

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND

### THE HOLY BIBLE

Rev Hywel R. Jones MA (Wrexham)

The writer is Pastor of Borrass Park Evangelical Church, Wrexham in North East Wales and was previously in pastoral charge of Grove Chapel, Camberwell, London. Mr Jones is also an Associate Editor of this Journal.

Maintaining the inerrancy of Scripture as well as its infallibility is likely to cause an old question to be re-asked and with great vigour. That question is "How do you know the Bible is the Word of God?" While being able to make a worthy reply will not of itself convince the gainsayer or the honest enquirer, it is important that we should be able to make one for uncertainty about this point of our knowledge touches the vitals of our confidence in and our response to the things of God. This article is concerned with the content and character of our reply and our ability to make it rather than with any effect which, in the grace of God, our reply may have on others.

Of late two lines have been followed by evangelicals in making a reply. Each is correct and has its place, but both of them together are inadequate. A third - and the chief - element needs to be added which binds these two features and lifts up the whole reply to a higher level. This article concentrates on that extra, and neglected feature, but the inadequate replies will be briefly touched upon first.

#### 1. The Features of the Bible.

The rich story of the Bible's composition, compilation, preservation, transmission and translation provides abundant evidence of its uniqueness. As a library of sixty-six books in three languages, spanning some two thousand years and set against several cultures, composed by various authors and in different literary styles, its harmony and unity of content is truly amazing. This factor is explained and enforced by three crucially important statements in the New Testament, viz. John 10:35; 2 Timothy 3:16; and 2 Peter 1:

20 & 21. In addition to these data the great message of the Bible puts it into a class of its own. What can be shown to be without human parallel can be said, presumptively at least, to be divine.

## 2. The Force of the Bible.

The intensity with which men and women have sought for and died for the Bible (or even a page of it) is only matched by the intensity with which others have sought to destroy it. Its effect on thought and conduct in Western society is on the wane, but so is that society which has rejected it. However the chief and intended effect of the Bible is to present the gospel of Christ and this multitudes from all over the world have believed and lived by. The literature it has spawned is incalculable; the lives it has transformed innumerable. Once more its uplifting and transforming influence indicates a superhuman origin and character.

So far we have proceeded with what accords with a section of the Westminster Confession of 1643 which speaks of the following as "arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God", <sup>1</sup>viz

"the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof." <sup>1</sup>

However the Confession goes further not only to include but to emphasise the other element which has been somewhat neglected. It says that the authority of Scripture rests upon God its author and on neither man nor Church and then says:

"We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and revered esteem of the Holy Scripture ... yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." <sup>1</sup>

Clearly the testimony of the Church and the features of the Bible are put in a different category from the internal testimony of the

Spirit in the matter of certainty concerning the Bible's being the Word of God. It is this testimonium we are to consider. We shall do so by concentrating on Calvin's Institutes because of the clarity of his exposition and the historical situation in which he presented it.

## THE THEOLOGY OF THE TESTIMONIUM

In presenting this Calvin strikes three notes which are basic to his entire theological outlook. They are the clarity of God's revelation in Nature and Scripture, the blindness and perversity of the fallen human mind and heart, and the consequent necessity of the working of the Holy Spirit if anything of God or ourselves is to be savingly known.

He writes:

"A simple external manifestation of the word ought to be amply sufficient to produce faith, did not our blindness and perverseness prevent. But such is the proneness of our mind to vanity, that it can never adhere to the truth of God, and such its dullness, that it is always blind even in his light. Hence without the illumination of the Spirit the word has no effect."<sup>2</sup>

Calvin uses various forms of three words to depict the character of this work of the Holy Spirit, namely illumination, witness or testimony, and persuasion. The significance of each of these terms and all of them together must be understood for the character of the testimonium to be appreciated.

Using each of these terms in its primary sense yields the following result. The testimonium is the Holy Spirit enlightening, affirming, and persuading. Enlightening, He gives light to enable us to see, and we behold. Affirming, He avowedly declares so that we know and we learn. Persuading, He dispels doubt and denial so that we are convinced. The Holy Spirit therefore gives heavenly light concerning truth to which the response is unconquerable faith.

From this it will be seen that the Holy Spirit does something internally with reference to something which is external. He conveys and increases faith in the Truth.

## **a) The Testimonium and Faith**

Faith is submission not assent. To believe is to bow and not to nod. Therefore the testimonium is related to a submission to God in a reception of His Word. The internal testimony is not a credal subscription. The Bible cannot be truly believed without God being adored and served and the Redeemer being trusted. Calvin writes:

"The first step in true knowledge is taken when we reverently embrace the testimonium which God has been pleased therein (i.e. in Scripture) to give of himself. For not only does faith, full and perfect faith, but all correct knowledge of God, originate in obedience."<sup>3</sup>

The testimonium is intimately bound up with our reception of the gospel, our relationship to God, and these are inseparable from our reception of Scripture as God's Word. (The fact that some claim to know God in Christ and yet do not hold an orthodox view of Scripture is not to the point. The point is that none who make such a claim reject Scripture as God's Word in whatever sense they construe it to be so).

## **b) The Testimonium and the Truth**

The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of Truth. His testifying activity is truthful and therefore reliable and He testifies to God's Truth, i.e. His self-revelation which centres in Christ as He is presented in Scripture. The Spirit's ministry is to enable people to perceive, believe and appreciatively respond to the Word of God. So His testimony comes "by and with the Word". This occurs by the effectual call in preaching as

"By the internal illumination of the Spirit he causes the preached word to take deep root in their hearts."<sup>4</sup>

This has an inevitable link with the Bible for it is there in the written Word of God that the preached word can be found and read.

"The Word is the instrument by which the illumination of the Spirit is dispensed. They know of no other Spirit than the one who dwelt and spake in the apostles - the Spirit by whose oracles they are daily invited to the hearing of the Word."<sup>5</sup>

In this quotation Calvin is dealing with one of the religious

movements of his time against which he found it necessary to contend, viz the wilder Anabaptists. He also opposes the Roman Catholic Church and his opposition to both is crystallised in his teaching on the Testimonium.

His chapter on Roman Catholicism is entitled "The Testimony of the Spirit Necessary To Give Full Authority To Scripture. The Impiety Of Pretending That The Credibility Of Scripture Depends On The Judgment Of The Church." <sup>6</sup> With regard to the wilder Anabaptists he entitles a chapter "All The Principles Of Piety Subverted By Fanatics, Who Substitute Revelations For Scripture."<sup>7</sup> It is Calvin's claim that in the former the Church supplants the Spirit, and in the latter the Spirit (or rather some other spirit) supplants the Scripture.

The relevance of all this to us today should be immediately clear. The supremacy of Scripture is challenged by the supremacy of either the Church or the Spirit. With regard to the former it is not merely Roman Catholicism which presents this threat, but the Orthodox Churches and Protestantism, all of which are now placing an increasing, though varied, emphasis on Tradition in the Tradition-Scripture inter-relationship. The two strands of Calvin's teaching, viz the plainness of God's revelation which yields the conclusion that Scripture does not need the authentication of the Church, and the testimony of the Spirit which results in recognition by the Church of what is inherently authoritative is still the abiding valid answer today.

With regard to the latter, whom Calvin calls Libertines, what Calvin says applies to the cults and world religions if for Spirit we read the Absolute or Ultimate, and to Liberalism if for Spirit we read reason or spirit or feeling. It is also issuing a warning against the Neo-Pentecostal movement. Calvin's position is based on the claim that the Libertines are "tearing asunder 'what has been joined' in indissoluble union." "The author of Scripture cannot vary and change his likeness" is his basic principle. His conclusion is:

"The Lord has so knit together the certainty of his Word and his Spirit that our minds are duly imbued with reverence for the word when the Spirit shining upon it enables us there to behold the face of God; and, on the other hand, we embrace the

Spirit with no danger of delusion when we recognise him in his image, that is, in his word." <sup>8</sup>

The testimonium therefore internalises the genuineness of an objective reality, i.e. the written word of God and so correlates to it the state of mind and heart which results from His activity. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is the inner teacher of divinely revealed and recorded truth. This refutes an unverifiable and vacillating subjectivism of either Reason or Feeling and also a blind submission to some external authority like philosophical enquiry, ecclesiastical tradition, or existential crisis. The Holy Spirit and the Holy Bible are signposts to each other.

Calvin writes gloriously:

"Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, does not submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit. For though in its own majesty it has enough to command reverence, nevertheless, it then begins truly to touch us when it is sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Enlightened by him, we no longer believe, either on our own judgment or that of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but, in a way superior to human judgment, feel perfectly assured - as much so as if we beheld the divine image visibly impressed on it - that it comes to us by the instrumentality, from the very mouth of God. We ask not for proofs or probabilities on which to rest our judgment, but we subject our intellect and judgment to it as too transcendent for us to estimate ... We have a thorough conviction that ... we hold unassailable truth ... because we feel a divine energy living and breathing in it - an energy by which we are drawn and animated to obey it, willingly indeed, and knowingly, but more vividly and effectually than could be done by human will or knowledge... Such, then, is a conviction which asks not for reasons; such, a knowledge which accords with the highest reason, namely knowledge in which the mind rests more firmly and securely than in any reasons; such, in fine, the conviction which revelation from heaven alone can produce. I say nothing more than every believer experiences in himself though my words fall far short

of the reality." 9

Therefore we ought to reflect on how we regard our belief in the nature of Scripture. Remembering that it does not authorize Scripture as the Word of God, but authenticates it as such to and within us, we ought to ask whether our view has become too cerebral or/and too cautious. In our thinking are we putting scholarship or apologetics in the place of the Holy Spirit's internal testimony? Or are we afraid of saying we are sure about Scripture's nature and status because we know that this will appear to others as some psychological state? Let us cease grieving the Spirit in our thinking and not only feel we can sing "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," but also "The Bible is God's word, I know for the Spirit tells me so".

#### References

1. Westminster Confession. Chapter I, Sections 4 & 5
2. Institutes. Book III. Chapter II, Section 33.
3. Institutes. Book I. Chapter VI, Section 2.
4. Institutes. Book III. Chapter XXIV, Section 8.
5. Institutes. Book I. Chapter IX, Section 3.
6. Institutes. Book I. Chapter VII.
7. Institutes. Book I. Chapter IX.
8. Institutes. Book I. Chapter IX, Section 5.