

A Working Definition and its Purpose.

"What then is the Inspiration of the Bible?"

It is at the least that divine influencing of Hebrews, Jews and early Christians in virtue of which the Bible, as the "specially sacred" literature of Christianity, is morally and religiously so much superior to the "specially sacred" writings of any of the other most important religions.

After quoting these with other lines from my "summary" Doctor Saunders wrote:

"It will be observed in the above quotation that Brother Waring says that this last definition is "a good working definition of the inspiration of the Scriptures."

It will be observed that the Doctor here omits to state for whom, or for what purpose, this definition was given; ignoring even what was more than suggested in what he had just quoted from the "summary itself." The purpose was to give a definition for working with the increasingly large numbers who, in intellectual honesty, are not able to hold to the Doctor's assumption of an inspiration that implies the absolute inerrancy of the original writings. It is designed to help others, but especially these and in a three-fold way. (1) It permits freedom of study. Unhampered by, to them, an untenable view of inspiration, they can go to the study of the Bible without assuming either that it is, or is not, inerrant. In the presence of the God of Truth they can, in the study of a Bible passage, honestly seek to find out first just what meaning the author intended to convey. (2) It incites to study. The freedom for honest study that it permits, and its suggestion of the great superiority of the Bible to all the literature to which the Bible belongs, are, to thoughtful minds, strong incentives to Bible study. (3) It helps in study. The explanation of the expression "specially sacred" is, in itself a suggestive help to a truer understanding of the Bible. This explanation as given in our "summary" is: "In each of a number of religious literatures there have been some writings which we will call specially sacred because by the adherents of its religion they have been commonly viewed (1) as having special influence with deity, or (2) as having in their production been specially influenced by deity, or (3) as having been inspired, or (3) in both these ways." Our "working definition" recognizes that there are other "specially sacred" writings. Even where there is no chance to compare these with the Bible the recognition of the fact that in and for them there are only somewhat similar claims to those made in and for the Bible is helpful. It helps to the important thought that the claims in and for the Bible must be judged by the same methods as the claims in and for the other "specially sacred" writings. Though the results of the testing be very widely different, the methods of testing ought, in all honesty, to be the same. Though we have little or no chance to try these methods on the claims for other "specially sacred" writings, yet, by the recognition of the presence of these claims, we are better able to see and use the right methods for testing the claims for the Bible as the "specially sacred" literature of Christianity. If we feel, and justly, that the adherents of other religions have no right to assume the infallibility of the claims in and for their "specially sacred" writings, have we a right to merely assume the infallibility of the claims made in and for the Bible. Ought not these claims like the claims made in and for other "specially sacred" writings be judged by the contents and effects of these writings by the character of the claimants, by the beliefs of the times, etc. Seen then in the light of its purpose and taken in connection with the rest of the summary we (and the more confidently because of the falseness of the Doctor's criticism) offer our definition as "a good working definition" for Bible study.

The falseness of the Doctor's criticism of our definition is due not only to his ignoring our frequently expressed purpose in giving the definition, but also to his ignoring the fact that even where one cannot go deeply into this particular study of comparative religion a slight knowledge of it wisely used may be very helpful. I have but a slight knowledge of medicine but it has been of great service to me. The average Christian can easily be led to see that there are "specially sacred" writings in other religions and he can thus be helped to a truer method of judging the claims in and for the Bible and so to a truer method of studying the Bible. If he can go farther than this general view suggests so much the better, but if no farther than this it may be made very helpful to him. I did not urge even my intelligent Bible class to spend much time in the study of other "specially sacred" writings.

It may be appropriate, therefore, perhaps the Doctor may say not "necessarily" so to quote from the Doctor's articles on inspiration. After quoting from Robertson Smith, a wonderfully rich truth about the Spirit's witness to the Bible—a truth in which I greatly rejoice—the Doctor continues thus:

"Please don't forget this if you see or hear some beginner in the fog of his zeal discount the great importance of the people comparing their Bible with the tons of heathen sacred writings, which is easier of course than a railroad ride to the moon, and in this comparison getting their assurance that the Bible is the revealed will of God, and that knowledge of inspiration gained in this way is so much superior to the inspiration of tradition, the imposed inspiration. The great Robertson Smith did not refer the people to any such absurd impossibilities for assurance that God speaks through his word to all Christians, learned and unlearned alike."

In view of such language as this would it be strange if some one should ask if the Doctor either through such "a railroad ride" or in some other way had been brought "in the fog of his zeal," temporarily, at least, under the peculiar influences of "the moon?" Our large and intelligent Bible class knows no one who has been guilty of what the Doctor so wittily describes. While it rejoices with me in the truth of the witness of the Spirit it also appreciates the thought of "the great Robertson Smith when he wrote:

"The old method of explaining difficulties and reconciling apparent contradictions would no longer be tolerated in dealing with other books, and men ask themselves whether our Christian faith, the most precious gift of truth which God has given us, can safely base its defense on arguments that bring no sense of reality to the mind."

After a paragraph in which the Doctor, writing of the "victimized" higher critics, says: even believers who lapse are submerged again in darkness, the Doctor continues: "In no other way can there be found a satisfactory reason for the various conceptions of the Inspiration of the Bible and the atonement by Christ. For example—One says an Inspiration that produces higher type of literature than is found in the productions of non-Christian peoples another an inspiration that makes the Bible the infallible Word of God. Light and darkness are the extremes found in these different interpretations."

Ah! How suggestive! We might substitute a name for the "one" and another name for the "another" but of course we would not say they were necessarily intended. Instead of doing this let us quote again from "the great Robertson Smith." The increasing influence of critical views among earnest students of the Bible is not to be explained on the Manichean theory that new views commend themselves to mankind in proportion as they ignore God. The living God is as present in the critical construction of the history as in that to which tradition has wedded us.

In view of the reasons given for the falseness of the Doctor's criticism of our definition, if we would simply quote what the Doctor has written the mistakes he has made would be apparent. He seems to criticize its use, first at home and then on the foreign missionary work. Let us quote first his false treatment of its use at home.

The Doctor writes:

"The Bible Brother Waring asserts, will be found to be superior to the sacred writings of other religions. To advance the gospel at home, the Bible should therefore be compared with the sacred writings of the ancients. The books of the Hindus, the Chinese, the Buddhists, the Persians, the Greek the Mohammedans and the ancient Romans. The impossibility of this except for students in our professors of comparative theology is so apparent that it may be set aside without comment. For the use of the churches no argument is necessary to show that it is outside of the practicable."

Let us begin with the last sentence first. We have shown that (contrary to the Doctor's improved assertion) this comparison though in most cases to a very limited extent is practicable even then, and since this is the only comparison urged in the class in all honesty it should not have been "set aside without comment." My thought was of the comparison of the Bible with other "specially sacred" writings of which from the "Chinese," "Greeks" and "ancient Romans" we have practically none. A comparison of the Bible with other "specially sacred" writings will I am sure impressively show its wonderful superiority. In the words of the summary: "Knowledge comes through comparison. While for the sake of the right method we should be willing, in our profound confidence in the result we may well be anxious, that the Bible be intelligently compared, for instance, with *Scriti*, *Trilitaka*, *Zend-Avesta* or *Koran*. I believe that in its production the influence of the Holy Spirit was such that when thus compared, the Bible especially through its revelation of the Son of God, His teaching vicarious death, etc., will be found (to use a *pari dox*) to be, beyond comparison." In the words of Dr. J. S. Moulton to working men:

"If you are asked to believe that there are other sacred books in the world which can for one moment be compared with the Bible and especially with the gospels, I have to ask you to read those sacred books."

Concerning the use of our definition in missionary work the Doctor writes thus:

"It might be informing to enquire as to the practice of Paul in circumstances where it was possible to make such comparison with the ethnic Scriptures. To the Epicureans and Stoics, before going to Mars Hill, he did not say compare our Scriptures with the writings of the Persian, Egyptians, Hindus and your own system, but he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection. On Mars Hill he did not suggest to that learned audience the comparison of the Scriptures with the sacred writings of the heathen, but he preached the Great God, the Creator, the guilt of man and his accountability to God, the judgment day and the resurrection of Christ, and hence of all men. Not one word about comparing the ancient heathen Scriptures with the Old Testament and Paul's declarations of truth. He ignored them. He won a number of souls for Christ, among them were Dionysius and the woman Damaris. Think of it! Paul telling these philosophers to compare the Hebrew Scriptures with the sacred works of the Gentiles. It would have taken them years to have done it. By that time he had established churches all around the Mediterranean Sea. He believed Christ and him crucified would be to all classes, even the learned philosophers of Greece, the power of God unto salvation, and he was not mistaken. Our missionaries do the same. They follow Paul's example. They preach the gospel. They as Paul did, denounce the doctrines and practices of heathen, but they never for once think of saying to the heathen: Let us sit down and compare our Scriptures with the systems of idolatry with a view to prove that the Christian Bible is superior to the sacred writings of the heathen nations."

I cannot take the space to take this up sentence by sentence and show how, mixed with much that is true, are errors, omissions and assertions unproved that leave erroneous impressions on the average reader. If even Homer nods perhaps the Doctor was a little drowsy when he wrote what we have just quoted, from him. Even if the Greeks to whom Paul was talking had had "specially sacred" writings it would have been pre-eminently Paul's business to preach unto them "Jesus and the resurrection." "It might be informing" to state that the Greeks had no "specially sacred" literature with which Paul could compare the specially sacred literature of the Jews. Under the circumstances it would seem that Paul made a good attempt for we read he quoted from a religious line of Greek poetry thus: "as certain even of your own poets have said. For we are also his offspring." Prof. J. M. English, D. D., of Newton and so I presume a Baptist, in his study of Paul's Address on Mars Hill writes: "An analysis of the contents of the address shows that it moved almost entirely within the realm of what we call natural theology—the only theology that lay next to the mind and heart and conscience of Paul's audience."

So much for Paul. Concerning the missionaries of today let me quote the words of one who as secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions can speak with more authority I suppose, than even the Doctor. These are some of his "informing" words, and I would I had space to quote what precedes and follows them: "Within the last few months I have seen a mixed audience in India in the streets of a large city held for an hour by Christian preachers, some of whom took their theme from the Hindu sacred writings and then led their hearers over to the fuller and clearer statement of the same general truth as it is found in the Christian's Bible, or in the words of Jesus Christ. Many pressed forward to purchase a copy of the Christian's sacred book, in order that they might read and compare for themselves. Did any one feel that his own religion had been slandered? Were the feelings of any one hurt by anything that seemed to reflect upon it? Not by any means. On the contrary, many seemed to feel pleased that the Christian preacher knew something of their own faith and was able to give them so full an interpretation of its meaning, while they were led into the desire to study into Christianity. Almost in the language of Paul, they say, 'That religion which ye ignorantly follow, we are attempting to interpret to you in the language and person of Jesus Christ.' I believe that if one searches through the missions of those Boards which send out only thoroughly trained and balanced missionaries, it will be found that the above statements fairly represent the attitude of the missionaries towards the ethnic religions, or, in fact, toward any religion."

In view of what has thus been shown to be the Doctor's mistakes in criticizing my definition and in view of the benefit "at home and in the foreign field" that I have shown is to be derived from the comparison that the definition suggests it is interesting to read the Doctor's next paragraph:

"At home and in the foreign field, Brother Waring's definition of inspiration is, in my opinion, worse than worthless. It is misleading, unsettling, and destructive."

It is of more or less interest to learn the Doctor's opinions. It would be more to the point, however if he gave us more proof instead of misrepresentation through missions, etc. We as Baptists are a long way removed from bondage to ex cathedra deliverances. The *ipse dixit* of even a self-appointed Baptist Pope is not accepted as necessarily infallible, even when he writes to "confirm" the people in their traditional belief. We look for proof. Since in this case the Doctor's expressed "opinion" is not only an improved assertion but is contrary to the purpose of our definition and to the facts and proofs we have given, would it be wrong to say concerning this "opinion" of the Doctor that it is worse than worthless. It is misleading, unsettling, and destructive?"

In the next paragraph the Doctor writes:

"For practical evangelical purposes, the only attempt to make such comparison was in 1893 at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. To attend the meetings of this body, where representatives of all the great religions were heard, and where Buddhists, Brahmans, Persians, Shintoists and Tavis were honored; and then attend the meetings in Haymarket Theatre and other places conducted by Mr. Moody, McNeill, Dixon and others, was to have demonstration to the eyes, of the utter failure of this practical comparison of the ethnic religions with Christianity. To begin with there was on the wall leading to the large hall of meeting, a shocking prostitution of the religion of the Bible, by having the name of Christ bracketed with those of Zoroaster, Buddha and Confucius. The thousands who frequented Moody's meetings were filled with holy awe, and great numbers were turned to the Lord in Chicago, then gorged with tens of thousands of strangers."

To this we reply:

All hail to Moody and his work! Such work must have first place. It does not follow from this, however, that comparative religion has no place at all. In view of increased knowledge at home and of missionary activity abroad it is having (whether the Doctor will or not) an increasingly important place. In the class I scarcely mentioned the Parliament of Religions and have never been a defender of it as it was conducted but only of the principle of comparison that was back of it. Since however the Doctor