
Book Reviews

The Battle for the Bible, by Harold Lindsell, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976. 218 pp. \$6.95.

This is likely to be the most discussed book in evangelical circles this year. Some will castigate it as the work of a crank; others will see in it the voice of a prophet; but no one who reads the book carefully will come away without being disturbed. In it the distinguished editor of *Christianity Today* confronts head on what he regards as the most crucial issue now facing evangelical Christendom, the inerrancy of Scripture.

The church has traditionally taught that the Bible as written is completely trustworthy, infallible, “free from error in the whole and in the parts” (p. 27). By this is meant that both the thought, and the words conveying the thought, are divinely inspired. However fallible may have been the human authors in their personal lives, when they wrote the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is believed that they expressed accurately what God wanted to say.

For 1800 years this doctrine was never seriously challenged, but in the past two centuries it has gradually come under attack. Those of liberal theological persuasion, of course, would be expected to take exception. But more recently some persons within the evangelical constituency have joined in the opposition, contending that infallibility pertains only to matters of salvation, and that in other things, such as history or science, the Scriptures can be wrong.

This raises some basic questions about the nature of inspiration, not the least being the integrity of God Himself. Can the Spirit of Truth inspire falsehood? If so, then His character is faulted, either in His desire to communicate truthfully, or His ability to do it. Also, if it is allowed that the Bible contains both truth and error, still it must be settled who is to make the determination, and by what means. However resolved, “something outside of and above the Bible becomes its judge” (p. 203). The result is that a non-inspired source becomes the final arbitrator of what to believe.

Without an absolutely reliable authority, it is easy for one to be misled by human reason and experience. Not that all evangelicals who oppose inerrancy have taken this course. Most that I know still have a high respect for the Bible. Nevertheless, the history of the church shows that

once this doctrine is abandoned, eventually more serious deviations follow, not only in faith, but also in behavior. It is this concern which prompted Dr. Lindsell to write the book.

In terms of the historical and theological content, the book differs little from others on the subject, such as the recent symposium, *God's Inerrant Word*, edited by John Warwick Montgomery. The new aspect of Lindsell's approach is that he goes on to detail how views of errancy have penetrated the life of evangelical churches and institutions. Prime illustrations cited are the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the Southern Baptist Convention, and Fuller Theological Seminary. I frankly was startled at the forthright way he called his shots.

Surprisingly little attention is given to the Methodist tradition, perhaps because our drift away from Biblical authority is already well known. Nevertheless, the observation of the author is appreciated that "John Wesley would be dismayed at what has transpired in the church he founded" (p. 154). There can be no doubt, as Lindsell notes, that Wesley "preached, taught and labored on the basis of his underlying conviction that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God" (p. 69). It is correct that he did not spend much time on this subject, but this was because Biblical inerrancy was not an issue in his day. Where references are made to the principle it is clear that he believed the Scripture in its entirety to have "no defect, no excess" (*Explanatory Notes*, p. 9). As he put it, "If there be any mistakes in the Bible there may as well be a thousand. If there is one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth" (p. 69, quoted from *Journal*, VI, p. 117).

I suspect that if Wesley were living now, and saw the confusion occasioned by modern equivocation on the inspiration of Scripture, recognizing the danger it portends for the future, he would join the front ranks in the battle for the Bible. However, in contending for the faith, he would seek to reconcile differences by reasoned discourse, and he would not let contention destroy Christian fellowship, nor detract him from his consuming passion for evangelism.

This would be a wise course for his ecclesiastical successors. We cannot ignore the controversy, unpleasant as it may be. To avoid the conflict will cause evangelical Methodists to lose credibility, particularly among students of the Bible. I would only hope that we will discuss the issue in a bond of mutual respect, remembering that our higher responsibility is to proclaim the infallible Word of God to a lost world.

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The Book of Isaiah from the *New International Version*, Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation.

The New Testament in the *New International Version* did not click with me; it did with many, I know, but the wooden character of the work troubled me.

Quite the reverse is my impression of this first chunk of translation work from the Old Testament. Here we have the evidence of literary artists at work, as well as work by men with expertise in the original languages. Isaiah 60, for example, is a masterpiece of literature, as is 49:8-13; 28:7; 59:19b, etc.

What is lacking in this version are cross references. References are most helpful and it seems to me every translation should include them for study purposes. Hopefully, when the entirety of the Old Testament is published, they will be included.

Some corrections are made (e.g., Isaiah 64:6) and this is appreciated.

Footnotes indicating variant readings in M.T., D.S.S., LXX, etc. assist the student and preacher at his work.

Recommended for fresh insight into a great book, sermon preparation, analysis, and new input for devotional purposes.

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Jesus and the Spirit. A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament, by James D. G. Dunn, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975. xii and 515 pp. \$19.50.

James Dunn, Lecturer in New Testament at the University of Nottingham, England, has given us a definitive study of the first 30 years of Christianity in order to deduce the New Testament writers' conception of religious experience. The author insists that the *experience* of the early believers was at the heart of their Gospel and that their message was in large measure the expression of the experience.

Dunn seeks to probe into the nature of Christian experience as ever against religious experience in general. He writes from the standpoint of Biblical theology, as opposed to philosophical or systematic theology. He has given us a splendid study of the religious and "Charismatic" ex-

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perience of Jesus and the first Christians as reflected in the New Testament corpus.

Part One deals with the religious experience of Jesus (pp. 11-92); Part Two traces the religious experience of the earliest Christian communities (pp. 95-196); Part Three takes up the religious experience of Paul and of the Pauline churches (pp. 199-342). Finally, Dunn surveys the second generation of Christianity (including the later Pauline correspondence and the Johannine writings) and offers concluding remarks (p. 345-361). The footnotes appear at the end of the volume, and take up some 113 pages. The book also contains an index of Biblical references, and index of modern authors, and an index of subjects.

The conclusions of the book can be summarized as follows: religious experience was for Jesus both a unique experience of God as Father and the experience of the Holy Spirit as eschatological power and inspiration. From Jesus' experience flowed His sense of mission, His authority, His Gospel, His lifestyle. The earliest Christian community sprang from the epochal experiences of two sorts – the post resurrection appearances of Jesus and the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit. Paul provides us with the mature attempt within Christianity to theologize about the nature and distinctive character of Christian experience. Paul recognized that God (and His Spirit) may be experienced in various ways, both in non-rational ecstasy and through the mind and will. Basic to Paul's teaching on Christian experience is its tension between the past and the future, between the already and the not-yet.

The distinct essence of *Christian* experience lies in the relation between Jesus and the Spirit – the Holy Spirit *is* the Spirit of Jesus. (Dunn avoids the quasi Tri-theism of those who tend to separate the Holy Spirit's ministry from the person of Christ.) Epigrammatically, the author states, "Jesus became the personality of the Spirit" (p. 325). It is this important relationship which "provides the dynamism of Christian experience" (p. 358).

Dunn presents four theological models which reflect the corporate dimension of religious experience. (These may serve as paradigms of the different responses to the Christ event in our own time.) *Luke* uncritically glories in the vitality of the Charismatic and ecstatic experiences of the first generation. This model excites, but glosses over problems and provides no lasting norm for individual or corporate experience. *The Pastoral Epistles* for Dunn contain little Lukan vitality or Pauline vision; prophecy is little recognized because tradition begins to take over. *John* seeks to turn from increasing institutionalization, but

loses the eschatological tension of Paul and increasingly withdraws from “the world.” The final model is *Paul*.

The author favors the “vitality and maturity” of the Pauline model. Dunn observes that twentieth century Christianity needs to take the Pauline exposition seriously. Paul conceived of the church as the body of Christ, commonly sharing in the experience of the Holy Spirit and His diverse manifestations.

I personally agree with his conclusion: “The life of the Christian church can go forward only when each generation is able creatively to reinterpret its gospel and its common life out of its own experience of the Spirit and word which first called Christianity into existence.”

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