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## 859TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

HELD AT THE NATIONAL CLUB, 12, QUEEN ANNE'S GATE,  
LONDON, S.W.1, AT 6 P.M. ON APRIL 30TH, 1945.

THE REV. A. M. STIBBS, M.A., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed and signed.

The CHAIRMAN then called upon the Rev. G. W. Bromiley, M.A., Ph.D., to read his paper entitled "The Biblical Doctrine of Divine Revelation."

The Meeting was later thrown open to discussion in which Mr. W. M. Powell and Mr. A. E. Hughes took part.

Written communications were received from the Rev. Principal P. W. Evans, B.A., D.D., and Alexander Fraser, Esq.

The following elections have been made: Kenneth N. Walker, Esq., M.A., F.R.C.S., Member; Miss Ruth M. Filmer, B.Sc., Member.

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### *THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF DIVINE REVELATION.*

By the Rev. G. W. BROMILEY, M.A., Ph.D.

CHRISTIANITY is not primarily a system of religion, a human work, but faith in a revelation, a work of God, attested by the record known as the Bible.\* Attempts have, of course, been made to substitute the religious for the revelational aspect: the most destructive and radical in the modern period, when Protestant theologians, influenced by the European thought-movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, tried to absorb the Bible revelation into the immanentist-naturalist philosophies, accepting Christianity only as one religion with others, a product of the intellectual and emotional faculties of man. Such men as Herder, Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Harnack, Rashdall, all worked along these lines. But always Christianity has had to come back to the elementary fact that its roots are

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\* Religion, definable in many ways, has to do with human thought, emotion, conduct and ritual in relation to God. The word is seldom used in the Bible, which is the record of revelation, the divine work in relation to man. Religion without revelation, being a work of man, is necessarily tainted with sin. But religion is also the natural response of man to the work of revelation. Where God is revealed and God is at work, it is possible to attain in response to pure religion, of which the highest expression is a life of holiness and of love. Christianity is revelation first, since its foundation and power is in God, but in so far as man must respond, it is also, secondarily, religion.

in God, not man, that God has revealed Himself to man, as Scripture witnesses. The first aim of the theological revival of the present, led by the great thinkers Barth, Brunner, Lecerf, Niebuhr, has been the reinstatement of Christianity as revealed message rather than religion, the creation of God rather than of man. The modern world has no greater need than that Christianity should be understood again and preached as the revelation of God, and the Bible honoured, not as a literary or historical record, which it is incidentally, but as the living Word in which God Himself is known.

The controversy between revelation and religion, between the approach which stresses God's work and that which stresses man's, is central today. The greatest danger is that the advocates of a humanised Christianity should adopt the concepts of faith whilst giving to them a new meaning and setting them against a new background. It was in this way that the rationalistic Neology, and later Herder and Schleiermacher with their romanticised theology, sought at once to overthrow and to retain Christianity as a revealed faith. When we speak of a divine revelation it is necessary that the exact meaning of the term should be brought out, and its relation to Scripture clarified. The word revelation, "unveiling," can be used in many senses. The immanentist can speak of a revelation through Scripture as well as the Transcendentalist. Many cry out that the message of the Gospel should be translated into the terms of modern thought, but the true need is that the revelation of God should be proclaimed in opposition to the philosophical misunderstandings and perversions of it prevalent in theology and science. If the plant is to emerge in its full beauty and strength, parasitical growths must be cleared away.

It is not possible in a single paper to lay down even the outlines of a theology of revelation, but what can be done is to indicate the general lines along which the divine revelation must positively be proclaimed, and, without apologetic, to show the points at which opposition to current philosophies must arise. To give to this survey incisiveness and comprehensiveness, the Biblical doctrine of revelation will be stated in a series of concrete propositions, with some general illustration from Scripture, and a discussion of the more obvious liberal misconceptions. If a dogmatic defence cannot be undertaken, the risk of an over-simple and dogmatic presentation is worth running.

The basic proposition in a Christian theology of revelation is

that revelation is not a revealing of God *by* man, but a self-revealing of God *to* man. Speak of the revelation, or "making known" of God, and there is, grammatically, an ambiguity. Is it the unveiling of God, with God as Object, or God's unveiling, with God as Subject? But the ambiguity is superficial, because, Scripturally, both meanings are correct. God is both Object and Subject: it is God who is revealed and it is God who reveals. There is perhaps the suggestion (the "*si integer stetisset Adam*" of Calvin) that in the days of innocence a definite act of revelation was unnecessary, that man, as man, had the knowledge of God and could walk and talk with Him intimately by nature. Even then, however, God was self-revealed in nature and in the spirit of man. But with the Fall the garden became a memory and God a mystery. Traces of God could be discerned, but in His innermost Being He was the Unknown God, the *Deus absconditus*. Not that God veiled His face. The sin of man obscured His face. Only God Himself could pierce the veil of sin. If, then, God is to be known by sinful man, He must by a definite act make Himself known. The knowledge of God depends upon the act of God.

Of this act Scripture is the record. Nothing could be more misleading and mischievous, except for the student of comparative religion as such, than to treat the Bible as a partial record of the human quest for God. Scripture testified rather to the divine quest for man, affecting, without doubt, the history, emotions and aspirations of the race, but not understandable as such. When Eden lost its springtime light and bloom, Adam fled, but God began to seek. When the Judgment of the Flood was impending, Noah did not awake to the knowledge: God warned him. Abram had his own way of life and worship, his own thoughts of God, in Ur, (unsatisfactory) perhaps, and his thought developed in Haran and Canaan, but what mattered was that God called and led and blessed him. The sheep do not seek the shepherd, but the Good Shepherd comes to seek and to save that which is lost. The religious background of these acts is interesting, the growth of insights important, but the acts of God are more than background and insights. A crib is interesting and important, but, for anyone but a professional manufacturer of cribs, to investigate the crib and to ignore the baby is to betray a pitiful lack of proportion. And for anyone but a student of religion in his capacity as such, to trace the

story of a religious growth and to ignore the story of the revealing work of God is the height of folly.

Revelation is inevitably interwoven with religion, but the two are not one. Religion is the work of human and sinful faculties. Apart from, and even in response to, the revelation of God, it is sinful and idolatrous, and easily lends itself to corruption. Faith can point to many a triumph, but religion has many a story of shame. Faith in the revelation of God is religion, but secondarily—the earliest believers had faith within the context of another religion. Thus whilst faith in God's revelation does issue in the highest and purest religion, the primary, the basic thing in Christianity is the faith itself, the humble acceptance by man of the living Word of the living God.

Revelation is a self-revelation on the part of God. But this means the second proposition: that revelation consists, not in a process, but in an act, or a series of acts, supernatural in character. Post-renaissance thought has been enslaved by the pseudo-scientific understanding of movement as growth, of which the philosophical concept of an immanent God is the counterpart. Romantics, Idealists, Naturalists, joined forces in subjecting physical, historical and spiritual life to the same laws of organic development. Process, progress, evolution became the slogans of the age in its understanding of history and life, of religion and God.

In Christian doctrine the reaction has been two-fold: first, an attempt to harmonise the concept revelation with an immanentist-evolutionary view of the universe—the very misleading notion of progressive revelation; second, an attempt to resolve the contradiction between the natural and the divine by the elimination of the supernatural. In each case the understanding of God in immanentist and not transcendent terms is the basis: God is reduced from Creative Subject to immanent spirit, revealed only in natural law and growth, and, in the more daring writers (*e.g.*, Hegel), realising itself only in the creaturely world, and attaining for the first time to self-awareness, or consciousness, with the emergence of man.

The attempt to re-write Hebrew history in accordance with evolutionary notions of what ought to have happened, is of a piece with this movement, witness its exclusion of all supernatural, transcendent acts on the part of the free Creator. The Hebrew record must be amended to form a story of continuous growth. The religious conceptions of the Hebrews reflected in it must be

grouped, and the records themselves regrouped, to fit in with a scheme of progressive development from primitive animism to the final exalted monotheism. The term revelation is still used, but it describes a progressive comprehension of truth, a gradual clarification and deepening of concepts, an elimination of the primitive and crude; God-inspired, God-directed, but the work of the human soul. It is revelation because it is the work of the spirit of God immanent in man, but it is revelation as a natural process, not as a supernatural act.

The matter is complicated because, of course, religious concepts, as man's reception, do necessarily intermingle with the divine revelation, and the revealing acts of God do have their place in the ordinary course of history. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for instance, built their altars in accordance with the custom of the age, and perhaps, in the frailty of their human understanding, they did share some of the religious thoughts of their neighbours. In the Mosaic code, again, there are provisions similar to those in heathen codes. During the troubled times of the occupation the Hebrews fell into quite open idolatry, adopting the customs, ceremonies and beliefs of Canaan, and this persisted under the kings, in spite of the prophetic witness. But this was all incidental, the historical setting, the human reception, not the revelation itself. God revealed Himself to man within the context of historical movement, now progressive, now retrogressive, but the revelation itself was from without. Receiving is relative, the revelation absolute. The revelation does not consist in the thoughts of those who received it, but in the supernatural acts of transcendent Deity, Calling, Deliverance, Prophecy, Miracles, Incarnation. Because revelation and religion interlock and intermingle, to form an historical whole, we must not be confused, by the immanentist equating of God and man and denying of sin, into thinking that they are identical.

Again, God does make Himself known generally, in nature, history and conscience, all created by Him. But the Biblical revelation in nature is not that of God immanent in law, but of creative power expressed in law. Natural law, historical movement, conscience, these reveal God. Had man remained innocent they would have sufficed. But sinful man is blind to the transcendent God thus immanent in the world. Confounding Creator and creature, he gives to creature the honour due to the Creator. Only as the new revelation of Love enlightens his eyes can he learn again to exclaim with the Psalmist "The

heavens declare the glory of God," to perceive the hand of God upon the nations, to hear the voice of God in the soul. Sinful man, surveying nature, sees gods, demons, forces, immanent spirit, the play of mechanical powers, the self-realisation of divinity; surveying history, he sees a meaningless jumble, or the cycle of recurrence, or evolutionary ascension, or a movement of growth and decay; surveying conscience, he sees blind instinct, or social morality, or a purposeless, hidden testimony. God is still revealed, truly, but without the new and transcendental acts in nature, history and conscience (the plagues of Egypt, the Red-sea deliverance, the Law-giving at Sinai), there are neither eyes to see nor a heart to receive. But once God is known in judgment and grace, He is known too in the lily that grows and the sparrow that falls, in the battle that is won and the voice that speaks within. And He is known, not as the law of creation, but as the law-giving Creator, who, even as Hidden God, is Lord.

Revelation in the Bible is the self-revelation of God, transcendent, not immanent. By its nature it is supernatural, even when it is given through the natural. Eliminate miracle, and revelation, redemption, even creation, as well as the Bible, are eliminated. Pantheists argue that the distinction between natural and supernatural is artificial, and with some truth. They wrongly conclude that all is natural. On the contrary, all is miracle. The creation itself and natural law are, ultimately, miracle, as is God's transcending of creation and natural law. Revelation is miracle from first to last. Deny this, and God is denied. Sinful man, surveying the creation of God deranged by sin, is pleased to call it natural. But the truly natural is not this sub-nature, in which the perfect laws of God shine through the clouds in preservation, but the Will of God, expressed either in those laws or in others beyond the petty ken of man. Man is the denier of nature, not the supernatural God. Imagine God as a spirit tied down to this world deranged by sin, and the race is condemned indeed to a horrible perdition. But apart from the prior revelation in and through creation, God the Lord has revealed Himself in grace in acts of power, supernatural, in that they transcend the ordinary laws of creation, truly natural, in the sense that they are the fulfilment of the Divine Will. And in these acts God is revealed as the God of grace, who is truly immanent because He is Incarnate, yet in that immanence itself, transcendent.

A third proposition naturally follows: The revelation which is God-given, if it consists in supernatural acts, is a particular revelation. Truth which is revealed is not abstract and timeless, for all men to grasp whenever they can or choose, as are, for instance, the truths of mathematics. It is historical and concrete. It is not something which is there, but something which happens, and which has all the "once-for-all-ness" of the event. Revelation, as the act of God in history, has the singularity proper to the historical act. Man cannot now know God through the age-long witness of nature, history and conscience, which have some permanence, even if they are constantly renewed. This revelation does persist, as Scripture testifies, leaving man without excuse. But man cannot receive it. There is need for something more than this general display of wisdom, power and righteousness. The Bible revelation begins where this general revelation is broken off, with the failure of sinful man to perceive it. The Bible is the record of the new and particular revelation of God to sinful man, in judgment and in grace.

But if this revelation is particular, historical, concrete, unique, an event, it is quite different from abstract truth, which might be diffused through a variety of religious systems. Apply the word "comparative" to religions, and an interesting anthropological study results. Christianity can be classified with the rest. But apply it to revelation and the result is nonsense. There is perhaps a sub-stratum of truth in almost all religions, handed down from the earliest times when man knew God in the general revelation in nature. This is not surprising. Nor is it surprising that man has overlaid that truth with the idolatrous extravagancies of his own sinful fancy. But there can be no question of a diffusion of revealed truth through the religions, nor of a gradation of revealed truth. The false premises of much comparative study is that there is some degree of revelation in every faith, and in Christianity the highest degree, thus far. This is an erroneous assumption which vitiates much work otherwise of great historical value. Religion is general, because it is the work of man, and, although the quality of religions differs, the needs which prompt them are, roughly, the same the world over. But revelation, the revelation of grace, is one and absolute, a final event, which admits of no comparison with the fancied theophanies of paganism. The Bible does not claim that faith in God is superior to belief in pagan gods, because God is one, and His revelation is one, and all else is nothing.

The series of God's redeeming acts culminates in an historical life, the Incarnate life of the Son of God. Here the work of redeeming grace reaches its climax, in an absolute and exclusive work of God which marks out Christianity from all the religions : the Virgin Birth, the life of love, the death upon the Cross, the Resurrection and the Ascension into Heaven. If this is the Word of God, then all other revelations are excluded, " I am the Way, the Truth and the Life ; no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

God reveals Himself ; He reveals Himself through acts ; His revelation is absolute, particular. In the three propositions which follow, more detailed truths with regard to the form, the reception, and the content of that revelation must be stated. Urgent and vexed questions are raised, especially with regard to the relationship of the absolute revelation to the necessarily contingent and relative historical nexus, but any detailed discussion is impossible. The main need is that the outlines of Christian teaching should be drawn up in opposition to modern views which threaten to obscure the pure truth of Scripture.

The fourth proposition is : That the revelation of God, which consists in a series of transcendental acts, comes to man in the form of historical events, which are recorded and attested in the written story of the Hebrew race.\* The revelation of God may be spoken of with a threefold reference, as regards its outward form. The primary reference is to the acts or words of God, such as the Flood, the Call of Abraham, the Red-sea deliverance, the Fire at Carmel, the Word of the prophets, the teaching, the life, the death and the Resurrection of Christ, the descent of the Spirit. These are the unveiling of God in the original sense. It is through these deeds and words that God has made Himself known to individuals, families, nations, all nations. But there is a secondary reference, to the witness by which this primary revelation is mediated. The record of these acts and words is also, secondarily, the revelation of God. God caused this record, Holy Scripture, to be made. God inspired the authors. God causes the events of which it speaks to happen

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\* The question is sometimes asked : Why the Hebrew race ? Why Abraham ? Various reasons might be given, but the only true reason is that this was the Sovereign Will of God, which, since revelation is purely of grace, man has no claim to question. Why did God create man ? Why did He cause grass to be green ? Why did He act in one way and not another ? these are all boasting and foolish questions, which man has neither right to ask nor power to answer.

to the seeking soul in every age. Detailed questions as to the Bible's reliability and authenticity, and the nature of its inspiration, cannot be discussed here, but the problem is that of the Incarnation itself, of the transcendent revelation of God in the contingent world of history, and it is no essential problem to the one who has received the revelation. The final guarantee of Scripture is the activity of God the Holy Ghost through the written page. The term revelation may, finally, be used with an even wider reference, to cover all Christian preaching and teaching which is based upon the written witness and empowered by the Holy Ghost. It is through this spoken word, based upon Scripture and speaking of the primary acts, that God ordinarily makes Himself known to the soul. The divine act, which is the basis, is not thereby excluded. Preaching is a proclamation of those acts of which Scripture is the perpetuation, a heralding of what God has done and said, an extending of the exclusive and absolute act to all humanity, a quickening of the historical past to the living present.

This doctrine of revelation as the Word revealed, written, preached, excludes many conceptions of the modern age. Mysticism in the pure sense, in which the emotional intercourse of the soul with God is revelation, independent of concrete acts or words, is negated. The message of God may come *through* individuals, chosen vessels,\* and it must be received *by* individuals, but the revelation itself does not consist in the *experience* of the individual: it is from outside, *objective*, an *act* of God, and, as such, not exclusive to the mystical type. Again, a religious individualism pure and simple is excluded. The religion of a man may be his own, but it is not thereby true. Each man must make the revelation of God his own, by the Holy Ghost, but the revelation itself is given, attested and proclaimed, and if a man prefers his own thought to that revelation, then however sincerely he may hold to it, it is idolatrous and erroneous. True and living knowledge is only possible where God Himself speaks from without: all feeling, all thinking which has not this basis is delusion. Misconceptions with regard to the written record are also repelled: on the one hand the error of an over zealous, and thus unwise faith, which would treat the

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\* It might well be argued by mystics that the individuals chosen are mystical types, but the point is that the revelation of God is not the experience, nor is it peculiar to the individual. It is something—a word—from God, given through the individual to all.

Bible itself, not the acts and words which it attests, as the primary revelation ; on the other, the error of humanistic pride, which, understanding the world anthropocentrically, would treat the Bible as the story of a religious quest, the religious record and literature of a nation, revelation not as written testimony to the work of God, but as manifestation of the divine spirit in humanity. Let the scientist, historian, literary critic, study the Bible as literature, history, science—by all means. But let him not wander from that study into speculative theology. And let him remember that if the Bible is science, history, literature, it is also, and supremely, the record of the revealing acts of God. And when the minister of the Gospel studies the Bible humanistically, let him remember that the true secret of the Bible can only be known when it is read with humility and faith as revelation. Finally, a true understanding of revelation in its extended sense as propagation, dispels false ideas with regard to the nature and function of preaching. Preaching, as revelation, is not topical chatter, the airing of commonplace views upon current affairs. It is not discussion, oratory, devotion even. It is the heralding of news, the proclaiming of the acts of God, testimony to what God has done. Less urgent matters, devotion, instruction, application to contemporary problems, have a place ; but if the primary nature is realised, the pastoral problem loses its edge. Men cannot spare the time to listen to the prattle of fellowmen, but they must pay heed to a living testimony to the great acts of God, which means to each soul life or death.

Not everyone, however, does receive the revelation of God in power. This is not a limitation of God's redeeming love, but a plain fact of experience. Christ Himself, we read, taught in parables, so that only those who perceived as well as saw, who comprehended as well as heard, might receive His word. A fifth proposition must be made then : That the revelation of God, which consists in outward acts, attested by Scripture and proclaimed by witnesses, cannot be known by the individual except there is the inward testimony of the Holy Ghost and the movement of repentance and faith.

A twofold problem arises : The relationship of the revelation of God, as history, to history as such, which may be known of all ; and the tension between revelation as objective fact and as subjective truth. The former problem involves the whole question of Scripture as God's work and man's, of miracles as transcendent and yet historical events, of the Incarnation, the

two natures of Christ, of the death and empty tomb which were atonement and resurrection. It is too large to discuss here. A few words might, however, be profitably said upon the second, and, (since the two are fundamentally one), this would also help to indicate the lines along which the first must be tackled, and at the same time to bring out the great divergence which exists here between much philosophical theology and the teaching of Scripture.

Revelation in Scripture is an objective reality. It consists in concrete facts of history, concretely attested, not in emotions and intuitions, as Schleiermacher would have it. A pure subjectivism, which destroys absolute authority, is thus negated. But revelation and the witness to it, as concrete facts of history, have the apparent contingency of such facts, and their true meaning as revelation is not immediately or on the surface clear. With a little wresting they are susceptible of explanation purely as history. They have the character of the incognito. Faith alone can pierce the incognito and see through to the true reality. Thus Christ was a religious teacher, but faith sees more, the Lamb of God. The cross was an execution, but faith sees an atonement. Easter was an empty tomb, a riddle (hallucination, fraud, mistake ?), but faith knows a resurrected Lord. A pure objectivism is thus also avoided. Revelation does not come as a fact or series of facts which all can learn, although it rests upon and consists in facts, but as an act of God which sifts the heart : for only in penitence and faith can it be received.

A few Old Testament examples might help to make this plain. There are the given facts by which God is known : the plagues, the law-giving, the overthrow of Jericho. These are all historical events. The historian may, if he so choose, deny the transcendental and miraculous character, and treat them solely as historical events : the plagues, a series of natural disasters, culminating in widespread assassination ; the law-giving, a volcanic eruption ; the fall of Jericho, an earthquake. So long as fancy explanations and evasions of awkward facts are avoided there is clearly room for investigation along purely historical lines. But once let the principles of objective research so enslave a man, once let him become so obstinate in his denial of the obviously supernatural, that he cannot see in the historical events the redeeming finger of God, then not only does he miss the point, but he also reveals that he himself is unrepentant and devoid of faith. The revelation is not above the history and the

natural phenomenon. The union between the two is, as it were, hypostatic: both are fully present in the one event. So complete is the union that although all men can see the history, as all men can see Jesus the Man, faith alone sees in the history the revelation, as faith alone sees in Jesus the Man, Jesus the Son of God. The revelation, objectively given, must be subjectively received.

This teaching corrects three major errors of the age. First, the error of orthodoxy, which, accepting the supernatural, but obliterating the purely historical character of the acts, understands the revelation of God only as supernatural, objective fact. That is why barren orthodoxy comes to teach the faith as a list of events and a system of beliefs, and to read the Bible as a text-book of supernatural happenings, independent of ordinary literary and historical associations. Orthodoxy of this type clings to a pedantic view of inspiration, suspects every attempt to understand the revelation of God as history, insists upon the acceptance objectively of objective facts. Whatever its justification in the defence of the Bible against the cavilling of unbelief, it is not based upon a true understanding of the word and work of God, and it frustrates the inward activity of the Holy Ghost, who seeks to quicken the revelation to living spiritual knowledge.

A far greater error is that of denying to revelation all objective character, which usually results in the separating of the so-called eternal content of religion from the contingent and relative historical form (which is not in this view revelation in any sense), and the degrading of the Bible to a purely secular level. This is the peculiar error of the modern age, characteristic of the rationalistic Neology, of Romantic Immanentism (Herder and Schleiermacher), and of contemporary liberalistic mediation. The terrible peril which lurks in it is this: That if revelation is made purely subjective, and divorced from the events in which it is set, then divine truth is left without foundation: the outward acts of God are accidental and contingent events, and truth is a generality. Recent years have made us familiar with the consequences: a purely human study of the Bible as ("unreliable") literature and history; the treatment of Christ as no more than teacher, hero, genius or martyr; comparative study of religion; undermining of the authority of faith and morals; a false and deluding religiosity; ultimate failure to understand either revelation or history.

A third error, which appears in some extremists of the Barthian reaction, is that of retaining a true, objective revelation, whilst denying the particular historical witness of Scripture. This apparent contradiction rests upon the violent separation of the revelational element in Scripture from the human. At root it is thoroughly subjectivist. Scripture is seen as a human book, a fallible record of historical events. But to the individual soul at individual moments the Holy Ghost chooses to use this record as the Word of God. The record is not the revelation in itself: it *becomes* the Word. Thus the relationship between the revelation and the events recorded in Scripture is precariously and arbitrarily retained, but without a true objectivism. The truth is that as Christ is always truly Man, yet truly God, so revelation is at all times truly history, yet truly revelation. Not everyone perceives this. Many study the Bible and miss the revelation, as many study Christ and miss God. But the fault is not with the Bible, or with Christ. It is with the individuals. If, in the power of the Spirit, there is a change it is a change in the men, not in the revelation or in Christ. This man sees in Christ only a good man. But Christ is still God. He does not need to become God. The man himself needs to learn to see God in Christ. If the revelation is to become a subjective reality, it must be by a change in the human subject, not in the revelation. The objective reality of the revelation is a constant.

To sum up: objectively, revelation exists irrespective of human understanding or reception; subjectively, it comes to life in the individual as the Holy Ghost illumines the given facts, and faith appropriates the redeeming work. Christ died for men, whether they believe or no. That is the objective reality. Christ died for me, as my eyes are opened to see beyond the good man crucified to the Lamb slain, and as I by faith receive the atoning work. That is the subjective truth. Stress the one to the exclusion of the other, and the result is either barren orthodoxy, or baseless emotion. See the proper relationship, the proper tension, and the wonder of God's revelation is partly known, the God who is above history revealed in history, contingently, yet according to His own purpose, veiled to unbelief, revealed in the plenitude of love and power to the penitent and believing.

What then of the content of revelation? No study, however brief, can omit a word upon the substance of the divine message. What is it that God makes known through those acts of power

which culminate in the Incarnation of the Saviour? The answer to this query, in a sixth and final proposition, is: That the content of the Divine revelation is the righteousness, the power, the redeeming love of God, set forth in One who is both God and Man, to the conviction of the sinner, to the pardoning and cleansing of those that believe.

God is not revealed as progressive spirit working in and through the race. He is not revealed as spark immanent in the human soul. He is not revealed in the nobility and dignity of man. He is not revealed as the weak father of a fractious humanity. He is not an intangible, poetry of the poets, truth of the philosophers, goodness of the moralists. He is not the law or spirit of nature, the vital upward thrusting of individuals and species. Many of these things may be comprehended in God, but God in His self-revelation through particular acts tells us something quite different from these imaginings of humanists, romantics and scientists.

The God of the Bible revelation is the Creator God, transcendent in majesty and power. He is the God of righteousness, against whom the race has sinned, so that His work in creation is veiled. He is the God of mercy, of love and redemption. He is the Incarnate God, not a liberalised historical figure, but the Christ of the Gospels, who bore the sin of man, who loved to the end, to refuse whom is self-condemnation, whom to know is life eternal. He is not the God revealed to some chosen ones in secret, but the God whom all can know, whom none can fathom. The revelation of God, majestic and yet simple as the God revealed, is not an academic thesis calling for approval, a philosophy engaging the mind, but earnest compelling truth, calling for decision.

When the revelation of God comes to the soul, earthly considerations fade. The issues are eternal; the soul is at grips with that which means life or death. It is right that there should be a proper understanding of revelation. It is good that theologians should seek to clear away false conceptions, ideas, interpretations, which hinder a right perception. But when the content of revelation is considered, it is fitting that the voice of the theologian should cease, and the voice of God Himself alone be heard. The content of revelation can only rightly be known by him who receives that revelation in the word of Scripture or of preaching, which is the word of power. And when he does receive it, then before the simple and stupendous fact of it,

argument perishes and the intellect is silent, and the heart of man can only answer, each heart for itself, in the cry of despair which is the cry of faith : " Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

#### WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

The Rev. Principal P. W. EVANS, B.A., D.D., wrote : Dr. Bromiley's acute and valuable paper on " The Biblical Doctrine of Divine Revelation " merits deep consideration, but I am compelled to write rather hurriedly. Probably many of my difficulties would be removed by a fuller and more balanced statement.

Page 83, paragraph 2. While Scripture is undoubtedly to be received as primarily due to the divine quest for man, there seems no reason to limit to the student of comparative religion the view of the Book as also a partial record of man's quest for God. Acts xvii, 26 speaks of such a quest as part of the divine purpose, and in the Psalms and Job we have examples of it. Admittedly, this quest for God is itself inspired and guided by earlier revelation and communion.

Page 84. " Religion is the work of human and sinful faculties." Not necessarily so, for the Revealer is at the same time the Creator Spirit within, co-operant with man's quest for God.

Page 84. " The very misleading notion of progressive revelation." The phrase has often been misapplied, but that calls for correctness not for denial of the truth implied. Some have suggested that we should speak of " progressive apprehension on man's part," and that is valuable as guarding against the idea that God changes as the centuries pass. Surely, however, God has revealed Himself with growing fulness from time to time, and Dr. Bromiley admits this in his first paragraph on page 88, where he speaks of a " climax " and a series of redeeming acts which " culminates." Revelation progressed at such crises as the rise of the eighth century prophets, and pre-eminently at the Incarnation. Those who accept the idea of " progressive revelation " are certainly not wholly immanentist in theology ; indeed, Dr. Bromiley practically concedes the progressiveness for which I should contend on page 85, where he speaks of God revealing Himself to man within the context of the historical movement, " now progressive, now retrogressive."

Indeed, the closing sentences of paragraph 2 on page 85 seem to me to express in too absolute antithesis what the author probably intends to state only comparatively. Is the revelation accomplished unless it becomes part of the thoughts of those who received it? It is a two-sided process, and whilst God certainly initiates it man, some man at least, must receive it, or there is no revelation.

Page 86, second paragraph, at beginning: "Revelation in the Bible is the self-revelation of God, transcendent, not immanent." Is He not both? By the phrase "Revelation is miracle from first to last," does the author deny a place to what is natural? If so, he is sundering God's world. It is a false antithesis to assume that, unless we subscribe to a wholly supernatural view of revelation, we "imagine God as a spirit tied down to this world deranged by sin." Does the phrase "truly immanent because He is Incarnate" deny divine immanence previous to the Incarnation? Both immanence and transcendence must be accepted, and the measure of each is the other—wholly transcendent, wholly immanent.

Page 87, first paragraph. Some qualifying word such as "sufficiently" should be inserted before "know." If there is "perhaps a sub-stratum of truth in almost all religions," that truth is truth, however man came by it, and to suggest that it is handed down from "the general revelation of nature" surely classifies it as revealed truth. The alternative to styling it "revealed truth" is to regard it as man's discovery of truth. Was the Holy Spirit idle through the non-revelational centuries?

Page 93. "Objectively, revelation exists irrespective of human understanding or reception." This is surely only a half-truth. Revelation essentially implies a Revealer and one to whom something is given or made clear.

As suggested at the beginning, Dr. Bromiley's point of view probably suffers from compression and antithetical statement, but I would like to add appreciation of the many good qualities of the paper, especially the references to preaching on page 90 and the statement about exaggerations or denials of objectivity on page 93.

Rev. ALEXANDER FRASER, wrote: I am incapable of criticizing this paper from the point of view of scholarly attainment . . . with

the overwhelming part of it I seem to be in complete agreement. However, when Dr. Bromiley comes to illustrate his position in the teaching of present-day theologians and other modern applications of his position, I am afraid he is in such bad company as to raise serious doubt as to the desirability of this paper for any evangelical purpose.

(1) He speaks of the following great thinkers of the theological revival of the present, among whom are Barth and Niebuhr.

(2) I greatly question his first full paragraph on page 93 as being a sound evangelical statement. One cannot be too careful about throwing stones at orthodoxy these days, even if it should be accounted "pedantic" and "barren," because by so doing he gives great comfort to the enemies of Christ. The unbelieving modernists of Union Seminary could write a book on that paragraph.

3. I cannot personally accept his statement on the same page that "Christ is always truly Man, yet truly God." It seems to my non-theological mind that the teaching of Philippians 2, 5-11 indicates that the humanity of our Lord was an *assumed phase*, an incidence, and that He was before and afterward truly God. Here again is a matter of throwing a sop to the modernist by undue emphasis upon His humanity. Peter settled this question in his first great sermon on the day of Pentecost when he said: "Therefore know assuredly, that God hath made Him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts ii, 36).

Rev. A. M. STIBBS thanked Dr. Bromiley for his paper, and expressed warm appreciation of his able treatment of the subject.

#### REPLY TO PRINCIPAL EVANS.

From the many interesting points raised by Principal Evans, two important issues arise. The first has to do with the place of religion within revelation. In the paper the false view repudiated was that which merges revelation into religion. It is, of course, quite true to say that the receiving of revelation is part of revelation itself, and that the Holy Spirit is active in the religious subject. A revelation not received, although it has a certain objective reality, ceases in the strict sense to be revelation, and faith itself is the work of God.

So far so good. But some very real distinctions do need to be made. First, it is only in the sphere of the objective revelation that the Holy Spirit works. Natural religions are thus only God-inspired in so far as they are related to the revelation in nature and conscience, and the substratum of truth is often small, and overlaid with distorting accretions—which means that it often has the form of half-truth. Second, the religious response, although it is the work of God, is worked out in, by and through men who are sinners, and in this way it falls short of the perfection of the revelation objectively considered, which, although given through men too, is in a more particular sense a work of God. It is at this point that the confusion of the revelation with the response to it must be guarded against, since many thinkers refuse to admit any revelation apart from the immanent work of the Holy Ghost in religious subjects. There is something received (which is perfect), as well as a receiving (which is not wholly perfect). Jesus Christ, the acts of God, the normative witness of Scripture are as the thing given perfect in a way in which the work and theology of the Church are not, although these latter are also in truth directed and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Third, the revelation, or thing received, is of far greater importance than the human receiving of it—at any rate it is primary, just as the quest of God for man is primary, not the quest of man for God. Both have a place, but the latter is subordinate to, indeed is part of the former. The error of much theology is that it reverses this relationship. The whole question of immanence and transcendence is involved. Of course, God is immanent—did not Jesus Christ become Man?—*but not in such a way that His transcendence is negated*. If God is active in man, He is also active outside of man. If He reveals Himself within man, it is from outside of man. If He speaks through man, it is a voice from beyond man. If He works in and through nature, the works themselves are above nature. If Jesus is man, He is none the less God.

The second has to do with the alleged progressiveness of revelation. In so far as God reveals Himself within the time process, of His own choice there is necessarily a “successiveness” in revelation. It is not wrong then to speak of the story of revelation, its unfolding, its culmination. It is not even wrong to use the term progress, so long as it is made quite clear that there is no development from

the inferior (in Genesis) to the superior (in the Gospel), *i.e.*, so long as the term is not used, as normally, to express judgment: Two points call for notice. 1. There is a sequence of revealing acts, and at different times different attributes of God are no doubt more particularly revealed—power, justice, one-ness, faithfulness, wisdom, love. This sequence, in so far as it is regarded from the point of view of the human subjects, may even be regarded as a kind of schooling, with a general drift of progressive apprehensiveness on the part of the scholars—this can easily be exaggerated, since Abraham knew God in a way in which many Christians clearly do not! But 2. It is the same God in His fulness who speaks at all times and to all, and all His attributes are expressed even if one is more particularly emphasized. The revelation is the revelation of a Person through His acts and words, and if it is successive, generally to the race, privately to individuals, it is still the One Person who is known, and He is always fully and perfectly there, even although it is only one aspect of His character that the subject or pupil knows through any one act. Jesus Christ is the final act in the sequence, because He is the express image of the Godhead, and in Him all the attributes are present and made known. Notice, however, that there is still successiveness in the display of them and particularly in the disciples' general and individual apprehension of them. But this is quite different from the progressive revelation (from totemism to monotheism and so forth) so often imagined by students. At all points God is known, and known truly.

#### REPLY TO MR. FRASER.

Mr. Fraser's stricture on the Christology of page 93, paragraph 1, is, I think, based on a misapprehension. The whole paragraph has to do with Christ in the flesh, with the historical life of the Son of God, and the "always" means simply that at all times during the earthly life He was truly man, *i.e.*, He did not now cease to be man and act as God, or now cease to be God and act as man. Whether there is any sense in which Jesus Christ can be considered as eternally Man is a different problem, and does not come within the scope of this paper. Mr. Fraser's fear of any criticism of orthodoxy,

even of a dead, barren and pedantic type, is I believe exaggerated and even unwise. Historical examples of such an orthodoxy are by no means uncommon. Where it is not recognised and corrected it has two disastrous results. It destroys spiritual work, which is far more important ultimately than the holding of a meticulously correct set of beliefs—this is not a disparagement of theological exactness! It provokes a reaction which will almost certainly be extremely unorthodox. Thus modern liberalism and rationalism are to a large extent consequences of the hardening of reformed theology in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.