

Abbreviations used in 'The Inerrancy of Scripture'

T.S.T.S.	The Saviour and the Scriptures
R & I	Revelation and Inspiration
S.R. & W.G.	Special Revelation and the Word of God
F. & W.G.	Fundamentalism and the Word of God.
T.W.I.T.	Thy Word is Truth
P.R.	Presbyterian Review
T.O.T.I.C.C.	The Old Testament its Claims and Critics
N.I.C.	New International Commentary
N.G.M.	National Geographical Magazine

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THE DANGERS OF AN INTELLECTUAL APPROACH

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Let me first of all make clear my own position. *"My relation to real scholarship will probably remain all my life that of an unfortunate lover"* - these words of Emil Brunner express it perfectly. I am not a scholar, but I do share Machen's conviction that, *"Never was there a stronger call of God than there is today for a vigorous and scholarly defence of the faith"*. In the wilderness of contemporary irrationalism, evangelical Christianity must project itself as an oasis of reasonableness.

Nevertheless, there are very real perils in the habits of the studious and book-minded Christian, and my duty for the present is to draw attention to some of these.

The basic danger is that we shall forget the depravity of the human intellect. We quite willingly grant that sin has enslaved the will and alienated our affections from what is good and true. But we are inclined to overlook the effects of sin in the realm of pure reason, to imagine that the Fall has left our cognitive faculty intact and that if we only lived up to our convictions all would be

well. The Biblical representation, however, is quite different. Our understandings are darkened, and this has been only partially corrected even in the case of the regenerate. The Fall has left in the mind a carnal bias and prejudice which will always seriously hinder us in our efforts to arrive at truly spiritual judgements. There is no more difficult task in the believer's life than to think Christianly, and to do so consistently. It requires constant and conscious effort, and in all our reading and study we have to remember the many affinities with the world, the flesh and the Devil which our minds still retain.

Again, orthodoxy, vitally important though it is, is not salvation. We may be interested in the truth; we may be enamoured of the theological process; we may be meticulously accurate both in our apprehension and exposition of the Christian faith; we may be zealous in its propagation and defence as we understand it - we may be all these and still be strangers to the grace of God. We may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, we may have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and yet be nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1-2). *"Men may continue to maintain in theory an orthodox creed, and yet may manifest such deadly hostility to vital piety that they must be considered the enemies of the cause of God and the work of the Spirit"*. These solemn words from Archibald Alexander place in clear focus before those of us who cherish our orthodoxy the need for constant self-examination. And there is, of course, a corollary - the need for charity in our judgment of the less orthodox. *"The deepest life of godliness,"* said 'Rabbi' Duncan, *"may coexist with muddled doctrine. But that is no argument in favour of obscurity"*.

The third danger is that reading and study may become a cult in its own right, engrossing our attention to the neglect or exclusion of other duties. It may become a tyrant intolerant of prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship and even public worship.

This is insufferable. To be in a position where we prefer any book of human composition to the Word of God is to be backslidden. We must ruthlessly subordinate all our study to the glory of God, our own edification and the evangelisation of the world. *"I have no interest whatever,"* said James Denney, *"in theology which does not help us to evangelise"*. Nor should we be blind to the fact that one may study theology and related subjects from very wrong motives. Since study of any kind is an exhilarating, pleasurable activity, the desire of theological knowledge, as Cunningham pointed out, *"may originate in a mere love of knowledge as a means of intellectual exercise and cultivation"*; or in what is worse - *"a regard to wealth or power or fame"*.

Another very real danger is that we may give the impression, or succumb to the impression, that Scripture can be understood only by the academically initiated. It would be utterly wrong to deride the value of a knowledge of the original languages and of commentaries, expositions, dictionaries and other helps, to those who are interested in arriving at a true understanding of the Word of God. The logical conclusion of such an argument would be to put the preacher himself out of business, since, in the last analysis, his office is simply to be a 'help' towards a practical understanding of the Scriptures. But we must not institute a priesthood of the expert, nor imbibe that habit whereby men despair of understanding a particular passage simply because they have no commentary to hand. Every such tendency must be met with a firm emphasis upon the Protestant doctrine of the perspicuity of the Word. It is for wayfaring men. *"All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all,"* says the Westminster Confession; *"yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due sense of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient*

*understanding of them*". This applies equally to Christian doctrine. The ordinary Christian commonly regards such doctrines as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Sovereignty of God, and so on, as somehow beyond him and irrelevant to him. Yet these doctrines are the stuff of the most elementary Christian experiences. Every believer, however deficient his acquirements in theological literature, should make it his habit to meditate upon them and learn to handle them to his comfort and edification in every kind of spiritual situation.

Yet another danger facing us as evangelicals is that of becoming pre-occupied with intellectual respectability. Symptoms of this abound: the desire among students for the ministry to secure the imprimatur of the universities, regardless of the fact that the courses of study are seldom evangelical and have but little bearing upon the real work of the ministry; the tendency to demonstrate ostentatiously that we are academically contemporary, having read all the most recent works, especially of non-Evangelicals, regardless of their intrinsic value; the willingness to concede to science as much as Evangelicals possibly can; the interest in ecumenical involvement (which has tragically diverted our best scholars from the desperately needed work of positive exposition, especially in Biblical and Systematic Theology); a growing reluctance to link inspiration with inerrancy; and such an over-eagerness to welcome the pro-Christian utterances of the famous that we often give the impression that Christ is immeasurably indebted to any leader of public opinion who does Him the honour of being converted. Behind all these is the fact that we are far too much intimidated by the brilliant array of scholarship which stands against the Church; we forget that the world is inevitably against the Church; we forget that by and large the scholars, especially the second-rate ones, have always been in opposition; that it was the princes of this

world who crucified the Lord of glory, and the leaders of public opinion who rejected Him. *"True Christianity, now as always"*, said Machen, *"is radically contrary to the natural man, and it cannot possibly be maintained without a constant struggle"*. To expect a rapprochement is utterly futile.

We must further remember the spiritual peril involved in reading the arguments of other men against the Christian faith. This is not to say that we are at liberty to opt out of this labour. Intelligent and meaningful contact with the world must be based on an understanding of its principles and priorities; and the task of theological demolition (one of the most urgent of the hour), demands an expert knowledge of the structural weaknesses of non-Evangelical systems. But our attitude to the books and arguments of unbelievers must never be cavalier. It may be fatal to approach them in a self-confident spirit. After all, our basic premise is the depravity of even the regenerate intellect. In other words, our minds continue to have affinities with the sceptical arguments; which, in addition (and let us make no mistake about this), are often highly plausible and unsettling. Every time we approach an anti-Christian or anti-Evangelical book, we need to put on the whole armour of God. Otherwise we most certainly shall not be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. The danger is particularly acute for those students who are attending non-Evangelical colleges. With only a minimal prior knowledge of the content of the Christian faith, and the arguments in favour of its validity, they venture, sometimes with a boundless confidence, into the lions' den of the world's specious arguments, imagining themselves immune. It is not surprising that the casualty-rate should be high.

Finally, there are dangers in the application of philosophy, reason and scholarship to the theological process itself.

We must abandon, for example, the hope of

demonstrating, upon the ground of logic alone, the validity of Christian doctrine. Not even the article of the divine existence is a truth of reason. It is a truth of revelation. Not that we have less than certainty upon this question, but that the being of God is an ineradicable datum of the human consciousness, and not a fact which requires speculative demonstration. We believe in order to understand.

Then there is a precisely opposite danger - that familiarity with Christian teaching may blind us to the sheer marvellousness of its central emphasis upon the love of God. The fact of such a love is very far from being self-evident. Conscience does not teach it; providence does not teach it; the mind of man did not conceive it. It is a sovereign, optional thing, certainty upon which is possible only because God has revealed it by His Spirit.

Again, we must beware of reluctance to accept one truth because we cannot reconcile it with another. This is especially true of such doctrines as divine sovereignty and human responsibility. *"Those who will only believe what they can reconcile",* said Spurgeon, *"will necessarily disbelieve much of divine revelation. It were much better to believe the truths and leave the Lord to show their consistency."* *"I believe in predestination without cutting and trimming it",* he writes later, *"and I believe in responsibility without adulterating and weakening it."* We must be prepared to receive a doctrine on its own independent evidence, irrespective of whether or not we can reconcile it with others.

Similarly, we must beware of trying to impose our system upon the Word of God. This charge is often brought against Calvinism, but here, I trust, is where it is least applicable. Calvin's system, according to Professor J.K.S.Reid, *"is certainly logical in the sense that the argument moves*

*carefully step by step from one point to the next. But, including elements not easily (or at all) capable of being harmonised - a complexio oppositorum."* It is against Arminianism and Hyper-Calvinism that this charge may most aptly be brought, since both of these start out from the philosophical premise that ability limits obligation. "Man is not able to believe, therefore he cannot be required to believe," says the Hyper-Calvinist. "Man is required to believe, therefore he must be able to believe," says the Arminian. But we are all liable to this error, even in our treatment of single texts. "*That is truth,*" James Denney would sometimes reply to a suggested exegesis, "*but it is not the truth taught in the text.*"

In conclusion, let us remind ourselves of the need to be careful that all our opinions are brought to the bar of Scripture. It is very easy, in support of a particular opinion, to cite a great name, and to be content with that. But no extra-Biblical writers - not the Fathers, not the Reformers, not the Puritans - are to be followed implicitly. Let us follow the maxim, "*See this in the New Testament for yourself*", and then we shall not have cause to lament with Hamish MacKenzie, "*Some who were trained in a theological school which scorned 'proof texts' and looked upon the employment of Holy Writ almost as a sign of cultural barrenness, are now deeply ashamed of their lack of facility there. They will never make it up in this life.*" Certainly experience teaches that many Evangelicals profoundly loyal to such doctrines as the deity of Christ, the substitutionary nature of His work, the personality of the Holy Spirit and the endlessness of future woe are seriously embarrassed when asked to substantiate these convictions from the Word of God. The consequences for the effectiveness of our witness are incalculable.

Evangelicals today are gradually recovering their confidence after a long period of intellectual inertia. They are awakening to the fact that the conflict between them and Modernism is not, even on the

academic level, by any means an unequal one. But, even as we enter with a new zest and zeal into the struggle we must exercise a constant watchfulness. The symptoms of intellectualism already exist - not to afford opportunity to hurl the one at the other the charge of backsliding and apostasy; but to alert us together to the dangers which lurk in the Church's perennial commitment to give a reason for the hope that is in her.

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EVANGELICALS AND SOCIAL ACTION - an agenda for  
consideration

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NECOSE is the mnemonic not for a little known trade union but for a little known conference held in the Autumn of 1978. Its full title was the National Evangelical Conference On Social Ethics and it was a refreshingly frank brotherly (and sisterly!) exploration of the theoretical basis for evangelical engagement in the realm of social action. Like many other conferences it managed to ask more questions than it answered and it would be salutary for us to consider what some of these questions are. They are suggested here as an agenda for evangelical discussion, in the hope that readers of this journal might also be among those being provoked to think and write about them for our mutual good.

For starters, as they say, current positions need to be explored. Social ethics is a growth industry among evangelicals and any who have followed developments since Lausanne will be aware of this. In this country the activities of the Shaftesbury