

William G. Blaikie

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Letter to  
A.A. Bonar

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Letter to the Rev. Andrew A.  
Bonar, D.D.

# LETTER

TO THE

REV. ANDREW A. BONAR, D.D.

ON

A MANIFESTO ISSUED BY HIM ON  
THE DODS AND BRUCE CASES

BY

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NEW COLLEGE, EDINBURGH

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## L E T T E R.

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MY DEAR DR. BONAR,

I have to thank you for sending me the "Statement by Ministers and other Office-Bearers of the Free Church, in regard to the decisions of last General Assembly in the cases of Drs. Dods and Bruce." I regret to say that I am quite unable to express that approval of the document which you invite. I think it due to you and the Church that I should state briefly some of the grounds of my inability to support the "Statement." I regret to differ from you on any point connected with the authority of that Divine Book on which you have so lived, and grown, and thriven that we all bless God alike for the purity of your character and the influence of your life. I acknowledge with pleasure that the framers of the Statement have striven not to be unnecessarily offensive, and to express themselves in as kind and brotherly terms as possible. But for substance, I am constrained to say that I count it a most uncharitable document; it makes no vestige of allowance for possible diversity of view among men loyal to the Scriptures: carried out to its proper conclusions, it would require a majority of the ministers of our Church to be subjected to discipline; and should that seem impracticable, it hints ominously at a coming disruption!

I will confine my remarks to the subject of inspiration. Your personal view on that subject was expressed in the first words of your address at the Mildmay Conference this summer—"Every word of the Bible is true." The "Statement," in like manner, insists on our holding that in the Scriptures, as

originally given, there was not a vestige of error. Errors may have crept in afterwards, but there was not a vestige of error at the first. You conceive that the existence of any error at the first would have proved God to be the author of error, and from that conception you revolt, as horrible and blasphemous.

Now I am happy to think that on the great fact of the Divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and of the whole of the Scriptures, there is no difference between us. Our difference is solely as to the exact purport and scope of the term "inspiration." You hold that it excludes the possibility of even the smallest inaccuracy in the original Scriptures. I hold that that is not involved in the proper sense of the term *inspiration*. You say it cannot be conceived that there was any inaccuracy in the original Scriptures. I appeal to the facts of the case in opposition to your view. I maintain that your view is not a direct statement of Scripture, but only an inference from its statements. You refuse to tolerate my view and threaten or hint that if I and others persevere in it you will disrupt the Church. This, to my mind, is a very serious and most unwarrantable position, and, allow me to add, a position which I cannot think to be in accordance with the mind of the Head of the Church.

I say we agree on the great fact of inspiration. There can be no manner of doubt that again and again the Scriptures claim to be the Word of God; they assert that in time past God spake to the fathers by the prophets; they affirm that the Holy Ghost spake by David and other writers of Scripture; that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God; and in reference to the New Testament, the Apostle Paul claims that he taught not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; and there are many other passages of similar tenor. All this we, of course, equally receive. Neither of us has any sympathy with the endeavour to eliminate its glorious Divine element from the Word of God. God forbid, that any man in the Church should even say one word to

disparage the glory of Scripture, or to impair the value of the gift which, next to Jesus Christ Himself, is the most precious asset in all the Church's heritage.

The one point of difference between us respects the question, whether there was, or could be conceived to be, any inaccuracy or error in the Scriptures as originally given?

In our mode of dealing with this question the main difference between us is, that you lay your stress on certain general considerations, and on certain specific statements of Scripture. We, on the other hand, while accepting the specific statements, lay great stress also on the structure of Scripture as we find it, on certain phenomena which lie on the surface, and on the inextricable difficulties which are involved in carrying out your view in detail.

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Among the general considerations on which you or your friends lay stress, one is, that the Scriptures would not be adapted to their purpose as an infallible revelation of God's will if they were not absolutely free from error. This sentiment appears in various parts of the "Statement." It has been laid down more explicitly by Dr. Cunningham. He owns that in our inquiries as to the scope and extent of inspiration, we start with "a presumption in favour of the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration as that which we would wish for, and desire to have, in any writing which was to be the rule and standard of our faith." This is very honest of Dr. Cunningham, but it is a position against which I vehemently protest. We have no right to commence this inquiry with any such presumption. We have no right to assume that God will frame His revelation according to what we should wish for and desire. This were rationalism, pure and simple. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord."

If there be any subject on which men ought to beware of theorising, and to be eager to accept of all the light which can be got from all sources, including a copious and candid

examination of the actual structure of the Scriptures, it is this doctrine of inspiration. It relates to a profoundly abstruse subject—the contact of God and man, the joint action of the infinite and the finite, a process essentially different from dictation, yet giving rise to an infallible revelation of God and of His will. Contrary to all that we should have naturally expected, it has pleased God to reveal Himself in His Word through the instrumentality of men. He has condescended to use human language—at best a most imperfect instrument for revealing the Divine,—human logic, human rhetoric, human poetry, human imagination, thought, feeling, conscience. In form and structure the Bible is a very different book from what we should have expected. But in this very fact it is a masterpiece of Divine skill. To my mind one of the most convincing proofs of the Divine inspiration of Scripture lies in this, that amid all its seemingly heterogeneous structure—as if bits of history and biography, poetry and song, didactic teaching and symbolic vision, proverb, parable and prophecy, had been all shot, as it were, into one capacious reservoir—there shines throughout it such a clear, vivid, supernatural revelation of God, and of the way to that communion with Him which sin has destroyed. Studying it, too, as a completed whole, we trace clearly the hand of Him who sees the end from the beginning, and mark the gradual evolution of the Divine plan, till, in the fulness of the time, all converges and culminates in Him who is, pre-eminently and emphatically, “the Word of God.” It is marvellous, indeed, that amid all the variety of voices and scenery in Scripture there should exist and be clearly visible an infallible, objective revelation of the will of God, bearing on the great question of man’s relation to Him, and subordinate to that, bearing on the whole round of man’s interests and duties, both for the life that now is and that which is to come.

My belief is, that Dr. Cunningham’s “presumption” in favour of a revelation of a particular structure, absolutely free from any inaccuracy, is the determining consideration in a

great many minds. But true loyalty to God demands that it be altogether set aside. "Presumption" is not a trustworthy support. The "presumption" that the supernatural is impossible is the most fatal error to be dealt with in the whole field of apologetics. Perhaps you have noticed a sermon recently delivered by Dean Perowne in Edinburgh, in which he said—"The cardinal error of theologians seemed to him to be that they would start with a theory, and so long as they started with a theory of what the Bible ought to be, instead of trying to ascertain what the Bible was, they would only increase their doubts and difficulties" (*Scotsman*, 8th October).

But, of course, your main support is in those passages which declare emphatically that "God spake" by the inspired writers, and that what they wrote were "God's words." And, as God is truth, they could not have written one word which was not absolutely true. I, for one, cordially accept the position that in many parts of Scripture we have God's very words; but I am not prepared to extend this to all parts of Scripture. In fact, on the face of them many parts of Scripture are but a record of man's words and of man's deeds. Even you allow that all that inspiration secures there is a correct record of what was thus said and done; and the difference between us seems to be that you maintain that record even of man's words and acts to be infallibly correct. We rather hold that it is substantially accurate for all the purposes for which it was needed.

Don't suppose that it is to please ourselves, or to gratify our own whims, that we take this position. We are obliged to take it by carefully examining the structure of Scripture. We believe it to be more correct, and much more honouring to God than yours.

When we carefully examine such expressions as "God spake" and "the words of God," we find that they are sometimes used in an elastic rather than a rigid sense. For instance, in Exodus xx. 1 we read "God spake all these words, saying." Then follow the ten commandments in the usual

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form. In Deut. v. 22 we read "These words the Lord spake," with reference to a different form of the commandments. The fourth commandment, especially, is given in a quite different form in the two records. Yet it is said that God spake and also that he wrote "these words." The explanation must be that in Exodus you have God's original words expanded in one form, and in Deuteronomy in another. But the term "words" is used in a very elastic sense, and cannot be restricted to the *ipsissima verba*. Again, in 1 Cor. ii. 13, the Apostle says, in a verse usually regarded as a principal proof of the very rigid view:—"Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." Yet in the same chapter (ver. 9) the Apostle, quoting the words of the Holy Ghost in Isa. lxiv. 4, makes a very material alteration of them, and especially changes "what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him" into, "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Could anything be more clear than that in such passages the term "words" is used not in a rigid but in an elastic or literary sense? Therefore you are not entitled, even in view of the language of such passages, to insist on your rigid view of inspiration.

It would be tedious, and in a letter to you needless, to go over the well-known facts in the actual structure and contents of Scripture which prevent many sincere believers from accepting the very rigid doctrine of inspiration. But for the sake of others I refer to some of them in an Appendix (No. I.).

In the "Statement" it is affirmed, in much bolder words than I think even *prima facie* warrantable, that your view has always been the view of the Scottish Church, and that it is laid down clearly in the Confession of Faith. As to the Confession of Faith, your claim to its support is based on your interpretation of the phrase, "God, the author of Holy Scripture," a phrase which I cordially accept, and which I maintain to be in perfect harmony with my view of inspiration. It is a phrase which could only be claimed by you exclusively

if it were allowed that God is an author to precisely the same effect as man—which I think is unwarrantable. As to the historical question, I am not aware that the precise point between us was ever formally discussed by our earlier divines, nor do I find any reference to any treatise formally bearing on it in my friend Dr. Walker's Cunningham Lectures. There are some considerations bearing on this subject which would not be suitable for discussion in a letter, but which I will refer to in Appendix No. II.

It strikes me with surprise that the "Statement" dwells so little on the question of morality. It criticises the expression in the deliverance of the Assembly: "the Church views the use of the term 'mistakes and immoralities' to describe recognised difficulties in the Scriptures as utterly unwarranted, and fitted to give grave offence." If this refer only to the *form of expression* (as I believe it does), the "Statement" highly disapproves of it. But you make no attempt to place in a satisfactory light the actual difference in moral tone between earlier and later parts of the Bible. You cannot but be aware that here lies a grave difficulty demanding careful examination. You content yourselves with looking it in the face and passing on; or rather you content yourselves with denouncing what is said of it by Dr. Dods, and what is said by the Assembly of Dr. Dods's way of putting it. Do you really think that this will do? Do you suppose that our people will hold this question settled by a burst of indignation? Perhaps you accept the view of a progressive revelation of morality. If you do, you go a great way to meet Dr. Dods and to meet the Assembly. In that case you might even view with some charity the expressions used by Dr. Dods about it, although, with the Assembly, you disapprove of them. But you may be very sure that the vast mass of our thoughtful people believe, in whatever terms it may be put, that there are very strange points in the morality of the Old Testament. This is a matter that demands all the coolness, all the charity, all the rever-

ence, all the humble crying for Divine light, that we can bring to bear upon it. It is a delicate task to reconcile Old Testament morality in some points with the inspiration of Scripture. Instead of fighting over this we have much more need to fall on our knees, and, with united and humble voice, implore the light we need to see the whole subject as God sees it.

Let me advert to one of your other arguments. You have a strong conviction that any relaxation of the most rigid view of inspiration, any concession of possible inaccuracy in any, even the most insignificant, statement of Scripture, would open the way to concessions without end, would introduce a policy of surrender, the end of which would be the entire subversion both of the objective truth and the binding authority of the Bible. There is no doubt that this consideration tells powerfully on many minds. But it does not so much tend to convince them, as to make them unwilling to move. They are in constant terror, because if they conceded the slightest point they know not whither they might ultimately be borne.

It seems to me that, substantially, this is an argument of unbelief. It is not based on the truth or falsehood of the view objected to, but only on its apparent tendency. It would be equally valid whether the view were true or false. We have to meet many such objections to some of our doctrines, founded not on truth, but on their possible or probable tendencies. Predestination to eternal life is objected to because it leads some to say, if we are to be saved, we must be saved; if we are to be lost, we must be lost. Salvation by grace is objected to because some infer that it matters not how they live. The validity of prayer is objected to because it would place the Almighty at the disposal of His creatures. We must always be on our guard against arguments that are based on possible inferences.

As in the case of the doctrines just specified, it is quite possible that any concession on inspiration would be taken advantage of by some for illegitimate purposes. There are always

people in abundance who, if you give them an inch, will take an ell. I grant, too, that some of your opponents have been fearfully indiscreet. But as I cannot see that the rigid view was held by the fathers of the Church, or that it is contained in the Confession of Faith, I do not hold our view to be properly speaking a concession. It is a concession as compared with the prevalent opinion in Scotland in the early and middle part of this century, but not as compared with the standards of the Church.

But apart from all that, even if it were a concession, it is a strictly limited concession. I will not go into this here, but advert to it more fully in the APPENDIX (No. III.). It will appear there that the liberty which is sought is a liberty which we are allowed to exercise by the very principles of Protestantism on much more vital matters and without danger to the authority of Revelation.

In conclusion, let me express my great regret at the new agitation which you now propose to institute. It will keep up noise, discontent, and strife, without succeeding in its aim. I think some of your friends are prone to forget that to tolerate a position is not necessarily to approve of it. Where a mass of thinking men are associated in a common body, they must tolerate more than they approve. It is always open to them to contend for the truth, and we must esteem them very highly when they conscientiously try to do so. But it is a different thing to contend for the Church exercising discipline on their opponents, and perhaps ejecting them from its bosom. Especially when among these are many fathers and brethren with whom you have been accustomed to co-operate in every good work, and whose loyalty to your Master you never found cause to doubt. To attempt discipline against half the Church were Quixotic. I remember, as probably you do likewise, that in the Convocation of 1842, a proposal to discipline all who sympathised with the Strathbogie ministers, although this would have been the proper logical outcome of the case, was scouted

as monstrous by the common sense of the meeting. You point ominously to another course—disruption. I am amazed. I had thought that we had all become convinced that separation could be justified only as the last resort of persecuted men. We ought not to think lightly of rending the body of Christ, and you know that you and the other fathers of 1843 would have continued to sit side by side with the extremest Moderates, if you had not absolutely been driven out. I believe that you yourself tolerate many things in the “Statement” which you do not approve, for they do not savour of your mature and mellow charity. All that we desire is, that you would extend your toleration to views more worthy of it.

I am,

Yours, with much respect and affection,

W. G. BLAIKIE.

OCTOBER 1890.

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## APPENDIX I.

### PHENOMENA OF SCRIPTURE TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN INDUCTING A DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION.

WHAT we contend for is, that instead of taking such expressions as "God spake," "God's words," by themselves, and establishing upon them an absolute doctrine, we ought to take into account the structure and contents of Scripture, so as to ascertain the true sense in which such expressions are used. Among these phenomena are—

1. *Pre-existing Documents.*—That the inspired writers of Scripture often use such documents is very apparent. In some cases this is beyond doubt; in other cases it is very probable. For instance, the genealogies reproduced in Scripture were undoubtedly copied from the Hebrew archives. The book of Jasher and the book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and Israel were undoubtedly placed under contribution in the composition of existing books. Quotations are given from Greek and other pagan poets by Paul. No man will say that these documents were inspired. No man will say that God was the author of them in the special sense of the phrase. Luke tells us that in composing his gospel he derived assistance from persons—some doubtless uninspired—"which from the beginning, were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." What are we to infer from the fact that the inspired writers incorporated portions of these uninspired writings or statements? Simply that the Holy Ghost guaranteed their substantial accuracy and allowed their use, but not that He stood sponsor for every word. He accepted in this sense, for example, Matthew's forty-two generations, or three fourteens (Matt. i. 17), copied doubtless from the national archives, although we know that there are omissions in them, rendering them not absolutely correct.

With regard to the use of pre-existing documents on a more extensive scale, I desire to write with caution. I have never seen cause to apply that hypothesis to the book of Genesis, for example, to the extent to which it has been proposed to carry it. Yet I cannot deny that in some places the internal evidence for the use of pre-existing documents is very strong. I must say that the fourteenth chapter of Genesis contains expressions that indicate its having been taken from another narrative. 1 Samuel xvii. 12-15 looks very like a summary, either out of place or drawn from another quarter. The question as to the extent to which Scripture was composed out of pre-existing documents seems to me to be one on which we may for the present suspend our judgment, waiting for more light, and along with this, the possibility of God's weaving into His inspired records larger portions of uninspired material than we have been accustomed to suppose. Let it be carefully observed, however, that this remark applies not to the substance of God's revelation proper, but to the records of historical events

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in connection with which it pleased Him to make Himself known. One thing is very certain, that in whatever manner the historical records of the Old Testament may have been compiled, they are marvels of accuracy. All the information recently gathered from the cuneiform inscriptions and other monuments of antiquity attests this fact.

2. Another class of phenomena is—*Quotations*. We often find a change of language, and in some instances modification of thought, in quotations from the Old Testament in the New. I need not multiply instances; let me just note the passage that is most frequently quoted in the New Testament—Isaiah vi. 10, and in all the six cases with considerable variation [see Matt. xiii. 14; Mark iv. 12; Luke viii. 10; John xii. 40; Acts xxviii. 26; Rom. xi. 8]. Of course we must remember that the original is in Hebrew, and that the New Testament writers wrote in Greek, using sometimes the Septuagint translation, and sometimes translating for themselves. But both in language and in the train of thought the quotation often differs from the original. A few years ago the use of non-verbal quotations from the gospels in early Christian writers was represented by the author of "Supernatural Religion" as a proof that *our* gospels did not exist when these writers wrote. All of us were grateful for the eminent service of Bishop Lightfoot in showing what was the *habit of quotation in those days*, and inducting from many quarters proofs that verbal variations were no evidence that the text of the authors quoted from was then different from the present. But it is difficult to see how the writers of the New Testament could have allowed themselves any such liberty had they believed that in every case the original words, in the form in which they stood in the Hebrew, and no other, were those of the Spirit.

I have seen it argued that the New Testament writers were led by inspiration of the Spirit to modify the words, and that by this means the words as modified became as much the words of the Spirit as the words originally written. I thoroughly believe that it was under the guidance and sanction of the Holy Spirit that the New Testament writers did make the modifications, on the ground that they conveyed the spirit and substance of the passages in a form perhaps better adapted to their immediate purpose. But this recognised a certain flexibility in the original words not consistent with the rigid doctrine of inspiration. Moreover, we must remember what the purpose of a quotation is. It is to bring an admitted definite authority to bear on a question under discussion. The whole force and value of a quotation lie in the identity between what is quoted and what is sought to be proved. If you substantially alter the original passage you deprive it of all force *as a quotation*. Whatever alterations, therefore, the inspired writers of the New Testament made must be held to have been within the true scope of the passages, and in harmony with the view of inspiration held by those to whom they were writing. They were not bound to the *ipsissima verba*.

I do not forget here how our Lord and His apostles, in quoting from the Old Testament, sometimes made their argument turn on particular words or forms of words. This, I think, is the strongest point in your position. It undoubtedly ought to have most earnest attention in any comprehensive

endeavour to induct a doctrine of inspiration. But in all fairness it ought to be considered alongside the other practice of which I have been speaking. Our business must be to harmonise the two practices. We should seek for some common ground on which to justify both. Perhaps there may be something peculiar to the passages which were used as verbal arguments. This is one of the difficulties of the subject, regarding which brethren on both sides should be more ready to help each other than to run their opponents up into a corner and prove them heretics. It is one of the most painful features of this controversy, as it has been of most of our controversies, that we are so combative on both sides when we might be conciliatory.

3. *Discrepancies*.—A third phenomenon of Scripture bearing on this subject is its discrepancies. These are of two kinds, verbal and substantial. Of verbal discrepancies, we have already adverted to the two versions of the decalogue, and we shall only notice the four versions of the superscription over the cross. These variations are no difficulty to me, because I believe that in matters of this kind the inspiration of the four evangelists by the Holy Spirit was not meant to secure verbal, but only substantial, accuracy. But if we adopt that rigid interpretation of the phrase, "God, the author of Scripture," on which the "Statement" proceeds, this view is untenable. The precise words of the inscription must have been present to the Holy Ghost. If the words of Scripture are as much the words of God as the words of man, why were they not then, in all the four cases, accurately reproduced?

But variations in substance are more serious than variations in words. As a sample of these, let me refer to the speech of Stephen in Acts vii. In his *résumé* of early Hebrew history, he makes several statements which are at variance with the Old Testament narrative. For instance, he says that when Jacob died, he and the fathers "were carried over into Sychem (Shechem), and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor, the father of Sychem (Shechem)." We have an express record in Genesis of the burial of Jacob, but there is no mention of any of his sons except Joseph being carried up for burial in Canaan, and that was centuries after, when the whole people left Egypt. Further, Jacob was not buried at Shechem, but at Machpelah in Hebron. Thirdly, Abraham did not buy the sepulchre of the sons of Emmor, but of Ephron, one of the children of Heth. And, fourthly, while the Greek implies that Emmor was the son of Sychem, he was really his father, and the authorised version, for purposes of harmony, has inserted that word. The revised version, however, has it—"Abraham bought for a price in silver of the sons of Hamor (or Emmor, *marg.*) in Shechem." On what ground Stephen departed from the Old Testament narrative is not very obvious, and it is not our business here to inquire: he was a man "full of faith and of the Holy Ghost," yet he seems to have been allowed to make these deviations while, in the very highest sense, under the Spirit's influence.

Now, the rigid view of inspiration requires that all these statements of Scripture should be brought into harmony with one another. And, in order to accomplish this, men have embarked on a sea of the very wildest conjec-

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ture. Let us take the hypothesis of Turretine. The patriarchs may have been buried at Shechem, though this is not mentioned in the Old Testament. But it is said that Joseph's bones were carried up, and had the bones of his brothers been taken too, mention would surely have been made of it. But Turretine's supposed reason for the substitution of Jacob for Abraham is positively grotesque. Abraham is an indeclinable noun, and it may be in the genitive case, governed by "grandson" understood; or Abraham may be used as a patronymic, like Abrahamides in Greek. Many cannot brook this way of torturing Scripture. They can hardly keep their patience when it is proposed as an act of homage to the Word of God, and to the Holy Spirit by whom Stephen was inspired. It is a way of treating the Bible which would never be proposed for any other book. If Pascal in his "Provincial Letters" had come across it, he would have had something racy to say of it!

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## APPENDIX II.

### HISTORICAL POSITION OF THE CHURCH.

I should like to say something more of the contention that the Church is committed by its standards and otherwise to the extreme view of inspiration.

It is beyond question that it has been widely held in Scotland, especially in the present century. Dr. Cunningham and Dr. Hodge, two of the most powerful Calvinistic theologians of the century, have maintained it. Many men, both in England and Scotland, have strongly upheld it, men of the highest ability and excellence, and of temperaments as varied as Haldane, the fervent evangelist, and Carson, the bitter controversialist, Dr. Chalmers, Dr. Candlish, Dr. Bannerman, Cardinal Newman, and Mr. Spurgeon. But it has never, in the form now proposed, been an article of our theology.

Take, for instance, Calvin. Dean Perowne, in his admirable work on the Psalms, calls Calvin the "prince of commentators," and "the great master of exegesis." "He is always careful to ascertain as exactly as possible the *whole* scope and meaning of the writer on whom he comments. In this respect, his critical sagacity is marvellous and quite unrivalled." The Dean proceeds to remark that if Calvin were now alive, some of his interpretations of the Psalms, especially the Messianic Psalms, would expose him to the charge of rationalism. He also comments on Calvin's charging the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews with a quotation "not made in accordance with the genuine sense of the passage as it stands in the Psalms." This is too strong; he should have said "with the *apparent* sense of the passage." Calvin repeatedly says that if the quotation be substantially accurate, the words are of little consequence. Let us see how he treats Paul's quotation from Isaiah lxiv. 4 in 1 Cor. ii. 9, where the Apostle, besides other changes, has substituted "them that love him" for "him that waiteth for him." In so doing, Calvin says, "he has fol-

*all inconsistent, or confuses Calvin's doctrine of Id. with his use of it: & misapprehends the meaning of use*

lowed the Greek interpreters, who have translated it in this way from having been misled by the resemblance between one letter and another [Heb. *חנה* to wait, *חבב* to love]; but as that did not affect the point in hand, he did not choose to depart from the common reading, as we frequently have occasion to observe how frequently he follows the revised version." In other words, Calvin holds that Paul, writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, accepted an error of the Septuagint caused by confounding one Hebrew letter with another. Yet who could reasonably accuse Calvin of denying the most ample inspiration to Paul? What divine ever appreciated more fully than Calvin the noble testimony of Paul to the Divine inspiration of the Old Testament, or the wonderful contribution which that Apostle made to the unification of the entire Scriptures? Calvin in this case may be right or wrong; all that I say is, that he furnishes a clear proof that the rigid view has not always been held by the masters of Calvinistic theology.

So also with regard to the divines of the Westminster Assembly. I quote from Mr. Ross Taylor's speech in the last General Assembly. "On consulting the published Minutes of the Westminster Assembly in regard to this subject, and taking the words of the well-known Dr. Mitchell, who had edited these Minutes, he found him making this declaration:—That the Westminster divines were at special pains to leave open all reasonable questions as to the mode and degree of inspiration which could consistently be left open by those who accepted the Scriptures as the infallible rule of truth and duty. This I think goes a long way to deprive of all validity the argument founded on the article on Holy Scripture in the Confession of Faith. No one can read that article without seeing that it is expressed in a very peculiar way; that the phrases do not occur in it which the "Statement" uses to denote its position, and that it is only by putting an interpretation which is not conceded by others on the phrase "God the author of the Scriptures" that any claim to Confessional authority can be advanced for the view of the "Statement."

With regard to the views of Drs. Cunningham and Hodge, I do not think that either of them argues the case satisfactorily. Dr. Cunningham repeatedly and deliberately uses the words "dictate" and "dictation" as equivalent to inspiration. These words are now generally allowed to be appropriate only to the theory of mechanical inspiration, now all but abandoned. In referring to the difficulties in the speech of Stephen, he just remarks in an easy way that they may be easily overcome. It is really hard that so many of these dogmatic, as opposed to exegetic, divines attempt so little to work out the exegesis of such passages. One thing to be commended in Dr. Cunningham, and especially to be pressed on those who would force all the Church into their views, is his candour in admitting that some writers have attached undue importance to the doctrine of the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture, as if any one denying it could not be a genuine believer in its divine authority. He rebukes the "dogmatism and arrogance" of Carson towards a class of men that includes such names as Philip Doddridge, Pye Smith, Ebenezer Henderson, Bishop Daniel

Wilson of Calcutta, Dr. George Hill, to say nothing of more modern divines like Dean Alford and Dean Perowne.

With reference to Dr. Hodge, all I would say is, that he lays down the position that the true doctrine of inspiration is to be inducted conjointly from the statements and the phenomena of Scripture. Yet in his argument he entirely overlooks the latter. Dr. A. A. Hodge, in his "Evangelical Theology," does not look at either of these, but deals *a priori* and analogically with the subject.

In the attempt of the "Statement" to show that its view is the received doctrine of the Church, there is one point, however, which has surprised me. It is the reference to what was done in the Assembly of 1878. In that Assembly the case of Dr. Dods was discussed, and a finding was come to sustaining the decision of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, in which decision of the Synod condemnation was passed on the opinion that there are errors in the Scriptures. I am surprised that in the circumstances of that case it should be maintained that the doctrinal views of the Synod are morally binding on the Church, especially after the explanation given by Principal Rainy during the discussions of last General Assembly, and without any attempt to meet his statement. He said that in 1878 the motion carried was proposed by him, and that "this motion said that the Assembly were *not in circumstances to discuss the merits*, but that in the attitude and aspect which the case presented (neither the Presbytery of Glasgow nor Dr. Dods complaining), it did not appear that any serious harm would be done by allowing the decision of the Synod to become final. In the decision of the General Assembly it was expressly affirmed that the Assembly refused to make any decision *on a principle*. His own speech from end to end was a protest against the Assembly in their circumstances pretending to decide so serious a question." Yet your paper affirms (without any authority) that "it was assumed by all parties that the doctrine of the Free Church, respecting the infallibility and divine authority of Holy Scripture, then reaffirmed and declared to be contained in the Standards of the Church, excluded views exactly similar to those brought under the notice of last Assembly." How could this be, when the Assembly expressly refused to make any decision of a principle? The "Statement" says the Assembly decided the whole case; Dr. Rainy says the Assembly decided no principle.

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### APPENDIX III.

#### EFFECTS OF TOLERATION.

I do not think that there is any necessary connection between such toleration as I contend for and the abuse apprehended.

(a) By Protestants the true doctrine of inspiration must be inducted from the Word of God, and from that alone. It must be derived from a fair, candid, comprehensive view both of the statements of Scripture and of

the phenomena of Scripture. Men are not entitled to consult their own fancy on the subject. To sift Scripture, and accept or reject statements because we like or dislike them, is contrary to the first principles of Protestantism. To any such course the toleration which I advocate lends no shadow of sanction.

(b) The toleration asked is practically limited to matters that are subordinate and incidental; it does not extend to the great verities of revelation. It is connected with the structure rather than the substance of the Scripture. It in no degree invalidates the truth and preciousness of the grand testimony:—"This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

(c) We surely need not fear a little liberty in regard to the letter of Scripture when so much is left to our discretion regarding its spirit. The great object of Scripture is to reveal to us the Divine Will. Happily in the most essential matters the Divine Will is so clearly made known that he that runneth may read. But how are we to ascertain the Divine Will in certain parts of the record, as, for example, in Job and Ecclesiastes? Or how, in dealing (let us say) with biography, are we to discriminate between the good and the bad in a man's life? Scripture generally gives no commentary on men's actions—how are we to know the mind of God about them? Not by any hard-and-fast rule, not by any mechanical method. We must use our faculties as best we can, humbly seeking light from God. Here is a large sphere for human discretion. It has sometimes been abused, grossly abused. Men have been known to abuse Scriptural examples to torture, to deceive, to murder, and to massacre. Yet we do not feel that there is any serious risk that men will so pervert the liberty they have to judge of the right and wrong in Bible biography as to run into all excess of riot.

(d) There are other indeterminate questions bearing on Scriptural subjects, and yet they do not prevent us from coming to definite conclusions. As Principal Rainy put it in his speech in the General Assembly, "God did not always give them mathematical lines. He had not given them clear mathematical lines about the canon, and yet they found that they had surmounted that difficulty, for there was no real difficulty about the canon. God had not given them mathematical lines about the text, and that was a matter of great difficulty once, but they had surmounted it, and there was no difficulty about the text. God had not given them a mathematical line about interpretation, and yet honest students of Scripture were agreed about interpretation—he meant in all the main and essential matters." In Canon Mozley's book on Miracles there are some striking remarks on indeterminate rules. Conscience is not always clear, memory is not always correct, yet who would say they are of no use? It is not always clear what the Divine voice is in particular passages of Scripture, but what careful and candid reader, habitually seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can be in doubt as to God's will on the whole?

## POSTSCRIPT.

MR. HOWIE of Glasgow has published a reply to this letter, seemingly official, on which I offer a few brief notes :—

1. He misrepresents my object. He frequently and offensively affirms that my object is to show that there are “errors in the Bible” (pp. 21, 28, etc.). That is not my object. I examine the Bible doctrine of inspiration, and show its scope and bearing, and *my object is to prove that it would be wrong to make Mr. Howie’s view a binding article in our Church.* Mr. Howie speaks of my “eagerness to vindicate Dr. Dods to the utmost” (p. 4). No one knows better than Dr. Dods how ridiculously incorrect that statement is.

2. He misrepresents my theological position. He classes me with rationalists of the worst type—“heathenish rationalism” (p. 9). He accuses me of “contradicting the plain statements of Scripture and of the Confession of Faith, as also the testimony of our Lord” (p. 31). I have plainly disregarded my ordination vows. My very hearty recognition of the inspiration and authority of Scripture, and of an infallible objective revelation of the will of God, is merely one of the “devices” of a skilful controversialist (p. 43). My cordial testimony to the glory of revelation is something I am “constrained to admit” (pp. 14, 29). I simply decline to answer these statements. I regard them as the *reductio ad absurdum* of the method of *vicious inference* which he follows: of ascribing to an opponent all the wild conclusions which he thinks he can logically deduce from his position, however vehemently the opponent disowns them; and not only the logical or illogical conclusions, but all the moral turpitude attaching to them! I had thought that this abuse of logic was now banished from civilised warfare.

3. He charges me with personal inconsistency and duplicity. He says I *privately* advocated my views, *publicly* joined in the *apparent* condemnation of them, and “only ventured to avow them *publicly* after I believed I might do so with ecclesiastical impunity” (p. 69). This is equally offensive and incorrect. I have openly avowed my views on inspiration to my students for a dozen or fifteen years, along with other views, but not pressing my own; I submitted a paper on them five or six years ago to the Edinburgh Clerical Club; I have never concealed them on any occasion. And it was my desire to take my share of responsibility and odium, and to help to ward off what I deemed a danger to the Church, that induced me, when I got Dr. Bonar’s circular, to take the opportunity of publishing my reply.

4. I make Mr. Howie very welcome to his minor skits and flings if they give him any pleasure. He is welcome to hold my letter “pitiably weak” (p. 42), though, if so, it may occur to some reader to ask, Why does he take seventy-six pages to answer it? And if he or any of his friends is pleased to call it “a new specimen of the feeble outpourings of Dr. Blaikie, using the language of the late Dr. Begg” (p. 42), the question may possibly be put, If, in a public controversy, Dr. Begg, who was usually conspicuous for generosity to opponents, wrote so shabbily, must he not have felt himself somewhat hard pressed?

I wrote in a courteous and brotherly spirit, honestly desiring to remove misunderstanding, and this is my reward!

Gaylord 

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