

THE ISSUE OF BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

AN EDITORIAL

The Biblical scholar, oriented within the evangelical theological tradition, is immediately confronted with a primary issue the moment he commences his theological effort. This issue necessitates a definitive position from which he can then proceed to the analytic and interpretative answers to the ever-widening theological issues. That primary issue is: must my starting-point in Biblical scholarship be the authoritative and declarative nature of the Bible as the Written Word of God, or must my point of departure be within the theological structure of accepted dogma, however derived—intuitively, rationally, or biblically?

The answer to this issue is not a simple one. Those who accept the second alternative, i.e. theological structure is primary, do *not* deny the relevance of Biblical scholarship. In fact, there has been an astonishing resurgence of Biblical investigation, both literary and historical. Those who adopt the former position, i.e. theological scholarship begins *within* the structure of the Bible, have more and more honored the relevance of systematic theological structure and the ability of the theologian to *think* into and through the contemporary theological issues, including the wider cultural and social implications of those issues.

What then is the precise point at issue? Those who take their starting-point within a theological structure assert that the relevance of the Bible in theological scholarship must be determined by interests outside the nature of the Bible as the Written Word of God. An *interpretation* of the Bible therefore becomes the *meaning* of the Bible. The Bible thus becomes theologically successful when it speaks meaningfully within the activity or deliverance of human faith or reason, i.e. not antecedent to but successive to these.

Those who take their starting-point in the nature of the Biblical revelation (for the evangelical that means within the unique deliverance of the mind of God *in* the Written Word, verbally inspired, not just *through* the Written Word) assert that in every theological issue the attitude of the theologian is one of *listening* to the divine promulgation of divine truth. He does not only read the Bible, he listens to it. Theology is the analysis and synthesis of the knowledge that God has of all things, which He has conveyed to and adapted to human understanding. Although this knowledge of God given in the Written Word is soteriologically intended in its primary significance, the wider implications of truth in every sphere of human history are involved. The only possible starting-point for such theological endeavor must be divine-truth-as-communicated-to-man. Man cannot possibly uncover the mind of God directly and immediately, but only that mind as communicated. That communication is uniquely the Bible.

Whatever redemptive, historical, cultural, and social truths our particular theology attains, the derivation of the principles of explication of all such truths is *within* the Bible. The pronouncement declaration of such truths must be Biblical in content. Thus theological method and theological content are *within* the Bible. It is this factor which distinguishes theology from philosophy or sociology for the evangelical theologian, although he seeks the interrelation of all disciplines.

On the other hand, to make one's theology a simple linguistic process of Biblical analysis fails to achieve theological relevance. Since the mind of God possesses all truth in the eternal dimension (i. e. God's understanding is not discursive but eter-

nally complete), that truth is constantly relevant to the theological problem of every age. It is the business of the Biblical theologian to analyze the cultural, historical, and social problems and patterns of his day, and by the powers of integration, consistent with the laws of thought and empowered by the illumination of the Divine Spirit, to pronounce biblically-theologically in the name of God on such issues. This demands an absoluteness of linguistic effort in listening to God in His Word, and an analytic ability in living theologically in one's time.

J. E. Luchies
Wheaton College