

LECTURE I

THE WORD

I

THE Shorter Catechism begins with the question: "What is the chief end of Man?" Suppose that we make a similar start with our study of the Church. Why is there a Church? What is its place in the divine plan and purpose? In reply we might affirm that the Christian Church is an institution which regards itself as an instrument in the hand of God for the expression and exposition and execution of His Will with particular reference to matters spiritual, and so for the establishment of His Kingdom; and it is this that we have in mind when we assert that the first business of the Church is the proclamation of the Word. Dr. Thomas Chalmers asked: "Who cares about any Church but as an instrument of Christian good?"¹ The *Westminster Confession* speaks of gifts of God to the Church "for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life." Professor James Bannerman of the Free Church wrote that "Scripture represents the one great object of the establishment of a Church in the world to be the glory of God in the salvation of sinners by means of the publication of the Gospel."² Such views may be supported from Eph. iii. 8-12, where St. Paul claims to have grace to proclaim the Gospel, and to lead men to the new order so that God's wisdom may be manifested through the Church, as God originally planned.³

"His name is called the Word of God": of this much is made in Scottish theology. It is as the Word that Christ does his work of Redemption, restoring faith, giving new life, shedding light upon divine truth, showing the path in which men should walk, making us members of his Body so that we have union with him: "*fide insiti in Christi corpus.*"⁴ The Word was made flesh and the second dispensation commenced.

There is naturally no forgetting that "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made." Some, however, have felt that Protestantism does not see the activity of God in its true proportions and lays too much emphasis upon the work of man's

salvation. Overemphasis there may very well be; perhaps a tendency to look at creation as an incident in the total redemption process rather than at redemption as an incident in the total creative process. But the pamphlet entitled *Catholicity*⁵ goes so far as to say that "failure to provide a theology of the created order has remained as a permanent characteristic of orthodox Protestantism." This generalisation and others are guarded by the remark that exceptions to them do not amount to disproof; but surely it depends entirely upon the nature of the exception cited. In this passage the evidence is confined to Luther, who is said to have neglected the doctrine of man as made in the image of God and to have isolated redemption from its true cosmic setting. Whether this is fair to Luther may be doubted; the charge is certainly not one that can be made without qualification against Protestantism as a whole, least of all against Calvin.

It is true that extreme evangelicals incline to isolate the spiritual from the natural, the elect from the worldly, and that Catholics or the Scottish Moderates seem more at home in the world and take sin more calmly. What would be a fissure to Thomas Aquinas is an abyss for Karl Barth, and if the Barthians were to be regarded as representative Protestants the criticism of the Anglo-Catholics might hold good. Nor would exaggerated conceptions of total depravity be difficult to find amongst more servile admirers of Geneva. But in Calvin himself and in a typical Presbyterian Church like the Church of Scotland, while emphasis is given to certain aspects because, owing to disastrous overemphasis in some other direction, there is urgent need for this particular correction, the one-sidedness is never complete, and there is in fact a remarkable balance, with a possibility of readjustment that is not so readily open either to the extreme institutionalist on the right or to the extreme disciples of the Spirit on the left.

It is therefore relevant to call attention to Calvin's⁶ explicit statement "that the divine image was not utterly annihilated and effaced" in man, and that this is the end of regeneration that Christ may "form us anew in the image of God." That these words represent major convictions is clear from similar statements in the Commentaries such as that in the *Commentary on St. James*: "Many excellent endowments, by which we excel the

brutes, still remain"; while other expressions revealing an associated line of thought may be exemplified by affirmations from the *Commentary on Isaiah*: "There is a seed of religion implanted in us by nature"; and from the *Institutio*: "A sense of deity is indelibly engraven on the human soul."

The Scots writer Hugh Binning⁷ fairly expresses Calvin's view when he says: "The light of knowledge was put out and the life of holiness extinguished, and now there remain nothing at all of that stately building but some ruins of common principles of reason and honesty engraven on all men's consciences, which may show unto us what the building hath been." John Weemse, writing in 1627 on *The Portraiture of the Image of God in Man*, notes that "it is true that there are some relics of the image of God left."⁸

It is less than just to depict all Protestants as so worried about the Fall as to overlook Creation. There would be something natural, though perhaps not quite in proportion, in making less fuss about "the day that we were born" than about some surprising mercy in the midst of our conscious experience; and the language that Calvin uses is frequently extreme so that in his enthusiasm for the glory of the new creation he does speak of the image of God as effaced by sin, for with him there is an intensity of over-powering conviction of sin for which no expression could be too dramatic.⁹ There is no slurring over evil as mere weakness; and this puts more reality into the word "re-creation." Indeed it is simply Augustine once again in contrast to Pelagius, and it is to be remembered that the Church as a whole has never committed itself to either of these, realising that grace and nature provide here one of those ultimate tensions which help to constitute our world: there can be over-emphasis in either direction. Nor is to stress the Atonement anything but to raise the Cross. And, of course, it is not the Fall of man, as F. D. Maurice imagined,¹⁰ to which special attention is called, but his Redemption.

Total depravity was evidently not understood by Calvinism in such a sense as would justify the suggestion of *Catholicity* that it must lead to a "retreat from history." This is confirmed by a study of Calvinism in practice. Both individuals and communities in the spheres of ethics, politics and economics show

religion in close touch with life. And even the Puritan who is so much afraid of the world forgets his Creator no more than the Catholic ascetic. The controversy between Barth and Brunner, Cullmann's analysis of "die Allherrschaft Christi und das Heilsgeschehen," the confusion that always remained in Augustine's mind as to the exact boundaries of *civitas dei* and *civitas terrena*, the constant historical conflicts between Church and State, all offer analogies to the problem of creation and redemption.

Calvin mentions that "long declamations" would be required if one sought to speak at all adequately of creation, and he takes space only to exclaim "how great must have been the artist."¹¹ He expresses pious delight in the works of God, and recognises the divine perfection in the sustaining of such a universe; and his theology of the created order may be summed up in his statement that "the Lord himself, by the very order of creation, has demonstrated that he created all things for the sake of man."¹² God is Creator and Lord of all, but we are in a special position as His sons. The doctrine of Redemption is therefore stressed, according to which Christ "restores us to true and perfect integrity."¹³ That is to say, we begin with what is most characteristic about God, His saving love, His original purpose to bless, evident in creation, and reaffirmed in such marvellous fashion in the Incarnation.

Bishop Kenneth Kirk in his *Vision of God*¹⁴ notes a paragraph in the *Institutio* where Calvin mentions "with some enthusiasm" the divine bounties in creation. It is indeed a fine passage; but Dr. Kirk thinks that it is too short compared with the space afterwards given to the dangers of abusing the gifts of God or what he calls Calvin's "rigoristic" view. But one might as well criticise the Sermon on the Mount for saying nothing friendly about Sinai and the Old Testament "blesseds": these were the recognised accepted attitudes which made the new emphasis necessary while remaining its complement. Calvin could take for granted the doctrine of creation: he had his special point upon which to expatiate, and he puts it in its "cosmic setting" by that remarkable half-page. He had the sense to keep to the religious at that moment in spiritual history, and not lose everything in cosmological speculation, and there was grave need to call for

repentance and to produce conviction of sin and to proclaim the promises. It suffices that the title of the First Book of the *Institutio* is *De cognitione dei creatoris*; but much else that bears upon the doctrine of creation has been effectively brought together out of Calvin's writings in Gunter Gloede's *Theologia naturalis bei Calvin* (1935), and recently by T. F. Torrance in his *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*.

The term "creator" is seldom applied to God in Scripture; but Scots theologians had it always in mind as evidence of combined power and beneficence, and this was of importance as the background of teaching with regard to redemption. There is emphasis upon the sovereignty of God, on common grace, on God as source of all, the principle of order in the world and in experience: "a cosmic setting" for further doctrine. Abraham Kuyper¹⁵ sought to express this by showing that Calvinism "has not only honoured man for the sake of his likeness to the divine image, but also the world as a divine creation, and has at once placed to the front the great principle that there is a particular grace that works salvation, and also a common grace by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse upon it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Him as Creator." George Hutcheson¹⁶ explains how St. John starts his Gospel deliberately on the lines of Genesis: "In the beginning"; and goes on to speak of the Word, and of Light and Life, as in the Creation story: he is setting out to deal with the new Creation. Hutcheson shows how Christ manifested himself to all men "by the light of nature, holding out some sparkles of light concerning a deity, and some principles of justice and moral virtue, and by the works of creation and providence": a system of natural theology. James Ferguson¹⁷ in his *Epistles of St. Paul* follows a similar line, and says that "though the grace of redemption be not of equal extent with the work of creation . . . yet God's equal interest in all by creation . . . none could justly stumble at God's saving the Gentiles as well as the Jews, seeing He had equal interest in both by creation"; Christ by his Godhead and his part in creation was specially in a position to reveal interest in men as his creatures, and to re-create them. In Thomas Boston's *Fourfold State*¹⁸ the first state is that of

Innocence, and the discussion is with regard to man made in the image of God, though admittedly the writer's aim in dilating upon conditions before the Fall is that "the ruins may the more affect us."

And might we not find a hint as to an adequate combination in Calvin's statement that God "continues to visit miserable sinners with unwearied kindness, till He subdues their depravity, and woos them back with more than a parent's fondness"?¹⁹ "Paterna" here brings together nature and grace, creation and redemption.

We may certainly say that if the Protestant "emphasis on Grace" is capable in extreme cases of having such results as those indicated in *Catholicity*, this does not hold of Protestantism generally or of the Church of Scotland in particular. At worst it provides an overemphasis complementary to that of *Catholicity* itself.

II

In the beginning of the first creation was the Word; and the second commenced when "the Word was made flesh." The report of his redeeming work and of his doctrinal and ethical guidance, as made under apostolic influence, has come down to us in the New Testament; and this, taken with its necessary background in the sacred literature of the Old Testament, was re-discovered at the Reformation period, and regarded as the very Word of God, the authoritative record of God's will in creation and providence and in redemption, and of His purpose with reference to the establishment of the Kingdom.

In Scotland it was felt that a primary function of the Church was to listen. "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." Calvin²⁰ in this connection several times notes Hab. ii. 1: "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me," and Isa. ii. 3: "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths." Such verses were held to emphasise the hearing of the Word in Church. The Word was what God had to say to community and individual through His Spirit-guided prophet directly or indirectly on the basis of Scripture. The Reformation rediscovery of the Bible amounted to a startling and dazzling

revelation. There is overwhelming proof of extreme ignorance of the Bible²¹ among the clergy of the old Church in Scotland, and when the book was opened up to the people at the Reformation there was uncovered so much that was new, different from what was expected, surprising both in depth and in simplicity, that men were naturally only able to make a very imperfect evaluation. When one stands for the first time before some famous picture, a glance may convince one as to the genius there manifested; but only after repeated visits could one feel that one knew the picture and had discovered the artist's secret. Even when one felt that one had grasped the conception and could identify oneself with the aim, problems of interpretation would rise in the mind, hesitations as to whether the painter was right in this or that, disillusionment perhaps as to his technique, but finally a deepened satisfaction and conviction and veneration. Similarly it must have been with men suddenly ushered into the library of Scripture and brought face to face with this picture of the Christ. If there was misapprehension, misdirected enthusiasm, idolatry, can one be surprised? It was suspicions as to such possibilities that had kept the Bible from the people, and the new daring certainly had its risks as well as its opportunities.

The Reformers were sadly lacking in facilities for studying both Bible and early Church history, and so failed to observe some of the plainest problems, and to see in true perspective what was before them. Turning from a Church which had sadly and culpably failed them, people sought a more immediate authority, and the Bible came to be regarded by many in the manner criticised by Hooker,²² or even that illustrated by a sermon of Voetius at Utrecht in 1634 which pronounced Scripture to be the authority on politics, economics, rhetoric, physics, arithmetic, music, metaphysics, medicine and much else.²³ John Knox was persuaded that the Bible declared the Word of God so plainly that only obstinacy could leave any one in doubt.²⁴ The Reformers were in no position to imagine the problems which became so pressing under nineteenth-century scientific criticism. They could only agree that such views as they propounded must submit to the Scripture test, and that their truest disciples would be such as were prepared to desert them for the Word, if choice had to be made.²⁵ Literalism

was general. It is a mistake, however, to regard this as of the essence of their faith. Calvin like all the others could only make use of the categories of his own time; but it should be noted that he was a much broader-minded person than the scholastic Calvinist of the second generation, and that too many people continue to assess him from a knowledge that is confined to the *Institutio*, and ignores the *Commentaries* and the *Sermons*. Though many of his followers through the centuries would come under John Robinson's censure that "they stick where he left them, a misery much to be lamented,"²⁶ this does not make such prosaic admirers the true representatives of his spirit; and one best honours him by calling attention to utterances which plainly reach out beyond the limitations which the times imposed.

Thus, on the one hand, Calvin and his Scottish adherents were severely limited and could not be expected to be precise as to the relation of Word and Scripture which has come to be commonplace with us. Their immediate reaction to the issue, had it been raised, would have been to identify these; they habitually used the expressions "Word of God" and "Scriptures" without distinction. Calvin²⁷ spoke in unqualified terms of the authority of the Scriptures, which should be "believed to have come from heaven as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them." The Bible he held to be perspicuous, sufficient and in all respects reliable. "Scripture bears upon the face of it as clear evidence of its truth, as white and black do of their colour." What was in the Bible he accepted; what was not in the Bible he thought might be left out of account: "all men," he said, "are infected with the disease of desiring to obtain useless knowledge."²⁸ He generalised particular commands, such as: "Thou shalt not add thereto," from Deut. xii. 32.²⁹ The unity of the Bible,³⁰ and the equal inspiration of all its parts, he assumed. The proof-text method was employed, corroborative verses being collected indiscriminately, so that in support of fasting he is ready to quote Esther and Acts, while elsewhere he establishes one point from Psalms and 1 Corinthians, and another from Genesis and Ephesians. Old Testament passages are described as "dictated by the Holy Spirit," while the writings of Apostles, who are "sure and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit," are regarded as "oracles of

God.”³¹ Beliefs and practices required warrant from the Bible: “nothing is safer than to banish all the boldness of human sense and adhere solely to what Scripture delivers.”³² Faith, he stated plainly, depends upon the Word; the Creator reveals Himself in His Works, but our eyes are dim and need spectacles: these the Bible supplies.³³ In one passage he goes so far as to say: “Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted which is necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught except what it is of advantage to know.”³⁴ The Bible for him had only one message, and the difference which he admits between the Old Testament and the New³⁵ is not in the revelation, but in the receivers of it to whom God adapted Himself so that we have in the one a material kingdom, the letter, types, fear, a national religion, but in the other heavenly felicity, reality and spirit, fulfilments, love, and a universal faith. The Old provides but a shadow of what is to come. At certain points, sometimes curiously selected, he does not doubt but that the Old is superseded: thus musical instruments³⁶ were allowable for Jews but on no account for Christians, while, however, heroes such as David³⁷ are accepted as examples as well as types. This is one side of the picture.

But Calvin’s practice frequently reveals an independence not restrained by the strict identification of Word and Scripture.³⁸ The thought of a man of his intellectual and spiritual vigour fitted awkwardly into the categories which he unconsciously assumed or consciously imposed upon himself as a child of his times. He lived before Wellhausen and Colenso and Robertson Smith, but he shows the same critical spirit as one sometimes finds in the Fathers; refers to the doubts of Eusebius regarding 2 Peter, and agrees with Western opinion that Hebrews was certainly not written by St. Paul; suggests that there must be interpolation in 1 John ii, but hesitates about accepting Jerome’s omission of 1 John v. 7. The Epistle of James troubles him as far as authorship is concerned, but he allows it a place in the canon because he sees “no just cause for rejecting it,” and nothing in it “unworthy of an Apostle of Christ.” He makes many ingenious attempts to meet difficulties arising from the inerrancy idea, but at times he goes far from his base, as when he declares that “the Apostles were not squeamish, for they paid

more attention to the matter than the words.”³⁹ He is not nervous about mistakes in the letter of Scripture, noting how Jeremiah is named for Zechariah, and how St. Paul’s quotation from Isa. lxiv. 4 is not in accord with the Hebrew text. Allegory, the unfailing refuge of the puzzled, had no attractions for him, for he considered it audacious, far-fetched and childish, believing that the literal meaning of Biblical statements ought to be taken seriously, and showing insight into, and concern for, what the author actually wished to say to those for whom he wrote at the time, displaying also honesty and common sense in discarding or accepting interpretations, and proving himself well aware of the importance of context in this connection. Though he believes that Scripture shines sufficiently by its own light, he keeps on bringing in reason to substantiate what it appears to teach, and he insists upon the responsibility of the individual to examine and study the Bible, and presses for education, not only of the clergy, but of the people.

III

All the Reformed Churches paid careful attention to education. Ignorance was one of the admitted abuses of that old system which they were seeking to replace. It seemed plain that the function of the Church to proclaim the Word demanded that its ministers be trained in languages and theology so as to understand it, and that the people be sufficiently enlightened to follow the exposition. There is involved here a special emphasis on Truth, and a high estimate of the place of knowledge in connection with religion. Such an attitude was natural in the Age of the Renaissance, for not only the Bible, but the mind of man, had been rediscovered. Knowledge had come to the sixteenth century as, under the influence of scientific advance, it came to the nineteenth; and something of the same arrogance characterised its use. Education was imagined to be the one thing needful. Writing had come to be supposed the pre-eminent means of self-expression, and interpretation by reason was immediately introduced, for words are nothing in themselves, but are of importance for what they convey. If words are the road to meaning, meaning is the justification of words. In Calvinistic circles the intellectual element tended to be over-prominent, and reason

very scornfully displaced the senses as the approach to the soul. Reading became a duty; print had begun its long masquerade as the herald of Truth. Calvin's *Institutio* opens by proclaiming that the two things necessary are knowledge of God and knowledge of man. Calvin himself indeed spoke of such knowledge as "the life of the soul" and his idea of Truth was that of the Gospel of St. John.⁴⁰ "Knowledge," he says, "is connected with Faith because we are certain and fully convinced of the Truth of God, not in the same manner as human sciences are apprehended, but when the Spirit seals it in our hearts." He is thinking of "the light of heavenly wisdom in which God manifests Himself to us that He may conform us to His image." And he is well aware that "natural reason will never direct men to Christ," and that "natural perspicacity is of no avail for understanding spiritual wisdom." We shall have to insist further upon this presently. But Calvin was a humanist, intellectual and erudite, and had the highest opinion of mind, mentioning its many noble faculties, "the swiftness with which the human mind glances from heaven to earth, scans the secrets of nature, and, after it has embraced all ages, with intellect and memory digests each in its proper order, and reads the future in the past," "intellect by which we are able to conceive of the invisible God and angels," "ideas of rectitude, justice and honesty."⁴¹ Sheer scientific knowledge was therefore in no danger of neglect, and at times came to be confused with something more spiritual so that theology might even be mistaken for religion. Scotland would with difficulty have recognised as a Christian one who was not "well seen" in the *Shorter Catechism*.

The pamphlet entitled *Catholicity* states that "Among large sections of orthodox Protestants, a dislike of rational thought, for fear of rationalism, has become traditional." It is true that some Protestants have, like Tertullian, developed a dread of learning, mostly, one would imagine, from outside. We can see this in the Faust legend, and George Fox may be taken as typical of enthusiasts for a simple gospel and a conviction that brains have nothing whatever to do with salvation. There were certain Scots in the Cromwellian period who preached "down doctrine, and up Christ,"⁴² and something of this disdain of culture and even of manners showed itself among Seceders of the eighteenth

century, partly perhaps by way of protest against the worldly life and secular libraries of the Moderates. Their works contain occasional warnings against "unsanctified learning" which was rightly bracketed with "mere morality," warnings very pertinent in this age of the atomic bomb; but Thomas Boston, though his own collection of literature was sadly restricted by sheer poverty, had the grace to commend outside reading so long as the student took care "to bring and consecrate the spoil to the service of the tabernacle."⁴³ But so far is it from being true of Calvinistic countries that they had developed a traditional dislike of rational thought, that the assertion might rather have been that "among large sections of orthodox Protestants" no such dislike was in evidence. Indeed, as already hinted, one of the defects of Calvinism, especially in the seventeenth century, was its intellectualism.

There was, of course, alarm about rationalism in Scotland. If a Scots preacher was not denouncing Bellarmine, he would probably be disposing of Descartes, Spinoza and particularly Hobbes. Later there was worry about Samuel Clarke; and the Scottish Church was highly elated when it came to be imagined that George Campbell had refuted Hume and that Beattie had vindicated Truth against Voltaire. But the situation was not different from that in England where, for example, "fear of Rationalism" had much to do with the Oxford Movement. "Rationalism," wrote Newman,⁴⁴ "is the great evil of the day. May not I consider my post at St. Mary's as a place of protest against it?" Looking ahead, he saw Catholic Truth and Rationalism as "contending powers" rushing upon each other in "stern encounter." If the learning of some Scots evangelicals consisted, as was alleged, "only in the study of some anti-Arminian metaphysics,"⁴⁵ there were always the moderates of whom A. P. Stanley makes so much in his impressionistic *Lectures on the History of the Church of Scotland*,⁴⁶ and whom Dr. Samuel Johnson so highly admired when he visited them in their Highland manses and took note of the Latin tomes in their libraries, or read their sermons with an eagerness qualified only by the regret that they were by Scotsmen.⁴⁷

The pre-theological education of all Scottish ministers included instruction in the classics, in logic, metaphysics, moral philosophy and history of philosophy, with such elementary

psychology, economics and political theory as were available and physics and astronomy as these were understood at the time. The training was to a considerable extent according to the method of disputation, which was useful as mental discipline and made for clearness of thought and expression, though it promoted an interest in victory rather than in truth. No one coming to the study of the Word after such an academic course would despise rational thought. He might not know what to do with it, but he would respect it. It is true that theology was scholastic, and rather an exposition of the Bible in the light of Calvin than an independent science. There was little originality of speculative thinking, and Scots quarrelled over ecclesiastical rather than over doctrinal points. The *Westminster Confession* was not seriously questioned within the Church before the time of John Macleod Campbell; but since then there has been much distinguished theological effort, and to-day "among large sections of orthodox Protestants" the "discipline of rational thinking" is in no danger of neglect. Once again *Catholicity* has made a rash and hasty generalisation.

Tolstoi has written that "not he is a prophet who receives the education and the culture of a prophet, but he who has the inner conviction that he is, must be, and cannot help but be, that and nothing else."⁴⁸ This is an extreme utterance with regard to the self-authenticated ministry, but it represents an opinion which was common in *English Separatism* in the seventeenth century and which has by no means vanished. That which is here set forth as the whole truth is, however, an important half-truth. A university training is not enough. That everyone should be able to read his Bible is not enough. This, of course, was in Calvin's mind, and if, possibly, Reformed Churches since his time have erred in judgment and shown exacting expectations as to the theological capacity of ordinary churchgoers, it must never be forgotten that the sermon upon which so much stress was laid was invariably embedded in religious worship, and was regarded as part of worship. At times in Scotland the accusation may have been justified that praise and prayer were popularly treated as mere preliminaries; but that was by no means the intention. The idea was rather that it is upon one's knees that one should study the Bible. It was after hallowing the name of

God and singing and praying oneself into His very presence in true humility and self-dedication that one might hope to hear His Word. The people are there seeking communion with God that He may reveal to them His will, and through His prophet give them according to their needs, that they may return to duty renourished, and enlightened and instructed, with new resolution and power. "What an effectual instrument of God's power," exclaimed Calvin, "the preaching of the Gospel is."⁴⁹ The Word of God to him meant "the clear image of His purpose,"⁵⁰ and the appointed means by which men could be turned from their evil way was by hearing God's word, conveyed to them by such as had stood in God's counsel. It was not just *didache*, but *kerugma*.

Calvin and his more spiritually-minded followers were well aware that useful knowledge does not constitute education, and perhaps later bibliolatry might have been avoided had men realised something of the difference between learning and wisdom, learning being capable of being imported, while wisdom is always a home product; if they had realised adequately that the Reformation was a spiritual movement, a turning from without to within; and if they had realised at all that the knowledge which they were being encouraged to seek had little resemblance to the assent to doctrine which satisfies Rome, and little connection with mere culture, but involved experience and meant convictions and decisions that affected the whole man, and were intimately related to imagination and will. Wordsworth⁵¹ speaks of

*"those sweet counsels between head and heart
Whence grew that genuine knowledge."*

That gives the idea; and Hugh Binning made it clear long before when he wrote: "If you would profit by the Scriptures you must bring both your understanding and your affections to them"; "Faith is not an empty assent to the Truth, but a receiving of it in love, and when the Truth is received in love, then it begins to work by love . . . if the soul within receive the seal and impression of the Truth of God, it will render the image of that same Truth in all its actions."⁵² A modern Scots theologian, Robert Flint,⁵³ similarly declares that for the apprehension of religious truths we

need "a veritable spiritual experience of their influence on our hearts and lives." Calvin notes also that humility is essential. He quotes Horace:

*"Nil mortalibus arduum est;
Coelum ipsum petimus stultitia"*

and insists that "Man, with all his acuteness, is as stupid for obtaining of himself a knowledge of the mysteries of God, as an ass is unqualified for understanding musical harmonies."⁵⁴ He thinks of God letting Himself down to the measure of our minds, or in response to our humility lifting us up to Himself and shewing Himself unto us.

True preaching⁵⁵ will thus never be only pleasantly edifying, or consist of "painful" communication and apprehension of information or argument or clevernesses, or convey the impression that Christianity amounts to certain conventional opinions, to something in our head. True preaching brings men into the real and effective presence of God. Actual sermons in particular cases may not achieve this, but does the performance of a rite invariably do so? True preaching will be the Word of the Lord spoken with authority; not just with sincerity, enthusiasm, intelligence and personality, though all these are necessary, but with authority. The essential Calvinistic sermon was drama; it involved learning, eloquence and wisdom, and appealed to the mind and to the emotions, but above all was directed to the will, and what it sought was not to talk about conversion but to achieve it, to accomplish nothing less than to generate the Will of God Almighty in the human soul. There is something here as real and practical and life-giving as anything which the devotees of sacraments can find in the Word made visible. This is the Word of which it is written: "It shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

IV

Fundamental in the Calvinistic attitude to Scripture, whether read or preached, is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶ Some standard of judgment was necessary, and the authority of the

Church had been largely set aside in sheer disgust; but everyone believed in the Holy Ghost, and so we find Calvin⁵⁷ writing: "Our conviction of the Truth of Scripture must be derived from a higher source than human conjecture, judgments or reasons, namely, the secret testimony of the Spirit"; "the only true faith is that which the Spirit of God seals in our hearts"; "then only does Scripture suffice to give a saving knowledge of God when its certainty is founded on the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit"; "the external Word is of no avail by itself, unless animated by the power of the Spirit." In this connection Dr. Thomas Chalmers pertinently quoted Isaiah: "Read this I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed."⁵⁸

It is by this route that Calvin approaches in practice to the modern view of the relationship and distinction of Word and Bible. This may be confirmed from a paragraph which he devotes to the term "sacrament," where he mentions the tree of life given to Adam and Eve as "an earnest of immortality," and the bow in the cloud given to Noah as pledge that no flood would again destroy the earth. "They had a mark engraven on them by the Word of God to be proofs and seals of His covenant. The tree was previously a tree, and the bow, a bow; but when they were inscribed with the Word of God, a new form was given to them: they began to be what they previously were not."⁵⁹ Similarly with the letter of Scripture. Calvin would never have agreed that everyone could find the Word in Scripture: the revelation is not for the casual reader, nor is it for the mere student. There must be the testimony of the Spirit. James Durham⁶⁰ says that the only souls capable of learning, or of joining in, the songs of Heaven, are the redeemed; and Thomas Boston reminds us that "the coals with which the priests were to burn incense in the temple, were to be taken from the altar of burnt offering."⁶¹

But how does one recognise the leading of the Spirit and his "enlightening and renewing influences"? Is there not a danger of subjectivism? Serious peril of this sort may certainly be encountered. The vagaries of private judgment have been responsible for a multitude of sects, a plague of ignorant and crazy opinions, the anarchy of the inner light, and supposed guidance. We so readily make God in our own image, or act—

*"like the irregular crab,
Which, though 't goes backward, thinks that it goes right
Because it goes its own way."*⁶²

Calvin himself did not escape all the time. He was sometimes overhasty in presuming that he had found Scripture support for doctrine or practice, his eagerness bringing him to make a number of surprisingly convenient discoveries. Thus in the matter of organisation one suspects that his conviction as to the clamant need for lay elders to overtake such work as that of the former bishops' courts, came to his aid in the interpretation of 1 Tim. v. 17.⁶³ But Calvin's experience of Anabaptist fantasy had warned him; and Robert Blair⁶⁴ in Scotland could write: "This accursed way of Revelation we leave to papists and other sectaries," the tradition of the Romanists producing similar unverifiable instructions claiming to be divine in origin. Said Calvin: "Numberless fallacies of the devil will meet us immediately, unless the Word holds us in strict obedience."⁶⁵ John Knox on his deathbed asked to have read to him a passage from St. John's Gospel in which he said that he had "first cast anchor";⁶⁶ unless we are so anchored in the Word, the wind that bloweth where it listeth may drive us very far from home, and wreck us in the end.

Calvin believed that he avoided such dangers by insisting that Word and Spirit must not on any account be separated. Romanist and other fundamentalists incline to take the Word without the Spirit, while the extremer Sects incline to take the Spirit without the Word. The balanced position is well stated by Professor Jean de Saussure of Lausanne: "*on se rappelle que seul l'Esprit certi-fie l'Écriture, nous rend certain de son caractère de Parole de Dieu, et que seule la Bible véri-fie nos inspirations, nous fait distinguer lesquelles sont vraies, authentiquement divines et lesquelles ne sont qu' imagination humaine ou même instigation satanique.*"⁶⁷ William Guthrie of Fenwick said: "The Spirit speaking in the Scripture is judge of all controversies."⁶⁸ The Word requires the Spirit to interpret it, spiritual insight; and the Spirit confines himself to interpreting the given Word, bringing out the real meaning and applying it.

That there is still some risk of subjectivism may be admitted.

We remember how St. Augustine had many difficulties with the letter of the Bible, and how the special service which was rendered to him by St. Ambrose was his introduction to the allegorical method of interpretation. The troublesome passage, it appeared, did not mean what a first glance had suggested: there was a spiritual significance which the initiated would recognise. Here was release. The method, as we know, was pursued with such zest that there arose the complaint of Theodore of Mopsuestia, that all that we can be sure of in the early Genesis story is that Adam was not Adam, the garden not a garden, and the serpent no serpent.⁶⁹ It may seem that, modern research having destroyed the identification of Word and Scripture, a similar escapism may intrude itself. Thus Barth's "event," his "perpendicularly from heaven," and similar expressions⁷⁰ might be regarded as so far from the boasted objectivity of the system as to be comparable with Coleridge's well-known "Whatever finds me, bears witness for itself that it has proceeded from a Holy Spirit,"⁷¹ a direction very different from what was intended.

The whole Barthian movement, admittedly much the most interesting theological development of our time, is a return to Authority from the hesitations and resulting helplessness of Humanism, and a characteristic note is struck by such expressions as these:⁷² "Not how we find a way to Him, but how He has sought and found the way to us"; "The Bible is God's Word so far as God lets it be His Word, so far as God speaks through it." So strongly is stress laid upon the activity of God that it is found necessary to indicate by way of qualification: "We are not here concerned to assert a passivity in man, which would set aside or even only limit his freedom." In practice, however, it is the subjective that triumphs. Indeed, Barth's situation might actually be compared with that of Mystics who spoke of the All of God and the Nothingness of Man, yet who in real life were as much the victims of their own fancies as any modern "grouper" under "guidance." In principle the appeal to authority would seem very much the same as that of Romanism; but the recent drift of the movement towards the left, the criticism of infant baptism, the approval given to congregationalist forms of government, the Kierkegaardian individualism in the attack on the multitudinous

Church, are plain proof that the ultimate authority is he who proclaims himself the Lord's prophet, and we have all the dangers of the religion of the Spirit, which Calvin so earnestly sought to counter by the effort to bind together inseparably Word and Spirit.

V

Calvin further sought to strengthen his case by bringing in the Church, and this is indeed necessary, for, as Principal George Galloway has written, "The witness of the Spirit divorced from the historic life of religion furnishes no stable basis of religious truth."⁷³ There are two sides to Calvin's teaching on Word and Church. On the one hand, he declared it a most pernicious error to let the Church decide as to Scripture values, an absurd fiction to assign to the Church the power of judging Scripture.⁷⁴ He could not but have agreed with Barth, and indeed it seems obvious, that "when we inquire about the true Church, and consider preaching, the sacraments and the ordinances of the Church, it is Jesus Christ Himself as the Word of God, who has to be the subject of our inquiry."⁷⁵ God made His revelation in Christ the Word, and to what was thus given to the Apostles and their circle, so far as they were enabled to grasp it, they proceeded to give their testimony, to bear witness before the world, proclaiming the Gospel. Their testimony was presently in large measure recorded in the books of the New Testament, and very opportunely, for history leaves no doubt but that otherwise it would have been corrupted beyond recognition. As Brunner⁷⁶ has put it: "We need the Bible because through this tradition alone we know and understand Christ." Scottish writers have said much the same, as for example John Dickie:⁷⁷ "The Bible is our primary literary source of religiously effective knowledge of God and Christ"; and W. P. Paterson:⁷⁸ "Scripture is our one authentic and trustworthy source for the knowledge of the revelation of God in Christ."

Such modern writers had, of course, no difficulty in comprehending that the Scriptures which thus preserve the apostolic testimony take the form of a human production which is not by any means free from misunderstandings and inadequacies and

that what is essential about them is the Word which they enshrine. It is the Word that we are seeking in and through the Bible, and we may be satisfied that the new methods, wisely employed, are capable of facilitating for us a measure of communion with Christ that was not possible before, an enriched communion that is the proper aim. Scots like William Robertson Smith, George Adam Smith and James Moffatt have contributed to this better understanding, and Calvin's doctrine of Word and Spirit is in line with these later developments, and his literalism, which was continually breaking down, can be set aside without wrecking his system or confusing his message. But the books of the Bible are the sole available test by which professedly Christian proclamations may be finally judged. The teaching of the Apostles and Prophets is the foundation of the Church, and is the reason for the Church, whose chief function is to proclaim the Word so witnessed. Dr. R. Newton Flew⁷⁹ writing of the apostolic witnesses describes their testimony as "the constitutive fact for the Christian *ecclesia*"; and in nineteenth-century Scotland James Bannerman⁸⁰ stated his conclusion that "The Church is the institute of God on earth to preserve His Truth," "the authoritative witness" to this Truth which finds its record in the Bible.

Calvin adopted the characteristic Protestant attitude towards the human opinions and human inventions which were believed to have been foisted upon Christianity in the medieval period. "We study to suppress superstition," said John Knox.⁸¹ The Reformers urged nothing more strongly than a return to apostolic simplicity and purity. The process is not so simple as they imagined; this is evident from the experience of sects which have made particular efforts in this direction. And while the first generations of Christians stand in a unique position as witnesses, it would be unhistorical literalism to overestimate the quality, and therefore the constraining authority, of the ideas and customs reported. Neither evidence nor likelihood suggests that they had any specially complete grasp of the Gospel message or understanding of the person of Christ or of his teaching or practical preferences. One might even consider whether the ordinary citizen in a nominally Christian country does not have something from Christianity that was not available to the early Church. Views, for example about slavery or the position of women,

which we regard as originally and scripturally Christian, would be strange to it. This does not detract from their authority as witnesses, but it shifts the weight from the letter to the interpretation, as in the case of the text. The Reformers, however, would not have dreamed of such criticism, and Calvin saw no difficulty in demanding that the Church be contented with the authority of Christ alone, and shed whatever could be classified as "the tradition of men," of which Scripture and not the Church was to be the judge. In the *Scots Confession* we read: "We affirm, therefore, that such as allege the Scripture to have no other authority but that which it has received from the Kirk, to be blasphemous against God, and injurious to the true Kirk, which always hears and obeys the voice of her own spouse and pastor; but takes not upon her to be mistress over the same."⁸² The attitude could not be better expressed than it was as early as 1528 in the *Ten Theses of Bern*: "The Holy Christian Church, whose only Head is Christ, was born of the Word of God, and abides therein, and hears not the voice of the stranger."⁸³

This brings us to the other side of Calvin's doctrine of the Word and the Church. The individualism of his scriptural emphasis is balanced by his equally characteristic and earnest community spirit. Community experience under the leading of the Holy Spirit he and his followers regarded as vital to a true appreciation of the Word and an absolutely essential check upon private judgment. He is clear that "to those to whom God is a Father, the Church must also be a Mother," that there is no other means of entering the Christian life, and no reconciliation to be hoped for, apart from the Body of Christ.⁸⁴ It is fatal to abandon the Church; through its instrumentality alone are we "born of God and brought up."⁸⁵ Only within the membership of the Church can one be a Christian.

Scots writers give expression to the same opinion. Thus Robert Rollock at the beginning of the seventeenth century wrote: "Look never to get grace except thou be conjoined in the Body. . . . A loon will scorn when he is cut off from the Body by excommunication: well, I say, go and ride where he will, he wants the spiritual life of Jesus, and shall not get it till he come to the Body again."⁸⁶ A little later Patrick Forbes was writing: "All true knowledge of Christ is in his Church."⁸⁷ And in the next

century Ebenezer Erskine, the leader of the First Secession, declared: "There is no promise in the Bible but it is made in the first instance to Christ as the Head, and in Him to the members of His mystical Body."⁸⁸ In more recent times Professor H. R. Mackintosh has been emphatic that in this connection the Church is indispensable.⁸⁹

Nor must we exaggerate the Calvinist demand for chapter and verse; it was not questioned that a certain authority to regulate and prescribe was proper to the Church, and there was probably no more than one sentence in Augustine's *De utilitate credendi* that caused perturbation. In external discipline and with respect to ceremonies, details were acknowledged to depend upon the times, and where it was not a case of something necessary for salvation circumstances were unquestioningly taken into consideration, and it was understood that the interest of the Church might require the abrogation of the old and the introduction of new forms, charity being in all such eventualities the guide. The *Westminster Confession* which begins with the article on Holy Scripture states this clearly. In the *Scots Confession* there is an interesting sentence which reads: "We dare not receive or admit any interpretation which repugns to any principal point of our faith."⁹⁰ This seems plainly to indicate an outside standard, and to mean very much "the spirit of the society interpreting the spirit in the books," thus allowing for some regulative Church tradition. At a later date in Scotland we notice that the truth of the Bible in the experience of keen Evangelicals was channelled through the Westminster documents, and this would appear to imply that the Bible was being used to confirm a traditional view, a procedure startlingly in harmony with the Catholic and Anglican idea, which Newman thought self-evident, that "the sacred text was never intended to teach doctrine, but only to prove it."⁹¹

It may be observed that interpretation, even when not thus guided by creed or confession, is often nevertheless directed. The whole of Scripture, for example, may be studied from the standpoint of the Gospels or of the Epistles, or even of one of the Epistles. As in the history of Apologetics one notices the standard of judgment shifting as the controlling assumptions of one era give place to others, a new philosophy dictating the new

attitude, so a certain amount of present-day Biblical scholarship might be challenged as unconsciously tendencious, predisposed to particular conclusions under the influence of some new interest. It makes a difference whether one opens the Bible as a Humanist or as a Barthian, whether one starts from Ephesians or from Romans. The application of an outside standard occurs surprisingly even among the unsophisticated, as in the case of one Scot who is said to have declared: "Then that's just where me and Paul differs," and another who, when his Puritan attention was called to the fact that David danced, responded: "Yes, and I think none the better of him for it." One might without hesitation say that everyone, including the strictest fundamentalist, in practice reads the Bible with a bias, looks at the letter with certain eyes, out of a particular experience, from a definite angle, and that this makes some kind of Tradition the ultimate standard of judgment, under the Spirit of God.

VI

It must, however, be observed that, if it is possible unduly to exalt the authority of the letter of Scripture, so it is easy to show exaggerated reverence for Tradition. Thus we are told that alongside of Scripture there was an oral Tradition handed down and always respected in the Church; and it is of course well-known that documentary evidence is seldom if ever complete and exhaustive, may be influenced by prejudice or misunderstanding or may be patient of very different interpretations. Oral tradition may in some instances be most important, and it must never escape the notice of the historian. On the other hand it is common knowledge that stories become distorted as they are passed on from one to another. The Apocryphal New Testament writings reveal most of the possibilities both good and bad. In an important sense the Bible has saved us from Tradition, and its dangers, as made evident to the Church by Gnosticism, helped to settle the Canon of Scripture, not, as has been suggested, by any *quod ab omnibus* test, but by what seemed then the simple historical test of apostolicity.

Popular use of the word "tradition" associates it with the unreliable: traditional and legendary are sometimes almost

identified and "mere tradition" we class with "idle rumour." The traditions of the past we treat in many cases as sanctions or fashions that are out of date and inapplicable, while we notice, for example in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Calvinism, what tradition can do to a living system, preserving indeed, but in a mummified condition. With regard to early Christian history, belief and practice, some things were not immediately recorded and must either have been handed down by word of mouth, or made their appearance later in the casual and unmarked manner that is so characteristic of life both individual and communal. The relation of the Sabbath and the Lord's Day is an interesting instance. But most people would readily acknowledge that a belief or custom of long standing has something more than literally "venerable" about it, and might acquiesce in Hort's delicate wording as to "the gracious pressure of some legitimate tradition or other authority, into the limits of whose jurisdiction they had seldom occasion to enquire."⁹² On the whole, however, one might venture to submit that not much that is vital to Christianity has been preserved as a mere matter of tradition.

But Tradition is further used to include changes admittedly made later on the basis of Scripture or Apostolic practice, or at least as compatible with these and in accord with their spirit. The Church had to adapt itself constantly to changed conditions, and naturally and inevitably and rightly introduced what were undoubtedly new and significant developments in doctrine, liturgy and government. Freedom to do so remains of vital importance for the Church. Adaptability and life are closely associated; unadaptability and death, likewise. Some of the innovations were associated with the antiquated method of the whole Church in reading Scripture, and indeed much of the tradition to which exception was taken at the Reformation was prepared to defend itself from verses in the Bible. It would be interesting to investigate precisely how much of present-day Church life and practice is strictly dependent upon the proof-text method of using the Bible and on similar attitudes which have been at least theoretically abandoned. Development and adaptation were essential; but the practice opened up possibilities of grave abuse, and one feature of Protestantism was its zeal in purging out an enormous quantity of ceremonial for which it

was unable to discover Biblical warrant, and much of which was due to the connection between symbolism and imagination which leads the ritualist to add symbol to symbol in the spirit of Tennyson's Ulysses. The corruption and superstition which were among the principal objectives in the Protestant attack seemed intimately connected with tradition, from bondage to which they struggled to free men's minds and consciences. It is not surprising that intense feeling carried some of them to violent extremes against "human inventions" or "traditions of men." Milton spoke with disgust of "a muddy pool of conformity and tradition."⁹³ Not without sorrow and severity had Jesus said: "In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." With the superfluous and the embroidered something genuine and helpful may very likely have been impulsively rejected; this must be confessed in respect of the Scots Reformation, but the supporters of Tradition had themselves to blame and an attitude such as that of modern Romanism proves that the suspicion and distaste were not without cause, for it co-ordinates in authority with that which is contained in Scripture, what the Church "either by a solemn judgment or in virtue of her position as universal teacher, proposes for belief, as having been divinely revealed." Here Tradition, and so the Church, looms large in the picture, while the Bible lies on a little side-table. In opposition to the elevation of Tradition to no less authority than is assigned to the Law and the Prophets Calvin had asked: "What, then, will it be permitted to disapprove? for there is no gross old wife's dream which this pretext will not enable them to defend; nay, there is no superstition, however monstrous, in front of which they may not place it like a shield of Ajax."⁹⁴

In connection with Tradition, much was naturally said about the Fathers of the Church, and there were Protestants sufficiently ignorant of these to fancy that anyone familiar with their writings "smelled of Popery."⁹⁵ Calvin, however, was well read in the Fathers, and reference to them is plentiful in Scots theology of the seventeenth century, though less in the eighteenth, when English and Continental works had greatly multiplied and become available. Of James Durham it was said that "he was so familiarly acquainted with the Fathers as if he himself had been one of

them."⁹⁶ John Knox thanked God for the Fathers, and was prepared to accept what they proponed in conformity with Scripture,⁹⁷ and his son-in-law, John Welch, in answer to a Romanist challenge on the point, affirmed that he received gladly the writings of the Fathers, but declined to class them with Scripture.⁹⁸ John Forbes of Corse studied the Fathers with the utmost diligence, and pointed out how much support their works provided for the main Protestant positions.⁹⁹ Calvin pronounced it a calumny to represent Protestants as opposed to the Fathers. Their writings contained gold and dross, and in studying them Protestants endeavoured to remember "that all things are ours to serve, not lord it over us, but that we are Christ's only."¹⁰⁰

Most Protestants to-day would heartily admit that for the saving apprehension of the Word of God, Tradition, in a wide sense, neither merely legalistic nor merely evolutionary, is important. It is manifest that the Bible in whole and in part must be seen in proper context, that the information transmitted by Scripture cannot be fully grasped until scholarship of many types, and human religious experience, have examined it. To know Homer we must know something about ancient Greece: it is this elementary principle that must be applied in all seriousness to the Bible and that is, of course, now being faithfully and reverently applied. We suffer still from the ignorance and timidity revealed by scholars during the long period from the days of the early Church until comparatively recent times, whose lack of critical method turned both Old and New Testaments into collections of private revelations in code, and of thousands of isolated verses, each with a magical text-value. Want of acquaintance with the cultural context made true understanding utterly impossible. Nothing, perhaps, makes this more obvious than the weird library of seventeenth-century books on the Song of Solomon and the Book of Revelation. At the same time there has been a tendency to stress the all-sufficiency of the Bible, and to ignore all that people have thought about it in the course of many centuries of piety and scholarship, to forget the Middle ages! Karl Barth justly attacks this Biblicism in his *Credo*. It should further be recognised that not only linguistic and historical studies are required, but also comparative religion,

psychology and much else from the side of scholarship; and further that mere erudition does not give us the Gospel, and in the end it can only be in the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and as a result of the Church's vast experience, that the message can be fully appreciated, and the Word discovered in Scripture. Thus and thus alone will the Bible yield what the Apostolic testimony is meant to convey, that for which the Church listens, that which it is commissioned to proclaim.

The Word of the Lord is contained in the Bible, and may be found as we read its sacred pages in the light of the Church's past, by the aid of the Holy Spirit. This Word is necessary for salvation. It is needed by the world of to-day, by professing Christians who desire to be directed into the path of immediate duty in face of the problems that particularly concern them; by the indifferent and careless and hostile outside, who seem in these times to constitute the mass of our fellows, but whom the Church is under obligation to seek and to save; and by the regions beyond, where non-Christian and anti-Christian thought and custom prevail, and where the Younger Churches require to be strengthened for their future great missionary work.

This Word of the Lord in general is just the same as it has always been, and that is why we hold so firmly to the apostolic testimony recorded in the Bible. But the Word of the Lord in particular is new every moment, according to our need, which is why we constantly wait upon the Holy Spirit to lead us. The "once for all" and the "now" are here combined; "things old and new"; eternity and history. And in order to be effective the Word has not only to be grasped and apprehended and assimilated, but it has to be exhibited and applied; and that means prophets of the Lord. In Old Testament times God never left Himself without witness, and in modern days there have been many to whose utterances and example men have paid heed, and whose influence at least for a space was a real power for good. The world needs such great prophets to-day as much as ever; and yet quite as vital in its own place will be the service rendered by the ordinary parish minister who knows his Bible and has the Spirit of God, or by the layman similarly equipped according to his opportunity. It is, of course, as much by action as by speech that the Gospel is proclaimed. "Ye are my witnesses,

saith the Lord." Each of us can be, and can help the Church to be, "an instrument of Christian good," living to show forth God's will and so to bring in the Kingdom. Our times are difficult; but Faith should realise that

"Troy in our weakness stands, not in her strength,"

and those who "have tasted the good word of God" and heard that God has committed to us in the Church the word of reconciliation, who respect the Headship of Christ and recognise the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, cannot but believe that the Word of the Lord shall have free course and be glorified, and that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against His Church.