

time, while keeping God's grace in Christ as its centrepiece, and the Bible as its touchstone, can continue to speak to present-day issues as Keele began to do, it will render good service. The signs seem quietly hopeful.

3

**EVANGELICALS, HONESTY AND
NEW TESTAMENT STUDY**

MICHAEL GREEN

Evangelicals ought to be the last people who could be arraigned for intellectual dishonesty. We dare to believe that truth matters. It matters so much that it has become incarnate. At a particular period in history, at a particular place on the map, the ultimate has become observable, the ideal real. In the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth we believe we have final truth about God, man, and the world. Not all the truth that there is: he does not exhaust the deity. But truth all the same, truth unmixed with error. When Pilate asked Jesus scornfully 'What is truth?' he got no answer in words: the answer was staring him in the face in the person of the one who on another occasion said, 'I am the truth'.

Now nobody ought to be able to believe that easily. The incarnation of ultimate reality into the person of Jesus of Nazareth is a claim of breath-taking magnitude. But if a man does come to believe it, he is thereby released from petty-mindedness and obscurantism. Such a man has no right to live in a cosy world of make-believe, where the chill winds of criticism cannot blow. He claims to have the truth. Not to know it all, mind you, for there are many aspects of Jesus to which I am, alas, blinded by my prejudices or my background or my partial understanding; not to know it all, but to have it. To have, in Jesus Christ, God's final word about himself, about ourselves, about what it means to be human, about what it means to love and to forgive and to sacrifice. Such a belief is liberating. It means that I shall never be afraid of the truth, wherever I find it. It means that the truth cannot possibly harm me. Whatever is true in science or art, in music or painting, in human love or natural beauty, sheds some light, some further precious light, upon the quintessence of truth,

Jesus Christ, and is in itself illuminated by him. Away, then, with phobias, to which Evangelicals have too long been prone! The God who has given us minds to search after truth has given us truth to satisfy them, and this truth stands before us concentrated and self-validating, in the Man of Nazareth. Indeed, our claim verges on the insane. With St Paul we would want to claim that 'in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form', that 'all things were created through him and for him. He holds the sovereignty over all things, and through his agency all things hold together.' We believe that 'God who spoke in many and various ways to our fathers through the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us in the person of his Son', who is the creator of all things, the goal of all things, no less. Such is our Christology. It is not blindly accepted. There are excellent reasons for our belief in the full deity of Jesus Christ, but this is not the place to deploy them. Suffice it to say that if we do believe these things about Jesus Christ we ought to have our minds as capable of enlargement as the universe itself. We ought to think big, not small. There ought to be no trace of obscurantism about us.

Very well, then. If Jesus is what we claim him to be, what are we to make of the New Testament? We cannot allow it a veneration of the sort accorded by Muslims to the Koran. It is not in itself a holy book, descended from heaven for our adulation. Its authority is a derived authority, for the place of final truth is not held for us by any book: it is occupied by a Person, and what a thrilling thing that is—to know that in this perplexing and often sub-personal world final truth is personal! The New Testament, therefore, is testimony to a person whom we believe to enshrine all the truth about God and man that we need to know in order to get right with God. What sort of testimony is it?

It is very human testimony, to be sure. Mark's Greek is appalling, the grammar of the Apocalypse is non-existent, the vocabulary of St John small. Paul gets so carried away that he sometimes does not finish his sentences, and on other occasions goes on for fifteen verses without a main verb—before coining a form of word which is unique and probably a howler! Very human stuff: the treasure is in earthen vessels all right. But it is precious all the same. Because it is testimony from the first generation of Christians to God's supreme word to man, Jesus Christ. That is

what makes the Bible, in the words of the Coronation Service, 'the most precious thing this world affords'.

It is well known that Evangelicals accord the supreme place, under Christ, to the Scriptures. I want, in the space I have, to look at two aspects of this position. Why, in the first place, do Evangelicals get so excited about the Scriptures? And then, how do they face the problems in belief and practice to which this adherence to Scripture exposes them?

Presuppositions

Evangelicals believe that the New Testament is supreme over all other Christian writing, for the simple reason that it is the witness of the eyewitness generation to Jesus Christ, the Word of God. The New Testament documents emanate from the apostolic circle, though by no means all from the apostles themselves. They enshrine the testimony of those who had known Jesus or had known his immediate followers. By definition, therefore, that stage is unrepeatable. We cannot get back *behind* the testimony about Jesus given to us in the New Testament. There is no independent access to the mind of Christ. We know him through the New Testament witness or not at all. That is why, as early as the New Testament itself, the apostolic circle is seen as the foundation layer of the building of the Church (Eph. 2: 20, 3:5, 1 Pet. 1:11, 12, Rev. 21:14). Any gospel which by-passes or contradicts the apostolic gospel is no gospel at all (Gal. 1: 6-8; 2 Thess. 3: 6-15; 2 John 10; Rev. 22: 18ff). That is why in the second century the canon of Scripture recognized what proceeded from the apostolic circle but rejected Christian writings which, like 1 Clement and Ignatius, were orthodox but sub-apostolic, or works like the Gospel of Peter, which were pseudonymous. What was required by Christian people was the unrepeatable first generation witness to Jesus Christ. The purest water is found near the source of the river: the risk of pollution is too great if you drink from further down the mountain.

Evangelicals believe not only that Scripture is the only window we have into Jesus Christ, but that its writers were inspired by the Spirit of God to bear true testimony to Christ. Jesus himself seems to have envisaged this. In passages such as John 16: 12-14 he promises them the Holy Spirit who would equip them to interpret his person and significance, just as in the Old Testa-

ment God not only acted redemptively for Israel but inspired men to interpret that redemption. Jesus sends his disciples out clothed with his own authority—'He who receives you receives me', and 'As my Father has sent me, even so send I you' (Matt. 10:40; John 20:21). So much so that in the great commission of Matt. 28:18f, Jesus can say: 'All authority in heaven and earth is committed unto me . . . Go you therefore, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' The apostles are clothed with the authority of Christ as they bear witness to him.

They certainly claimed this inspiration. St Peter claims that the same Spirit who inspired the prophets is at work inspiring the apostles (1 Pet. 1:11, 12). Peter puts 'the words which were spoken previously by the holy prophets', and 'the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord', on the same level. This need not surprise us. For Peter proceeds to give perhaps the clearest indication of the nature of inspiration to be found in the whole Bible (2 Pet. 1:21). What characterizes 'scripture' is that holy men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. There is a co-operation in the writing of Scripture. Man does it, in his own style and against his own cultural background. But it is the Holy Spirit of God who directs his hand, so that what emerges is not distorted by the human agency but is God's message incarnated, so to speak, in that author's way of putting things. We find basically the same claim in John's repudiation of anyone who does not hold the apostolic doctrine (2 John 10), confident as he is of the rightness of his own interpretation of the Word made flesh, because he has seen, known and touched him (1 John 1:1-4). St Paul made breathtaking claims to inspiration by the Spirit of God for his writings; see 1 Thess. 2:13; Gal. 1:6-12; 2 Thess. 3:14; 1 Cor. 2:16 and 7:17. Perhaps the most shattering claim he gives comes at the end of his treatment of men who were very conscious of the Holy Spirit at work in them. As an apostle of the Lord he can say, 'If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this *he is not recognized*' (1 Cor. 14:37f RSV). It is interesting to note that this was too strong meat for many scribes, who altered the *agnoeitai* to *agnoeitō* with the banal meaning: 'If anyone does not recognize it . . . well,

let him not recognize it!'—which is certainly not what the apostle wrote!

Because the New Testament writings claim to be divinely inspired (a claim, incidentally, gladly acknowledged by the leaders of the sub-apostolic era who readily and clearly distinguished between their own authority and that of the apostles: e.g., Ignatius's 'I do not command you as Peter and Paul did. They were apostles'), we Evangelicals recognize them as having a binding authority over us in both what we believe and how we behave. New Testament teaching is decisive for belief and ethics. The word 'infallibility' is sometimes used to describe this normative quality of the Scriptures. At its very least it means that if you follow it you will not go astray. Some Evangelicals would want to go further and maintain that there is no possibility of any particle of error in the Scriptures, and that if there were it would jeopardize the reliability of the whole. This seems to me an unduly defensive piece of *a priori* argument and by no means necessary to upholding the New Testament's claims for itself. What all Evangelicals would agree is that if you show them a doctrine that is undoubtedly taught in the New Testament they will credit it and teach it, however little they may like it. If you show them a command that is clearly taught in the New Testament they will seek to let it guide their lives, however difficult it is. In other words, Evangelicals agree to take the New Testament as decisive for their faith and conduct. For it contains the gospel of salvation by grace through what Jesus has done. It interprets and discloses to us his person and the significance of his achievement, and is inspired by the Spirit of God. That is why Evangelicals give Scripture the regard they do. They are not oddities in so doing. They are merely following the indications of the Bible itself. They believe, yes, really believe, what most of the Churches profess to believe in their confessional and credal statements. Thus, the Council of Trent wrote: 'The Synod, following the example of the orthodox fathers, receives and venerates all the books of the Old and New Testament, seeing that one God is the author of both.' The Lutheran Formula of Concord says: 'The Holy Scriptures alone remain the only judge, rule and standard according to which all dogmas shall be discerned and judged'; and the Church of England in its Thirty-nine Articles puts it thus: 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so

that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the faith.' Indeed, the Church of England goes much further. It demands of all ordinands to the priesthood: 'Are you persuaded that the holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined out of the said Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge and to teach nothing (as required of necessity to eternal salvation) but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by Scripture?' The 'oddity' of the Evangelical's presuppositions and practice is that he believes just that and tries to practise just that.

Problems

But it is high time to turn to some of the problems which beset a man who takes this attitude towards Scripture. How does he go about facing the difficulties adduced by modern critical study of the New Testament?

How does this Stone Age attitude of 'Back to Jesus and the apostles!' square with the assured results of modern criticism?

Well, of course, it does not always square with modern theories. For one thing, the assured results of modern criticism are by no means assured. Not long ago the pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians, the priority of Mark, the existence of a unified Greek or Aramaic document known as 'Q', and the lateness of the Fourth Gospel, were all unassailed bastions of critical orthodoxy. Now all that has changed. Indeed, recent study has shown that the whole basis of the generally accepted solution to the Synoptic Problem is in grave doubt. The Evangelical notices this. He reads Ronnie Knox's *Essays in Satire*, and he glances casually at the piles of unsaleable theological rubbish in second-hand bookshops that was once the latest thing off the presses. Can we blame him for being just the tiniest bit unpersuaded that the latest heterodox Ph.D. thesis is the answer?

But another reason why the position of the Evangelicals may not always square with modern theories is that their respective presuppositions may be quite different. Many theologians will honestly acknowledge their presupposition that the Bible is entirely governed by the laws which obtain in secular literature,

and is nothing more than any secular document apart from the fact that it is all about God. The Evangelical, persuaded both by the testimony of Jesus and the experience in his own life of the power of the Bible, that there is a divine authorship as well as a human to this book, is bound to come at it a different way. He will not rule out the possibility of a predictive element in prophecy, for instance. He will not deem it impossible that the Holy Spirit did bring things to the remembrance of the disciples. He will not rule out the possibility that Paul really had, as he claimed, the mind of Christ in his teaching rôle.

But when this has been said, it must not be supposed that the Evangelical is blind to the work of modern critical study. He is committed to it. He is committed to *textual criticism*, because the very importance he assigns to Scripture drives him to ascertain, as far as he can, which among variant readings is the correct one. Gone is the day, if it ever existed, when obscurantists claiming to be Evangelicals said, in effect: 'The Authorized Version was good enough for St Paul. It is good enough for me.' Significantly enough, some of the most distinguished work on the text of the New Testament in recent years has been done by Evangelicals, men like Tasker in Britain and Metzger in the States.

The Evangelical is equally committed to *source criticism*. The more seriously he takes the significance of the Gospels, the more intrigued he will be by the inter-relationship of the first three. Was Mark's the first to have been written? Or was there, perhaps, a primitive pattern which they all, Mark included, incorporated? And did Luke and Matthew depend on it? Is the sayings material common to Matthew and Luke (known as 'Q') a document which is otherwise unknown? Or does it represent oral tradition which they both reproduce? If it is oral, how come that much of it is word for word? If written, how come that much of it is so diverse? These are questions which will exercise the ingenuity, the patient study, the imagination, and the hard work of the Evangelical, just as much as any other New Testament scholar — perhaps even more, for the motivation is all the greater, when the scholar approaches the problem humbly seeking the truth, whatever it may be, and uncommitted either to the tradition of the Evangelical elders or the theological band-wagon of the moment.

Perhaps this is the moment to digress a little on this question

of sources. It need not be supposed that the Evangelical will be in the least disturbed if, say, 'Q' should turn out to be a lost document, partly preserved in Matthew and Luke. He will rejoice to have so early a testimony to the teaching of Jesus, as old as Mark's, if not older. Likewise, Evangelicals have no antipathy to hypotheses which postulate a source 'M' behind St Matthew's Gospel, nor any stake in maintaining that Matthew the tax-gatherer wrote it. It does not claim to be by Matthew the tax-gatherer; it does not seem to be, for the evidence continues to point to the probability that the author used Mark, and that would be a very odd thing for an apostle and eyewitness to do. In point of fact, all the Gospels are anonymous, and their authorship is an open question. It is no more 'Evangelical' to suppose that the Fourth Gospel was written by the Son of Zebedee than to assign it to John the Elder, if that shadowy character really existed. I do not mind who wrote the Fourth Gospel. I do not mind what sources, be they never so numerous, lay behind the Synoptic Gospels. But I do receive those Gospels as four shafts of bright light on the person of Jesus, that enable me to understand something of his person, his achievement and his will for human life. To me as an Evangelical they are decisive. This does not mean to say they are all to be taken literally. Literalism is extremely foolish to apply, say, to apocalyptic, and there is no lack of apocalyptic in the Gospels. Thus, when Matthew, for instance, records that at the Crucifixion, the rocks were rent, the tombs opened and the bodies of the saints were raised, and emerging from their tombs, they went into the holy city after Christ's Resurrection and appeared to many, I am not shut up to one possible interpretation. Is he being literal? Then what were those raised bodies doing between his Crucifixion and their going to Jerusalem after his Resurrection? Is he using apocalyptic imagery, to show the cosmic significance of the death of Christ? That death opens the door of eternal life to all the people of God, past and present, but their newness of life is 'after his resurrection' and causally linked to it. On this view 'the holy city' might be heaven rather than Jerusalem, and Matthew might be making a profound theological interpretation of the meaning of Jesus' death. Other possibilities are also open. My point is simply that literalism is no part of Evangelical faith, and that the task of the Biblical exegete is to attempt to discover what category of litera-

ture he is dealing with and apply the criteria appropriate to it. The man who attempts to work out with wooden literalness the carat-rating of the golden streets of the heavenly Jerusalem, or listens with a metronome for the sound of the last trump is not honouring the God of the Bible. He is showing that he has no sense of discrimination in the categories of the Biblical material under discussion.

But there is one area where Evangelical hackles do rise over the question of authorship. They do not rise over the attribution of the Gospels; they do not rise when Hebrews is dubbed non-Pauline, or when the Apocalypse is assigned to a different author from that of the Fourth Gospel. There is no question of falsifying New Testament claims in any of these cases. But the matter is different when 1 and 2 Peter are deemed non-Petrine; or Colossians, Ephesians and the Pastorals, non-Pauline. Here the question of truth seems to be involved. Most Evangelicals will want a lot of convincing that these documents do not derive from their putative source. They will critically evaluate the arguments which are held to prove them pseudepigraphical. And rightly. For it does not seem to us likely that God should have used false claims in these documents as vehicles for his truth. We are right to give them the benefit of the doubt unless the case against them is presented a great deal more cogently than it has been hitherto. But should it be conclusively demonstrated that, say, 2 Peter is not from the hand of the Apostle (even granting a good deal of freedom to an amanuensis) then we should have to rethink. We should either have to conclude that the Church was wrong in reckoning this document among the New Testament, and exclude it from our operational canon, or else conclude that, odd though it might seem to us, God used the practice of pseudepigraphy, which was after all common enough in the ancient world, and deigned to reveal something of Himself through it. I would gladly adopt that second position if the arguments against 2 Peter were better deployed. They do not seem to me conclusive. I have argued this in print. And the majority of scholarly opinion fails to meet the arguments adduced but continues to regard 2 Peter as pseudepigraphical! Is obscurantism, I am sometimes tempted to wonder, confined to Evangelicals?

It is not only textual and source criticism to which we are committed as Evangelical scholars, but *form criticism*. To be sure,

this is regarded with deep suspicion in some parts of the Evangelical camp. But this is because of the presuppositions of some of its leading practitioners, not because of anything inherently wrong with the methodology employed. The whole purpose of this discipline is to analyse and classify the forms in which the Christian material circulated before it came to be written down in the New Testament. This undertaking is admittedly speculative, but it is highly useful. It enables us to penetrate that thirty-year gap between the events and the writing of the Gospels. It enables us to see how these early missionaries shaped and used the stories. It poses perhaps the most interesting question one could possibly ask of a Gospel story: 'Why was that remembered? What use did it have in the life of the early Church? Why this and not other stories?' Now once you have found the life-setting of the story in the early Church, you may, if you are a sceptical German scholar, conclude that the early Church made it up and that it had no setting in the life of Jesus. But that is a gratuitous assumption.

There is a gross logical mistake in making an analysis of form and then jumping from it to a judgement on content. Eyewitnesses remained. There is, moreover, a methodological mistake in supposing that because there are parallels to some event recorded of Jesus in Hellenistic literature, therefore the Christians must have made up their story. They may have; they may not. It has to be evaluated on grounds other than form. There is often a contextual mistake in the more destructive work of some form critics. They use as comparison Homeric or Norse legends which took centuries to take shape, and neglect the factor of the survival of eyewitnesses in the New Testament situation. There were plenty of people around in the sixties who knew Jesus well, and, if the Christians had in fact been dreaming up words to put in his mouth, and actions to attribute to him, it is not likely that the whole body of these eyewitnesses would have remained silent. Indeed, many of the most sceptical form-critics pin their faith on parallels from the Hellenistic world and forget the essentially Jewish character of the early Church, where accurate memorization played the major part in educational method. Form-critics sometimes make a presuppositional mistake, too; they assume that the early Church could not have been interested in anything simply because it was about Jesus, unless it had a specific

use in the catechesis or apologetic or worship of the Church. I find that naïve in the extreme. Are we the first generation to be interested in history? And, finally, there is the psychological mistake of supposing that arresting material is capable of being created by that shadowy entity, the early Church. On the whole, communities and committees do not create memorable stuff. That is done by commanding individuals. Read the reports of Church Commissions if you do not believe me!

So there is a powerful critique that can be mounted against the sceptical use of form-criticism. But what a valuable tool when freed from existentialist, anti-supernaturalist, and anti-historical presuppositions! It gives us a better understanding of the nature of the Gospels once we understand the problems which preoccupied the early Christians. We realize how much the needs of the community shaped the form in which the tradition has come down to us. We get a fresh understanding of the individuality of each evangelist as one of the early preachers. And we see the good news in each of the short *pericopae* into which the form-critics analyse the material. 'The light of the sun is glitteringly reflected in every drop in the dewy meadow. Similarly the complete personality of our Lord confronts us in every brief story', wrote Martin Kähler. Faith in Jesus Christ did not come later than the tradition. It is in the light of faith alone that the tradition can be understood.

Most recently, form-criticism has developed into a further stage, redaction-criticism. This concentrates attention not so much on the beads of early tradition which the evangelist has strung together on his necklace of a Gospel, but on the way each evangelist has polished his stones, arranged them, and what sort of string he has used. Here again the Evangelical can rejoice and enter wholeheartedly into the quest for the distinctive emphases and theology of the particular evangelist. Dr Howard Marshall has given an excellent and highly constructive use of this redaction-critical method recently in his *Luke, Historian and Theologian*. Instead of being asked to see the evangelists as mere scissors-and-paste men, as they were under the source-critical hypothesis; or as mere beachcombers, looking for other men's pearls to put on their string, as they were in the hey-day of form-criticism, they are now given a chance to appear in their rightful guise as theologians and evangelists within the surging life of the early Church

which they helped to shape. Men with a message, men with a distinctive point of view about Jesus. This does not mean that the Evangelical will go along with redaction-critics like Conzelmann in seeing in St Luke a profound theological break from his predecessors, or subtle geographical factors determining his theology. The evidence on which Conzelmann builds his theories is flimsy, and sometimes is perversely handled. What it does mean is that the Evangelical is not at all opposed to the methodology employed. He welcomes it.

This leads naturally into another area of critical study to which the Evangelical is committed, that of unity and diversity within the New Testament witness. We have been over-simplistic here for a long time. We have too easily allowed ourselves to claim 'The New Testament says', when what we mean is that one small strand of the material says that. Each New Testament writer has his own viewpoint. St Paul and nobody else in the New Testament talks about the Christian experience of grace as justification; and even he does so only in polemical contexts where 'works' are being suggested as the ground for our standing before God. St Paul does not, however, unlike St John and St Peter, talk about the new birth. They do not talk about adoption. Each writer has a distinctiveness in his testimony to Jesus. It is not all the same. It does not all proceed from the same viewpoint. It is directed towards different constituencies and its form of expression is influenced by different external pressures. It is our job as Evangelicals to study the differentia of the sacred writers and put them together to gain a wider appreciation of the many-splendoured person of Christ. But to pretend that they are all saying the same thing is not to be Evangelical but to be insensitive.

This diversity does not apply only to forms of expression but to Christological understanding and to eschatology. The teaching on the last things is profoundly different in St John, for instance, from Paul in 1 Thessalonians, Chapter 4. The teaching on the Christian attitude to the state is very different in Revelation 13 from Romans 13. But there is a harmony and a complementarity in the New Testament witness taken together which is the more impressive the more you study it. The unity is none the less real for being diverse.

Ah, it is said, but it is when you come to try and apply New

Testament teaching to modern church life that the rub comes. Our world is so different from theirs; our problems so dissimilar. Their witness is so unsystematic, so partial, so fragmentary, so historically conditioned by the situation which evoked those pastoral letters which largely comprise the New Testament.

I do not think we need see this as a problem, rather as a challenge. What, in point of fact, are those New Testament writers doing as they write to persecuted Christians in the Apocalypse, doctrinally mistaken Christians in Colossians, enthusiastic Christians at Corinth? They are seeking to apply Christ to that situation. No more, no less. To believe that they were inspired in so doing does not relieve us of the responsibility of thought and study and initiative. It rather demands these qualities. We have to understand the principles they laid down and apply them imaginatively, lovingly and above all, Christocentrically, to the present situation. We shall often get it wrong. But at least we know where to return for direction and inspiration—to the New Testament itself. Sometimes we shall be at a loss to know whether a specific teaching of the New Testament was conditioned by the circumstances of the day or not. St Paul's teaching about women wearing hats in church is now seen, rightly or wrongly, by most Christians to have been historically conditioned by what was seemly at the time. But the principle for which Paul contended applies just as strongly as ever. A Christian woman in twentieth-century England should avoid any suggestion of impropriety just as carefully as her Corinthian sister was told to.

It may be that St Paul's teaching about women's ministry was also conditioned by the fact that at the time women did not occupy any position of leadership in mixed society among pagans or Jews, and therefore he did not want to bring discredit on the Christian cause by women teaching in public. It may be that his embargo is to be seen as divine truth for all time. This is something that must be hammered out by patient discussion and diligent study of all the available evidence. There is no one Evangelical party line on the matter which delivers us from the obligation of using our God-given reason and experience alongside the God-given Scriptures, themselves inspired by the God-given Spirit who indwells us. To have a conservative view of Scripture does not mean an easy life, as if one had only to go to the book and read off all the answers. It involves the difficult procedure of

seeking to apply the teaching of the book to daily life, utterly different as it is from the circumstances of those days when it was written. That is why the internal illumination of the Lord the Spirit along with the hermeneutical tradition of the people of God down the ages are so important in interpreting the Scriptures in our situation. The Holy Spirit's illumination is indispensable: he inspired it in the first place, and he can interpret it. Similarly, the history of interpretation by God's people down the ages is a helpful safeguard against my misinterpreting my bright ideas for the leading of the Spirit of God.

Perhaps, after all, 'problems' is the wrong heading for the second part of this chapter. For the most distinctive thing about the Evangelical in his approach to the Scriptures is that he does not simply go there for the problems that so engross most of his New Testament colleagues, problems which absorb attention to such an extent that whole areas of the New Testament are entirely neglected. He comes not for problems (though he will not shirk them when he finds them) but for food. It is here that he encounters Christ. It is here that he seeks the illumination of Christ upon matters of contemporary belief and behaviour. It is here that he tests his understanding of the good news and the Christian way by the touchstone of the original documents. It is thus that the Evangelical seeks to be *non solum reformatus sed semper reformandus*. And perhaps that is not so reprehensible an attitude for a Christian to take up.

4

THE OLD TESTAMENT

ALEC MOTYER

Nothing is easier than for defence to become defensiveness. If an extensive ideological perimeter is under attack, and the defenders (maybe not over-equipped for the task) are under necessity to rush hither and thither as one point after another is stormed, the temptation soon arises simply to ignore that any breach has been made, to substitute denial for reply, and presently to allow not only dialogue but also thought to cease.

Is this too exaggerated a picture of the Evangelical reaction to the onset and presently the triumphalism of the so-called 'higher criticism'? To recall from earlier days the encyclopedic minds and largely unanswered counterattacks of men like B. B. Warfield and James Orr is to see how our broad generalization has distorted the facts; but on the other hand to recall the large-scale retreat of Evangelicals from the field of intellectual combat into the more sheltered and in some ways more profitable paths of personal piety and monochrome fellowship, is to become aware that even such a broad generalization contains its quota of the truth. We need to acknowledge this without surprise and certainly without condemnation. Views of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament, for which there had never been any call to formulate a defence, were suddenly under assault. A whole world of learning came rapidly to espouse a view of Scripture radically different from the traditional orthodoxy of the Christian Church, and as the attack proliferated on point after point until nothing seemed sacred, defence deteriorated into defensiveness. For, after all, however one might be ready to admit that the headings in the Authorized Version were no part of sacred Scripture, yet they did enshrine what the Church had ever believed and which few devout minds had ever questioned. What

EVANGELICALS TODAY

13 Stock-taking essays

edited by

John C. King



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