to, the Old Testament witness, deep in its spirit, the Messiah of the cross. In a word, the torch He carried through Old Testament was the Gospel of Grace. He read His Bible critically, but religiously. He read it with the eyes of faith, not of science; and He found in it not the making of history by men, but the saving of history by God.

That is to say He read His Bible as a whole. For He was His Bible, and He lived on its Gospel as a whole. Take the parables for an illustration. The chief spoken revelation of God is in the parables of Christ. What is the true principle of interpreting the parables? It is to treat each as the vesture of one central idea for whose sake it is there. We refuse to be entangled in the suggestive-ness of details, as if it were allegories that Christ uttered. So it is with the verbal revelation of God altogether, the Bible. All its vast variety is there for one central theme and one vital purpose, to which details may sit loose. It was so, I say, that Christ read His Scriptures. And it is only when we read the Bible in this way, as a whole, that we realize that it is not there for its own sake, or for the sake of historical knowledge, but for the sake of the evangelical purpose and work of God. We do not read our Bible as Christ did if we dissect out portions of it as the Word of God and reject portions that are not. I do not say that that is forbidden. I shall indicate later that Christ did it on points outgrown. I have no objection to part with Leviticus, Esther, and Canticles from a Gospel Canon, however valuable they may be in a Hebrew library.* All I say is that the method of getting at the true Word of God in the Bible by dissection was not Christ's. And it is not decisive, and may be merciless. The Bible within the Bible, the Canon of the Canon, is not to be dissected out, but to be unified. What is most divine is not a section of it, but the spirit, the theme of it. God's great Word came less in fragments of writing than in His growing purpose through historic action and deeds of grace. The word of a prophet consisted in a kind of speech which was itself a deed, a practical revelation, relevant to the hour, of God's power, purpose, righteousness, judgment, mercy and redemption.

VII.

It seems all but impossible to get out of the popular mind the idea that faith is faith in statements, and that the Bible is a compendium of truths about God, or a correct chronicle (or forecast) of history, Hebrew, Christian or cosmic. Almost all the upholders against scientific criticism belongs to one or other of these irreverent positions. For it is irreligious to debase the Bible, the Book of Faith, to a repertory of truths, or a series of annals. It is irreligious to stake the divine value of Christ on the reality of pre-historic characters in Hebrew history, on the authorship of a Psalm, or the tracing of the Abrahamic in Numbers. There are few perils to the Bible worse than the ill-tempered champions of late Protestant orthodoxy who pose as the monologists and savours of the Gospel. "A traditional Biblicalism, heated whole and harsh at the heads of those who read the Book.

*While it may be granted that there are books in the Canon that we could now dispense with, it is also clear that there is no book known to us outside the Canon (apart from the non-canonical) that is of apostolic or non-apostolic distinction, but only with books that carry the
“otherwise, is not faith in God’s Word.” The unity of the Bible is living, growing, suffusing unity. It is the unity of a body with a quick and mighty spirit. It is a unity that may come home through much defect and loss in its body. A great conqueror may have but one eye or one arm. There are women whose every feature is wrong more or less, but they bring all men to their feet.

“Faults she had once as she learned to run and tumbled.
Faults of feature some see, beauty not complete.
Yet, good people, beauty that makes holy
Earth and air may have faults from head to feet.”

The mighty and glorious Gospel can speak freely from a vulnerable scripture Canon. The Canon, which is so to say, the physical base of the Gospel, may contain elements as superfluous as the appendix, or may have a part amputated. The unity of the Bible is organic, total, vital, evangelical; it is not merely harmonious, balanced, statistic; it is not the form of symmetry but the spirit of reconciliation. Such a fragment from a statue and you ruin it. Its unity is mere symmetry of the kind that is ruined so. But the unity of the Bible is like the unity of Nature. It has a living power always to repair loss and transcend lesion. The Bible unity is given it by the unity of historic Gospel, developing, dominant, but not detailed. It transcends the vicissitudes of time, the dislocations of history, the frailties of prophets and their proofs, and the infidelity of the chosen race; thus is the unity that Christ found and answered in His Bible. His master of His Bible is not shown so much in His readiness with it as in His insight into it. It is not borne in on us by the command of it, as showed in His irresistible dialectic with the Pharisees upon point it appears rather in His grasp of its one historic grace; not in He ready wit with it but in the fact that He found Himself to be the true Lord and unity of Bible, Temple, Sabbath and Israel. If we are to take the Bible as Christ did we may not feel compelled to take the whole Bible, but we must take the Bible as a whole.

But we shall be told that that gives us leave still to pick and choose according to some fantastic inner light, some extravagant and, perhaps, heartless scholarship, some individual verdict of the Christian conscience. Not at all. All these things, even the inner light, come to the Bible from without, like its detailed infallibility (which is rationalist importation). But the Christian key to the Bible, and authority, is within itself. It is the thing that produced it, the thing it exists for, wherewith it is in trival, the thing that makes Jesus be Redeemer. It is the regnant Gospel of a gracious God and not Redeemer. This mighty word uses the text of the Bible simply; we use the elements in communion, as sacred but not sacrosanct.

The concern of some scrupulists about the detail of our sacramental Scripture is quite parallel to the meticulous carelessness...
as a means of grace, as a servant of the Gospel, lame, perhaps, unsoiled, showing some signs of age, it may be, but perfectly faithful, competent, and effectual always.

VIII

And even if my faith were too poor to find in the Bible more than a witness to history, a document for the Church, a record of religious ideas; if I read it only for its interest to the modern mind, or its contribution to a noble humanism; or if I do not read it at all, but pursue a feeble, fanciful, subjective kind of piety, all this and more does not affect the authority of that Gospel which is the burden of the Bible whole. For the Gospel's last appeal is not to individual faith nor to groups, but to the faith of its other product, the Church. The Bible as a great work appeals to faith as a great whole. Deep calls to deep. The Gospel, whose revelation used up a long, eventful, national history, has also produced a history longer and more eventful still in its continuous faith of the whole Church. The grace which speaks from sundry portions of the Bible in divers ways speaks to a manifold sum of Christian experience in the Church of all times and climes. There is not a Church that has not spoiled its witness in the telling, but there is none that has not told it, and told it because it knew it. As is too great a Gospel to be perilled on a scriptural incident, text, or bond, so it is too great to be measured by individual or sectarian sociability. That many find nothing in it means little when set against what has been found in it by the experience of such a Church, and done through it by the Church's faith.

The Bible, therefore, has to do not with a pictured Christ, but with a preached Christ. It does not stretch a figure but proclaims a Gospel. And even of that Gospel it is not a mere report. It is much more than a record, document, or source of information even about the first preaching. It preaches that preaching. It prolongs it. It is a source of power as well as knowledge. It is a living source in the religious sense. It is not only produced by the Gospel, it is a producing source in turn. The Bible, as produced by the Word, becomes integral to the Word, and so in course a producer of the Word. It generates the faith that generated it, and it sends forth by its preaching a company of preachers. Faith comes from the preaching (from the Bible, that is) and the preaching came from the Gospel Word of God. The Bible, from the nature of its origin, can never cease to produce preaching and preachers. Preaching must always be the supreme concern of a Church that gives the Bible its proper place for the Gospel. And it has been noted that probably more converts have been made by preaching from the Bible than by direct reading of it. Only the preachers must read it all the more, and habitually read it, and come to close quarters with it, and know where they are with it, and treat it as their chief means of grace, the constant source of their salvation, mission, and power. Nocturna versate manu versate divina. If you would preach a classic Gospel, give your nights and days, your heart and head, to converse with the Bible. Our fathers had much to say about the efficacy and sufficiency of Scripture. And this was what they meant, its power to be a sacrament of the Word and pass the Church on from faith to faith; its power to be a producing source of the faith that produced it, to prolong the Word in which it arose, and speed the message to which it is hands and feet. To this Gospel, which is the living totality of the Bible, the great witness is the grace which is the living totality of the Church. If the Gospel of Christ's grace is the one authority set up among men, the seat of that authority is the Bible, and the witness is the faithful Church. But, as it is the God that sanctifies the temple and not the gold, so it is the authority that hallows its own seat and not the seat's pattern or structure. The King is King by something else than the art found in His throne. And the Gospel is supreme, not because it comes by a perfect, infallible Book or Church, but because it is the historic advent of the Saviour God to the Church's experience and faith.

IX

The Bible can never be detached from the Gospel, though it must be distinguished from it. It is detachment from the Bible that is the mark both of Romanism at one end and of the religiosity of the modern mind at the other. To take the latter first. The modern man feeds his religious nature on philanthropy, literature, journalism, pious booklets and sentiments, and writings generally meant for reading and not study—and all at the cost of the Bible. This happens even with preachers, whose eloquence and sympathy may poorly cover the nakedness of their exegesis. And as to Rome's similar relation to the Bible, let me mention this. The great antagonist of Luther has been Loyola. Jesuitry is the real counter-reformation. And the essential difference between the two camps is indicated from their start. Both Luther and Loyola were crushed at their outset by the mighty hand of God. But Luther found his release, gospel and commission in serious contact with the Bible; while Loyola found his in visions, voices and fantasies, not essentially different from the subjective aspirations and intuitions of the modern heart. It is a far cry from the fierce ascetic Loyola to Mark Rutherford, but they join deep in their mystic frame. And the visions of the Jesuit are as subjective as the intuitions of the literary humanist,
or of the modern hero who is converted by falling in love, and saved by the Angel in the House. It would be useful to draw out the way and startling affinities between Jesuitism and the modern in between Catholic modernism and Protestant. There is no future Protestantism which shall be neither ritual nor sentimental, except be founded directly on the objectivity of the Bible, and know how to use it. It is the Gospel alone that can teach Rome its place. Other Church can cope with Rome. Only the Gospel can purify the message of abounding grace. The critics help us in their way to that, and the theologians still more. They help us to the object which is Rome's strength. An objective and positive Gospel is the only safety of our too subjective and fumbling faith. And it is authority which above all others we need to-day, and especially our pulpits. There is much fraternity, but there is too little master.

X.

The questions about the Bible are giving much trouble the finds expression, but much more that finds none. They are the source of much uneasiness that is felt, of much decay of spiritual life that is felt but in part. They produce, among thousands, that have never seriously faced them, a vague sense of insecurity about the Bible, and its uselessness to the lay reader in consequence. It not only cease to be an authority, but it ceases to be a means of grace for the soul and of support for the spiritual life. It becomes more of a problem than a stay. I am speaking of the effect within the Church, among Christian people, not among the public. Very likely there is more Bible reading in the Churches than we think; but, for all that, there is less than there used to be, when there should have been more. There is too little to maintain independent spiritual conviction, and vigorous spiritual life. There is a good deal of religious toying with the Bible, but there is not much real acquaintance with it, and not nearly what there should be in the pulpit. I am afraid this tendency will grow as the results of criticism filter down. And it is not certain that a Church where the Bible is not each member's manual in an intelligent way is doomed to spiritual decay? It is condemned to iniquity against a Church or ministry making exorbitant claims for itself.

Is it not certain, further, that the exit from the difficulty lies in the direction I have indicated? It cannot lie in the way of ignorant denunciation of critical scholarship or the denial of its right. That right is now secure, both for the Old Testament and New. You may challenge certain results, but its method is now beyond question. It was historical criticism that destroyed the mythical theory of the Gospel, it was not the scandalised resentment of mere orthodoxy. But what secures the right? The Church's own security in the Gospel. Only the evangelical certainty of faith in grace can guarantee the freedom of theology and learning in the Church. The Church can handle the Bible fairly and freely only through the conviction that Bible and Church are both there at the disposal of the Gospel they stand to preach. But the "Church's own security in the Gospel"! I know how that will sound to some. It will mean the blindness of the Church's views on such questions as Atonement, justification, and Faith. It will mean evangelical orthodoxy. Alas, I am not afraid evangelical orthodoxy has answer for much decay in the Gospel's power and welcome. That is not what I intend. The story lies in the ambiguity of the word Gospel. This means two things: It means the mighty saving act of God in Christ; and it means the news of that act by the word of apostolic men. It means, God's Word to man, not spoken but done, by a Saviour who is very little of it, and less and less as he drew near the doing of it.

It means:

"the matchless deed achieved,
Determined, dared, and done."

And it means, secondly, man's word under the influence of that deed God, its expansion, its reverberation, so to say, in the souls it saved and inspired. It means the Church's preaching of God's mighty work. We have thus the Church's gospel of God's Gospel. It is like the distinction between history and a history. The Bible is a living history of God's history in man. The one is not the other. The first draws all its value from the second. But the second without the first could be unknown. That preaching, that Bible which I call the episcopate of the first preaching of the Apostles, has no other object than this, to be the sacramental channel of the power of God's redeeming deed. When I speak of the Church's own security in the Gospel I do not use the word Gospel in the secondary sense. I do not mean the Church's self-complacency with the way she has long delivered the message. That is the sign of a Church dead and done with. And it is the badge of several Churches. But I mean her active and central confidence and obedience towards God's act of living grace in Christ. Our security in the Gospel is not our certainty of an evangelical creed, but our confidence in God's saving and grace. That is really the one article of the Christian creed, God's grace redeeming guilt from guilt in Christ. And the response to it, the living, saving faith that alone makes a Church a Church. From its ceasing centre of Christian life there issues endless power and endless freedom of thought and life, especially in regard to the life and form of the Bible.
XI.

The Churches have almost lost the sense of its books as wholes, and of the Book itself as a living whole, submerging parts archaic or obsolete. And yet it is there, in its corporate unity of grace, that the Bible's real power lies. There is its solidarity. We have lost our sense of authority because we would construe the seat of authority as a document, a charter, a protocol, either for history or for orthodoxy, instead of a throne from which the charter issues and whose beholds it serves. I would not insist on textual preaching if we had evangelical. I would not require the preacher to start from a verse, or a passage, or a creed, if he expound the great Gospel and the creed of faith, with any amount of scope in its treatment that seems to him to light it up and carry it home.

XII.

The Charter of the Church is not the Bible but the Redemption. The prophets repeatedly forced the Church of Israel back on the great Redemption from Egypt which gave the nation its formal call. It was by his grasp of Redemption that Athanasius saved the Church in his day; his metaphysics being but the dialect of the day. And it was the same with Luther. The Church's charter is a deed, not in the sense of a document but of an act of power reflected in the document. It is the power of God to day in all the Churches with all their errors. It is a power which has survived ages when the Bible was much in abeyance, as in the medieval Church. It is a power which has dragged the Bible from neglect, and set it on high again as the Gospel's candlestick and the Gospel's pulpit. But the Bible can never be the surrogate of the Gospel. The letter of the trust deed should never submerge the bequeathing purpose it conveys. That is the paganism of law which a law-Church has drained of the Gospel and starved of intelligence. We never do the Bible more honour than when it makes us forget we are reading a book, and makes us sure we are communing with a Saviour. Secure in the Gospel of God, we can take our true, free attitude to its preaching by men, even by Apostles. We cannot do without their word. A revelation without historic facts or personalities is no Christian, no real revelation. But we may weigh by their theme, their arguments and their story, secure in our inheritance of grace by that word, in which they stood. They have not domination over our faith, but they are helpers of our joy. There are sections of the Bible which are so unintelligible to many of the best Christians that for them they might as well not exist. There are facts that do not appeal to them, and are not used now, however useful once. It looks as if our Lord Himself exercised this spiritual selection on His
Old Testament. There were parts He found to have bad value only for their own passing time. “Ye have heard—but I say. Would it be fatal to the manner of His Gospel to find that there were similar parts for us even in the New Testament. But, you see, if criticism reduce Christ’s “reliable sayings to half a dozen”! We that does not make critical scholarship anti-Christian. It only rests other critics and scholars to correct such one-sided criticism, criticism where the scholar’s memory has crushed his judgment, criticism which more pedantry than historic sense, and without the sense of the Gospel. And it also warns us off the fatal error of interpreting the work of Christ by His teaching instead of His teaching by His work. May we not select from among Christ’s words as He selected from among those of the prophets? Surely. The evangelists did. And of those they give they nowhere state that it is a verbatim report exactly as it left His lips. Nor were all His precepts meant by Himself to be perennial. Surely we may and must discriminate and exercise a critical selection. But by what clue? Let us use the supreme principle supremely. Those words of Christ are prime revelation to us, and of first obligation, which carry home to us the saving grace incarnate in His Person and mission. The Holy Spirit who illuminates the Bible is the Spirit which proceeds from the cross, the Spirit which made Paul, who was made by the Christ not only as He lived, but chiefly as He died and lives for ever the Son of God with power. It is Atoning Grace that is our sanctification.

And I say all this with a deep sense both of curiosa felicitas of the phrase of Scripture which made its verbal inspiration so plausible, and of that searching profundity which is in the teaching of Christ. That felt, as every scriptural preacher must, the Bible’s ἄδειπνον φόνον and its πλὴν ἡμῶν βίον, its endless charm and its wealthy depth.

XIII.

The Bible not only provides but compels its own criticism by the Holy Spirit. It carries not only its own standard but the universal spirit which from age to age compels us to apply that standard. The evangelical criticism is the most constructive of all. It is the kind criticism which is a perpetual self-preservative. There is no dire feature of the Gospel than its self-preservative power in history, in self-correction and self-recovery. The Reformation is the most striking illustration of this action of the Spirit, which has been active in all ages in the Church, though not successful in all. It is self-correction, the sanctification of faith by faith, the reform of religion by religion, the re-reading of the Bible by the Gospel. Whatever remain of the Bible is whatever is essential to the Gospel.
become pedants. They get out of touch with the public and with the Gospel. The New Testament becomes an ancient text detestable to the scholarly Church but ineffectual for the living Word. The plow plows upon its back and long their furrows draw. They plow among the Christian public a reaction which is ignorant enough, perhaps, but which means more than it knows, and much that the critics should heed. In their native land even the liberal theologians grow impatient of them, and the public still more.

XIV.

The great test, I have said, of a religion is religious. Christianity will not stand or fall by its critical attitude to its documents, but by its faithful attitude to its Gospel. It is its self-criticism that will decide its fate, not the criticism of the world, even of the learned world. Everything turns on the criticism of faith, by faith, on the final authority of the Gospel, standing at the altar and receiving the sound contributions of the critical method. They are truths that need to be restated in this light. But criticism alone cannot do very much more. It has prepared for a higher reconstruction, which is overdue, the serious use of a revised Bible for its revised Gospel. For instance, we do not need further histories of Israel, nor histories of the religion of Israel. That is not what the Church needs at least. What we need from a scholar equipped with the soundest results, however new, is what Jonathan Edwards gave his day, a history of Redemption, a history of the Revelation always working up through the religion of Israel and of Christendom at once purifying it and condemning it. In the Old Testament we have a blended record both of Israel’s religion and of God’s revelation. In the New Testament there are traces of similar action. And it is very striking in the history of Europe, in the struggle (and infection) of Catholicism with the indigenous paganism. We need now that the revelation which is vital to the Church that prolongs the Gospel be disentangled from the popular religion, ancient or modern, and shown on its conquering way.

XV.

We need, in a closing word, that the Free Churches should do what they have not yet done, that they should really face the spiritual situation created by the collapse of Biblical infallibility for their communities that have long repudiated the final authority of the Church. To come to terms with culture (in this sense of the word) is at least as necessary for the Churches in their action on society as it