

SPECIAL REVELATION

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Below are excerpts from an address on the Holy Scriptures recently delivered by Dr. MacRae before the Evangelical Presbyterian Training Association as part of a Series of Lectures on the Westminster Confession of Faith given monthly for Christian laymen in the Wilmington, West Chester, and Philadelphia areas. The address has been published in booklet form, including other sections on General Revelation, the Existence of God, the Canon of the Scripture, and the Apocrypha, and may be ordered from the Rev. W. Harold Mare, Faith Theological Seminary, 1303 Delaware Ave., Wilmington, Del., at 10 cents a copy, or \$1.00 a dozen. Excellent for distribution to congregations.

The statement about general revelation with which the Confession begins is introduced by the word "although." The fact that all men can see proof of God in nature is taken as a starting point, but it is stressed that this is not sufficient for salvation. Much more must be known. And it can be learned only through a special revelation from God Himself.

The Westminster Confession of Faith begins with the claim that we have such a revelation in the Bible. The Scripture is the foundation of our knowledge in the field of religion.

Enemies of Christianity often speak of us as Bible-worshippers. The term is utterly wrong: nobody actually worships the Bible. But it is almost impossible to overstate the importance of the Bible in religion, for it is our one and only means of learning religious things beyond the bare fundamentals which are displayed in nature. It is our means of access to the vital facts. It is the foundation of our knowledge. Without it we are blind in this field, because we have no access to its data.

Recently I played a mean trick on my little boy. Though he is less than a year old he has learned how to turn on the radio and make it start playing. Time after time he would hit it just right, but one day I played a mean trick on him. I pulled out the cord. He did this and that, twisting first one dial and then another. That is exactly the religious situation in the world today. People are twisting this dial and that, but they have lost the connection. If you don't have the connection you will get nowhere, and the connection is the Word of God. We have to have God's Word if we are to learn facts in the religious field. As the Confession says, general revelation is not "sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation."

So the section goes on, and says that "therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the

"TO COMMIT THE SAME WHOLLY UNTO WRITING"

The Confession says that God led the writers "to commit the same wholly unto writing." The word "wholly" requires examination. It does not mean that everything God ever revealed to the prophets was necessarily written in the Scripture. God led them to write such things as He desired to have preserved for the guidance of His people in future ages. It does mean that everything which God wished preserved as His revelation for His people was included in the Scripture. All the facts which God has revealed about that area of knowledge which is otherwise inaccessible to us are included in the Bible.

The Roman Catholic church claims to possess tradition passed on by word of mouth, just as vital as the revelation contained in the Bible itself. This claim the Westminster Confession denies, by using this word, "wholly." It leaves no room for tradition. According to the Westminster Confession, nothing that has come down by word of mouth has any standing in the Christian Church. . . .

The fourth section of the Confession says: "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, (who is truth itself,) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God."

You would almost think this had been written quite recently, wouldn't you? How timely it is! You would think the framers of the Confession had picked up our newspapers and seen big advertisements stating that the Bible is the creation of the Church — alleging that for three hundred years there was no Bible, but that the church had brought the Bible into existence. How flatly the Confession denies such unhistorical claims! The Bible's authority does not come from any church, nor does it rest on the word of any man. It derives its authority wholly from God.

This is a very important section. It is dealing with one of the most central problems of our religion.

The fifth section continues the theme of the fourth. It is a wonderfully balanced section. Three-fourths of it is devoted to assuring us that reasonable arguments are valid as evidence of the fact that the Bible is God's Word. The last fourth of the section assures us that complete certainty does not come from reason alone, but "from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts."

The fourth section declared that our acceptance of the Bible as God's Word does not depend upon the authority

The sixth section has three main thoughts. First, it stresses the completeness and sufficiency of the Bible for revelation of those religious truths which God desires us to know. Second, it states that "the inward illumination of the Spirit of God is necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word." Third, it points out that it is not to be expected that precise instructions for all acts of religion will be contained in the Bible. God expects His people to use the brains He has given them in working out satisfactory means of accomplishing desired ends, always keeping, of course, within the area of action circumscribed by "the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed."

The seventh section opposes the idea that simple people must abstain from seeking to interpret the Word of God themselves or that they must uncritically accept any view that learned men or church leaders claim to derive from it. Words of Scripture are clear enough that a simple Christian can judge as to the correctness of interpretations which may be presented. The necessary truths of salvation are so clearly stated "that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them."

I like the eighth section very much. It declares that the Bible in the original languages is the final authority in all controversies of religion. But it balances this by a declaration that people who do not know the original languages are also commanded to read and search the Scriptures, and that therefore the Scriptures "are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come."

It is to be feared that this declaration of the Westminster Confession is not sufficiently followed today. We have a wonderful translation of the Bible into the English language as it was spoken more than three hundred years ago. No one speaks it that way today. The King James Version is not in "the vulgar language" of our nation; it is in a dialect which is rapidly becoming unintelligible to our people. Word after word, phrase after phrase, expression after expression in it is meaningless to the unlearned people of our day. The Confession declares that it is the duty of the learned to study the Bible in the original, which is the only final court of appeal in all controversies. The unlearned are to search through it in a good translation in their common speech. It would be absurd to call the King James Version a translation into the common speech of America today.

It is the glory of the King James Version that it is the climax of a century of constant effort by many men to discover the best way to translate the Bible into the language of their day. Unless we make similar efforts to attain a