

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Email: [Jrob1517@aol.com](mailto:Jrob1517@aol.com)

Website: [www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org)

Telephone: 423.743.0199

Fax: 423.743.2005

## Contemporary Religion *versus* the Gospel

Edited by John W. Robbins

### *The Charismatic Movement*

The modern Pentecostal movement is an offshoot of the American holiness movement. It made its appearance in this country in 1900. One of its leaders has called it "the greatest ecstatic movement in the history of the Christian church." It is distinguished by its overwhelming emphasis on an experience—often called the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This baptism is usually, if not always, identified by ecstatic speech, which Pentecostals call "the gift of tongues." This gift of tongues is regarded as the sign that one is baptized in the Holy Spirit. Before 1960 Pentecostalism was a movement outside the mainstream of the Protestant church. It was very sectarian, and most churches looked upon Pentecostalism as a divisive, offbeat type of religious fanaticism.

About 1960, Pentecostalism took a new turn. It began to jump denominational barriers. The ecstatic experience of speaking in tongues began to appear among Baptists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians—indeed there was hardly a Protestant church that escaped the Pentecostal invasion. This new interdenominational phase of Pentecostalism became known as neo-Pentecostalism, or the charismatic movement.

While the old ("classical") Pentecostalism was regarded as a divisive and sectarian movement, neo-Pentecostalism appears to be uniting and non-

sectarian. Demonstrating a new openness toward all branches of the church, the charismatic movement broke down all denominational barriers. The Pentecostal experience is available to people of different religious traditions, liberal and conservative.

When the charismatic movement was getting underway in the Los Angeles area in the early 1960's, an Assembly of God preacher remarked, "We used to be the leaders in experiencing the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but not since the Spirit has visited the great historic and Protestant churches. I know an Episcopalian priest in this city who is so liberal he neither believes in the virgin birth nor the resurrection. Yet he has recently received the baptism in the Spirit and exhibits a marvelous power in his ministry."

It makes no difference where one stands in the theological spectrum when it comes to participating in the Pentecostal experience. The "gift of the Spirit" is available regardless of denominational or doctrinal loyalty. The most recent "gift of the Spirit" is uncontrollable laughter.

### *Romanism*

Since 1969 the Roman Catholic Church has become openly charismatic. Pentecostalism appears to be the first factor for more than 400 years which is able to bridge the gulf between Romanism and Protestantism. Dr. Henry van Dusen and many

others have suggested that it has the potential of healing the wound of the sixteenth century. Pentecostals and Roman Catholics are ending their bitter religious rivalry in South America. And all over the world Protestant and Catholic Pentecostals are meeting together to sing, "We are one in the Spirit."

Rome has, since 1967, shown a real openness toward the charismatic movement. Thousands of her priests and nuns are embracing the charismatic experience. In June of 1970, more than 20,000 Roman Catholic Pentecostals gathered at Notre Dame University for the seventh Charismatic Renewal Conference. One of the featured speakers was a powerful prince of the Roman State-Church, Cardinal Suenens from Belgium. He came to give his enthusiastic approval to the charismatic movement within the Catholic Church. He said: "The charismatic renewal has extraordinary ecumenical implications . . . . Many important breakthroughs are happening in a wonderful way in the charismatic renewal. It will be a great impetus for Christian unity. Christians of different churches need to experience themselves as belonging to the same family, as being brothers, and that is happening in the charismatic renewal."

Speaking at the Presbyterian Charismatic Conference in March 1973, the Cardinal said: "Our unity has to be done quickly because the Holy Spirit is leading it, God is desiring it, and the world is in need, badly in need, of that visible unity . . . . I see the heads of the Christian churches coming together . . . . Let us come back home: home means the Upper Room, Pentecost." The Cardinal stood before the Presbyterians, holding the hands of two of their leaders (Jim Armstrong and Rodman Williams) and singing, "We are one in the Spirit."

Rome has become far more open toward "evangelicals." *The Catholic Digest*, July 1972, presented a feature article lauding Billy Graham. The Jesuit author wrote, "Billy Graham is orthodox. I have read nothing by him that is contrary to Catholic faith." In some places priests are being instructed to become familiar in the use of "evangelical" terminology like "getting saved" or being "born again." Roman Catholics join with neo-

evangelicals in cooperative efforts like Evangelicals and Catholics Together.

### *Neo-evangelicalism*

In the last few decades "neo-evangelicalism" has also emerged. Neo-evangelicalism began 50 years ago as an attempt to separate from the separatism of some fundamentalists. "Neo-evangelicals" (who are no more genuinely evangelical than the neo-orthodox are orthodox) felt a desire to enjoy fellowship with other "evangelicals" across denominational boundary lines.

In the past 25 years the neo-evangelical movement has shown an increasing openness and sympathy toward the charismatic movement and the Roman Catholic Church. If we may take *Christianity Today* as representative of the neo-evangelical movement, we may discern a real warming of the relationship between neo-evangelicals and Pentecostals. At first *Christianity Today* was decidedly negative toward Pentecostalism and Romanism. Then it became tolerant. Now it is very sympathetic to both. As long ago as 1972 *Christianity Today* said: "The force that appears to be making the greatest contribution to the current Christian revival around the globe is Pentecostalism . . . . A new era of the Spirit has begun . . . . An evangelical [*sic*] renaissance is becoming visible along the Christian highway from the frontier of the sects to the high places of the Roman Catholic Communion." In the September 6, 1973, issue, Clark H. Pinnock wrote: "The new Pentecostal movement seems to this observer to be a genuine movement of the Spirit of God renewing his church . . . . It thrills my soul to see multitudes of people allowing the Spirit to operate freely in their midst."

Neo-evangelicals are also embracing Romanism. There is a great deal of optimism about the changes which appear to be taking place in the Roman Catholic Church. Many are trying to heal the wound of the Reformation.

### *Liberalism or Modernism*

Influenced by developments in Germany in the nineteenth century, especially by the German

theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher and the later "higher critics," modernism or liberalism first appeared in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century and blossomed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States. Princeton Seminary Professor J. Gresham Machen wrote a book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, in an effort to stop the growth of liberalism in American churches. In his book, Machen argued, quite correctly, that Christianity and liberalism are two different religions: "the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology."

Among the cardinal doctrines of liberalism and modernism were a denial of the sufficiency and authority of the Bible, and an appeal to personal experience as the basis for one's religion. Machen put it this way: "It is not true at all, then, that modern liberalism is based upon the authority of Jesus.... The real authority for liberalism can only be 'the Christian consciousness' or 'Christian experience....' The only authority, then, can be individual experience.... Such an authority is obviously no authority at all, for individual experience is endlessly diverse, and when once truth is regarded only as that which works at any particular time, it ceases to be true."

For the Bible, liberalism substituted personal experience; for the understanding, emotion; for doctrine, personal stories. Machen summarized the difference between liberalism and Christianity in these words: "liberalism is totally different from Christianity, for the foundation is different. Christianity is founded upon the Bible. It bases upon the Bible both its thinking and its life. Liberalism on the other hand is founded upon the shifting emotions of sinful men."

## *Neo-Orthodoxy*

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a reaction against the scientism and anti-supernaturalism of liberalism began in Europe. One of the leading theologians of

the movement that came to be known as neo-orthodoxy was the Swiss pastor Karl Barth. Barth denounced the humanism and naturalism of liberalism and defended divine revelation and the supernaturalism of the Bible. But neo-orthodoxy was not what it at first appeared to be. Rather than returning to the old orthodoxy, the authority and sufficiency of the Bible, the neo-orthodox theologians added a new variety of religious subjectivism: the thought of the relatively unknown 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. They emphasized paradox, not understanding, and taught that one must have an encounter with Christ, not believe a creed. They reacted against the rationalism of liberalism with the irrationalism of Kierkegaard. God became Totally Other. Scripture became paradoxical. Faith became illogical. Logic—mere human logic—was suspect, if not abandoned altogether. The neo-orthodox too substituted religious experience for Scripture.

## *A Fivefold Union*

The charismatic movement is open to neo-evangelicals, Roman Catholics, liberals, and neo-orthodox. Romanism is open to charismatics, neo-evangelicals, liberals, and neo-orthodox. Not to be outdone, neo-evangelicalism is open to charismatics, Roman Catholics, neo-orthodox, and liberals. This apostate quintet is moving closer and closer together in a growing bond of sympathy. There is a theological reason for this. Each emphasizes *inner experience*. The uniting factor is that the message of each movement—Romanism, neo-evangelicalism, the charismatic movement, liberalism, and neo-orthodoxy—is *the centrality of religious experience*.

In the September 1972 *Christian Herald*, a Presbyterian woman testified to what it is like to speak in tongues. She wrote: "All the joys of my life were blended together in one ecstatic moment—all the fun of childhood, my first date, the moment when the man I wanted asked me to share life with him, the exultation of the finished sex longing . . . I had the sensation I was almost floating instead of walking."

Anyone who knows anything about the classical medieval doctrine of *gratia infusa* knows that the mystical inward experience of infused grace is the central concern of Roman Catholic piety. The charismatic emphasis has found great acceptance in the Roman Church because, as its theologians have recognized, Pentecostalism "is in profound harmony with the classical spiritual theology of the Church" (Edward O'Connor, *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church*, 183). Rome, which has rejected the Biblical doctrine of salvation by *imputed* righteousness, is very much at home where inward experience is the supreme emphasis.

Not to be outdone by either Protestant or Catholic Pentecostals, the neo-evangelical movement is hawking the gospel of marvelous inward experience. This is not a new thing in the neo-evangelical movement. For years revivalism has laid great stress on dramatic "heart" experience. Neo-evangelicals have generally had far more to say about the subjective experience of conversion than about the mighty acts of our salvation in Christ. Groups like Campus Crusade for Christ and InterVarsity make their focus the inward experience of receiving Christ into the heart, "the exciting discovery of the Spirit-filled life," the development of "the radiant Christian personality."

Basically, there is no great theological difference between Romanism, the charismatic movement, neo-evangelicalism, neo-orthodoxy, and liberalism. The message of each centers on the inward experience of the believer. This pursuit of a dramatic, satisfying experience is the burning passion of contemporary religion.

## *The New Testament*

By contrast, the apostles were men who turned the world upside down with the preaching of the historical Gospel, not by running around telling people about their exciting religious experiences.

Can you imagine the apostle Peter standing up on the day of Pentecost and declaring, "Friends, I want to tell you about the marvelous experience we had this morning when we were baptized in the Holy Spirit. I felt a great sensation of peace right down to

the balls of my feet . . ."? Can you imagine one of the Mary's adding her glowing testimony, "I want to tell you what a thrill it is to speak with tongues. All the joys of my life were blended together in one ecstatic moment—the fun of childhood, the excitement of my first date, the exultation of the finished sex longing . . ."? Ridiculous! Blasphemous! This plain fact stands out in Holy Writ: Genuinely Spirit-filled people were so preoccupied with the *message* of their crucified, risen, and ascended Lord that they made scarcely any reference to their own experience. Their experiences, of course, were genuine. But their experiences were not their message.

Luke is the New Testament writer who makes frequent references to people who were "filled with the Holy Spirit." When Zacharias was "filled with the Holy Ghost" (*Luke* 1:67), he opened his mouth and proclaimed God's redemptive works. When the praying disciples were "all filled with the Holy Ghost," Luke very pointedly adds, "and they spoke the Word of God with boldness . . . And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (*Acts* 4:31, 33). The Spirit causes them to preach the Gospel, not experience.

This pinpoints the vital difference between the Holy Spirit's illumination and religious mysticism. When the Spirit is poured out, something is *said*. There is an intelligible message. In mysticism something is *felt*. The one bears testimony to the objective message of God's redemptive activity in Christ on behalf of his people. The other bears testimony to some indescribably subjective happening and feeling.

## *The Nature of the Gospel*

We have said that the only focus of the apostles was the Gospel—the good news about Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The Gospel is historical and objective. When people believe the Gospel and become preoccupied with God's marvelous work for them in Jesus Christ, it certainly brings them a new experience. The Gospel radically changes them, regenerates, and sanctifies them. All this is the fruit of the Gospel. But it is not the Gospel, and they are not saved by these experiences. The

greatest treachery takes place when men take what should be the fruit of the Gospel and make it the Gospel. It is like using God's gift of grace to rob him of his glory. The New Testament order is the Gospel over experience. It is mortal heresy to place experience over the Gospel.

If the Gospel does not hold first place, it holds no place. Paul's greatest difficulty was with people and churches who were continually inclined to place the Gospel in a subordinate role to their own religious experiences. See it in the churches at Corinth, Galatia, and Colosse. What was the issue in Corinth? Some of the Corinthians were becoming so preoccupied with their spiritual gifts that they were forgetting the Gospel. So Paul had to write to them: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and wherein you stand; by which also you are saved, if you keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (*1 Corinthians 15:1-4*).

It is not so hard to reconstruct what was happening at Corinth, Galatia, and Colosse, seeing that the believers there faced temptations identical to ours. False teachers came among the believers, saying, "Paul brought you the Gospel. That is fine—just what is needed to start the Christian life. Now you must go on and rise higher. We bring to you the secret of the deeper life, the full Gospel and real secret of victorious living." This is *the* great heresy of the New Testament church and of the church in every subsequent century. It was the heresy of relegating the Gospel to something that has great significance at the time of Christian initiation, but after that believers are supposed to go on to higher things.

Luther had to contend with the same sort of mentality in his day. The enthusiasts were prepared to admit that Luther made a good start with the doctrine of justification through faith in God's work in Jesus Christ. But, like the charismatics today, they felt that the great Reformer was very deficient

in his doctrine of the Holy Spirit's work in human lives. Wishing to go beyond justification by grace, the enthusiasts cried, "The Spirit, the Spirit!" The center of their interest was God's work in the human heart, but tragically, like all those who make this the center of their message, they could not see anything higher than their own spiritual navels.

Luther understood the mentality of heresy when he described how people were constantly inclined to put the Gospel behind them: "One must not surely stay forever with the same matter, but continue and progress [say the sects]. Dear people, you have now heard the self-same stuff for so long a time; you must rise higher." When the Spirit-filled fanatics reproached Luther, he replied: "I slap your spirit on the snout."

### *The Relation of Gospel and Holy Spirit*

As church history has amply demonstrated, nothing threatens the supremacy of the Gospel as much as a preoccupation with experience. It is therefore urgent that we understand the true role of the Holy Spirit in human redemption. We must therefore address ourselves to this vital question: *What is the relationship between the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit's work today?*

The answer is clearly given in the words of our Lord to the apostles: "When he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself. But whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you" (*John 16:13-14*). As Christ came into this world to reveal the Father (*John 1:18; 14:9*), so the Holy Spirit comes to reveal the glory of Christ's work. Concerning God's work for us in Christ, the apostle Paul declares: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit . . . Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the

things that are freely given to us of God" (*1 Corinthians* 2:9, 10, 12).

No one could comprehend the significance of Christ's work without the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who comes to us (because of Christ's work) with fullness of divine power. Nothing less than Pentecost is needed to understand what Christ has done for us. This fact is clear from the New Testament record. It was not until Pentecost that the real significance of Christ dawned upon the disciples. It was Pentecost that gave to the disciples that illumination into Christ's person and work. Not until Pentecost did they fully realize that they had actually been living in the presence of the Lord of glory. By the gift of the Spirit they were lost in the awesome wonder of the Incarnation, and they could talk of nothing else.

We also need the Holy Spirit to understand what the disciples understood. Then we will know that the human mind can contemplate nothing greater than this:

God himself made a visit to this planet in the person of his Son. It was the Creator of Heaven and Earth who was borne in that donkey's feed box. It was the Lord of glory who was wrapped in those swaddling clothes. He who owned the cattle on a thousand hills had nowhere to lay his head. It was the Judge of all who was arrested at midnight by sinful men and arraigned before corrupt courts where he was abused, spat on, and bruised by sinful men. The Judge of all became the judged of all. The vile rabble judged him worthy of death—not a decent death, but the cruelest, most shameful kind of execution reserved for those regarded as the dregs of the Earth. Heaven numbered him with the transgressors. God laid our sins upon him and treated him as we deserve. Having borne our sins and suffered their consequences, having satisfied the justice of the Father, Christ rose from the dead, triumphed over death, and ascended into glory.

As we survey God's awesome act of atonement in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit gives us faith by hearing the message of Christ (*Romans* 10:17). As John Calvin said, "Faith is the principal work of the Holy Spirit." Christ became our man. He took our

human nature upon his divine nature. He was our representative. Just as we were united to Adam, our first head, and were really and legally in Adam when he sinned (and were made sinners by his act of disobedience—*Romans* 4:18-19), so we are united by faith to our head and representative, Jesus Christ. His righteousness legally and judicially became our righteousness. Our sin legally and judicially became his sin. He is punished; we are saved. The good news is not only that he lived, died and rose again for us, but that, as believers before God, we were represented by Christ when he lived, died, arose, and ascended to glory. By the grace of imputation and substitution, God's people lived a perfect life in Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago; our sinfulness was punished, slain, and buried in Joseph's tomb. And when Christ rose from the dead and ascended into glory, we legally rose in him and were made to sit down on the right hand of God's favor with him (*Ephesians* 2:5-6). In Christ, God purged us, perfected us, and took us to the throne of glory. The good news is that we have been washed clean in Jesus Christ and taken into perfect fellowship with God. The good news is not, "Be patient, God is not finished with me yet," but "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus;" it is the message that God is finished with us in Jesus Christ, for "you are complete in him" (*Colossians* 2:10). Christ is our righteousness.

The Spirit's chief work is to make us believe these truths. Christian faith is not faith in our experience—it is not faith in our new birth; it is not faith in our commitment and surrender; it is not faith in our faith. It is faith in Christ's person and work. When Paul reaches his glorious climax in presenting the Gospel to the Romans, he challenges tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present and things to come to condemn or separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Upon what was Paul's confidence based? On his Spirit-filled life? Does Paul encourage himself by thinking of his new birth, his baptism, his Spirit-filled ministry, or his great missionary experiences? No! "Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (*Romans* 8:34).

The foundation of the apostle's confidence is objective. It is based wholly on the historical Gospel.

## *Conclusion*

Contemporary religion lacks the New Testament evidence of the Holy Spirit's work. Instead of being preoccupied with Christ's person and work as were the apostles and Reformers, contemporary religious figures are preoccupied with religious experience. Instead of being based on the Bible alone, it is based on personal experience, on infused righteousness, on the gifts of the Spirit.

But wherever the Holy Spirit is poured out, there you will find men and women preoccupied with the objective Scriptures and the objective Gospel—Christ our Representative, Christ our Substitute, Christ the Surety of the better covenant, Christ our high-priestly Intercessor at the right hand of God, Christ guiding the affairs of human history toward the day of his coming in glory. Where God's people are thus preoccupied with Christ and the Bible, there and there alone is the evidence of the Holy Spirit.

*Extensively revised and adapted from Present Truth, a defunct magazine.*

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Email: [Jrob1517@aol.com](mailto:Jrob1517@aol.com)

Website: [www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org)

Telephone: 423.743.0199

Fax: 423.743.2005

## Dispensationalism

Gordon H. Clark

A few paragraphs above there was a reference to the "Covenant Theology" of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Though the aim here is to show that this theology is Biblical, as are the doctrines of the Trinity and two natures of Christ, yet in the history of Christendom none of these three doctrines were well understood for centuries after the apostles. Perhaps the credit of having discovered this doctrine [of the covenant] may be assigned to Zwingli. Calvin mentions the doctrine, but his emphasis is on other matters. Ursinus in Germany and a bit later Ussher in Ireland developed the idea. The Westminster Assembly gave it confessional status. In Holland, Cocceius popularized it—though he unfortunately added a few fanciful details. The Anabaptists denied the Covenant of Grace, as did some Baptists before John Gill; and naturally the Arminians, Wesleyans, and Methodists found no place for it. Its frequent mention in the Scripture, however, makes such denials or neglect a strange phenomenon among those who profess to accept the Bible.

More recently the opposite extreme of multiplying covenants or dispensations has given rise to Dispensationalism. The Scofield Bible enumerates seven dispensations. It defines *dispensation* in the subhead to *Genesis* 1:28: "A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect to obedience to some *specific* revelation of the will of God." In itself this definition is not particularly bad. Old Testament history describes several

occasions when God tested man by some *specific* revelation. This was true not only of Noah, Abraham, and Moses, but also of many others. There are several cases in Judges, such as the testing of Gideon by reducing his army as described in the seventh chapter. Then there is the case of Saul and Agag (*1 Samuel* 15:3, 8, 14); Saul failed the test, Gideon passed the test. Then too there is the case of David's numbering the people (*2 Samuel* 24:1, 10, 12). These, however, are not what Scofield means by dispensations, even though they are cases of God's testing men by a special revelation. Scofield enumerates seven dispensations. Even this, though somewhat fanciful, is nothing to cause great alarm. The description of the first dispensation in the footnote to *Genesis* 1:28 is quite good. The really serious error, the actually fatal error, of dispensationalism is the construing of these dispensations so as to provide, since the fall, two (or more) separate and distinct plans of salvation. Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote, "There are two widely different, standardized, divine provisions, whereby man, who is utterly fallen may come into the favor of God" (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 93, 1936, 410). On *1 John* 3:7, "he that doeth righteousness is righteous," the Scofield Bible's note is in part, "The righteous man under law became righteous by doing righteously; under grace he does righteously because he has been made righteous." Thus instead of a covenant of grace—extending from Adam, through Abraham, into Galatians, and on to the



culmination—dispensationalism has two methods of salvation.

For example, Scofield's footnote to *Romans 7:56* speaks of "two methods of divine dealing, one through the law, the other through the Holy Spirit." Now, Paul before his conversion may have had a wrong conception of the Mosaic law, but this does not mean that in reality the Holy Spirit was inoperative in the Old Testament. Similarly the footnote to *John 1:17*, "Grace ... is constantly set in contrast to law, under which God demands righteousness from man." But God still demands righteousness from man, though this righteousness is a gift from God. The righteousness by which an Old Testament saint was saved was also a divine gift. Therefore Scofield is quite wrong in the following footnote, which says, "As a dispensation grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ. The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation." But the dispensation of grace did not begin with the crucifixion. God began dispensing grace to Adam. Furthermore, legal obedience was not the condition of salvation in the Mosaic "dispensation." The condition was faith in a future sacrifice.

This radical deviation from the doctrine that salvation in all ages can be found in Christ alone results in another amazing distortion of the Old Testament. In his note on *Matthew 4:17*, Scofield says—and to ensure against the charge of misrepresentation by omission the note will be reproduced in its entirety: " 'At hand' is never a positive affirmation that the person or thing said to be 'at hand' will immediately appear, but only that no known or predicted event must intervene. When Christ appeared to the Jewish people, the next thing, in the order of revelation as it then stood, should have been the setting up of the Davidic Kingdom. In the knowledge of God, not yet disclosed, lay the rejection of the kingdom (and King), the long period of the mystery-form of the kingdom, the world-wide preaching of the cross, and the out calling of the Church. But this was as yet locked up in the secret counsels of God. (*Matthew 13:11, 17; Ephesians 3:3-10*)."

This footnote should be carefully examined to see how fatally heretical it is. Whether "at hand" actually means what Scofield says is unimportant. What is important is that Scofield takes it to mean that "no known or predicted event must intervene" before what is "at hand." Hence, when Jesus says that the Kingdom is at hand, Scofield concludes that the Old Testament has no prediction of anything that occurs between the moment of Jesus' preaching and his second advent to institute the millennium. This means that the Old Testament contains no prophecy concerning the Atonement. Incredible as this is for an interpretation of the Old Testament, Scofield puts this quite explicitly: "When Christ appeared to the Jewish people, the next thing in the order of revelation as it then stood [i.e. in the Old Testament prophecies] should have been the setting up of the Davidic Kingdom. In the knowledge of God, not yet disclosed [i.e. not prophesied in the Old Testament] lay the rejection of the kingdom (and King) [Scofield's parenthesis includes the crucifixion and resurrection]... This was as yet locked up in the secret counsels of God." This is an explicit denial that there is any prophecy in the Old Testament relating to the crucifixion. "The world-wide preaching of the cross" including the events of Pentecost, which Peter said was the fulfillment of a prophecy by Joel, was all locked up in God's secret counsel. Incredible!

Though it may not be spelled out so explicitly, the footnote to *Matthew 5:2* in effect says that sinners during the millennium will be saved, not by the blood, merits, and grace of Christ, but by their obedience to the beatitudes, which are "pure law." But this contradicts the universal proposition of *Acts 4:12*: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." The Scripture, quite the reverse of Dispensationalism, asserts that there is just one way of salvation. True enough, the divine plan in all its completeness, as Paul said in *Ephesians 3:5*, "was not made known unto the sons of men in other ages as it is now revealed to his apostles and prophets by the Spirit"; but Paul's fuller doctrinal explanation is precisely the same covenant that was less fully revealed in *Genesis 3:15*— "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it

shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

Though this is the fatal error that removes dispensationalism from the sphere of evangelical Christianity, there are also some minor infelicities, which, though overshadowed, need not be overlooked.

When it comes to Noah, the Scofield Bible professes to see only a covenant of civil government. Supposedly this divine test of man is limited to civil government. If it has any bearing on salvation, it would seem that heaven is to be achieved through governmental agencies. If it has no bearing on eternal life, the theory faces two difficulties. The first and more important point is that the whole transaction must envisage salvation from sin. The background is the wickedness of the human race as described in *Genesis 6*. God decided to destroy mankind because of its sins, but "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (*Genesis 6:8*). Here then is the Covenant of Grace. Noah was not to be punished and destroyed with the others, because "With thee will I establish my covenant" (*Genesis 6:18*). Naturally the immediate deliverance is from the flood; but as the flood is the punishment for sin, it is hard to exclude an anticipation of a final and complete deliverance. Explicitly in the following chapter, it says, "Thee have I seen righteous before me" (*Genesis 7:1*). The underlying motif therefore is sin and salvation, not merely a flood and escape from drowning. But if this be the case, one cannot suppose that Noah achieved heaven on the ground that he instituted civil government.

In the second place, it is hard to find any reference to civil government at all. Chapter 9 does indeed mention capital punishment; but this can be inflicted, and was inflicted, by the family of the murdered man. This supposition is strengthened by the word "brother" in *Genesis 9:5*. Civil government simply does not appear. Instead, if anyone wishes to exclude salvation from sin, the passage becomes simply a covenant or promise not to cause another worldwide flood. But though this is the immediate concern, such an interpretation discounts the cause and purpose of the flood.

It is on the Abrahamic covenant that Dispensationalism most obviously founders. A supposed antithesis between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic dispensation, plus the antithesis and mutual incompatibility between both and the New Testament covenant of grace, is a contradiction of both Testaments. Even in the so-called Mosaic dispensation, *Deuteronomy 1:8* and *4:31* briefly and partially, yet unmistakably, appeal to the covenant with Abraham. In an earlier passage, Moses prays for forgiveness on the basis of the promise to Abraham (*Exodus 32:13*). More clearly, *Leviticus 26:42* specifies the Abrahamic covenant as the basis for God's dealing with the Israelites after the Exodus. The unity of the covenant and its application during the time of David is expressed in *Psalms 105:8-10*: "He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant." Note that it is an everlasting covenant, one that did not cease at the Exodus.

But of course the clearest and most important passage is *Galatians 3:6-9,17*: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, for seeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So that they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham . . . And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect."

The first few verses of this quotation show that the elect in New Testament times are saved on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant and are counted as children of the patriarch. Further, these verses state that God's declaration to Abraham was in essence the very gospel that Paul preached. Not only so, but at the time of Abraham God explained to him that the covenant included the Gentiles. In the next place, Paul expressly affirms that the Mosaic

"dispensation" could not disannul the Abrahamic covenant that four hundred and thirty years earlier had been confirmed in Christ. *In Christ*, no less. The Mosaic ritual, Paul explains, was a temporary arrangement necessary because of the sins of the Israelites. It was to cease when the Messiah should come. Even during the Mosaic administration, the Abrahamic covenant was not disannulled, set aside, invalidated, or made of no effect. The Abrahamic covenant was operative all through the alleged dispensation of law. No one was ever saved by keeping the law. No one ever kept the law. Salvation, now, then, and always has been by grace through faith. Hence from the fall of Adam there has been one, just one continuing Covenant of Grace.

This unmasks another subsidiary though important instance in Scofield's footnote to *Matthew* 16:18: "Israel was a true church, but not in any sense the New Testament church—the only point of similarity being that both were 'called out' [ek-klesia], and by the same God. All else is contrast." But not all else is contrast. Israel and the New Testament Gentiles were not only as a matter of fact called out by the same God, but they were called out to the same salvation from sin. This salvation in both cases depended on faith in the same promises. To say otherwise, as Scofield does, is to imply that either David or Cornelius failed to arrive in Heaven.

## Book Review

*A Predestination Primer* by John H. Gerstner (Winona Lake, Indiana: Alpha Publications, 1979 [1960], 51 pages, \$1.95). Reviewed by Garrett P. Johnson.

Dr. Gerstner is professor of Church History and Government at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He is also a minister of the apostate United Presbyterian Church. One is not surprised, then, by the fact that Dr. Gerstner's *parvum opus* on predestination is a defense of free will and an attack on divine sovereignty. The book contains many errors that are commonly preached in "Reformed" churches and seminary classrooms today. For that

reason, a brief examination of these errors could be quite instructive.

In chapter one, Gerstner stipulates a distinction between the terms "foreordination" and "predestination." He writes, "Predestination is that part of foreordination which deals with the actions of free moral agents, be they angels, men, or devils" (6). In describing a falling, inanimate object, Gerstner says, "It therefore does not pertain to predestination but it is a part of foreordination, merely" (6). This seems to be a distinction foreign to Scripture. The King James uses both "foreordain" and "predestinate" when referring to persons. See, for example, *1 Peter* 1:20 and *Romans* 8:29. Moreover, each word translates a different Greek word. Therefore, Gerstner's stipulated usage does not reflect scriptural usage and should not be assumed to do so.

In this same chapter, a more serious problem occurs when Gerstner says, "reprobation is usually regarded as a permissive decree..." for "God predestinates the acts of sinful men by ordaining all the circumstances which lead to the sinner's choice of evil.... God in this instance refrains from positive action. He does not change the heart of the individual, ... but on the contrary leaves the individual to himself" (7). In confusion, he cites *John* 1:12, 13, and 14:6 to prove that election and reprobation are asymmetrical: God actively acts in election, but merely permits evil choices and acts resulting in reprobation. But none of the verses demonstrates a permissive, "negative" decree in God. The idea that God does not positively determine moral evil, but merely permits the sinner to act on his own is a very common teaching found in *The Writings of James Arminius* (Baker, 1977). Arminius wrote: "God is the permitter of sin, ... in that He leaves to the creature the free disposition of his own influence" (Book 3, 450). These statements are contradicted by numerous scripture verses: "The king's heart [*i.e.* mind] is in the hand of the Lord.... He turneth it whithersoever he will" (*Proverbs* 21:1). "The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord" (*Proverbs* 16:1); "He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtly with his servants" (*Psalms* 105:25); "And the Lord said to Moses ... I will harden [Pharaoh's]

heart, that he shall not let the people go" (*Exodus* 4:21); "There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, ... for it was of Jehovah to harden their hearts, to come against Israel in battle, that he might utterly destroy them" (*Joshua* 11:19, 20).

These verses, and many more, teach that the sinful acts of men are not the result of a "negative," permissive decree, but rather a positive, active decree in the will of God. Nevertheless, Gerstner claims God "does not change the heart of the individual, or enable or incline the individual to do the virtuous and saving act, but on the contrary leaves the individual to himself. This individual then inclines toward the evil and does the wicked deed which brings about his damnation" (7). By concluding thus, as though sinners acted independently of God, he denies the plain teaching of Scripture and is deserving of Calvin's rebuke. For Calvin wrote: "It is easy to conclude how foolish and frail is the support of divine justice afforded by the suggestion that evils come to be not by His will, but merely by His permission. Of course, so far as they are evils, which men perpetrate with their evil mind, ... I admit that they are not pleasing to God. But it is quite a frivolous refuge to say that God otiosely permits them, when Scripture shows Him not only willing but the author of them... Who does not tremble at these judgments with which God works in the hearts of even the wicked whatever He will, rewarding them none the less according to desert? Again it is quite clear from the evidence of Scripture that God works in the hearts of men to incline their wills just as He will, whether to good for His mercy's sake or to evil according to their merits, His judgment being sometimes open and sometimes concealed, but always just" (*Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, 176-177).

Chapters 2-5 of Gerstner's book, which together are only slightly longer than chapter 1, contain short discussions of total depravity, inability, the divine initiative, and predestination. These chapters are generally sound. However, in the sixth chapter on "Objections to Predestination," Gerstner displays his confusion once again. In bold defense of free will Gerstner claims that there is "one area [which]

is invulnerable and impervious to anybody and anything, namely, the sovereignty of our own will.... Not even Almighty God, once he has given me this faculty of choice, can make me, coerce me, force me to choose" (29). Perhaps *Daniel* 4:35 is an appropriate response to this humanistic declaration of independence: "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou?"

Gerstner objects when a person says that "predestination renders an act certain and makes it impossible that the actor will do otherwise" (30). Apparently Gerstner abhors the idea of "the actor" being incapable of resisting God's will. He says this "makes the actor a machine, taking away his freedom" (30). This statement illustrates the confusion in Gerstner's mind. The difference between men and machines is not some alleged—and unscriptural—freedom, but consciousness. Because the Bible denies the power of contrary choice to man, Gerstner believes that man becomes a machine. He never defines the term "machine." The missing definition is essential to the argument, and Gerstner expects the reader to provide it. His argument becomes increasingly invalid when he concludes, "If God forced the will it would no longer be a will" (29). Now when Jesus says, "No man can come to me except the Father .... draw him," is it not clear that a man must be forced by God against his dead, evil will to believe on Christ? In *John* 6:44, the word "draw," *elkuo*, literally means to *drag* or to *take* for oneself. Liddell and Scott inform us that it means "draw, drag, with collat. notion of force or exertion." God must actively drag unregenerate men whose minds are not subject to the law of God to choose Jesus. If Gerstner is displeased with this idea then his dispute is with the Holy Spirit, for he chose the word.

In the latter part of chapter six, Gerstner's infralapsarian and unscriptural notion of a permissive reprobation leads to even odder implications. He says, "if men are left to themselves they will perish while he [God] pleads with them to believe and be saved" (35). Here Gerstner confuses God's decretive will with his preceptive will. The

preceptive will or the Gospel *command* "to believe and be saved" he takes to be a secret desire of God's that what he has determined will never come to pass, will come to pass. Like Arminius, Gerstner simply imputes stupidity to God. His confusion can be seen in the following quotation: "It is a perfectly legitimate question to ask why God strives with men whom he knows and has predestinated should perish.... [We] wonder why God ...continues to work with [the reprobate] to persuade them to believe" (36). Gerstner bombards the reader with his paradoxes, and then concludes with a blatant falsehood: "[A]re we able to discover why God, who knows the futility of certain endeavors to convert certain persons, does proceed to make these endeavors which he knows are going to be futile ...? As we have said, it is only the wickedness of the human heart and not the decree of God which causes men to reject ... God and his gospel" (36-37). Paul eliminates this incredible confusion in one statement: "God ... causeth ... and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one [*i.e.* reprobate] we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other [*i.e.*, the elect] the savour of life unto life." Paul teaches that God has a two-fold purpose in the preaching of the Gospel, not one, as Gerstner apparently believes. One is to redeem the elect; the second is to condemn the reprobate, so that seeing, they might not see and hearing, they might not hear, lest they turn from their sins and be saved.

On page 39, Gerstner ends his discussion by recommending Loraine Boettner's *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1976). This is an excellent volume, although Boettner seems confused on the subject of God and evil. For a more consistent and scriptural treatment of predestination the reader should consult Gordon H. Clark's *Biblical Predestination* and *Predestination in the Old Testament*. These books should be read before reading Gerstner. The Gerstner "Primer" is valuable only for the student who desires an example of the confusion that inhabits the minds of some so-called Calvinists.

## The Horror File

"At the same time," Billy concedes, "I am far more tolerant of other kinds of Christians than I once was.... I've found that my beliefs are essentially the same as those of orthodox Roman Catholics, for instance. They believe in the Virgin Birth, and so do I. They believe in the blood atonement of the cross, and so do I. They believe in the Resurrection of Jesus and the coming judgment of God, and so do I. We only differ on some matters of later church tradition."

In the same article, Graham is quoted as saying: "I used to play God, but I can't do that any more. I used to believe that pagans in far-off countries were lost—were going to Hell—if they did not have the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached to them. I no longer believe that. I believe that there are other ways of recognizing the existence of God—through nature, for instance—and plenty of other opportunities, therefore, of saying 'yes' to God."

Graham issued a clarification following the publication of this interview in *McCall's*, and he repudiated the statements attributed to him concerning lost pagans, although, significantly enough, he did not claim he was misquoted. What he did say is this:

On the whole, I am pleased with the accuracy of the interview. However, a few of the statements unfortunately convey meanings which I never intended to suggest in the original, unedited interview. This may be due to my own failure to make myself as plain as I should have.... Whoever sees the footsteps of the Creator in nature can ask the God he does not fully know for help, and I believe God—in ways we may not fully understand—will give that person further light and bring him to a knowledge of the truth that is in Jesus Christ so he will be saved.

More significantly, however, Graham did not repudiate his views about Roman Catholicism. These views explain why he uses Roman Catholics as counselors in his evangelistic campaigns, why he

urged Catholics to reconfirm their confirmation at his 1979 rally in Milwaukee, why the Vatican would not oppose a Graham campaign in Rome, why he does not tell Catholic "converts" that they should leave their parish churches, and why there is now adequate evidence to question Billy Graham's belief of the truth. Paul curses anyone who perverts or preaches any other Gospel than that which Paul preached, and Christians ought to take such curses seriously.

*John W. Robbins*

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Email: [Jrob1517@aol.com](mailto:Jrob1517@aol.com)

Website: [www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org)

Telephone: 423.743.0199

Fax: 423.743.2005

## Marstonian Mysticism The Anti-Theology of Gorge W. Marston John W. Robbins

In 1960 a little book by an Orthodox Presbyterian minister appeared, entitled *The Voice of Authority*. The book was reprinted in 1978 by a California publishing house, and as a consequence, came to this writer's attention.

After having read the book two times (it is only 116 pages), I have been tempted to think that it was written by two different men, one man eminently sane, and the other more than slightly daffy. The proper conclusion, however, appears to be that it is a mishmash of confusion—a pinch of orthodox Christianity and a handful of neo-orthodoxy—and thus typical of much so-called Reformed theology in the twentieth century. Because it is typical of much contemporary "Reformed" theology, a closer look at this little book could be quite instructive.

### *A Little Orthodoxy*

Let us begin with the pinch of orthodox Christianity. Marston presents some excellent statements on exegetical method. On page 59 he writes:

Consider the unity of this Book. In reality, this is not a book but a library consisting of sixty-six books written by more than thirty different authors over a period of some fifteen hundred years. Three

different languages are found in the Bible. The racial and cultural backgrounds of the writers are marked by variety. These men wrote under varying circumstances. They had no opportunity to get together beforehand and map out the Book; to agree on policy; to adopt principles which would guide them in their writing. The unity of these books is most remarkable. The various writers are in absolute agreement. They do not contradict but supplement one another in their message. These books are so unified in their teaching that we think of them as one book. Where else could one find a library consisting of sixty-six volumes, written by thirty or more authorities in a given field, where all the writers are in absolute agreement? How can we account for the unity which we find in the Bible? Here is the answer. Behind the minds and pens of these writers was the mind of the Almighty God. The unity of the Book attests its divine authorship.

Marston follows this statement with another, equally excellent, on page 64:

There is a third rule to be observed. Scripture must be interpreted in the light of Scripture. This rule is based upon the

unity of the Book. It recognizes the Bible as the Word of God. It assumes that God is self-consistent, that what He says on a certain subject in one part of the Bible is bound to be in harmony with what He says elsewhere in this Book on the same subject... No one passage may be interpreted in a way which will bring it in conflict with the teaching of other passages in the Bible. Because the Bible is the Word of God, Scripture cannot contradict Scripture... Unless the interpretation given a certain passage is in harmony with the total teaching of the Bible, it cannot be correct.

Marston illustrates this principle for the reader by referring to *John* 3:17:

*John* 3:17 reads as follows, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved." Some would interpret this verse to teach that God intends to save all men. This interpretation, however, must be rejected because it conflicts with the teaching of such passages, for instance, as *John* 3:36, which contains the statement, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." The conflict between this interpretation and the words of Christ as contained in *Matthew* 25:46 is even more apparent.

Now all of this is excellent (except for the fact that *John* 3:17 and *John* 3:36 do not logically conflict: Perhaps, a universalist might argue, all will believe, and that contention would have to be refuted by other verses). The principles are merely restatements of orthodox Christian doctrine, the best statement of which was made by the Reformers. Note well, however, that these statements are buried in the middle of Marston's book. The first part of the book—and again the latter part—present the diametrically opposed view of the neo-orthodox theologians. Marston surrounds a kernel of truth with a massive husk of neo-orthodoxy, and makes

assent to the neo-orthodox views the test of one's salvation, rather than assent to the truth.

## *A Lot of New-orthodoxy*

Instead of teaching that the Biblical writers are in "absolute agreement"; that they "do not contradict but supplement one another"; that "what He [God] says on a certain subject in one part of the Bible is bound to be in harmony with what He says elsewhere in this Book on the same subject"; that "no one passage may be interpreted in a way which will bring it in conflict with the teaching of other passages in the Bible"; and that "Scripture cannot contradict Scripture," Marston declares that the Bible contains "mysteries" and "paradoxes" which are contradictions. These paradoxes are the exceptions (and they are major exceptions, containing the heart of the Christian faith, as we shall see) to the rule of the self-consistency of Scripture, for Marston writes:

True, as we have already seen, there are paradoxes in Holy Writ which contain truths that seem to be contradictory, but *aside from these*, unless the interpretation given a certain passage is in harmony with the total teaching of the Bible, it cannot be correct (page 65, emphasis added).

These two themes—the major, neo-orthodox theme of the paradoxical Scriptures, and the minor, orthodox theme of the harmony of Scripture—are antithetical and contradictory. Either the Scriptures are in "absolute agreement" or they contain truths which "cannot possibly be reconciled before the bar of human reason." Either "no one passage may be interpreted in a way which will bring it in conflict with the teaching of other passages in the Bible" or there are irreconcilable truths in the Bible. Either Scriptures "do not contradict but supplement one another" or they "seem to be contradictory." Either A or non-A. Not both A and non-A. Marston's position is logically absurd and Scripturally false.

What is worse, Marston makes this mysticism—this assertion of contradictories—the test of orthodoxy: "Those who cannot accept a paradox must reject the doctrine of the Trinity" (page 17). "If one refuses to



accept paradoxes he must, if logical, also reject the Lord Jesus Christ" (page 21). If that be so, Marston should state whether John Calvin was or was not a Christian, for it was Calvin who wrote that "no one can be more averse to paradox than I am, and in subtleties I find no delight at all" (Letter to Laelius Socinus, 1551).

Marston defines a paradox as follows:

A paradox is not, as Barth thinks, two truths which are actually contradictory. Truth is not irrational. Nor is a paradox two truths which are difficult to reconcile but can be reconciled before the bar of human reason. That is a seeming paradox. But when two truths, both taught unmistakably in the infallible Word of God, cannot possibly be reconciled before the bar of human reason, then you have a paradox.

There are several things to be noted about this definition. The first is that there is no difference between a contradiction and a paradox, despite Marston's unsupported assertion that there is. A paradox is "two truths ... [which] cannot possibly be reconciled before the bar of human reason." Is not a contradiction also two truths which cannot possibly be reconciled before the bar of human reason? Marston apparently believes that by using two words, he can create a difference. What is the difference? He does not say. (In correspondence with the writer, Marston states flatly, "A paradox consists of two statements which are contradictory." Letter dated May 10, 1979.)

The reason for making this distinction without a difference becomes clearer when the matter of Karl Barth comes up. Marston is anxious to differentiate between his position and Barth's, and his concern is amply justified, for the two positions are quite similar. Marston attempts to put some distance between his view of the Incarnation as paradoxical and Barth's view of the Incarnation as paradoxical. On pages 24 and 25 he spends a few paragraphs in this attempt, and concludes, "One nature cannot be both human and divine. This is a real contradiction." Marston is right, of course; it is a

real contradiction, and Marston recognizes it as such because it cannot be reconciled before the bar of human reason. The authors of the Creed of Chalcedon also recognized this view as a real contradiction. The important point is that Marston, using his stated principles of the paradoxical nature of Scripture and the necessity for curbing human logic, cannot assert that Barth's position is wrong. By undercutting Scripture and logic, Marston leaves himself no ground on which to stand. There is, we are forced to conclude, no difference between his paradoxes and Barth's. Both agree that the Bible is paradoxical, that human reason is impotent in reconciling at least some of the truths of Scripture, and that one's salvation depends upon one's accepting logical absurdities. They differ merely in which truths are paradoxical and which are not. Of course, Marston maintains that the truths are paradoxical (contradictory) only to finite minds. They are not contradictory to God, he says. The neo-orthodox would disagree, and, strangely enough, logic would be on their side; for if the only revelation we have is paradoxical, on what ground does Marston deny that God's mind, as well as finite minds, is confronted with irreconcilable truths? Has Marston had a special, non-paradoxical, revelation on this point? How does he know "truth is not irrational" if the major truths revealed to us are contradictory?

The Incarnation is not the only paradox Marston (or Barth, for that matter) finds in Scripture. Marston names a least five more: the Trinity, God's sovereignty and man's "free moral agency," the holiness of God and the origin of sin, unconditional election and the sincere offer of the Gospel, and limited atonement and a universal offer of salvation. A seventh, man's inability and accountability, he tells us, is believed to be a paradox by some, but he himself thinks that those two truths are reconcilable before the bar of human reason. Marston does not say whether his list of paradoxes is complete. Perhaps there are more; we are not told. In any case, Barth finds more, and so do some others, as Marston acknowledges. This is not a minor point, for if one's salvation—or at least one's orthodoxy—depends upon accepting paradoxes, we must have a complete list of the alleged paradoxes. Half measures will not do. Marston's entire argument is

that these paradoxes cannot be reconciled; that is, they are not his subjective difficulties in understanding the Bible: They are objectively there. If that be so, then a complete list is absolutely necessary if we are ever to be sure that we are not going to hell for our rationalistic and impious attempt to do the impossible: Reconcile irreconcilable truths.

There is also another point to be made, not any less serious: Marston, by asserting that there are paradoxes in Scripture, has opened the floodgates of irrationalism; for he has asserted that at least some of the Scriptures are irrational, that they cannot possibly be reconciled before the bar of human reason. Marston may personally object to some of Barth's paradoxes, but he has no *reason* to do so. The Scriptures are paradoxical, and human reason is not to be trusted, he says.

Some hypothetical theologian might assert that the two truths—(1) a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law, and (2) by works a man is justified and not by faith only—are both taught unmistakably in Scripture and cannot possibly be reconciled. He might, if he were a Marstonian, make the test of orthodoxy belief in this paradox. (Marston writes: "While the Bible teaches salvation by faith alone, it does not also teach salvation by faith and works. If it did, that would be a paradox." Letter dated May 10, 1979. The reader should understand that Marston apparently means "justification" rather than "salvation.") To answer our hypothetical theologian, Marston would have to appeal to the laws of logic, but how could he? He agrees with the hypothetical theologian that human reason is impotent when dealing with divine truth and that the Scriptures are paradoxical. Marston would have no answer to the hypothetical theologian, except to say that while Scripture is paradoxical, this is not one of the paradoxes. Yet if piety consists in one's willingness to curb logic, and if the precedent for paradoxes has already been established, would not Marston obviously be impious in denying this to be a paradox? By deliberately offending the laws of logic in one point, Marston has forfeited any right to criticize any other view as illogical or unscriptural. One

wonders where we would be today had Martin Luther or John Calvin been a Marstonian mystic.

### *Further Difficulties*

There are, moreover, still other serious problems with Marston's view. He holds that the paradoxes are really there; that they are not simply problems in his own mind. They are objective paradoxes, not subjective paradoxes. A subjective paradox is not a paradox at all, according to Marston, but a "seeming paradox." Those who believe that man's responsibility and man's inability constitute a paradox are wrong, he says. That would be an example of a seeming paradox. Yet if the paradoxes are objective, how many are there? This writer finds none of Marston's alleged paradoxes to be irreconcilable before the bar of human reason. That is not to say that the writer has absolutely no difficulty understanding some teachings of the Bible; it is to say that he does not know enough to state categorically as Marston does that some truths "cannot possibly be reconciled before the bar of human reason." This writer has not made all the logical deductions from Scripture that may possibly be made, as Marston apparently has. So this writer is in no position to make the sort of sweeping claims Marston makes. The claim this writer does make is that the list Marston presents is not a list of paradoxes in Scripture at all, but a list of the different ways Marston has misunderstood Scripture. He has projected his subjective misinterpretations of Scripture—misinterpretations arrived at by violating his own exegetical rule against interpreting passages so that they conflict with other passages—into the Scripture itself. This may be clear by comparing two statements from his book. On page 66 he writes:

If the seeker should find certain truths which do not seem to fit together, he simply sets them aside until he finds other truths which are necessary to bridge the gap. If the searcher should fail to find them, he may assume that the inadequacy is within himself.

This is an excellent statement of true Christian humility, but Marston himself disregards it. Rather

than "setting aside" the truths which do not seem to him to fit together, Marston makes assent to their alleged irreconcilability the test of orthodoxy. Rather than assuming that "the inadequacy is within himself," Marston asserts that it is Scripture and human logic that are inadequate. He recommends this statement for others, but fails to live by it himself. When he finds two truths that he cannot fit together properly, he does not say, "This doctrine (the Trinity), which lies at the very heart of the Christian faith, is one which I am presently unable to understand correctly; but I pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten my mind, cause me to see my error, and lead me into all truth." No. Instead he publishes a book with the following words: "This mystery, which lies at the very heart of the Christian faith is one which the finite mind cannot solve. The truth must be accepted by faith" (pages 17-18). Marston acknowledges no *personal* inadequacy at all (just the opposite, in fact). Rather than confessing his failure to understand Scripture correctly, he puts the blame on his environment: It is not his misunderstanding of the doctrine that causes the problem; it is that the doctrine cannot be understood by the finite mind. Note that Marston does not say, "George Marston's mind"; he says, "finite mind." George Marston, we must assume if we are to reach the conclusion he reaches and wants us to reach, does not err. The Scriptures really are paradoxical. What George Marston does not understand, cannot be understood by the "finite mind." Isn't the assumption clear? Marston's claim necessarily presupposes that George Marston is the most intelligent creature who ever was, is, or will be. Not merely the most intelligent human being, but the most intelligent *creature*, for he speaks of the "finite mind." What George Marston does not understand, cannot be understood by anyone except, possibly, God himself.

But Marston's conceit is not exhausted yet. He claims to have found paradoxes in Scripture—truths irreconcilable before the bar of human reason. These are *really* irreconcilable—not merely difficult to reconcile—and, as such, are irreconcilable in this life and in the life to come, since we will still be finite human beings with human reason then, too. The assertion of contradictions in the Bible once was a standard claim of unbelievers, and a common

objection to Christianity. Now, by the alchemy of the modern theologian, it is transformed into an argument for Christianity and even the mark of divine truth! Tertullian may never have said it, but Marston does, though not in so many words: "I believe because it is absurd." Marston's position is that of Soren Kierkegaard, father of existentialism and neo-orthodoxy:

Ready to completely discard the Bible, which appeared to him to be filled with the absurd, the contradictory and the paradoxical, Kierkegaard suddenly saw a solution. It is because God is timeless and spaceless, and man is in time and space, that the Bible presents so many problems. Man has no categories, no mental containers in which to receive ...eternal truth. There is a disjunction, a Chinese wall before God and man ("Neo-orthodoxy," *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*).

The trouble with orthodoxy, according to the neo-orthodox, is that it tries to dissolve these paradoxes into a rational, logically coherent system... The Bible ...is full of paradoxes. God is One and Three; Christ is God and Man; Man is *non posse non peccare*, yet free; faith is an act and a gift, and so on ("Neo-orthodoxy," *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*).

Marston, of course, does not say that there is a "Chinese wall" between God and man. He uses the words "qualitative difference." Nor does he explicitly fall into Van Til's error (at least not in this book) that God and man have no univocal knowledge. That error is completely destructive of Christianity, for it destroys the possibility of revelation. Nevertheless, Christians should realize that anyone, be he a professed believer or a raging infidel, who claims to have found irreconcilable truths in the Bible is the epitome of conceit. He is thereby claiming, whether he expressly makes such claims or not, (1) that he has understood the Scriptures correctly; (2) that he has made and examined all possible deductions from the propositions of the Bible; and (3) that there is no logical way to reconcile the paradoxical statements.

Unless he has done these things, he cannot truthfully say that there are irreconcilable truths in the Bible. Marston's claim assumes infallibility and omniscience: What Marston does not understand cannot possibly be understood.

### *Pious Arrogance*

This hubris, amazingly enough, is presented to the reader as pious humility. Somehow—the reader is asked to believe—it is humble and meek to say that there are irreconcilable truths in the Bible, that George Marston is the most intelligent creature ever made, that logic must be curbed, and that God cannot express himself coherently. Marston's claim must be recognized for what it actually is: an attack on revelation; on the unity, in errancy, and perspicuity of Scripture; and on the omnipotence of God. God is so hamstrung by Marston's "qualitative difference" that he is unable to reveal many truths to man in a coherent, non contradictory way. It is no wonder that Reformed churches are virtually impotent in the twentieth century. Their theology is neo-orthodox. They have no sure word from God. They have two words, one contradicting the other. They speak logical nonsense, and deservedly are ignored by the world. Until this anti-theology is repudiated, the impotence of the Reformed churches will continue.

Like Marston, many so-called Reformed writers have inferred a "qualitative difference between God and man which the telescope of the human mind is not qualified to penetrate. Can a dog understand his master?" (page 11). This Creator-creature epistemological gap is so wide that not even God can bridge it: "It is true that God has revealed certain things about Himself to man... The fact that man was made in the image of God, however, does not eliminate the qualitative distinction between the nature of God and the nature of man. God in His essence is beyond our understanding" (page 11). Marston finds more common ground with the existentialists, for he, William Barrett, Soren Kierkegaard, and Karl Barth affirm that "Religious truth ... Is concerned with matters which are basically above and beyond the reach of reason."

Had Marston taken the orthodox view, he would have made the point that the human mind cannot "search out" God (there are a number of verses stating this), and then he would have proceeded to emphasize the necessity for revelation if man is to know God. He does not do so. He is concerned to make an entirely different point: Not only is man unable to reach God, but God is unable to reach man in an intelligible fashion. At best, God reveals paradoxes when he speaks of himself and certain other major matters. God is so different from man that his word is unintelligible to men. The "qualitative difference" is a scrambler: God reveals himself, but the message is scrambled before it is communicated to men. This attack on God's omnipotence is an extremely serious matter, for as Marston himself notes,

Those who have rejected one or more of God's attributes have, in principle, rejected God. They may not realize what they have done. They may still call upon His name in prayer and seek to walk in outward conformity to His laws but in reality they have given to their own minds the place that belongs to God. These men have dared to sit in judgment upon God; to say what He can or cannot be, what He can or cannot do. The God who is thus rejected in principle, will in time be renounced in practice.

That is precisely what is happening in Reformed churches. The mystics, like Marston, say God *cannot* reveal himself coherently. They attack God's omnipotence. They have given their own minds the place that belongs to God, not in the professed service of logic and intelligibility, but in the service of paradoxes and irrationalism. They are guilty of the very sin which they claim to find in others. Yet they still call on his name in prayer and seek to walk in outward conformity to his laws.

The practical consequences of Marstonian mysticism are becoming clearer daily. First, there is the end of Christian theology. After all, if the heart of the Christian faith and other important doctrines are forever beyond human understanding, then theology is futile. Second, if we already have

theologians who have reached the zenith for finite minds, then what is the point of becoming a theologian? Third, if theology is futile, practice is all that is left, and the church concentrates on "practical" matters. The professing churches today eschew theology like the plague and run endless seminars on "practical" issues. Those few that do venture into theology teach anti-theology. What must soon follow is the rejection of Christianity altogether, for Christianity is a system of doctrine. Neo-orthodoxy is not Christianity, nor is Marstonian mysticism. They are anti-theologies.

### *The Perspicuity of Scripture*

There remains, however, one final question: What motivates men like George Marston to write books like *The Voice of Authority*? Only God knows for sure, but this writer would like to suggest one possible answer: a desire for power. It is the same motive that led to the denial of the priesthood of believers in the Dark Ages. The principal obstacle to the creation of the sort of power structure desired by some persons in the church is the perspicuity of Scripture. If a power structure is to be created, if an elite is to emerge, then the perspicuity of Scripture must be denied. That is what the Romanists did, and that is what Marston attempts to do. A perspicuous Scripture is the voice of authority, for Christians can appeal to it directly without the mediation of men; but those who wish to lord it over Christians find it necessary to fabricate arguments showing why the Scriptures are mysterious and need human interpreters, if only to list the paradoxes that one must accept on pain of being declared an impious rationalist. These human interpreters become the voice of authority, for without their guidance, it would not be possible to understand Scripture aright, *i.e.*, paradoxically. Without their help, one might actually fall into the error of thinking that the Bible makes sense.

We are forced to conclude that *The Voice of Authority* is not the logical, self-consistent God speaking in non contradictory Scripture, but George W. Marston speaking in paradoxes. It is his understanding of the Scripture that is infallible; it is he, who, with the assurance of omniscience, states that there are truths in the Bible that cannot be

reconciled by "the finite mind." The test of one's faith is not whether one assents to the coherent system of truth revealed in the Bible, but whether one accepts the notion of paradox. For those Christians who believe that God is not the author of confusion; that his revelation is non contradictory; and that the regenerate man, guided by the Logic that illumines him (see *John* 1), is capable of understanding and believing that revelation, Marston's attempt to obscure the truth with paradoxes must be totally rejected. We must take Paul's warning seriously: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." For, as John wrote: "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, so that we may know him who is true."

Once, not so long ago, Calvinists were often castigated by their opponents for being "too logical." They accepted the witless insults as compliments, and wore them as badges of honor. Now, in this century, some who call themselves Calvinists use the same absurd accusation (absurd because it is not possible to be too logical) against genuine Calvinists who maintain that the Bible is non contradictory. Like Balaam, they bless, attempting to curse. It is our hope that all who call themselves Calvinists will once again merit the blessings of men like Balaam.