Father Hebert and Fundamentalism[1]

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It is made quite clear that the controversy between the S.C.M. and the Evangelical Unions gave birth to this book, *Fundamentalism and the Church of God*, and that it is specially concerned with the Inter-Varsity Fellowship and Conservative Evangelicals in the Church of England.

The author leaves no doubt in the mind of the reader that he is strongly opposed to Conservative Evangelicalism in general and the Inter-Varsity Fellowship in particular, but his opposition in the main is put forward with graciousness and sincerity. Yet this graciousness and sincerity, which we greatly appreciate, must not be allowed to distract our attention from the plausible dangers and errors which are not only found in the book but which are bound to arise elsewhere. This can be clearly seen from a review of the book by the Editor of the *Church Times*, who heads his review, " A Heresy Explored ". Not only does this latter title sound the alarm for all Conservative Evangelicals, but it completely destroys the author's plea for unity. He, himself, is a member of the Anglo-Catholic party, the *Church Times* is the official organ of that party, therefore the official view is that the attitude of Conservative Evangelicals towards the Bible is heretical.

AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Although other aspects of the book will be dealt with, we must endeavour to examine the main point, which is the authority of Holy Scripture. We are told that the written words of man must be subject to literary and historical criticism, and that as the Bible falls into this category, therefore it must be subject to the above criticism. This is clear enough for all to understand and appreciate, but we are then told, " The Word of God is the Word which He has spoken and still speaks. It is His Word and calls for our entire acceptance and obedience." It seems obvious from this quotation that the Word of God has supreme authority, otherwise it has no right to claim our entire acceptance and obedience. Now Our Lord said that David wrote Psalm 110 and that Jonah was three days and three nights in the fish's belly, but the writer strongly criticizes the former statement of Our Lord, and one is left with the impression that he does not accept the latter. To overcome the difficulty he argues that ignorance is not error, which, of course, is true, but when we make an erroneous statement because of ignorance that statement is still erroneous. Therefore, in actual fact, the writer accuses Our Lord of making erroneous statements on the one hand, yet, on the other, he states that the Word of God is His Word and calls for our entire acceptance and obedience, i.e. it is supreme. The fact of the matter is that Dr. Hebert is not at all certain wherein authority lies. Where Biblical criticism departs

[1] *Fundamentalism and the Church of God*, by Gabriel Hebert, S.C.M. Press, pp. 156, 15/-.

from the sayings of Our Lord, he is prepared to follow Biblical criticism. Drawn to its logical conclusion it amounts to this—that the Word of God in the Bible can only be found and proved by scientific and historical criticism, which is nothing more or less than rationalism and leaves little or no room for God.

(*a*) *Liberalism of a past decade*

Dr. Hebert says, " The glory of Liberalism was first the sustained endeavour to seek the truths of the events just as the natural scientists were seeking the truths about natural phenomena. The Liberals knew that the facts, whatever they were, were God's facts, and all truth is God's Truth." There is nothing very illuminating in this statement, for all Evangelicals know that true facts are God's facts, and that all truth is God's Truth. This has never been objected to—the objection lies in making theories facts, and errors truth.

In the same connection we are told—" The Holy Spirit was not absent in this new study of the Bible ". This was recently proclaimed in an Oxford University sermon by C. F. Evans, quoted with approval by Hebert—" Must we not claim ", he said, " that the same Holy Spirit Who spake by the prophets and Who inspired the Scriptures, does in another and lesser mode of His operation lead men to a right critical exercise of the natural reason upon the same Scriptures? " Yet Dr. Hebert tells us almost in the same breath that " It is indeed true that the Liberals often fell far short of a right view of His Godhead and of the Word of God which the Bible proclaims ", and on page 78 it is said—" But we must return to the Liberals. On the theological side the original Fundamentalists rightly saw that they were confronted with real heresy. Perhaps the central point of all was this, that religion was being substituted for God," and again, " The account which the Liberals gave of the course of the history was certainly falsified by their misunderstanding of the Bible " (p. 79). Thus, on the one hand, we are informed that the Holy Spirit was in the study of Liberalism and that He leads men to a right critical exercise of the natural reason upon the same Scriptures. Yet, on the other hand, they had a wrong view of the Godhead of Jesus Christ and of the Word of God which the Bible proclaims, that they taught real heresy, substituted religion for God, and their account of the course of history was false. It is true that the author would assert that no one school has all the truth. But even if we grant this, are we to believe that where there is such a denial of the Christian faith, as stated above, the Holy Spirit was working in such a Movement?

(*b*) *Science and Theology*

We also find a further difficulty in the concessions which are allowed to Science and not to Theology. He says that " Theology is always a puzzle to the scientific worker. He cannot understand the study which appears to have all its dogmas laid down in advance, for such procedure is contrary to his whole method " (p. 72). While Dr. Hebert says, " All its dogmas," it is right to point out that Science accepts certain dogmas without hesitation. There could be no forward movement in the scientific world if it was not prepared to accept

the fact that certain dogmas need no further inquiry. Are we to deny the same rights to Theology? Are theologians to go on for ever seeking to find out whether certain Biblical statements are facts or theories?

On page 80 he says, "We have laid it down as a fundamental principle that scientific inquiry into natural phenomena or history must be free to follow the evidence, and that there can be no honest inquiry if the conclusions, which it is to reach, are determined before it starts". The writer accepts the fact that it is a fundamental principle that scientific inquiry into natural phenomena or history must be free to follow the evidence. Illustration of this is given in one account of the Resurrection. We are told, "St. Paul was certainly not prepared to cut loose from history". But the point at issue is not whether Paul was prepared to cut loose from history but whether there can be an honest inquiry if the conclusions are determined before it starts. Now with St. Paul the conclusions were obviously determined beforehand, for he had seen the Risen Christ, but when he had to deal with the doubts of others he did not hesitate to quote historical testimony. A Christian is someone who has experienced in his own life the living Christ Himself, therefore the conclusions about the Resurrection are determined, and he can only point to the historical testimony as an objective witness to his personal experience. Then there must be times when faith is compelled to rise above scientific inquiry even when the evidence appears to be against it.

The Virgin Birth of Our Lord is a good example of faith rising above the evidence at our disposal, and of belief being placed in the written records. This birth must be either a historical fact or pure fiction. In a matter such as this it is impossible to appeal to the *genre* of the story. The author and Evangelicals accept it as a historical fact, but what evidence is there in its favour, and does it stand up to scientific inquiry? There are only two portions of Scripture which refer to it. It is often stated that the Matthæan account is derived from Isaiah vii. 14, and that there is some doubt about Luke's account on textual grounds. Thus, apart from a very doubtful reading in John i. 13, this completes the whole evidence of the New Testament, and no part of it is free from doubt. The whole scientific inquiry into the natural phenomenon of human birth never found another case of Virgin birth. Then Our Lord Himself never in the Scriptures claimed to have been born of a Virgin. The evidence, therefore, derived from the whole history of man is against it, and a real critical exercise of the natural reason is also opposed to it, as is seen in the writings of critics of fifty years ago. To be logical, reasonable and consistent, Dr. Hebert should also reject it, but he does not do so even though the many miracles of the Old Testament, which he does reject, are mild compared with this one. Briefly, in the miracle of the Virgin Birth, Dr. Hebert is compelled to depart from the system which he sets up, and to accept the inerrancy of the written words of Scripture, yet he is not prepared to allow the same rights to Conservative Evangelicals on other matters.

(c) *Divine and Human Elements*

The written words of men and the Word of God are not identical in the Bible, states the author, and he clearly makes a division which

remains theoretical, for no logical means is given whereby we may differentiate the two. With regard to the Divine side of the Bible the writer is hardly concerned. He is so keen to stress the human side and also the human nature of Our Lord, that one might accuse him of drifting into the error of Nestorianism. He may, and probably does, accept the fact that Our Lord is " Very God of Very God ", but there is nothing in this book which would suggest it. He does not rise higher than this—" Yet we must say that in Him as Man dwelt the fulness of Divine wisdom ; all theories of His ' emptying ' of Himself which suppose that in becoming Man He left His Divine Nature behind, to resume it at His Ascension, are contrary to the Faith. We must say, however, that in His Human Nature God was present and was revealed ; in Him were God's Righteousness and God's Truth, God's Love and God's Wrath, translated (so to speak) into our human language." There is nothing in this statement which would have disturbed the Arians, yet Christ was truly God—" Very God of Very God ". " Veiled in flesh the Godhead see " is far more correct than this statement of Dr. Hebert, and it is unfortunate that the writer has drifted into that old fallacy, " to err is human," which was really put forward as an excuse for human sin. True man was made in the image of God, and when he defaced the latter he defaced the former, and it would be more correct to say to err is a characteristic of fallen humanity. Yet it is the acceptance of this wrong premise which has led Dr. Hebert into accusing Christ of error. So with the Bible he stresses the human side so much that one is left wondering where God comes in, that is, if He does come in it all. He fails to realize that it was a similar fault which led Biblical Criticism fifty years ago to deny such matters as prophecy, miracles, the action of God in the original revelation, the Virgin Birth, and also the Deity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

SOCRATIC DIALOGUE

The following rough sketch of a Socratic dialogue will give some idea, and we hope not unfairly, of the views of Dr. Hebert :

Socrates : You admit that all written words of men should be subject to literary and historical criticism ? *Hebert* : Certainly. *Socrates* : You maintain that the Bible is the written words of men ? *Hebert* : Yes, I do. *Socrates* : You must then admit that the Bible should be subject to literary and historical criticism ? *Hebert* : Undoubtedly I do admit it. *Socrates* : You also maintain, I am given to understand, that the Word of God is also found in the Bible ? *Hebert* : Yes. *Socrates* : But do you maintain that this Word of God is not subject to literary and historical criticism ? *Hebert* : I am not certain about this, could you make your meaning clearer ? *Socrates* : Certainly, let me put it in another way—You say that the Word of God is His Word and calls for our entire acceptance and obedience ? *Hebert* : Yes, that is correct. *Socrates* : Good. You will, I think, admit that that which calls for our entire acceptance and obedience must have supreme authority ? *Hebert* : Undoubtedly. *Socrates* : Then the Word of God must have supreme authority ? *Hebert* : Of course. *Socrates* : Now you will admit, I think, that that which has supreme authority

is not subject to literary and historical criticism? *Hebert*: Yes, I must admit it. *Socrates*: I suppose that there is a way or means or method whereby we can find the Word of God? *Hebert*: There is. It is the method of literary and historical criticism. *Socrates*: Do you admit that when this method is applied there is no possibility of error? *Hebert*: Certainly not, for critics are only human and subject to error. *Socrates*: Then it is possible that you may still fail to find God's Word even after this method has operated. *Hebert*: I am afraid so, if this was all. *Socrates*: Then there is something more? *Hebert*: Yes, there is the help of the Holy Spirit. *Socrates*: Excellent. You admit that the method of literary and historical criticism with the help of the Holy Spirit is sure to find the Word of God? *Hebert*: I do. *Socrates*: The critics of fifty years ago, I suppose, used the method of literary and historical criticism? *Hebert*: Yes, of course, they did. *Socrates*: You admit, I think, in your book that they had the help of the Holy Spirit? *Hebert*: Yes, I do admit it. *Socrates*: But did you not state in your book that these men made mistakes? *Hebert*: Yes, I did.

etc., etc., etc.

We find ourselves wandering in a complete circle, and are left high and dry as to where authority stands. The writer, in a fine endeavour to escape the dilemma, leads us at last into abject subjectivism.

CHRISTIAN UNITY

A special plea is made for unity between S.C.M. and the Inter-Varsity Fellowship on the ground that "it is impossible that a controversy between believing Christians should end in final disagreement, for Christianity has made them one". We wholeheartedly agree that there should be no final disagreement amongst believing Christians, but when we go further into the meaning of "believing Christians" difficulties immediately arise. We are told that "the visible Church is part of the Gospel. Nothing could be plainer than this in Holy Scripture. From the beginning the purpose of God for man's salvation has been worked out through the believing and worshipping community." Here we have the identification of the visible Church with the believing and worshipping community, which sounds very strange to Evangelical ears, and has no Scriptural authority. On the contrary, such parables as "the Wheat and Tares", and "the Sheep and Goats", show that in the visible Church there are those who do not believe, who are non-Christians.

The bringing in of the people of Israel and the Old Covenant to support his argument has the same weakness. In Israel there existed those who believed and those who did not believe, for there was a spiritual Israel as well as the visible Israel (Rom. ix. 6, 7), and Hebrews iii and iv show that many members of the people of Israel did not receive the promise because of unbelief. It is exactly so in the visible Church—there are those who only know a mechanical form of religion and are complete strangers to the saving Grace of God. Those who desire unity in the visible Church appeal to St. John xvii. 21, but an examination of verse 20, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word," shows that Our

Lord prays for the unity of true believing men and women, and this unity has been seen over and over again. There never has been, nor ever will be, unity within the visible Church. The nearest approach to it was in the medieval age and, strangely enough, this has been called the " dark age " ! The rise of the International Council of Christian Churches as a protest to the World Council of Churches may be unfortunate, but the latter body is to blame because of its unscriptural attitude, in such matters as Holy Communion and the Episcopacy, towards Free Churchmen.

We must ask the question—Who are the real creators of division in the Church ? Is it Conservative Evangelicalism, or those who insist on Episcopacy to such an extent that Free Churchmen appear not to be a part of the true Catholic Church. For more years than one can number the Ecumenical Movement has been talking about Christian unity, but the Anglo-Catholic party has so insisted upon the Episcopacy for all branches of the Church that no unity has taken place. This tragic barrier is a creation of man, and herein lies the cause of true division. While the Ecumenical Movement has been trying to overcome this fundamental barrier, and has so far failed, Conservative Evangelicals have been putting Christian unity into practice. At the Keswick Convention held annually thousands of men and women of all denominations meet together for fellowship, prayer, and study of God's Word. They are able, both Anglicans and Free Churchmen (and we thank God for this) to have fellowship at the Lord's Table. Here we find denominationalism and the barriers created by man overcome, and so what others have been talking about, Evangelicals have accomplished.

SINLESSNESS

The author accuses the Conservative Evangelicals of holding that true Christians are sinless, which is quite fantastic. He has been careful to read one aspect of Conservative Evangelical literature, but unfortunately he appears not to have read any of the Keswick Convention literature of the past seventy-five years. If he had done so he would have been the first to admit that sinlessness is not only never mentioned, but constantly opposed. He certainly would have found much teaching concerning the failure of man, but also the way of victory over sin and the self-life through the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit. His accusation that Evangelicals foster separation is unfounded. If he were to examine all walks of life, not only in the Ministry and other professions, but in the industrial life of the nation, he would find Conservative Evangelicals taking their stand for the cause of Jesus Christ. It is not these people who have separated themselves from the world, but those who have entered monastic houses, and failed to face up to the real facts of every-day life.

THE CLOSED MIND

A serious accusation is that of Sir John Wolfenden, quoted at length by the author, concerning the supposed " closed mind " of the Conservative Evangelical Undergraduate. Sir John says, " But I am frightened—that is not too strong a word—by the number of young

people who to-day come from Sixth Forms to Universities with their minds firmly closed, locked, bolted and barred, not just about the Bible and religion in general but about all sorts of things as well, philosophy, politics and history among them ". Page 141 also records that he said " He had no use for the boy and girl at school who wasted two or three years and then went into examinations, shut their eyes and prayed ! " This latter statement we can dismiss as perfectly ridiculous, for it is by no means a tenet of Conservative Evangelicalism and would be condemned out of hand by any responsible Evangelical. Such a statement as this is not worthy of Sir John, who has departed from an intelligent approach to an exaggerated emotional one to try to prove his point of view.

" The closed mind " is more interesting and very serious if true, but we challenge the truth of this statement. The Bishop of Southwell, when speaking about the same persons, made the following remark, " A number of these boys and young men, of course, broaden out to some extent during their training ". Now it would be admitted that in so far as these have broadened out they have not a closed mind. I take it for granted that by " broaden out " it means the acceptance in some form or other of that which is known as " higher criticism ". It seems that those who can accept this have an open mind, and those who cannot have a closed one. We repudiate such an illogical approach, and we ask Sir John to make a careful analysis of all walks of life and he will find that the number of Conservative Evangelicals who have made their mark is as high in proportion as any other religious body. The Christian literature published by the Tyndale Press, has as much a high academic standard and compares favourably with other Christian works, yet most of the writers came from Christian Unions to the Universities. We suggest that Sir John should open his mind to the true facts and then he will lift up his heart to Almighty God for the great work which is being accomplished in the hearts and lives of so many young people.

Conservative Evangelicalism is by no means infallible, and where it has failed it should be frankly admitted, and if this book compels Evangelicals to examine their position again it will do a good work. Yet having said this one is bound to admit that the writer has only studied one aspect of Conservative Evangelical literature, and as he has brought to bear upon this his own preconceived ideas, his book fails to deal adequately with the subject.