Christ and The Bible

We live in a time of growing secularism. The separation between the sacred and secular, the ecclesiastical and political, is growing. The accent of living is on the present. Life is to be lived according to the present pressure without a view towards ultimate meaning and significance.

Within the church membership is down in all the major denominations. At the same time, there is growing membership in cults and occult groups. The central doctrines of the gospel are questioned not only from outside the church but from inside. A respected church historian has said the church is in a worse state now than any time in history. Unless there is an authoritative standard by which we can give clear answers to the above problems, we are caught in the same relativism and flux as the culture.

Sartre once said that at any point in history, it has an infinite reference point. In his Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Wittgenstein argued that the sense of the world must lie outside the world, that man never has sufficient perspective from within this world to build an eternal structure of truth and value. If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside of the whole sphere of what happens now. In other words, ethics are transcendental. In a letter (published in the Philosophical Review, Jan. 1965), Wittgenstein said that if a man could write a book of ethics which really was a book of ethics, this book would, with an explosion, destroy all other books in the world.

Neither Sartre nor Wittgenstein seriously considered the Scriptures as the answer to the need for a reference point. Unless we do have that reference point in Scripture, we are bound to be uncertain about the message we have to proclaim.

There has been a widespread retreat from the absolute authority of Scripture even among conservative circles. Probably the most important factor is the massive assault of secular science and negative biblical criticism. Nearly the entire biblical framework of history and doctrine has been repudiated or subjected to substantial modification in some modern culture— including some of the theological sector.

Some feel that the inerrancy of Scripture cannot survive the scrutiny of critical study.

There are three basic ways to deal with the alleged errors in the Bible. First, one can try to solve the problems uncovered by critical study. Second, one can hunt for a way to do theology without a reliable Bible. But when the authority of Scripture is surrendered, it is from clear on what ground Christian truth can be predicted.

In his various debates with religious leaders, he never encouraged them for following the Old Testament too closely. He urged them (unwisely) to read it closely for understanding about the New Testament and the inspiration above Scripture and for not reading it as profoundly as the New Testament or the prophets. Jesus also condemned those who made a legalistic emphasis on the priest in the temple tax (Mark 12:24).

In the temptation narratives, Jesus says man is to live not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. In Matt. 5:17, he states that he did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them, not one jot or one tit will pass away. Whoever relaxes the least of the commandments and teaches others to do the same will be less in the kingdom and whoever does and teaches the least of the commandments will be great in the kingdom. (John 10:14, 17)

He calls the Scripture law even though the passage is from Psalm 136.46—no doubt because all Scripture possesses legal force. He inserts the phrase, "Scripture cannot be broken." Its significance is not just as a related proof text, but as an indication of Jesus' normal trust in Scripture.

One recurring objection to this line of approach is that Jesus accommodated his views to those of his contemporaries without committing Himself to the correctness of their position. There are two basic objections to this view. First, Jesus was no conformist in theology. He was not afraid of conflict. Secondly, his doctrine of Scripture was too close to his own self-understanding to be abandoned.

"Our Lord's view of inspiration was not an isolated tenet on the border of his theology. His belief in the truthfulness of the Old Testament was the rock on which he based his own sense of vocation and the validity of much of his teachings."

Indeed, if he could be mistaken here on matters which he regarded as of the utmost significance to his own person and ministry, it is difficult to see how he could be trusted anywhere else.

"We hold such a high view of Scripture that it might provide a clue to show how we are to approach our biblical difficulties. Should we not at least give the assurance that the author of Scripture is the author of Christ Himself, and that we can trust Him anywhere, at any time?"