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## DR. DODS' DOCTRINE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE \*

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By the munificence of the late William Bross, a considerable sum of money has been placed in the hands of the "Trustees of Lake Forest University," the proceeds of which they are charged to use to create a literature of exposition and defense of the Christian religion. It is specified, among other particular objects that should be sought under this general commission, that an effort is to be made "to demonstrate the divine origin and authority of the Christian Scriptures." It was quite natural, therefore, that among the earlier works called out under the stimulation of this bequest there should be one on the origin and nature of the Bible. It may be doubted, however, whether Dr. Dods' lectures are calculated to meet perfectly the expectation aroused by language which speaks of a demonstration of the divine origin and authority of the Christian Scriptures. Dr. Dods, of course, believes that the Scriptures are a product of a movement of life and thought which originated in a divine impulse, and that there is much that is divine, and therefore authoritative, in them—that their main burden and central message, in fact, is divine. But around this central core, he believes that much that is human in origin and far from authoritative in effect has been woven like a widely extended web, or shall we say like the coma of a comet which surrounds, partly transmitting, partly obscuring the light of the nucleus.

In this Dr. Dods is but a representative of a general tendency which is at the moment very active in Christendom. Men everywhere, deeply affected by the assault which has been made in our day, perhaps with unexampled vigor and subtlety, upon the Christian system as a divine revelation, and especially upon the Christian Scriptures as the vehicle of that revelation, have sought to ease the situation by casting away what they have deemed the husk in the hope of saving what appears to them the kernel. They have commended to us, therefore, a new and reduced Christian-

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ity, documented in a new and reduced body of Scriptures. Dr. Dods is by no means an extreme representative of this tendency. But *gradus non mutant speciem*. In this book also he appears before us as the "concessive" apologist, the "meditating" theologian, and begs to put in our hands a Bible, which, in his view, is much more rationally conceived in its origin and nature than the old Bible was, and therefore, in his opinion, may be much more successfully defended. We certainly shall not deny that a certain measure of ease may be purchased for the defender by simply declining to defend; although it is not always certain that, so long as what we consider the citadel is to be defended, its defense is made really easier by the surrender of what we may deem outposts but which may prove to be approaches. We gladly recognize that Dr. Dods would fain defend what both he and we look upon as the citadel. But we find it impossible to admit that what he would yield as indefensible outposts are either indefensible or can be yielded safely or loyally. We rejoice that we have a fuller and richer Christianity than Dr. Dods feels bound to proclaim, and Scriptures far more divine in their origin and nature than he is inclined to admit. We believe that the defense of this richer Christianity and these more completely divine Scriptures is not only possible but imperative, if we would preserve Christianity in the world. And we believe their defense to be logically easier than that of the lowered views which Dr. Dods would commend to us. We do not believe that half-truths are more easily defended than whole ones; and we look upon the "concessive apologetics" which Dr. Dods represents, as inimical to Christianity, and all the more to be firmly resisted because its assault is more insidious and therefore more dangerous than open attack.

Ask Dr. Dods what the Scriptures are and he will tell you. A body of books which we set apart from all others and assign a place of supremacy because they "are all in direct connection with God's historical revelation which culminated in Christ." Like all Dr. Dods' definitions (it is inherent in the position he occupies) this is—inadequate. If we should say the Bible is the documentation of God's self-revelation for the purpose of human salvation, that would be a more adequate description of the internal characteristic of the Scriptures,—expressing, indeed, their unifying principle. But the plain fact is, to put it in briefest terms, that the Scriptures are objectively the *corpus juris* of Christians imposed on them as such by competent authority. This competent authority is proximately the Apostles, acting as Christ's authoritative agents in founding His Church. Thus apostolicity (in the sense of apostolic imposition, not authorship) is and always has been the principle of canonicity. There is no gain in blinking this plain fact, and seeking to transmute it into some more immanent principle. The Christian Church is a manufactured article; it was founded; and its character was impressed on it and its law imposed on it by its founders. Of course we may ask why the Apostles imposed just this par-

ticular body of books on the Churches which they established as Christ's authorized agents in founding His Church. And doubtless, in pursuing this inquiry, we shall ultimately reach the principle that these books stand together as constituting the "canon" which the Apostles gave the Church, because they constitute as a whole the documentation of God's revelation of Himself for salvation. But nothing could be more confusing than to confound this internal principle of unity with the external principle of canonicity, though good men, as, for example, Luther, have in every age been guilty of the confusion,—with the most unfortunate results. Throughout its whole history authentication as God's law for His Church has been the proximate ground of the reception of the canon, although, of course, throughout the whole history of its formation organic participation in the revelatory process was the principle of the constitution of the canon. And it is on the same ground that the canon must continue to be received if received at all. It is a grave error to represent this rational procedure as a desertion of the principle which governed the fathers of the Reformed Churches. They, as little as we, sought to determine the "canon"—which is a matter of history—on the basis of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*—which is a matter of experience; on that basis is determined not the "canon" but "the Word of God" to us. From his standpoint Dr. Dods very naturally finds the method of the Reformed doctors a little confusing; but the confusion is his not theirs. They treated the Scriptures as a unit because the Scriptures are a unitary apostolic book; and they then asked if this book "found them." Discovering that it did, they recognized it in its entirety as the "Word of God." Of course Dr. Dods may say that apostolicity can not justly be claimed for all these books. That is a matter of opinion, concerning which we differ with him; and concerning which the fathers of the Reformed Churches differed with him. That the body of the Apostles imposed a Bible on the Church is not disputable; that this Bible contained all the books and no others, which our present Bible contains, we consider historically substantiated; that this collection as a whole is "the Word of God" is experimentally verifiable. This is the Reformation method and it strikes us as a much more reasonable method of dealing with the matter than Dr. Dods' fluctuating way, which involves a confusion between the historical question of what constitutes the canon and the vital one of what is the Word of God to me,—analogous to the common confusion of the Scriptures as the *principium cognoscendi* and the Scriptures as the means of grace.

Let us, however, revert to the primary definition which Dr. Dods gives of the Bible as constituted of books which we set apart from all others and give a place of supremacy because "they are all in direct connection with God's historical revelation which culminated in Christ." What is to be observed here is that all that Dr. Dods can say of Scripture is that it is "in

direct connection with" revelation: and that the adjective "historical" which he attached to "revelation" is not to be read as distinctive, but as descriptive. That is to say, Dr. Dods believes in no other than an "historical" revelation; what he teaches is that God reveals Himself only in the sequence of historical events, while Scripture is only one product of this revelation, working upon and through human minds. The theory, as will at once be perceived, is that which was given great vogue in the middle of the past century by the attractive presentation of it by Richard Rothe, and which has been more recently commended, with some caution but much earnestness, to English readers by the late Prof. A. B. Bruce. As commonly presented, its essence is that it confines Revelation to the series of Divine acts in history, while it treats inspiration as the correlate of Revelation, or, as Dr. Dods prefers to phrase it, its "complement" (p. 97),—the action of the Divine Spirit on the human spirit by virtue of which the latter "perceives, appreciates, accepts and in certain cases records the Revelation of God." In this view the Bible is no part of the Revelation; though why the production of the Scriptures may not be conceived as an element in the series of the Redemptive acts of God it is hard to perceive. It is simply its record; and its record, so far as appears, in purely human strength—apart, that is, from the effects of that so-called Inspiration by which in Dr. Dods' view men are enabled sympathetically to receive and possibly to record Revelation. "The essential elements in revelation," explains Dr. Dods, "have been understood and interpreted by men." "In the Bible we have that selected revelation which inspired men have accepted and seen fit to record." "God has revealed Himself, and the leading facts of this revelation are recorded for us in the Bible, and from these facts we can gather what God wishes us to know about Him and how He wishes us to think of Him" (pp. 96, 97). In other words, all that we commonly know as "direct revelation" is denied or retired to the background. Revelation is made to consist in an immanent action of God through man by virtue of which a series of events are produced. These events are then perceived and interpreted by human spirits prepared for their task by a corresponding action of God upon them enabling them to see and appreciate these events aright. The latter Divine activity is then called Inspiration. Inspiration has therefore, no direct concern with the record; it is distinctly not graphical but personal.

We shall not pause to point out how little support this construction has in the letter of Scripture itself. Scripture represents revelation, normative revelation, as through the medium of speech, or at least in a mode best represented by speech. "Thus saith the Lord" is its typical expression. And Scripture assigns Inspiration not to the person but to the written product: to it, it is "every Scripture"—or, as it is probable we should translate it, "the entirety of Scripture"—that is given by inspiration of God. Let us pause only to call attention to the lowered supernaturalism of the

theory; and also to the inconsequence of the reasoning by which it is supported. "What has been the method of revelation?" asks Dr. Dods. "Our answer to this question," he replies, "depends upon our idea of God." "If we believe in God as immanent in the world and man, then we shall necessarily believe that God reveals Himself through human sensitiveness to the Spiritual, and inquiry after Him. If we believe in God as merely transcendent, we shall think of Him as moving man from without" (pp. 78-9). Now, why has Dr. Dods—shall we say subintroduced?—into the last clause, the little word "merely" by the introduction of which the exact parallelism of this clause with the preceding one is broken? In point of fact, "merely" must stand in both clauses if they are to be taken, as they are treated here, as true disjunctives. And, in point of fact, Dr. Dods actually reasons throughout the volume on a presupposition which tends to treat God as "merely" immanent and as operating in the world solely "through human sensitiveness to the Spiritual"—though we thankfully recognize that in dealing with the miraculous element in the Gospels a higher note is struck. Indeed, he at once goes on to say in our present passage: "In the one case revelation will be internal and natural; in the other it will be external and supernatural,"—and proceeds to point out that "belief in the immanence of God tends to abolish the distinction between the natural and the supernatural." It is this tendency, showing itself everywhere, which leads Dr. Dods to pare down the supernatural character of the Bible; it is it which lies at the root of his denial of the infallibility of the Bible—or of its "literal infallibility" as he elects to call it, in the effort to save for the Bible, even on his theory of its origin and nature, a sort of infallibility in a single sphere.

How inadequately Dr. Dods thinks of the supernatural element in the Bible may be observed as well as elsewhere at the point where, in an attempt to break the force of the Bible's own doctrine of inspiration, he cries out with emphasis (in opposition to the direct testimony of Scripture) that it is not the Book but "the man who is inspired" (p. 117). But where does Dr. Dods suppose that this man that is inspired came from? He apparently imagines that he is given by the world—or by himself—and that God comes to him, finds him as he is, and does the best He can with so poor and inadequate an instrument. It is "with all his natural powers and idiosyncrasies" that "he becomes the organ of the Spirit,"—as if **therefore** the product would necessarily be different from what the Spirit might have made it if only He had had a better instrument! "Inspiration does not lift the inspired person out of all his limitations, but uses him as he is, and all his faculties as they are," he asserts, with no pause to consider that all these natural powers and idiosyncrasies, all these faculties and capacities, that make the man, are themselves, down to the last one of them, in a high sense of God; that the man himself is what God in His providence and grace, has

made him and what God has made him precisely for this end, that through him He might give this precise word to men; that God the almighty ruler of the world does not have to put up with the best man He can find and agree to abide the result, but first forms the man to suit His purpose, and then uses him to accomplish His purpose, and so produces through him precisely what He wills. It is, ultimately, this defective sense of the Divine, even in its immanent working, which lies at the root of our modern tendency to depress the supernatural; and the evidences of it face us everywhere. Thus, for example, we find Dr. Dods using such language as this: "God was compelled" (p. 85), "It was useless for Christ to die, until . . . ." (p. 86),—as if God were under the domination of men and needed to wait on man and walk warily lest He should get beyond His tether. It is amazing that any thinking man could imagine that by such shallow expedients as this language embodies, the great problem may be solved of why God Almighty operates in this world by process. The current employment of such language is the saddest indication of how far the men of our day have lost the vision of God, and of how prone they are to operate in their thinking with the will of man as really the prime factor of importance in the world's history. It surely is no wonder, therefore, that, even though but a little under the influence of this modern blight, Dr. Dods should show himself throughout these lectures working under the fatal confusion of man's thought of God with God's revelation of Himself, and that he should accordingly be continually treating the record as the record of how man (under whatever Divine impulses) had come to conceive of God rather than of how God from time to time revealed Himself to man.

We have written somewhat desultorily, but we hope we have made it clear that the fountain of Dr. Dods' inadequate conception of Scripture as the documentation of God's revelation of Himself for salvation, lies in his inadequate conception of the modes of the Divine operation in the world—in a word, in his chariness with regard to the supernatural. He wishes apparently as little supernatural a book as he can, as a Christian man, manage to get along with. The writers of Scripture, it is undeniable, occupied a diametrically opposite position. There was no antecedent opposition to the supernatural in their minds. They lived in a supernaturalistic atmosphere. They saw God in everything and above and over everything. And they give us a frankly supernatural book. Dr. Dods says that it is not the book but the man that is inspired: Paul says that every, or all, Scripture is God-breathed. Dr. Dods says that much of Scripture is of little or no spiritual value; Paul says it all is profitable to make the man of God perfect. Dr. Dods says that whole stretches of it are untrustworthy for historical or other not directly spiritual purposes, and no part of it is untouched by human fallibility; the writers of the New Testament say as the end of all strife, "It is written!" and Jesus Himself says, that when we adduce Scripture we adduce what can not "be broken."

It is possible that in a matter of fact like the infallibility of Scripture, however, Scripture will not, on Dr. Dods' view, be implicitly trusted. We must at least ask, however, how he will practically get along with his fallible Scriptures. He gives his strength to proving that, fallible as they are, they yet preserve a true picture of Christ, and that Christ, once given us, becomes the criterion of Scripture. Now, of course, this is the main thing. The Scriptures exist to give us Christ; and when they have brought us to Christ they have performed their fundamental function. No human being who knows the Scriptures and has by them come to Christ will deny that. But what Christ is this that we shall get from our fallible Scriptures? We know the Christ which the infallible Scriptures give us: and every lineament of that Divine-human form is precious to us. Shall we be able to retain this form in all its lineaments on the basis of a fallible Scripture? How much of it goes, with the infallibility of Scripture? Nothing essential, says Dr. Dods: and we might conceivably be willing to content ourselves with the Christ he preserves for us. But what about the Christ that Wernle gives us? or Wrede? or Oscar Holtzmann? or Auguste Sabatier? or Réville? or Brandt? or Harnack? Which Christ of the fallible Scriptures shall we be ultimately forced to put up with? Will He become to us at length only a vague figure who lived in Galilee nineteen centuries ago and made a religious impression on His followers of such depth that it has propagated itself down to our day? And when we have got our Christ from Scripture, what Scripture will that Christ in turn give us? The Christ the Scriptures as they stand give us, is the Christ that said of Scripture "It can not be broken." Everywhere throughout the whole extent of the Scriptural representation, it is this attitude that He holds to Scripture. It seems quite clear that this is not the Christ that Dr. Dods would have us receive from Scripture; or at least, if we receive Him, it is quite clear that he would not have us accept His Scriptures at His estimate. It appears that we are to estimate Scripture not by His teaching, then, but by His "standard." That He was conscious of no incongruity of Scripture with His standard,—even that is not to weigh decisively with us. We are to do our own judging: we are easily to reject all that does not approve itself to our estimate as measuring up to Him. It may seem to some of us, indeed, that we thus come into grave danger of discrediting the very Christ we have received. But as we have received Him only from a fallible Scripture, perhaps we may be justified in adjusting Him when received to our own ideals. Many pursue this method. But in that case what warrant, other than our own subjective conception, have we for the Christ we finally adopt and make the criterion of Scripture? And if we are to make the Scriptures that give us the Christ and then make the Christ which gives us back the Scriptures—it will be hard if we do not ultimately find ourselves arrived at the goal for which we set out.

Subjectivism is, in truth, the gulf into which all our modern theorizers inevitably fall. Dr. Dods no more escapes it than the others. What he really gives us is therefore an ideal sketch—a “program,” is it not, that they call it?—of what he would like to be the principle of the canon, the nature of revelation, the function of inspiration, the extent of infallibility, and the like; of what he would find it commodious, in accordance with his preconceived opinions as to God and the world, to hold and teach and defend on these matters. For what is really the principle of the canon, the nature and method of revelation, the effect of inspiration, the infallibility of Scripture,—for the facts, hard or comforting as we may esteem them—we must go elsewhere. That what Dr. Dods could wish were the facts approaches much nearer to what they are than what they are represented to be by many others, sharers with him in the modern prepossessions against the supernatural—though adopting them more exclusively or developing them more consequently than he—we very gladly recognize. Dr. Dods still believes in the general historical trustworthiness of the Gospels; and, although unwarrantably assailing their trustworthiness in many details (on, let us say it frankly, very frivolous grounds), yet sturdily and successfully defends the essential historical soundness of their narrative, and especially the trustworthiness of the portraiture of our Lord which they present. Dr. Dods even believes in and defends the reality of the miraculous element in the life of Christ as it is depicted by the Evangelists. These are great things to say of one who is so much affected by the modern spirit which, as he himself tells us, is swayed by nothing more profoundly than “the presupposition of the incredibility of miracles” (p. 134), and to which the presence of a supernatural element in a narrative is enough to condemn it at once as unhistorical. We rejoice that Dr. Dods would preserve to us at least a supernatural Redeemer, even if he draws back before too supernatural a Bible. We could wish, of course, that he had gone on and done as much justice to the supernaturalism of revelation and inspiration and the resultant Scriptures as he has to the supernaturalism of the person and work of our Lord. As it is, he inevitably seems to us to have handled these matters far too lightly, and to have presented only, as he himself remarks of Professor Huxley in a similar case, “another demonstration that the ablest man may sometimes be satisfied with touching but the surface of a subject.”

### **A CHAPTER IN PROPHECY: THE SEVENTIES AND SEVENS**

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The prophecy of the ninth chapter of Daniel, in many respects, is very peculiar; in some of these, is unlike any other of the Old or the New Testament. The discussion having reference to its fulfilment has been too often