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An Examination and Evaluation of A. H. Strong's Doctrine of Holy Scripture

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AN EXAMINATION AND EVALUATION OF A. H. STRONG'S
DOCTRINE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Theology

by

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May 1986

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CHAPTER I

THE IMPORTANCE OF A. H. STRONG FOR TODAY

Augustus Hopkins Strong was president and professor of theology at the Rochester Theological Seminary (now Colgate Rochester Divinity School) for forty years (1872-1912). During that period he wrote a textbook on theology that went through eight revisions.¹ Initially, Strong taught the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture.² In the last two editions, however, he changed his view, rejecting verbal inspiration and stating that the inspiration of the Bible "did not guarantee inerrancy in things not essential to the main purpose of Scripture."³ In light of these facts, it is appropriate to raise the question of Strong's importance for today.

¹Lectures on Theology was printed by E. R. Andrews in 1876. Ten years later the same material, only greatly expanded, appeared under the title Systematic Theology. There were eight editions of Systematic Theology, incorporating the changes in Strong's views. The eighth edition (1907) is still in print today and widely used in many Baptist seminaries.

²While Strong rejected the dictation theory of inspiration, he said that "inspiration is therefore verbal as to its result, but not verbal as to its method." cf. Systematic Theology, rev. and enlarged 6th ed., (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1899), p. 103.

³p. 104a in Systematic Theology, rev. and enlarged 7th ed., 1902, (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son), and in Systematic Theology, (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1907), p. 215.

The Paucity of Baptist Theology Texts

No textbook in theology written from a Baptist perspective can compare to Strong's Systematic Theology, and this is not an exaggerated statement. Strong's awareness of and familiarity with the wide range of knowledge available in his day is overwhelming. His Systematic Theology contains 1056 pages of text with two sizes of print: small and very small. It is a compendium of quotations from the natural and social sciences, literature and history, as well as a treasury of exegetical, theological and homiletical insights.⁴

Among modern Baptist theologians, two writers stand

⁴Reviewing the first (that is, 1886) edition of Strong's Systematic Theology, Willis A. Anderson remarks: "Dr. Strong has availed himself of the advantages of his method, which enables him to compress into a single volume an unusually full discussion. Large use is made of historical theology, and this element makes it a very valuable compendium for the student and pastor. A striking excellence is the full bibliography of theological science here presented. Authorities and writers of all shades of opinion are cited freely, the most important by page references. Especially valuable are the abundant references to English and American periodicals. In short, the student is put in possession of all the instruments of theological learning. And to attract him to seek these treasures, copious quotations are made from the best writers, not to mention the gems--brief, sententious expressions culled from general literature--which meet one on every page. This feature testifies to a remarkable range of reading, and to the tribute under which the author has laid all department of thought to serve his purpose. Another characteristic is the large place given to the Scriptures. Every position taken is fortified by Biblical evidence, and the citations are printed in full in the subordinate text. The discussion is carried forth in a direct, logical manner, and characterized by breadth and scholarly attainment." Willis A. Anderson, in a book review of A. H. Strong's Systematic Theology, which appeared in The Andover Review, Vol. 8 (July-December, 1887):96.

out as authors in the field of systematic theology. Carl Henry's massive six-volume work God, Revelation and Authority displays an awareness of many of the important current philosophical and theological issues but is more suitable for use in apologetics or contemporary theology than for use in systematic theology.⁵ Dale Moody recently published a textbook in theology.⁶ However, his systematic use of historical-critical methodology in his exegesis of the Bible, together with his rejection of and attack upon doctrine traditionally held by the majority of Baptists in America (for example, the perseverance of the saints) will greatly inhibit its wide-spread use in Baptist seminaries. Therefore, A. H. Strong's Systematic Theology will continue to play an important role in shaping the thinking of many Baptist seminarians in the future.

Strong's Influence

In his book Theology in America: The Major Protestant Voices From Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy, Sydney Ahlstrom lists Strong as ". . . among the eminently worthy thinkers whose works have long been considered for inclusion in this volume. . . ." ⁷ In the Dictionary of American

⁵Carl F. H. Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, 6 vols., (Waco: Word Publications, 1976-1983).

⁶Dale Moody, The Word of Truth (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981).

⁷Sydney, E. Ahlstrom, Theology in American: The Major Protestant Voice from Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967), p. 15.

Biography article on A. H. Strong, William H. Allison states: ". . . Strong has been ranked with William Newton Clarke, Alvah Hovey, and George W. Northrup as one of the four most influential Baptist theological teachers of his period."⁸ More specifically, Strong's influence was felt in the following circles.

Strong's Students

LeRoy Moore, Jr., in his scholarly article on the Rochester Seminary, particularly during Strong's tenure as president and theology professor, makes the following remarks about Strong's influence on students:

It is plain from what has been said that Strong did not try to dam the streams of thought in his time, either for himself or for those about him. As a consequence, his own views did not remain set, but grew and changed. Particularly were the contours of his thought altered as a result of evolutionary conceptions and biblical criticism. In his own mind he was generally open to the consideration of new ideas, but his own personal mannerisms, as well as his pedagogical methods, often communicated a very different impression. In the classroom he was king over all, ruling not for the sake of ruling but in order to make his students think. He worked his students because he respected them and trusted their abilities; he had faith in young men and "he constantly discovered strong men." He himself was no reed blown in the wind. He insisted that "a teacher must reach definite conclusions. Hence, he could be exceedingly dogmatic." One Rochester alumnus pointed out that Strong "dominates most of his pupils while they are with him and sometimes for years after they have left his classroom." This sort of personal domination tended to come out on the part of the apprentice in a parroting of the teacher's system of doctrine. For this reason, it

⁸William H. Allison, "Strong, Augustus Hopkins" in Dictionary of American Biography, 22 vols., Dumas Malone, ed. (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1936), XVIII, 142.

was reported that, "almost to a man," his pupils "can pass a strict ordination council." But these very same pupils had been taught to think, so that "in from one to ten years after graduation a goodly crop of 'heretics' is found on the alumni role."

Some of the "heretics" became scholars who did not hesitate to credit their former theology teacher--A. H. Strong--with their thinking. For example, Henry C. Vedder, professor of Church History at Crozer Theological Seminary, wrote a book entitled The Fundamentals of Christianity. In it, he said:

Those who know how shallow and false is this dogma of Biblical infallibility, those who have learned from Christian history how and why it came to be held, those who know how unscrupulous are some of its advocates and how ignorant others, those who realize how it contradicts the hard-won results of Biblical study through the centuries, those who appreciate how damaging such a dogma is to the cause of true religion, how impossible it is to build an edifice of Truth on a foundation of lies--these must have the courage of their knowledge and convictions, must accept the challenge proffered them, must begin without delay to teach the plain Christian people the truth about the Bible, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.¹⁰

Later in the same book he states:

If we accept the words of Jesus as the guide of life, He becomes our Saviour from the theologians, as well as our Saviour from sin. For theologians of all ages have, wittingly or unwittingly, led men back to the Pharisaic notion that right belief is the all-important thing, whereas with Jesus right conduct is all-important. . . . Nothing can be clearer than that Jesus never intended to make "salvation" or deliverance from moral evil, dependent upon any theory of what he was

⁹LeRoy Moore, Jr., "Academic Freedom: A Chapter in the History of the Colgate Rochester Divinity School," Foundations 10 (January-March, 1967):66.

¹⁰Henry C. Vedder, The Fundamentals of Christianity (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), p. xiii.

or did.¹¹

These quoted statements from Vedder reflect an emphatic rejection of traditional doctrines associated with Christianity, yet Vedder dedicates this book to A. H. Strong! The dedication reads: "To my teacher in theology, Augustus Hopkins Strong, D.D., LL.D. Reader, if you find here aught good and true thank him. If you find untruth and heresy blame me!"¹²

Conservative Theologians

Within the past forty years, three doctoral dissertations have been written on some aspect of the life, beliefs and influence of A. H. Strong. All three of them testify to Strong's influence on conservative theologians.¹³ Furthermore, in a careful examination of textbooks in theology written since the life and ministry of A. H. Strong, the following results were obtained: Francis

¹¹Ibid., p. 72.

¹²Ibid., frontispiece.

¹³Carl F. H. Henry's Ph.D. dissertation at Boston University was published under the title, Personal Idealism and Strong's Theology (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1951). Pages 11 & 13 mention Strong's influence on conservative theologians. The second dissertation was written by LeRoy Moore, Jr. and is entitled, "The Rise of American Religious Liberalism at the Rochester Theological Seminary, 1872-1928." It was presented in 1966 to the Claremont Graduate School. See pages 263-65. for the use of Strong's writings by fundamentalists and conservatives. The third dissertation was written by Grant Wacker, Jr. and is entitled, "Augustus H. Strong: A Conservative Confrontation with History." It was presented in 1978 to Harvard University. See pages 248-251. for the connection between Strong's writings and conservative theologians.

Pieper, a Missouri Synod theologian, mentions Strong's writings no less than fifteen times, usually in a favorable manner.¹⁴ Lewis Sperry Chafer, the author of an eight volume text in theology from a dispensational viewpoint, also refers to Strong fifteen times.¹⁵ R. V. Sarrels, the author of a Primitive Baptist (hyper-Calvinistic) theology book, cites Strong ninety-two times!¹⁶ Henry Clarence Thiessen, a Baptist, has seventy-eight references to Strong.¹⁷ Finally, H. Orton Wiley, an Arminian theologian within the Wesleyan tradition, refers to Strong thirty times.¹⁸ These results indicate that Strong's writings were influential in the thinking of conservative theologians from several diverse theological backgrounds.

Liberal Theologians

Not only were the writings of A. H. Strong influential upon conservative theologians; liberals, too, were affected. One writer notes:

Strong's influence was as diverse as the inter-

¹⁴Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), Index Vo., p. 992.

¹⁵Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), Index Vo., p. 89.

¹⁶R. V. Sarrels, Systematic Theology (Azle, TX: Harmony Hill Primitive Baptist Foundation, 1978), p. 519.

¹⁷Henry Clarence Thiessen, Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 534.

¹⁸H. Orton Wiley, Christian Theology, 3 vols. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1943), III:462.

pretation of his controversial theology. As president and chief theologian of one of the most important Baptist seminaries in America for forty years (1872-1912), Strong personally shaped the moral and theological outlooks of hundreds of Baptist ministers, missionaries, and denominational leaders. Most of his students followed Strong's lead in attempting to take the best from both conservative and liberal views, but some of them pursued more radical implications of Strong's ethical monism. The death-of-God theologian George Burman Foster was one of Strong's students. The panpsychist Charles Augustus Strong was both Strong's son and his student. Social ethicist Walter Rauschenbusch's life and thought were inextricably bound up with Strong's from the beginning of his life to the end. All of these thinkers had to reject a portion of Strong's vision before arriving at their own mature theologies, but the very intensity of their dialogue with him and the diversity of their debts to him are, in fact, a tribute to Strong.¹⁹

When the eighth edition of Strong's Systematic Theology was published in 1908, it was printed in three volumes. Commenting on volume one, William Adams Brown²⁰ states: "It is no slight achievement for any man who has taught theology as many years as Dr. Strong has done, to come to three score years and ten with as open a mind, as broad a sympathy, and as keen a vision as he had done. . . ."21

¹⁹A. H. Strong, Autobiography of Augustus Hopkins Strong, ed. Crerar Douglas (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1981), pp. 15-16.

²⁰William Adams Brown taught theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City at the time he wrote this review of Strong's Systematic Theology. Brown has been called "liberalism's most eminent teacher." Cf. Kenneth Cauthen, The Impact of American Religious Liberalism (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 107.

²¹William Adams Brown, "Recent Treatises on Systematic Theology," The American Journal of Theology, 12 (1908):155.

Renewal of Interest in Strong

Within the past twenty five years, numerous journal articles have used A. H. Strong as an example of a man who appealed to both religiously conservative theologians and religiously liberal thinkers. Grant Wacker, Jr.'s chapter in the book The Bible In America, for example, describes the difficulty of trying to identify Strong's theological stance. Wacker says, "Historians of American religion have never known quite what to do with Strong. Some have called him an irenic fundamentalist, some have suggested he was a closet liberal, and at least one has intimated that he was simply befuddled."²² In a more creative venture, Crerar Douglas suggests that Strong should be considered a great theological mediator in our century whose writings could show modern theologians how to avoid polarization.²³ This suggestion causes one to ask: Specifically, which features of Strong's theology might be used to produce a theology textbook for today that would come to grips with modern issues and at the same time accurately summarize the changeless teaching of the Bible?

²²Grant, Wacker, "The Demise of Biblical Civilization" in The Bible In America, Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 130.

²³Crerar Douglas, "The Cost of Mediation: A Study of Augustus Hopkins [Strong] and P. T. Forsyth," Congregational Journal, 3 (January 1978):28-35.

Openness to Truth

In his autobiography, Strong mentions four things that he had learned after twenty five years as president and professor of biblical theology at Rochester Theological Seminary:

The first was hospitality to new ideas. When I began to teach, I felt inclined to challenge new truth rather than to welcome it. I have learned that all truth is of God and that it is my duty to bring forth out of my treasure things new as well as old. The second thing I have learned is that truth is not made to be error merely because it has been taught by heretics and wicked men. I have come to believe that Christ has shot some rays of his light even into the minds of Spinoza and Huxley. The third thing I have learned is that new truth does not exclude or supercede the old but rather elucidates and confirms it. I try to interpret the old in terms of the new philosophy and science, but I do not regard any of the old doctrines of theology as antiquated or outworn. And the fourth and final thing I have learned is that the truth to which I have arrived must be trusted by me and proclaimed by me, even²⁴ though others may not yet accept or even understand it.

This writer greatly admires Strong's openness to truth yet recognizes that no criteria have been given whereby truth might be distinguished from error. It is evident from the shift in the theological emphasis away from conservatism toward a liberalism at the Rochester Theological Seminary during Strong's forty year presidency that he was not able to distinguish truth from error, or fact from someone's interpretation of that fact.

Acceptance of Major Christian Doctrines

Shortly before he died, Strong published an article

²⁴Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 256.

in the Watchman-Examiner. In it, he said, "Baptist institutions should be in the hands of Baptists. . . . Is it honest for us, whom they have put in trust . . . to harbor in our seminaries and boards of control men who are unwilling to say that they are Baptists in the sense of the fathers? Can we justify our holding in places of instruction men who may be Unitarians in disguise, and who are unwilling to declare themselves as believers in the pre-existence or the virgin birth of Christ? . . . Let us stand again for the unity, the sufficiency, and the authority of Scripture. Let us purge our institutions of men who are unwilling to confess their faith. . . . And let us inaugurate this change by the adoption of a 'Confession of Faith'. . . ." ²⁵

Conclusion

The writings of Augustus Hopkins Strong, especially his Systematic Theology, are still important today. The fact that Judson Press has continued to keep this book in print demonstrates its continued usefulness in Baptist circles--particularly Baptist seminaries. Other Baptist theology texts written during the past seventy-five years have never gained the popularity of Strong's Systematic Theology. Undoubtedly, the influence he had upon his students and on scholars in general--both liberal and

²⁵Augustus H. Strong, D.D., "Confessions of Our Faith," The Watchman Examiner, 21 July 1921, p. 910.

conservative--contributes to his text's continued use. But it was his openness to truth--from whatever source it came--coupled with an acceptance and defense of major Christian doctrines which creates a renewed scholarly interest in this man and his writings.²⁶

²⁶It was this writer's privilege to attend two Baptist seminaries: Central Baptist Seminary in Minneapolis, from January 1964 until May 1966, and Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from September 1966 until May 1967, and Strong's Systematic Theology was a required textbook in the systematic theology courses.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF A. H. STRONG

A study of Strong's life is necessary for an understanding of the shift in his theology. In this chapter his life will be viewed from two vantage points: chronology and theology.

Chronology

Augustus Hopkins Strong was born on August 3, 1836 in a little frame house located at 105 Troup Street in Rochester, New York.¹ He described himself as having been "born and bred in a Christian household."²

Childhood

During his childhood three religious experiences made deep impressions upon him. The first of these occurred when he was six years old. On a Saturday afternoon, his mother took him into a closet where they knelt together and she taught him to pray. Strong recalled, "when words failed me she put the words into my mouth, and I never shall forget

¹A. H. Strong, Autobiography of Augustus Hopkins Strong, ed. Crerar Douglas (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1981), p. 36.

²Augustus Hopkins Strong, One Hundred Chapel Talks to Theological Students (Philadelphia: The Griffith & Rowland Press, 1913), p. 5.

how her hot tears came down upon my upturned face when I succeeded in offering the first prayer of my own to God."³ Commenting on his mother reading the Bible to him as a child, Strong states: "then I learned that Adam was the first man, that Samson was strong and Moses meek, and that Jesus Christ died on the cross for me, a sinner."⁴

Strong's second religious experience of childhood occurred when he was ten years old. Upon awaking one Sunday morning, he noticed it had snowed and there were large drifts. He went to his father and announced that there would not be any church services because no one would attend. To this his father replied that for that very reason it was most important that both of them should go! So, off to church they walked. Only seven people were present, but they had a prayer service that so moved Strong that he never forgot it.⁵

Strong's third childhood religious experience occurred when he was twelve years old. It was the last day of December and he was thinking of his sinfulness. He made a resolution to begin a Christian life the very next day. The merriment of New Year's Day, however, banished his resolution, and he was not troubled by his sins for several

³Ibid.

⁴Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 36.

⁵Strong, One Hundred Chapel Talks, p. 6.

years.⁶

When Strong was fourteen years of age, he began to study Latin. During the three week spring vacation, he and an older student diligently studied the complete Latin Reader, fables and history. When they showed the results of their work to the principal, he allowed them to skip a year and go directly into the Cicero class. This principal also taught the Latin and Greek courses, and under his influence Strong had read all of Virgil's Aeneid, much of the Odes of Horace, three books of Herodotus and other classics--all before he was sixteen years old!

Strong worked for his father's newspaper, in the counting room, for a year and a half and then enrolled as a student at Yale. While there, he joined a debating society and devoted himself to reading, writing and speaking. His grades were sufficiently high that he was inducted into the honor society Phi Beta Kappa.⁷

After graduating from Yale, Strong returned to Rochester, New York and enrolled as a student at Rochester Theological Seminary, where eventually he would be president for forty years. Strong graduated from the regularly prescribed course of study (a two year program at that time)⁸

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., pp. 6-10.

⁸Ibid., pp. 21-22. While it is clear that A. H. Strong did in fact graduate from The Rochester Theological Seminary (cf. The Rochester Theological Seminary Bulletin: The Record, May 1922, "Augustus H. Strong Memorial Number,"

and then travelled throughout Europe for about a year.⁹

Pastorates

Augustus H. Strong pastored two churches: a country church of about 300 members (The First Baptist Church of Haverhill, Massachusetts) for four years (1861-1865) where he was ordained on August 3, 1861, and a city church with 600 members (The First Baptist Church of Cleveland, Ohio) for seven years (1865-1872).¹⁰

During these two pastorates, several important events occurred. Following his ordination, Strong took a month's vacation and returned to Rochester. During this vacation he was introduced to Miss Hattie Savage. Within a week they were engaged, and within three months they were

p. 3) his travels in Europe were necessitated by a respiratory ailment, and in his autobiography Strong says his travels to Europe left "my seminary course unfinished by two or three months" (p. 124 in Autobiography of A. H. Strong).

⁹Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 141. Specifically, Strong said he had been gone from the United States "one year, two months, and four days." While it is possible that Strong studied under German idealists when in Berlin, it is highly unlikely since he was there for only two and a half months, listening to lectures by Hengstenberg, Twisten and Carl Nitzsch, whose lectures dealt with biblical and theological material. Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 144, 156, 177. On p. 150, Strong described Haverhill as "that little shoe-town in the northeastern corner of Massachusetts." At least two scholars have said that First Baptist Church of Cleveland was the church of which J. D. Rockefeller was a member at the time Strong was the pastor. Cf. Moore, "The Rise of American Religious Liberalism at the Rochester Theological Seminary, 1872-1928," Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1966, p. 33 and Wacker, "Augustus H. Strong, a Conservative Confrontation with History," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1978, p. 55. Yet in his autobiography, Strong

married.¹¹

During his pastorate in Cleveland, Strong began to study science and literature. How this came about is recorded in Strong's own words:

At a class meeting in New Haven I met, about this time, my old classmate James W. Hubbell. He had made no particular mark in college, but to my surprise I found him unusually well informed; indeed, I was dismayed to perceive how much more he knew about science and literature than I did. I asked him how, with all the cares of a considerable pastorate, he had managed to acquire so much learning. He told me that he had taken up one by one the sciences he had studied in college, beginning by reviewing his old textbooks, then reading larger treatises, sticking to one subject till he felt that he knew something about it, and, only after he had gained a certain mastery of this, passing on to something else. . . . I resolved that I would pursue the same course.

I began with geology. . . . Then I studied botany . . . , chemistry [then] meteorology and astronomy. Political economy absorbed me for the greater part of year. . . . Finally I got to studying metaphysics, for which I had natural liking but which I had neglected for five or six years. The philosophy of Comte was then threatening to sweep away the foundations of the faith. I greatly enjoyed the essays of James Martineau, and I read and reread the books of Porter and McCosh, putting my conclusions into the address on "Philosophy and Religion" which I delivered before the alumni of the Rochester Theological Seminary on May 20, 1868.¹²

Strong's interest in science and literature, as well as philosophy and theology will play an important role in the

says, "It was in 1879 [7 years after leaving the pastorate of the Cleveland church] that I bethought me of Mr. John D. Rockefeller and determined to do what I could to secure his help. I had known him while I was pastor in Cleveland. His little daughter had died. In the absence of his pastor, I was called to conduct the funeral service. This gave me a little hold upon the family." Autobiography of A. H. Strong, pp. 237-38.

¹¹Ibid., p. 157.

¹²Ibid., pp. 180-81.

development of his thinking which caused him to shift and modify his theology.

Seminary President

In 1872, Augustus Hopkins Strong resigned the pastorate of the First Baptist Church of Cleveland, Ohio to become President and Professor of theology at the Rochester Theological Seminary. He remained in those two positions until he retired in 1912, forty years later. At various points during this time period he was president of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (1892-1895), president of the General Convention of Baptists of North American (1905-1910) and a trustee of the New York Baptist Union for Ministerial Education (1903-1921).¹³ He died on November 29, 1921.

Strong's presidency may be divided into three parts, according to the three faculties over which he presided:

(1) the first faculty was there when Strong became president in 1872,¹⁴ (2) the second faculty, known as the "big five,"

¹³The R. T. S. Bulletin, "A. H. Strong Memorial Issue," p. 3.

¹⁴The first faculty consisted of the following men: Horatio B. Hackett, professor of New Testament at Rochester Theological Seminary from 1870 to 1875, R. J. W. Buckland, professor of church history at Rochester Theological Seminary from 1869 to 1876, Augustus Rauschenbusch a professor in the German department of the seminary from 1858 to 1890 (Rauschenbusch's son, Walter, was the "father" of the social gospel and would become a faculty member in the third faculty) and Herman M. Schaffer, another professor in the German department from 1872 to 1897. Cf. Moore, "The Rise . . .," p. 17 and, Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 232.

were gathered by Strong, and together they taught at Rochester Theological Seminary for almost twenty years (1881-1900).¹⁵ (3) The third faculty, also gathered by Strong, were much more liberal in their theological outlook than the preceding faculties. Three of the five men in this faculty were graduates of the seminary, having studied theology

¹⁵The second faculty consisted of the following men: A. H. Strong, president and professor of theology at Rochester Theological Seminary from 1872 to 1912, Howard Osgood, professor of Hebrew Language and literature at Rochester Theological Seminary from 1876 to 1900, William Arnold Stevens, professor of biblical literature and New Testament exegesis at Rochester Theological Seminary from 1877 to 1910, Benjamin Osgood True, professor of church history at Rochester Theological Seminary from 1881 to 1904. Cf. Moore, "The Rise . . . ," pp. 41-43.

The third faculty consisted of the following men: Walter Robert Betteridge, professor of Hebrew language and literature at Rochester Theological Seminary from 1900 to 1916, Walter Rauschenbusch, professor of church history at Rochester Theological Seminary from 1902 to 1918, Joseph William Alexander Stewart, professor of Christian ethics and pastoral theology at Rochester Theological Seminary from 1903 to 1923, Cornelius Woelfkin, professor of homiletics at Rochester Theological Seminary from 1905 to 1912, and Conrad Henry Moehlman, professor of biblical studies and church history at Rochester Theological Seminary from 1907 to 1944. Cf. Moore, "The Rise . . . ," pp. 43-45. Some have tied the three faculties to the shift or shifts in Strong's theology. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 46. Those who have written about Strong's shift in theology are not agreed among themselves as to how many changes there were and what the nature of the changes were! Moore sees 3 periods: (1) orthodox, (2) progressive, and (3) reactionary polemic (in favor of orthodoxy), *Ibid.*, whereas Henry, while he sees 3 periods, says they move from (1) uncompromisely fundamentalist, to (2) traditional theism but with evolution, to (3) ethical monism. Cf. Carl F. H. Henry, Personal Idealism and Strong's Theology (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1951), . . . , p. 15. Wacker, however, says: "In retrospect it is clear that Strong's doctrinal ideas were, with one or two exceptions, eminently traditional within a Reformed, evangelical perspective." Wacker, "Augustus H. Strong . . . ," p. 260.

under Strong.¹⁶

Theology

The life of Augustus Hopkins Strong may be viewed from a theological as well as a chronological perspective. There are two primary sources for this approach to Strong's life, both of which are autobiographical: the first is his Autobiography; the second is his address, "Theology and Experience" which is found in his book One Hundred Chapel Talks to Theological Students. In his One Hundred Chapel Talks . . ., Strong recounts eight lessons in theology that he learned, while in his Autobiography, he describes twelve such lessons! For our purposes, the twelve lessons in theology found in his Autobiography will be used as the major points for the remaining part of this chapter, although the eight lessons in One Hundred Chapel Talks . . . will be integrated into the discussion.

The Depth and Enormity of Sin

During his college days, Strong returned home during spring vacation and attended a revival meeting conducted by Charles Finney in the local Presbyterian church. He responded to Finney's invitation to those who wanted to submit to God to go to a lower room in the building. The gospel was not emphasized. Instead, man's duty to obey God was stressed. Strong later recalled that meeting and his

¹⁶Betteridge, Walter Rauschenbusch and Moehlman. Moore, "The Rise . . .," pp. 43-44.

feeling afterward: "I had no idea that night that I was a Christian, nor was I even sure that I had truly turned to God. But now I believe that night to have been the night of my conversion."¹⁷ Yet he goes on to say that he had no peace or assurance of salvation during the rest of the vacation period, and he said to himself on the train as he headed back to Yale, "This train is taking me to hell!"¹⁸ He tried giving up habits he felt were bad for him but still had no peace or assurance. Strong comments:

. . . and I learned during those three weeks my first lesson in theology--the depth and enormity of sin. I learned that my sinful nature was like an iceberg, seven-eighths beneath the surface of the water; seven-eighths of my being was below consciousness. . . . I discovered within me a coldness of heart, a lack of love, an inability to believe, that I had never suspected before. Why, I had thought I could be a Christian any time I chose. I found out that I was in the hands of God, that unless he had mercy upon me I was lost. . . .

Please notice that my experience was thus far a purely Arminian experience. I had yet to learn the truth in Calvinism. In my conversion, so far as I can remember, I had no thought of the Holy Spirit or of Christ. I had no idea that God was working in me to will and to do; I was only bent on working out my own salvation. There was no reliance on Christ's atonement; I was trusting in my¹⁹ own power to begin and to continue the service of God.

Several comments by way of evaluation seem appropriate. First, Strong's autobiographical address, "Theology and Experience" as printed in One Hundred Chapel Talks to

¹⁷ Autobiography of A. H. Strong, pp. 83-86.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁹ Strong, One Hundred Chapel Talks . . . , pp. 14-15, 18.

Theological Students, was delivered on January 13, 1913 which is five or six years after the final revision of his Systematic Theology had been published and after his theological views had taken their final shape. Strong's own evaluation of his experiences, therefore, reflects his mature thinking. Second, Strong's moderate Calvinism (that is, acceptance of God's unconditional election but a rejection of limited atonement) can be detected in his affirmation of human inability and his dependence on God to have mercy on him. While the biblical material stresses human inability (Romans 3:11) and divine sovereignty (Romans 8:28-30), it also stresses God's love for the whole world (John 3:16) and Christ's death and resurrection as the basis for salvation (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). These latter emphases are missing from Strong's account. Third, that in spite of the fact that by his own admission he was not yet trusting Christ's atonement, Strong nonetheless considered this a genuine conversion demonstrates the influence of Strong's "ethical monism" on his thinking. The "spirit of Christ" working through natural means,²⁰ rather than the Spirit of God working through the Word of God (1 Thessalonians 1:5, 2:13; Romans 10:13, 14, 17) allows Strong to think in this manner. Fourth, Strong's emphasis is upon his experience rather than upon the objective work of Christ on the cross.

²⁰Cf. Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 253 where Strong says, "Nature is a continual manifestation of Christ."

The biblical emphasis is upon the latter (Note Romans 5:5-10 where the Spirit's subjective witness of God's love for us is tied to the objective reality of the cross).

Man's Need of God's Regenerating Grace

After reading 2 Corinthians 6:16-18, Strong received peace and assurance of salvation because he clung to God's promise that He would be a father to those who separated themselves from unclean things. Yet he continued to struggle with old habits. Nevertheless, he believed he had begun a Christian life. Strong says:

Then I learned my second great lesson in doctrine, namely, Man's need of God's Regenerating Grace. If I could not keep myself from falling, after I had gotten into the Christian way, how could I ever have entered that way without God's help at the beginning? Man must be born again, as well as kept by God's mighty power.²¹

It must be remembered that Strong was a college student at the time, and his remarks should be evaluated on that basis. Nevertheless, while the work of God in regeneration is being stressed, the basis for such a work, namely, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 3:14-15) is omitted. This emphasis must wait for the third lesson in theology.

Only the Objective Atonement of Jesus Christ,
Only Christ's Sufferings Upon the Cross, Can
Furnish the Ground of Our Acceptance with God

Strong said that from the moment of his conversion

²¹Strong, One Hundred Chapel Talks, p. 19.

he knew he would be a preacher.²² So, it was only natural that he should enroll in the Rochester Theological Seminary. While a student there, he conducted services in a mission congregation. One evening, after he read and spoke on Isaiah 53, a young woman had difficulty understanding the gospel. Strong said to her:

"Suppose Christ should come now for the first time into the world, and he came to you, a sinner, and said: 'I am going to suffer for all who will put their case into my hands. I will take all your sins and responsibilities upon my own shoulders. Are you willing that I should do this? If you are willing to take me for your substitute, I will pay your debts and I will save you.'" I asked this young woman if she would take Christ for her Saviour. I saw the light of heaven shine suddenly upon her face. She looked up to me and said, "Oh! I see it; yes, I will." And from that moment she was an earnest Christian woman. From that experience I learned a third lesson in Christian doctrine, viz., that only the objective atonement of Jesus Christ, only Christ's sufferings upon the cross, can furnish the ground of our acceptance with God.²³

At this point in his theological understanding, Strong is not attempting to distinguish objective and subjective justification. However, it seems that Strong sees a connection between these two ideas because while his illustration stresses subjective justification through faith (defined as personal trust), this "acceptance with God" is grounded in the "objective atonement of Jesus Christ."²⁴ Unfortunately, it will become evident in the later lessons in theology that objective justification enjoys only a superficial position in his theological system. Strong believes that the ground

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., p. 21.

²⁴Ibid.

of our acceptance with God is the objective atonement of Jesus Christ, but this belief does not greatly influence the other areas of his theology.

The Doctrine of the Church

With this lesson in theology, there is a divergence between Strong's account in his Autobiography and in his One Hundred Chapel Talks. This is due to the fact that in the Chapel Talks account, Strong presents eight lessons in theology while in his Autobiography he presents twelve! Just before Strong accepts his first pastorate he wrestles with the biblical teaching concerning the visible church, particularly the issue of "open communion." Strong found it difficult to forbid some believers in Christ from coming to the Lord's Supper simply because they did not agree doctrinally with the congregation in which the Lord's Supper was being administered. For Strong, the issue was not the words of institution, as in Lutheran circles, but rather the mode of baptism. For Strong, the issue was: should non-immersed believers be permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper? Historically, Baptists had responded in the negative because the one loaf pictures a unity of doctrine and practice (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Strong says:

I finally made up my mind that baptism was a New Testament prerequisite to the Lord's Supper and also that we could decline to admit a brother to church fellowship upon the ground that he was not baptized, while at the same time we could hold with him the most loving and hearty Christian fellowship. I found indeed in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 the model for our conduct in such a

case, for that is an instance of exclusion from church fellowship and from the Lord's Supper, its sign, while yet the offender is not excluded from Christian fellowship but is still counted "a brother." So I learned by practical experience my fourth lesson in doctrine, the doctrine of the church.²⁵

Two comments seem appropriate: first, while Strong says he learned this lesson in theology by practical experience, it is clear that what he means is this: experience was the occasion for him to consider what the Bible taught on the subject; second, Strong's beliefs concerning the doctrine of the church placed him in a specific circle of influence. The history of Baptists in the North was shaped in great part by the preaching and writing of Augustus Hopkins Strong. If he had allied himself with some other denominational group, that history would be very different.

The Union of the Believer with Christ

Two years after Strong became pastor of the congregation in Haverhill, Massachusetts, he felt discouraged. There seemed to be very little, if any, spiritual results of his ministry there. When summer vacation time came, he returned to Rochester for four weeks. During that time Strong read the Book of Acts and concluded that the power and vitality which the apostles experienced were related to the presence of Christ in them. Then he read the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the Gospel of John, and Strong reached the following conclusion:

²⁵Autobiography of A. H. Strong, pp. 148-50.

The apostles had experienced only what Jesus had promised long before. I read about the vine and the branches. I had never regarded this as more than an Oriental picture of a union of sympathy or friendship, a union of juxtaposition or moral likeness. Now I saw that it was a union of life which Christ was describing, a union in which the Spirit of Christ interpenetrates and energizes ours, a union in which he joins himself so indissolubly to us that neither life nor death, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from him

So I learned by experience my fifth great lesson in doctrine--the great lesson of union with Christ. I have come to think, with Alexander,²⁶ that it is the central truth of all theology and of all religion. From it radiate all the other doctrines of Christianity. With this lesson learned of a union with the Second Adam, which makes redeemed humanity partaker of his righteousness, I could also understand the prior union of life with the first Adam, which made fallen humanity partaker of his sin and guilt.²⁷

By way of evaluation, five things need to be said: First of all, Strong is correct about the fact that the Spirit of Christ (that is, the Holy Spirit) indwells every true believer. John 15:1-7 makes that clear. So when Strong allowed God's Spirit to live through him, his personal life and ministry were transformed.²⁸

Second, when Strong says that the mystical union "is the central truth of all theology and of all religion," he

²⁶"Alexander" here refers to "Dr. J. W. Alexander." His full name was James Waddell Alexander. He was a Presbyterian pastor and a professor of rhetoric (in 1833) and ecclesiastical history (in 1849) at Princeton Seminary. Cf. Samuel Macauley Jackson (ed), The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, 12 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1908), 1:122.

²⁷Autobiography of A. H. Strong, pp. 163-64.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 164-68.

is wrong. A consideration of Titus 3:3-8 indicates that our sinful condition (verse 3), note, not God's record of our sins, necessitated the appearance of God our Savior (verse 4). Our problem (sinful condition-verse 3) is solved by the impartation of eternal life-the regenerating work of God's Spirit (verse 5) which is the result of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross (verse 6). But regeneration, becoming heirs according to the hope of eternal life (verse 7)--is predicated upon justification (verse 7a). Lenski translates this passage: "so that, by having been declared righteous by that One's (God's) grace, we got to be heirs" ²⁹ In other words, justification, not regeneration, is foundational to all of the other benefits of salvation. God does not give eternal life to one who has not been declared righteous! God does not indwell one whose sins have not yet been blotted out of His record. An examination of the first four chapters of Romans would demonstrate the accuracy of this view. The problem with man is his sinfulness (Romans 1:18-3:18) but this problem, as far as God is concerned, is legal (Romans 3:19-- the whole world, because it is sinful, comes under God's judgment). And God's solution to this problem is not regeneration or sanctification. God's solution is justifi-

²⁹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), p. 930.

cation (Romans 3:20-28), a change in God's record whereby our sins are not credited to us (Romans 4:7-8) and whereby Christ's righteousness is credited to us (Romans 4:4-6; 3:24-26).

Third, since the Bible teaches that a person is justified by grace through faith and also teaches that God indwells the believer, some might wonder why an issue should be made over which benefit of salvation logically comes first. The fact that, historically, this was a major issue in the Protestant Reformation should cause one to ask whether or not something important is at stake in this issue. Listen to the Roman Catholic Church in its condemnation of the Protestant view of justification:

If anyone saith that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour of God; let him be anathema.³⁰

The issue, upon closer examination, is not whether justification or the mystical union is taught in the Bible as a benefit of salvation. The issue concerns which of these two benefits is foundational to all the other benefits. And the answer to this question goes to the very heart of the gospel! Why? Because if the mystical union is central and foundational, then God has accepted sinners and continues to

³⁰Canon XI under "On Justification" in Dogmatic Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1912), pp. 51-52.

accept them because they are responding favorably with ability to do good works which He has given them. In this case, grace and good works are identical since grace is an infused God-given ability to do good works. Yet, the Bible contrasts grace and good works with respect to salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). If, however, justification is foundational and central, then God has accepted sinners and continues to accept them because of what Jesus Christ did when He died on the cross. In this case, grace is set in contrast to good works, since grace is God's unmerited favor and refers to Christ's death and resurrection. That Strong really knew the truth about justification being foundational can be seen from his remarks about his third lesson in theology (See page 24 in this dissertation).

Fourth, Strong was wrong when he said:

With this lesson learned of a union with the Second Adam, which makes redeemed humanity partaker of his righteousness, I could also understand the prior union of life with the first Adam, which made fallen humanity partaker of his sin and guilt.³¹

Of course, Strong held to the seminal headship of Adam with its corresponding idea, traducianism.³² The point which must be made, however, is that because of humanity's relationship to Adam (regardless of what it was: either seminal or representative), humanity is considered by God to be guilty of Adam's sin (Romans 5:12-21). Thus, humanity

³¹Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 164.

³²Strong, Systematic Theology, 8th ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1907), pp. 493-97 and 619-37.

has a problem which is legal. To repeat: man's problem is a legal one; he is considered guilty of Adam's sin. The reason why he is considered guilty may or may not be due to some kind of a union between the human race and Adam, but that is beside the point. Man's problem is legal and God's solution to that problem must be legal, as well.

Finally, as will be evident later in this chapter, Strong's emphasis on the mystical union helps him to accept the idea of theistic evolution and to adopt an integrating philosophical concept which he calls "ethical monism" (an idea which comes close at times to pantheism). Though Strong's concept of justification is correct, the place he assigns it in his theological system is incorrect, and is a contributing cause of other error.

Christ is the Life of the Universe

During his second pastorate Strong developed an interest in areas of study other than theology and religion.³³ As he studied the arts and sciences he learned his next lesson in doctrine. Strong says:

I now learned that Christ is the life of the universe, as well as the life of the believer; that in him all things consist, or hold together; that he is the one and only medium through whom God creates, upholds, and governs the world. . . . My studies in science gave me inspiring views of the wisdom and power of God, and I drew from science a multitude of illustrations for my preaching. My preaching took a wider range than before.

³³On page seventeen of this dissertation, the details of how this interest was kindled in Strong are given.

It dealt more with universal interests. I began to apply Christianity to all the relations of life. History, art, literature, society, as well as science and philosophy, might have place in my teaching. But the center must be Christ; all treasures must be laid at his feet; he must be Lord of all.³⁴

The implications of this lesson in doctrine were seen by Strong some years later. He says:

Christ's creatorship was my sixth great lesson in doctrine. The immanence of Christ did not then impress itself upon me as it did afterwards in Rochester. But I was gathering material for broader conceptions. . . . I took a more generous view of the gospel and the preaching of the gospel. I began to see that the preacher's business was to apply Christian principles to all the relations of life. Everything in heaven and earth and under the earth might furnish him with subject for treatment. History, art, literature, and society, as well as science and philosophy, might have a place in his preaching. . . .

There was a danger in all this, and I did not wholly escape it. It was partly a doctrinal danger and partly a danger of experience. With the study of laws of nature, there was danger of regarding Christianity itself as a mere matter of law. . . . Reducing theology to scientific form involves the putting of great emotions into terms of mere intellect. You run the risk of purchasing clearness by the sacrifice of real power. During my later years in Cleveland I preached some sermons which tended in the direction of naturalism.³⁵

Prayer is an Entering into the
Mind and Will of Christ

The seventh lesson in theology that Strong recalled in his autobiography concerned prayer. He says:

³⁴Strong, One Hundred Chapel Talks, p. 28.

³⁵Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 197.

Then I began to see that this same Christ who had recreated believers had also created nature and that all science was the shining of his light. After this sixth point came a seventh: prayer is an entering into the mind and will of Christ, so that the believer becomes partaker of his knowledge and power. Thus far I had come in my doctrinal progress. The person of Christ was the clue that I followed; his deity³⁶ and atonement were the two loci of the great ellipse.

While Strong's comment on this seventh lesson in theology is not lengthy, it is clear that he is linking the sixth and seventh lessons together, so that ideas which are normally distinguished, such as the sacred and the secular, the supernatural and the natural, and prayer and providence, are grouped together as being equally a manifestation of Christ's power in and through nature. Thus, the beginnings of what will become "ethical monism" can be detected.

Furthermore, while Christ's deity and His atonement, when properly understood, are appropriate guides in understanding the other areas of theology,³⁷ Strong's view of the believer's union with Christ dominates his view of the atonement. Holy Scripture, however, teaches that justification, rather than the believer's union with Christ, is foundational to a correct understanding of the atonement.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 251.

³⁷ sola gratia and sola fide (grace alone and faith alone) are foundational to one's understanding of Holy Scripture. Just as The Bible teaches that God, through His Word, calls people to saving faith in Christ and then enables them to trust His Word as inspired, so too it teaches that a proper understanding of salvation by grace through faith precedes and points to a proper understanding of various doctrinal matters.

Christ's Union with the Human Race Gave Him
A Human Nature with Liabilities

Strong's eighth lesson in theology was learned after he began as president and professor of theology at Rochester Theological Seminary. In the quotation of Strong just given, he said, "The person of Christ was the clue that I followed; his deity and atonement were the two loci of the great ellipse."³⁸ The evaluation given to Strong's statement was that while Strong's principle was correct, his application was not. This criticism was given because Strong made the believer's union with Christ, rather than Christ's death and resurrection for the believer's justification, central to his understanding of the atonement. In evaluating Strong's eighth lesson in theology, it will be shown that even Strong's concept of Christ's person is subject to criticism.

Strong was wrestling with the problem of how to relate Christ's deity to His atonement. He states:

My theological gains at Rochester have been mainly in the understanding of these two factors and their mutual relations. The two natures of Christ perplexed me until I saw that I must work at the problem from the side of the one person; every son of man has a single personality, though father and mother have each contributed to it something of their natures; Christ is a unity, though God was his Father and Mary his mother. I have adopted Dr. Robinson's realism³⁹ in explaining the justification

³⁸Cf. page 33 in this dissertation, note #36.

³⁹"Dr. Robinson" refers to Ezekiel Gilman Robinson who taught theology at the Rochester Theological Seminary from 1853 to 1872 (he was president of the Seminary from 1860 to 1872, and Strong was a student under Robinson in

of the believer by virtue of his vital union with Christ and the condemnation of the race by virtue of the derivation of its life from Adam. How now was to be explained the imputation of the sin of the race to Christ? The only possible answer seemed to be that our sin was laid upon him because he had become one with us by his assumption of human nature in the womb of the Virgin; here, too, as in the other two cases, imputation resulted from a prior vital union. In this explanation I rested for a time, and I wrought it into my book on theology. If I have added anything to theological science, it is by my application of the realistic principle to the atonement. . . . If Christ took our nature, he must have taken it with all its exposures and liabilities. . . . And this constituted my eighth forward step in theology, and perhaps my first new and original contribution to theological science, showing the nexus between the personal holiness⁴⁰ of Christ and his justly bearing the sin of the race.

Several things will be said by way of evaluation.

First, to say as does Strong ". . . God was his Father and

1858 and 1859). In one place, Strong gives the impression that Robinson's theology did not play a great part in his own thinking: "I wrote out and printed my own Theology without ever once looking at his. . . ." Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 219. Yet on the previous page, Strong spoke of the influence on him of Robinson's view that law was the transcript of God's moral nature. And in a printed Tribute to Robinson, Strong said, "To my teacher and predecessor I owe more than I owe to any one else outside of my own family circle;." Page 163 in "Dr. Robinson As A Theologian", printed in Ezekiel Gilman Robinson: An Autobiography With A Supplement by H. L. Wayland and Critical Estimates, edited by E. H. Johnson. (New York: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1896). Strong's reference to "Dr. Robinson's realism" means only that Dr. Robinson taught that Adam's sin affected the human race because of the union between Adam and the race. As a matter of fact, Dr. Robinson denied that the guilt of Adam's sin was imputed to the race, teaching that depravity, not guilt, was the effect of Adam's sin upon the race. cf. Christian Theology by Ezekiel Gilman Robinson (Rochester: E. R. Andrews, 1894), pp. 148-64. That Strong was aware of this is evident from "Dr. Robinson As A Theologian," pp. 184-86.

⁴⁰Autobiography of A. H. Strong, pp. 251-52.

Mary his mother" is confusing at best and is error at worse. In its context, Strong's statement could be understood as meaning that God was the producer or originator of Christ's divine nature. This would be erroneous. When the Bible speaks of God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, it means that God and Christ share the same divine nature. (Note John 5:17-18 where the Jews understood Christ's claim that God was his father in this way). An eternal relationship of consubstantiality, not a point of origination, is the meaning of Christ's title, "Son of God."

Second, Strong is not clear at this point, what it is precisely about Christ's human nature that makes it possible for Him to bear the sins of the race. Ordinarily, Christian theologians have said that the humanity of Jesus Christ was necessary for atonement because only death--the shedding of blood--could bring forgiveness of sins.⁴¹ However, Strong is not linking together the following: humanness → dying → forgiveness. Instead, he is connecting: humanness → human nature → our sins placed on Christ. By way of evaluation, only a word of caution is being raised about Strong's ideas. They are unclear. He does not explain what he means by Christ taking our nature

⁴¹For example: "Christ without a human nature could be the Savior of the world as little as a Christ without a divine nature. 1 John 1:7: 'The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.'", Christian Dogmatics, by John Theodore Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), p. 258.

"with all its exposures and liabilities." But the fact that he considered this an original contribution to theological science ought to make one wonder whether or not he will be successful in his attempt to construct a theology which is biblical and authentically Christian.

Christ, Who is the Life of the World,
Must Bear the Sins of the World

Closely connected to his eighth lesson in theology is the ninth. Strong explains in detail this lesson in theology:

I had printed this theory of the atonement and was waiting, though vainly, for opposing criticisms when it occurred to me that my theory did not go far enough. It showed how Christ could bear the common guilt of the race, that guilt which belongs to all as a consequence of Adam's sin, but it did not show how Christ could bear the subsequent sins of Adam and the multitudinous sins of Adam's prosperity. Yet personal sins, as well as original sin, are atoned for. It was not enough to say that he bore the guilt of the root-sin from which all other sins have sprung: this would be to deny any remainder of freedom and reduce all human sins to the one first sin of the father of mankind. Christ then must sustain an even larger relation to the race than that into which he enters when he takes our humanity in the womb of the Virgin. And here there flashed upon me with new meaning the previously acknowledged fact of Christ's creatorship. Christ's union with the race in his incarnation is only the outward and visible expression of a prior union with the race which began when he created the race. As in him all things were created and as in him all things consist or hold together, it follows that he who is the life of humanity must, though personally pure, be involved in responsibility for all human sin, and so it was necessary that the Christ should suffer. This suffering was a reaction of the divine holiness against sin, and so was a bearing of penalty, but it was also the voluntary execution of a plan that antedated creation, and Christ's sacrifice in time showed what had been in the heart of God from eternity. The atonement then is not only possible but also necessary, because Christ is from the

beginning the life of humanity. This was the ninth step in my doctrinal progress and the second new⁴² and original contribution which I have made to theology.

There is yet the tenth lesson in theology which must be presented before an accurate summation and evaluation can be made of Strong's views that tie Christ's person and the atonement together.

Christ is the Omnipresent and Immanent God

The tenth lesson in theology for Strong centered around the immanence of Christ. He says:

Christ, however, is the life of humanity only as he is the life of the whole universe. I quickly saw that I must take another and a final step and must see in Christ not only the life and light of men but also the omnipresent and immanent God. The Son is the revealing God even as the Father is the God revealed. Christ is the principle of physical interaction as well as mental interaction, the principle of logical induction, as well as of evolution and of moral unity. Nature is a continual manifestation of Christ. . . . His historical atonement is but a manifestation to sense of what, as preincarnate Logos, he has been doing ever since man's first sin. The incarnation and death of Christ are only the outward and temporal exhibition of an eternal fact in the being of God and of a suffering for sin endured by the Son of God ever since the Fall. God's holiness necessarily visits sin with penalty. . . . This general doctrine of Christ's identification with the race because he is the Creator, Upholder, and Life of the universe, I called ethical monism. It regards the universe as a finite, partial, and graded manifestation of the divine life; matter being God's self-limitation under the law of necessity, humanity being God's self-limitation under the law of freedom, incarnation and atonement being God's self-limitations under the law of grace. Metaphysical monism, or the doctrine of one substance, principle, or ground of being, I maintained

⁴²Autobiography of A. H. Strong, pp. 252-53.

to be entirely consistent with psychological dualism, or the doctrine that soul is personally distinct from matter, on the one hand, and from God, on the other. And this ethical monism is the last, and the most important, addition which I have made to theology. It is the tenth distinct advance step in my doctrinal thinking.⁴³

The fifth through the tenth lessons in theology which Strong learned during his lifetime actually form a unit, or, to use a metaphor, if the fifth lesson placed Strong onto a certain highway, the subsequent lessons caused him to continue on that highway. It is this writer's view that the fork in the road came for Strong when he had to decide whether the union of the believer with Christ or the justification of the believer by the death and resurrection of Christ would be foundational to his system of theology.

At this point, a summation of the content of Strong's eighth, ninth and tenth lessons in theology is appropriate. First, when Strong learned his eighth lesson in theology ("Christ's union with the human race gave Him a human nature with liabilities") he was trying to relate Christ's deity with the atonement. Second, he credits Dr. Robinson's "realism" with helping him to understand that a believer's justification is based on the union of the believer with Christ. In footnote 39 of this chapter, however, it was made clear that Robinson rejected the immediate imputation of the guilt of Adam's sin to the human

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 253-54.

race (the view of Strong and W. G. T. Shedd⁴⁴), teaching instead that depravity rather than guilt was the effect of Adam's sin upon the race. On the other hand, this same footnote explained that Robinson's view that law was the transcript of God's moral nature made a deep impression on Strong's thinking. This must be kept in mind as it helps to clarify what Strong means when he speaks of "ethical monism." Third, Strong learned to relate Christ's human nature "with all its exposures and liabilities" to his justly bearing the sins of the human race. Fourth, Strong's ninth lesson in theology ("Christ, who is the life of the world must bear the sins of the world") taught him that Christ should be considered responsible for all human sin and not merely for Adam's sin. Fifth, the ninth lesson also taught Strong that Christ's union with the race at his incarnation must have been preceded by a union with the race which began at creation. Sixth, this ninth lesson also taught Strong that Christ's suffering in time showed what had been in God's heart from eternity. Seventh, Strong's tenth lesson in theology showed him that nature is a continual manifestation of Christ. Eighth, this tenth lesson also taught him that Christ's incarnation and death are only the exhibition of an eternal fact in the being of God. Finally, this

⁴⁴A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., pp. 619-37, and William G. T. Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House reprint, n.d.), 2:181-92.

lesson taught Strong that the universe is a "finite, partial, and graded manifestation of the divine life."

By way of evaluation, several things need to be said. First, Strong wishes to relate Christ's deity and the atonement. To this degree, at least, he is attempting to construct a system of theology which will effect this relationship. But by taking an ancillary truth (the believer's union with Christ) and making it foundational to his system, he ensures that any genuine development within his system will be farther and farther removed from the emphasis found in Holy Scripture. And to that extent, his system will be a distortion of biblical truth. Second, Strong's adoption of Robinson's belief that law is the transcript of God's moral nature could help Strong's system of theology to be faithful to the biblical message. In fact, the idea that holiness is not arbitrary with God but rather part of His character does form one of the two major emphases in Strong's "ethical monism." It is what Strong means by his use of "ethical." Third, by combining the "ethical" concept with monism, Strong turns the ethical concept away from a system in which God, though interested in His creation, is distinct from it and away from a system in which God's holiness views both man's sinfulness and the atonement in juridical terms toward a system requiring a more naturalistic and evolutionary explanation. Fourth, Strong's resultant view of Christ's humanity is not faithful to Holy

Scripture which describes Jesus Christ, our High Priest as "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26). That Christ's high priestly ministry requires Him to be human as well as divine is clear from 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (New King James Version). Finally, on page 39 of this dissertation, Strong is quoted as saying:

Metaphysical monism, or the doctrine of one substance, principle, or ground of being, I maintained to be entirely consistent with psychological dualism, or the doctrine that soul is personally distinct from matter, on the one hand, and from God, on the other.

Yet this writer must agree with Albert Henry Newman in his critique of Strong's view:

It does not appear to the reviewer that the author has made good his contention here or in the articles on Ethical Monism. If man's soul is in reality personally distinct from God and from matter, Monism in the common acceptation and the proper meaning of the term is excluded; if, on the other hand, there be only one substance in the universe, pantheism, with the utter negation of human personality and responsibility, as well as of divine personality, would seem to be inevitably involved.⁴⁵

At a more popular level, Oliver Buswell says evolutionary pantheism underlies Strong's theology. He relates the following story:

I was confirmed in my opinion by remarks made to me by Professor A. T. Robertson of Louisville Seminary just a year or two before his death. Robertson had openly accused Strong of pantheism. I asked him personally about the matter. His reply was characteristically sharp. "Yes," he said, "according to Strong, the end

⁴⁵Albert Henry Newman, "Strong's Systematic Theology" in The Baptist Review and Expositor 2 (January 1905):47.

the end of my little finger is a piece of God!"⁴⁶

Inspiration is Christ's Gradual
Enlightenment From Within

This eleventh lesson in theology was so described by Strong in his autobiographical address "Theology and Experience." In his autobiography, Strong describes this lesson as recognizing "an evolutionary process in divine revelation."⁴⁷ He explains in the following statement:

My later thought has interpreted the Bible from the point of view of the immanence of Christ. As I have more and more clearly seen him in human history, I have been led to recognize an evolutionary process in divine revelation. No age and no race of man has been left without its witness to the truth. Christ is the Light that lighteth every man. As Hebrew history is the work of Christ, so is Hebrew Scripture. As the history is his work in spite of its imperfections, so the Scripture is his work in spite of its imperfections. Both are like the human eye, to which we do not refuse to attribute designing intelligence simply because it is not a perfect optical instrument.

I am prepared now to acknowledge all that the higher criticism can prove as to the composition of the sacred documents at the same time that I see in them the proof of a divine as well as a human authorship. Inerrancy in matters not essential to their moral and religious teaching is not to be claimed. And yet the Bible, taken as a whole, and interpreted by Christ's teaching and Spirit, is our sufficient rule of faith and practice. We shall never outgrow it but shall ever find it able to make us wise unto salvation. It will always be our textbook,⁴⁸ not of science or philosophy, but of religion.

⁴⁶J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., "Our Testbook in Systematic Theology" in The Bible Today (New York: National Bible Institute, February 1949), p. 157.

⁴⁷Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 345.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 345-46.

Three comments are in order by way of evaluation. First, it becomes clear that the evolutionary path down which Strong is going is causing him to give up his belief in the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture. In the next chapter it will be demonstrated that this was Strong's original viewpoint as expressed in his 1876 Lectures On Theology. Now there is a shift away from an authority which is objective (that is, Holy Scripture) to another authority which is subjective (that is, "Christ's teaching and Spirit"). Second, if Strong had taken the time to examine "Christ's teaching" with regard to Holy Scripture, he would have discovered a view far different from his own. Robert M. Grant, professor of New Testament at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago states:

To Jesus, as to his contemporaries in Judaism, the scriptures were authoritative and inspired. To his opponents, whether human or superhuman, he can quote scripture and say, "It is written . . ." (Mark 11:17; Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4 and so on). He can ask them, "have you not read . . . ?" (Mark 2:25). And he can stress the divine source of inspiration of scripture by saying, "David himself said in the Holy Spirit" (Mark 12:36). . . .

Like his contemporaries, Jesus regards Moses as the author of the Pentateuch and David as the author of the Psalms. . . . He regards the events of the Old Testament times as real events. God made man male and female (Mark 10:6); Abel was murdered (Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:51); and so on.

Finally, although this passage in the Bible will be examined in more detail later in this dissertation, it should be

⁴⁹ Robert M. Grant, A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963, rev. ed.), pp. 17-18.

noted that 2 Timothy 3:15, from which Strong was quoting when he said "able to make us wise unto salvation," does not provide the interpreter with a means by which the "religious" parts of the Bible can be distinguished from the other parts, nor does it attempt to limit the authority of Scripture in any manner! Here, in context, is what the passage says:

and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (New King James Version)

The goal of Holy Scripture is to make one wise for salvation, indeed, but rather than limiting the inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture only to certain portions, the passage says that all Scripture is inspired and profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction! On what basis, then, dare one stand over the shoulder of the Spirit of Christ trying to tell Him what is profitable and what is not?

Christ's Spirit Works Outwardly to the Reform of Human Society

Strong states:

As the Creator and Upholder of the universe, Christ has a natural connection with every human heart, and service done to any human being is service done to him. But he is also the Creator of a new society; and to follow him is to enlist in all manner of effort for the reform of

industrial and business and governmental relations, until these are pervaded by his Spirit.⁵⁰

In his autobiography, Strong describes this twelfth lesson in theology as the immanence of God. He states:

But of late I have been impressed as never before that God is here and now. He that comes to God must believe that He is and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. These present tenses have a new meaning to me. And the kingdom of heaven is within us, and we are citizens of it today, without waiting for the future.⁵¹

Since Strong believed and taught a postmillennial return of Christ, it is not difficult to see how his belief in evolution, divine immanence and "ethical monism" would bolster this eschatological concept. In this view of the end times, God's kingdom is already present, but it needs to be cultivated and developed throughout the world before Christ can return. Liberalism in America used a form of postmillennialism to justify its emphasis on the "social gospel." Strong used it to justify social reform as well as world missions.

⁵⁰Strong, One Hundred Chapel Talks, p. 31.

⁵¹Douglas, Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 346.

CHAPTER III

THE THEOLOGY OF A. H. STRONG

The object of this chapter is to present major changes in the theology of A. H. Strong. While various articles he wrote and addresses he delivered could be used to reach this objective, it seems more appropriate to use his 1876 printed notes covering all the areas of theology to represent his early views, and to use the 1907 edition of his Systematic Theology to explain his later theological viewpoint. In this way, statements he intended to be formal explanations of his views will be presented. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to present all of Strong's theological views or to show all of the changes that occurred in his thinking.¹

Strong's Earlier Theology

When he became president of Rochester Theological Seminary, A. H. Strong also became professor of theology. Four years after he began to teach theology Strong had his lectures printed under the title Lectures on Theology. Examination of this volume will be conducted under seven major theological headings.

¹This task was admirably accomplished by Carl F. H. Henry in Personal Idealism and Strong's Theology, (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1951), pp. 16-192.

God

Two points stand out in Strong's treatment of the doctrine of God. First, his discussion of God's existence stands out because the traditional philosophical arguments for God's existence are considered by Strong to be philosophically invalid, yet they are used by him to confirm and explicate man's knowledge of God.² This can be done, according to Strong, because man's knowledge of God is intuitive, that is, it is a first truth.³ Strong concludes with this evaluation of the philosophical attempts to prove that God exists:

As a logical process this is indeed defective, since all logic as well as all observation depends for its validity upon the presupposed existence of God, and since this particular process, even granting the validity of logic in general, does not warrant the conclusion that God exists, except upon a second assumption that our abstract ideas of infinity and perfection are to be applied to the Being to whom argument has actually conducted us.

But although both ends of the logical bridge are confessedly wanting, the process may serve and does serve a more useful purpose than that of mere demonstration, namely, that of awaking, confirming and explicating a conviction which, though the most fundamental of all, may⁴ yet have been partially slumbering for lack of thought.

It seems fair to say that Strong believes God has made Himself known to all men intuitively. The value of the philosophical arguments does not lie in their ability to

²Augustus H. Strong, Lectures on Theology (Rochester: E. R. Andrews, 1876), p. 22.

³Ibid., p. 17.

⁴Ibid., p. 27.

prove God's existence but in their ability to bring this intuitive revelation to human consciousness of it. Describing the fall of man, Strong says of this intuitive revelation:

It is to be remembered, however, that the loss of love to God has greatly obscured this primitive knowledge, so that the revelation of nature and the Scriptures is needed to awaken, confirm and enlarge it, and the special work of the Spirit of Christ to make it the knowledge of friendship and communion.⁵

So, at least in the early stage of his understanding of theology, Strong correctly notes that divine revelation (in the form of intuitive knowledge) must precede human reasoning and that regeneration (the work of the Spirit of Christ) must precede fellowship with God. Thus a works-righteousness motif, in which man is searching after God both for knowledge of Him and for worship of Him, is avoided; rather, God takes the initiative both to let man know that He exists and to bring man to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

The second point that stands out in Strong's treatment of the doctrine of God involves his discussion of the attributes and the trinitarian character of God. The divine attributes, according to Strong, can be known rationally by using the principles of negation, analogy and causation, although he states that this rational method "has insuperable limitations and its place is a subordinate one."⁶ The

⁵Ibid., p. 21.

⁶Ibid., p. 62.

superior method is to look in the Bible to determine God's attributes, and when this is done, holiness is revealed as the fundamental attribute of God. Strong says:

. . . in Christ's redeeming work, though love makes the atonement, it is violated holiness that requires it; and in the eternal punishment of the wicked, the demand of holiness for self-vindication overbears the pleading of love for the sufferers.

Two statements, by way of evaluation, seem appropriate concerning Strong's belief that holiness is the fundamental attribute of God. First, there is a sense in which this is biblically true. The seraphs worshipped God as thrice holy (Isaiah 6:3) and this seems to be the kind of worship given to God in heaven by the angels (Revelation 4:8). Francis Pieper, after noting that God's holiness can be understood in two ways: (1) His supreme majesty and absolute transcendence, and (2) His absolute ethical purity, states, "In its first meaning the holiness of God describes God in His essence and therefore includes all His attributes."⁸ Second, there is a danger of imbalance in making holiness God's fundamental attribute. In the previous chapter, it was shown that Strong accepted Robinson's idea that law is the transcript of God's moral nature.⁹ Since this concept

⁷Ibid., p. 70.

⁸Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3 vols. (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 1:456.

⁹See pages 34-35 of this dissertation. The confusion of Law and Gospel prevails in many segments of Christendom today. The Law, which makes demands on sinful man and terrifies him, is confused with the Gospel, which

greatly influences Strong, the danger exists that Law and Gospel will be neither defined nor distinguished correctly. In this case, the specific danger is that Law will dominate Gospel so that what is called Gospel would in reality be Law! The way to avoid this danger is to define holiness in the twofold sense described by Pieper. Thus, in His supreme majesty and absolute transcendence, holiness is the fundamental attribute of God. In His ethical purity, however, holiness properly describes Law, the kind of purity God demands of His creatures. Part of Strong's problem is that he is constructing his theology in reaction to the liberalism of his day which tended to make love the primary attribute of God, resulting in a denial of eternal punishment. While Strong's motive is admirable, his method is not. The Christian theologian must construct his theology in response to God's Word, not in reaction to some contemporary issue.

The Bible

Two things are clear about Strong's early view of the Bible: (1) he held a high view of Holy Scripture, believing it to be a revelation from God and free from error in the choice of words in the original manuscripts, and (2) he was not consistent in his view of inspiration, even in this early stage of his thinking. Both of these points can

proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the basis for friendship and fellowship with God. Gospel comforts while Law terrifies; Gospel proclaims God's grace while Law makes demands.

be seen in the following statement by Strong:

Inspiration did not always or even generally involve a direct communication to the Scripture writers, of the words they wrote. Thought is possible without words and in the order of nature precedes words. The Scripture writers appear to have been so influenced by the Holy Spirit that they perceived and felt even the new truths they were to publish, as discoveries of their own minds, and were left to the action of their own minds, in the expression of these truths, with the single exception that they were supernaturally held back from the selection of wrong words, and when needful were provided with right ones. Inspiration is therefore verbal as to its result, but not verbal as to its method.¹⁰

Because he believed that inspiration somehow affected every word of Holy Scripture, and because he also believed that every part of the Bible was inspired, Strong held a high view of biblical authority. When speaking of God's attributes Strong said, "Now that we have proved the Scriptures to be a revelation from God, inspired in every part, we may properly look to them as decisive authority with regard to God's attributes."¹¹

The Works of God

Under this heading providence and miracles will be discussed. Strong defines providence as "that continuous agency of God by which He makes all the events of the physical and moral universe fulfill the original design with which he created it."¹² It is significant to note that even

¹⁰Strong, Lectures On Theology, p. 54.

¹¹Ibid., p. 62.

¹²Ibid., p. 106.

in this early stage of his theological development Strong rejected the days of creation as being 24 hour days. Furthermore, while at this point he does not accept the idea of spontaneous generation, he says if science could prove it, this would only supplement the biblical idea of immediate creation.¹³ Strong's view of Genesis might properly be described as the pictorial-summary view. Strong says he believes "that the Mosaic account is a rough sketch of the history of creation, true in all its essential features, but presented in a graphic form suited to the common mind and to earlier as well as later ages."¹⁴ It is note-worthy that even in this early stage of his thinking, Strong permits nonbiblical material (what Strong believes to be divine revelation in nature) to inform his interpretation of biblical data (Genesis one). The danger for the Christian theologian is twofold: (1) God's revelation in nature is very limited in what it reveals about God (Romans 1:19-20) and (2) there is distortion, both in natural revelation itself because of the curse God placed on the earth when man sinned (Genesis 3:17-19 and Romans 8:20), and in sinful man's attempt to understand that revelation in nature. (See 1 Corinthians 1:19-21 where the "wisdom of the world" is set in opposition to the wisdom of God). This twofold danger requires the Christian theologian to use Holy Scripture to

¹³Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 99.

help him understand any true information in nature. Nothing must be permitted to sit in judgment over God's Word.

Strong defines a miracle as:

an event palpable to the senses, produced for a religious purpose by the immediate agency of God; an event therefore, which though not contravening any law of nature, the laws of nature, if fully known, would not be competent to explain.¹⁵

In this definition a miracle is understood as something supernatural rather than as something governed by natural law (even though that law were unknown at the time). Later, under the influence of evolution and his "ethical monism," Strong will alter his definition of miracle.

Man and Sin

In 1876, Strong believed in a real, historical Adam and Eve. He said, "The Scriptures teach that the whole human race is descended from a single pair."¹⁶ He never deviated from this view, as will be shown in the last part of this chapter. The fact of man's creation is beyond all doubt in Strong's thinking, but the method God used to create man was always open to speculation. He says:

But, on the other hand, the Scriptures do not disclose the method of man's creation. Whether man's physical system is, or is not, derived by natural descent, from the lower animals, the record of creation does not inform us. . . . Psychology, however, comes in to help our interpretation of Scripture. The radical

¹⁵Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 122.

differences between man's soul and the principle of intelligence in the lower animals, especially man's possession of general ideas, the moral sense and the power of self-determination, show that that which chiefly constitutes him man could not have been derived by any natural process of development from the inferior creatures. We are compelled, then, to believe that God's "breathing into man's nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. 2:7) was an act of immediate creation,¹⁷ like the first introduction of life upon the planet.

Thus, while Strong at this point in his thinking believed that man's body as well as his soul was created directly by God, his reason for so believing was not due to the biblical data but to the latest psychological theory. If he had taken the time to examine Genesis 2:7 more carefully he would have discovered the following three points: (1) when God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life man became a "living soul"; (2) the two Hebrew words translated "living soul" in Genesis 2:7 are translated "living creature" in Genesis 1:24, and therefore, (3) when Genesis 2:7 says man became a living soul as a result of God's forming man's body and breathing into man's nostrils, it must mean that man became a living entity (not a human being, since the living creatures of Genesis 1 were not human beings). Thus, the Bible does speak directly to the issue concerning the origin of man's body, and yet Strong overlooks it, coming to a belief in the direct creation of man's body only because a psychological theory supported such a view.

Sin is defined by Strong as "lack of conformity to

¹⁷Ibid., p. 121.

the moral law of God, either in act, disposition or state," and he sees the essential principle of sin ("the characterizing motive or impelling power which explains its existence and constitutes its guilt") to be selfishness.¹⁸ It should be noted that in a special section entitled "Relation of the Law to the Grace of God," Strong states:

Grace is to be regarded, however, not as abrogating law but as republishing and enforcing it; . . . By removing obstacles to pardon in the mind of God and by enabling man¹⁹ to obey, grace secures the perfect fulfillment of law.

This statement demonstrates the influence of Reformed theology on Strong's thinking. Grace is viewed, not as the opposite of law but as republishing law. Law is viewed, from the Reformed perspective, as a positive expression of God's will for man, rather than as something which is necessary only because of human sinfulness. In Holy Scripture, God's grace and man's good works are contrasted (Romans 11:6), especially as they are related to salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9).

When Strong discusses the various theories concerning the imputation of Adam's sin to the human race, he teaches that such an imputation was immediate and based on the natural headship (sometimes described as the seminal headship) of Adam. Here are the arguments for his view:

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 140, 143-44.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 139.

- A. It puts the most natural interpretation upon Romans 5:12-21. . . .
- B. It permits whatever of truth there may be in the federal theory and in the theory of mediate imputation to be combined with it. . . .
- C. While its fundamental presupposition--a determination of the will of each member of the race prior to his individual consciousness--is an hypothesis difficult in itself, it is an hypothesis which furnishes the key to many more difficulties than it suggests. . . .
- D. We are to remember, however, that while this theory of the method of our union with Adam is merely a valuable hypothesis, the problem which it seeks to explain is, in both its terms, presented to us both by conscience and by Scripture. In connection with this problem a central fact is announced in Scripture, which we feel compelled to believe upon divine testimony, even though every attempted explanation should prove unsatisfactory. That central fact, which constitutes the substance of the Scripture doctrine of original sin, is simply this, that the sin of Adam is the immediate cause and ground of inborn depravity,²⁰ guilt and condemnation to the whole human race.

Two points stand out in Strong's defense of his view: (1) in this stage of Strong's theological development, the natural union of the race with Adam is only a hypothesis, and (2) the reason for accepting this view is that the Bible seems to teach it. There will be a shift in Strong's thinking whereby the idea that there is a natural union of the race with Adam is no longer a hypothesis but a fact, and while Strong will continue to argue on the basis of scriptural exegesis for it, the real reason for holding this view will be philosophical (ethical monism).

Salvation

Strong discusses both the person and the work of

²⁰Ibid., pp. 158-59.

Jesus Christ under the doctrine of salvation. Strong's intent is to be true to Holy Scripture as it has been understood historically in the Nicene Creed and in the Formula of Chalcedon.²¹ Thus, he teaches that in His divine nature, Jesus has always existed with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.²² When He became a man, a human nature was united to His divine nature ("organically and indissolubly . . . , yet so that no third nature is formed thereby."²³).

Strong divides the work of Christ into three parts: Prophet, priest and king. He discusses the various theories of the atonement and argues for the ethical theory, which he defines as follows: "The atonement is therefore a satisfaction of the ethical demand of the divine nature by the substitution of Christ's penal sufferings for the punishment of the guilty."²⁴

Under the application of salvation Strong discusses eight related topics: (1) election which Strong believes is

²¹Ibid., p. 174.

²²Ibid., pp. 82-83.

²³Ibid., p. 174. An interesting note is that Strong argued for the view that Christ possessed one will (monothelism), a view condemned by the sixth ecumenical council held at Constantinople in A.D. 681. Cf. Strong, Lectures On Theology, p. 180. Strong maintained monothelism throughout all the editions of his theology book. Cf. Systematic Theology, 8th ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1907), p. 695.

²⁴Ibid., p. 195.

unconditional;²⁵ (2) calling which he sees as both a general invitation to all and a special call to the elect which always results in saving faith;²⁶ (3) regeneration which he defines as "that act of God by which, through the truth as a means, the governing disposition of the soul is made holy";²⁷ (4) conversion which Strong considers to be the human side of regeneration and composed of both repentance and faith;²⁸ (5) union with Christ which he describes as:

. . . a union of life, in which the human spirit, while then most truly possessing its own individuality and personal distinctness, is interpenetrated and energized by the Spirit of Christ, is made inscrutably but indissolubly one with him, and so becomes a member and partaker of that new humanity of which he is the head.²⁹

(6) justification is "that judicial act of God by which, on account of Christ to whom the sinner is united by faith, he

²⁵Ibid., p. 201. By "unconditional" Strong means that God's election (choice) was not based or conditioned on God's foresight of who would have faith in Christ.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 202-3. Strong rejects the idea that God forces a person against his will to trust Christ and so he prefers the term, "efficacious call" to "irresistible call."

²⁷Ibid., p. 204. Actually Strong's view is much closer to the Reformed teaching that the Holy Spirit regenerates without means, since Strong does not believe there is power in the truth but in the Holy Spirit to make the truth understood. In fact, Strong sees the "immediate agency of the Holy Spirit as the efficient cause of regeneration." Ibid., pp. 205-7.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 209-214. Strong does not make repentance a separate step from faith. Also, contrary to Reformed theology, Strong places regeneration as a logical result of faith. Ibid., p. 213.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 214-15.

declares that sinner to be no longer exposed to the penalty of the law, but to be restored to his favor." Strong believes justification is a result of union with Christ;³⁰ (7) sanctification which Strong considers to be a process in which the Holy Spirit strengthens and confirms the holy disposition given in regeneration;³¹ and (8) perseverance which Strong sees as God's guarantee that "all who are united to Christ by faith will infallibly continue in a state of grace and finally attain to everlasting life."³²

Church

Strong believes that the Bible uses the word "church" in two ways: (1) to refer to "the whole company of regenerate persons in all times and ages, in heaven and on earth,"³³ and (2) to refer to a local congregation which he defines as "that smaller company of regenerate persons who in any given community unite themselves voluntarily together in accordance with Christ's laws, for the purpose of securing the complete establishment of his kingdom in themselves and in the world."³⁴

Following a Baptist viewpoint, Strong argues for congregational government, immersion as the only mode of

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 216-17.

³¹ Ibid., p. 223.

³² Ibid., p. 226.

³³ Ibid., p. 228.

³⁴ Ibid.

water baptism and a sacramentarian understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper.³⁵

Future Events

Baptists never have held exclusively to one eschatological viewpoint. Until 1875 when the fundamentalist-modernist controversy began to influence Baptists in the northern part of the United States, premillennialism and dispensationalism were not dominant in the writings of many Baptist theologians.

Strong teaches that the soul does not sleep but is conscious during the intermediate state, that there will be a literal, visible coming of Christ followed by the resurrection and judgment of all people, after which the righteous will enjoy eternal life while the wicked will be punished eternally.³⁶

Nevertheless, it is clear that Strong is postmillennial rather than amillennial in light of the following statements:

- A. Through the preaching of the gospel in all the world, the kingdom of Christ is steadily to enlarge its boundaries until Jews and Gentiles alike become possessed of its blessings, and a millennial period is introduced in which Christianity generally prevails throughout the earth; . . .
- B. There will be a corresponding development of evil, both extensive and intensive, whose true character

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 232-35, 239-55.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 258-71.

shall be manifest not only in deceiving many professed followers of Christ, and in persecuting true believers, but in constituting a personal antichrist its representative and object of worship. This rapid growth shall continue until the millennium, during which, evil, in the person of its chief, shall be temporarily restrained;. . .

- C. At the close of this millennial period, evil shall again be permitted to exert its utmost power, in a final conflict with righteousness. This spiritual struggle, moreover, shall be accompanied and symbolized by political convulsions, and by fearful indications of desolation in the natural world.³⁷

Strong's Later Theology

Thirty-one years after his Lectures On Theology were published, the final edition of his Systematic Theology was printed. This book will be used to present Strong's later theology.

God

The preface to Strong's last edition of his Systematic Theology contains a number of statements by the author that help the reader to understand the major difference between this last edition and the earlier ones, especially as those differences concern the doctrine of God.

Strong says:

. . . My philosophical and critical point of view meantime has also somewhat changed. While I still hold to the old doctrines, I interpret them differently and expound them more clearly, because I seem to myself to have reached a fundamental truth which throws new light upon them all. . . .

³⁷Ibid., p. 261.

That Christ is the one and only Revealer of God, in nature, in humanity, in history, in science, in Scriptures, is in my judgment the key to theology. This view implies a monistic and idealistic conception of the world, together with an evolutionary idea as to its origin and progress. But it is the very antidote to pantheism, in that it recognizes evolution as only the method of the transcendent and personal Christ, who fills all in all, and who makes the universe teleological and moral from its centre to its circumference and from its beginning until now.

Neither evolution nor the higher criticism has any terrors to one who regards them as parts of Christ's creating and educating process. . . .

Philosophy and science are good servants of Christ but they are poor guides when they rule out the Son of God. As I reach my seventieth year and write these words on my birthday, I am thankful for that personal experience of union with Christ which has enabled me to see in science and philosophy the teaching of my Lord.³⁸

The number of pages went from 271 (without any index) to 1056 plus 107 more pages of indices. The final edition of Strong's Systematic Theology is almost four times as large as his 1876 Lectures On Theology, yet the basic outline did not change. Quotations, many of them philosophical and scientific in content, were added throughout the successive editions.

When Strong discusses the philosophical arguments for the existence of God, his view is the same as in the 1876 Lectures On Theology, that is, while the arguments are philosophically invalid, they may be used to confirm man's knowledge of God.³⁹ However, in the 1907 edition of

³⁸ Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., pp. vii-viii.

³⁹ Cf. Lectures On Theology, p. 22 and Systematic Theology (1907), p. 71.

Systematic Theology, the teleological argument for God's existence is related to and illustrated by the theory of evolution.

Carl Henry compares Strong's early theology with his later theology as that theology was expressed in the 1907 edition of his Systematic Theology. Here are Henry's comments:

There is a tendency to quote extensively from philosophical theists, and to employ their material on divine attributes in such a way as to minimize the necessity for special revelation in arriving at a specifically Christian concept of God. The treatment of divine personality is developed not by an exclusive appeal to special redemptive disclosure, but rather the integral elements of personality, self-consciousness and self-determination, are championed alternately by Biblical and philosophical appeals. . . .

Strong's treatment of divine love and holiness was expanded, in accordance with the preface, to emphasize that love is not the all-inclusive ethical attribute of God, and that holiness is the fundamental divine attribute and therefore God requires propitiation. If the concept of God which Strong defended was in almost all points orthodox, including the divine infinity, triunity and transcendence, he did modify the statement of divine love to stress that it "involves also the possibility of divine suffering, and the suffering of sin which holiness necessitates on the part of God is itself the atonement."⁴⁰

Strong himself said in the preface:

The present volume, in its treatment of Ethical Monism, Inspiration, the Attributes of God, and the Trinity, contains an antidote to most of the false doctrine which now threatens the safety of the church. I desire especially to call attention to the section

⁴⁰Carl F. H. Henry, Personal Idealism and Strong's Theology (Wheaton: Van Kapen Press, 1951) . . . , p. 157. Cf. p. 266 in Systematic Theology, 1907 ed.

on Perfection, and the Attributes therein involved, because I believe that the recent merging of Holiness and Love, and the practical denial that righteousness is fundamental in God's nature, are responsible for the utilitarian views of law and the superficial views of sin which now prevail in some systems of theology. There can be no proper doctrine of the atonement and no proper doctrine of retribution, so long as Holiness is refused its preeminence. Love must have a norm or standard,⁴¹ and this norm or standard can be found only in Holiness.

One can appreciate Strong's concern over the apostasy he saw in theological circles and his attempt to correct or to stem its flow of influence. Nevertheless, two critical comments are appropriate: (1) first, one does not construct a system of theology in reaction to some current issue. The biblical material relating to that issue may be gathered and used to combat it, but this is not the same as building a complete system of theology around one issue. The danger of imbalance looms on the horizon when this happens. For example, even a casual examination of groups within Christendom that consider themselves to be Christian but in reality are cults will reveal an anti-Catholic attitude and methodology. And so, many sabbatarian groups worship on Saturday rather than on Sunday because they believe the Catholic church changed the day of worship, overlooking what the New Testament teaches about this subject (Romans 14:1-6; Colossians 2:14-17). Likewise, other groups reject the Trinity because the Catholic church teaches this doctrine, failing to come to grips with what

⁴¹Strong, Systematic Theology, p. x.

the Bible says about this subject as a whole (John 1:1-4; 5:17-24; 10:30-39; 14:16-17; 16:13-14). A major problem with both the sabbatarian and antitrinitarian groups is that their viewpoint is formulated in reaction against whatever the Catholic church teaches, rather than on the basis of what Holy Scripture teaches; (2) second, the "antidote" which Strong proposes is not precisely the biblical teaching on the holiness of God, but as earlier sections in this dissertation revealed, Strong's doctrine that holiness is the fundamental attribute of God is tied to his "ethical monism" in such a way as to make the proper distinction between Law and Gospel impossible.⁴²

The Bible

Augustus H. Strong initially printed his Lectures On Theology in 1876. These lectures comprise 271 pages and form the basic outline he was to follow in writing his Systematic Theology, a text which went through eight editions, the first of which was published in 1886 comprising about 600 pages. The size of the various editions stayed virtually the same until the final edition of 1907 when more than 400 pages were added. A major change in the definition of inspiration is introduced in the seventh edition (1902) along side of the earlier definition and explanation. In the eighth edition (1907), the earlier material is removed

⁴²Pages 34-43 and 50-51 in this dissertation.

and only the alternate definition and explanation are given.

A detailed explanation and evaluation of this alternate definition will not be given at this point since that is the task of the remaining chapters in this dissertation. Instead, the new definition will be stated and several brief comments about Strong's treatment of it will be given. Strong changed his definition of inspiration to say:

Inspiration is that influence of the Spirit of God upon the minds of the Scripture writers which made their writings the record of a progressive divine revelation, sufficient, when taken together and interpreted by the same Spirit who inspired them, to lead every honest inquirer to Christ and to salvation.⁴³

The statement found in Lectures On Theology and in the first seven editions of Systematic Theology, namely, "Inspiration is therefore verbal as to its result, but not verbal as to its method" is changed to read: "Inspiration is therefore not verbal, while yet we claim that no form of words which taken in its connections would teach essential error has been admitted into Scripture."⁴⁴ It is true that some of the earlier material, reflecting a higher view of Holy Scripture, has been left in the 1907 edition of Systematic Theology. As a result, it becomes difficult to obtain an entirely clear picture of Strong's viewpoint towards the Bible.

⁴³Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 196.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 216.

A comparison of this definition with his earlier one unveils the following facts: (1) Strong no longer wished to describe inspiration as verbal, (2) Strong is still unwilling to admit the presence of error in Holy Scripture (although the possibility of such error seems to be anticipated in the case of scientific or historical statements), (3) Strong's early definition is descriptive while the later definition is functional. Such a distinction does not make that which is descriptive mutually exclusive with that which is functional, and the untrained reader might not see any difference between them. But in this case, at least, there is a great difference. The early definition describes the Bible as an infallible and sufficient rule of faith and practice. The later definition says that Scripture functions to lead the honest inquirer to Christ and to salvation, and (4) the early definition stresses an objective basis for understanding the Bible, that is, the Bible itself, while the later definition shifts to a subjective basis for understanding the Bible, that is, "the Spirit" who inspired it.

The Works of God

Strong's concept of providence is exactly the same as it was in his Lectures On Theology, and this is also true concerning his attitude toward spontaneous generation. He

still holds to the pictorial-summary view of Genesis one.⁴⁵

The major change in Strong's thinking concerning the works of God deals with his understanding of miracles. Here is his early definition:

an event palpable to the senses, produced for a religious purpose by the immediate agency of God; an event therefore, which though not contravening any law of nature, the laws of nature, if fully known, would not be competent to explain.⁴⁶

While this early definition is still printed in the 1907 edition of his Systematic Theology, it is followed by what Strong calls an "alternative and preferable definition".

Here is his later definition:

A miracle is an event in nature, so extraordinary in itself and so coinciding with the prophecy or command of a religious teacher or leader, as fully to warrant the conviction, on the part of those who witness it, that God has wrought it with the design of certifying that this teacher or leader has been commissioned by him.⁴⁷

Following this definition, Strong gives five reasons why this definition is superior to his earlier one:

(a) It recognizes the immanence of God and his immediate agency in nature, instead of assuming an antithesis between the laws of nature and the will of God. (b) It regards the miracle as simply an extraordinary act of that same God who is already present in all natural operations and who in them is revealing his general plan. (c) It holds that natural law, as the method of God's regular activity, in no way precludes unique exertions of his power when these will best secure his

⁴⁵ See pages 52-53 in this dissertation for Strong's earlier statements on providence, spontaneous generation and Genesis one.

⁴⁶ Strong, Lectures On Theology, p. 33.

⁴⁷ Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 118.

purpose in creation. (d) It leaves possible that all miracles may have their natural explanations and may hereafter be traced to natural causes, while both miracles and their natural causes may be only names for the one and self-same will of God. (e) It reconciles the claims of both science and religion. . . .⁴⁸

It is clear that his new definition of miracles is being determined by a monistic concept of God's relationship to the world, rather than by the biblical data.⁴⁹

Man and Sin

Strong continued to proclaim "The Scriptures teach that the whole human race is descended from a single pair."⁵⁰ One might wonder why this should still be part of Strong's thinking. Perhaps one might conclude that it is merely a remnant of his earlier teaching that had not been purged from the final edition of Systematic Theology. Such a conclusion would be wrong. Strong's belief in a real, historical pair called Adam and Eve never wavered. This belief formed an important part of his theological system: Just as man's guilt in the sight of God is a result of the human race's organic union with Adam in his transgression,

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 118-19.

⁴⁹This fact can be demonstrated from the 1907 edition of his Systematic Theology, p. 123, where Strong is defending the possibility of miracles. He says: "This possibility of miracles becomes doubly sure to those who see in Christ none other than the immanent God manifested to creatures. The Logos or divine Reason who is the principle of all growth and evolution can make God known only by means of successive new impartations of his energy."

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 476.

so the believer's salvation is a result of his organic union with Christ.

Strong no longer believes that Adam's body was immediately created by God. He says:

We are compelled, then, to believe that God's "breathing into man's nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. 2:7), though it was a mediate creation as presupposing existing material in the shape of animal forms, was yet an immediate creation in the sense that only a divine reinforcement of the process of life turned the animal into man. In other words, man came not from the brute, but through the brute, and the same immanent God who had previously created the brute created also the man.⁵¹

It has been shown that while Strong accepted the direct creation of Adam's body in his earlier thinking, he did so only because psychological concepts seemed to point in that direction. Now that his thinking is dominated by theistic evolution and ethical monism, he has jettisoned his earlier view.

However, Strong's doctrine of sin remained the same. Sin was still defined as "lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition or state." The essence of sin was still viewed as selfishness. He also retained the section on "Relation of the Law to the Grace of God." And when Strong presented his view that Adam was the natural head of the race, he added to the four reasons previously given for holding this view a fifth: "This theory finds support in the conclusions of modern science."⁵² It

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 466-67.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 549, 559, 547-48, 624.

is clear that Strong's belief in the natural headship of Adam was strengthened in his later thinking by his evolutionary and monistic views.

Salvation

Both the person and the work of Christ are discussed under this heading. Strong's doctrine of Christ stayed basically the same.⁵³ It was the issue of Christ's relationship to the human race--Strong's ethical monism--that caused his christology to take a new shape.⁵⁴

Under the priestly office of Christ, Strong presents the atonement. In his early theology he had said, "The Scriptures teach that Christ obeyed and suffered in our stead to satisfy an immanent demand of the divine holiness and thus remove an obstacle in the divine mind to the pardon and restoration of the guilty."⁵⁵ In the 1907 edition of his Systematic Theology he repeated this statement and then

⁵³Strong continued to maintain that Christ possessed only one will, and his discussion of this issue from the historical perspective reveals that Strong was aware of what the council of Constantinople in A.D. 681 taught. However, he argues that "this Council has never been regarded by the Greek Church as Oecumenical. . . ." Systematic Theology, p. 695. Timothy Ware, in his book The Orthodox Church (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1964), pp. 28-37, 343 states that the Orthodox Church does accept this Council as Oecumenical.

⁵⁴Cf. pages 31-43 in this dissertation and pages 751-63 in Systematic Theology.

⁵⁵Lectures On Theology, p. 186.

amplified it with seven propositions:

(a) The fundamental attribute of God is holiness, and holiness is not self-communicating love, but self-affirming righteousness. Holiness limits and conditions love, for love can will happiness only as happiness results from or consists with righteousness, that is, with conformity to God. . . .

(b) The universe is a reflection of God, and Christ the Logos is its life. God has constituted the universe, and humanity as a part of it, so as to express his holiness, positively by connecting happiness with righteousness, negatively by attaching unhappiness or suffering to sin. . . .

(c) Christ the Logos, as the Revealer of God in the universe and in humanity, must condemn sin by visiting upon it the suffering which is its penalty; while at the same time, as the Life of humanity, he must endure the reaction of God's holiness against sin which constitutes that penalty. . . .

(d) Our personality is not self-contained. We live, move, and have our being naturally in Christ the Logos. Our reasons, affection, conscience, and will are complete only in him. He is generic humanity, of which we are the offshoots. When his righteousness condemns sin, and his love voluntarily endures the suffering which is sin's penalty, humanity ratifies the judgment of God, makes full propitiation for sin, and satisfies the demands of holiness. . . .

(e) While Christ's love explains his willingness to endure suffering for us, only his holiness furnished the reason for that constitution of the universe and of human nature which makes this suffering necessary. As respects us, his sufferings are substitutionary, since his divinity and his sinlessness enable him to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. Yet this substitution is also a sharing--not the work of one external to us, but of one who is the life of humanity, the soul of our soul and the life of our life, and so responsible with us for the sins of the race. . . .

f) The historical work of the incarnate Christ is not itself the atonement,--it is rather the revelation of the atonement. The suffering of the incarnate Christ is the manifestation in space and time of the eternal suffering of God on account of human sin. Yet without the historical work which was finished on Calvary, the

age-long suffering of God could never have been made comprehensible to men. . . .

(g) The historical sacrifice of our Lord is not only the final revelation of the heart of God, but also the manifestation of the law of universal life--the law that sin brings suffering to all connected with it, and that we can overcome sin in ourselves and in the world only by entering into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and Christ's victory, or, ⁵⁶ in other words, only by union with him through faith.

Thus, the influence of Strong's "ethical monism" can be seen in his mature doctrine of the atonement. The question remains, "Does this view of the atonement accurately convey the biblical teaching?" In response to this question, the following evaluation is submitted: (1) when one is attempting to present the biblical data concerning God's attributes, the presentation must focus primarily on the divine attributes as they relate God to Himself, not as they relate God to His creation. Since there are three Persons eternally existing in the Godhead one does not have to say "God is love only after He created" or "God is holy only after He created"; (2) to single out holiness as God's fundamental attribute and to define it as Strong has done, is to confuse Law and Gospel;⁵⁷ (3) the Bible points to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the foundation of redemption (Ephesians 1:7), propitiation (Romans 3:25) and reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). The death of Jesus Christ was not, according to Holy Scripture, merely the historical

⁵⁶ Strong, Systematic Theology, pp. 713-16.

⁵⁷ Pages 50-51 in this dissertation.

revelation of the atonement but rather the atonement itself.

God's Word says:

then He said, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. Hebrews 10:9-14 (New King James Version).

Under the application of salvation, Strong discusses the same eight points presented in his Lectures On Theology. For the most part, his views remained the same with the following exceptions: (1) in his discussion of divine election, Strong argues that "Divine election is only the ethical side and interpretation of natural selection,"⁵⁸ Thus connecting the doctrine of election with theistic evolution; (2) in his discussion of the believer's union with Christ, Strong comments:

It is easier to-day [sic] than at any other previous period of history to believe in the union of the believer with Christ. That God is immanent in the universe, and that there is a divine element in man, is familiar to our generation. All men are naturally one with Christ, the immanent God, and this natural union prepares the way for that spiritual⁵⁹ union in which Christ joins himself to our faith.

While Strong denies that this union destroys either the personality and substance of Christ or the believer, never-

⁵⁸ Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 786.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 798.

theless, it is clear that Strong's concept of the believer's union with Christ has been transformed by his "ethical monism." One cannot help but wonder how Strong protects himself from a belief that in the end the whole human race will be saved by virtue of their union with Christ.⁶⁰

Church

Strong did not alter his beliefs on the doctrine of the church. What he had said in his Lectures On Theology were amplified in the 1907 edition of his Systematic Theology. It seems that his "ethical monism" and his belief in theistic evolution were not used to expand or change his views concerning the definition, sacraments (which Strong called "ordinances"⁶¹) and government of the church.

Future Events

Strong continued to believe and teach the same eschatological views he had espoused in his Lectures On Theology. On the other hand, much of the material used to defend the immortality of the soul in his Systematic

⁶⁰Cf. Ibid., pp. 1033-1056. Strong emphatically rejects universalism, teaching that God's punishment of the wicked is a vindication of His law. Some might argue that belief in objective justification of the human race also has the same problem. However, such is not the case. One can be pardoned and yet reject that pardon. This involves a legal transaction. Union with Christ, as Strong perceives it, is realistic.

⁶¹Rejecting a sacramental understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper, Strong defines an ordinance as "a symbolic rite which sets forth the central truths of the Christian faith, and which is of universal and perpetual obligation." Systematic Theology, p. 930.

Theology is taken from philosophers who accepted a monistic view of reality and from those who taught theistic evolution.⁶² His belief in postmillennialism could have been immeasurably strengthened by an appeal to his monistic concept of Christ's relationship to the world; thus Strong could have argued that the "Spirit of Christ" is working in the world, causing it to change for the better an evolutionary view congenial to his "ethical monism." For some reason, however, such an appeal is missing. His defense of the postmillennial view is along historical and exegetical lines, rather than scientific or philosophical ones.

⁶²Cf. pages 983-87 in Systematic Theology.

CHAPTER IV

REVELATION AND MIRACLES

In the remaining chapters of this dissertation, Strong's doctrine of Holy Scripture will be examined and evaluated. In this particular chapter, attention will be given to what Strong describes as "preliminary considerations" in his presentation of "The Scriptures A Revelation From God."

Strong's Argumentation

In this section of his Systematic Theology, Strong is introducing the question of whether or not a revelation from God, attested by miracles and prophecy, is probable or even possible.

Reasons A Priori for Expecting a Revelation From God

Before one begins to answer the question as to whether or not a revelation from God has been given, Strong says there are reasons for expecting that, indeed, such a revelation exists. He gives two reasons: First, man's nature has needs. Strong says:

Man's intellectual and moral nature requires, in order to preserve it from constant deterioration, and to ensure its moral growth and progress, an authoritative and helpful revelation of religious truth, of a higher and completer sort than any to which, in its present

state of sin, it can attain by the use of its unaided powers.¹

Strong offers two kinds of proof to support the above statement. One is psychological. Some ideas would never occur to us naturally, such as the trinitarian concept of God, the atonement or even life after death. Yet these ideas are of the greatest importance to us. Furthermore, even truth that we can discover with our natural ability needs to be confirmed by divine authority since the human mind and will have been affected by sin. A special revelation of God's mercy and help is needed for moral encouragement and for breaking sinful habits. In support of this psychological proof, Strong quotes from classical Greek writers, like Plato, and philosophers/psychologists alive in Strong's day, like William James.² The second kind of proof Strong offers is historical. An examination of nations that have no special revelation from God reveals people whose concepts about morals and religion are very imperfect.³

The second reason that Strong gives for expecting the existence of a revelation from God is "presumption of supply."⁴ Having established to his own satisfaction the fact of God's existence in an earlier section of his

¹A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, 8th ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1907), p. 111.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 112.

⁴Ibid., pp. 112-13.

Systematic Theology, Strong is now trying to demonstrate that belief in God's existence demands a corresponding belief in a revelation from this God. He says, "What we know of God, by nature, affords ground for hope that these wants of our intellectual and moral being will be met by a corresponding supply, in the shape of a special divine revelation."⁵

And yet, at the conclusion of this section Strong says:

We conclude this section upon the reasons a priori for expecting a revelation from God with the acknowledgment that the facts warrant that degree of expectation which we call hope, rather than that larger degree of expectation which we call assurance: and this, for the reason that, while conscience gives proof that God is a God of holiness, we have not, from the light of nature, equal evidence that God is a God of love. Reason teaches man that, as a sinner, he merits condemnation; but he cannot, from reason alone, know that God will have mercy upon him and provide salvation.⁶

Marks of the Revelation Man May Expect

Having discussed the reasons for expecting a revelation from God, Strong now moves to the marks which characterize this revelation. These marks are related to the substance, method and attestation of the revelation.

As to the substance of this revelation Strong says:

We may expect this later revelation not to contradict, but to confirm and enlarge, the knowledge of God which we derive from nature, while it remedies the

⁵Ibid., p. 112.

⁶Ibid., pp. 113-14.

defects of natural religion and throws light upon its problems.

Therefore, the first mark of revelation--the mark that is related to the substance of this revelation--is concerned with amplifying our previous knowledge of God.

Concerning the method of this revelation, Strong indicates that it should follow the procedures God uses in other communications of truth. More specifically, this will involve: (1) continuous historical development, (2) original delivery to a single nation or person in order to be given to the whole world, and (3) preservation of the revelation in written and accessible documents.⁸

With respect to the attestation of the revelation, Strong explains that this revelation should be accompanied by evidence that its author is the same One previously recognized as the God of nature. To this end, Strong establishes four criteria for proper attestation:

This evidence must constitute (a) a manifestation of God himself; (b) in the outward as well as the inward world; (c) such as only God's power or knowledge can make; and (d) such as cannot be counterfeited by the evil, or mistaken by the candid, soul. In short, we may expect God to attest by miracles and by prophecy, the divine mission and authority of those to whom he communicates a revelation. Some such outward sign would seem to be necessary, not only to assure the original recipient that the supposed revelation is not a vagary of his own imagination, but also to render the revelation received by a single individual authoritative to all (compare Judges 6:17, 36-40--Gideon asks a sign, for

⁷Ibid., p. 114.

⁸Ibid., pp. 114-116.

himself;⁹ 1 K[ings]18:36-38--Elijah asks a sign, for others).

Miracles As Attesting A Divine Revelation

In this section Strong centers his discussion of miracles around six major issues: (1) the definition of miracle; (2) the possibility of miracles; (3) the probability of miracles; (4) the amount of testimony necessary to prove a miracle; (5) the evidential force of miracles; and (6) counterfeit miracles.

The definition of miracle

In the 1907 edition of his Systematic Theology, Strong gave two definitions of a miracle.¹⁰ Since he describes his second definition as "preferable," it is this definition that will be examined and evaluated. Strong says:

A miracle is an event in nature, so extraordinary in itself and so coinciding with the prophecy or command of a religious teacher or leader, as fully to warrant the conviction, on the part of those who witness it, that God has wrought it with the design of certifying that this teacher or leader has been commissioned by him.¹¹

⁹Ibid., pp. 116-17.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 117-19. The fact that these two definitions are given together demonstrates that this 1907 edition of his Systematic Theology, while the final one, contains contradictory material, reflecting both the early and late thinking of Strong. Cf. p. 69 of this dissertation for both definitions of "miracle" and for Strong's list of reasons preferring the second definition.

¹¹Ibid., p. 118.

The primary difference between this definition and the first concerns the question of whether or not a miracle is supernatural. The first definition affirms, while the second denies, it. Two observations concerning this second definition should be made: (1) a miracle is an event "in nature" rather than "above" nature. An example of such a "miracle" might be playing a radio for some remote, uncivilized tribe of people. To them the radio is a miracle, although natural laws are capable of explaining its operation; and (2) the functional character of "miracle" is emphasized. A miracle does not happen simply because God had nothing better to do; rather, a miracle occurs for the purpose of certifying a religious teacher or leader.

The possibility of miracles

Five considerations by Strong argue for the possibility of miracles:

(a) Lower forces and laws in nature are frequently counteracted and transcended by the higher (as mechanical forces and laws by chemical, and chemical by vital), while yet the lower forces and laws are not suspended or annihilated, but are merged in the higher, and made to assist in accomplishing purposes to which they are altogether unequal when left to themselves. . . .

(b) The human will acts upon its physical organism, and so upon nature, and produces results which nature left to herself never could accomplish, while yet no law of nature is suspended or violated. Gravitation still operates upon the axe, even while man holds it at the surface of the water--for the axe still has weight. . . .

(c) In all free causation, there is an acting without means. . . . In other words, the human will can use means, only because it has the power of acting initially without means. . . .

(d) What the human will, considered as a supernatural force, and what the chemical and vital forces of nature itself, are demonstrably able to accomplish, cannot be regarded as beyond the power of God, so long as God dwells in and controls the universe. . . . In other words, if there be a God, and if he be a personal being, miracles are possible. . . .

(e) This possibility of miracles becomes doubly sure to those who see in Christ none other than the immanent God manifested to creatures. The Logos or divine Reason who is the principle of all growth and evolution can make God known only by means of successive new impartations of his energy. Since all progress implies increment, and Christ is the only source of life, the whole history of creation is a witness to the possibility of miracle.¹²

The sum and substance of these considerations point to Strong's understanding of miracle as simply the operation of a higher law in nature. Certainly no one will deny the possibility of that!

The probability of miracles

Strong gives six points as arguments in favor of the probability of miracles. These arguments are based upon Strong's belief that nature exists "for the contemplation and use of moral beings."¹³ He says:

A. We acknowledge that, so long as we confine our attention to nature, there is a presumption against miracles. Experience testifies to the uniformity of natural law. A general uniformity is needful, in order to make possible a rational calculation of the future, and a proper ordering of life. . . .

B. But we deny that this uniformity of nature is absolute and universal. . . .

¹²Ibid., pp. 121-23.

¹³Ibid., p. 125.

C. Since the inworking of the moral law into the constitution and course of nature shows that nature exists, not for itself, but for the contemplation and use of moral beings, it is probable that the God of nature will produce effects aside from those of natural law, whenever there are sufficiently important moral ends to be served thereby. . . .

D. The existence of moral disorder consequent upon the free acts of man's will, therefore, changes the presumption against miracles into a presumption in their favor. . . .

E. As belief in the possibility of miracles rests upon our belief in the existence of a personal God, so belief in the probability of miracles rests upon our belief that God is a moral and benevolent being. . . .

F. From the point of view of ethical monism the probability of miracle becomes even greater. Since God is not merely the intellectual but the moral Reason of the world, the disturbances of the world-order which are due to sin are the matters which most deeply affect him. Christ, the life of the whole system and of humanity as well, must suffer; and since we have evidence that he is merciful as well as just, it is probable that he will rectify the evil by extraordinary means, when merely ordinary means do not avail.¹⁴

According to the understanding of this writer, Strong's thinking has organized these six points into three groups of two points each; thus, group #1=A + B, Group #2=C + D, and group #3=E + F. If this understanding is correct, the following would be true: (1) group #1 is stressing the uniformity of nature which must be true if exceptions are to be perceived as exceptions, and yet this uniformity must permit exceptions; (2) group #2 is stressing the moral character of the laws of nature and thus is arguing that in light of the moral disorder, miracles should be considered

¹⁴Ibid., p. 126.

probable; and (3) group #3 is stressing God's involvement, and even more particularly, Christ's involvement in the world due to His immanent relationship to it as a basis for expecting miracles as being probable in the correcting of this world's moral disorder.

The amount of testimony necessary
to prove a miracle

In this short section Strong argues that "the amount of testimony necessary to prove a miracle is no greater than that which is requisite to prove the occurrence of any other unusual but confessedly possible event."¹⁵ Strong argues that if miracles are ruled out because a person has never experienced them, then one's own personal experience becomes the standard by which all human experience is measured. Furthermore, such skepticism uses negative human testimony in an attempt to refute positive human testimony. This is fallacious because the negative testimony is an argument based upon ignorance! Because the skeptic has never experienced a miracle does not prove miracles have never occurred. Strong has an excellent illustration of how negative testimony was once used: "The son of Erin charged with murder defended himself by saying: 'Your honor, I can bring fifty people who did not see me do it.'"¹⁶ The force of

¹⁵Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 128.

testimony of these fifty people can be overthrown with one positive testimony that, indeed, the son of Erin was seen committing the murder.

Evidential force of miracles

In this section Strong explains that miracles do not occur with regularity. He says:

Miracles are the natural accompaniments and attestations of new communications from God. The great epochs of miracles--represented by Moses, the prophets, the first and second comings of Christ--are coincident with the great epochs of revelation. Miracles serve to draw attention to new truth, and cease when this truth has gained currency and foothold.

Miracles are not scattered evenly over the whole course of history. Few miracles are recorded during the 2500 years from Adam to Moses. When the N. T. Canon is completed and the internal evidence of Scripture has attained its greatest strength, the external attestations by miracles are either wholly withdrawn or begin to disappear.¹⁷

Strong also says that as a general rule miracles primarily and normally attest the leader or teacher rather than each specific doctrine the leader or teacher presents. Along with this concept, Strong argues that miracles do not stand alone as proof for the teacher. Purity of life and doctrine must also be found in the teacher, if the teacher's message is to be received. Yet, Strong says,

¹⁷ Ibid. For a detailed historical study of miracles in the early church which supports Strong's view, see Benjamin B. Warfield's book, published by Scribner's in 1918 under the title Counterfeit Miracles, but more recently published by Eerdmans under the title Miracles: Yesterday and Today.

"miracles do not lose their value as evidence" with the passing of time.¹⁸ Strong ties all of these ideas together by pointing to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the primary evidence for the authority of His teaching. And, Strong states, Christ's resurrection "is demonstrated by evidence as varied and as conclusive as that which proves to us any single fact of ancient history."¹⁹

Counterfeit miracles

In this section Strong lays down some ground rules by which true miracles--those that come from God--may be distinguished from counterfeit miracles--those occurrences that come from evil spirits or men. There are five distinguishing characteristics of false or counterfeit miracles, according to Strong: (1) they are accompanied by immoral conduct or false doctrine; (2) they are silly or extravagant; (3) the object which they are supposed to support is insufficient; (4) they lack substantiating evidence; and (5) they deny (or at least undervalue) previous divine revelation in nature.²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., p. 132. Strong's illustration of the third characteristic is the miracles that supposedly accompanied the publication of the doctrine of papal infallibility. Strong's illustration of the fifth characteristic is faith-healing which rejects or downplays the role of a doctor in God's normal way of solving physical ailments.

Prophecy as Attesting a Divine Revelation

Strong has nine points to make about prophecy. The first of these is a proper definition of prophecy. Strong states: "Prophecy is the foretelling of future events by virtue of direct communication from God--a foretelling, therefore, which, though not contravening any laws of the human mind, those laws, if fully known, would not, without this agency of God, be sufficient to explain."²¹

The second point concerns the relationship of prophecy to miracles. Strong says: "Miracles are attestations of revelation proceeding from divine power; prophecy is an attestation of revelation proceeding from divine knowledge."²²

The third point is a list of five requirements any prophecy must meet if it is to be considered as an evidence of revelation: (1) the prophecy must be distant from its fulfillment; (2) there must be nothing to suggest that the "prophecy" was merely natural prescience; (3) the prophecy must not be vague; (4) yet it must not be so precise as to secure its own fulfillment; and (5) the prophecy must be followed by an event which fulfills it.²³

²¹Ibid., p. 134.

²²Ibid., p. 135. Strong also says prophecy has two advantages over miracles as an evidence of revelation: (1) the fulfillment of prophecy is not derived from ancient testimony but is before our eyes and (2) the force of prophecy becomes stronger with each fulfillment.

²³Ibid.

The fourth point Strong makes concerning prophecy is a description of the general features of prophecy in the Bible. These features include: (1) the large amount of space such prophecy occupies in the Bible; (2) the ethical and religious nature of such prophecy (for example, a future judgment by God is predicted because of man's present sinfulness); (3) the unity of such prophecy being Jesus Christ in spite of its diversity; and (4) what appears to be a non-fulfillment can be explained.²⁴

The fifth point is a description of messianic prophecy. Such prophecy predicts the birth, suffering and subsequent glory of the Messiah, and this includes prediction of God's kingdom, together with historical types of Messiah (for example, David) and with rites that prefigure the future fulfillment (for example, animal sacrifice, passover).²⁵

The sixth point concerns specific predictions stated by Jesus, especially concerning His death and resurrection, the events between His death and the destruction of Jerusalem, the destruction of Jerusalem itself, and the world-wide spread of the gospel.²⁶

The seventh, eighth and ninth points are concerned with (1) the double sense of prophecy (a near and a far

²⁴Ibid., pp. 135-36.

²⁵Ibid., p. 136.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 136-37.

fulfillment, or a sense in which the prophet understood the fulfillment and a sense in which the prophet did not fully understand the fulfillment), (2) the overall purpose of prophecy, even when it is yet unfulfilled, being not to map out the future in detail but to assure the believer that God knows the end from the beginning, and (3) like miracles, prophecy does not stand alone as the evidence of a leader or teacher's commission by God.²⁷

Principles of Historical Evidence Applicable to the Proof of a Divine Revelation

These principles are applied to two areas of concern: (1) any documents and (2) testimony in general.

Principles related to documents

Three such principles are described by Strong: (1) documents that appear to be ancient and do not seem to be forgeries and are in the proper custody are presumed to be genuine unless or until there is evidence to the contrary; (2) copies of documents are presumed to correspond with their originals even when the originals are no longer available, if those who did the copying are considered to be diligent in faithful reproduction; and (3) with the passing of time, written evidence is superior to oral tradition.²⁸

²⁷Ibid., pp. 137-40.

²⁸Ibid., p. 141.

Principles related to testimony

Strong presents four principles that are related to the acceptance of testimony: (1) the true test of testimony is to ask if there is sufficient probability that it is true (whether it is possible that it might be false); (2) testimony is considered to be true when enough good evidence is given; (3) in the absence of suspicious circumstances, a witness should be considered to be telling the truth; and (4) a small amount of positive testimony, if not contradicted, far outweighs a large amount of negative testimony. That one did not see something is no proof that it did not happen.²⁹

An Evaluation of Strong's Argumentation

At this point in the paper, the various issues presented by Strong and explained in the first part of this chapter will be evaluated.

Reasons A Priori for Expecting a
Revelation from God

Three points, by way of evaluation, will be made: (1) the procedure of Strong is to start with man's belief in God as a first truth, and from there move to "reasons a priori for expecting a revelation from God."³⁰ A question needs to be raised as to whether or not Strong' procedure is

²⁹Ibid., pp. 142-43.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 52-117.

correct. Closely related to this question is another which asks about the importance of procedure. Does one's procedure in theology make any difference? Is it important? The answer is in the affirmative. One's procedure in theology is crucial because it reflects the viewpoint the theologian holds. In this case, Strong's procedure reveals his belief that unregenerate man is capable of knowing that God exists, that He wants to communicate with man and that such a communication is probable. While this belief is not wrong in itself, often it accompanies a theology that views the unbeliever as morally neutral towards God or His revelation. Such a procedure assumes that there are people in the world who, though they do not know God, are sincerely seeking for Him. Based on this assumption, advocates of this procedure attempt to convince unbelievers that there is a God, that it is probable He has revealed Himself in some way and the Bible is a divine revelation. The point is that procedure is not neutral. Now it is appropriate to address the earlier question concerning whether or not Strong's procedure is correct. In this writer's estimation, the answer must be in the negative and for the following reasons: (a) while God, indeed, has made Himself known through nature and conscience (Romans 1:19-20; 2:14-15), the uniform teaching of Holy Scripture is that mankind does not use it rightly, that is, in order to worship God (Romans 1:21-22). In fact, in and of themselves, all men and women refuse to seek after God (Romans 3:11). Strong's procedure, however, presupposes

that some people do seek after God; that is the logic or reasonableness of his procedure; (b) the pattern displayed in Holy Scripture is not the following:

unbeliever responds to natural revelation → seeks for God → accepts Bible as inspired → becomes a believer

instead, the pattern to be found in the Bible is the following:

unbeliever rebels against God and revelation in any form → Holy Spirit uses God's Word to call to saving Faith → accepts Bible as inspired

Of these two models, the first is rationalistic, rejecting the biblical teaching concerning man's depravity and assigning to man a certain cooperation with God in salvation. The biblical model, however, says:

Prior to man's conversion there are only two efficient causes, namely, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God as the Holy Spirit's instrument whereby he effects conversion. Man should hear this Word, though he cannot give it credence and accept it by his own powers but solely by the grace and operation of God the Holy Spirit.³¹

Luther was correct when he said:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth,³² and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith:

³¹Theodore G. Tappert, ed. & trans., The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 472 ("The Formula of Concord: Epitome").

³²F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau, Trans., Concordia Triglotta (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 545 ("Luther's Small Catechism": The Creed, The Third Article).

Thus, while Holy Scripture teaches that no one seeks after God (Romans 3:11), it also teaches that the Holy Spirit convicts the world through the gospel (John 16:8-11), sanctifies (or sets apart) those whom the Father has chosen with the result that they obey the gospel and Christ's blood cleanses them (1 Peter 1:2) and then assures them that their sins have been forgiven for Christ's sake (Romans 8:1-4, 16). The first point, then, is that Strong's procedure is wrong; (2) The second point is that from a strictly logical stance, the idea that man's intellectual and moral nature requires some kind of revelation from God is invalid. It is quite logical to hold a deistic concept of "God", that is, while there is a God, and He did create the world, He rules only through natural law and does not directly intervene, and therefore, along with this deistic concept of God, to construct one's sense of duty apart from any written revelation from God. Furthermore, it is not fair to argue, as does Strong, that certain ideas such as the Trinity and the atonement are crucial to us yet would be unknown by us apart from some written revelation from God. It is not fair because Strong is bringing his Christian theology as presuppositions into the discussion. Of course, the doctrines of the Trinity and the atonement are crucial to us but it is only the person who accepts the Bible as God's Word who knows this to be true! Therefore it cannot be used to support "reasons a priori for expecting a revelation from

God"; (3) The third point is that Strong himself admits that this type of reasoning produces only "hope" and not "assurance."³³ Why? Because natural revelation does not give a complete picture of God. It may reveal His holiness but not His love. On what basis, then, can Strong reason that humans should be able to expect a revelation from God even before they know whether or not God has, indeed, given a revelation? It seems that the conclusions to which Strong comes are determined by his Christian theology rather than by reason.

Marks of the Revelation Man May Expect

Strong had related these marks to the substance, method and attestation of the revelation. Concerning the substance, Strong said we would expect this revelation from God to confirm and enlarge the knowledge already derived from nature. It seems to this writer that this is an obvious truth. Concerning the method, Strong had established three criteria: (1) continuous historical development; (2) original delivery to a person or nation who would give it to the whole world; and (3) preservation in written form. By way of evaluation, it may be said that while these marks of method may be evident by examining the Bible, they certainly are not evident by looking at nature. This is another example of Strong reading his Christian theology

³³Strong, Systematic Theology, pp. 113-14.

back into the preliminary considerations. Concerning the attestation of this revelation, Strong give four characteristics for the kind of attestation needed, and these characteristics may be summarized in two words: miracles and prophecy.

Miracles as Attesting a Divine Revelation

This section is, perhaps, the most important prelude to an investigation of the change in A. H. Strong's doctrine of Holy Scripture. This is due to two factors: (1) there is a parallel change in his definition of miracle, and (2) the change in his definition of miracle is directly tied to his belief in theistic evolution and "ethical monism."

The definition of miracle

In the 1907 edition of his Systematic Theology, the two definitions--the earlier one reflecting a supernaturalistic understanding along with supporting statements, and the later one reflecting a naturalistic understanding along with supporting statements--are given. The earlier statement defines a miracle in the following way:

A miracle is an event palpable to the senses, produced for a religious purpose by the immediate agency of God; an event therefore which, though not contravening any law of nature, the laws of nature, if fully known, would³⁴ not without this agency of God be competent to explain.

Strong explains six ideas that are inherent in this

³⁴Ibid, p. 117.

definition:

(a) A miracle is not a suspension or violation of natural law; since natural law is in operation at the time of the miracle just as much as before.

(b) A miracle is not a sudden product of natural agencies--a product merely foreseen, by him who appears to work it; it is the effect of a will outside of nature.

(c) A miracle is not an event without a cause; since it has for its cause a direct volition of God.

(d) A miracle is not an irrational or capricious act of God; but an act of wisdom, performed in accordance with the immutable laws of his being, so that in the same circumstances the same course would be again pursued.

(e) A miracle is not contrary to experience; since it is not contrary to experience for a new cause to be followed by a new effect.

(f) A miracle is not a matter of internal experience, like regeneration or illumination; but is an event palpable to the senses, which may serve as an objective proof to all that the worker of³⁵ it is divinely commissioned as a religious teacher.

One might wish to quibble about the first idea. Natural laws may be in operation at the time of the miracle but they are not producing their usual results, and so there is no observable way to determine whether or not certain laws of nature, the ones being affected by a particular miracle, are in operation. The question could be raised concerning Strong's sensitivity over this issue. Perhaps even at this stage, "science" is influencing Strong's thinking.³⁶ In

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶In chapter 3 of this dissertation, an examination of "the works of God" in Strong's earlier theology as reflected in his 1876 Lectures On Theology revealed that Strong rejected the days of creation as being 24 hour days,

contrast, another theologian speaks:

All so-called astronomical systems suggested by men rest upon hypotheses, which are beyond positive proof. Over against the astronomical systems of scientists the Christian theologian must therefore maintain: (a) Scripture never errs, not even in matters of science, John 10,35; 2 Tim. 3,16. (b) Scripture accommodates itself to human conceptions, but never to human errors, since it is always truth, John 17,17. (c) We know so little concerning astronomical data that it is both foolish and unscientific to supplement, correct, or criticize Scripture on the basis of human speculative systems. (d) It is unworthy of our Christian calling to discard the inerrant Word of Scripture in favor of the "assured results" of science falsely so called. Hence in a controversy on this point a Christian must always maintain the divine authority of Scripture. But he must not believe that by convincing an unbeliever of the truth of the Mosaic narrative he may convert him, since conversion is accomplished only through the preaching of the Law and the Gospel.³⁷

Strong gave a number of examples from the Bible to support this definition of miracle: (1) the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11: 38-44) and similar raising "refuse to be classed as events within the realm of nature, in the sense in which the term nature is ordinarily used"; (2) "Our Lord, moreover, seems clearly to exclude such a theory [the very theory Strong himself is going to set forth as "preferable"!] as this, when he says: 'If I by the finger of God cast out demons' (Luke 11:20)"; (3) Christ confronts

accepting instead the pictorial-summary view. That "science" was influencing him even at this early stage of his thinking is also evident in his reason for accepting the direct creation of man's body: not the Bible, but psychology informed and shaped Strong's reasons!

³⁷ John Theodore Mueller, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), p. 183.

the leper and says, "I am willing; be cleansed" (Mark 1:41, New King James Version).³⁸ In all three examples, the miracles were direct interventions by the Son of God, and therefore cannot be described as workings of natural law. But, trying to harmonize science and religion, Strong offers a new definition:

A miracle is an event in nature, so extraordinary in itself and so coinciding with the prophecy or command of a religious teacher or leader, as fully to warrant the conviction, on the part of those who witness it, that God has wrought it with the design of certifying that this teacher or leader has been commissioned by him.³⁹

Following this new definition, Strong gives five reasons for preferring it to the earlier one. The first reason is: "It recognizes the immanence of God and his immediate agency in nature, instead of assuming an anti-

³⁸Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 118.

³⁹Ibid. There is an interesting historical question involved in the change of definitions. In his book, Philosophy and Religion (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1888), Strong reprints an address he gave to the Baptist Pastors' Conference of the State of New York at Binghamton, N.Y. on October 23, 1878 and printed in the Baptist Review of April 1879. In this address, Strong uses the LATER definition! Yet the tone of the address is supernatural and does not appeal to a monistic concept of God. Strong also gave an address on miracles at the Second Conference, held at the Mathewson Methodist Episcopal Church on November 11, 1903. His address was entitled, "The Miracle At Cana: With an Attempt at a Philosophy of Miracles." It should be no surprise that the later definition for miracles was given and defended from an evolutionary and monistic viewpoint. While no certain explanation can be given as to why as early as 1878 Strong would use his later definition of miracle, perhaps he was "thinking out loud," since the article itself does not reveal any tendency to downplay the supernatural element in miracles.

thesis between the laws of nature and the will of God."⁴⁰ By way of response, it may be said that the earlier definition of miracle does not assume an antithesis between the laws of nature and the will of God. It recognizes that ordinarily God exercises His will providentially in and through the uniformity of nature, and so it is possible to speak of the "laws" of nature. If there were no uniformity, there could be no possibility of miracles. Strong's later definition, with its naturalistic character, so blurs the distinction between miracles and the laws of nature that the biblical concept of miracle is lost.

The second reason Strong gives for preferring his later definition of miracle is: "it regards the miracle as simply an extraordinary act of that same God who is already present in all natural operations and who in them is revealing his general plan."⁴¹ This writer's response to such an argument is that it could be given for either definition of miracle. Unless Strong has a hidden agenda which is not obvious in his defense, his second reason has nothing in it to support the later definition rather than the earlier one.

The third reason Strong gives for preferring the later definition is: "it holds that natural law, as the method of God's regular activity, in no way precludes unique exertions of his power when these will best secure his

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

purpose in creation."⁴² Again, this writer's response is that such an argument could be used for either definition. The supernatural understanding and definition of miracle requires natural law to be God's method of regular activity, and what Strong chooses to call "unique exertions of his power" is more carefully described by the concept of miracle: that is, not a higher natural law but a direct divine intervention.

The fourth reason Strong gives for preferring the later definition is: "it leaves it possible that all miracles may have their natural explanations and may hereafter be traced to natural causes, while miracles and their natural causes may be only names for the one and self-same will of God."⁴³ Part of Strong's hidden agenda is now visible. What was slipped into the first reason, that is, "his [God's] immediate agency in nature" is now strengthened. Strong rejects the label pantheist, and he insists his view of God supports his denial of pantheism. But it is things like these in his Systematic Theology that cause others to accuse him of pantheism. On what basis other than pantheism can one teach "the immanence of God and his immediate agency in nature"?⁴⁴ The key is the word "immediate." The biblical view, which believes that God is both

⁴²Ibid., p. 119.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 118.

immanent and transcendent with respect to His creation, teaches that in the beginning God created the world immediately, that is, directly. Since then, He has worked with regularity to accomplish His purpose in the world through indirect means which are commonly called the laws of nature. This is the general rule. The exceptions to the rule are called miracles. These are immediate interventions by God. In this fourth reason there are several more quasi pantheistic indications. The first of these is the suggestion that "all miracles may have their natural explanations." If this suggestion is taken seriously, the very idea of the supernatural would be eliminated--and in the name of miracle! The second of these is Strong's statement: ". . . miracles and their natural causes may be only names for the one and self-same will of God." This statement may be understood in one of two ways. The first is orthodox, believing that everything that happens in the world was foreknown by God and at the very least permitted to occur by His will. If this is what Strong meant, it is strange he offers it only as a suggestion. The second understanding of Strong's statement is quasi pantheism: in some naturalistic sense God is at work in all things. Perhaps the closest to this concept that a nonreligious person comes is when he ascribes certain events to the acts of "Mother Nature."

The fifth reason Strong gives for preferring the later definition of miracle is:

It reconciles the claims of both science and religion: of science, by permitting any possible or probable physical antecedents of the miracle; of religion, by maintaining that these very antecedents together with the miracle itself are to be interpreted as signs of God's special commission to him under whose teaching or leadership the miracle is wrought.⁴⁵

Here the agenda is no longer hidden: the purpose for redefining miracle is to reconcile the claims of both science and religion. Earlier in his 1907 Systematic Theology, Strong laid the foundation for this idea. He said:

Kaftan should have recognized more fully that not simply Scripture, but all knowable truth, is a revelation from God, and that Christ is "the light which lighteth every man" (John 1:9). Revelation is an organic whole, which begins in nature, but finds its climax and key in the historical Christ whom Scripture presents to us.⁴⁶

It should not be surprising that, having blurred the distinction between the supernatural and the natural with respect to miracles, Strong should also blur this distinction with respect to revelation.

In response to Strong's view, two remarks are in order: (1) there is a real harmony, it is true, between God's revelation in Holy Scripture and in nature, but, as was demonstrated earlier in this dissertation,⁴⁷ God's revelation in nature is very limited and is distorted because of man's fall. Since this is true, any revelation of God in nature always must be harmonized with Holy

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 119.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁷page 53 in this dissertation.

Scripture (Note Psalm 19:1-11 where the first six verses describe God's revelation in nature, and verses seven through eleven describe Holy Scripture and its power to transform lives); (2) furthermore, there is a great difference between God's revelation in nature, that is, the facts themselves, and the interpretation of those facts. Since "the world" in its wisdom sets itself in opposition to God's wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:20-21), it is not surprising to find that "the facts" are arranged and interpreted in such a way as to contradict the clear teaching of Holy Scripture. Yet it is the interpretation of facts and not the facts themselves which Strong calls "the claims of science" and wishes to harmonize with the claims of religion.⁴⁸ Strong's belief in evolution and his ethical monism cause him to allow "the claims of science" to interpret the Bible. If this judgment seems harsh, note Strong's comment on Christ's resurrection:

⁴⁸A clear illustration of the difference between facts and their interpretation can be found in the foreword to the book, The Genesis Flood by John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1961). The book rejects the geological ages and teaches a young earth which was changed by a universal flood. The foreword to the book was written by a man who rejects the view of the book! He is John C. McCampell, professor and head of the Geology department at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. Notice what he says: ". . . the skeptical reader . . . will find out that the essential differences between Biblical catastrophism and evolutionary uniformitarianism are not over the factual data of geology but over the interpretations of those data. The interpretation preferred will depend largely upon the background and presuppositions of the individual student." page xvii.

Christ's resurrection may be an illustration of the power of the normal and perfect human spirit to take to itself a proper body, and so may be the type and prophecy of that great change when we too shall lay down our life and take it again. The scientist may yet find that his disbelief is not only disbelief in Christ, but also disbelief in science.⁴⁹

The possibility of miracles

Having defined miracles in such a way that they are only the operation of higher laws of nature, Strong's arguments for the possibility of miracles attempt to illustrate this definition. Of the five considerations Strong discusses, three comments are appropriate: (1) Strong does not like to describe a miracle as a violation or suspension of natural law. This is perfectly consistent with his understanding of a miracle. The criticism of this writer of such a view is that a miracle is no longer a miracle when there is no distinction between the natural and the supernatural, or perhaps, it is better stated that a miracle is no longer a miracle when the supernatural is ruled out of possibility. So, how does Strong describe the relationship of a "miracle" to natural law? He says the lower laws are "counteracted and transcended by the higher," that the lower laws of nature are "merged in the higher, and made to assist in accomplishing purposes to which they are altogether unequal when left to themselves."⁵⁰ One of his illustra-

⁴⁹ Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 120.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 121.

tions is a man holding an axe. He says, "gravitation still operates upon the axe, even while man holds it at the surface of the water--for the axe still has weight."⁵¹ This writer questions the accuracy of saying that the law of gravity in such a case is being merged into a higher law and made to assist. The law of gravity is doing no such thing! If the law of gravity had its way, the axe would fall to the ground; it is only that a higher law is working against the law of gravity that keeps this from happening! (2) when Strong explains his fourth consideration for the possibility of miracles he says, "in other words, if there be a God, and if he be a personal being, miracles are possible. The impossibility of miracles can be maintained only upon principles of atheism or pantheism."⁵² This writer strongly agrees but points out that such a consideration is a better defense for Strong's earlier definition of miracle, rather than his later one; and (3) in his fifth consideration, Strong states:

This possibility of miracles becomes doubly sure to those who see in Christ none other than the immanent God manifested to creatures. The Logos or divine Reason who is the principle of all growth and evolution can make God known only by means of successive new impartations of his energy. Since all progress implies increment, and Christ is the only source of life, the whole history

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 121.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., p. 122.

of creation is a witness to the possibility of miracle.⁵³

In this writer's estimation, to those who view Jesus Christ in the same way Strong views Him, the possibility of miracle, that is, a truly supernatural occurrence, is eliminated, since everything that happens falls under the category of natural law. Does not this understanding of God's relationship to His creation come dangerously close to saying that "God" is a personification of nature? After all, according to this view, Jesus Christ is the Logos or divine Reason who is the principle of all growth and evolution.

The probability of miracles

Earlier in this dissertation, the six points Strong makes to demonstrate the probability of miracles were examined.⁵⁴ It was shown that these six points actually fit into three categories of two points each (category # 1=A+B, category # 2=C+D, and category # 3=E+F). The points in the first category emphasize the uniformity in nature and at the same time stress the idea that exceptions to this uniformity must be acknowledged if miracles are to be considered possible. With these points this writer is in agreement, but it also seems that they argue for the earlier definition of miracle rather than the later one. The points in the

⁵³Ibid., p. 123.

⁵⁴Cf. pages 84-86 in this dissertation.

second category relate nature and morality in the following manner:

Since the inworking of the moral law into the constitution and course of nature shows that nature exists, not for itself, but for the contemplation and use of moral beings, it is probable that the God of nature will produce effects aside from those of natural law, whenever there are sufficiently important moral ends to be served thereby. . . .

The existence of moral disorder consequent upon the free acts of man's will, therefore, changes the presumption against miracles into a presumption in their favor. The non-appearance of miracles, in this case, would be the greatest of wonders.⁵⁵

These two points in the second category do not seem evident and Strong does not attempt to prove them. In this section Strong is attempting to show the probability of miracles, presumably to an unbeliever, since the believer already acknowledges the biblical teaching concerning miracles. But, for example, if one does not believe in the existence of God, how will these points demonstrate the probability of miracles? Is it obvious that "nature exists, not for itself, but for the contemplation and use of moral beings"? Not to one who rejects the existence of God. He very well may believe that there is no order in the universe, that random chance has produced the world in which people live. In such a world, there is neither moral law nor moral disorder. In this writer's thinking, therefore, the points in this second category do not prove the probability of miracles.

⁵⁵ Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 125.

The points in the third category stress the concept that God is a moral being (the ethical aspect of "ethical monism") and then attempt to present God's relationship to the world from a monistic perspective. Strong states:

From the point of view of ethical monism, the probability of miracle becomes even greater. Since God is not merely the intellectual but the moral Reason of the world, the disturbances of the world-order which are due to sin are the matters which most deeply affect him. Christ, the life of the whole system and of humanity as well, must suffer; and, since we have evidence that he is merciful as well as just, it is probable that he will rectify the evil by extraordinary means, when merely ordinary means do not avail.⁵⁶

As supporting evidence for the probability of miracles, the points in the third category fail to achieve their purpose--for two reasons: (1) for the one who does not accept Strong's ethical monism, these points are not true, and (2) even for the one who accepts ethical monism, there is no reason to think that miracles are probable as a result of accepting ethical monism.

The amount of testimony necessary
to prove a miracle

There is nothing in this section that bears directly on the definition of miracle; thus one who holds Strong's earlier definition and one who holds Strong's later definition could accept what he says here. Strong is correct when he argues that to reject the possibility of miracles because one has never experienced a miracle is to beg the ques-

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 126.

tion.⁵⁷ It is an argument based on ignorance: "because I have not experienced a miracle, miracles are impossible."

Evidential force of miracle

Strong says that miracles did not occur with regularity during biblical history but corresponded to the epochs of revelation. Two passages in the Book of Hebrews seem to confirm this view:

God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things. . . .

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:3-4 (New King James Version).

Strong also says that miracles usually do not certify doctrines but the teacher or leader. Thus, Jesus did not perform a miracle each time He taught something new. Tied to this idea is another, that is, miracles do not stand alone but must be accompanied by purity of life on the part of the teacher/leader. Furthermore, Strong says, miracles do not diminish in value with the passage of time. The prime example of a miracle whose testimony is as varied and conclusive as possible is the resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁵⁸ While this writer agrees with these ideas, it

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 127.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 130. A modern illustration of the fact that miracles do not convert people can be found in the book, The Resurrection of Jesus by Pinchas Lapide

needs to be pointed out again that miracles do not convert anyone. Some of those who saw Lazarus raised from the dead went and told the religious leaders about it so that they could plot against Jesus (John 11:45-47). In the case of the rich man in Hades, he wanted the beggar raised from the dead so his brothers who were still alive would see the miracle and believe, but he is told that if they will not believe Holy Scripture ("Moses and the prophets") they will not believe a miracle either (Luke 16:27-31). The Holy Spirit uses the Law to convict of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11) and then uses the Gospel to create faith in the heart (Romans 10:17--notice that the immediate context uses "word" as a preached message--Romans 10:8-16; also notice that the older Greek manuscripts have "Christ" rather than "God" in Romans 10:17--"Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (NASB).

Counterfeit miracles

In this section Strong sets down five statements by which genuine miracles may be distinguished from counterfeit ones. These statements are presented on page 88 of this dissertation. They can be used in a helpful manner by those who accept either the early or the later definition of

(Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983). The author affirms his belief that Jesus was raised from the dead, not surprising for a Christian author. But as a matter of fact, the author is not a Christian but an Orthodox Jewish theologian who affirms the resurrection of Jesus but denies His divinity!

miracle by Strong. Basically, counterfeit miracles may be detected by the outrageous claims made for them or by the ungodly life of the teacher, and usually accompanied by heretical doctrine.⁵⁹

Prophecy as Attesting a Divine Revelation

The first point Strong makes concerns his definition of prophecy:

Prophecy is the foretelling of future events by virtue of direct communication from God--a foretelling, therefore, which, though not contravening any laws of the human mind, those laws, if fully known, would not, without this agency of God, be sufficient to explain.⁶⁰

The parallel between this definition and Strong's earlier definition of miracle is striking. It should be noted also that Strong is not attempting to summarize the full range of biblical teaching on the subject of prophecy; instead, he is limiting his discussion to prophecy as attesting a divine revelation. Given this limitation, this writer believes Strong's definition to be correct. At the same time, however, Strong's definition is undermined by his discussion of prophecy in the small print that follows the definition. Strong says:

As in the case of miracles, our faith in an immanent God, who is none other than the Logos or larger Christ, gives us a point of view from which we may reconcile the contentions of the naturalists and supernaturalists. Prophecy is an immediate act of God; but, since all natural genius is also due to God's energizing, we do

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 132.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 134.

not need to deny the employment of man's natural gifts in prophecy. The instances of telepathy, presentiment, and second sight which the Society for Psychical Research has demonstrated to be facts show that prediction, in the history of divine revelation, may be only an intensification, under the extraordinary impulse of the divine Spirit,⁶¹ of a power that is in some degree latent in all men.

The second point Strong makes concerns the relationship of prophecy to miracles as attestations of revelation. "Miracles," Strong states, "are attestations of revelation proceeding from divine power; prophecy is an attestation proceeding from divine knowledge."⁶² This distinction is helpful, regardless of which definition of miracle is used. The other points in this section on prophecy were mentioned earlier in this chapter⁶³ and do not require further comment.

Principles of Historical Evidence Applicable to the Proof of a Divine Revelation

These principles deal with documents and with testimony and are explained earlier in this chapter.⁶⁴ They are straightforward and do not require an evaluation.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 135.

⁶³ pages 89-91 in this dissertation.

⁶⁴ pages 91-92 in this dissertation.

CHAPTER V

THE PROOFS FOR HOLY SCRIPTURE AS REVELATION

Strong presents four proofs that the Bible is a revelation from God: (1) the genuineness of the Christian documents, (2) the credibility of the biblical writers, (3) the supernatural character of biblical teaching, and (4) historical results of the propagation of biblical teaching. First these proofs will be presented and then they will be evaluated.

Strong's Argumentation

Strong offers the four topics mentioned above as proofs that the Bible is a divine revelation. In this section Strong's presentation will be given in summarized form.

Genuineness of the Christian Documents

By "genuineness" Strong means that "the books of the Old and New Testaments were written at the age to which they are assigned and by the men or class of men to whom they are ascribed."¹ In this section of his Systematic Theology,

¹A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, 8th ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1907), p. 145.

Strong discusses the canonicity of the books of the Bible.²

Genuineness of New Testament Books

Strong makes four points concerning the canonicity of the New Testament books:

A. All the books of the New Testament, with the single exception of 2 Peter, were not only received as genuine, but were used in more or less collected form, in the latter half of the second century. . . .

B. The Christian and Apostolic Fathers who lived in the first half of the second century not only quote from these books and allude to them, but testify that they were written by the apostles themselves. . . .

C. It is to be presumed that this acceptance of the New Testament documents as genuine, on the part of the Fathers of the churches, was for good and sufficient reasons, both internal and external. . . .

D. Rationalistic Theories as to the origin of the gospels.³

²Strong spends at least 25 pages of his Systematic Theology in a detailed argumentation for the inclusion of all 66 books in the canon. It is beyond the purpose of this dissertation to explain all of this material; instead, the major points will be presented, and then later in this chapter, they will be evaluated. Various books written from a conservative perspective are available today. Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible by R. Laird Harris (Grand Rapids: Zonderavan Publishing House, 1957) deals with both Testaments. Survey of Old Testament Introduction by Gleason L. Archer (Chicago: Moody Press, revised 1974) covers the Old Testament books, while New Testament Introduction by Donald Guthrie (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970) covers the New Testament books.

³Strong, Systematic Theology, pp. 146-65. Of course there is much detailed material under each of these points. Concerning the fourth point, Strong presents and evaluates the "myth-theory" of Strauss, the "tendency-theory" of Baur, the "Romance-theory" of Renan and the "Development-theory" of Harnack.

Genuineness of Old Testament Books

Strong develops his defense of the Old Testament books along eight lines: (1) the New Testament quotes or alludes to all but six Old Testament books, (2) Jewish authorities, ancient and modern, testify to the same books in the Old Testament as we now have, (3) the testimony of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament)⁴, (4) indications that soon after the exile and during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the first six books of the Bible were in existence and considered authoritative, (5) the testimony of the Samaritan Pentateuch, (6) the finding of "the book of the law" in the temple in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, (7) references in Hosea and Amos to teaching and revelation "extending far back of their day," and (8) the repeated assertions of Scripture that Moses himself wrote a law for his people.⁵

Credibility of the Scripture Writers

Actually, Strong attempts to prove the credibility only of the gospel writers, because, he says, ". . . if they are credible witnesses, the credibility of the Old Testament, to which they bore testimony, follows as a matter of

⁴Ibid., p. 166. Strong says, "MSS. of the Septuagint contain, indeed, the O. T. Apocrypha, but the writers of the latter do not recognize their own work as on a level with the canonical Scriptures. . . ."

⁵Ibid., pp. 165-72.

course."⁶ He gives six reasons for believing in the credibility of the gospel writers.

They are capable or competent witnesses

By this, Strong means the gospel writers possessed actual knowledge of the events about which they wrote. In defense of these men, Strong argues that they had the opportunity of observing and asking about events, they were men who could not easily be deceived, and their circumstances were such as to make an impression on their minds with respect to the events they witnessed.⁷

They are honest witnesses

Strong argues this point by indicating that they had nothing to gain and much to lose by their testimony, yet they willingly bore witness to what they had seen. Strong couples to this argument the idea that what they wrote reveals a strong reverence for truth, even when this may put themselves in a bad light. The example given is that of Peter's denial of Christ.⁸

The Gospels mutually support each other

Here Strong is referring to his belief that the four Gospels are consistent in their testimony. He defends his belief with four points:

⁶Ibid., p. 172.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 173.

(a) The evangelists are independent witnesses. This is sufficiently shown by the futility of the attempts to prove that any one of them has abridged or transcribed another. (b) The discrepancies between them are none of them irreconcilable with the truth of the recorded facts, but only present those facts in new lights or with additional detail. (c) That these witnesses were friends of Christ does not lessen the value of their united testimony, since they followed Christ only because they were convinced that these facts were true. (d) While one witness to the facts of Christianity might establish its truth, the combined evidence of four witnesses gives us a warrant for faith in the facts of the gospel such as we possess for no other facts in ancient history whatsoever. The same rule would refuse belief in the events recorded in the gospels "would throw doubt on any event in history."

The conformity of the gospel
testimony with experience

Having presented the fact in an earlier chapter¹⁰ that the amount of proof needed for a miracle is no greater than would be needed to prove any unusual but possible event, Strong now argues that in the gospels there is no record of facts contrary to experience but only a record of facts not witnessed in ordinary experience. If the amount of proof is sufficient, and Strong argues that it is, then the gospel testimony should be believed.¹¹

Coincidence of this testimony
with collateral facts

In this section Strong points to three facts: (1)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 127. Cf. pages 86 and 110 in this dissertation.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 173.

the numerous correspondences between the gospel narratives and contemporary history, (2) the failure of every attempt thus far to prove wrong some statement in the gospel narratives by a trustworthy statement in records of corresponding secular history, and (3) the infinite improbability that this detailed harmony should exist if the gospel narratives were fictitious.¹²

Conclusion from these arguments

If the miracles recorded in the gospel narratives really happened, and this is precisely what is at stake in the issue of the gospel writers' credibility, then the doctrine they proclaimed must be accepted as true, also, since God would not accredit with miracles those who were teaching false doctrine.¹³

The Supernatural Character of Biblical Teaching

In this section Strong presents four examples of the supernatural character of scriptural doctrine.

Scriptural teaching in general

Strong argues for the unity of the Bible by saying:

(a) In spite of its variety of authorship and the vast separation of its writers from one another in point of time, there is a unity of subject, spirit, and aim throughout the whole. . . .

(b) Not one moral or religious utterance of all these writers has been contradicted or superseded by the

¹²Ibid., pp. 173-74.

¹³Ibid.

utterances of those who have come later, but all together constitute a consistent system. . . .

(c) Each of these writings, whether early or late, has represented moral and religious ideas greatly in advance of the age in which it has appeared, and these ideas still lead the world. . . .

(d) It is impossible to account for this unity without supposing such a supernatural suggestion and control that the Bible, while in its various parts written by human agents,¹⁴ is yet equally the work of a superhuman intelligence.

From his argument stating the unity of the Bible Strong moves to another argument, namely, that the "one mind that made the Bible is the same mind that made the soul, for the Bible is divinely adapted to the soul."¹⁵ If one were to ask what is meant by the statement that the Bible is "divinely adapted to the soul," Strong would respond with a five-fold answer:

(a) It shows complete acquaintance with the soul. . . .

(b) It judges the soul--contradicting its passions, revealing its guilt, and humbling its pride. . . .

(c) It meets the deepest needs of the soul--by solutions of its problems, disclosures of God's character, presentations of the way of pardon, consolations and promises for life and death. . . .

(d) Yet it is silent upon many questions for which writings of merely human origin seek first to provide solutions. . . .

(e) There are infinite depths and inexhaustible reaches of meaning in Scripture, which difference it from all other books, and which compel us to believe

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 175-76.

¹⁵Ibid.

that its author must be divine.¹⁶

Moral system of the New Testament

In this section Strong argues that the moral or ethical teachings of the New Testament are comprehensive, spiritual and practical, and he spends seven pages of very small print presenting and evaluating various world religions in light of the New Testament.¹⁷

The person and character of Christ

Strong makes two points: (1) the Bible presents Jesus Christ as a person with a divine and a human nature and as one possessing a character of perfect moral excellence. This concept cannot be explained on any other basis than historical reality. After all, no source available to the gospel writers would have presented such a view, nor could the backgrounds of the gospel writers themselves be considered sufficient to enable the writers to present such a view of Jesus Christ; and (2) acceptance of the biblical view of Christ cannot be accounted for apart from the idea that such a person really did exist. If the biblical view of Jesus Christ were false, witnesses could have been brought to testify to that. Since there was no monetary or social benefit but rather the opposite for accepting the

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 176-77.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 177-86.

New Testament view of Christ, there would be no satisfactory explanation for the existence of the early church if the biblical view of Christ were false. It would take the supernatural aid of God to cause people to accept such a view if it were false, but why would God support something false?¹⁸

The testimony of Christ to Himself

There are only three possible explanations for the testimony of Jesus Christ to Himself: (1) He was a deceiver; (2) He was deceived; and (3) He was the One He claimed to be.¹⁹ Of course, Strong rejects the first two possibilities and accepts the third: "If Jesus, then, cannot be charged with either mental or moral unsoundness, his testimony must be true, and he himself must be one with God and the revealer of God to men."²⁰

Historical Results

In this section Strong makes some generalizations about the rapid spread and acceptance of the gospel on the one hand, and about its beneficial effect on those nations and individuals who have been influenced by it. Strong notes that it took only three centuries for Christianity to replace paganism, and he remarks that this is amazing in

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 186-89.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 189-90.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 190.

light of three factors, that is, the scepticism of the civilized people, the prejudice of the common people and the opposition of the government.²¹ Strong also mentions four major factors about the message and the messengers: (1) the preachers of the gospel were, for the most part, unlearned men; (2) the gospel they preached required faith in a Jew; (3) this gospel required people to admit they were sinners; and (4) this gospel claimed to be the only way to God.²²

In the final part of this chapter in his Systematic Theology, Strong contrasts the beneficial effects of the gospel on nations and individuals with the continued corruption in heathen countries. Strong lists seven principles recognized by nations when the influence of the gospel is accepted: (1) the importance of the individual; (2) the law of mutual love; (3) the sacredness of human life; (4) the doctrine of internal holiness; (5) the sanctity of home; (6) monogamy and the religious equality of the sexes; and (7) identification of belief and practice.²³

An Evaluation of Strong's Argumentation

Strong presents four proofs that the Bible is a divine revelation. As these proofs are appraised, it should be kept in mind that Strong had changed his view on the inspiration and authority of the Bible, yet some of the

²¹Ibid., p. 191.

²²Ibid., p. 192.

²³Ibid., p 193.

earlier material was not removed from the final edition of his Systematic Theology but was retained while his later beliefs were interspersed throughout the presentation.

Genuineness of the Christian documents

Three issues will be evaluated in this section: (1) Strong's definition and elaboration of "genuineness"; (2) New Testament canonicity; and (3) dating and authorship of certain Old Testament books.

Strong's definition of "genuineness"

Strong explains what he means by "genuineness" in the heading he uses for this section. He says: "the genuineness of the Christian documents, or proof that the books of the Old and New Testaments were written at the age to which they are assigned and by the men or class of men to whom they are ascribed."²⁴ Having described the term "genuineness" in this manner, it is surprising to read in the small print that follows this heading how Strong develops this description:

Genuineness, in the sense in which we use the term, does not necessarily imply authenticity (that is, truthfulness and authority); . . . Documents may be genuine which are written in whole or in part by persons other than they whose names they bear, provided these persons belong to the same class. The Epistle to the Hebrews, though not written by Paul, is genuine, because it proceeds from one of the apostolic class. The addition of Deut. 34, after Moses' death, does not invalidate the genuineness of the Pentateuch; nor would the theory of a later Isaiah, even if it were established, disprove the genuineness of that prophecy; provided, in both cases,

²⁴Ibid., p. 145.

that the additions were made by men of the prophetic class.²⁵

These remarks by Strong so qualify his definition of "genuineness" that one may conclude properly that several elements, somewhat alien to each other, have been included by Strong, reflecting several historical (that is, earlier and later) layers of his understanding. At the same time it is possible to reach another conclusion: at the time of this final revision of Systematic Theology, Strong desires to affirm both the validity of higher critical methods and the genuineness of the Bible. In the preface to this volume Strong says: "neither evolution nor the higher criticism has any terrors to one who regards them as parts of Christ's creating and educating process."²⁶

Several questions properly may be raised at this point: (1) Is there an inherent contradiction between Strong's initial explanation of "genuineness" and his subsequent remarks? From this writer's perspective it would seem that there is. There is a difference between saying documents may be genuine although their authorship is unknown, as in the case of the Epistle to the Hebrews, since, most scholars believe that its author, if not the Apostle Paul, was a close companion of his (for example, Luke, Barnabas or Priscilla and Aquila) and saying documents may be genuine although the persons whose names are

²⁵Ibid., p. 146.

²⁶Ibid., p. vii.

attached to them are not the true authors, as Strong says. Furthermore, whatever explanation of the authorship of Deuteronomy 34 one chooses in no way weakens the case for the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. It is clear that Jesus Christ accepted its Mosaic authorship (John 5:39-47).

(2) If "genuineness" does not refer to the authenticity (that is, truthfulness and authority) of the documents, what possible meaning can this term possess? Evidently, the answer from Strong's perspective seems to be that "genuineness" means these books properly belong in the biblical canon, since they are written by those who, if not the ones whose names their books bear, nevertheless belong to the prophetic class. Whether one agrees or not that Strong's use of "genuineness" is meaningful, it is clear that his attempt to support the authority of Scripture while at the same time defending the higher critical approaches to that Scripture demonstrates the incompatibility of these two ideas. Arguing for a "later Isaiah" hardly fits the criterion of being "written at the age to which they are assigned."²⁷

New Testament canonicity

For the Christian theologian the question concerning which books properly belong in the New Testament canon is very serious. Since the New Testament itself does not specify which books belong in its canon, any means used to

²⁷Ibid., p. 145.

solve this problem with certainty is placed over the New Testament, destroying the biblical and Reformation principle sola Scriptura. At least three different approaches to this issue are worthy of note: (1) the Roman Catholic approach argues that the Church determined the New Testament canon and concedes that sola Scriptura is an incorrect principle if it means nothing must be allowed to sit in judgment on the Bible²⁸; (2) the approach of some sixteenth century Lutherans makes the distinction of the Ante-Nicene Fathers between the majority of New Testament books (the homologoumena) and the seven New Testament books about which there was some question (the antilegomena, that is, Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, James, Jude, and Revelation).²⁹ LC-MS

²⁸ Chapters II and III in "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" (pp. 114-21 in The Documents of Vatican II, edited by Walter M. Abbot, S.J. New York: The American Press, 1966) make it clear that the Roman Catholic Church still rejects the sola Scriptura principle. "Holy Mother Church, relying on the belief of the apostles, holds that the books of both the Old and New Testament in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself." (pp. 118-19).

²⁹ Cf. Robert D. Preus, The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 1:304-306. Preus himself seems somewhat critical of this approach. He says: "Thus we observe that in its polemic against Rome, in its attempt to maintain that the canon was created by the Spirit of God and not the church, Lutheran theology grossly oversimplifies the problem of the New Testament canon and fails to be faithful to the historical data," pp. 305-306. In another sense, one could say that this approach uses the historical data, but only up to a certain point in time and then draws its conclusions.

theologian Francis Pieper shows that the majority of Lutherans who wrote and taught from 1530 to 1580 had doubts about one or more of the antilegomena, and he argues for the validity of making such a distinction today.³⁰ This approach to the New Testament canon is presented out of a desire to be faithful to the sola Scriptura principle; (3) the approach of Strong argues for the genuineness of all twenty-seven New Testament books on the basis of the testimony of the Ante-Nicene Fathers.³¹

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss in detail all the ramifications related to the issue of New Testament canonicity. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to sketch a series of factors which must be taken into consideration. First of all, the sola Scriptura principle demands that nothing be placed above the Bible itself, and therefore, any information used to determine the New Testament canon must be obtained from Holy Scripture itself. Second, the Lord Jesus Christ made statements during His earthly ministry that indicate a special ministry of the Holy Spirit upon certain disciples of Jesus in which they would be caused to remember what Jesus had said to them

³⁰Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 1:330-32. On the other hand, The Book of Concord quotes from or alludes to passages from all seven disputed NT books for support, even describing Hebrews and Revelation as "Scripture." Cf. the Biblical References Index in the Tappert edition.

³¹Strong, Systematic Theology, pp. 146-55.

(John 14:26); Furthermore, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide His disciples into all truth and would declare to them the things to come (John 16:13). Third, these statements by Jesus seem to find their fulfillment in the message of the apostles. Thus Paul commends the Thessalonians because they did not receive his message as the word of men but as the word of God which is working in them as believers (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Undoubtedly, for the same reason, Paul links Luke 10:7 and Deuteronomy 25:4 together and introduces both quotations with ἡ γραφή, a term used in the New Testament exclusively for Holy Scripture.³² Fourth, the writer of 2 Peter identifies Paul's epistles with this same technical term for Holy Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). Therefore, it does not seem inappropriate to conclude that New Testament books were recognized immediately as part of the canon of Scripture by local congregations and to argue that doubts over canonicity rose later along with regional and doctrinal differences. Fifth, the historical data, while not being made the determining factor, must be considered in trying to understand how the New Testament canon was recognized by Christianity. Those who do not regard the antilegomena as canonical are certainly using historical data to determine what books do or do not belong in the New Testament canon. They differ with

³²Cf. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 166.

other approaches only in that they draw their conclusions before the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397. Sixth, a trust in the providence of God must be utilized in accepting the twenty-seven books in the New Testament canon. On this assumption, a newly discovered epistle of Paul might be recognized as genuine but would not be accepted as canonical.

Higher criticism and
certain OT books

A comparison of this edition (the 8th, printed in 1907) with the previous one (the 7th, printed in 1902) reveals extensive reworking of the material, so that what once produced evidence in favor of the conservative view concerning the dating and authorship of certain Old Testament books now is replaced with material arguing for a moderately critical view. For example, in the earlier edition the testimony of ancient and modern Jewish scholars was used to support the same books that now exist in the OT canon.³³ In the 8th edition, however, this is changed to support the idea that the canon of the Old Testament developed very slowly and was not finalized until after the time of Christ.³⁴ Furthermore, ten detailed arguments favoring the mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch³⁵ are replaced by

³³Augustus Hopkins Strong, Systematic Theology (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1902), p. 80.

³⁴Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 166.

³⁵Strong, Systematic Theology, 1902 ed., pp. 81-82.

material favoring the documentary hypothesis.³⁶

Nevertheless it is possible to find, even in the 8th edition, ideas that reflect a conservative view. Thus, Strong states:

A bright Frenchman described a literary critic as one who rips open the doll to get at the sawdust there is in it. That can be done with a sceptical and hostile spirit, and there can be little doubt that some of the higher critics of the Old Testament have begun their studies with presuppositions against the supernatural, which have vitiated all their conclusions. These presuppositions are often unconscious, but none the less influential. When Bishop Colenso examined the Pentateuch and Joshua, he disclaimed any intention of assailing the miraculous narratives as such; as if he had said: "My dear little fish, you need not fear me; I do not wish to catch you; I only intend to drain the pond in which you live." To many scholars the waters at present seem very low in the hexateuch³⁷ and indeed throughout the whole Old Testament.

Credibility of the Scripture Writers

As was explained earlier in this chapter, Strong does not attempt to demonstrate the credibility of every biblical writer. Instead, he concerns himself with the gospel writers, arguing that if their credibility can be proven, then the Old Testament, to which they are bearing witness, is also shown to be credible. Strong's six proofs for the credibility of the gospel writers are: (1) they are competent witnesses, (2) they are honest witnesses, (3) they support one another, (4) their testimony conforms with human

³⁶Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., pp. 168-69.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 169-70. It is worthy of note that this illustration does not appear in the 1902 edition, demonstrating that Strong's mature thinking was a combination of both conservative and non-conservative ideas.

experience, (5) their testimony coincides with other, "secular" facts, and (6) the conclusion that if the miracles recorded in the gospels actually happened, then the doctrine recorded in the gospels must also be true.³⁸

By way of evaluation, certain questions must be asked. First of all, it is proper to ask whether or not Strong's acceptance of critical methods weakens his "proofs" for the credibility of the gospels. But, it could be pointed out that though Strong argues in principle for the acceptance of critical methods, he actually uses them only in the Old Testament. Thus, it might be concluded that it is not proper to introduce the question of Strong's acceptance of critical methods at this point, since he is here arguing for the credibility of the gospels. In response, it should be noted that Strong himself is tying the credibility of the Old Testament to the credibility of the gospels. Thus, it seems to this writer that this is an appropriate question to ask. If, as Strong thinks, Isaiah did not write all of the book ascribed to him,³⁹ if Moses did not write the Pentateuch (even though Jesus Christ said he did)⁴⁰, and if Daniel and Jonah should be understood as books of drama rather than books describing historical

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 172-75.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 239.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 314-15. Cf. pages 44-45 in this dissertation where Robert M. Grant, professor of NT at the University of Chicago states that Jesus believed in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

events,⁴¹ how can one be certain that the gospels are presenting historical, factual material? Both the credibility of the gospels and the Old Testament books are brought into question by the acceptance of critical methods, methods which Strong himself endorses.

The second question is related to Strong's comments on the conformity of the gospel testimony with experience. On this issue Strong says:

We have already shown that, granting the fact of sin and the need of an attested revelation from God, miracles can furnish no presumption against the testimony of those who record such a revelation, but, as essentially belonging to such a revelation, miracles may be proved by the same kind and degree of evidence as is required in proof of any other extraordinary facts. We may assert, then, that in the New Testament histories there is no record of facts contrary to experience, but only a record of facts not witnessed in ordinary experience--of facts, therefore, in which we may believe,⁴² if the evidence in other respects is sufficient.

Using an approach based on logic and reason, Strong is attempting to build a case for the credibility of miracles, particularly the miracles recorded in the gospels. So he states ". . . miracles may be proved by the same kind and degree of evidence as is required in proof of any other extraordinary facts." The second question which must be asked is this: Since Strong does not explain what he means by "other extraordinary facts," there is no basis for knowing whether he is right or wrong when he says "miracle

⁴¹Ibid., p. 241.

⁴²Ibid., p. 173.

may be proved by the same kind and degree of evidence as is required in proof of any other extraordinary facts." Yet the writer of the Gospel of John says that miracles are recorded in his gospel so that his readers might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, they might have life in His name (John 20:30, 31). Does not the kind and degree of evidence needed to prove something upon which one's salvation depends have to be greater than that for "other extraordinary facts"? It is this writer's view that God first calls one to salvation, and then He uses the objective self-authenticating character of God's Word, by means of the subjective witness of His Holy Spirit, to convince the believer that what God's Word says is true--miracles and all.⁴³

The Supernatural Character of Biblical Teaching

In this section Strong begins with the unity of biblical doctrine. He argues that because God is the author of the Bible, its teaching is not only unified but also "adapted to the soul,"⁴⁴ since this divine Author is also the Creator of man. This brings Strong to the second stage in his four-part presentation: the moral and ethical teachings of the New Testament, in contrast with the ethical

⁴³This view is discussed on pages 93-95 and 174-77 of this dissertation. It is treated at some length in chapter six, under an evaluation of Strong's sixth "proof of inspiration".

⁴⁴Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 176.

teachings of all the other great world religions, are precisely what mankind needs. In the third stage, Strong points to what the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ. He says that the idea of One who has always existed with God the Father as God the Son, who without ceasing to be divine becomes a human being is an idea unthinkable apart from divine revelation. In the fourth stage, Strong focuses his attention on the testimony of Christ to Himself, arguing that such testimony permits only three possibilities: (1) He was a deceiver, (2) He was deceived, or (3) He was the One He claimed to be.⁴⁵

By way of evaluation, the following remarks may be made: (1) while this writer fully accepts the idea that the teaching of the Bible is a unity, and precisely for the reason Strong gives, namely, that God is the author, such a belief and a reason are consistent only with an acceptance of the verbal inspiration and the inerrancy of Holy Scripture, viewpoints that Strong rejects; (2) while Strong, in this section, points to the many differences between Christianity and the other world religions, his belief that Christ is the life of the universe and that Christ is united to the human race in some manner would lead one to argue for just the opposite view;⁴⁶ and (3) the attention which Strong

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 189-90.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 666 where Strong says, "Christ is the great educator of the race. The preincarnate Word exerted an influence upon the consciences of the heathen."

focuses upon the person and character of Jesus Christ is valuable because the biblical material in this area contain clear statements of both law and gospel--of law because the sinless perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ stands in sharp contrast to mankind's failure to keep God's law, and gospel because the character and message of Jesus points to Him as "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6), as "the door" to salvation (John 10:9), as "the good shepherd" who "gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). So, although Strong may intend to use this material only to argue rationalistically that what the biblical material states concerning the person and character of Jesus is so unique that it must be a revelation from God, nonetheless, God's Spirit is able to take this material and use it to call people to saving faith in Christ. Once one becomes a believer, God's Spirit is able to convey certitude concerning the truthfulness of God's Word.

Historical Results

In this section Strong argues that the rapid spread of the gospel and the beneficial effects the gospel has had on those nations and individuals who accepted it proves that the Scriptures are a revelation from God.⁴⁷ By way of evaluation, the following points are in order: (1) the rapid spread of Christianity no more proves that the Scriptures are a revelation from God than does the rapid spread

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 191-95.

of Communism prove that its tenets are true; (2) the popularity of Christianity in the world during the fourth century was caused by the union of church and state, a union which many Christian scholars today believe weakened true Christian faith; and (3) it is possible to see the benefits that Christianity brought with it to various societies as "good" when compared with what those societies already possessed and yet to argue that today there are religious or political viewpoints whose benefits upon society are even greater. So, admitting the beneficial effects of Christianity upon various societies does not necessarily commit one to agreeing that the Scriptures are a revelation from God.

CHAPTER VI

THE INSPIRATION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Strong interacts with five areas which are related to the inspiration of the Bible: (1) the definition of inspiration, (2) the proof of inspiration, (3) the theories of inspiration, (4) the union of divine and human elements in inspiration and (5) objections to the doctrine of inspiration. In this chapter, these areas first will be presented and then evaluated.

Strong's Presentation

In this section of his Systematic Theology, Strong goes to the very heart of the matter: the inspiration of Holy Scripture. On the one hand, he wishes to affirm that Holy Scripture is inspired by God; on the other hand, he is determined to recognize the validity of the historical critical methods, the newer views of the social and natural sciences and the philosophical implications of "ethical monism" for use in the understanding of Holy Scripture. To some, this merely indicates the mediating character of Strong's viewpoint and thus makes him valuable in the contemporary effort to accept both the historical Christian faith while at the same time using the various historical

critical methods for interpreting the Bible. Others will view Strong's approach in these matters either as a purposeful attempt to harmonize what really cannot be harmonized or as an accumulation of material that reflects Strong's earlier conservative viewpoint as well as his later, less conservative views.

The Definition of Inspiration

Strong defines inspiration in the following terms:

Inspiration is that influence of the Spirit of God upon the minds of the Scripture writers which made their writings the record of a progressive divine revelation, sufficient, when taken together and interpreted by the same Spirit who inspired them, to lead every honest inquirer to Christ and to salvation.¹

Following this definition, Strong lists eight points which he believes emphasize the significance of every aspect of his definition:

Notice the significance of each part of this definition: 1. Inspiration is an influence of the Spirit of God. It is not a merely naturalistic phenomenon or psychological vagary, but is rather the effect of the inworking of the personal divine Spirit. 2. Yet inspiration is an influence upon the mind, and not upon the body. God secures his end by awakening man's rational powers, and not by an external or mechanical communication. 3. The writings of inspired men are the record of a revelation. They are not themselves the revelation. 4. The revelation and the record are both progressive. Neither one is complete at the beginning. 5. The Scripture writings must be taken together. Each part must be viewed in connection with what precedes and with what follows. 6. The same Holy Spirit who made the original revelations must interpret to us the record of them, if we are to come to the knowledge of the truth. 7. So used and so interpreted, these writings are sufficient, both in quantity and in quality, for their

¹A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, 8th ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1907), p. 196.

religious purpose. 8. That purpose is, not to furnish us with a model history or with the facts² of science, but to lead us to Christ and to salvation.

Finally, Strong draws three conclusions from his definition of inspiration: (1) "Inspiration is therefore to be defined, not by its method, but by its result." By this, Strong intends to say two things: (a) inspiration includes many "methods" of "kinds and degrees of the Holy Spirit's influence"³ and (b) the "result" is "the putting into permanent and written form of the truth best adapted to man's moral and religious needs"⁴; (2) "inspiration may often include revelation. . . . It may include illumination. . . . Inspiration, however, does not necessarily and always include either revelation or illumination." At this point Strong is merely distinguishing between revelation (which is a direct communication by God to man of truth which man would not otherwise know), illumination (which is that ministry of God's Spirit in the life of a believer whereby the believer is enabled to understand truth that has already been revealed) and inspiration (which is the ministry of God's Spirit upon the Scripture writers securing the transmission into writing of what God wanted written);⁵ (3) while the term "inspiration" may refer to oral utterances or to

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

wisdom for sound leadership, its use in this section will be limited to the writing of Scripture.⁶

The Proof of Inspiration

After giving his definition of inspiration as well as the implications and conclusions to be drawn from this definition, Strong presents six "proofs" for the inspiration of the Bible.

The reasonableness of the idea

Here Strong is attaching his view of inspiration to the preceding material. Having shown to his own satisfaction that God has revealed Himself to man, Strong believes it is reasonable to assume that God would not leave the "publication" of that revelation to chance or misrepresentation. Instead, the same Spirit who gave the revelation originally would also superintend its transmission into writing so that its religious purpose could be accomplished. It seems that Strong is not only discussing inspiration as such, but is including the issues of preservation and translation as well.⁷

The witness of Jesus to the Old Testament

There are two kinds of ideas presented by Strong in this section. First, he says that Jesus has been shown to be a messenger from God, and the testimony of Jesus to the

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 198.

Old Testament is that it is inspired. In support of this statement, Strong cites the formula: "it is written" used by Jesus when referring to the Old Testament. Strong also cites the statements of Jesus that "one jot or one tittle" of it "shall in no wise pass away" and "the Scripture cannot be broken."⁸ In the second place, however, Strong seems to offer evidence that the endorsement by Jesus of the Old Testament was qualified. For example, Strong says that expressions such as "word of God," "wisdom of God" and "oracles of God" probably refer not to Holy Scripture but to the original revelations of God.⁹ Furthermore, Strong says:

Jesus refuses assent to the O. T. law respecting the Sabbath (Mark 2:27 sq.), external defilements (Mark 7:15), divorce (Mark 10:2 sq.). He "came not to destroy but to fulfill" (Mat. 5:17); yet he fulfilled the law by bringing out its inner spirit in his perfect life, rather than by formal and minute obedience to its precepts;¹⁰

The witness of Jesus to the New Testament

Just as in the previous section, Strong presented two statements, the second one severely qualifying the first, so he does here, too. On the one hand, Strong says, "Jesus commissioned his apostles as teachers and gave them promises of a supernatural aid of the Holy Spirit in their teaching, like the promise made to the Old Testament pro-

⁸Ibid., p. 199.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

phets.¹¹ It seems, Strong is saying that Jesus Christ predicted and preauthenticated a work of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles that would aid them in their teaching. On the other hand, he also makes clear the limits of this aid: (1) the guidance of the Holy Spirit is concerned with "all the truth of Christ," not all the truth of science or philosophy; and (2) this includes all truth within this limited sphere, making the Bible the sufficient rule of faith and practice.¹²

The witness of the apostles
to their writings

Strong says, "the apostles claim to have received this promised Spirit, and under his influence to speak with divine authority, putting their writings upon a level with the Old Testament Scriptures."¹³ His development of this point is significant because it ties the authority of the New Testament message to the authority of the Old Testament prophets. He states:

Statements: I Cor. 2:10, 13--"unto us God revealed them through the Spirit. . . . Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth"; 11:23--"I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you"; 12:8, 28--"The λόγος σοφίας was apparently a gift peculiar to the apostles; 14:37, 38--"the things which I write unto you . . . they are the commandment of the Lord"; Gal. 1:12--"neither did I receive it from man, nor was I

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 200.

¹³Ibid.

taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ"; I Thess. 4:2, 8--"ye know what charge we gave you through the Lord Jesus. . . . Therefore he that rejecteth, rejecteth not man, but God, who giveth his Holy Spirit unto you." The following passages put the teaching of the apostles on the same level with O. T. Scripture: I Pet. 1:11, 12--"Spirit of Christ which was in them" [O.T. prophets];--[N.T. preachers] "preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Spirit"; 2 Pet. 1:21--O. T. prophets "spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit"; 3:2--"remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets [O. T.], "and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles" [N. T.]; 16--"wrest [Paul's Epistles], as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." Cf. Ex. 4:14-16, 7:1.¹⁴

It is evident from the above quotation that Strong was not ignorant of the biblical support in favor of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture. His use of 1 Corinthians 2:10, 13; 11:23 and 12:8, 28 indicates this.

The witness of apostolic
authority and sanction

Strong has two separate issues in mind in this section. First, he intends to support the claims of the apostles with miracles and prophecy. The heathen sages were not able to produce such attestation. Second, canonical books in the New Testament whose authorship was uncertain or nonapostolic, nevertheless were considered to be inspired and therefore to have apostolic sanction and authority.¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 201.

The witness of the Spirit
through the Scriptures

Strong comments:

The chief proof of inspiration, however, must always be found in the internal characteristics of the Scriptures themselves, as these are disclosed to the sincere inquirer by the Holy Spirit. The testimony of the Holy Spirit combines with the teaching of the Bible to convince the earnest reader that this teaching is as a whole and in all essentials beyond the power of man to communicate, and that it must therefore have been put into permanent and written form by special inspiration of God.¹⁶

The Theories of Inspiration

In this section, Strong presents four major theories concerning the inspiration of Holy Scripture: (1) the intuition theory, (2) the illumination theory, (3) the dictation theory and (4) the dynamical theory.

The intuition theory

Strong describes this view in the following manner:

This [theory] holds that inspiration is but a higher development of that natural insight into truth which all men possess to some degree; a mode of intelligence in matters of morals and religion which gives rise to sacred books, as a corresponding mode of intelligence in matters of secular truth gives rise to great works of philosophy or art. This mode of intelligence is regarded as the product of man's powers, either without special divine influence or with only the inworking of an impersonal God.¹⁷

Strong makes five comments on this view, four of which are critical: (1) Strong agrees that man does have a certain

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 202.

natural understanding of truth and that inspiration would use that understanding; but (2) in all matters of morals and religion, man's insight is weakened by wrong affections to the point where he is certain to err unless a supernatural wisdom guides him; (3) Strong argues that if natural insight is the sole source of religious truth, the sacred books of the major world religions should agree upon basic ideas. Such, however, is not the case; (4) this theory considers religious truth to be purely subjective, with no reality apart from the opinion of men; and (5) to be consistent, this theory would eliminate the concept of a personal God, since, in this theory man's intelligence seems to be the highest reality.¹⁸

The illumination theory

Strong explains this view as follows:

This regards inspiration as merely an intensifying and elevating of the religious perceptions of the Christian, the same in kind, though greater in degree, with the illumination of every believer by the Holy Spirit. It holds, not that the Bible is, but that it contains, the word of God, and that not the writings, but only the writers, were inspired. The illumination given by the Holy Spirit, however, puts the inspired writer only in full possession of his normal powers, but does not communicate objective truth beyond his ability to discover or understand.¹⁹

Strong's comments on this theory indicate that he rejects it. He says: (1) there is such a thing as illumination

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 203-204.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 204.

from the Holy Spirit, and, perhaps, at times "inspiration amounted only to illumination;"²⁰ (2) however, illumination was not and could not be the ordinary method of inspiration because illumination by its very nature communicates a new understanding of truth already possessed, not new truth itself; (3) Strong criticizes the illumination theory because it does not protect the Scripture writers from serious error. Since his own view of inspiration did not require that Scripture be free from all error, his comments here are noteworthy:

Mere illumination could not secure the Scripture writers from frequent and grievous error. The spiritual perception of the Christian is always rendered to some extent imperfect and deceptive by remaining depravity. The subjective element so predominates in this theory, that no certainty remains even with regard to the trustworthiness of the Scriptures as a whole.

While we admit imperfections of detail in matters not essential to the moral and religious teaching of Scripture, we claim that the Bible furnishes a sufficient guide to Christ and to salvation. The theory we are considering, however, by making the measure of holiness to be the measure of inspiration, renders even the collective testimony of the Scripture writers an uncertain guide to truth.²¹

(4) the illumination theory is indefensible because it intimates that illumination of truth can be given without the impartation of truth itself. Strong argues that God must "first furnish objective truth to be perceived before

²⁰Ibid., p. 206.

²¹Ibid., p. 207.

he can illuminate the mind to perceive the meaning of that truth."²²

The dictation theory

Strong explains this view by saying: "this theory holds that inspiration consisted in such a possession of the minds and bodies of the Scripture writers by the Holy Spirit, that they became passive instruments or amanuences--pens, not penmen, of God."²³ In the very small print following this explanation, but preceding his general comments on this theory, Strong presents material which helps to clarify his understanding of the dictation theory. In this material, Strong notes: (1) the dictation theory goes hand in hand with the understanding that miracles are suspensions or violations of natural law; (2) Isaac Dorner, whom Strong quotes with approval, says that the dictation theory denies the inspiration of the writers while affirming the inspiration of the writings. Dorner labels this view "docetic"; (3) the dictation theory is post-Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin holding a much freer view of inspiration; (4) according to William Sanday, the Jewish rabbi, as well as Philo and Josephus, taught the dictation theory; and (5) verbal inspiration is another name for the dictation theory.²⁴

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., p. 208.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 208-209.

Following this material, Strong makes five comments about the dictation theory, four of which are critical: (1) it is true that there were times when God spoke to man in words and commanded that those words be written; (2) however, the dictation theory insists that this was the usual method of inspiration whereas the Bible does not teach this; (3) the dictation theory cannot account for the human aspects of biblical inspiration. Interestingly, in the very small print under this comment, Strong quotes William Newton Clarke, evidently with approval, as saying: "we are under no obligation to maintain the complete inerrancy of the Scriptures. . . . We have become Christians in spite of differences between the evangelists;"²⁵ (4) it is unclear, if the dictation theory is true, why God would dictate to the Scripture writers what they already know or could discover for themselves; and (5) the dictation theory contradicts the way we know God works in man's soul,²⁶ that is, "the higher and nobler God's communications, the more fully is man in possession and use of his own faculties."²⁷

The dynamical theory

This is the theory which Strong believes to be

²⁵Ibid., p. 210.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 209-210.

²⁷Ibid., p. 210.

correct. He explains it in the following manner:

The true view holds, in opposition to the first of these theories, that inspiration is not simply a natural but also a supernatural fact, and that it is the immediate work of a personal God in the soul of man.

It holds, in opposition to the second, that inspiration belongs, not only to the men who wrote the Scriptures, but to the Scriptures which they wrote, so that these Scriptures, when taken together, constitute a trustworthy and sufficient record of divine revelation.

It holds, in opposition to the third theory, that the Scriptures contain a human as well as a divine element, so that while they present a body of divinely revealed truth, this truth is shaped in human moulds and adapted to ordinary human intelligence.

In short, inspiration is characteristically neither natural, partial, nor mechanical, but supernatural, plenary, and dynamical.²⁸

The only comment Strong makes about this view is rather weak: "although we propose this Dynamical-theory as one which best explains the Scripture facts, we do not regard this or any other theory as of essential importance. No theory of inspiration is necessary to Christian faith."²⁹

The Union of the Divine and Human Elements in Inspiration

Although Strong's explanation of the dynamical theory of inspiration was quite limited, his discussion of the union of the divine and human elements in inspiration is extensive. His development of this theme is conducted under

²⁸Ibid., p. 211.

²⁹Ibid.

eleven headings.

Cooperative production

Under the first heading Strong states: "the Scriptures are the production equally of God and of man, and are therefore never to be regarded as merely human or merely divine."³⁰ Two ideas under this point are worthy of note: (1) the first idea is that the union of the divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ is an appropriate analogy of the "interpretation of human powers by the divine efficiency."³¹ Strong also views the work of God in regeneration and sanctification as analogous to inspiration;³² and (2) the second idea worthy of note is Strong's affirmation of a Lutheran principle that the finite is capable of the infinite or, as in this case, the human mind is capable of the divine. Strong states:

In inspiration the human and the divine elements do unite. The Lutheran maxim, "Mens humana capax divinae," is one of the most important principles of a true theology. "The Lutherans think of humanity as a thing made by God for himself and to receive himself. The Reformed think of the Deity as ever preserving himself from any confusion with the creature. They fear pantheism and idolatry." (Bp. of Salisbury, quoted in Swayne, Our Lord's Knowledge, xx).³³

One may question Strong's application of this principle but

³⁰Ibid., p. 212.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

the fact that he accepts the principle indicates his attempt to be scriptural in his theology rather than to be rationalistic in defense of some theological system.

Internal impartation and reception

Under the second heading Strong says:

This union of the divine and human agencies in inspiration is not to be conceived as one of external impartation and reception. On the other hand, those whom God raised up and providentially qualified to do this work, spoke and wrote the words of God, when inspired, not as from without, but as from within, and that not passively, but in the conscious possession and the most exalted exercise of their own powers of intellect, emotion, and will.

The Holy Spirit does not dwell in man as water in a vessel. We may rather illustrate the experience of the Scripture writers by the experience of the preacher who under the influence of God's Spirit is carried beyond himself, and is conscious of a clearer apprehension of truth and of a greater ability to utter it than belong to his unaided nature, yet knows himself to be no passive vehicle of a divine communication, but to be as never before in possession and exercise of his own powers. The inspiration of the Scripture writers, however, goes far beyond the illumination granted to the preacher, in that it qualifies them to put the truth, without error, into permanent and written form.³⁴

While Strong's purpose for the above remarks is to indicate that divine inspiration is an internal rather than an external work of God in the lives and personalities of the Scripture writers, these remarks also serve to demonstrate Strong's concern to state that somehow it is proper to say the Scripture writers spoke and wrote the words of God.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 212-13.

Personal peculiarities of the writers

Strong states under the third heading:

Inspiration, therefore, did not remove, but rather pressed into its own service, all the personal peculiarities of the writers, together with their defects of culture and literary style. Every imperfection not inconsistent with truth³⁵ in a human composition may exist in inspired Scripture.

Those who believe in verbal inspiration have no problem accepting what Strong is saying under this heading. As a matter of fact, Strong quotes Charles Hodge (who believed in verbal inspiration) as saying: "when God ordains praise out of the mouths of babes, they must speak as babes, or the whole power and beauty of the tribute will be lost."³⁶

Methods of literary composition

Under his fourth heading, Strong states:

In inspiration God may use all right and normal methods of literary composition. As we recognize in literature the proper function of history, poetry, and fiction; of prophecy, parable, and drama; of personification and proverb; of allegory and dogmatic instruction; and even of myth and legend; we cannot deny the possibility that God may use any one of these methods of communicating truth, leaving it to us to determine in³⁷ any single case which of these methods he has adopted.

In the small print, Strong quotes from James Denney in order to explain what is meant by the term "myth" and the role it plays in the Bible:

³⁵Ibid., p. 213.

³⁶Ibid., quoting Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965 reprint), 1:157.

³⁷Ibid., p. 214.

Denney, *Studies in Theology*, 218--"There is a stage in which the whole contents of the mind, as yet incapable of science or history, may be called mythological. And what criticism shows us, in its treatment of the early chapters of Genesis, is that God does not disdain to speak to the mind, nor through it, even when it is at this lowly stage. Even the myth, in which the beginnings of human life, lying beyond human research, are represented to itself by the child-mind of the race, may be made the medium of revelation. . . . But that does not make the first chapter of Genesis science, nor the third chapter history. And what is of authority in these chapters is not the quasi-scientific or quasi-historical form, but the message, which through them comes to the heart, of God's creative wisdom and power."³⁸

Strong continues by quoting Charles Gore who says that a myth is not a falsehood but an idea that is not yet distinguished into history, poetry and philosophy.³⁹ Strong's conclusion is: "so the early part of Genesis may be of the nature of myth in which we cannot distinguish the historical germ, though we do not deny that it exists."⁴⁰ It is clear from the above statements that A. H. Strong made room in his understanding of the doctrine of inspiration for some of the conclusions of the historical-critical methods.

Scriptures given by gradual evolution

Strong states:

The inspiring Spirit has given the Scriptures to the world by a process of gradual evolution. As in communicating the truths of natural science, God has communi-

³⁸ Ibid., quoting James Denney, *Studies in Theology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895), p. 218.

³⁹ Ibid., quoting Charles Gore, "The Holy Spirit and Inspiration" in *Lux Mundi*, ed. Charles Gore (1889), p. 356.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

cated the truths of religion by successive steps, germinally at first, more fully as men have been able to comprehend them. The education of the race is analogous to the education of the child. First came pictures, object-lessons, external rites, predictions; then the key to these in Christ, and their didactic exposition in the Epistles.⁴¹

It is possible that Strong merely wishes to affirm the progressive character of divine revelation. There is evidence for this understanding in the small print which follows his main point.⁴² That it should be stated by Strong as "a process of gradual evolution," however, is no accident. It is this writer's belief that Strong uses this occasion to restate his monistic view of God's relationship to mankind. That is why Strong can say in the same small print mentioned above: "whatever of true or of good is found in human history has come from God."⁴³

Inerrancy limited to
Scripture's essential purpose

Under this sixth heading Strong explains:

Inspiration did not guarantee inerrancy in things not essential to the main purpose of Scripture. Inspiration went no further than to secure a trustworthy transmission by the sacred writers of the truth they were commissioned to deliver. It was not omniscience. It was a bestowal of various kinds and degrees of

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 214-15.

⁴²For example, Strong refers to the woman's seed bruising the head of the serpent as "but faint glimmerings of the dawn." Also, he points the reader to one of James Orr's books which deals with the progressive character of divine revelation. Cf. Ibid., p. 215.

⁴³Ibid.

knowledge and aid, according to need; sometimes suggesting new truth, sometimes presiding over the collection of preexisting material and guarding from essential error in the final elaboration.⁴⁴

In the small print following his main point, Strong explains:

Personal defects do not invalidate an ambassador, though they may hinder the reception of his message. So with the apostles' ignorance of the time of Christ's second coming. It was only gradually that they came to understand Christian doctrines; they did not teach the truth all at once; their final utterances supplemented and completed the earlier; and all together furnished only that measure of knowledge which God saw needful for the moral and religious teaching of mankind.⁴⁵

It is not clear whether or not Strong is saying that the early views of Christ's return, held by the apostles and recorded in Scripture, were actually wrong and that their later writings are needed to correct them.

Ordinarily, God did not give the writers words

For his seventh main point in the discussion of divine and human elements in inspiration, Strong states:

Inspiration did not always, or even generally, involve a direct communication to the Scripture writers of the words they wrote. Thought is possible without words, and in the order of nature precedes words. The Scripture writers appear to have been so influenced by the Holy Spirit that they perceived and felt even the new truths they were to publish, as discoveries of their own minds, and were left to the action of their own minds in the expression of these truths, with the single exception that they were supernaturally held back from

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

the selection of wrong words, and when needful were provided with right ones. Inspiration is therefore not verbal,⁴⁶ while yet we claim that no form of words which taken in its connections would⁴⁷ teach essential error has been admitted into Scripture.

In small print following the main point, Strong includes Luther and Calvin among those "who admit the errancy of Scripture writers as to some matters unessential to their moral and spiritual teaching."⁴⁸

⁴⁶These words were not underlined by Strong but by this writer to point out that in all previous editions Strong had said "inspiration is therefore verbal as to its result, but not verbal as to its method." See chapter three of this dissertation, pages 67-68 for a discussion of this change.

⁴⁷Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 216.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 217. While many scholars have argued that Luther and Calvin rejected the total inerrancy of Holy Scripture, for example, The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible by Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKin (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), pp. 75-116, others have pointed out that this view treats the writings of Calvin and Luther selectively, noting only those statements which favor its view. According to these scholars, Luther and Calvin believed and taught the total inerrancy of Holy Scripture. See Biblical Authority by John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), pp. 49-67, "Luther and the Bible" by J. Theodore Mueller, and "Calvin and the Holy Scriptures" by Kenneth S. Kantzer in Inspiration and Interpretation, edited by John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), pp. 87-155. Other scholarly materials defending Luther's & Calvin's belief in total inerrancy are: "Lessons from Luther on the Inerrancy of Holy Writ" by John Warwick Montgomery and "Calvin's View of Scripture" by J. I. Packer in God's Inerrant Word, edited by John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), pp. 63-114; and "Luther and Biblical Infallibility" by Robert D. Preus and "John Calvin and the Inerrancy of Holy Scripture" by James I. Packer in Inerrancy and the Church, edited by John D. Hannah (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), pp. 99-188. The classic work defending Luther's belief in total inerrancy is Luther and the Scriptures by M. Reu (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1944 and reprinted in 1980 as part of the Concordia Heritage Series by Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis).

Inspiration constitutes
Scripture an organic whole

Strong states:

Since the Bible is in all its parts the work of God, each part is to be judged, not by itself alone, but in its connection with every other part. The Scriptures are not to be interpreted as so many merely human productions by different authors, but as also the work of one divine mind. Seemingly trivial things are to be explained from their connection with the whole. One history is to be built from the several accounts of the life of Christ. One doctrine must supplement another. The Old Testament is part of a progressive system, whose culmination and key are to be found in the New. The central subject and thought which binds all parts of the Bible together, and in the light of which they are to be interpreted, is the person and work of Jesus Christ.⁴⁹

This eighth major point by Strong is rooted in the conservative side of his theology, because it emphasizes the unity of the Bible, a unity which somehow includes even the "seemingly trivial things." Yet in the small print following this point, Strong criticizes those who do not accept the unity of Holy Scripture for having "an insufficient recognition of the principle of evolution in Old Testament history and doctrine."⁵⁰

The Bible is a safe and
sufficient guide to salvation

Strong's ninth major point is built upon his earlier ones. Strong states:

When the unity of the Scripture is fully realized, the Bible, in spite of imperfections in matters non-essential to its religious purpose, furnishes a safe and sufficient guide to truth and to salvation.

⁴⁹ Strong, Systematic Theology, p. 217.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The recognition of the Holy Spirit's agency makes it rational and natural to believe in the organic unity of Scripture. When the earlier parts are taken in connection with the later, and when each part is interpreted by the whole, most of the difficulties connected with inspiration disappear. Taken together, with Christ as its culmination and explanation, the Bible⁵¹ furnishes the Christian rule of faith and practice.

It is clear Strong wishes to teach that the Bible is authoritative, and that he wants to tie this authority to the Holy Spirit's agency (inspiration). At the same time, since he rejects verbal inspiration, he is not able to argue that the words of Holy Scripture are authoritative. Instead, it is the "organic unity" of the Bible, "with Christ as its culmination and explanation." Strong does not make clear whether he means that passages in Holy Scripture should be interpreted christologically, a procedure endorsed by the Lord Jesus Himself (Luke 24:25-27, 44-45) or whether Strong is referring to something subjective, "the spirit of Christ," by which, he is advocating, Scripture should be interpreted. If this latter possibility seems remote to the reader, special note should be taken of Strong's tenth major point.

Christ Himself is the only
ultimate authority

Strong has much to say under this tenth major heading:

⁵¹Ibid., p. 218.

While inspiration constitutes Scripture an authority more trustworthy than are individual reason or the creeds of the church, the only ultimate authority is Christ himself.

Christ has not so constructed Scripture as to dispense with his personal presence and teaching by his Spirit. The Scripture is the imperfect mirror of Christ. It is defective, yet it reflects him and leads to him. Authority resides not in it, but in him, and his Spirit enables the individual Christian and the collective church progressively to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, and so to perceive the truth as it is in Jesus. In thus judging Scripture and interpreting Scripture, we are not rationalists, but rather are believers in him who promised to be with us always even unto the end of the world and to lead us by his Spirit into all the truth.⁵²

This material is found in the large print. In the small print, Strong elaborates on his comments:

Authority is the right to impose beliefs or to command obedience. The only ultimate authority is God, for he is truth, justice and love. But he can impose beliefs and command obedience only as he is known. Authority belongs therefore only to God revealed, and because Christ is God revealed he can say: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and earth" (Mat. 28:18). The final authority in religion is Jesus Christ. Every one of his revelations of God is authoritative. Both nature and human nature are such revelations. He exercises his authority through delegated and subordinate authorities, such as parents and civil government. These rightfully claim obedience so long as they hold to their respective spheres and recognize their relation of dependence upon him. "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1), even though they are imperfect manifestations of his wisdom and righteousness. The decisions of the Supreme Court are authoritative even though the judges are fallible and come short of establishing absolute justice. Authority is not infallibility, in the government either of the family or of the state.

The church of the middle ages was regarded as possessed of absolute authority. But the Protestant

⁵²Ibid., p. 219.

Reformation showed how vain were these pretensions. The church is an authority only as it recognizes and expresses the supreme authority of Christ. The Reformers felt the need of some external⁵³ authority in place of the church. They substituted the Scripture. The phrase "the word of God" which designates the truth orally uttered or affecting the minds of men, came to signify only a book. Supreme authority was ascribed to it. It often usurped the place of Christ. While we vindicate the proper authority of Scripture, we would show that its authority is not immediate and absolute, but mediate and relative, through human and imperfect records, and needing a supplementary and divine teaching to interpret them. The authority of Scripture is not apart from Christ or above Christ, but only in subordination to him and to his Spirit. He who inspired Scripture must enable us to interpret Scripture. This is not a doctrine of rationalism, for it holds to man's absolute dependence upon the enlightening Spirit of Christ. It is not a doctrine of mysticism, for it holds that Christ teaches us only by opening to us the meaning of his past revelations. We do not expect any new worlds in our astronomy, nor do we expect any new Scriptures in our theology. But we do expect that the same Christ who gave the Scriptures will give us new insight into their meaning and will⁵⁴ enable us to make new applications of their teachings.

In his ninth point, Strong emphasized the unity of Scriptural teaching on essential Christian doctrine. How one might distinguish this essential doctrine from nonessential doctrine is not explained by Strong until the tenth point: the Spirit of Christ evidently whispers into the believer's ear, since Strong purposefully makes this Spirit's ministry, rather than the Scriptures themselves, the ultimate religious authority. It should be noted that Strong's concept

⁵³The underlining of this word for emphasis is not found in the quotation by Strong but is added by this writer to alert the readers to Strong's clearly subjective basis of authority.

⁵⁴Strong, Systematic Theology, pp. 219-20.

is grounded in the idea that God works directly, apart from means.

Three principles and three quotations

Under the remaining two major headings Strong gives three principles and three quotations. He states:

Principles: (a) The human mind can be inhabited and energized by God while yet attaining its own highest intelligence and freedom. (b) The Scriptures being the work of the one God, as well as of the men in whom God moved and dwelt, constitute an articulated and organic unity. (c) The unity and authority of Scripture as a whole are entirely consistent with its gradual evolution and with great imperfection in its non-essential parts.

Questions: (a) Is any part of Scripture uninspired? Answer: Every part of Scripture is inspired in its connection and relation with every other part. (b) Are there degrees of inspiration? Answer: There are degrees of value, but not of inspiration. Each part in its connection with the rest is made completely true, and completeness has no degrees. (c) How may we know what parts are of most value and what is the teaching of the whole? Answer: The same Spirit of Christ who inspired the Bible is promised to take of the things of Christ, and, by showing them⁵⁵ to us, to lead us progressively into all the truth.

Under these final two headings, therefore, is actually a summarization of Strong's thinking about the authority of the Bible as this authority is related to the inspiration and interpretation of the Bible.

Objections to inspiration

Strong responds to ten objections to the doctrine of inspiration. In this section, Strong's response to each of

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 220-21.

these objections will be summarized. The value of this summary is that Strong's own position will become clear as he responds to these objections.

Errors in matters of science

On the one hand, Strong argues in response to this first objection that no such errors have been found. What are usually pointed to as errors of science are really phenomenal statements, that is, statements in popular, nontechnical language, describing events as they appear to the human eye. On the other hand, Strong argues that it would not affect his view of inspiration if, in fact, errors of science could be demonstrated in the Bible.⁵⁶

Errors in matters of history

Strong responds to those who charge there are errors in matters of history in the Bible by making four points: (1) some examples of so-called errors actually are mistakes in transcription, and unless it can be shown that these mistakes are in the original manuscripts, they have no bearing on inspiration, since inspiration applies only to the original writers and not the copyists of Holy Scripture; (2) other examples are nothing more than the permissible use of round numbers; (3) still other examples are diverse accounts of the same event, but because we do not possess a complete account of the event, there might be some fact,

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 223-26.

now unrecorded, that would reconcile the seeming discrepancies; (4) although errors in historical matters might yet be found in Scripture, they would not disturb the fact of its inspiration, since, in Strong's view of inspiration, total inerrancy is not guaranteed.⁵⁷

Errors in morality

Strong gives five points worthy of consideration in his response to this objection: (1) some so-called examples of errors in morality are nothing more than the setting down in writing of what happened with no endorsement of specific acts or deeds; (2) some examples are given to endorse an accompanying attitude or virtue but not the wrong act; Strong cites Rahab as an example of such, where her faith, not her lying, is commended in Scripture (Hebrews 11:31); (3) some examples fall short of a fully developed morality in the Bible but since revelation is progressive in character, this should not be surprising; thus, we should not judge those passages by the light of a more fully developed standard of morality; (4) in other examples, God has the sovereign right to do what He will with those whom He has created; (5) still other examples of so-called errors in morality are due actually to the misunderstanding of the interpreter, rather than to any so-called error in the biblical text.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 226-29.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 230-32.

Errors of reasoning

In this section Strong presents four arguments in response to the charge of errors of reasoning in the Bible: (1) often what are taken to be errors of reasoning are valid arguments that are expressed in condensed form; (2) the reason some passages do not appear to be logical may be due to the interpreter's ignorance of divine logic rather than to a problem in the text; (3) the Jewish methods of reasoning, where they could be proved, would not be sanctioned wholesale but in those particular instances; (4) if erroneous Rabbinical methods were used in the Bible, the truth being presented could be distinguished from the methods used to present it, and inspiration would guarantee only the religious truth involved.⁵⁹

Errors of Old Testament quotation or interpretation in the New Testament

Strong responds to this objection with four points: (1) what is thought to be an error of quotation or interpretation often is the interpretation of the same Spirit who inspired it; (2) when the Septuagint is quoted, it may indicate that at least part of the meaning of the original manuscript is conveyed by this translation; (3) the freedom the Holy Spirit takes in His interpretation of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament does not give interpreters today a license to take the same kind of freedom when

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 232-33.

considering other passages of Holy Scripture; (4) while there is no admission that New Testament writers misquoted or misinterpreted Old Testament passages, even if such could be proved, it would not invalidate the theory of inspiration being proposed, since only truth sufficient for the moral and religious needs of mankind is guaranteed.⁶⁰

Errors in prophecy

To the person who objects to the inspiration of the Bible on the basis of errors in prophecy, Strong has four points to make: (1) what some consider to be errors in prophecy may be prophecy as yet unfulfilled; (2) the thoughts of the prophet concerning the meaning of his prophecy may have been uninspired and incorrect, while at the same time the prophecy itself could be inspired and correct; (3) some prophecies are more clearly understood in light of later prophecies or in light of the total teaching of the Bible; (4) since prophecy is a "rough general sketch of the future"⁶¹ presented in figurative language, it is quite probable that error, if any, is to be found in our interpretation rather than in the prophecy itself.⁶²

Certain books do not belong in the canon

Strong responds to this charge saying: (1) this

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 234-35.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 236.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 235-36.

objection is based upon a misunderstanding of the aim and method of certain biblical books; (2) the testimony of church history and Christian experience in general is against those who raise this objection; (3) material from such accused books in the Bible argue against this objection.⁶³

Parts of the Bible written
by someone other than
the stated author

To this charge, Strong has three answers: (1) in the case of biblical books which contain material from pre-existing sources, inspiration preserved those who compiled the canonical material from including "inadequate or improper material;"⁶⁴ (2) in the case of additions of later material to biblical books (as in the closing chapter of Deuteronomy where the death of Moses is recorded), Strong argues that the additions are inspired; (3) certain material (such as the letter of Claudius Lysias in Acts 23:26-30) is included by inspiration in the biblical books without passing judgment on its truthfulness. This is a commonly accepted practice and does not argue against inspiration.⁶⁵

Sceptical or fictitious narratives

To this charge that certain accounts in books of the

⁶³Ibid., pp. 236-38.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 238.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 238-40.

Bible are not worthy of a person's admiration, Strong gives a three-pointed reply: (1) some descriptions of a person's experience are not given for the reader's imitation but rather for his admonition; (2) the words of the devil may be quoted in the Bible but this only means that inspiration guarantees that the devil actually said them, not that a reader should admire or obey them; (3) even when it is difficult to distinguish from the context whether or not God intends for the reader to admire and obey certain things, rather than arguing against inspiration, it testifies in favor of inspiration because the lessons to be learned are clear enough.⁶⁶

Acknowledgement of the
non-inspiration of Scripture
teachers and their writings

In this section, Strong presents the two Scriptural passages upon which this objection is based, and then he explains them in such a way that they are not valid objections to the inspiration of the Bible: (1) the first passage is Acts 23:5 where Paul says that he was not aware of the high priest's identity when he spoke against him. Strong says that Paul was either using irony to justify his harsh words (for example, "I would not recognize such a man as high priest") or Paul actually was unaware of the identity of this man. Such ignorance would not affect his canonical writings; (2) the other passage is 1 Corinthians 7:10, 12

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 240-42.

where Paul distinguishes his teaching from that of the Lord. Strong explains that the contrast here is not between the apostle inspired and the apostle uninspired but between the apostle's words and the actual saying of Christ during His earthly ministry. Strong paraphrases this contrast: "with regard to this matter no express command was given by Christ before his ascension. As one inspired by Christ, however, I give you my command."⁶⁷

An Evaluation of Strong's Presentation

In this section, the five major issues raised by Strong--the definition of inspiration, proof of inspiration, theories of inspiration, the union of the divine and human elements in inspiration, and objections to the doctrine of inspiration--will be evaluated. As this evaluation proceeds, the model which this writer considers to be correct will become clear. An examination of key New Testament passages on inspiration also will be conducted. In this way what is helpful in Strong's views will be demonstrated and what is in error will be corrected.

The Definition of Inspiration

Strong's initial definition of inspiration stressed the objective character of the Bible as "an infallible and sufficient rule of faith and practice."⁶⁸ In his final

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 242.

⁶⁸ A. H. Strong, Lectures on Theology (Rochester: E. R. Anderews, 1876), p. 50.

revision (31 years later), Strong's definition of inspiration stresses the functional character of the Bible, that is, "to lead every honest inquirer to Christ and to salvation."⁶⁹ Furthermore, the basis of authority, which originally was Holy Scripture itself, is changed to something subjective in the life of the believer, that is, the Spirit. The liberal theologian, William Adams Brown, noted this shift and explained its implications:

It is not necessary to comment at length upon the significance of these changes. They are far-reaching in importance, involving the entire shifting of the basis of authority from an external and dogmatic basis to one which is spiritual and inherent. It is the more to be regretted that the insight so clearly expressed in the passages cited should not have been allowed to determine the treatment in other parts of the volume. Had this been done we cannot help believing that structural changes would have taken place more radical than any which we have discovered in our survey. Two such changes we may be allowed briefly to suggest in closing. The first has to do with the place of the religious experience itself as a source of theology; the second, with the vexed question of the significance of the historical element in revelation, or, in other words, the relation of the immanent Christ to Jesus of Nazareth.⁷⁰

The Proof of Inspiration

Strong begins his presentation of the "proofs" of

⁶⁹Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 196. See pages 66-68 of this dissertation for another comparison of Strong's early and later definitions of biblical inspiration.

⁷⁰William Adams Brown, "Recent Treatises on Systematic Theology," The American Journal of Theology, 12 (1908):154. See page eight of this dissertation, footnote #20 for the reference where Kenneth Cauthen describes Brown as "liberalism's most eminent teacher."

inspiration with a logical assumption: that the God who revealed Himself would not allow the publication of that revelation to be distorted. By way of evaluation, two comments are in order: (1) it must be pointed out that Strong is distinguishing between divine revelation and Holy Scripture which he views as a record of that revelation. This is clear from his statement: "the phrases 'word of God' (John 10:35; Mark 7:13), 'wisdom of God' (Luke 11:49) and 'oracles of God' (Romans. 3:2) probably designate the original revelations of God and not the record of these in Scripture."⁷¹ (2) What Strong believes is necessary is that "the same Spirit who originally communicated the truth will preside over its publication, so far as is needed to accomplish its religious purpose."⁷² One wonders why he raises this issue here since it is related to the nature of inspiration rather than to proof for inspiration.

The "proof" of inspiration that Strong advances with respect to Christ's witness to the Old Testament is of questionable value. On the one hand he correctly summarizes the attitude of our Lord:

Jesus, who has been proved to be not only a credible witness, but a messenger from God, vouches for the inspiration of the Old Testament, by quoting it with the formula: "It is written", by declaring that "one jot or one tittle" of it "shall in no⁷³wise pass away," and that "Scripture cannot be broken."

⁷¹Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 199.

⁷²Ibid., p. 198.

⁷³Ibid., p. 199.

On the other hand, he qualifies his summarization by making a distinction between the Word of God, which he views as divine revelation, and the Bible, which he sees as a record of this revelation and by saying that "Jesus refuses assent to the O.T. law . . . ; yet he fulfilled the law by bringing out its inner spirit in his perfect life, rather than by formal and minute obedience to its precepts."⁷⁴ This same problem is found also in Strong's treatment of Christ's witness to the New Testament. On the one hand he says the Lord Jesus promised His disciples supernatural help from the Spirit in their teaching, yet he qualifies this "help" by limiting it to religious ideas.⁷⁵ While granting that this "help" from the Spirit makes the New Testament, as well as the Old, a sufficient rule of faith and practice, Strong does not, in this place, explain how religious ideas are to be distinguished from philosophy or science.⁷⁶

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 199-200.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 200. There are other places where Strong does state some of the things he specifically accepts or rejects in the Bible. For example, in a book written after his retirement as seminary president and professor of theology, he said: "I do not undervalue the historical method, when it is kept free from this agnostic presupposition that only man is the author of Scripture. This method has given us some information as to the authorship of the sacred books, and it has in some degree helped in their interpretation. I am free to acknowledge my own obligation to it. I grant the composite documentary view of the Pentateuch and of its age-long days of creation, while I still hold to its substantially Mosaic authorship. . . . I grant that there may be more than one Isaiah, while yet I see in the later Isaiah a continuance of the divine revelation given through the earlier. Any honest Christian, I

When Strong discusses the witness of the apostles to their writings, he makes it clear that inspiration extends to the very words, surprising because this is not his view of inspiration. Nevertheless, Strong says:

We have not only direct statements that both the matter and the form of their teaching were supervised by the Holy Spirit, but we have indirect evidence that this was the case in the tone of authority which pervades their addresses and epistles.

Note well his statement that "both the matter and the form" of the apostles' teaching "were supervised by the Holy Spirit." That Strong did not allow this understanding of inspiration to guide his thinking in this area of theology is truly regrettable.

The final "proof" presented by Strong for the inspiration of the Bible is the internal witness of the Holy Spirit to the believer through the self-authenticating

would say, has the right to interpret Jonah and Daniel as allegories, rather than as histories. . . . In short, I take the historical method as my servant and not my master; as partially but not wholly revealing the truth; as showing me, not how man made the Scripture for himself, but how God made the Scripture through the imperfect agency of man." A Tour of the Missions by Augustus Hopkins Strong (Philadelphia: The Griffith and Rowland Press, 1918), pp. 186-87. In an unpublished address before a group of ministers in 1893, Strong said: "How much imperfection may there be in Scripture? Just as much as is consistent with its teaching all needed moral and religious truth. The human element may extend to slight errors that do not affect the moral and religious teaching, and the facts that are themselves doctrines such as incarnation and resurrection. But minutiae of historical detail, such as two or one blind man, may be imperfect." Address Before the Minister's Conference, Rochester (NY), October 2, 1893, p. 3 of typed copy.

⁷⁷ Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 200.

character of Holy Scripture itself.⁷⁸ In this writer's estimation, this subject towers above all the other so-called proofs. Not only is Strong correct in setting this proof forth, but if he had permitted its truth to permeate his whole system of theology, the result would have been a textbook of theology that was more biblical in its viewpoint and more effective in stemming the tide of unbelief in his own church body.⁷⁹ Dr. Gottfried Wachler, in his article, "The Authority of Holy Scripture" summarizes the importance and the implications of the Spirit's witness through Holy Scripture itself. He states:

The divine authority of the Bible cannot be proved to anyone from the outside, whether by pointing to its age, its spread, the confirmation of its accounts through excavations, and the like, or by resorting to rational proof. It is, indeed, an apologetic task (that is not unimportant) to refute the arguments against the truth of Scripture, especially in the area of history, by means of counter arguments. But in this way it can only be demonstrated to be humanly credible but not to be the Word of God. Nor will an unbeliever be moved to acknowledge Scripture's divine authority on the basis of what Scripture says about of itself, that is, by means of a doctrine of its inspiration and divine character. He will not accept statements from Scripture as proof, since he first wants proof that Scripture is the truth. However, when the Holy Spirit opens the human heart by means of what Scriptures says to it in Law and Gospel, Scripture authenticates itself as the Word of God to that person. The Scriptural Word of God works within man as a fire, as a hammer, as a sword (Heb. 4:12; Jer. 23:29). But one who has experienced the effect of a hammer and a sword needs no further proof that the

⁷⁸ See page 146 of this dissertation for a detailed statement by Strong of this proof. It may also be found on page 201 of his Systematic Theology.

⁷⁹ Cf. page ix in the preface to his Systematic Theology. Strong hoped it would help stem the tide of unbelief.

hammer is a hammer and the sword is a sword.⁸⁰

The point being made is that only a believer in Christ can possess with certainty confidence that the Bible is God's Word.⁸¹ Reflection on this point produces two ideas: (1) the initial need of a person is not to be convinced that the Bible is God's Word; the initial need is the new birth. Many people who are involved in the cults believe that the Bible is God's Word, yet they fail to understand the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus, Himself, condemned the religious leaders of His day for the same reason. He told them: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life." (John 5:39-40, NASB; (2) after the new birth, the person is convinced by the way in which God's Spirit used the Scriptures as Law and Gospel to bring him to saving faith that the Bible is, indeed, the Word of God. And, Wachler argues, this confidence applies to the Bible in its totality. He says:

If Jesus Himself has struck my heart through His very Words, how could I question the genuineness, truth, and obligatory character of those very words that do not so directly touch me personally today? When His Word has laid hold of me, how could I simply ignore His testimony concerning the authority of the Old Testament? Never! The situation is, rather, like this: If by faith I have

⁸⁰Gottfried Wachler, "The Authority of Holy Scripture" trans. by H. J. A. Bouman, Concordia Journal, September 1984, p. 171.

⁸¹See pages 94 and 112 in this dissertation for this writer's presentation of the same point.

come to know at one place that the claim of the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures is true, then this confirms for me this claim in its totality,⁸² and not only in one part. Trust cannot be subdivided!

The Theories of Inspiration

While Strong presented four theories of biblical inspiration, only two of these theories require evaluation, since the intuition and illumination theories do not attempt to consider seriously the biblical data in the formulation of their respective viewpoints.

The dictation theory

Under this heading Strong classifies the verbal inspiration view.⁸³ The two theories, however, are not the same. And Strong himself knew that! The theories are not the same because while the dictation theory does not permit the personality or style of the individual biblical writer to be expressed, the verbal inspiration view does. Furthermore, the theories are not the same because while the dictation theory attempts to explain the process of inspiration, the verbal inspiration view attempts to explain the product (or end result) of inspiration. Strong himself had admitted this distinction in the first seven editions of his

⁸²Wachler, p. 172.

⁸³On pages 149-50 of this dissertation a summary of Strong's treatment of the dictation theory is given.

Systematic Theology, saying: "inspiration is therefore verbal as to its result, but not verbal as to its method."⁸⁴

In the eighth edition, this statement is changed to read: "inspiration is therefore not verbal, while yet we claim that no form of words which taken in its connections would teach essential error has been admitted into Scripture."⁸⁵

One of Strong's criticisms of this theory is that it "naturally connects itself with that view of miracles which regards them as suspensions or violations of natural law."⁸⁶ This point is important because Strong correctly recognizes that one's definition of miracles is related to one's understanding of biblical inspiration. Unfortunately, Strong's definition of miracle had, under the influence of ethical monism, changed.⁸⁷ The change of definition, while

⁸⁴Strong, Systematic Theology, 7th ed. (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1902), p. 103. This page is identical to page 103 in the first six editions, and the quotation can be found even in Strong's Lectures on Theology (1876), p. 54.

⁸⁵Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 216.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 208.

⁸⁷It should be noted that Strong never said that miracles were suspensions or violations of natural law. In fact, he carefully disassociated his earlier definition of miracle from these ideas. He said: "a miracle is not a suspension or violation of natural law; since natural law is in operation at the time of the miracle just as much as before." Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 117 and Lectures on Theology (1876), p. 33. What he did say in his earlier definition, however, is "a miracle is an event palpable to the senses, produced for a religious purpose by the immediate agency of God; an event therefore, which, though not contravening any law of nature, the laws of nature, if fully known, would not without this agency of God be competent to explain."

not including the words "suspension" or "violation," clearly removes the idea of miracle from the realm of the supernatural to the realm of natural law. In his earlier definition, a miracle is produced by the immediate agency of God, that is, directly by Him. The laws of nature, even if fully known, would not be able to explain a miracle. In his later definition, a miracle is "an event in nature," extraordinary, to be sure, but an event in nature nonetheless.⁸⁸ That Strong's understanding of biblical inspiration should shift from the supernatural to the natural, from an emphasis upon the divine aspect to the human character should not, therefore, surprise anyone. Strong also says that the Reformers did not hold this theory of inspiration. In so saying, he is confusing the issue of canonicity with inspiration. The Reformers may have questioned whether or not some or all of the antilegomena belonged in the canon of Holy Scripture but the books they considered canonical they also considered inspired.⁸⁹

The dynamical theory

Strong's explanation of the dynamical theory is brief. This is somewhat surprising since it is the theory he considers to be correct. His summary of this theory is

⁸⁸ Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 118.

⁸⁹ Cf. pages 128-31 in this dissertation for a discussion of the antilegomena; cf. page 158, footnote #48 for a discussion of the Reformers' view of biblical inspiration.

that it is supernatural ("the immediate work of a personal God in the soul of man"), plenary (that is, inspiration belongs not only to the writers but also to the writings, making them a "trustworthy and sufficient record of divine revelation") and dynamical (that is, the truth in the Bible is shaped in human form and adapted to human understanding).⁹⁰ Only one comment, by way of evaluation, will be made at this point: Strong's use of "supernatural" must be more rhetorical than real, and this includes his use of "immediate" to describe the work of God upon (or within) the Scripture writers. At best, Strong has his feet planted in two different and contradictory places. On the one hand, he is attempting to be true to biblical teaching. This explains his belief that inspiration is the immediate work of a personal God. On the other hand, his viewpoint is being informed by ethical monism, a philosophical viewpoint which sees God's relationship to the world in terms of immanence rather than transcendence. And so a miracle is defined as an event in nature! If such is the case, it seems to this writer that the term "supernatural" has been robbed of its ordinary meaning.⁹¹

New Testament Teaching on Inspiration and Inerrancy

In the next section of his Systematic Theology,

⁹⁰Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 211.

⁹¹Cf. pages 97-113 in this dissertation for a discussion of Strong's understanding of "miracle."

Strong discusses eleven points under the general heading, "the union of the divine and human elements in inspiration." In order to be able to evaluate these points with fidelity to Holy Scripture, it is necessary to preface that evaluation with a brief survey of some key New Testament passages. Six passages will be examined, three of them reflecting the view of the Lord Jesus Christ as found in the Gospels (Matthew, Luke and John), two of them in Paul's epistles and one from 2 Peter.

Matthew 5:17 & 18

Six times in this chapter (#1=verses 21-22; #2=verses 27-28; #3=verses 31-32; #4=verses 33-34; #5=verses 38-39; #6=verses 43-44) Jesus contrasts His interpretation of God's law with the interpretation given by the Pharisees. That He was not contrasting His authority with that of the law is clear from verses 17 and 18:

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the law, until all is accomplished. (NASB)

Several conclusions may be drawn from these verses: (1) the phrase "the Law and the Prophets" refers to the entire Hebrew Scriptures. Broadus comments:

This phrase was frequently employed to denote the entire Scriptures (that is, the O. T.), the "law" being the five books of Moses, and "the prophets" the remainder. (See, for example, 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 28:23; Rom. 3:21.) In Luke 24:44 it is "the law, and the prophets, and the psalms," the last division probably including the other poetical

books. In some other cases "the law" denotes the whole (see John 10:34; 12:34; 15:25; I Cor. 14:21.) Observe it is "the law or the prophets." Not merely were the requirements of Moses to continue in force, (which some Jews regarded as more sacred than the rest of the O. T.), but also all that was taught by the other inspired writers, the prophets. No part of the existing Scriptures was to be set aside. And we know from Josephus and early Christian writers, that all Jews of our Lord's time would understand "the Scriptures" or "the law and the prophets" as meaning a well known and well defined collection of sacred books, the same as our Old Testament.⁹²

(2) if it is correct to say that Jesus is contrasting His interpretation of the law with the interpretation of the scribes and Pharisees (and verse 20, as an introduction to our Lord's six-fold contrast seems to indicate that this is the case), then the authority of Christ is tied to what Holy Scripture says, rather than to the believer's religious experience; (3) the authority of the law and the prophets extends to the very letters⁹³ which make up the words of Holy Scripture; (4) one of the most important issues raised by Strong's remarks is the relationship of the Bible's inspiration to its authority. The authority of the Bible is based upon the inspiration of the Bible; that is, precisely

⁹²John A. Broadus, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.), pp. 98-99.

⁹³In Matthew 5:18, what the NASB calls "the smallest letter" is the "Greek equivalent of the Aramaic yod" whereas what it calls a "stroke" is a "projection, hook as part of a letter." Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 386, 428.

because the Bible is God's Word, it has a right to demand obedience from a believer. If this is correct, then it also may be stated that the extent of biblical authority depends upon the extent of biblical inspiration. If only the general concepts of the Bible are inspired, then only those concepts are authoritative. Yet this passage makes clear that the authority of Holy Scripture extends to its words.

Luke 4:1-13

In this passage, the temptation of Jesus Christ by the devil is recorded. Of interest to this study is the identification of the authority by which Jesus repelled the various temptations. Certainly the devil attempted to relate the kind of response he desired from Jesus to Christ's divine sonship: "if You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread" (verse 3) and "If You are the Son of God, cast Yourself down from here" (verse 9, NASB). Carefully note the response of Jesus: to the first two temptations, he says: "it is written (verses. 4 and 8, NASB) while to the third temptation he says: "it is said" (verse 12, NASB). R. C. H. Lenski comments:

The importance of the reply is indicated by the preamble: "he answering said." The remarkable thing is that Jesus meets every assault with a word of Scripture: γέγραπται, "it has been written," the perfect tense with the implication: "and once written, now stands forever."⁹⁴

⁹⁴R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943), p. 144.

One may ask why the word Jesus used in response to the third temptation was different from the word he used twice earlier. Lenski gives the answer:

This temptation is overcome by a single word. A true son knows what his father says and means; so Jesus knows that all the great promises of his Father's protection are meant for our humble trust in him and never once for our presumption. It would be a caricature of humble trust to take a gracious promise of God and by some foolhardy act to challenge God to see whether he will, indeed, do what he has said, or still worse, simply presume that he must do what his words say. As the first temptation tries to lead, under the plea of acting like a true son, to distrust of the Father, so this temptation tries to lead, under the same plea, to a false trust of the Father. What such false trust really is the Father himself has declared in plainest language, and as a true son, who knows all that his Father has said and means by his words, Jesus sets beside the word quoted by the devil another word that belongs together with it and brings out its true meaning. After the devil himself used *γέγραπται*, "it has been written," in imitation of Jesus who used this formula, Jesus now says pointedly *εἰρηται*, "it has been said," namely by God himself. His word was, of course, also written, but Jesus stresses the fact that God himself spoke this word, and he is certainly able to speak his meaning so as to make it clear. In other words, in any quotation we must get just what is said and meant and not use another's words in a sense which he never intended. The perfect tense "has been said" also has the present connotation: and stands thus to this day.⁹⁵

As in the Matthew 5 passage, so here in Luke 4, religious authority is tied, not to the believer's experience or even to the Lord Jesus Christ, but to the written Word of God.

John 10:30-39

In chapter nine, Jesus healed a man on the sabbath.

⁹⁵R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), pp. 240-41.

This, in turn, produced a confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders and is recorded in John, chapter ten. The statements of Jesus culminate in His words, "I and the Father are one." (John 10:30, NASB). William Arndt explains the reaction of the Jewish leaders and the response of Jesus Christ to their reaction:

The Jews had accused Jesus of blasphemy because He had said that He and the Father are one, ascribing deity to Himself. Then He points out to them that in their own Holy Book, the Old Testament, the title "gods" was applied to men who were receiving the Word of God, namely, the judges of Israel. The passage He alludes to is Ps. 82:6: "I have said: Ye are gods and all of you are children of the Most High." The argument of Jesus runs thus: God Himself gave the judges of Israel the exalted title "gods," and that is an appellation which no one can take from them because Scripture cannot be broken, because it is of inviolate and absolute authority; how much less, then, should anybody be offended when He who had come from the bosom of the Father above called Himself the Son of God! . . .

God has spoken, and His Word you cannot set aside, thus we might paraphrase this famous saying of our Lord. It, then, implies quite distinctly the divine origin and authority of the Scriptures. And what makes this saying of Jesus particularly impressive is that it pertains to one word, or expression, in the Old Testament, not to a doctrine or a general truth. It teaches that not even single terms employed in the Scriptures can be disregarded, be their function ever so subordinate.⁹⁶

1 Corinthians 2:9-14

Paul, who had founded the church at Corinth, writes to these believers that his message and preaching were in

⁹⁶W. Arndt, Bible Difficulties (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932), pp. 4-5.

demonstration of the Spirit and power so that their faith would not be in man's wisdom but in the power of God.

Lenski sees this as a reference to the inner witness of the Spirit.⁹⁷ The "we" and "us" (verses 6-7, 10, and 12-13) are in contrast to the "you" (verses 1-3) because Paul is speaking of himself in a separate category from the Corinthian believers. As an individual apostle (1 Corinthians 1:1) Paul had preached to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). Now he speaks as part of a larger group (hence the "we" and "us"), namely, the apostles (1 Corinthians 4:8-9). The change from the singular ("I") to the plural ("we" and "us") indicates a change from a specific set of circumstances (that is, the things that occurred when Paul preached to the Corinthians) to a series of principles that are true of all the apostles when they function as instruments of revelation. These principles are presented in verses 9-14. They are: (1) revelation cannot be discovered by the unaided human mind (verse 9); (2) but, what cannot be discovered by man may be revealed to man by God (verse 10), and, as a matter of fact, God has revealed truths to the apostles (verses 10); (3) only the human spirit knows the thoughts of that man; in like manner, the Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God the Father and is, therefore, qualified to reveal these thoughts to the apostles (verse 11); (4) the

⁹⁷R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), p. 92.

apostles had received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit of God so that they might know the things God's Spirit was revealing to them (verse 12); and (5) the apostles convey what God's Spirit has revealed to them--and they do this, "not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit," (verse 13, NASB). The fifth principle is very important because it states two truths: (a) negatively, the apostles did not communicate the revelation they received from God's Spirit in words taught by human wisdom; (b) positively, the apostles communicated the revelation they received from God's Spirit in words taught by the Spirit Himself.⁹⁸ First Corinthians 2:13, in its context, clearly teaches verbal inspiration.

2 Timothy 3:15-17

There are several problems attached to these verses that do not directly affect the point being made in this dissertation. Thus, they will be mentioned, along with their possible solutions, without a final resolution of these problems. The first problem deals with the identity of "Scripture" in verse 16. Some argue that it refers just to the Old Testament and is, therefore, identical to the

⁹⁸Charles Hodge in his An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969 printing), p. 41 says, "The apostle had said that the truths that he taught were revealed by the Spirit; and that the words which he used were taught by the Spirit, which he sums up by saying, he explained spiritual things in spiritual words."

"sacred writings" mentioned in verse 15, while others, noting that a different word is used in verse 16 from the one found in verse 15, that the word found in verse 16 is used in 1 Timothy 5:18 to introduce quotations from Deuteronomy and Luke's Gospel, and that verse 16 states "ALL Scripture is inspired. . . ," argue that verse 16 includes some or all of the New Testament as well as the Old.⁹⁹ The second problem has two parts to it: (1) should $\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\alpha$ $\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\eta$ be translated "every Scripture" or "all Scripture"? and (2) since "is" must be supplied, should the passage read "every Scripture inspired by God is also profitable" or "all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable"? The American Standard Version of 1901 gives the former reading while the New American Standard Bible of 1975 gives the latter reading. Neither reading calls into question the inspiration of Holy Scripture. While the latter reading ("all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable . . .") would be emphasizing the Bible's inspiration, the former reading ("every Scripture inspired by God is also profitable . . .") would be saying something like the following: "In verse 15 we are told that Holy Scripture is able to make one wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. In verse 16 we are told that in addition to its salvific function, Holy

⁹⁹A. C. Hervey, "Second Timothy," The Pulpit Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), 21:49.

Scripture, precisely because it is inspired by God, is also profitable for doctrine etc."¹⁰⁰ In either case, the inspiration of Holy Scripture is being affirmed in 2 Timothy 3:16. Furthermore, while it is true that ἡ γραφή is used in the New Testament exclusively as a technical term for Holy Scripture,¹⁰¹ it is also true that the word means "writing" and thus refers to what has been written, in this case, Holy Scripture. The point is that not the writers but the writing, not the process but the product, is said to be inspired.

Second Timothy 3:16 clearly states the inspiration of Holy Scripture. The word translated "inspired by God" (θεόπνευστος) literally means "God-breathed".¹⁰² McClain explains the significance of this meaning:

No stronger term could have been chosen to assert the divine authorship of Scripture. The "breath of God" in the Bible is a symbol of his almighty, creative word.

¹⁰⁰Cf. Ed. L. Miller, "Plenary Inspiration and II Timothy 3:16," The Lutheran Quarterly 17:1 (February 1965):56-62 for a profitable discussion of this problem. Dr. Miller prefers the reading: "Every Scripture inspired by God is also profitable." For a defense of the alternate reading, see Edward J. Young, "Scripture--God-breathed and Profitable," Grace Journal 7:3 (Fall 1966):5-7.

¹⁰¹Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, p. 166.

¹⁰²Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1948), p. 133 says: "The Greek term has, however, nothing to say of inspiring or of inspiration: it speaks only of a 'spiring' or 'spiration'. What it says of Scripture is, not that it is 'breathed into by God' or is the product of the Divine 'inbreathing' into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, 'God-breathed,' the product of the creative breath of God."

So we are told the heavens were made "by the breath of his mouth . . . he spake, and it was done" (Ps. 33:6, 9). Into the first man, God breathed . . . the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). To say, therefore, that Scripture is "God-breathed" is to place the Scriptures in the same category [sic] as the universe and the spirit of man. All three are "God-breathed," the direct product of Almighty God.¹⁰³

Furthermore, because Scripture is God-breathed, it is profitable for "teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NASB). The word translated "adequate" means "complete, capable, proficient-able to meet all demands."¹⁰⁴ Thus, the scope of the Bible's authority extends not only to making one wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15) but to equipping the man of God so that he may be complete. Therefore the Bible, and the Bible alone, has supreme authority for teaching, reproof, correcting, and training (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

2 Peter 1:12-21.¹⁰⁵

In verses 12 and 13, Peter expresses his desire to

¹⁰³Alva J. McClain, The Inspiration of the Bible (Winona Lake, IN: The Brethren Missionary Herald Co., [n.d.]), pp. 13-14.

¹⁰⁴Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, p. 110.

¹⁰⁵Some may question the canonicity of 2 Peter. Donald Guthrie, in his New Testament Introduction, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), pp. 814-48 discusses the pros and cons in detail with a conclusion that favors petrine authorship. At any rate, Luther quotes 2 Peter 1:21 and ascribes it to Peter in The Smalcald Articles, Part III,

remind his readers of certain basic truths. In verses 14 and 15, he explains his awareness of imminent death, and yet his desire is to continue to remind them of these things even after he is gone. Undoubtedly, he intends to put his words into writing and by that means accomplish his goal. In light of this desire, Peter states some key ideas concerning Holy Scripture in general and his writings in particular: (1) the miracles that occurred in our Lord's earthly ministry must not be regarded as myths¹⁰⁶ (verse 16); Christ's transfiguration is singled out as an example of such miracles. Peter claims to be an eyewitness to this event; in fact he uses the plural "we were eyewitnesses" to indicate the transfiguration was witnessed by others, as well (verses 16-18); thus, the miracles of Christ must be accepted as having actually taken place; (2) "prophetic word" (verse 19, NASB) does not describe merely the prophetic sections of the Bible but rather characterizes all of Scripture as originating from God. This seems clear from what is said in verses 20 and 21. Prophecy is not preaching; it is God communicating a message through a prophet (see Acts 21:10-11 for a good example of New Testament

Article VIII, and the Solid Declaration of The Formula of Concord, Part II, Chapter VIII refers to 2 Peter 1:4 as the testimony of St. Peter. So, without directly resolving the issue of canonicity, it seems proper to use 2 Peter authoritatively in trying to determine what Holy Scripture says about biblical inspiration and authority.

¹⁰⁶The Greek word translated "fables" (KJV) or "tales" (NASB) is μύθοις !

prophecy); (3) "made more sure" (verse 19, NASB) seems to be a comparison of God's written Word to Peter's being an eyewitness to the transfiguration. Seeing the miracle was good but possessing the written Word of God is even better because it is a more sure or firm basis for belief. Being an eyewitness gives only the facts; possessing God's written Word gives not only the facts but a correct interpretation of those facts: (4) God's written Word is authoritative; Peter says of it: "to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place," (verse 19, NASB); as a lamp it guides the believer in his beliefs and practice; (5) Scripture does not originate of its own unfolding; proof for this is in verses 20 and 21: (a) "prophecy of Scripture" is an important phrase because it uses prophecy to describe the sacred writings (Scripture) as originating from God and because the word "Scripture" requires one to view Peter's remarks as pertaining, not only to holy men of God speaking but to their writing it down, as well; (b) the verb translated "is" (γίνεταί) here means "arises or originates";¹⁰⁷ (c) "one's own interpretation" (verse 20, NASB) is better understood as "its own disclosure or unfolding".¹⁰⁸ The "for" at the beginning of verse 21 ties the

¹⁰⁷M. R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament (Mac Dill AFB, FL: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), I, 328.

¹⁰⁸A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament 6 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1933), 6:158-59, says: "'No prophecy of Scripture comes out of private disclosure,' not 'of private interpretation.'

discussion of verse 20 to verse 21 where clearly Peter is discussing the origin, not the interpretation, of Holy Scripture; (6) the divine agent in the production of Holy Scripture is the Holy Spirit (verse 21). The word "prophecy" is used in this verse to reinforce the idea that what the Scripture writers wrote originated with God. This belief is stated both in a negative and positive way: negatively, "no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will" (verse 21, NASB); positively, "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (verse 21, NASB). The word translated "moved" is φέρω and when used in the passive voice, as here, means "be moved, be driven."¹⁰⁹ This supports the idea that inspiration involves a much more active ministry of the Holy Spirit than merely keeping the writers from error. Pieper says, "inspiration does not consist in mere guidance and protection against error . . . , but is a divine supplying or divine giving of the very words that

The usual meaning of epilysis is explanation, but the word does not occur elsewhere in the N.T. . . . It is the prophet's grasp of the prophecy, not that of the readers that is here presented, as the next verse shows." Albert Barnes, commenting on this verse, agrees. He says: "the more correct interpretation, as it seems to me, is that which supposes that the apostle teaches that the truths which the prophets communicated were not originated by themselves; were not of their own suggestion or invention; were not their own opinions, but were of higher origin, and were imparted by God." Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament: James-Jude (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978 printing), p. 232.

¹⁰⁹Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, p. 855.

constitute Scripture."¹¹⁰ The fact that this verb was used to describe the action of the wind beating upon the ship on which Paul was a passenger (Acts 27:15) supports Pieper's statement.

Other New Testament passages

In this category are two passages in the New Testament where the human writers are said to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. Mark 12:36 reveals Jesus saying: "David himself said in the Holy Spirit." Lenski comments:

Jesus says that David wrote this psalm ἐν τῷ Πνεύματι τῷ Ἁγίῳ, "in connection with the Holy Spirit," under this Spirit's influence, which, ¹¹¹if it means anything, means by divine inspiration.

The other passage is Acts 28:25 where Paul is speaking to the Jewish leaders in Rome. He says: "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers," (NASB). While Paul recognizes that Isaiah was involved in making the statement, he is arguing that the statement itself does not originate with Isaiah but with the Holy Spirit. Isaiah was His spokesman. The point of both of these passages is that God the Holy Spirit was in control of the human writer. In Mark 12:36, David speaks under the Spirit's control. In Acts 28:25, the Holy Spirit is said to

¹¹⁰Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 1:219.

¹¹¹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), p. 546.

be the speaker, working through Isaiah the prophet. Such passages do not permit one to think of biblical inspiration in terms of God merely giving the writers the thoughts but allowing them to put the message in their own words. And there is no reason to think that what Jesus said about David, or what Paul said about Isaiah were exceptions to the rule; rather, this is how the Holy Spirit worked in causing Scripture to be written.

The Union of the Divine and Human Elements in Inspiration

The preceding examination of key passages in the New Testament has made it possible now to evaluate the major ideas that Strong presents under the heading, "the union of the divine and human elements in inspiration."

Cooperative production

Strong says the Scriptures were produced "equally of God and of man" and thus should not be considered just human or just divine, using the hypostatic union of Christ and the work of God in regeneration and sanctification as analogies. That both God and man were involved in the product of the Bible cannot be denied; Strong's statement that "the Scriptures are the production equally of God and of man" can and must be denied. Mark 12:36 makes it clear that David spoke "in the Holy Spirit" in the Psalms. This does not mean, however, that the davidic Psalms are "equally" produced by the Holy Spirit and by David; rather, David was under the

Holy Spirit's control. This same truth is found in Acts 28:25. It is the Holy Spirit speaking through Isaiah the prophet. There is no hint that Isaiah and God's Spirit contributed equally. It is possible, of course, to interpret Strong to mean only that both the human writer and God were truly involved in the production of Holy Scripture. No one would deny this. But in light of Strong's rejection of verbal inspiration, it is more likely that he means the former rather than the latter. In any event, the biblical emphasis upon the Spirit's control of the Scripture writers is worthy of remembrance. One wonders about the two analogies Strong used, since in the incarnation the will of Jesus was always subject to the will of His Heavenly Father (Matthew 26:39) and since in sanctification it was God's working in believers to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13). There is no thought of the human and divine activity as being equal. In regeneration God's will, and not man's will, is singled out in Holy Scripture as the cause of the new birth (John 1:13).

Internal impartation and reception

Strong's remarks on this point may not be wrong.¹¹² In fact, if all one knew of his view was what he states under this heading, one would conclude that Strong believes in verbal inspiration and inerrancy.

¹¹²Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., pp. 212-13.

Personal peculiarities of the writers

Strong says, "every imperfection not inconsistent with truth in a human composition may exist in inspired Scripture."¹¹³ The "imperfection" referred to by Strong is amplified to include "all the personal peculiarities of the writers, together with their defects of culture and literary style."¹¹⁴ Nothing in this section contradicts a belief in the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture.

Methods of literary composition

Unfortunately, Strong includes myth and legend as possible literary methods used by God in the Bible. Though Strong, quoting Gore, says "a myth is not a falsehood; it is a product of mental activity, as instructive and rich as any later product, but its characteristic is that it is not yet distinguished into history and poetry and philosophy,"¹¹⁵ one wonders what a myth really is. While those who believe in verbal inspiration and scriptural inerrancy are willing to accept the idea that many literary forms may be found in Holy Scripture, they are not willing to include forms or methods which undercut their belief in Holy Scripture's complete trustworthiness. Since Strong does not really define "myth," one cannot criticize him for using the term.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 213.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 214.

However, one can and must criticize him for failing to define it.

Scriptures given by gradual evolution

Since in this section Strong is concerned with the union of the divine and human elements in inspiration, at first one wonders why he includes a point which seems only to be affirming the progressive character of revelation. Upon closer examination, however, it is discovered that Strong has something else in mind. He states:

The teacher may dictate propositions which the pupil does not understand: he may demonstrate in such a way that the pupil participates in the process; or, best of all, he may incite the pupil to work out the demonstration for himself. God seems to have used all these methods. But while there are instances of dictation and illumination, and inspiration sometimes includes these, the general method seems to have been such a divine quickening of man's powers that he discovers and expresses the truth for himself.¹¹⁶

Note well the final sentence of the above quotation: ". . . the general method [of inspiration] seems to have been such a divine quickening of man's powers that he discovers and expresses the truth for himself." In reply to Strong's statement, the following is offered as a critique: (1) Strong's methodology is inappropriate, since his theology is being informed by "natural science" rather than Holy Scripture¹¹⁷; (2) the idea that man could discover divine truth

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 215.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 214 where Strong says, "as in communicating the truths of natural science, God has communicated the truths of religion by successive steps, germinally at first, more fully as men have been able to comprehend them."

for himself is contrary to the concept of revelation. In 1 Corinthians 2:9-11, St. Paul specifically rejects the idea that he had discovered for himself the message he was preaching; rather, that which man could NOT discover for himself (verse 9) God's Spirit had revealed to him (verse 10); (3) In 1 Corinthians 2:13, St. Paul rejects the idea that God allowed a Scripture writer to express the truth for himself; instead, Paul affirms his belief that the things he teaches are in words given to him by the Holy Spirit. And the impression one receives from 1 Corinthians 2:9-13 is that Paul is not describing an exception to the rule but the general way in which God made truth known.

Inerrancy limited to Scripture's essential purpose

Several comments will be given in order to evaluate Strong's position on "limited inerrancy": (1) to say, as Strong does, that inspiration was not omniscience¹¹⁸ is to cloud the issue. No one is advocating that Holy Scripture presents an inexhaustible array of information on every conceivable subject. What is being advocated, however, is that whenever Holy Scripture does speak on a subject, its statements are true and trustworthy; (2) to say, as Strong does, that inspiration does not mean personal infallibility or entire freedom from sin¹¹⁹ also is to cloud the issue.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 215.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

No one advocates the idea that the Scripture writers were sinless or infallible in their personal lives. What is being advocated, however, is that when God's Spirit worked in them and on them to write Holy Scripture, what they wrote is completely true; (3) to say, as Strong does, that inerrancy is limited to the essential purpose of Holy Scripture is to presume that one not only knows what that purpose is, but also what specific parts of the Bible do or do not contribute to that purpose. Strong's belief in a real, historical Adam and Eve, but also his belief that they evolved from lower forms of animal life cannot convince his audience that he has been able to distinguish successfully between those parts of the Bible that are related to Scripture's essential purpose and those that are not. On what possible basis could he accept Holy Scripture's teaching concerning the historicity of Adam and Eve, and reject its teaching concerning physical death being a result of Adam's sin (Romans 5:12)? The following statement is a potent criticism of Strong's attempt to make such a distinction:

It must be observed, however, that this does not allow us in any way to eliminate certain troublesome words or statements from Scripture on the grounds that they are superfluous to the Holy Spirit's purpose and hence participate to a less degree in inspiration. Much less may we suppose that some words lie altogether outside of divine inspiration, that is, that they appear only by "permission." Any kind of selective elimination would be, to say the least, extremely hazardous in view of the fact that we possess no criterion for selectivity. But, more to the point, it cannot be justified on the basis of the doctrine of verbal inspiration, which demands that every word be accepted as an inspired word in the context in which it stands. "Inspiration," and more precisely "spiration" (theopneustos, II Tim. 3:16),

is a concept which denotes positive action. It hardly allows for passivity. A word may contribute an idea more or less incidental to the author's main purpose. Yet every word remains an inspired word and must be supposed to have a purpose even when that purpose may be difficult to discern. So all the words of Scripture, speaking in their "ordered sequence," are to be received as wholly trustworthy.¹²⁰

Ordinarily, God did not
give the writers words

This statement must be criticized for the following reasons: (1) St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:13 says that when God's Spirit communicated revelation to him it was in words; (2) St. Paul, in 2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture comes from the breath of God, an active rather than a passive ministry; (3) St. Peter, in 2 Peter 1:21 describes the men who wrote Scripture as being carried along by the Holy Spirit, a more forceful ministry than the one envisioned by Strong; (4) Strong argues that "thought is possible without words"¹²¹ but the fact of the matter is that revelation, not thought, is the topic under discussion, and the aforementioned Scripture passages make it clear that God communicated revelation and caused it to be inscripturated by means of words; (5) the fact that the 1907 edition of Strong's Systematic Theology did not contain the words, "inspiration is therefore verbal as to its result,

¹²⁰Decision of the Synod of 1961 of the Christian Reformed Church on Infallibility and Inspiration in the Light of Scripture and Our Creeds (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1961), p. 35.

¹²¹Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 216.

but not verbal as to its method" but said instead, "inspiration is therefore not verbal . . ." reveals the change in Strong's thinking. The former statement can be found in all the earlier editions of his Systematic Theology. It is proper to inquire as to the reason for this change, and there is no exegetical reason evident.¹²² Something other than Holy Scripture was causing Augustus Hopkins Strong to change his view on verbal inspiration.

Inspiration constitutes
Scripture an organic whole

The belief that Holy Scripture is the work of "one divine mind"¹²³ really undercuts Strong's advocacy of the historical-critical methods since such a unity would contradict the so-called pluralism inherent in the critical views.

¹²²Strong does say in the small print under this point: "the theory of verbal inspiration is refuted by the two facts: 1. that the N.T. quotations from the O.T., in 99 cases, differ both from the Hebrew and from the LXX; 2. that Jesus' own words are reported with variations by the different evangelists," Ibid. p. 216. From this writer's perspective, these two "facts" in no wise refute the teaching of Holy Scripture that it is verbally inspired. In both cases, the intention of the N.T. writer would determine whether or not verbal inspiration had been refuted. If the N.T. writer did not intend to quote verbatim an O.T. passage but simply to allude to it, then nothing has been refuted. If the N.T. evangelists did not intend to give a tape recorded account of Christ's words but arranged and chose the words of Jesus as their purpose demanded, nothing is refuted. Technically, verbal inspiration does not say the words of Christ are inspired, but rather that the Holy Spirit so moved upon the evangelists so that what they wrote is verbally inspired.

¹²³Ibid., p. 217.

The Bible is a safe and
sufficient guide to salvation

Since 2 Timothy 3:15 states that the sacred writings are able to make one wise unto salvation which is through faith in Christ, Strong's belief that the Bible is a safe and sufficient guide to salvation is true. His emphasis on taking the clear teaching of the Bible as it is found throughout the whole Bible rather than in some isolated passage is sound. What is not acceptable is his refusal to admit that this clear teaching is determined from specific passages in the Bible and that exegesis of these passages is possible only when their very words are taken seriously.

Christ Himself is the
only ultimate authority

Strong says:

While inspiration constitutes Scripture an authority more trustworthy than are individual reason or the creeds of the church, the only ultimate authority is Christ himself.

Christ has not so constructed Scripture as to dispense with his personal presence and teaching by his Spirit. The Scripture is the imperfect mirror of Christ. It is defective, yet it reflects him and leads to him. Authority resides not in it, but in him, and his Spirit enables the individual Christian and the collective church progressively to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, and so to perceive the truth as it is in Jesus.¹²⁴

Strong's view is subject to the following criticism: (1) evidently the "Christ" of A. H. Strong is different from the Christ of the Bible since the Bible is only an imperfect

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 219.

mirror of his Christ; (2) the Bible is defective, according to Strong, yet reflects and leads to Christ, but the reader is not told the sense in which the Bible is defective. Is it like the mirror of a fun house in a circus where tall, thin people are made to look short and fat? Since the Bible is defective, how does one know the view of Christ he has is accurate? These questions cannot be answered because, while the Christ of the Bible may be known objectively, that is, by means of the written Word of God, Strong's Christ can be known only subjectively, that is, by means of Christ's Spirit guiding the individual believer and the collective church; (3) Strong says, "it is not a doctrine of mysticism, for it holds that Christ teaches us only by opening to us the meaning of his past revelations,"¹²⁵ but if the Bible is an imperfect and defective mirror of Christ, one can never be certain the Christ he beholds is truly Christ.

Three principles and
three questions

These are found on page 163 of this dissertation and on pages 220 and 221 in Strong's Systematic Theology; therefore they will not be reproduced here. All of the principles he states and the answers he gives are good and helpful with the exception of the last question and response. Strong's reply to those who ask how one can know the teaching of the Bible is to say that the Spirit of

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 220.

Christ will make it clear.¹²⁶ A more appropriate response would be to say that Scripture interprets Scripture. The Spirit of God will use the written Word of God--not as an imperfect mirror but as a true presentation of the truth--to make known the teaching of Holy Scripture.

Objections to Inspiration

In this section, Strong responds to ten objections to the doctrine of inspiration. Without going over each of these objections individually (they are summarized on pages 163-70 of this dissertation), the following comments are in order: (1) when Strong discusses six of these objections (errors in morality, errors in prophecy, certain books do not belong in the canon, parts of the Bible were written by someone other than the stated author, some narratives are skeptical or fictitious, and some passages acknowledge that their writers were not inspired), he satisfactorily answers the objections that are raised. In the case of the remaining four objections (errors in science, errors in history, errors of reasoning, and errors of Old Testament quotation or interpretation in the New Testament), Strong's answers are generally satisfactory, with the exception that he allows for minor errors that do not affect the religious meaning. Since this view has been examined and found to be contrary to biblical teaching, it is not acceptable as a

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 221.

response to these objections. Thus, Strong's response to these objections is very good once his weak view of inspiration is removed from it.

CHAPTER VII

ETHICAL MONISM: THE HIDDEN AGENDA

The question comes to mind, "why did Augustus Hopkins Strong change major portions of his theology, including the doctrine of Holy Scripture?" This question is not answered directly. Nevertheless, it is possible to determine the correct answer. Strong's remarks in the preface to his final edition of Systematic Theology point the reader in the right direction:

My philosophical and critical point of view meantime has also somewhat changed. While I still hold to the old doctrines, I interpret them differently and expound them more clearly, because I seem to myself to have reached a fundamental truth which throws new light upon them all. This truth I have tried to set forth in my book entitled "Christ in Creation," and to that book I refer the reader for further information.

That Christ is the one and only Revealer of God, in nature, in humanity, in history, in science, in Scripture, is in my judgment the key to theology. This view implies a monistic and idealistic conception of the world, together with an evolutionary idea as to its origin and progress. But it is the very antidote to pantheism, in that it recognizes evolution as only the method of the transcendent and personal Christ, who fills all in all, and who makes the universe teleological and moral from its centre to its circumference and from its beginning until now.

Neither evolution nor the higher criticism has any terrors to one who regards them¹ as parts of Christ's creating and educating process.

¹A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, 8th ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1907 ed.), p. viii.

It was the philosophical viewpoint which Strong call "ethical monism" that caused him to reinterpret major doctrinal tenets. This chapter will be divided into two major sections. The first section will attempt to explain what Strong meant when he referred to "ethical monism." In the second section, an attempt will be made to try to uncover some of the factors which led Strong to adopt the "ethical monism" viewpoint.

An Explanation of Ethical Monism

Although Strong spoke about ethical monism in a number of his writings,² he did not attempt to explain this view in detail except in two places: the final revised edition of his Systematic Theology³ and a series of articles in the Baptist periodical, "The Examiner."⁴ In this section

²For example, Strong touches on the subject when he deals with Robert Browning in his book, The Great Poets and Their Theology (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), pp. 422-425. In volume One of his two volumed Miscellanies, Strong includes several addresses that discuss certain aspects of ethical monism. Cf. Miscellanies, 2 vols. by Augustus Hopkins Strong, (Philadelphia: The Griffith and Rowland Press, 1912), 1:220-238, 304-312. Strong's last book, published posthumously, also contains a brief chapter entitled, "Christ in Creation." Cf. What Shall I Believe? by Augustus Hopkins Strong (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1922), pp. 23-33.

³This is the 1907 edition. It should be noted that the seventh edition of his Systematic Theology (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1902) does contain a two sentence presentation of ethical monism (p. 51) but no discussion.

⁴Grant Wacker, Jr., "Augustus H. Strong: A Conservative Confrontation with History," unpublished Ph.D. thesis presented to Harvard University in 1978, p. 100, says in a footnote: "These articles were 'Christ in Creation,' published Oct. 6, 1894; 'Ethical Monism,' published Nov. 1, 8,

of the dissertation, neither Strong's viewpoint itself, nor his attempted explanation of it will be evaluated; rather the purpose for including it is to understand precisely what Strong himself means by this term. At the same time, however, it should be said that most of those people who responded in writing to Strong's efforts to explain ethical monism were not impressed or persuaded. One such writer was A. J. F. Behrends, a graduate of the Rochester Seminary and acquaintance of Strong.⁵ Behrends comments on Strong's articles in "The Examiner":

This would seem to be pantheism; but there are many who insist that they are not pantheists, however pantheistic their speech may seem to be. That protest must be accepted as honestly made; but this cannot shield them from the criticism which insists, with justice, that the pantheism which they repudiate shall be absent from the statements in which they embody their creed. Dr. Strong is not a pantheist. He insists upon the reality of moral distinctions. He repudiates the idea that God is the author of sin. He affirms the creative origin of the universe in time. He repudiates the notion that matter is eternal. He rejects the doctrine of universal restoration. All this is squarely antipantheistic. But these statements appear as qualifications in a monistic theory of being, with which they cannot be made to agree. Consistency demands either the repudiation of the theory or the surrender of the qualifica-

and 15, 1894; 'Ethical Monism Once More,' published Oct. 17, 24, and 3[3], 1895." All of these articles were reprinted in Christ in Creation by Augustus Hopkins Strong (Philadelphia: The Griffith and Rowland Press, 1899), pp. 1-86.

⁵ According to Charles Noble who wrote the entry for Adolphus Julius Frederick Behrends in the Dictionary of American Biography, 22 vols., Allen Johnson, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), 2:141, A. J. F. Behrends graduated from the Rochester Seminary in 1865. Strong himself had graduated in 1859, so while Behrends was not a classmate of or a student under Strong, they were acquainted.

tions. The logical outcome of the theory is pantheism.⁶ It should not be surprising, therefore, if Strong's attempted explanation of ethical monism leaves much to be desired.

Found in Systematic Theology

The most comprehensive, yet concise treatment of ethical monism is found in the 1907 edition of Strong's Systematic Theology. In six pages he defines and defends this philosophical viewpoint. He defines it in the following manner:

Ethical Monism is that method of thought which holds to a single substance, ground, or principle of being, namely, God, but which also holds to the ethical facts of God's transcendence as well as his immanence, and of God's personality as distinct from, and as guaranteeing, the personality of man.

This definition is followed by four major points.

Metaphysical monism and psychological dualism

In this first main point, Strong says:

While Ethical Monism embraces the one element of truth contained in Pantheism--the truth that God is in all things and that all things are in God--it regards this scientific unity as entirely consistent with the facts of ethics--man's freedom, responsibility, sin and guilt; in other words, Metaphysical Monism, or the doctrine of one substance, ground, or principle of being, is qualified by Psychological Dualism, or the

⁶A. J. F. Behrends, "Ethical Monism," Methodist Review, May 1895, p. 360.

⁷Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 105.

doctrine that the soul is personally distinct from⁸ matter on the one hand, and from God on the other.

Under this same point, Strong continues on in his attempt to explain this view:

Ethical Monism is a monism which holds to the ethical facts of the freedom of man and the transcendence and personality of God; it is the monism of free-will, in which personality, both human and divine, sin and righteousness, God and the world, remain--two in one, and one in two--in⁹ their moral antithesis as well as their natural unity.

Strong's attempt to define and explain his concept of ethical monism seem to this writer to be contradictory, and Behrend's comments seem to be sound criticism. But Strong must be allowed to continue his explanation.

The universe, a finite
manifestation of the divine life

In his second main point, Strong states:

In contrast then with the two errors of Pantheism--the denial of God's transcendence and the denial of God's personality--Ethical Monism holds that the universe, instead of being one with God and coterminous with God, is but a finite, partial and progressive manifestation of the divine Life: Matter being God's self-limitation under the law of Necessity; Humanity being God's self-limitation under the law of Freedom; Incarnation and Atonement¹⁰ being God's self-limitations under the law of Grace.

Strong does not really try to explain precisely what he means by this. Instead, he quotes with approval from

⁸ Ibid., p. 106.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 107.

several Unitarian philosophers¹¹ and several poets, including Robert Browning¹². His final quotation is from E. M. Poteat who says: "Night's radiant glory overhead, A softer glory there below, Deep answered unto deep, and said: A kindred fire in us doth glow. For life is one--of sea and stars, Of God and man, of earth and heaven--And by no theologic bars Shall my scant life from God's be riven."¹³

Divine immanence
guarantees individuality

This is Strong's third major point in his presentation of ethical monism. He states:

The immanence of God, as the one substance, ground and principle of being, does not destroy, but rather guarantees, the individuality and rights of each portion of the universe, so that there is variety of rank and endowment. In the case of moral beings, worth is determined by the degree of their voluntary recognition and appropriation of the divine. While God is all, he is also in all; so making the universe a graded and progressive manifestation of himself, both in his love for righteousness and his opposition to moral evil.

¹¹These two philosophers are Upton and Martineau. In Christ in Creation, p. 69, Strong says: "It is possible to do this, as both Martineau and Upton do, in a Unitarian sense" In this statement, Strong is referring to their belief about God's relationship to the forces of nature.

¹²Cf. Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 107. This is significant because later in this chapter, it will be shown that Browning was a factor in Strong's acceptance of ethical monism.

¹³Ibid., p. 108. George W. Dollar, in his book, A History of Fundamentalism in America (Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 1973) p. 352, identified Edwin M. Poteat as a Baptist Liberal. The quotation by Strong lends support for such an identification.

It has been charged that the doctrine of monism necessarily involves moral indifference; . . . Of pantheistic monism all this is true,--it is not true of ethical monism; for ethical monism is the monism that recognizes the ethical fact of personal intelligence and will in both God and man, and with these God's purpose in making the universe a varied manifestation of himself.¹⁴

Strong goes on to quote with approval the words of Borden

Bowne:

Of course even the evil will is not independent of God, but lives and moves and has its being in and through the divine. But through its mysterious power of selfhood and self-determination the evil will is able to assume an attitude of hostility to the divine law, which forthwith vindicates itself by appropriate reactions.¹⁵

The cross explains the universe

This is Strong's fourth and final main point. Under it, Strong relates ethical monism to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Since Christ is the Logos of God, the immanent God, God revealed in Nature, in Humanity, in Redemption, Ethical Monism recognizes the universe as created, upheld, and governed by the same Being who in the course of history was manifest in human form and who made atonement for human sin by his death on Calvary. The secret of the universe and the key to its mysteries are to be found in the Cross. . . .

This view of the relation of the universe to God lays the foundation for a Christian application of recent philosophical doctrine. Matter is no longer blind and dead, but is spiritual in nature, not in the sense that it is spirit, but in the sense that it is the continual manifestation of spirit, just as my thoughts are a living and continual manifestation of myself. Yet matter does not consist simply in ideas, for ideas, deprived of an external object and of an internal subject, are left suspended in the air. Ideas are the product of Mind. But matter is known only as the

¹⁴Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 108.

¹⁵Ibid.

operation of force, and force is the product of Will. Since this force works in rational ways, it can be the product only of Spirit. The system of forces which we call the universe is the immediate product of the mind and will of God; and, since Christ is the mind and will of God in exercise, Christ is the Creator and Upholder of the universe. Nature is the omnipresent Christ, manifesting God to creatures.

Christ is the principle of cohesion, attraction, interaction, not only in the physical universe, but in the intellectual and moral universe as well. In all our knowing, the knower and known are "connected by some Being who is their reality," and this being is Christ, "the Light which lighteth every man" (John 1:9). We know in Christ, just as "in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). As the attraction of gravitation and the principle of evolution are only other names for Christ, so he is the basis of inductive reasoning and the ground of moral unity in the creation. I am bound to love my neighbor as myself because he has in him the same life that is in me, the life of God in Christ. . . .

As Pantheism=exclusive immanence=God imprisoned, so Deism=exclusive transcendence=God banished. Ethical Monism holds to the truth contained in each of these systems, while avoiding their respective errors. It furnishes the basis for a new interpretation of many theological as well as of many philosophical doctrines. It helps our understanding of the Trinity. If within the bounds of God's being there can exist multitudinous finite personalities, it becomes easier to comprehend how within those same bounds there can be three eternal and infinite personalities,--indeed, the integration of plural consciousnesses in an all-embracing divine consciousness may find a valid analogy in the integration of subordinate consciousnesses in the unit-personality of man; see Baldwin, Handbook of Psychology, Feeling and Will, 53-54.

Ethical Monism, since it is ethical, leaves room for human wills and for their freedom. While man could never break the natural bond which united him to God, he could break the spiritual bond and introduce into creation a principle of discord and evil. Tie a cord tightly about your finger; you partially isolate the finger, diminish its nutrition, bring about atrophy and disease. So there has been given to each intelligent and moral agent the power, spiritually to isolate himself from God while yet he is naturally joined to God. As humanity is created in Christ and lives only in

Christ, man's self-isolation is his moral separation from Christ. . . .

Ethical Monism, however, since it is Monism, enables us to understand the principle of the Atonement. Though God's holiness binds him to punish sin, the Christ who has joined himself to the sinner must share the sinner's punishment. He who is the life of humanity must take upon his own heart the burden of shame and penalty that belongs to his members. Tie the cord about your finger; not only the finger suffers pain, but also the heart; the life of the whole system rouses itself to put away the evil, to untie the cord, to free the diseased and suffering member. Humanity is bound to Christ, as the finger to the body.¹⁶

This extensive quotation has been given so that the reader may judge for himself whether or not Strong has explained and defended his viewpoint. Or perhaps Behrends was correct when he concluded that Strong's qualifications of monism, while being antipanthestic, were also inconsistent with that monism.

Strong's presentation also raises two theological criticisms: (1) in terms of methodology, Strong has permitted something other than Holy Scripture (in this case, philosophy) to create a doctrinal belief. Even if such a doctrine were correct (which, in this case, it is not), the procedure itself would be inappropriate for use by a Christian theologian; (2) Strong merely cites John 1:9 (Christ "was the true Light which lighteth every man") and Acts 17:28 ("For in him we live, and move, and have our being") as if simply pronouncing the words of these texts would prove his view of ethical monism beyond any doubt;

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 109-10.

there is no serious attempt by Strong to support his view of ethical monism by a detailed exegesis of biblical passages.

Found in Christ in Creation

The articles that Strong had printed in "The Examiner" during 1894 and 1895 later were published as the first 86 pages of a book by Strong entitled, Christ in Creation in 1899. It is from this book that Strong's presentation of ethical monism will be made. Points made by Strong in his Systematic Theology will not be repeated in this section unless they are amplified.

The nature of matter

Strong says:

But what interpretation are we to put upon creation? It is the work of Christ; but what sort of work is it? I think we must admit that modern physics and psychology have rendered untenable certain modes of conception which our fathers held. Matter is not the blind, dead thing that it once was. Its qualities exist only for intelligence. We do not know it except in connection with the sensations which it causes. Atoms without force can do nothing; atoms without mind can be nothing. Matter, therefore, is spiritual in its nature. By this I do not mean that matter is spirit, but only that it is the living and continual manifestation of spirit, just as my thoughts and volitions are a living and continual manifestation of myself.¹⁷

Strong goes on to say:

¹⁷Strong, Christ in Creation, p. 6.

All nature is a series of symbols setting forth the hidden truth of God. Since Christ is the only being who can reveal this truth, the world is virtually the thought of Christ, made intelligible by the constant will of Christ. Nature is the ¹⁸omnipresent Christ manifesting God to creatures.

The nature of knowledge

Strong comments:

Philosophy has been trying for ages to solve the problem of knowledge. How can I be sure that my sense-perceptions correspond to objective facts? that there are other intelligent beings besides myself with whom I can communicate? that there is any such thing as truth apart from my individual notions of it? Here too the solution is Christ. . . . Knowledge is not transferred from one man to another any more than motion is transferred from one planet to another. The mind is never passive in knowledge; it is always active. Its own powers must be awakened; it must see for itself. What I know must be distinct from myself, it is true. Even in knowing myself I must objectify. But at the same time there must be a bond between the knower and the known. "The two must be connected by some being which is their reality" and which constitutes the ground of their existence. And so we know in Christ, just as we live and move and have our being in him. He is not only the principle of communication between God and man, but also between man and the universe.

As the attraction of gravitation and the medium of knowledge are only other names for Christ, so Christ is the principle of induction, which permits ¹⁹us to argue from one part of the system to another.

The nature of morality

Strong states:

It is only Christ, furthermore, who gives moral

¹⁸Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 9-10.

unity to the system of things. Why am I bound to love my neighbor as myself? Because my neighbor is myself-- that is, has in him the same life that is in me, the life of God in Christ. The brotherhood of man is the natural correlate of the fatherhood of God. The law of love and holiness is only the expression of the natural bond that unites the whole universe to the great source of its life and blessedness. I am bound to love myself because of what there is of God in me; I am bound to love my neighbor as myself because God's wisdom and will are manifested equally in him. So the Christ in whom all humanity is created, and in whom all humanity consists, holds together the moral universe, drawing all men to himself and so drawing them to God.²⁰

The nature of self-limitation

Strong states:

Our system, then, is neither idealistic nor materialistic. It holds that both nature and man are manifestations of God's life. We have no difficulty in accepting the Scripture teaching with regard to the self-limitation of the Logos in becoming man. We believe in such a depotentiation of the divine, that the Son of God could become ignorant and weak in the cradle of Bethlehem; but we now have to learn that this depotentiation in becoming man was not the first to which the Logos had submitted. There was a self-limitation also when humanity was originally created in him; since he is the only life of humanity, the race began to be, and it continued to be, only by virtue of a kenosis of the Logos which antedated his incarnation. Nay, we must carry our principle yet farther back. Since all things were made in him, it is his life which pervades even the physical universe, and matter itself is only the manifestation of that life in generic volitions and regular ways.²¹

While Strong has not developed fully his view on the person of Christ, certain things he says could be understood as teaching an unorthodox view of Jesus Christ. Some of these

²⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 28-29.

same things could also be understood in a pantheistic sense, and yet Strong denies this charge and reacts quite negatively to it.

The nature of psychology

Strong is interested in relating his view of ethical monism to a view of psychology popular in his day. He says:

Professor Wundt, of Leipzig, and more recently Professor Baldwin, of Princeton, have intimated that the integration of finite consciousness in an all-embracing divine consciousness may find a valid analogy in the integration of subordinate consciousness in the unit-personality of man. In the hypnotic state, multiple consciousness may be induced in the same nervous organism. In insanity there is a secondary consciousness at war with that which normally dominates. If consciousness is present in the elements of the nervous tissue apart from the unit consciousness of the organism as a whole, it need not seem so strange that in the one all-including divine consciousness there should be finite consciousnesses quite unaware of their relation to the whole, and even antagonistic to it. If matter, moreover, be merely the expression of spirit, then the body as an object of consciousness, may well be only the reverse side of what we call the consciousness of the object. Since the all-including consciousness is that of Christ, our very bodies may²² be manifestations of the thought and purpose of Christ.

The nature of sin

Strong recognizes that his view of ethical monism will be considered valid by Christian theologians only if it is able to take into account adequately the fact of sin. He remarks:

I am well aware that the test of this doctrine must be its ability to explain the fact of sin. How can that

²²Ibid., p. 31.

which is of the substance of God ever become morally evil? Our only answer is: It was not morally evil at the first. God has limited and circumscribed himself in giving life to finite personalities within the bounds of his own being, and it is not the fact of sin that constitutes the primary difficulty, but the fact of finite personality. When God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of his own life, he communicated freedom, and made possible the creature's self-chosen alienation from himself, the giver of that life. While man could never break the natural bond which united him to God, he could break the spiritual bond, and could introduce even into the life of God a principle of discord and evil.²³

One cannot help but wonder whether Strong has faced the issue that he himself raised or whether he switched the issue from sin to finitude.

The nature of atonement

Strong comments:

How can the innocent justly suffer the penalty for the guilty? How can the justification of Christ become my justification? Because "in him all things consist." There is nothing arbitrary in the process; it is simply natural law and actual fact. It is impossible that he who is the natural life of humanity should not be responsible for the sin committed by his own members. It is impossible that he should not suffer, that he should not make reparation, that he should not atone. The incarnation and death of Christ are only the outward and temporal exhibition of an eternal fact in the being of God, and of a suffering for sin endured by the pre-incarnate Son of God ever since the fall. The wrath of God against sin began to be endured by Christ just so soon as sin began. The patriarchs and prophets were saved, not so much by the retroactive effect of a future atonement, as by the present effect of an atonement which was even then in progress. The sacrifices of the Mosaic system had something behind them even then. Gethsemane and Calvary were concrete presentations of age-long facts: the fact, on the one hand, that holiness must punish sin; and the fact, on the other hand, that

²³ Ibid., p. 33.

he who gave his life to man at the beginning must share man's guilt and penalty. But the satisfaction of justice culminates in redemption--that is, in the conquest of sin and death. The eternal atonement is not such a conquest. The historical atonement is such a conquest. It is not merely a manifestation, it is the objectification, of the eternal suffering love of God, and at the same time the actual deliverance²⁴ of our nature from sin and death by Jesus Christ.

The Christian theologian whose view of the atonement is formed by Scripture alone can only blush with embarrassment at such an explanation. That Christ was himself justly guilty of sin (although Strong would also say he was personally pure) is blasphemy. Strong's view of the relationship of humanity to Christ would, if consistently held, rule out any possible punishment of the lost in hell forever. And, although Strong tries to correct it, his view shifts the atoning work of Christ away from the cross of Calvary.

An Explanation of Factors Influencing Strong

In this section, ten factors will be examined to determine what, if any, influence they had on Augustus Hopkins Strong in causing him to embrace ethical monism. Carl Henry identifies 1894 as the time Strong publicly taught ethical monism.²⁵ Without necessarily agreeing with Henry, it will be helpful in evaluating the following factors to keep this date in mind.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 37-38.

²⁵Carl F. H. Henry's Personal Idealism and Strong's Theology (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1951), p. 95.

The Influence of E. G. Robinson

Henry has suggested that Robinson, Strong's theology teacher in seminary, may have influenced Strong in his adoption of ethical monism. He says: "The influences which Strong suggests as encouraging his adoption of an intensified divine immanence include Ezekiel G. Robinson. . . ." ²⁶

The statement of Strong to which Henry is referring comes from an article which Strong wrote as a tribute to Robinson. Strong said:

Secondly, I am humbled to find out how much of my own thinking that I thought original has been an unconscious reproduction of his own. Words and phrases which I must have heard from him in the class-room thirty-five years ago, and which have come to be a part of my mental furniture, I now recognize as not my own but his. And the ruling idea of his system,--that stands out as the ruling idea of mine; I did not²⁷ realize until now that I owed it almost wholly to him.

The evidence, according to Henry, linking Robinson as a possible influence on Strong's acceptance of ethical monism is three-fold: (1) it was in 1894 that Strong published his first series of articles on ethical monism in "The Examiner"; (2) it was during the same year that Strong finally read Robinson's Christian Theology, and (3) it was sometime close to 1894 that Strong wrote his tribute to Robinson, saying that he owed the ruling idea of his theo-

²⁶Ibid., p. 228.

²⁷Augustus H. Strong, "Dr. Robinson as a Theologian," in Ezekiel Gilman Robinson: An Autobiography, ed. by E. H. Johnson (New York: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1896), p. 168.

logical system to Robinson.²⁸ Nevertheless, Henry does not give unqualified acceptance to the idea that Robinson was a major influence upon Strong's espousal of ethical monism. He points out two problems with this idea: (1) Robinson, at least in his published writings, rejected monism! and (2) Strong does not cite Robinson when he is mentioning others who hold this monistic viewpoint.²⁹ It is possible to conclude that in all probability, Robinson did not influence Strong to accept ethical monism, and what Strong meant when he said that he owed the ruling idea of his system of theology to Robinson, referred, not to the monism but to the "ethical" aspect, that is, the idea that the law was a transcript of God's nature.³⁰

Disappointment in the University of Chicago

Grant Wacker, in his doctoral dissertation, makes several suggestions as to the factors that may have influenced Strong to adopt ethical monism. One of these is expressed by Wacker in the following words:

Other than the slim possibility that Strong suddenly had been influenced by Robinson, the evidence yields very few clues as to what experience or experiences might have triggered the changes in his thinking in this two- or three-year period. He was bitterly disappointed by John D. Rockefeller's decision to build a great

²⁸Henry, Personal Idealism and Strong's Theology, p. 96.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 96-97.

³⁰A. H. Strong, Autobiography of Augustus Hopkins Strong, ed. Crerar Douglas (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1981), p. 218.

Baptist university in Chicago rather than New York.³¹ Wacker does not offer any statement or documentation to explain in what way Strong's disappointment in Rockefeller's decision to build a university in Chicago rather than in New York City might affect Strong in his thinking about ethical monism. This writer could not find any evidence for this possibility, either.

His Wife's Deteriorating Health

After mentioning Strong's disappointment in Rockefeller's decision to build a university in Chicago rather than in New York City, Wacker mentions the deterioration of Strong's wife's health as a possible factor. He says:

The steady deterioration of his wife's health, coupled with the rejection of Christian faith by his elder son Charles, obviously weighed heavily on his mind. Each or all of these experiences, in some inexplicable way, may have played a part. We do not know.³²

Wacker does not offer any evidence to support this suggestion, and this writer was not able to locate anything that pointed in this direction.

Charles Strong's Rejection of Christianity

While Wacker mentions in passing the possible influence of Augustus Hopkins Strong's eldest son, Charles,

³¹Grant Wacker, "Augustus H. Strong: A Conservative Confrontation with History" Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1978, p. 102.

³²Ibid.

upon his father as a factor in A. H. Strong's acceptance of ethical monism, this never developed.³³ This writer's research, however, has uncovered some material which supports the belief that Charles was a contributing factor to his father's acceptance of ethical monism.

Love and concern for Charles

There can be no doubt that A. H. Strong greatly loved his eldest son, Charles and was deeply concerned over his son's apostasy. Here are words of a proud father when he announced:

Be it known unto all inquirers that Charles A. Strong's book on "The Origin of Consciousness," upon which he has spent fifteen years of unremitting labor, is now printed by the Macmillans of London and is regarded by many as a final demolition of Kant's philosophy of relativity.³⁴

In his Autobiography, A. H. Strong describes many facts about Charles, including his abilities, various incidents in his life as he was growing up, his higher education and finally his rejection of the Christian faith.³⁵ He describes the exposure of Charles to liberalism at Harvard and his own reaction to that exposure in the following words:

³³While it is true that Wacker goes into some detail concerning Strong's attitude toward Charles (pages 157-63), he never indicates how this might be related to his acceptance of ethical monism.

³⁴Augustus H. Strong, "My Views of the Universe in General," The Baptist, May 29, 1920, p. 625.

³⁵Autobiography of A. H. Strong, pp. 257-264.

Then, as had been long agreed upon, he took a year at Harvard, entering the senior class and taking the Harvard degree of B.A. in addition to the same degree he had received at Rochester.

Charles' work at Cambridge was almost wholly in philosophy. He took six courses at once. James, Goodwin, Palmer, and Royce were his teachers. The Harvard atmosphere was very liberal, and I soon found that my son was beginning to question³⁶ the faith in which he had been brought up. At that time³⁶ I was myself less open to modern ideas than I have been since. The natural realism which I had imbibed under Professor Noah Porter still seemed to me the ultimate philosophy. I became alarmed at Charles's tendencies. Instead of trusting that his honesty of purpose would lead him into the light, I feared that he would become an apostate from Christianity. I³⁷ wrote to him of my fears and worried him by them. It was all a mistake on my part, and I now greatly regret that I did not leave him to himself and to the teaching of the Spirit of truth. He was desperately hard at work, and my anxieties only made life the harder for him.³⁸ He spent too many hours in study. I am afraid that he injured his health. But he was wonderfully successful in making friends and in taking the highest rank in his class. He graduated³⁹ summa cum laude, in a class of about two hundred.

³⁶Charles was a senior at Harvard during the 1884-1885 school year.

³⁷The collection of Strong family material was turned over to Crerar Douglas to catalogue. Professor Douglas was kind enough to provide this writer with typed copies of the letters Charles wrote to family members during his senior year at Harvard. While they do not give evidence of confrontations between A. H. Strong and his eldest son, they do reflect a father's concern over his son's studies.

³⁸Daniel M. Cory, biographer of Charles Augustus Strong, comments: "The emotional strain involved in informing his father of his loss of faith was great, and the resulting tension had a permanent effect on the nervous health of the younger man." Daniel M. Cory, "Strong, Charles Augustus," Dictionary of American Biography, Volume XI: Supplement Two, edited by Robert Livingston Schuyler, 22 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 639.

³⁹Autobiography of A. H. Strong, pp. 260-61.

Reversal of church discipline for Charles

After his studies at Harvard, Charles returned to Rochester and began studying at the seminary where his father was president and professor of theology. Gradually, he began to reject the Christian faith. A. H. Strong comments:

When the International Seminary Alliance met in Rochester, instead of giving himself to missionary work as I had hoped he would do, he seemed to set himself against it. When I told him that he who did not yield to Christ would find that stone grinding him to powder, he replied that he would not yield to one whom he could not see to be God. He sold his Hebrew Bible and his theological books, as if to burn his ships⁴⁰ and to put the ministry of Christ forever behind him.

In response to a letter from the First Baptist Church of Rochester, New York of which he was member, Charles requested that his name be dropped from the membership of the congregation.⁴¹

Twenty-five years later, A. H. Strong urged the First Baptist Church of Rochester, New York to reverse the removal of his son from the membership. Thus, on July 26, 1916 the congregation voted to rescind their previous action and to restore Charles A. Strong to membership in the First

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 262.

⁴¹A. H. Strong comments: "I ought to have believed in Christ's power to lead him out of darkness into light. But I almost despaired, and when he replied to a letter of the church and declared his inability to remain in their faith and fellowship, I myself thought it my duty to the church to make the motion to exclude him. I must leave to God and to the judgment day the decision of the question whether I did right." Ibid. "The Church Records of the First Baptist Church of Rochester, New York for Wednesday,

Baptist Church of Rochester, New York.⁴² One year later,

November 4, 1891" state "The Prudential Committee recommends to the church that the hand of fellowship be withdrawn from Charles A. Strong, at his own request, on account of his divergence from the views of the church, with regard to essential points of doctrine."

⁴²from "The Church Records of the First Baptist Church of Rochester, N.Y., for Wednesday, July 26, 1916." In his letter to the church, urging them to restore Charles to membership, A. H. Strong said:

"Dear Brethren:-

"On the 4th of November 1891, the hand of fellowship was withdrawn from my son, Charles Augustus Strong, upon the ground that he had ceased to believe in what the Church regarded as fundamentals of doctrine. I myself at that time approved of the Church's decision, and even urged its action. But I now think that I was wrong, and that the Church was wrong, and I request the Church to reverse its action, and to restore my son to its fellowship.

"A word of explanation may make the matter more clear. My son had not been guilty, and he has not since been guilty, of any moral lapse. On the other hand, he has been ever the same affectionate son, correct liver, and persistent seeker after truth. William James, before he died, called him the most thoroughgoing truth-lover he had ever known. He has been perplexed, and, as I think, to some extent blinded; but he has been always conscientious. He has borne patiently his exclusion from the Church, and has made no complaint.

"Times have changed during these last twenty years. Churches think less of mere formulas of doctrine, and more of the spirit of men's life. I believe that my son shows in his life the work of Christ's Spirit; and that a reversal of the Church's action, and his restoration to church-fellowship, may themselves be a help to the settlement in his mind of some of the speculative problems that have vexed him.

"I wish to confess my own wrong in the matter. I was a member of a Committee on Discipline. I thought I could not be a proper guardian of the Church in the case of other members who had gone astray, so long as I neglected to see justice done in the case of my own son. I would now be more lenient and forbearing and hopeful in cases where there is no moral delinquency, and where the defect is only intellectual misunderstanding. I am nearing my fourscore years, and I would like to celebrate my eightieth birthday with

A. H. Strong wrote in his autobiography concerning his son, Charles: "I do not see that he changed his views of Christ and of Christianity or that he now accepts Christ as his divine Lord and Redeemer."⁴³ Nevertheless, he adds:

I have great pity for him and great faith that Christ will yet reveal himself to him, for his filial loyalty and his persistent search for truth touch my heart. I believe that these traits are signs of Christ's working in him, though he is as unconscious of their Author as was Saul on his way to Damascus. And so I rejoiced last year in our church's action in reversing the excluding vote by which twenty-five years ago it had separated him from its membership. I was conscientious then in approving that excommunication. I now see more clearly that the Light that lighteth every man is Christ, and I live in hope that before I die Charles will see "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."⁴⁴

A. H. Strong did not get his wish. His son, Charles, never openly returned to the Christian faith.⁴⁵

this burden off my mind. Wherefore I pray the Church, if the Church can think it right and wise, to put Charles Augustus Strong back where he was before the Church excluded him, in the hope and faith that the Spirit of Christ will yet lead him into all the truth.

"Faithfully and affectionately yours,
"August H. Strong"

⁴³Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 351.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Note, for example, C. A. Strong's book, A Creed For Sceptics (London: Macmillan and Co., 1936) for a statement by Charles on his beliefs. Interestingly, in a chapter for the book, Contemporary American Philosophy, Charles attributes the crumbling of his Christian faith to correcting the proofs for his father's work on theology, in which theologians tried to harmonize the data from the Gospels on the life of Jesus. Cf. "Nature and Mind" by Charles Augustus Strong, Contemporary American Philosophy, 2 vols., edited by George P. Adams and Wm. Pepperell Montague (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), 2:313.

The point of including these quotations is to show the love and concern that A. H. Strong had for his son, Charles. This material also makes clear the influence Charles had upon his father.

Philosophical viewpoint of Charles

In the 1907 edition of his Systematic Theology, A. H. Strong argues against materialistic idealism. In so doing, he states:

There is, however, an idealism which is not open to Hamilton's objections, and to which most recent philosophers give their adhesion. It is the objective idealism of Lotze. It argues that we know nothing of the extended world except through the forces which impress our nervous organism. These forces take the form of vibrations of air, or ether, and we interpret them as sound, light, or motion, according as they affect our nerves of hearing, sight or touch. But the only force which we immediately know is that of our own will, and we can either not understand matter at all or we must understand it as the product of a will comparable to our own.⁴⁶

This discussion is followed by the citation of two modern philosophers who substantiate A. H. Strong's view. They are Hermann Lotze himself and "Professor C. A. Strong."⁴⁷

The Influence of Lotze and Bowne

One has only to look in the author index of the 1907 edition of A. H. Strong's Systematic Theology to see that Lotze and Borden P. Bowne are cited many times. This

⁴⁶A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, 1907 ed., p. 96.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 96-98.

dependence on these two men is borne out by an examination of the first 86 pages of Strong's Christ in Creation. In these pages Strong states:

The monistic tendency of our day is essentially a philosophical tendency. No thinker of recent times has had greater influence in this direction than has Lotze. He is both monist and objective idealist. Yet he holds with equal tenacity to the distinction between the divine personality and the human personality, and declares that "where two hypotheses are equally possible, the one agreeing with our moral needs and the other conflicting with them, nothing must induce us to favor the latter." He intends his monism to be an Ethical Monism, by which I mean simply a monism that conserves the ethical interests of mankind.⁴⁸

Thus, Strong himself acknowledges the influence of Lotze (and his American counterpart, Bowne) upon his own thinking. Henry recognizes this fact but does not understand the reason for it. He says:

It is a curious circumstance, that, in Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism, in replying to critics of a monistic position, it was not to the precedent of Robinson, but rather to the writing of Lotze, Ladd, Upton and Bowne, to whom Strong appealed, and whom he most frequently quoted in the section of his Systematic Theology revised in the interest of the newer view.⁴⁹

In another place Henry comments:

The influences which Strong suggests as encouraging his adoption of an intensified divine immanence include Ezekiel G. Robinson, his former teacher; Hermann Lotze, and his leading American interpreter in Strong's day, Borden P. Bowne. This study casts doubt on any substantial influence from Robinson in this direction.

⁴⁸Strong, Christ in Creation, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁹Henry, Personal Idealism and Strong's Theology, pp. 96-97.

The precise manner in which Strong effectively came in⁵⁰ touch with Lotze's view remains undiscovered.

One point often overlooked needs to be made. A. H. Strong's eldest son, Charles, became friends with George Santayana during their study together at Harvard. Santayana describes this relationship in the following words.

An event that had important consequences in the future course of my life occurred silently and almost unnoticed during my Senior year. A young man named Charles Augustus Strong--there was already something royal and German about that "Augustus" and that "Strong," though the youth was modesty and Puritanism personified--came from the university of his native Rochester, New York, to study philosophy for a year at Harvard. As I too was taking all the advanced courses in that subject, we found ourselves daily thrown together, gradually began to compare notes, and to discuss the professors and their opinions; and finally we founded a philosophical club, in order to discuss everything more thoroughly with the other embryonic philosophers in the place. Towards the end of the year we both became candidates for the Walker Fellowship, usually awarded to graduates who wished to study philosophy in Germany. . . .

. . . I asked him if he would be willing to agree that whoever of us got the Fellowship should divide it with the other. Then we should both be going to Germany for the next year. He consented at once . . . Later, Strong went to live in Europe, in Paris, in Fiesole. He had got used to having me to talk with. I was often his guest for long periods. . . .⁵¹

When Santayana returned to Harvard in 1888 he wrote a

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 228-29.

⁵¹ George Santayana, Persons and Places, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 1:249, 251-52.

doctoral thesis entitled, "Lotze's System of Philosophy."⁵² Therefore, it is quite likely that A. H. Strong came in touch with Lotze through his son, Charles, who in turn, would have become familiar with Lotze through his own study and through his friendship with George Santayana.

The Influence of the Pundit Club

LeRoy Moore, Jr. comments on the Pundit Club and A. H. Strong's relationship to it in the following words:

The principal source of intellectual nourishment through his [A. H. Strong's] long career as an educator was undoubtedly the Pundit Club, a select group of professional men to which Strong himself belonged for forty-nine years, from 1872 until his death. "Pundit Club" was the nickname which practically supplanted the official name, "The Club." A local intellectual and literary venture, the club was founded in 1854 by Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881), father of American anthropology and author of Ancient Society (1877), in which he set out the doctrine of the common origin and psychic unity of all races and expressed his theory of racial evolution through successive stages of savagery, barbarism, and civilization. Morgan's own boldly inquiring spirit characterized the Pundit Club from the first. Members met to hear papers on every conceivable subject, accompanied by candid and vigorous discussion. . . .

A favored theme for club discussions through the decades to 1900 was the relation of science, particularly the scientific method, to other disciplines. In 1871 E. G. Robinson, who was a club member ahead of Strong, read a paper on theology as related to scientific method. Also, among the presentations made, there was a veritable harvest of treatments of evolutionary themes,⁵³ and considerable attention to social criticism.

⁵²Ibid., 2:152. Cf. Lotze's System of Philosophy, by George Santayana, edited with an Introduction and Lotze Bibliography by Paul Grimley Kuntz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971).

⁵³LeRoy Moore, Jr., "The Rise of American Religious Liberalism at the Rochester Theological Seminary, 1872-

There is some indication that the Club had an effect upon A. H. Strong's thinking, particularly as it related to evolution. A fellow member of the Club commented:

It may not be presumptuous to suggest that not only did the Club derive the greatest benefit from their association with Dr. Strong, but that he himself may have felt the beneficial influence derived from his association with the Club. It has been observed by many that the views of Dr. Strong seemed to undergo some change from the stricter dogmatism of earlier days to a more liberal spirit of later years, due to the modified acceptance of the theory of evolution, which was already accepted⁵⁴ as the scientific creed of many of his associates.

While belief in theistic evolution would not require one to hold Strong's ethical monism, the two ideas naturally go hand-in-hand. It is noteworthy that on October 23, 1894 A. H. Strong read a paper to the Club on "The Philosophy of Robert Browning" and that on February 12, 1895 a paper entitled, "The Monistic Interpretation" was read by Dr. Hill.⁵⁵ It is possible that these topics, along with the accompanying discussion, influenced Strong's thinking. Strong himself says: ". . . and The Club, next to the seminary and the church, has been my greatest source of profit and enjoyment in Rochester."⁵⁶

1928," Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1966, pp. 34-35.

⁵⁴William Cary Morey, Ph.D., D.C.L., "Reminiscences of the Club", The Club: Si Quid Veri Inveneris Profer: 1854-1937, (Rochester, New York: 1938), pp. 24-25.

⁵⁵The Club: Si Quid Veri Inveneris Profer: 1854-1911, (Rochester, New York: 1911), pp. 35-36.

⁵⁶Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 313.

The Influence of Henry A. Ward

Moore thinks Ward influenced Strong on the subject of evolution. He says:

This interchange of ideas within the club was not, however, the only direct channel for evolutionary concepts to reach the mind of A. H. Strong. There was also his close friendship with naturalist Henry A. Ward (1834-1906), pioneer in the development of museum displays calculated to show the process of evolution clearly and as a whole.⁵⁷

There is some evidence to support Moore's remarks. On October 11, 1921, Strong lectured at the Rochester Historical Society on the life of Henry A. Ward. Among other things, he said:

Many years ago he [Ward] made for me a little cabinet of three hundred specimens, no one of which is more than three inches in diameter. It cost me three hundred dollars, but to my mind it is now worth three thousand, because it furnishes, in miniature, from all parts of the world, a unified object-lesson in geologic history, beginning with Eozoon Canadense, and ending with a blind fish of the Mammoth Cave.⁵⁸

The influence of Henry A. Ward upon A. H. Strong was directly related to the theory of evolution. Ward did, however, philosophize on Christianity. Strong remarks:

Ward called himself "a Christian agnostic." He was not an orthodox believer. He had accepted the evolutionary hypothesis of the earth's origin and history, and he regarded Christ and Christianity as products, in a process of natural and universal law. But he could not rid himself of the conviction that his natural law must somehow have a God before it, behind it, and in it;

⁵⁷ LeRoy Moore, Jr., "The Rise of American Religious Liberalism . . . ," p. 36.

⁵⁸ Augustus Hopkins Strong, "Henry A. Ward: Reminiscence and Appreciation," (Rochester: The Rochester Historical Society, 1922), pp. 22-23.

and though he made little of religious forms, he had in him a considerable respect for the Christian spirit.⁵⁹

The Influence of the Baptist Congresses

Strong was also influenced in his thinking by the Baptist congresses. Moore comments:

What the Pundit Club furnished in a local and frequent way in Rochester throughout our whole period, the Baptist Congress for the Discussion of Current Questions provided annually on a denominational level during the three decades from 1882 through 1913. This unofficial congress was exactly what its name implied: an open marketplace for the display and exchange of ideas from every quarter of opinion within the denomination.⁶⁰

A careful examination of the printed copies of the lectures given at these Congresses for the years of 1890, 1892, 1895, and 1898 yields the following information: (1) In 1890, Strong read a paper entitled, "The Divine Immanence in Recent Theology" in which he was quite negative toward this trend. His closing words were:

May we not hope that, in spite of the mighty drift of our time toward a denial of God's power and divinity, a multitude of his saints will still have in themselves, and will still give to others, this mightier and more convincing witness to the transcendence of God?⁶¹

Immediately following Strong's presentation, Dr. Philip

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁶⁰ LeRoy Moore, Jr., "The Rise of American Religious Liberalism . . . ," p. 36.

⁶¹ A. H. Strong, "The Divine Immanence in Recent Theology," Proceedings of the Baptist Congress for the Discussion of Current Questions, 1890, p. 181.

Moxom⁶² spoke. He said:

While listening to Dr. Strong's paper I forgot during a part of it that I was listening to a philosophical discussion, and thought I was listening to a sermon with its fervid and glowing periods. It will have something of the effect of a sudden cold shower bath to recall your minds to the definite philosophical question that I submit is presented in the theme before us. Many of the consequences, or the differences, from the doctrine of the Divine Immanence which have been stated to us in Dr. Strong's able paper are not only not legitimate but not fairly tolerable.⁶³

Moxom then proceeded to defend the emphasis on divine immanence in recent theology. This was followed by comments from four more people, all of whom seemed to feel that Strong had gone too far in his criticism of divine immanence. While it cannot be proven conclusively that this incident influenced Strong's thinking to be more favorably disposed to the issue of divine immanence, such is a real possibility; (2) In 1892 the topic for discussion at the Baptist Congress was the authority of Scripture. A number of speakers discussed the pros and cons of this topic. While all affirmed the authority of Scripture, not all were willing to affirm the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture. One speaker who did defend these views was

⁶²Philip Stafford Moxom was pastor of First Baptist Church in Boston in 1890. He studied theology under Strong from 1875-1878 and so he knew what Strong believed and how his thinking process developed. Cf. "Moxom, Philip Stafford," by John Haynes Holmes, Dictionary of American Biography, 22 vols., ed. by Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 13:301-302.

⁶³Rev. Dr. Moxom, "Response," Proceedings of the Baptist Congress for the Discussion of Current Questions, 1890, p. 181.

A. T. Robertson, the noted Greek scholar. After four people responded (some positively; others negatively) to Robertson's presentation, A. H. Strong made some remarks. Among other things, he said:

Though the Scriptures are such an authority, it does not follow that they are absolute authority, or that they are to be identified with God. The parent and the state have an authority derived from God, but it does not follow that the parent and the state are perfect. So the question whether the Scriptures are destitute of human imperfections, in matters of historical and scientific detail, is not a question to be determined by a priori reasoning, it is wholly a question of fact. In spite of my belief in the authority of Scripture, I hold myself open to all that science can prove with regard to the actual facts of divine inspiration. I am ready, after full and candid investigation of these facts, to modify my views with regard to the method of divine inspiration, according as the facts shall seem to be to require.

And yet at the same time I recognize the supremacy of the word of God over reason, and over conscience. I recognize it as the ultimate standard in all matters of faith and practice. Leibnitz the German theologian and philosopher, gave an illustration a great while ago which has always seemed to me of value. The Viceroy of a province, with credentials from the King, comes to the provincial assembly, and the doors open to receive him. . . . He lays his credentials upon the desk of the presiding officer; he awaits the scrutiny of these credentials. When the presiding officer has scrutinized the credentials, has ascertained that they are properly signed and sealed, and that they attest the appointment of this Viceroy by the King, he rises, announces the fact, and the whole assembly after him rises to its feet in reverence for the representative of the Sovereign. Then the presiding officer leaves his seat, the Viceroy takes his place, and from that moment the Viceroy's word is law. So the Scripture comes to reason, presents its credentials, proves its credentials to be sufficient; and then Scripture, and not reason,⁶⁴ sits upon the throne.

⁶⁴Professor A. H. Strong, "Remarks," Proceedings of the Baptist Congress for the Discussion of Current Questions, 1892, pp. 201-202.

(3) The Baptist Congress in 1895 discussed monism as its major topic. While Strong did not read a paper, it seems likely that these discussions help solidify the ideas to which he was coming; and (4) In 1898, the Baptist Congress discussed evolution as a topic. At these meetings, Strong read a paper entitled, "The Fall and the Redemption of Man in the Light of Evolution."⁶⁵ Others also spoke on this subject. Again, while there is no conclusive proof that these discussions shaped Strong's thinking, it does seem probable that they influenced his thinking to some degree.

The Influence of Robert Browning

Strong comments:

About the year 1884, however, I was asked to join the Browning Club. . . . I had never read Browning to any considerable extent. Years before, I had tried The Ring and the Book, but its uncouthness had repelled me, and I had given it up in despair. Professor J. H. Gilmore's readings in the Browning Club first gave me a suspicion that I was wrong. I made another trial, beginning with Saul and some of the easier poems. Little by little I came to see that here was a new elemental force in literature. The roughness became an evidence of originality and vigor. Going to the Browning Club to scoff, I remained to pray. I read extensively and with increasing avidity. Before the end of the year I had concluded that Browning was one of the greatest teachers of our time, the representative of a new philosophy, the poet of optimism.⁶⁶

⁶⁵A. H. Strong, "The Fall and the Redemption of Man in the Light of Evolution," Proceedings of the Baptist Congress for the Discussion of Current Questions, 1898, pp. 6-17.

⁶⁶Autobiography of A. H. Strong, pp. 315-316.

The "new philosophy" of which Strong spoke was his own ethical monism. Elsewhere Strong describes Browning as "a monist, but an ethical monist, a believer that God and man are of one substance, but a hater of pantheism which denies God's transcendence and separate personality."⁶⁷

Strong's Personal Study

In this section two distinct ideas are being presented and therefore they will be examined separately. One of them concerns Strong's openness to new ideas coupled with the relative authority he assigned to Scripture. The other idea concerns his methodology.

Strong's openness

This aspect of Strong's life has been examined already in this dissertation (pages 10 and 17). It has been shown also that even in his early theology, Strong was willing to place what he considered to be God's revelation in nature over Holy Scripture (see page 53). Thus, one of

⁶⁷ Augustus Hopkins Strong, The Great Poets and Their Theology, (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), p. 425. This chapter on Robert Browning is composed of two parts. The first part was written ten years before the second part and can be found in Strong's Philosophy and Religion (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1888), pp. 525-543. Cf. Douglas, Autobiography of A. H. Strong, p. 316 where Strong explains about the two parts and their being placed together in the above-mentioned book on the poets. It should be noted that toward the end of that chapter on Browning in the book on the poets, Strong says the later Browning changed his viewpoint--for the bad. cf. Strong, The Great Poets. . . , pp. 431-47.

the factors leading Strong astray was his openness to new ideas and his regulated study of the natural and social sciences, coupled with his failure to distinguish facts discovered in these disciplines from the interpretation placed upon these facts by the leading scholars of the day. Instead of testing the interpretation by Holy Scripture, he allowed God's Word to be placed under the natural and social sciences.

Strong's methodology

The other thing in Strong's personal study which seems to be a factor in bringing him to accept ethical monism is the importance he placed on the believer's union with Christ. Because he made this teaching, rather than the believer's justification, central to all of his other thinking, he looked for realistic rather than juridical explanations for the problem of sin and salvation. The lessons in theology that Strong says he learned throughout his life (especially lessons 5-12)⁶⁸ indicate how Strong moved from making the believer's union with Christ central in his system of theology to his adoption of ethical monism.

⁶⁸See pages 26-46 in this study for an examination and evaluation of lessons 5-12 in theology learned by Strong.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the major points of the dissertation will be summarized, and some general conclusions tentatively will be drawn. The purpose of this summary and conclusion is not only to bring this study to a close but also to highlight the important theological issues that have been presented.

Summary

In chapter one, the importance of Augustus Hopkins Strong for today was discussed. Born on August 3, 1836, he died on November 29, 1921. For forty years (1872-1912) he was president and professor of theology at the Baptist Seminary in Rochester, New York (Colgate Rochester Divinity School). He wrote a textbook in systematic theology which went through eight editions and which is still being published today. In addition to the continued use of his Systematic Theology, there has been a renewed interest in Strong. This is due to his openness to truth wherever it might be found and his general adherence to the major doctrines of Christianity.

In chapter two, Strong's life was viewed from two

perspectives. A chronological overview, highlighting the major periods in his life, serves to acquaint the reader with the life of A. H. Strong. A review of the twelve lessons in theology which Strong himself relates serves to make clear the direction in which his theological understanding moved throughout his life. The section treating these lessons in theology also contains an evaluation by this writer of those lessons. This enables the reader to understand the perspective from which this writer is writing.

In chapter three, the major aspects of Strong's theology are presented twice, first from the book he wrote during his early years as president and professor of theology and secondly, from the final edition of his Systematic Theology. In this way, both his early thinking and his later, mature thinking are examined. Very little attempt is made in this chapter to evaluate Strong's beliefs.

In chapters four, five and six, Strong's doctrine of Holy Scripture, as reflected primarily, though not exclusively, from the final edition of his Systematic Theology, was examined and evaluated. The perspective from which this evaluation was made includes this writer's belief in the following: (1) a proper distinction between Law and Gospel, (2) a rejection of synergism in salvation, (3) the witness of the Holy Spirit by means of Holy Scripture itself to assurance of one's own salvation and to the divine authority of the Bible, and (4) the work of the Holy Spirit upon and

within the writers of Holy Scripture causing them to write all that He wanted written, exactly what He wanted written, even in the choice of words, the result of this verbal inspiration being the inerrancy of the Bible in its original manuscripts.

In chapter seven, ethical monism, a term Strong used to explain his belief in God's relationship to the universe in general and to the human race in particular, was presented in some detail. This was followed by a section in which an attempt was made to try to determine what factors led Strong to adopt this philosophical view, since ethical monism, rather than justification and Holy Scripture itself, controlled Strong's theological beliefs. The influence of his eldest son, Charles, is one of the major contributions of this dissertation to original knowledge. Other influences, shown to be factors in Strong's adoption of ethical monism were the annual Baptist congresses, the Pundit Club in Rochester, New York, the writings of Robert Browning, his friendship with Henry A. Ward and Strong's own personal study.

Conclusion

One of the reasons for writing this dissertation was to provide a written document that would correct the major defects in Strong's doctrine of Holy Scripture from a perspective that accepts the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. But in the process of doing research and

writing, major problems were discovered in many areas of Strong's theology. An attempt has been made in this dissertation to point out these problems and to offer suggestions as to how they might be corrected, although it is beyond the scope of this study to explore these problems and/or their solutions in great detail.

One truth became clear as work on this dissertation progressed. The methodology one uses as a Christian theologian will, if applied consistently, invariably lead to certain doctrinal conclusions. Negatively, this means that any attempt to correct false doctrine in a person's system of theology will require more than an examination of that particular doctrine. Strong's adoption of the believer's union with Christ rather than the believer's justification by the death and resurrection of Christ as the central feature of his theological system led him to ethical monism. Positively, this means that a theologian who wishes for his system of theology to be truly Christian will insure that his methodology is consistent with this goal. Even in his early theology, Strong accepted the belief that man's body as well as his soul was created by God, not because Holy Scripture said so but because the findings in modern psychology seemed to point in that direction. When they ceased pointing in that direction, Strong ceased believing in the special creation of man's body! With the help of God, may we allow God's Spirit to teach us through the Bible which is His Word.

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