

New Testament

No More Infallible Books

L. Wallis: “God’s plan for the human race obviously does not include what is called an ‘infallible’ volume of Scripture. The Bible is holy – but not in the sense of ancient orthodoxy among Jews and Christians....The source materials in the Bible are, to a considerable degree, at variance with each other. The Bible...was never brought into complete harmony by any central, authoritative ‘Board of Editors.’” (Bible & Modern Belief, p. 32.)

Father Herbert: “The inadequacy of the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture has demonstrated itself. It is too narrow to fit the facts; it cannot be carried through in the exegesis of Scripture without resorting to special pleading; it does not explain the admitted imperfection of the O.T.; it involves a materialistic notion of truth. Above all, in being a negative word, it is quite inadequate to express the glory of the revelation of God in the Scriptures.” (Exp. Times 70:33.)

E.C. Blackman: “The Word of God is in the words of the Bible, but it is not to be identified with them...but interpreted out of them...The Bible is not itself revelation but is the record of revelation.” (N. Davies & D. Daube, Eschatolg. Background of the N.T., 18f.)

M.H. Franzman: “There is nothing in Jesus’ training of the Twelve or in his commissioning of St. Paul which points to an apostolic Word in writing.” (Concordia Theol. Monthly 28:193.)

V. Taylor: “It needs to be repeated in the strongest possible manner that the hope of absolute certainty based on an Infallible Book or an Infallible Church is a delusion.” (Exp. Times 71:72)

K.W. Clark: “We are often reminded today that there is not infallible manuscript or recension....The libraries of the world contain thousands of manuscript copies of the N.T. which gives full evidence that interpreters differed and sometimes wrote their theological differences into the text.” (Davies & Daube, op. cit., 38, 44.)

More Revelation Needed

W. Van Unnik: “The expression ‘if any man shall add...and if any man shall take away’...was extremely common in Greek writings in general; it is a formal set expression. Aristotle says it is a proverbial expression...It is of general application and can be attached to all sorts of documents. It is especially common as a term affixed to formal treatises...” In Rev. 22:18-19 “it simply states that one should not remove anything from the commandments of God nor add anything to them, i.e., that one should do no more or no less” (than God commands). The Christians were perfectly familiar with the formula as the Jews applied it to the O.T., “for the rule which the Jews applied to the O.T. was very familiar to the Christians and was accepted by them” – yet they ‘added’ the N.T. to the O.T.! In 200 A.D. “it was regarded as still possible

for someone to presume to add to the Word of the Gospel,” only in the 3rd century did the words of Rev. 22:18-19 acquire their present signification. (Vigilise Christmas 3:1-4.)

J. Jeremias: “The doctrine of a continuous revelation is a Gnostic heresy.” (Exp. Times 69:399.) “Revelation...continues to take place whenever the Kerygma is preached. Revelation takes place in the act of faith.” (ib. p. 355.) “The Church’s preaching is NOT revelation, but it leads to revelation.” (Ib. 339.)

F. Filson: “Biblicism forgets that it is God, not the Bible, who is the central fact for the Christian. Even the Bible cannot speak without the Spirit...in fact the Spirit interprets, continues, and advances that very revelation which was given in Christ and which is contained in the Bible.” (Exp. Times 69:65.)

The Language Problem

E.M. Good: “The Received Standard Version is admittedly a ‘provisional version.’ Surely. What version is not? I am disposed to doubt that we will ever have a ‘definitive translation.’” (Christianity Today Jan. 1961, p. 6.) “And if we must await the time when biblical scholars happen to come with all the right guesses in them, what will we do in the meantime on Sunday morning?...No translation of the Bible into English will ever be more than a provisional translation.” (ib. 6-7.)

H.C. Dodd: “The first axiom for the art of translation is that there is no such thing as an exact equivalence of meaning between the words in different languages...A word is a pointer to a whole area of meaning, enriched, extended, and complicated by the association and suggestions which depend on particular ways of thought, historical expression, and social considerations, and a host of factors which do not easily pass the frontier between languages.” (Exp. Times 72:268.)

N Turner: “The modern study of Comparative Philology has revolutionized previous attitudes to the language of the N.T.” For example, the papyri show that “Parousia was a king’s visit, for which taxes might be imposed to provide him a crown; hence the contrast implied in 2 Ti. 4:8, where Christ gives a crown at His parousia. Sometimes a new period of time was dated from one of these visits; hence the significance of 2 Pet. 3:12f, that Christ’s parousia will began a new aeon.” (Not how this same imagery is clearly set forth in Mosiah 2 and 5!)

The N.T. uses ordinary words, but in a wholly new context. N. Turner: “At the present moment, however, scholars are more prone than the early pioneers to emphasize the vital differences between the way these ordinary words are used in the Biblical language and the way they are used in the Greek Koine; and to notice (how) words and constructions experience a conversion similar to that of the writers.” “The N.T. writers do not create a special vocabulary...but use some of the simplest words in Greek and top them up with new Christian meaning.” (Ib. 105.)

J. Jeremias: Recent and painful progress in the Galilean Aramaic has revealed “peculiarities in the utterances of Jesus...which are without contemporary parallels,” e.g., the word ‘Abba’ in addressing God, and ‘Amen’ as an introduction. (Exp. Times 69:337)

K.W. Clark: Between 1930 and 1955 there appeared “at least forty-five (45) independent translations of the New Testament” into English. (Davies & Daube, op. cit., 39.)

The Textual Problem

K.W. Clark: “Any substantial effort to improve the basic critical text must ‘mark time’ until the whole complex of textual studies reveals a new integrating pattern.” (Davies & Daube., p. 42.) “The present generation stands at the beginning of a new cycle, in the search for the original Greek N.T.” (ib. p. 31.)

C.C. McCown: “Thirty or forty years ago...there was much talk of the ‘assured results’ of literary-historical (‘higher’) criticism...Now...biblical scholarship must fight for its life...in the light of new methods and new archaeological, textual, palaeographical, and historical discoveries.” (Jnl. Bibl. Lit. 75:12-13.) “For over 400 years the Greek N.T. has been in the hands of Christian scholars...for over 75 years scholars have been presenting their most brilliant ideas...But now only between the Continent and America, but within the American group, differences are sharper than ever...largely, because of the failure of our scholarship to attain assured and agreed results.” (ib. 13.)

Important recent discoveries:

1. The Chester Beatty Papyri, 1931. (N.T. documents written “within eighty years of the Apostles.”)
2. The John Rylands Papyrus 457, 1935. (A text of John 18 written before 150 A.D.)
3. Edgerdon Papyrus 2, 1935. (N.T. fragment written in Egypt before 150 A.D., but long after its original.)
4. The Dura Parchment, 1935. First known fragment of the long-lost Diatessaron of Tatian.
5. The Dead Sea Scrolls, 1947ff (Including a complete Isaiah 1000 years older than any Heb. text of the O.T.!)
6. The Nag Hammadi Manuscripts, 1947-1948. (A complete Gnostic-Christian library – 13 bound volumes – from the 3rd and 4th centuries.)
7. Bodmer Papyrus 2, 1956. (Last 8 chapters of John, frags. from 200 A.D.)
8. Crosby Codex at Univ. of Mississippi (Coptic I Peter and Jonah from the 3rd century A.D.)
9. Syrian Commentary of St. Ephraem on the Diatessaron, 1956, in C. Beatty Coll., dated 500 A.D.
10. Bodmer Papyrus 3, 1956. (John and opening chapters of Genesis – 52 pages, a 4th century Bohairic text over 300 years older than any other Bohairic writing known.)

C. Moule: “New testament textual criticism has gone forward with overwhelming intensity....The sheer quantity of the MSS available makes the editing of Classical texts seem almost child’s play beside the size and complexity of the N.T. apparatus.” (London Qt. & Holborn Rev., 1958, p. 91.)

K.W. Clark: “The eclectic method is openly embraced in our day. Indeed, it is the only procedure available to us at this stage, but it is very important to recognize that it is a secondary

and tentative method...it cannot by itself create a text...It is suitable only for exploration and experimentation...It belongs to a day like ours in which we know only that the traditional theory of the text is faulty but cannot yet see clearly to correct the fault.” (Davies and Daube., op. cit., 37f):... “We have reached the end of that era but don’t know what the text should be: ‘The best critical text so far achieved now holds little assurance of being the original text...’” (29) “The discoveries that mark our time may be expected to reveal ultimately a new meaning; and each new product of research to assume its place in a new pattern...The critic is sobered by the realization that the best critical text so far achieved now holds little assurance of being the original text.” (p. 30.) “Textual theory seems to have reached an impasse in our time,” (p. 50.) The N.T. presents “the most difficult and complex problems of all textual criticism.” (p. 51.)

W. Albright: New discoveries show that the N.T. picture is contemporary, that Christology is not a late development, that John is not Stoic or Mandaean, that the usual second-century date for much of the N.T., especially John, is fallacious. “This represents a volte-face of such drastic character that it may well require several decades for the majority of unprejudiced scholars to accept it.” (Cross Currents 9:114f.)

Paul quotes the Ancients

A.M Hunter: The basic question: “How much of Paul was original and how much was derived? It is now clear that ‘Paul, far more than many scholars had allowed, rested firmly on his predecessors, and was NOT to be regarded as an innovator.’” (Exp. Times 72:321.) Paul and the Gospels “drew deeply on certain passages from the prophets and Psalms, while apparently neglecting other portions of the O.T. And when we study the passages most commonly cited, we find that they have a single ‘plot,’ with three main variations. The first concerns the Day of the Lord; the second the New Israel; and the third the suffering and ultimate victory of God’s Righteous Servant.” (ib. 321.)

E. Howell: Many passages formerly thought to be original to Paul turn out to be quotations from ancient writers; his writings are larded with quotes and paraphrases from Aristophanes, Plato, Epimenides (an ancient Greek prophet), Pindar, Aeschylus, Euripides, etc.; he uses the Greek technical terms of the law courts and the boxing ring and the athletic field. (Exp. Times 71:328-331.)

But Paul’s own background was Hebrew, and the Semitic element is now emerging as dominant in the N.T. N.Turner: “the influence of the Septuagint and the Semitic cast of the authors’ thoughts, have been increasingly appreciated in recent years.” (Exp. Times 71:105.) (All this has direct bearing on the Book of Mormon.)

The Statue of John

C.L. Mitton: “Thirty years ago...a kind of current orthodoxy had come to be widely accepted concerning...the date of the fourth Gospel, the area where it originated, and, in general, its relationship to the other three Gospels.” In this system a “late date was felt to be required also by the ‘advanced’ theological thought of the Gospel...characterized as ‘Hellenistic’” and held to originate “in some centre of Greek culture, such as Ephesus.” (Exp. Times 71:337.) Then in

1953 Dodd and in 1954 Noack showed that John was the teaching of Jewish sectaries “completely unfamiliar with the other...the Synoptic Gospels.” Now it is held that “it is the most Hebraic book in the N.T., except perhaps for the Apocalypse,” and that it “took shape” in the “heart of South Palestinian Judaism,” and “stood in what has aptly been called the ‘pre-gnostic’ stream of Jewish wisdom mysticism.” (ib. 339.)

N.C. Dodd: “This disquieting document (Revelations) has caused much searching of hearts in recent criticism. A generation ago it was still possible to regard Revelations as a work of scissors and paste,” but today we recognize “that the Johannine riddle will be solved only after the point of the entire Johannine corpus has been discovered.” (Davies & Daube, p. 75f.)

W. Albright: “Under the impact of the new findings, a strong reaction has recently set in, materially aided by C.C. Torrey’s view that John is a translation from an Aramaic text written down well before 70 A.D. Some radical scholars now consider John as the earliest of the Gospels instead of the latest.” (Archaeol. of Palest. 240.)

The Historical Jesus

C.B. Armstrong: “Christianity has always claimed to be a historical religion...If the factual truth of our records were disproved, it is generally held...that the doctrinal truth must vanish with them.” (Hibberts Jnl. 55:131.)

O. Cullmann: “The historical character of salvation, which Bultmann regards as unacceptable to the modern mind...is not a secondary element, but it is the essence of the thought of the N.T. It cannot be eliminated and replaced by an existentialist philosophy....In interpreting the first Christian documents by way of the philosophical approach of the individual existence, we ascribe to their authors a preoccupation which, in any case, is not primary for them, and we make mythical and timeless what they regarded to be real and temporal.” (Concordia Theol. Mo. 27:24.)

Why was the historical Jesus rejected? Because –

J. Jeremias: “The Jesus of history and the Christ preached by the Church are not the same,” as was first pointed out by Reimar when in 1778 he launched The Search for the Historical Jesus. The search first led to Jesus the “Jewish political Messiah who failed,” whereupon his disciples, who “had no wish to return to their trade,” stole the body of Jesus and “created the figure of Christ.” (Exp. Times 69:333.) This concept “was clearly absurd and amateurish,” (ib. 334), but no more so than what followed: “...unconsciously, dogma has been replaced by psychology and fantasy...It was truly disastrous that Albert Schweitzer, who throughout his whole work has exposed with relentless insight the true nature of this wish-fulfilment, should himself have been enamored by the fallacy of psychological reconstruction.” Today it is agreed that from the materials available “it is not possible to construct a life of Jesus...we can only know Jesus clad in the garb of myth...We cannot go behind the Kerygma. It is true to say that the dream is over of writing a life of Jesus.” (334f.) Yet we cannot dispense with history since “every verse of the Gospels tells us that the origin of Christianity is...an historical event.” (ib. 335.) “The time is past when scientific skepticism could doubt whether

Jesus had ever lived at all.” (335.) But the real Jesus “was a Jewish prophet” who “preached a thorough-going O.T. belief in God,” which “can have no significance for Christian faith,” (Bultmann); hence the scholars turned from Jesus to Paul for an understanding of the message; but “we cannot understand the message of Paul unless we know the message of Jesus,” and so today “we need to know who the Jesus of history was, and what was the content of His message,” avoiding “a subjective, modernizing life of Jesus.” (336.) Though “we shall never be able to obviate” the danger of “projecting our own theology into Jesus of Nazareth...we possess today...ramparts which will preserve us from an arbitrary modernizing of Jesus, that is, which will protect us from ourselves.” (336.)

What is the key? J. Jeremias: “...behind every word of Jesus and every deed lies his claim to authority...If we treat the Gospels as history we must see in them the claim of Jesus to authority. This claim to Divine authority is the origin of Christianity, and hence occupation with the historical Jesus and His message...is the central task of N.T. scholarship.” (ib. 338.) “There is no parallel to the authority with which he dares to address God as ‘Abba’...If with the utmost zeal and conscientiousness at our disposal, we occupy ourselves with the historical Jesus, the result is always the same, we find ourselves in the presence of God Himself. That is the unique fact to which the sources bear witness.” (338.)

The Present Impasse

B. Marle: “Today we are reconstructing what the first Christians must have done. But it is not enough to find out what the original Christians believed – we must make our beliefs coincide with it in order to understand it. This is the direction of research today.” (Etudes 302:74.)

A. Leaney: “If this is exasperating, it is also unavoidable: there is no statement in the N.T. about Jesus which is not about the Christ of faith. The attempt to discover the historical figure around whom so many incredible legends have gathered, and then to give him his proper respect as one of the great teachers of mankind, is an attempt doomed to failure for the very simple reason that the evidence which we possess knows no such person.” (Ren. & Mod. Stud. 2:121.) “If we try to make him into a teacher we find to our dismay that the Sermon on the Mount is not a sermon, nor is it an ethic for everyday life: it...summons the latter-day elders of the people of God once more to obedience to the covenant, a renewed covenant, which he has to seal by his blood.” (ib. 122.)

H. Riesenfeld: “When Jesus proclaimed his gospel he did not preach abstract religion nor moral thoughts but presented himself as the centre of the coming kingdom of God...he himself has created Christology in its very kernel.” (Davies & Daube, op. cit., 89-90.)

T.W. Manson: “it is easy to laugh at those who, a couple of generations ago, saw in Jesus a good 19th-century liberal humanist with a simple faith in a paternal deity. It is less easy to see the joke when the Jesus of history is a 20th-century existentialist, a kind of pre-existent Heidegger.” (Davies & Daube, op. cit., p. 220.)

J. Jeremias: Some years back “the battle-cry was, Back to Jesus, the Man of Nazareth! Not christological dogma, but the personality and religion of Jesus are the decisive factors.

Under the shelter of this watchword a multitude of pictures of Jesus came into being, and we smile as we ready them today...Jesus the teacher of morality, the ideal Man, the artist in speech, the socialist and social reformer...Every author finds in the personality of Jesus the reflection of his own ideal.” (Exp. Times 69:334.)

W. Albright: “Even today the majority of O.T. scholars follow blindly in the trail of Wellhausen, assuming a three-fold evolution of biblical literature....In N.T. scholarship the Hegelian attitude...can still be traced in the common view that Jesus was a teacher of ethics who represented the highest level then reached by Judaism, that later christology is the work of Paul.” (Cross Currents 9:114.)

H. Nibley: Though Cyrus Gordon and Albright claim this inexcusable still it is understandable among people who claim no revelation. But what about our LDS General Boards, Sunday Schools, Institutes and Seminaries where these things are being taught today? Is there no other way of being intellectually respectable than to repeat mechanically the party-line of die-hard Protestant divinity schools?