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D. BROUGHTON

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KNOX

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SELECTED WORKS

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VOLUME I

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THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

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EDITED BY TONY PAYNE





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## ..... I. ABOUT THIS VOLUME .....

*D*. BROUGHTON KNOX WAS ONE OF the most important Christian thinkers of the 20th century. This may seem a startling claim on behalf of an obscure Australian theologian, largely unknown by most contemporary Australian Christians, let alone internationally.

Yet Broughton Knox was responsible, more than any other thinker, for the current vitality of Reformed evangelicalism in Sydney and beyond. His extraordinary grasp of Scripture and his talent for teaching theology shaped the minds and ministries of a generation of preachers; and these are in turn now leading a resurgent evangelical Christianity that is not only growing in Australia but is having a remarkable influence overseas.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that Broughton Knox's importance ought to be measured purely on the grounds of how many people he has influenced, or what has been achieved 'in his name'. This would no doubt have been considered an unacceptable criterion by Dr Knox himself. He would have wished to be measured by one rule only—whether his writings conformed to, and faithfully expounded, the truth of God, which is found in Scripture. Against this yardstick, as readers of this volume will discover, Broughton Knox was indeed a giant among us. His penetrating and original mind was forever casting new light on the Scriptures, and expressing with fresh clarity its unchanging truth.

The introductory pieces that follow tell something about Broughton Knox the man, and sketch the general contours of his thought. All that remains is for me to make a few remarks about the organization of this volume and those that will follow it (God willing).

Part I of this volume contains Dr Knox's most widely known work, *The Everlasting God*. This extraordinary treatise, which had fallen out of print, is reproduced here unabridged, including an appendix on

‘The implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for theology and for ordinary life’ that is not included in all previous editions of the work. The only change we have made (apart from minor editorial corrections) is to add extensive scriptural footnoting to take advantage of Dr Knox’s fondness for writing in sentences packed with biblical allusion. Readers can now chase through these allusions and quotations for further reflection.

Part II consists of a variety of theological writings on the doctrine of God under the general title ‘The Christian Worldview’. These writings have been chosen primarily for their individual qualities, but also because they demonstrate the breadth and range of Dr Knox’s thought, and the various contexts in which he taught and wrote. There are examples of sermons, theological papers, scholarly articles, book reviews, exegetical studies of particular passages or themes, and fragments from his personal papers. There are also a number of the pieces that were first delivered on Dr Knox’s regular radio broadcast, ‘The Protestant Faith’.

This volume is one to dip into and savour, rather than to read cover to cover; a nourishing meal to be enjoyed with pleasure over time, rather than a hamburger to be devoured immediately. Here are some suggestions for making the most of this volume:

- ▶ read *Part 1: The Everlasting God* (and its appendices) continuously as one work; this will provide an overview of Dr Knox’s thought; use the miscellaneous writings in Part 2 to pursue particular ideas further.
- ▶ while *The Everlasting God* is best read as a whole, the miscellaneous writings in Part 2 can be taken in any order; set yourself the goal of reading one a week (or one a month) with Bible open.
- ▶ use the index of Bible passages as a program for personal Bible study.
- ▶ use the collection of ‘Knox Gems’ (at the back) as a way into the contents of the volume; take an insight or subject that interests you, read the ‘gem’, and then read the article or chapter in which it is contained.

It is hoped that this current volume will be the first of three volumes of Dr Knox’s Selected Works. Later volumes will contain material focused on the Christian life, and on church and ministry.

In some ways, I imagine that putting the doctrine of God into one volume, and Christian living and fellowship into other volumes may

not have pleased Dr Knox. He was an integrative thinker, who saw the doctrine of God as being closely related to our personal and corporate lives, and vice versa. This is reflected in the material in this first volume. It is by no means dry theory. There are constant applications to how we should live, and how we should bring the gospel of Christ to a needy world.

I pray that this rich teaching would be as much food for your soul as it has been for mine.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks goes to the many people who have assisted in the production of this volume:

- ▶ to Peter Jensen and the staff at Moore Theological College, for access to their extensive collection of Broughton Knox's literary works, for encouragement to pursue the project, and for helpful guidance as to the selection and arrangement of material;
- ▶ to the *Reformed Theological Review* and *New Creation Publications* for their permission to reprint certain texts;
- ▶ to Paul Whiting for his extensive (and voluntary) labours in copy editing;
- ▶ to my colleagues Kirsty Birkett, Greg Clarke and Ian Carmichael for their contribution to the painstaking work of editing, proofing and compiling indexes;
- ▶ to Mrs Ailsa Knox, Broughton's widow, for her kindness and cooperation;
- ▶ and perhaps most of all to Denis Ryan, a good friend and colleague of DBK, who was instrumental in launching the 'Knox publishing project', and who has been both a tireless aid in locating and sifting through manuscripts, and a constant encouragement during the long process of publication.

To God be the glory.

*Tony Payne,*  
*Editorial Director, Matthias Media*

NOVEMBER, 2000

..... PART 1 .....

THE  
EVERLASTING  
GOD



## Chapter 1

# …… THE LIVING AND TRUE GOD<sup>1</sup>……

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IS OF THE utmost importance, for it controls the whole of life. As a person thinks about God, that is to say, as he thinks about ultimate reality, so his standards of behaviour, values and relations with other people are determined.

Everyone has a doctrine of God, even if it is only the negative doctrine that God does not exist. On such a view, the objectives and values of life and relationships with other people will be very different from what they are when ultimate reality is conceived as a personal God who will judge the world by his standards of right conduct, which are written in the human conscience. On the other hand, if a person's doctrine of God has the Christian dimension of self-sacrificing love, then behaviour and attitudes will again be different from what they would be without a belief in the existence of God. Everyone has a doctrine of God, that is, of ultimate reality, which will influence every aspect of life—the emotions, the decisions of the will, the hopes of the future and day-to-day behaviour. If the thinker is consistent, so that his

1. *The Everlasting God* was first delivered as the Moore College Lectures in 1979, and was first published in Australia by Lancer. It is Dr Knox's most well-known and widely appreciated literary work. It should be noted, however, that Dr Knox did not consider the structure or organization of *The Everlasting God* to be definitive or comprehensive. On being criticised at one point for not including more on the doctrine of the Spirit in *The Everlasting God*, Dr Knox responded: "I must emphasise that this book is a reprint of five lectures given to a lay audience. The five subjects chosen are subjects of importance, but I could not choose every subject of importance on the doctrine of God. But they were subjects which I believed needed emphasis in the context of my hearers. They were not the only subjects which needed emphasis, but a choice had to be made of five. The Spirit is God, and what is said of God is said of the Spirit."

actions correspond with his thoughts, then his doctrine of God will control his behaviour completely. But most of us are inconsistent, and this does not add to our happiness or enhance our effectiveness.

Since this doctrine is so influential, and a true doctrine consistently held and practised is a source of great benefit, it is a matter of great importance to investigate what may be known of the character and nature of God.

Deity is a concept congenial to the human mind. The existence of divine being is not an abstruse or difficult concept, like, for example, that of the infinitesimal calculus, which has to be struggled with before it can be apprehended; for even the simplest and youngest mind finds the notion of deity easy to accept and to understand. The idea of deity may be said to be innate, not in the sense that a child is born with the idea fully formed in his mind, but in the sense that the concept is readily understood and accepted by the child as soon as he is told about it. Strictly speaking, it is responsiveness to the concept of deity which is innate, though in actual fact there has been no child born into the world who has not early in his life learned from his elders of the concept of deity. For religion and belief in the divine are co-extensive with humanity. As far back into history as we can push our knowledge of the human race, religion is found, and among the nations and tribes that make up humanity at the present day, religion is a universal activity. So every child, early in his life, comes to hear of the concept of deity, and when he hears he understands it, and he has little problem in accepting it, if he learns it from one with whom he is in sympathy.

The ingredients that make up this universally held concept include personality and everlastingness, as well as knowledge, power and relatedness. The deities, as humanity conceives of them, are eternal, superhuman beings who influence our lives and who in turn may be influenced by a right approach to them. Belief in the existence of such a being or beings is found throughout humanity. There is no race known to history, or to archaeology, or to anthropology, who did not or who does not believe in deity. The concept is filled out in different ways, and apart from Christianity, Judaism and Islam, deity is always conceived of as a plurality of divine beings. Only in the sophisticated society of the ancient world or of modern times has the reality of deity been denied.

Although it obviously would be to the advantage of self-centred humanity that deity should not exist, the notion of deity is so natural

to the human mind that the acceptance of its non-existence can only be maintained by constant propaganda, and even this fails and the concept returns in one form or other. It would be strange indeed if this universal and tenacious concept of deity had no correspondence with reality. The alternative to the reality of deity is that people have made up the belief because their nature needs it. But this explanation contains within it a contradiction. For if people's nature is solely the creation of their environment, as the atheist affirms, how does it come about that the real environment has created in humans a need which can only be satisfied by something which does not exist—a need so real and basic that no human race has existed without its fulfilment in religious belief? The environment has not done this for any other form of life. How are we to believe then that it should do so simply for human life? It is self-contradictory to believe that ultimate reality, in this case for the atheist, material reality, has shaped humanity so that man is only truly man, only truly human, only truly related in a human way in societies, and only prospers, if he believes and devotes himself in worship to a nonentity, to something which is not there at all. If such were the case with regard to humanity, *homo sapiens* would be a sardonic misnomer.

#### PERSONAL DEITY SELF-REVELATIONAL

Although sophisticated thought is able to arrive at the concept of impersonal deity, and ultimately at the concept of the non-existence of deity, the universal view of deity, as received among the nations of the world from the time that history began, is that deity is personal. Now if this is true, it follows that men can have no knowledge of deity apart from deity's own volition. The gods have always been conceived of as persons, yet persons cannot be known unless they reveal themselves. To reveal themselves or not to do so remains within the will of persons.

Similarly, if the universally held view of humanity is true, if deity not only exists but is personal, the possibility follows that deity may reveal itself to humans. This possibility is inherent in personality. We ourselves, being persons, may take the initiative and reveal ourselves to whom we will; so, too, with personal deity, it may reveal itself to whom it will. But, of course, such events are unpredictable, just as our own

decision to speak to this one, but not to that one, is unpredictable. The matter rests entirely within ourselves. But once deity has acted to reveal itself, then the event passes into history. From that moment on, it is an historical event which cannot be eliminated with the passage of time. It is written in the ongoing pages of history. Now in the history that is written in the Scriptures it is affirmed that deity has addressed itself to humans in this way. For example, while Abraham was living with his relatives, idol-worshippers in Mesopotamia beyond the river Euphrates, God Almighty spoke to him, and commanded him to leave his home in Ur and his kinsmen, and to go out into a land which God would show him, and Abraham believed God and obeyed. In this way, through this word and response, Abraham, who up until then had been ignorant of God, began to know God. It is plain from the Old Testament narrative that God spoke with Abraham on many subsequent occasions. Abraham's personal relationship to God was so full that he was called the "friend of God".<sup>2</sup> Indeed this was God's own designation of Abraham: "Abraham my friend".<sup>3</sup> Friendship arises through personal conversation, personal association, one speaking to the other, the other responding, and vice versa. God took the initiative and spoke to Abraham, Abraham responded, and the friendship began which deepened over the years as Abraham came to know God more and more.

Another example from the history of the Old Testament of God's taking the initiative to make himself known was the incident of the burning bush in the desert of Sinai. Here God spoke to Moses, told Moses his name and something of his character, gave him directions how he should act and commissioned him to lead his people out of Egypt. Subsequent revelation of God to Moses was so complete and full that God himself said of Moses that he spoke to him face to face like a friend speaks to a friend.<sup>4</sup> A third example is at Mount Sinai where God addressed the children of Israel directly, giving them the Ten Commandments.<sup>5</sup>

2. James 2:23.

3. Isaiah 41:8.

4. Exodus 33 11; Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 34:10.

5. Exodus 19-20.

## PERSONS ARE SELF-AUTHENTICATING

We could multiply such illustrations, but it is sufficient to say that, when a person addresses another person, such action carries with it its own authentication. We know this from our own experience. So, too, when God addresses anyone, the person knows that he is being addressed. All necessity for proof of the existence of God falls away when you meet God. What is true on a human level when we meet with one another is all the more true when God, the Creator on whom we depend, wills to meet and speak with us his creatures and to establish personal relationships with us. Those to whom God speaks will have a firm and clear conviction of God's existence and of the fact that he is addressing them. God's words are self-authenticating to the hearts and minds of those whom he addresses. It could not be otherwise. When God spoke to Abraham, there could not be a moment's doubt in his mind that God was speaking to him, any more than there could be in Paul's mind any doubt that the Lord Jesus was addressing him on the Damascus road. So, too, with Moses and with all those to whom God speaks.

God's word authenticates itself, and must do so, because it is a personal word addressed to a person and heard by that person, for that is the purpose of God's speaking, and his purposes do not fail. Personal words addressed to us by someone else, when received as personal words, carry within themselves their self-authenticating character; that is to say, when we hear someone addressing us, we know the reality of the existence of that other person, and if we listen to him we become, by the act of listening, personally related to him. So, too, when God addresses people, God's existence is known by those who hear, with a conviction which all theories can never attain. The universal view of humanity drawn from their contemplation of creation, namely that deity exists, is proved to be true at the moment that God addresses us, as he addressed Abraham, as he addressed Moses and as he addresses all his children.

When the superhuman Person whom we know as God addresses any one of us, in that approach by God to us, in that word which he speaks to us, and which we receive because it is addressed to us by our Creator, we know God to be the true and living God. We know that he exists, we know that he has addressed us, we know that he is the living God, the true God, for only the living and true can speak. The gods

of the philosophers never come to life. We cannot relate ourselves to them because they do not address us. They are dead. They do not exist. The same is true of the gods of the idolaters, only more conspicuously so. As the psalmist says, “They have mouths but they do not speak”.<sup>6</sup> They do not address us; they are non-gods. But the God who addresses us is known in that action not only to be, but to be the living God and the true God, and we know that we are in his presence.

### GOD IS KNOWN IN HIS WORD

Humanity’s universal belief in deity, that is, in a superhuman person of everlasting character, of power and in a relationship with us, is confirmed as true in the only way that it can be confirmed—namely, by the deity approaching us and establishing a relationship with us through personal intercourse—that is to say, through his word, for words are the medium of personal relationship. God has spoken and in that address to us we know him—we know him to be existent, we know him to be living and we know him to be the only true God, because his Word carries conviction and he affirms that he alone is God. We know this to be true because, knowing him, we know his character that he is true.

God has not confined himself to speaking to Abraham and to Moses, but he has continued to speak to those whom he has chosen to address, and he has made known abundantly what his character is, through this ongoing relationship of person to person. In the same way as we learn the character of a friend as years go on and as our fellowship with our friend deepens, so, too, God has spoken to his people through the centuries in different ways. The most characteristic way by which God’s Word came in Old Testament times was through prophets; that is to say, through the men and women in whom God’s Spirit dwelt and whose words were controlled by the Spirit of God so that they were God’s words though also remaining the words of the prophet. The prophet prefaced what he had to say with the introductory phrase “Thus saith the Lord” and then went on directly to speak in the first

6. Psalm 135:16.

person singular in God's name. So the prophet was, as it were, God's mouthpiece, and those who heard the prophet heard God, and in hearing God's words learned of God's character. Now the Spirit of God was both giving the words through the prophet and confirming the words in the hearts of those to whom they were addressed.

The phenomenon of prophecy was not an occasional occurrence among the people of Israel but was characteristic of their relationship to God. God was present in the words of his prophets and the people were related to their divine Lord through his Word. As the Hebrew text so quaintly puts it, God rose up early and sent his prophets.<sup>7</sup> There was a succession of prophets right through Old Testament times who through their messages made clear the character of God and his will for men, and in this way gave to the hearers the opportunity of response through faith and obedience and so brought them into a personal relationship with the God who gave the Word.

The movement of the true and living God in revelation of himself to humanity was not confined to the prophets, but reached its apex in the incarnation of the Son of God himself. In Jesus of Nazareth God was present with us. Jesus was Emmanuel and his words were the words not of a prophet, but of the divine Creator himself. No longer does the divine message need the preface of "Thus saith the Lord", but Jesus speaks directly with the divine 'I': "I say unto you".<sup>8</sup> Christ's words were the words of God, and were received as such by those who believed him. In the words of Jesus and in the example of his life, God spoke to us, revealing his character and his will for us, and enlarged the possibilities of our relationship with him.

The revelation of God in Jesus was completed through the apostles and New Testament prophets. Jesus himself foretold that the Spirit of God, whom the Father would send at the Son's request on his ascension, would lead the apostles into the fullness of truth about those things which he himself could not yet teach them because of their immaturity. And so it came about. The Spirit of prophecy was conspicuously present among New Testament Christians.

7. As reflected in the KJV rendering of Jeremiah 7:13.

8. Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28.

## THE INSCRIPTURATED LIVING WORD

But there is a further point to add. God not only spoke directly to Abraham and to Moses, and to the children of Israel at Mt Sinai. He not only spoke through the prophets and once again directly in the Lord Jesus Christ, but he has spoken to us also, through the written Word of Scripture. We meet with him in his Word, which he addresses to us. The lifeless, the dead, the fictional gods of the nations do not speak. We may speak about them, theorize about them, mythologize about them. But the true and living God speaks, not only in the past but in the present also, for he has inscripturated his Word in the Bible. The Bible does not become out of date. It is the Word of God to the present-day reader, for what was spoken, for example, to Moses, was spoken by God not only to Moses, but also to us. Thus Jesus, quoting from Exodus, asked the Sadducees, "Have you not read that which was spoken to you by God?"<sup>9</sup> The writing may be ancient, but today's reader meets God in that Word, for God speaks to him in it and this was the divine intention from the time the Word was first spoken centuries before.

The Scripture is the true Word of God, as true a word as the word that Moses or Abraham heard or as Isaiah spoke in the name of the Lord, indeed as true a word of God as Jesus spoke (and expressed in his life) in Galilee. This is a great comfort. The words that Jesus spoke are no longer available for us to listen to with our outward ears, as the disciples did, nor can our eyes observe his character. Undoubtedly Jesus is pre-eminently the Word of God. Yet we can no longer observe his actions, and his words have ceased to echo in the Galilean hills. The words that Moses heard have similarly perished. But what we do have is the imperishable written Word, and our Lord and the apostles unite in affirming that this written Word is as prophetic a word as the word that was spoken for example by Isaiah, as true a divine word as that which was spoken by Jesus or his apostles, or uttered by God directly from heaven at Sinai or to Moses in the desert. As Paul put it, the written Word of Scripture is God-breathed, just as our words are breathed by us.<sup>10</sup> He called the Scriptures the oracles of God, that is, divine statements, spoken by God

9. Matthew 22:31.

10. 2 Timothy 3:16.

himself.<sup>11</sup> This is in fact the uniform testimony of all the New Testament writers. In this they were following the teaching of Jesus, who taught that what was said in the Scripture was spoken by God to us and that it could not be falsified.<sup>12</sup> It is essential for Christians not to deviate by a hairs-breadth from what Jesus taught about God, for he is the divine Son of God, and if he is wrong in what he believed and taught about God and God's relation to his creation, his words can carry no intrinsic authority in any other sphere of his teaching. Now with regard to Scripture, Jesus taught that this feature of creation is related to God in a way which makes the words in every respect God's words. It follows that the Scripture then, as the Word of God, is infallible, and without error in all that it affirms. The character of its divine author assures the reader of its truth and reliability. The reader knows *a priori* that it is true, that is, that it is infallible.

The Bible as the Word of God has the same characteristic as any human word, that is to say, it remains fully and truly the word of the speaker and expresses his mind, whether or not it is understood or even listened to. If it takes the form of a command, the Word of God is to be obeyed even though the hearer does not acknowledge its Author, and if the form of a promise, it is to be trusted even though it is not listened to. This is because it is the Word of God addressed to all those of whom he is the gracious Creator. But (and in this respect, too, it is just like any human word) the Bible as the Word of God does not establish a personal relationship with the speaker unless there is a glad response by the hearer. When it is heard in this way it authenticates itself to the hearer as being the word of the speaker, in the same way as any human word does.

Since it is the Word of God, Scripture is self-authenticating to those who receive it. It authenticates itself to the Christian heart. We hand it on as God's Word to those who come after us, just as we ourselves received it from those who went before us,<sup>13</sup> having for ourselves found it to be God's Word, in which God speaks to us, and through which we have fellowship with him.

This conviction may be tested for its reasonableness and its truth by

11. Romans 3:2.

12. Matthew 19:4, 5; 22:31; John 10:35.

13. 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:1-2.

other considerations. For example, our contemporaries, whose spirituality we know, lend their testimony to our own experience that the same spiritual experiences as ours are theirs through reading the Scriptures. Great saints, whose religious views are of the weightiest, have affirmed God's relationship to Scripture. Such are Paul and Peter. Jesus Christ himself testified that the Scripture received by his fellow Jews was indeed the Word of God. Furthermore, the perceived character of Scripture confirms its divine origin. The loftiness of its religious and ethical teaching, its consistency with itself throughout its pages, though composed over a period of a millennium, and the rationality of its world-view—all confirm the reasonableness of the conviction that the true God has spoken and speaks to us through the Bible.

God is in his Word. He is in it not only when the Bible is read, but also when it is truly preached, or witnessed to, or reflected on in the mind; we meet him in it, and so his Word brings both knowledge and fellowship.

## THE CHARACTER OF SCRIPTURE

The Word of God will have certain characteristics because of its authorship. Not only will it be infallible and inerrant in what it is saying to us, but it will be effective in its purposes, so that those to whom it is addressed will hear it and be able to understand it; that is to say, it will be perspicuous. These characteristics of God's Word spring from its Author. We are not able to say the same of our own words, which are fallible through our ignorance and sin. Moreover, our words may not be heard by those to whom we address them, and may not be understood, even when heard, because of our inability to express ourselves clearly. None of these things is true of the divine Word. It is effective; it accomplishes the purpose for which it is sent; it is heard by those to whom it is addressed. It authenticates itself as God's Word in the hearts of those who hear it. It is perspicuous and understandable and, of course, it is true, reliable, infallible, inerrant in what it is telling us.

This puts the Word of God into a classification quite distinct and different from all other words that we may hear. Peoples' words share all the defects of our sinful imperfect nature, but God's Word is alto-

gether different. It is perfect, whether spoken by God directly, or through prophets, or by the incarnate Son of God, or by the inspired writers of Scripture. For us, the only Word of God that we have is this last, the Holy Scripture. We are not in a position to leave our job to go out to listen to Jesus speaking on the hills of Galilee. We do not hear God addressing us directly from heaven as did those assembled in the church at the rock of Horeb,<sup>14</sup> nor are there prophets in our midst who are able to say with truth, "Thus saith the Lord". We do, however, have Holy Scripture which Peter himself said is more sure than even his own memory of the Galilean ministry of Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

### THE CANON

The giving by God of his Word in written form immediately brings into being the concept of the canon, because God's Word, with its perfections, is set in a category of writing quite distinct from all other writings. God's Word is normative for our life. It is authoritative over our conscience. The words of our fellow men are not so. God's Word is perfect; our writings are imperfect. The canon then is a very simple concept. It is putting into one classification or pigeon-hole those writings of which God is the Author, and putting into the other pigeon-hole all other writings which people have written—with a greater or lesser degree of truth—but which are not written by the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit to convey God's mind and Word to the reader, and are consequently not authoritative over the conscience.

The canon is a simple concept, although the exact extent of it may sometimes be a cause for investigation and reflection. But the simple concept of the canon is confused today in theological circles, and the reason is easy to find. Theologians have denied the unique character of the scriptural writings. The Scriptures are now widely regarded as merely the record of God's Word and not as themselves being God's direct and infallible Word. If Scripture is only another form of human writing and not primarily divine, the concept of the canon evaporates.

14. Deuteronomy 18:16.

15. 2 Peter 1:19, *cf.* Greek.

There are no longer two clearly distinct varieties of books that we may read—one of which God is the author, and the other of which men and women are the authors. But now all are included in the one category; all are only human writings, and this is what many modern theologians affirm. No wonder, then, that the concept of the canon is in confusion, for the word canon means a rule or measuring rod. It is the standard by which things are judged. Naturally in religious and moral matters, indeed in everything, God's Word, if we have it, is automatically the canon, and there is no other canon or standard of measurement which can compare to the Word of God. But if there is no clear Word of God, then there is no canon to rule thought, faith and conduct.

Given the view of Scripture held by many modern writers, there can be no such thing as canonicity; but this is not always realized. So all sorts of variations of the old and simple concept of the canon are held. For example, the idea of a canon within the canon has been aired, but how this can be is hard to understand. A writing is either canonical, that is to say, God's Word, and so of normative authority over life, or it is not canonical, being man's word, and however good and inspiring and helpful and true, cannot rule the conscience in the way that God's Word must. The phrase 'a canon within the canon' is used to assess canonicity by the quality of the message of a book. This is altogether too subjective and imposes our concepts on the Holy Spirit of prophecy. We cannot restrict the Holy Spirit to certain themes, as though we knew the whole mosaic of the revelation which the Spirit intends to give us. Prophecy is the only possible criterion for canonicity.

The view of the Bible current among many New Testament scholars and theologians is that it is not prophecy—that is, it is not God's Word written, but that it is a record of God's revelation, in particular, that it is a record of his revelation in Christ, who is supremely the Word of God. This modern view of the Bible suffers from many defects which render it untenable. It is contradictory to the views of Jesus himself. He regarded the written Word of Scripture as God's Word spoken in the past to the present readers. "Have you not read", he asked the Sadducees, "that which was spoken to you by God?". Secondly, it is contrary to the Nicene Creed, which states that the Holy Spirit spoke by the prophets—a reference to the prophetic writings of Scripture; so that the existence of a canon or body of authoritative prophetic writing is an article of the Christian faith.

## THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD

The statement of the creed is based on the testimony of Scripture itself and in particular on the testimony of Jesus Christ who regarded the Bible as God's infallible Word.<sup>16</sup> He had plainly studied it thoroughly before his ministry began. He quoted it in reply to the temptations of the devil and asserted that our life is to be based on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.<sup>17</sup> The whole of the written Scripture was regarded by Jesus as spoken by God. For example, in Matthew 19:5 Jesus quoted a comment of the writer of Genesis and attributed this comment to God himself. The writer to the Hebrews has the same view. In Hebrews 3:7 a verse from the Old Testament is introduced by the words "as the Holy Spirit says". The writer realized that though the verse was written by the psalmist, the real Author was God. Similarly in Acts 1:16, the quotation from the Bible is introduced by the phrase "the Scripture...which the Holy Ghost foretold by the mouth of David". (There are very similar words in Acts 4:25.) This is an interesting illustration of the two-sided truth that David wrote the words of the psalm naturally and freely, drawing on his experience, yet the true Author was the Holy Spirit who was infallibly directing those faculties which he himself had given to David.

There are many other illustrations of this New Testament attitude to Holy Scripture. Consequently the creed is right in affirming that the Holy Spirit spoke by the prophets and we should not circumscribe this reference to the prophets to mean simply those writers whom we call prophets, for it extends to the whole of prophetic Scripture, to 'every prophecy of Scripture', to use the phraseology of 2 Peter 1:20. The New Testament Scriptures are also included. Romans 16:26 is evidence of a body of New Testament prophetic Scripture received by the apostolic church. Paul explicitly stated that his own letters were prophetic Scripture and fully canonical.<sup>18</sup> He cited Luke's Gospel as Scripture,<sup>19</sup> and spoke generally of the revelation of the mystery of Christ, revealed through the apostles and New Testament prophets, among which he included his own writings.<sup>20</sup>

16. John 10:35.

17. Matthew 4:4.

18. 1 Corinthians 14:37.

19. 1 Timothy 5:18.

20. Ephesians 3:3-5.

All of Paul's Epistles are included in Holy Scripture in 2 Peter 3:16. Consequently, we ought not to restrict 2 Timothy 3:16—"All Scripture is inspired by God"—to the Old Testament, because at the time this was written there were New Testament Scriptures acknowledged and accepted in the Christian fellowship.

The existence of a canon of prophetic writings of Old and New Testament is an article of the Christian faith, taught clearly in the New Testament and affirmed Sunday by Sunday in the creed.

A third objection to the modern view, which regards the Bible not as God's Word written but only as a record of God's Word, is that it prevents the Bible from doing its proper work in convicting the conscience and so moving the will of the reader to obedience. God's Word rules the conscience, but a human record can never attain to this normative or canonical status. When the Bible is accepted as God's Word written, the preacher's task, though not easy, is simple in concept. He is to make clear to the eager listener what the Bible is teaching, and the conscience of the hearer gladly responds in obedience and faith to that Word of God clearly seen in the Bible through the preacher's exposition.

If, however, the Bible is primarily a human record of God's revelation in the past, it cannot evoke this spontaneous response in the regenerate heart of the listener. Human words must be assessed as to whether they are true and ought to be followed. For it is always possible that the record, if only human, is erroneous. Consequently, on the modern view that the Bible is a human record, the preacher's task has radically changed. Instead of expounding clearly the Word of God and enjoining it on the conscience of God's children to be trusted and obeyed, he is simply putting before his hearers ideas which they may treat as they like, according to their own judgement and assessment. In short, the preacher's distinctive ministry has disappeared if the Bible is not the Word of God. Could the reason why many clergy are uncertain about their role, and why they do not make public and private preaching and teaching their primary ministry, be that they doubt the infallibility of the Bible and so have lost their canon?

It is essential to hold firmly to the view of Jesus and the apostles that the written Scripture is God's Word, and therefore that we must believe it with joy, submit to it and obey it with alacrity and single-mindedness, so that its glorious promises set our standard of values and suffuse our life with hope.