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JOHN DEWITT

Dr. DeWitt was so widely known by reason of his varied and distinguished services to the Church of God, and so highly esteemed not only for what he accomplished but also for what he was, that it is altogether fitting that this REVIEW, to which he contributed so many of the products of his gifted pen, and of which he was for several years the managing editor, should contain an article commemorative of his life and work. The task of preparing such a memorial might well have been entrusted to more competent hands, and among his colleagues there are those who would have had the advantage of being able to draw upon a longer period of acquaintance with our venerated friend; but when the duty was laid upon me, I could not but welcome the appointment as giving me an opportunity of placing a wreath of affection upon the grave of one whose friendship I have cherished for years as one of my highest honors and greatest blessings. In tender and grateful regard, therefore, for his memory, but under the restrictions of sober fact—for Dr. DeWitt needs no exaggerated praise, and the simple statement of the truth will be eulogy enough—I shall sketch the salient features of his career and undertake an estimate of his character and achievements.

John DeWitt, on his father's side, sprang from one of the most ancient and influential families of the colonial period of our history. He was a lineal descendant, in the sixth generation, of that Tjerck Claessen DeWitt who, born in Westphalia in 1620, emigrated to New Amsterdam in 1656—sixteen years before the murder of his cousin, Jan DeWitt, the Grand Pensionary of Holland—and whose marriage to "Barbara Andriessen van Amsterdam" is recorded in the Register

THE TESTIMONY OF THE SCRIPTURES TO THEIR OWN TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to repeated deliverances of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. it is "an essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that the Holy Spirit did so inspire, guide and move the writers of Holy Scripture as to keep them from error." Though negative in form this is, in effect, a positive as well as an official pronouncement that the Presbyterian Church of the U. S. A. holds and confesses that the Holy Scriptures are completely trustworthy in all their statements. While there have been individuals, even within the Presbyterian Church itself, who took exception, from the first, to this pronouncement it is only recently that any united protest has been made against it. Such a protest has found expression in an Affirmation, signed by one hundred and fifty ministers, that on December 26, 1923 was submitted for the consideration of the ministers and people of this branch of the Presbyterian Church. These one hundred and fifty ministers unite in affirming: "There is no assertion in the Scriptures that their writers were kept 'from error.' The Confession of Faith does not make this assertion; and it is significant that this assertion is not found in the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed or in any of the great Reformation confessions. The doctrine of inerrancy, intended to enhance the authority of the Scriptures, in fact impairs their supreme authority for faith and life, and weakens the testimony of the church to the power of God unto salvation through Jesus Christ. We hold that the General Assembly of 1923, in asserting that 'the Holy Spirit did so inspire, guide and move the writers of Holy Scripture as to keep them from error' spoke without warrant of the Scriptures or the Confession of Faith. We hold rather to the words of the Confession of Faith, that the Scriptures are 'given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.'"

We will not stay to enlarge on the misinterpretation of the language of the Confession involved in the closing sentence

of the preceding quotation.¹ Neither will we attempt an explanation of the fact that such a body of men should affirm the assertion of the General Assembly of 1923 concerning the Scriptures to be without warrant of the Confession of Faith. This affirmation is astonishing in view of the fact that the conception of Scripture thus summarily rejected underlies the Confession as its source and foundation and more especially, perhaps, because of the express statements of the Confession itself. For we find that the Scriptures, identified with "all the books of the Old and New Testament," are spoken of as "the Word of God written" and as "given by inspiration of God" (Chap. I, Sec. 2), as constituting "the canon of Scripture" and as of "authority in the Church of God" (Sec. 3), as having "God (who is truth itself)" for their "author" (Sec. 4), as of "infallible truth and divine authority" (Sec. 5), as "being immediately inspired by God" so that "in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal to them" (Sec. 8), as so trustworthy that a "Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed" in them (Chap. XIV, Sec. 2).² Our main concern is to show that the Scrip-

¹ Dr B. B. Warfield has made clear that the use of this clause as a definition of inspiration for the purpose of confining inspiration according to the Confession to matters of faith and practice is discredited on both exegetical and historical grounds (*The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* for October 1893, p. 618-619).

² While the reference to the Reformation Confessions, in distinction from the Westminster Confession of Faith, is not so directly germane, attention may be directed not only to the fact that these creeds as truly as the Westminster Creed are derived from and based on the Scriptures as divinely trustworthy and authoritative but to such definite assertions in them as: "among us there is nothing received contrary to Scripture" (The Augsburg Confession, The Conclusion, p. 73); "We believe, confess, and teach that the only rule and norm, according to which all dogmas and all doctors ought to be esteemed and judged, is no other whatever than the prophetic and apostolic writings both of the Old and of the New Testament" and that "to Holy Scripture alone belongs the authority of a judge" (The Formula of Concord, The Compendious Rule and Norm, pp. 93-96); "I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word" (The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 21, p. 313); "We know these books to be canonical, and the sure rule of our faith" and that "all things should be examined, regulated and reformed according to them" (The French

tures themselves warrant the General Assembly's pronouncement as to their trustworthiness. It would avail little to show that the General Assembly spoke with warrant of the Confession of Faith if it could not be shown that it spoke with warrant of the Scriptures. All parties to this controversy, however much they may differ in their conception of Scripture, are agreed that "God alone is Lord of the Conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship."³

No one denies that the General Assembly's assertion as to the Scriptures is in harmony with long-standing and widely-prevailing belief. If, as the Affirmation alleges, this belief finds no expression in the Scriptures themselves the question arises, What was its origin? It might be maintained that its proximate, though not its ultimate, source is the great creeds of the Reformation. According to the Affirmation, however, these creeds are not even its proximate source. Whence, then, did belief in the complete trustworthiness of the Scriptures come? If this belief finds no assertion in any of the great creeds or in the Scriptures themselves, it seems obvious that it must have originated in connection with the study of the actual contents of Scripture. It must be that on examining the phenomena of the Scriptures men were so impressed by what they discovered that they inferred their indefectibility. But when it is considered that even the latest Scriptures were written nearly two thousand years ago; that they deal with periods of history of which at best we are very imperfectly

Confession of Faith, articles 3-5, pp. 360-362); "We believe that the Holy Scriptures are contained in two books, namely, the Old and New Testaments, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged" (The Belgic Confession, Art. 4, p. 385). Such citations might be considerably increased but these, together with those from the Westminster Creed in the main text, taken in connection with the above-mentioned Affirmation, seem to indicate with painful clearness that the study of the creeds of Christendom is at a minimum with a good many ministers of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. (The references to pages are to Dr. Schaff's *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. III).

³ The Confession, Chap. XX Sec. 2; The Affirmation, Sec. I.

informed; that they relate the religious experiences of many individuals; that they contain representations alleged to have been supernaturally revealed including predictions of the future—surely it is as clear as the sun at noonday that simply on the basis of the study of the contents of Scripture, assuming that testimony to their own trustworthiness is no part of the contents of Scripture, no one would be warranted in dogmatically affirming that they contain no errors. The very most that any one would be entitled to say would be that they contain no proved errors, seeing that no one—not even the greatest scholar—has even a fraction of that knowledge that would justify him in saying, on the basis of his knowledge alone, that their writers were kept from error. The case is different, however, if testimony as to their own trustworthiness is itself a part of the phenomena of Scripture. In that case it is possible to affirm the inerrancy of the Scriptures without possessing what would almost amount to omniscience. If our examination of them does not reveal any proved errors—a truly amazing fact if indeed it be a fact—the way is then open to assert that the Scriptures are without error without proving a universal negative. Our confidence in the self-testimony of the Scriptures may be such that we will feel warranted in accepting as true even those of their statements that we have no means of verifying.

Before indicating the Scriptural warrant for the General Assembly's pronouncement, it may be well to say a word concerning its importance. The Affirmation not only denies the existence of any such warrant but affirms that "the doctrine of inerrancy, intended to enhance the authority of the Scriptures, in fact impairs their supreme authority for faith and life, and weakens the testimony of the Church to the power of God unto salvation through Jesus Christ"—that is to say it characterizes this pronouncement as not only unwarranted but baneful. No doubt it is a mistake to maintain that there could be no Christianity apart from a completely trustworthy Bible. Even if the Bible were only generally trustworthy we could still have Christianity in a form sufficiently pure for

men to be justified and sanctified and glorified. It should not be overlooked, however, that in that case we would not have a *Holy Bible*, because that which most makes the Bible a *Holy Bible* is its divine trustworthiness as contrasted with the uncertainty that characterizes all ordinary books. We expect of *Holy Scriptures* not only "heavenliness of matter and efficacy of doctrine" but also "infallible truth and divine authority." Writings that lack such trustworthiness and authority may be highly esteemed but it is to sin against honest nomenclature to call them "holy" writings. We instinctively feel that the Bible as a "holy" book is being taken away from us when told that it contains errors and mistakes. It is true that many who ascribe even moral faults to the Scriptures still speak of them as "Holy Scriptures" but such speech on their lips is both indefensible and offensive. The question at stake when we consider the General Assembly's assertion as to the Scriptures is, therefore, nothing less than the question whether or not we have books in our possession that can rightly be called "Holy Scriptures."

Since we attach so much importance to the question of the reliableness of the Scriptures, and since we confess that apart from their self-testimony no one would be warranted in affirming that they are without error, it may seem that our confidence in their complete trustworthiness must have received a rude shock when one hundred and fifty men— all professed students of the Bible and some even professors in theological seminaries—united in affirming that "there is no assertion in the Scriptures that their writers were kept from error." We admit that we were somewhat astounded that this particular group of men should so affirm, though we have long been accustomed to being told that the self-testimony of the Scriptures to which we attach such large significance is non-existent. These one hundred and fifty men and their teachers and sympathizers to the contrary notwithstanding, belief in the complete trustworthiness of the Scriptures is not a conception that men have sought to impose on the Scriptures. Wholly apart from the question whether it is true or

false, it is based on a grammatico-historical study of the Scriptures themselves, more especially on the exegetically obtained fact that it was the view of Scripture held by our Lord and His apostles—so far is it from being true that “the Bible is nowhere a self-conscious book.”⁴ So obvious is this that it is accepted as an “assured result” by practically every school of Biblical criticism, with the exception of the “critical-evangelical” school—of which more will be said later.

It is now time to direct attention to the testimony that the Scriptures offer in behalf of their own trustworthiness. If nothing more was desired than a refutation of the representation of the Affirmation, all that would be needed would be the adduction of a single Biblical witness to the trustworthiness of the Scriptures, seeing that its signers have had the boldness to affirm that “there is no assertion in the Scriptures that their writers were kept from error.” We cannot, indeed, hope to present anything like a full statement of the recorded testimony, but it is thought that what follows is sufficient to make clear that the Scriptural warrant for the General Assembly’s pronouncement as to the Scriptures is more than ample.

The task of presenting, within a limited space, the Scriptural warrant for this particular deliverance is made difficult not by the scarcity but by the abundance of the available material. Perhaps, it will be well to adduce first the testimony of Paul. In II Timothy 3:16 he tells us that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable” or “Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable.” Whether we accept the translation of the Authorized or the Revised Version makes comparatively little difference. In either case what is affirmed is affirmed of the “Holy Scriptures” or “Sacred Writings” of the preceding verse. It is more important to note that the word translated “given by inspiration of God” or “inspired of God” means literally and more accurately “God-breathed” and that it is to be taken in a passive sense. It is clear, therefore, that Paul ascribed a supernatural origin,

⁴ Nolan R. Best, *Inspiration* p. 96.

and not merely certain profitable functions to the written Scriptures.⁵ Moreover this speaking of the Scriptures as themselves the product of a divine activity is characteristic of Paul's whole treatment of them (Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 4:6, 9:10, 10:11). If it stood alone it might be maintained with some degree of plausibility, perhaps, that he did not necessarily mean that the Scriptures were wholly free from error; but when we consider that for him to say "Scripture says" was equivalent to saying "God says" (Gal. 3:8; Rom. 9:17), and that he spoke of his own writings as authoritative (II Thess. 2:15), it is impossible to find plausible ground for denying that Paul offers clear testimony in behalf of the complete trustworthiness of Scripture.

The testimony of Peter is to the same effect. His main recorded utterance is found in II Peter 1:19-21. There we are told that every prophecy of Scripture affords a sure ground of confidence because "no prophecy ever came by the will of man; but men spake from God being moved by the Holy Spirit," more literally because "no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but it was as borne by the Holy Spirit that men spoke from God." It is somewhat questionable whether in this passage "every prophecy of Scripture" means Scripture as a whole, or only that portion of Scripture that is specifically prophetic, but at any rate we have an assertion that large portions of Scripture are of divine origin and trustworthiness. It should not be overlooked that in this same epistle (3:16) Peter puts the epistles of Paul on a level with "the other Scriptures."

Attention may next be directed to the fact that in all four of the Gospels Jesus is represented as believing in the divine trustworthiness of the Old Testament. This means, in the first place, that Mathew, Mark, Luke and John—four of the chief writers of the New Testament—believed in the com-

⁵ This has been fully proven by Dr. B. B. Warfield in the article "God-Inspired Scripture" in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, January 1900, as Dr. James Moffatt concedes, *The Approach to the New Testament* p. 72.

plete trustworthiness of that portion of Scripture, which, according to the Liberals in general, is least trustworthy. For, it is inconceivable that these men—unsophisticated worshippers of Jesus—should have ascribed to Him a view of the Old Testament they did not themselves hold. It is more important to note, however, that it also means that this was actually the view of Jesus himself. The testimony of Jesus is so vital to our whole discussion that we avail ourselves of Dr. B. B. Warfield's statement—the most succinct and comprehensive of which we have any knowledge—found in his article on "Inspiration" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*. After a somewhat detailed study of some of the reported utterances of Jesus in which He asserts the supreme trustworthiness of Scripture—such as the finality of His "It is written" in Mathew 4:4, 7, 10 and elsewhere, and "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures" in Mathew 22:29, and "The Scripture cannot be broken" in John 10:35—Dr. Warfield sums up and makes clear the situation after this fashion:

Thus clear is it that Jesus' occasional adduction of Scripture as an authoritative document rests on an ascription of it to God as its author. His testimony is that whatever stands written in Scripture is a word of God. Nor can we evacuate this testimony of its force on the plea that it represents Jesus only in the days of His flesh, when He may be supposed to have reflected merely the opinions of His day and generation. The view of Scripture He announces was, no doubt, the view of His day and generation as well as His own view. But there is no reason to doubt that it was held by Him, not because it was the current view, but because in His divine-human knowledge, He knew it to be true; for, even in His humiliation, He is the faithful and true witness. And in any event we should bear in mind that this was the view of the resurrected as well as of the humiliated Christ. It was after He had suffered and had risen again in the power of His Divine life that He pronounced those foolish and slow of heart who do not believe all that stands written in the Scriptures (Lk. 24:25); and He laid down the simple "Thus it is written" as the sufficient ground of confident belief (Lk. 24:46). Nor can we explain away Jesus' testimony to the Divine trustworthiness of Scripture by interpreting it as not His own, but as that of His followers, placed on His lips in their reports of His words. Not only is it too constant, minute, intimate and in

part incidental, and therefore, as it were, hidden, to admit of this interpretation; but it so pervades all our channels of information concerning Jesus' teaching as to make it certain that it comes actually from Him. It belongs not only to the Jesus of our evangelical records but as well to the Jesus of the earlier sources which underlie our evangelical records, as anyone may assure himself by observing the instances in which Jesus adduces the Scriptures as Divinely authoritative that are recorded in more than one of the Gospels (*e.g.*, "It is written," Matt. 4:4, 7, 10. (Luke 4:4. 8. 10); Matt. 11:10 (Luke 7:27); Matt 21:13 (Luke 19:46; Mark 11:17); Matt. 26:31 (Mark 14:21); "the scripture" or "the scriptures," Matt. 19:4 (Mark 10:9); Matt. 21:42 (Mark 12:10; Luke 10:17); Matt. 22:29 (Mark 12:24; Luke 20:37); Matt. 26:56 (Mark 14:49; Luke 24:44). These passages alone would suffice to make clear to us the testimony of Jesus to Scripture as in all its parts and declarations divinely authoritative.

We are so accustomed to hearing the testimony of Jesus and His more immediate disciples cited by those who ascribe errors to the Scriptures that, if we ignore its historical background, we are apt, more or less unconsciously, to misapprehend its significance. Fortunately we have not been left in doubt as to the view of Scripture held by their age and generation. The New Testament itself makes clear that contemporary Jewish thought held the Old Testament in utter reverence. Apart from the New Testament we have explicit statements of men like Philo and Josephus which make evident that those to whom Jesus and His early disciples spoke would have regarded the affirmation that the Scriptures contain errors as little short of sacrilege. According to the Talmud, as cited by the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (p. 4330) and other authorities, the denial of the heavenly origin of the Torah made a man an 'Epicurean' or apostate, and excluded him from the future age. The notion now widely held that the Scriptures are infallible only in regard to matters of faith and practice had not even entered the heads of those with whom Jesus and His disciples associated. Among them there were three things that were esteemed as peculiarly sacred: the Temple, the Sabbath, and the Scriptures. They found fault with the attitude of Jesus and His disciples toward the Temple and

the Sabbath; but there is nothing to indicate that they were scandalized at their attitude toward the Scriptures. Had they uttered a single word against the Old Testament we may be sure that the reaction on the part of the ever-watchful Jews would have been no less hostile than swift. The only possible inference is that Jesus and His disciples, like the Jews themselves, taught that the Scriptures are completely trustworthy.⁶

It is frequently asserted that in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus criticised the Old Testament and condemned it as faulty. The objection to the representation just given, drawn from Matt. 5:21-48, is easily refuted. Throughout this passage the contrast is not so much between Jesus' own teachings and those of the Old Testament as between His interpretation of the Old Testament and that of the ancients. Ordinarily when Jesus quotes the Old Testament He employs the formula "It is written" or its equivalent, but here He uses the formula "Ye have heard that it was said." Moreover a close examination of the sayings cited makes clear that He had in mind traditional interpretations of the Old Testament rather than the actual teaching of the Old Testament.⁷ It is the more surprising that this utterance of Jesus should be cited in favor of the notion that He criticised and rejected the moral teachings of the Old Testament, in view of the fact that in the paragraph immediately preceding, speaking specifically of the moral law of the Old Testament, He had said, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." It would seem in fact as though Jesus, foreseeing that what He was about to say might be understood as criticism of the Old Testament itself, expressly warned against such a misuse of His words. The very most that can rightly be said is that

⁶ See *The Inspiration of Holy Scripture* by William Lee, p. 51f; article "Inspiration" by Marcus Dods in *Hasting's Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*. Only the first part of Dr. Dods' article is commended.

⁷ See article, "Law in the New Testament" by Archibald M'Caig in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, p. 1845.

Jesus, like all who hold to the complete trustworthiness of the Scriptures, regarded the Old Testament as incomplete, but that He as the Son of God assumed to legislate more adequately for the children of the Kingdom. The "But I say unto you" is an expression of the Messianic consciousness of our Lord, not of a consciousness common to Christians. That Jesus should have asserted His own right to legislate for the Kingdom of God, notwithstanding the divine authority He attached to the existing legislation, finds its explanation in the fact—is indeed itself proof—that He regarded Himself as one with the Father. This utterance of Jesus is, therefore, in complete harmony with His other utterances concerning the Scriptures and wholly in favor of the complete trustworthiness of the Scriptures.

Attention has been directed to some of the testimony that the Scriptures offer to their own trustworthiness.⁸ A much larger mass of testimony might be presented, if space permitted, but enough has been cited to make clear that there is this difference between the fossil which the geologist investigates and the Scriptures which the theologian investigates—the fossil does not speak for itself but the Scriptures do. It is utterly unscientific to ignore this self-testimony. It should be the starting point of our investigation. It may prove to be false testimony but it should no more be ignored than the testimony of the defendant in court should be ignored. It so manifestly provides the only common-sense start-

⁸ Among the references that may be consulted by those desiring a more adequate statement of this testimony the following may be mentioned. "Inspiration," article in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* by B. B. Warfield; *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* by Abraham Kuypers pp. 428-473; *Is Christ Infallible and the Bible true?* by Hugh McIntosh, pp. 171-216 and pp. 367-428; *The Inspiration of the Holy Scripture* by William Lee, pp. 235-277; *Revelation and Inspiration* by James Orr, pp. 181-196; and the following articles in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, "It says": "Scripture says": "God says," July 1899, and "The Oracles of God," April 1900, by B. B. Warfield, "St. Paul and Inspiration," Jan. 1893, by George T. Purves, "The Testimony of Christ to the Old Testament," July 1892, by William Caven, "The Unerring Witness to the Scriptures," Jan. 1900, by Howard Osgood.

ing point that the plain man is apt to suppose that the mere fact that many discuss the trustworthiness of the Scriptures with no reference to its self-testimony is an indication that no such testimony is available.⁹

If such testimony is available the question arises, how explain the fact that able and evidently sincere men, including not a few scholars of high rank, ignore or deny it? For instance so influential a scholar as Driver, in words that future critics may regard as the source of the language of the Affirmation, has said, "The inerrancy of Scripture is a principle which is nowhere asserted or claimed in the Scripture itself. It is a principle which has been framed by theologians, presumably from a fear lest, if no such principle could be established, the authority of Scripture in matters of doctrine could not be sustained."¹⁰ And only recently so prominent an American Biblical Scholar as B. W. Bacon of Yale has attempted—unsuccessfully of course—to show that a grammatico-historical study of the New Testament makes clear that Jesus in His use of Scripture was the forerunner of the modern religious liberal.¹¹ In the case of anti-supernaturalists like Bacon there would seem to be no explanation except their sentimental attachment to Jesus and the Bible. In the

⁹ A captious critic might complain that none of the testimony adduced asserts the trustworthiness of the Scriptures as a whole. It will hardly be alleged, however, that the "one hundred and fifty" merely meant to say that there is no assertion in the Scriptures that affirms that the whole of Scripture as we have it is without error. That would be an attempt to make them appear ridiculous. It is true that the testimony adduced applies most directly to the Old Testament, but apart from the fact that few will ascribe an infallibility to the Old Testament that they deny the New Testament, it is evident not only that the Old Testament postulates additional revelation but that the New Testament writers themselves so extend the conception of "Holy Scripture" that it includes their own writings (I Cor. 14: 37; II Thess. 3: 14; I Tim. 5: 18; II Peter 3: 16): hence this and similar testimony may be legitimately applied to the whole of Scripture as we have it. See references in foot-note immediately above, especially Warfield in *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, p. 1482 and Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration*, pp. 192-196.

¹⁰ *The Higher Criticism* by S. R. Driver and A. F. Kirkpatrick p. 51.

¹¹ *He Opened to us the Scriptures* by B. W. Bacon, p. 69f.

case of supernaturalists like Driver, however, the explanation that most readily suggests itself is this. These men, as has already been intimated, belong almost exclusively to the so-called critical-evangelical school of criticism. They profess to unite an acceptance of current critical conclusions, with an evangelical faith. According to these critical conclusions, the Old Testament is a very untrustworthy book—so untrustworthy that it gives a very distorted picture of the course and development of religion among the Jews. It is evident that the testimony of Jesus is a serious difficulty in the way of accepting such critical conclusions and remaining orthodox in our Christology. The difficulty would be serious enough if, according to these critical conclusions, the Old Testament merely contained historical inaccuracies: it becomes overwhelming when it is asserted that the Old Testament contains deceit and falsehood, that many of its alleged prophecies are merely “prophecies after the event,” that even its ethical and religious representations are unworthy. For the so-called critical-evangelical there is no choice between saying that Jesus had no instinct for truth and was mistaken in regard to what was holy, and ignoring or denying His testimony to the divine trustworthiness and authority of the Old Testament. They have chosen the latter horn of the dilemma. We are not unappreciative of the motive that more or less unconsciously determines their choice. Had they a less high conception of Christ as a moral and religious guide, more especially if they had not been taught to call Him Lord and Saviour, they would no doubt not only admit with most non-evangelical critics that this testimony is a matter of record but frankly say with them that Jesus was mistaken and no longer to be considered our absolute guide in matters of faith and practice. Still less are we unmindful of the gravity of the issue that Christ’s testimony forces upon us. If this testimony exists and is such as we have represented it—and we think this indubitable—the conflict concerning the Scriptures becomes a conflict concerning Christ Himself. Even that, however, justifies no man in closing his eyes and stopping his

ears, ostrich-like, when there is mention of this testimony. That is the act of an obscurantist.

The question must now be faced, Do the contents of the Scriptures contradict the testimony they bear to their own trustworthiness? Certainly there is no want of voices telling us that if Christ and His apostles testified to the complete trustworthiness of the Bible, it is altogether certain—seeing that the accommodation theory is no longer seriously advocated—that they were either deceived or deceivers. We have already confessed that, in our judgment, it is only on condition that the content of Scripture does not contradict this testimony that it affords warrant for affirming that the writers of Holy Scripture were kept from error. It may be said in all reverence that even the testimony of Christ should not lead us to confess as true what we know to be false. Did not Christ himself say, “To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I might bear witness unto the truth” (John 18:37)? The poorest possible definition of faith is that which defines it as “believing what we know ain’t so.” We must at least have a faith we believe to be true. This does not mean, however, that we are to lightly discount this self-testimony of the Scriptures. Let this testimony, even the testimony of Christ himself, be tested by the facts wherever learned, and let the test be the more not the less stringent because of the issue involved, but let us be on our guard lest we reject this testimony because of counter-testimony that can not itself bear cross-examination. If it would be wrong to refuse to consider with care and candor any facts asserted to be inconsistent with this testimony, it would be not only wrong but the acme of folly to make shipwreck of our faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour on evidence not absolutely conclusive.

No doubt an examination of the Scriptures discloses not a few phenomena that are apparently out of harmony with the testimony that has been adduced. It is one thing, however, to admit the existence of difficulties, but quite another thing to admit the existence of proved errors. Our creed will indeed

be a brief one if we admit only those articles against which no serious objections can be urged. There is not an assertion in the Apostles' Creed against which serious objections are not urged. Even its primary assertion, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," is widely denied by eminent scholars. What boots it, then, that difficulties stand in the way of accepting the Scriptural testimony, seeing that there is not a single doctrine distinctive of Christianity that is not held, if it is held at all, despite many and serious difficulties. If, however, not only difficulties but proved errors appear when the Scriptures are examined, it is evident that this testimony is itself untrustworthy. Every one is aware, of course, that many proved errors—in science, philosophy, history and morals—are openly predicated of the Scriptures. It seems to us, nevertheless, that their number shrinks almost to the vanishing point when due weight is assigned the following considerations.

(1) It is one thing to say that the Scriptures contain statements out of harmony with the teachings of modern science and philosophy and a distinctly different thing to say that they contain proved errors. Strictly speaking there is no modern science and philosophy but only modern scientists and philosophers—who differ endlessly among themselves. It is only on the assumption that the discordant voices of present-day scientists and philosophers are to be identified with the voice of Science and Philosophy that we are warranted in saying that the Bible contains errors because its teachings do not always agree with the teachings of these scientists and philosophers. Does any one really believe that Science and Philosophy have yet reached, even approximately, their final form? May it not rather be contended that they are so far removed from their ultimate form that if the teachings of the Bible were in complete harmony with present-day science and philosophy it is altogether certain that they would be out of harmony with the science and philosophy of the future? If, for example, the anti-supernaturalism of the dominant science and philosophy of to-day is to be characteristic of science

and philosophy in their final forms, then, unquestionably the Bible contains many errors. Who, however, is competent to assert that this will be the case? But unless it is certain that the science and philosophy of the future will be essentially one with the dominant science and philosophy of to-day, we go beyond the evidence when we say that the Bible contains proved errors on the ground that its teachings contradict the teachings of present-day scientists and philosophers.

(2) The Scriptures are often said to contain many proved errors because they contain statements and representations out of harmony with the "assured results" of modern Biblical criticism. This is to forget that there is criticism and criticism. As a matter of fact there are no "assured results" that are accepted by all critical scholars. There are not lacking scholars of the highest standing who hold that literary and historical criticism leaves the trustworthiness of the Scriptures unimpaired. There is nothing strange, perhaps, in the fact that certain scholars should attach such weight to the validity of their own critical methods and the soundness of their own critical conclusions that they should think that the Bible contains errors if it contains anything that does not square with what seem to them "assured results." It is quite open to us, none the less, to believe that better critical methods and a more marked talent for drawing sound conclusions would have brought them to a different set of "assured results." If the Graf-Wellhausen-Driver view of the Old Testament, for example, is the true view, the Bible undeniably contains many proved errors. But their "reconstruction" of it is widely called in question by men whose ability and scholarship cannot legitimately be questioned. The fact that so many scholars of high rank accept conclusions, in the field of both Old and New Testament criticism, that necessitate the belief that the Bible contains errors is, no doubt, an obstacle in the way of believing in the complete trustworthiness of the Scriptures, but it constitutes no irrefragable proof that the Bible contains errors.

(3) It is frequently and confidently asserted that the Scrip-

tures contain errors on the ground that they contain moral teachings out of harmony with present-day ethical conceptions. In fact, one of the outstanding characteristics of the present-age is the wide-spread repudiation of the Christian ideal of conduct. It can scarcely be contended, however, that there is no real difference between saying that the Bible contains moral teachings that do not harmonize with those of men like Nietzsche and Shaw and Wells and saying that it contains moral teachings that are actually wrong. We can admit the former while flatly denying the latter. This is not to allege that there are no serious "moral difficulties" in the way of believing in the trustworthiness of the Scriptures. Many of these "moral difficulties," however, have no deeper root than a failure to recognize the progressiveness of revelation, within the limits of the historical period covered by the Scriptures. Here too there is "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Others have no deeper root than the failure to distinguish between what the Scriptures record and what they sanction. Those whose roots strike deepest have to do with such matters as the destruction of the Canaanites, the Imprecatory Psalms, the substitutionary doctrine of the atonement, and the teaching as to everlasting punishment. Even when rightly interpreted the Scriptural representations in regard to these and similar matter raise difficulties that are widely felt to be extremely serious. It should be noted, however, that these representations are morally wrong only on the assumption that there is not, or at least ought not to be, any such thing as retributive justice. It is because of the wide-spread denial of retributive justice as an attribute of God that so many regard these representation of the Scriptures as unworthy and immoral. Everywhere throughout the Scriptures, in the teachings of Christ as well as in the teaching of prophets and apostles, God is spoken of as being just as well as loving; but only those who revolt at the idea of retributive justice will suppose that this affords warrant for affirming that the Bible contains proved errors.

(4) Those who ascribe errors by the wholesale to the Bible

do so on one or more of the grounds that have been considered. Those who speak of the Scriptures as trustworthy on the whole, or as infallible only as regards matters of faith and practice, while they usually admit that they contain scientific and historical and moral errors are yet accustomed, in proof of their position, to point to such facts as these: their writers do not give precisely the same content or use precisely the same words in reporting an event or a speech or expounding a doctrine; when quoting Scripture they do not always quote it in precisely the same words and sense as the original. Marcus Dods, for example, tells us that the Gospels are not inerrant because "no two evangelists agree in their report of the title on the cross, or in their account of the appearances of our Lord after the resurrection" and Nolan R. Best argues that it is impossible to defend the inerrancy of the Bible because Exodus and Deuteronomy do not report the Ten Commandments in exactly the same words, Mathew and Mark do not report the Beatitudes in the same words or even the same sense, and the four accounts of Peter's denial disagree not only verbally but as to the incidents that attended it.¹² The ascription of errors to the Scriptures on such grounds as these, however, rests on a radically mistaken conception of the manner in which the defenders of its inerrancy conceive the Bible. It rests on the notion that they look upon Holy Scripture as a sort of code, expressed in notarial form and with notarial exactness. That Mr. Best ascribes such a conception of Scripture to the defenders of its inerrancy is indicated by the fact that he thinks it necessary to argue that "the conveyance of eternal truth is accomplished without any changeless crystallization of the words used" (p. 72). As a matter of fact all the representative defenders of the inerrancy of Scripture agree with Abraham Kuyper when he declares "that the writing down by the Holy Spirit of what was inspired has nothing in common with the protocolization

¹² For these and other alleged instances of Scriptural errancy see *The Bible: its Origin and Nature* by Marcus Dods, p. 136, and *Inspiration* by Nolan R. Best, pp. 68-80.

of an authentic official report, but that the several events and truths, yea, the same events and truths in their many-sided significance, have been brought to the canvass by the Highest Artist with a diversity of color and many-sidedness of interpretation which may indeed confuse the near-sighted cabalist, but which by its delightful harmonies fills the master-student, standing at a distance, with heavenly raptures."¹³ Moreover such a mechanical, mathematical, code-like accuracy has never been ascribed to the Bible by any theologian worthy of the name, and does not at all correspond to the actual character and contents of the Bible itself. It cannot be allowed, therefore, that the Bible contains errors because its contents are out of harmony with such a conception of Scripture. One might almost as well say that the Bible contains errors on the ground of its use of popular rather than scientifically-exact language—because it speaks of the sun as rising and setting when every school boy knows that strictly-speaking it does nothing of the sort.¹⁴

(5) Errors are often ascribed to the Scriptures when there is a reasonable doubt as to whether the alleged errors were in the original manuscripts. No one claims that the copyists and translators have been kept from error. No doubt this consideration may be abused. It is abused when it is used as an *asylum ignorantiae*, as an ever-ready refuge when we are confronted with alleged errors in the Bible. We have no right to say that an alleged error did not exist in the original manuscript in defiance of all sound textual criticism. Nevertheless, it should be firmly maintained over against such writers as Peake and Best¹⁵ that this consideration is a legitimate

¹³ *The Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct. 1904, p. 675.

¹⁴ See *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology* by Abraham Kuyper, p. 564.

¹⁵ See *The Bible: its Origin, its Significance and its Abiding Worth*, by Arthur S. Peake, pp. 102 and 397 f., and *Inspiration* by Nolan R. Best, p. 78. Our frequent reference to Mr. Best's book is not due to a high estimate of its value, but to the fact that as editor of *The Continent* he is, perhaps, the leading spokesman, within the Presbyterian Church itself, of those who reject the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. The contents of this book were originally printed as editorials in Mr. Best's paper; he was a commissioner to the last General Assembly and as such not only spoke

one and that we have no right to say that there are proved errors in the Bible unless we can show beyond any reasonable doubt that the alleged errors were in the original manuscripts. This consideration is no subterfuge, as is often said, but rather an eminently reasonable demand. The whole science of textual criticism is worthless, or at most has only an academic value, unless the original manuscripts are the final court of appeal.

If even after the fullest possible import has been allowed the five considerations mentioned that can reasonably be assigned them, there still remain phenomena seemingly irreconcilable with the testimony of Christ and His apostles, it is well to remember that the history of Biblical criticism raises a presumption in favor of the notion that advancing knowledge will confirm rather than discredit their testimony. It is a truly amazing fact that notwithstanding the critical assaults that have been made on the Bible there are still numerous scholars of the first rank who hold that there are no proved errors in Scripture. So trustworthy does the Bible appear at the end of the day that so competent a scholar as the late James Orr, though he did not maintain its inerrancy, yet affirmed, "It remains the fact that the Bible, impartially interpreted and judged, is free from demonstrable error in its statements, and harmonious in its teachings, to a degree that of itself creates an irresistible impression of a supernatural factor in its origin."¹⁶ The "criticism" and the "proved errors" that were most confidently paraded a generation or two ago by those who impugned the trustworthiness of the Bible are now being cited by defenders of its reliability—so true is it in the history of criticism that impugners of the Word have not been able to maintain their charges. A generation or more ago, for example, the Tübingen school of criticism enjoyed about the

and voted against the General Assembly's deliverance regarding the Scriptures but signed the protest against the action taken; and it is safe to say that, if elders as well as ministers had been asked to sign the Affirmation, he would have been among the first to do so.

¹⁶ *Revelation and Inspiration* p. 216.

same vogue as the Wellhausen School does to-day and the reputation of Luke as a historian was at low ebb, yet its "settled results" have now little more than an historical interest and most scholars agree with Sir William Ramsay that Luke is a careful historian of the first rank.¹⁷ In considering the trustworthiness of the Bible we should not, of course, overlook the positive evidence by which it is supported, apart from the testimony of Christ and His apostles. Did their testimony not exist we would at least be warranted in affirming the substantial accuracy of the Scriptures. Dr. Robert Dick Wilson has shown for instance that "out of 56 kings of Egypt from Shishak to Darius II, and out of the numerous kings of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Tyre, Damascus, Moab, Israel, and Judah, that ruled from 2000 to 400 B. C. the writers of the Old Testament have put the names of the forty or more, that are mentioned in records of two or more of the nations, in their proper absolute and relative order of time and in their proper place."¹⁸ And yet how often have we been told of the unreliability of the Old Testament records! Even apart from the testimony of Christ and His apostles we would be warranted in affirming, it seems to us, that the Scriptures are so remarkably trustworthy that they contain no proved errors. Whether we are warranted in affirming their complete trustworthiness depends on whether our confidence in these witnesses is such that we can go a step further and say that the Scriptures are without error, though many difficulties remain and possibly always will remain unsolved.

In conclusion we put this question, If we reject the testimony that the Scriptures offer in behalf of their own trustworthiness, how can we accept their testimony concerning other matters? If a witness on the stand asserts that he was an eye witness of the event he relates, and it be proved that he was elsewhere when the event happened, will not his testimony

¹⁷ Consult *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, by Sir W. M. Ramsay.

¹⁸ Article "Scientific Biblical Criticism" in this REVIEW, April 1919, p. 224f; cf. *Is the Higher Criticism Scholarly?* p. 18.

as a whole be discredited? Is it supposable that the jury will judge that though the witness lied—or shall we say was the victim of an hallucination?—when he said he was an eye witness of the event yet his testimony should not be disregarded altogether in arriving at a verdict? There is a sense, therefore, in which the case for Christianity is bound up with the case for the trustworthiness of the Scriptures. We are dependent on the Scriptures for our knowledge of all the distinctive facts and doctrines of Christianity. If we cannot trust them when they tell us about themselves, how can we trust them when they tell us about the deity of Christ, redemption in His blood, justification by faith, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting?

The gravity of the issue that is raised by the testimony of the Scriptures to their own trustworthiness is not adequately appreciated, however, unless it is perceived that the trustworthiness of Him to whom the Scriptures testify is involved. It is a firmly established exegetical fact that Christ ascribed absolute authority to the Scriptures of the Old Testament as an organic whole, that He, in fact, humanly speaking, derived His conception of His life-task from those Scriptures. How, then, can we escape the dilemma—either Jesus' view of the Old Testament is the true one or Jesus Himself was mistaken. The conflict over the Scriptures is, therefore a conflict over Christ himself. It may be well that many who ascribe not only historical but moral faults to the Scriptures that Christ Himself accepted bow before Him as their Lord and rejoice in Him as their Saviour. But in the long run so inconsequential an attitude cannot be maintained. The logic of the situation is dead against our being at the same time worshippers and critics of Christ. Only ignorance or lack of thought makes it possible for any man to suppose that he can remain orthodox in his conception of Jesus while accepting many of the critical conclusions that are widely current. As long as it remains true that the disciple is not above his master nor the servant above his lord, so long will it remain true that we are, to say the least, imperfect disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ as long as

it is possible for us to say, "Jesus taught so and so, but the real truth of the matter is thus and thus." Here too the decisive question is, What think ye of Christ? Here too we may seek to have nothing to do with this man, but, whether we will or no, as age succeeds age, it holds good that "this child is set for the falling and rising of many in Israel."

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