

5-1-1940

Reason or Revelation?

Th. Engelder

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Engelder, Th. (1940) "Reason or Revelation?," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 11 , Article 32.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol11/iss1/32>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Concordia Theological Monthly

Vol. XI

MAY, 1940

No. 5

Reason or Revelation?

What? Some more rattling of dry bones? As though *we* had to be told what an abominable and dangerous thing rationalism is!—Just read on. The thing is not so dead as you may think. We are dealing with a live issue. There are many more rationalists in the churches than the census lists. Your own theological thinking may have more of a rationalistic bias than you are aware of. And in our spiritual struggles we are inclined to heed the insidious logic of reason more than the sure Word of Scripture, the certain promise of the Gospel. So the time spent in studying the gross forms of rationalism is well spent. That will help us the better to realize the dangerous character of the subtle forms. We shall begin with *rationalismus vulgaris seu communis*.

I

What is the source of the saving doctrine, the seat of authority in religion, reason or revelation? Scripture is most clear on this point. Scripture declares that God's revelation, His revelation in Scripture, Scripture itself, is the sole source of saving knowledge. "To the Law and to the Testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," Is. 8:20. Again: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them," Luke 16:29. Again: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine," 2 Tim. 3:16. Once more: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God," 1 Pet. 4:11. "The oracles of God," not the oracles of man, the judgments and decisions of reason. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men," Col. 2:8. For "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him," 1 Cor. 2:14.

The position of the Lutheran Church is clear on this point.

"Nec ratio humana seu naturalis theologiae et rerum supernaturalium principium est." (See Baier, *Comp.*, I, 82.) "The Evangelical Lutheran Church recognizes the written Word of the apostles and prophets as the only and perfect source, rule, norm, and judge of all teachings—a) not reason, b) not tradition, c) not new revelations." (See *Walther and the Church*, p. 122.) The Formula of Concord states: "We receive and embrace with our whole heart the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged," and "allow ourselves to be diverted therefrom by no objections or human contradictions spun from human reason, however charming they may appear to reason." (*Trigl.*, pp. 851, 987.)

The rationalists use equally clear and vigorous language in proclaiming their principle: Not revelation, but reason! The Socinians of old said: "*Nihil in theologia verum est, quod a ratione non approbatur. . . . Nihil credi potest, quod a ratione capi et intelligi nequeat. . . . Nullo modo verum esse potest, cui ratio sensusque communis repugnat.*" Nothing is true in theology which does not find the approval of reason! The final judgment must be given by reason. Reason has the right to reverse the judgment of Scripture. And thus reason is the sole authority in religion. When rationalism was in flower, the great majority of the theologians gloried in proclaiming the supreme authority and self-sufficiency of reason. One of their leading lights, H. P. K. Henke († 1809), considered it his duty "to free the Christian doctrine from a threefold superstition, from Christolatry, *Bibliolatry*, and onomatology (the retention of antiquated concepts), and thus change the truth which was accepted on the basis of authorities into the truths of natural reason." (See *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1939, p. 129.) J. F. C. Loeffler, a general superintendent: "Our reason is manifestly God in us. Why should we seek God outside of us, in the strange voices which are frequently so illusive?" (See Fr. Uhlhorn, *Geschichte der Deutsch-Lutherischen Kirche*, II, p. 81. The book lists many similar statements.) J. F. Roehr, their chief, declared that Christianity is "the religion of reason intimately connected with the history of its founder." Concerning Roehr, Uhlhorn says: "He stood four-square on the principle that reason alone could decide matters of faith; that there can be no revelation, no immediate intervention of God in general, and no supernatural communication of divine truths in particular; that the Bible is a purely human book, in which noble and wise men of antiquity have set down, in the ordinary manner, the results of their investigation of religious truths; and so much of this is to be retained as reason finds to be of universal value." (*Op. cit.*, p. 162.) The Lutheran rationalist in America,

F. H. Quitman, proclaimed in a sermon on the Reformation: "Reason and revelation are the sole sources of religious knowledge and the norms according to which all religious questions must be decided." All of this was the development of the ideas of J. S. Semler, the father of German rationalism. Semler denied that the Bible was inspired in the real sense of the term and designed as the norm of faith for all men. Only that is inspired which can serve "our moral improvement — *moralische Ausbesserung*." Christ gave His disciples the right of private judgment. And using this right, Semler deleted from the Bible all those portions which did not find favor with him as being "Jewish conceptions." These portions found place in the Bible only because the Biblical heroes, Christ and the apostles, accommodated themselves in their language to the popular notions of their day. These things are not to be believed by us. — Lessing, the philosopher and dramatist, spoke in the name of the Enlightenment and rationalism when he said: "Christianity does not rest on the accidents of historical events but on necessary truths of reason."

And these rationalists are still with us. We have the Unitarians, and we have the Modernists. W. G. Elliot, Unitarian: "We become Christians solely through the use of reason." (*Discourses on the Doctrines of Christianity*, p. 8.) "No statement can be accepted as true because it is in the Bible. All its teachings must be subjected to the authority of reason and conscience." (Tract published by the American Unitarian Association. See *Popular Symbolics*, p. 401.) Wm. E. Channing, in a sermon on *Unitarian Christianity*: "The Bible treats of subjects on which we receive ideas from other sources besides itself, such subjects as the nature, passions, relations, and duties of man; and it expects us to restrain and modify its language by the known truths which observation and experience furnish on these topics. We profess not to know a book which demands a more frequent exercise of reason than the Bible. . . . With these views of the Bible, we feel it our bounden duty to exercise our reason upon it perpetually, to compare, to infer, to look beyond the letter to the spirit,¹ to seek in the nature of the subject and the aim of the writer his true meaning, and, in general, to make use of what is known for explaining what is difficult, and for discovering *new truths*." (*Works of W. E. C.*, p. 368.)

The Modernists of today are marching in line with the Unitarians, holding aloft the torch of the old rationalists. (We are not rattling dry bones!) Our next-door neighbors are telling us that reason is the seat of authority and are warning us against "Bibliolatry." David E. Adams: "The final basis of religious

1) That sounds familiar. In the current discussion on verbal inspiration we hear Lutheran theologians asking us to do that.

authority for you is yourself, your mind working on all that has come down in the religious tradition of Christianity and selecting and making your own those things which satisfy the requirements of your intelligence, of your moral judgment, of your spiritual hunger. . . . We have come to the point where each man must decide for himself, in the light of his own best knowledge and experience, what there is in that Book, what there is in the Church, what there is in the Christian faith that is valid for him, in the light of science, in the light of his own best moral judgment, in the light of that little spark of the divine which God has lighted in his soul." (*Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1926.) Semler and Roehr and Loeffler would say that this is just about what they have been saying. Our Modernists are simply repeating what is stored away in old archives. They are rattling dry bones. Let us hear some more of it. Dean F. C. Grant: "The Christian religion does not require any one to go contrary to his own experience either in faith or in conduct, i. e., not contrary to what in popular language is called 'reason,' or the conclusion we draw, the outlook we derive from our experience. This has ever been God's way with man; else what was 'reason' for, which God implanted in us as a guide through the mazes of conflicting sense-impressions and of opinions?" (*Living Church*, Nov. 11, 1933.) In *The Doctrine of God*, p. 175 ff., A. C. Knudson says that the Bible "in a special and preeminent sense" is still the source and norm of Christian belief; "for in it we have the earliest and most trustworthy record of the unique revelation of God which was mediated to the world by Jewish and early Christian history"; but to this must be added three supplementary sources: "the Church, natural reason, and Christian experience." In his book *Ringing Realities*, pp. 91, 216, O. L. Joseph declares: "There are some who sound the alarm that the Bible has lost its authority because scholars have submitted newer interpretations and different applications of its manifold message. The real difficulty is what these alarmists thought the Bible should be has no longer any foundation. The only course is to appeal to the testimony of evidence and to abide by a verdict that is approved by reason, conscience, and experience. . . . If we are to escape the pitfalls of barren intellectualism²⁾ and of prostrated emotionalism, we must recognize that reason and faith are the twin guides to truth." S. Parkes Cadman, a chief among the Modernists, insists that reason has the right to sit in judgment on Scripture. "Is not the authority of the Bible destroyed when we accept only that which is applicable to us and of which we must be the judges?" Answer: "The authority of the Bible is established by divine inspiration, but it is

2) That sounds familiar. We are being told that the teaching of verbal inspiration leads to this thing, "barren intellectualism."

also addressed to human intelligence. The Book itself invokes finite reason and appeals to its decisions. Plainly, the Scriptures themselves do not outlaw man's judgment on their contents. Why should we do so?" (*Answers to Every-day Questions*, p. 257 f.) Let us hear a Lutheran theologian who agrees with these people: "The Bible, the Church, and the Reason are all channels or seats of authority in religion. The *crux* in the theological debate has been the false exaltation of one or another of these seats of authority. Certainly the final appeal in religious belief cannot rest on any one of these factors divorced from the others. . . . In the final analysis the Biblical truths and the Church's creeds and confessions must be made real and vital by their personal revaluation and be experienced as religious facts before they command and compel the soul to submission and action. The final appeal is made to the Christian consciousness. All through the medieval and modern period of theological history, though the infallibility of Bible and Church has been preached, there have always stood clear-eyed and honest champions of the necessity and right of Christian experience to interpret and enforce the truths of our holy faith. Schleiermacher stands first among our Protestant theologians in the application of this point of view." (*The Lutheran Quarterly*, 1912, p. 570 f. See *Lehre und Wehre*, 1913, p. 156.) And beware of "Bibliolatry"! "Without a doubt our fathers came very close to Bibliolatry. They could make no distinction between the Word of God and the words of men by which that Word was given." (E. Lewis, *The Faith We Declare*, p. 49.) C. A. Wendell: "Bibliolatry is perhaps the finest and most exalted form of idolatry, but idolatry it is nevertheless." . . . This "stilted veneration for the Word," this "nervous anxiety to prove the complete inerrancy of the Bible from cover to cover." (*What Is Lutheranism?* P. 235.) — Plainly the issue "Reason or Revelation?" is not a dead one. The voice of Semler and Roehr is still heard in the land. A few new terms have been added to the vocabulary of rationalism, but the language is the same.

It is *sola ratio* against *sola Scriptura*. Is their slogan indeed "Reason alone"? Do they not stand for "Reason and Revelation"? They do say that reason and Scripture are the twin guides to truth. When they list the seats of authority, they never fail to mention Scripture. They do not purpose to get along without Scripture. For one thing, it would never do to propose that within the religious body in which they are operating. If they said, "Away with the Bible!" they would have to leave the Christian Church and start a religion of their own. And, for another thing, they do not want to get along without the Bible. They have a high regard for the Bible. Cadman sees it established by "divine inspiration." Roehr

studied his Bible; for did not the noble and wise men of antiquity set down therein the results of their investigations? H. E. Fosdick wants men to use the Bible. In his *Modern Use of the Bible* he speaks emphatically on this point. "An intelligent understanding of the Bible is indispensable to anybody in the Western world who wishes to think wisely about religion. By no possibility can any one of us be independent of the Bible's influence. Our intellectual heritage is full of its words and phrases, ideas and formulas." (P. 3.) Reason demands of you, as a wise man, to listen when other wise men speak. It is the part of wisdom to treasure up and study the maxims of Confucius and Socrates and Isaiah and Jesus. So there are two guides to truth: Scripture, containing what other wise men said, and your own individual reason. But at bottom there is, in the theology of rationalism, only one seat of authority—reason. For that, too, is the part of wisdom to examine carefully what your peers say and to accept only what stands the test. Have they not just been telling us that each man must decide for himself what there is in that Book that is valid for him, in the light of his own best moral judgment? With them, the statements of Scripture are not final; only so much of Scripture is acceptable as finds favor with reason. Did Jesus feed the five thousand with two loaves of bread? Impossible, says reason. This story is not reliable. Is the sinner justified without works? The Bible says so, but the best moral judgment of man must repudiate such an idea; and Scripture stands corrected before the bar of reason. Reason is set up as the final court of appeal in the theology of rationalism. Its principle is, in truth and reality, *sola ratio*. Walther is right when he says: "The Bible is nearly everywhere treated like the fables of Aesop. I am telling you the truth when I say this. When you begin later to compare the old with the modern theologians, you will see that I have not exaggerated. Science has been placed on the throne, and theology is made to sit at its feet and await the orders of philosophy." (*Law and Gospel*, p. 235.) H. Kraemer is right when he says: "In the eighteenth century the representatives of the enlightenment fought a . . . battle for the rights of human reason. Believing in the autonomy of man, their eyes were naturally blinded to the peculiarly religious and unique character of Biblical realism. The conception of 'natural religion' as the 'normal' and 'standard' religion became paramount, and in their humanist theology the light of reason became *the*" (italics by Kraemer) "organ of revelation." (*The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, p. 116.)³⁾

3) Kraemer is not right when he says: "The representatives of enlightenment fought a partly legitimate and salutary battle for the rights of human reason."

Is there any difference between the rationalists of the eighteenth century and the rationalists of 1940 as to their treatment of the Bible? No essential difference. Both groups treat the Bible like the fables of Aesop, accepting in Aesop and in Holy Scripture what is good and rejecting what is not so good. Our Modernists may not use the coarse language of *rationalismus vulgaris*. They will not treat the Bible as a purely human book. They may ascribe to it a higher degree of inspiration than Aesop possessed. They find "the Word of God" in it. But since not all of Scripture is "the Word of God," a careful selection must be made, and reason must make the selection. Here is a typical statement: "All of them [the writers of the epistles] struggled with evident limitations of temperament, environment, and vocation. In their case it is necessary not only to find out what they said but also what they were trying to say, what the eternal Word of God was saying in them to all men everywhere. . . . The wheat must be sifted from the chaff, the 'Word' taken from the worn-out wrappings. And then that 'Word' shall be made plain. All must be fitted to our modern thought. . . . What is warped and ill balanced must be corrected; what was neglected must be added; what was soiled by the heat and dust of controversy must be polished until it is bright and clear again." (Dr. D. H. Forrester, in the *Living Church*, Feb. 11, 1933.) O yes, says Dr. H. L. Willett, the Bible is a great book, but it is not an infallible standard of morals and religion. "No error has ever resulted in greater discredit to the Scriptures or injury to Christianity than that of attributing to the Bible such a miraculous origin and nature as to make it an infallible standard of morals and religion. That it contains the Word of God in a sense in which that expression can be used of no other book is true. But its finality and authority do not reside in all of its utterances but in those great characters and messages which are easily discerned as the mountain peaks of its contents. Such portions are worthy to be called the Word of God to a man." (*The Bible through the Centuries*, p. 289.) And who is the judge to decide which sections of the Bible are God's Word? Dr. Willett continues: "It is inevitable that one who studies the Scriptures should bring every statement and precept to the bar of his own sense of right and judge it by that standard." (P. 291.) Far from accepting the *sola Scriptura*, these men do not even place Scripture on a par with reason, but operate with the *sola ratio*. James Bannerman fitly describes the situation: "He comes to the Bible and sits over its contents in the attitude of a judge who is to decide for himself what in it is true and worthy to be believed and what in it is false and deserving to be rejected; not in the attitude of the disciple who, within the limits of the inspired record, feels himself at Jesus' feet to receive every word

that cometh out of His mouth. . . . The assurance that the Bible is the Word of God, and not simply containing it, in more or less of its human language, is one fitted to solemnize the soul with a holy fear and a devout submission to its declarations as the very utterances of God. The assurance, on the contrary, that the truths of revelation are mingled, in a manner unknown and indeterminate, with the defects of the record, is one which reverses the attitude and brings man as a master to sit in judgment on the Bible as summoned to his bar and bound to render up to him a confession of its errors and not a declaration of its one and authoritative truth." Basil Manly, who quotes this in *The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration*, p. 16, points out what inspires the rationalistic attitude: "It ministers to the pride of reason."⁴

It is indeed *sola ratio*. Dr. Hoenecke states the case thus: "The rationalists and the great majority of modern theologians hold that Scripture is not the Word of God but only contains the Word of God. But this assertion refutes itself. For if God's Word were only *contained* in Scripture, if it had to be sifted out of Scripture like wheat from the chaff, we should need a second immediate revelation, in addition to the revelation of Scripture, to serve as the standard and rule for separating that which is the Word of God in Scripture from that which is not the Word of God; for reason cannot be the measure and rule. *If reason could indeed*

4) The Bible "contains" the Word of God, "the wheat must be sifted from the chaff," — that sounds familiar. J. A. W. Haas has been telling us: "There must be a clear distinction kept in mind between the Word of God and the Bible. . . . The Bible is the Word of God because it contains the Word of God." (*What Is Lutheranism?* P. 176.) V. Ferm has been telling us: "The authority of the Sacred Writings is no longer found in 'the letter' but in the appeal of its spiritual content. . . . To us the 'Word of God' is the validly spiritual content which rises unmistakably in Scriptural utterances and in the pronouncement of Christlike seers." (*Ibid.*, pp. 279, 294.) And Dr. H. C. Alleman has been telling us: "The Bible contains the Word of God. It is the rule of our faith because it enshrines this Word. . . . The Bible has carried with it the husk as well as the kernel. There are many things in the Old Testament and some in the New Testament which are temporal and even provincial. When we read Old Testament stories of doubtful ethics and *lex talionis* reprisals, with their cruelty and vengefulness. . . ." (*Luth. Church Quarterly*, July, 1936, p. 240.) — Lutherans who like the phrase "The Bible contains the Word of God" might look up its pedigree. The Unitarians liked it. "Unitarians believe that the Bible *contains* the Word of God; they do not believe that every word which it contains is the Word of God." (*Scriptural Belief of Unitarian Christians*.) Semler, the father of modern rationalism, used it: "It is inconceivable how the thoughtful Christians confound the Sacred Scripture of the Jews and the Word of God which is here and there contained and enveloped therein." And "among those who would change the statement 'The Bible is the Word of God' into 'The Bible contains the Word of God' may be named Le Clerc and Grotius, whose views may be readily traced back to Maimonides, the celebrated Jewish Rabbi of the Middle Ages." (B. Manly, *op. cit.*, p. 49.)

serve as the measure, Scripture would be subordinate to reason, and a special revelation, such as is given in Scripture, would in reality have been unnecessary." (*Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik*, I, p. 333.) We are here not concerned with the difficulty confronting those theologians who are not ready to proclaim the absolute self-sufficiency of reason and still feel the need of a special revelation. Our interest at present is to show that any theologian who permits his reason, his scientific mind, his moral feelings, to correct and revise the Bible, is putting reason above the Bible, is proclaiming the *sola ratio*, is marching with the old rationalists.

We have shown that rationalism makes reason the norm and even the source of the saving truth. It was not hard to show this. The rationalists make no attempt to hide their position. We shall now show what the nature and effect of this principle of theology is. It will be seen at once what a wicked, evil, noisome thing it is. It is such a wicked, evil, noisome thing that Luther is compelled to use harsh language in describing it. "He tells us further what Mistress Hulda, natural reason, teaches on these matters, as though we did not know that reason is Satan's paramour and can do naught but defame and defile all that God says or does. But before we answer this arch-whore and Satan's bride, we shall first prove our faith with simple, clear Bible-passages." (XX, 232.) "*Ratio inimica fidei*. Reason, the enemy of faith." (IX, 157.)⁵ Note, first, its wickedness and, second, its harmfulness.

First, it is a wicked thing. God directs us to Scripture as the sole source of the saving truth, the sole norm of doctrine. "To the Law and to the Testimony!" Is. 8:20. "Search the Scriptures; . . . they are they which testify of Me," John 5:39. God will have nothing preached in His Church but Scripture: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God," 1 Pet. 4:11. God warns us against giving reason a voice in theology: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world," Col. 2:8. The rationalists read this and keep on saying: We will accept nothing but what our reason approves of. God asks us to "cast down imaginations and everything that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," 2 Cor. 10:5. What, say the rationalists, discard the noblest gift of God to man, our reason? God tells us in Holy Scripture that human

5) A similar statement, from a sermon on 1 Pet. 5: "Nam Satan venit mit eim sussen, lieblichen wein. Das heisst ratio humana. Ist ein schone metz, macht viel zu buben, das man etwas predigt, quod non est Verbum Dei, sed neben etwas erdenken; das macht, das man Gottes wort verachtet. . . . Man mus nuechter und wacker sein, am wort hallten. Sic nostra ratione [Satan] impugnat fidem. Ratio ist des Teuffels Braut." (Weimar Ed., 47, p. 841 f.)

reason is incapable of judging spiritual matters: "The world by wisdom knew not God," 1 Cor. 1:21. Again: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them," 1 Cor. 2:14. And again: "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." This "wisdom of God none of the princes of this world knew," 1 Cor. 2:8, 9. And the rationalists make answer: We certainly know all about these things.—They are doing a wicked thing. They are setting their judgment against God's judgment. They make nothing of Scripture.

True, they do not feel that they are doing a wicked thing. They deny that, in taking counsel with their reason, they are acting against God's will and Word. They know, of course, as well as we what is written 1 Pet. 4:11 and Col. 2:8. But they have persuaded themselves that these passages do not set up the principle of *sola Scriptura* or, if they do, that the wise men who penned these words were mistaken in identifying Scripture with God's Word; these passages must be discarded as chaff. However, Scripture remains the Word of God in all its parts. It comes to men clothed with the full majesty of God. And the fact remains that they who presume to sit in judgment on Scripture are, whether they realize it or not, doing a wicked thing. The fact that Scripture is God's Word should "solemnize the soul with a holy fear and a devout submission to its declarations as the very utterances of God." It is not a small thing when men treat all of Scripture or some parts of Scripture as the words of mere men. It is a terrible situation described by Walther in the words: "There is not in modern theologians that fear which animated David when he said: 'My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee,' Ps. 119:120. Such reverence in the presence of Holy Writ is found hardly anywhere. The Bible is nearly everywhere treated like the fables of Aesop." (*Law and Gospel*, p. 235.)

What animates the rationalists, old and modern, is not the fear of God and His Word but the pride of reason. "It ministers to the pride of reason," says Manly, to have the right and the opportunity to go through the Holy Book of Christendom and pass judgment on the worth and merit of every single statement. The pride of reason, the "*supercilium humanae rationis et philosophiae*" ("proud reason and philosophy," *Formula of Concord; Trigl.*, p. 882), breaks through all bounds and "exalts itself against the knowledge of God," 2 Cor. 10:5. It dares to dispute with God! Our reason is a noble faculty. "It is indeed true that it is of all things the highest and the chief thing, above all other things of this life the best, yea, something divine." (Luther, 19, p. 1462.) But now, Luther continues, "after the Fall, this finest and best of all things is under the

power and rule of Satan," and Satan has filled his paramour with his own spirit. There was no limit to the pride and arrogance of Satan—he would be like God. And reason, inspired and directed by Satan, knows no limit in its aspirations. It would be like God. How did the old rationalist Loeffler express it? "Our reason is manifestly God in us"! Our modern rationalists will not use such coarse language; but when you see how they treat the Bible, telling us what portions are not in accord with the moral sense of modern man, presuming to tell us which doctrines of Christianity we can accept and which doctrines we must reject, instructing us on the basis of their experience and investigation what to believe and what not to believe, you see to what extent sinful pride and satanic conceit will exalt itself—it reaches self-deification. H. Kraemer read the books of the old rationalists and passes this judgment: "Hamann rightly said that, properly speaking, Kant's moralism meant the deification of the human will and Lessing's rationalism the deification of human reason. To reject the God of revelation inevitably means to erect man in some form as God." (*Op. cit.*, p. 117.) And when we hear men like Fosdick and Cadman and Willett so blandly offering us their ideas concerning God and religion in place of what God has revealed in the Bible, we are witnessing a form of self-deification. In its January issue *Fortune* speaks of "those rationalists of the golden age of the American colonies for whom Reason was not merely mechanistic but *divine*." It might have included the rationalists of the era of Modernism. Their pride of reason, too, knows no bounds.

"Proud reason and philosophy" demands to be heard in theology and demands the final word, though it has very little to be proud of. Let us deflate its swollen pride.⁶⁾ In the first place, rationalism is engaged in a foolish business. As often as the rationalists bring their findings before their own chosen tribunal, reason, their judge tells them that they do not know what they are talking about and throws the case out of court. If there is a God at all,—and rationalism admits His existence, else it would not take up theology,—He is so far above man that the human mind cannot measure His thoughts, else He were no God. The thoughts and plans of God transcend human comprehension. Scripture says so—and reason says so. Scripture tells us that "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." On the basis of Scripture Luther declares: "What matters it if philosophy cannot fathom this? The Holy Spirit is greater than Aristotle. . . .

6) See 1 Tim. 6:3 f. "He is proud," *τετόφωται*, puffed up, *aufgeblasen*. Marginal note: He is a fool. Moffatt: conceited.—Puffed up with conceit.

Major est divini verbi auctoritas quam nostra capacitas. The authority of God's Word is greater than the grasp of our intellect." (XIX, p. 29.) Again: "Ein einiges Wort in der Heiligen Schrift auszugruenden und gar tief zu erholen, ist unmueglich, Trotz geboten allen Gelehrten und Theologen, denn es sind des Heiligen Geistes Wort, darum so sind sie allen Menschen zu hoch." (Weimar Ed. T. R. I, p. 28.) Yes, reason is a fine gift; "the light of reason shows you how to count and add up figures and to see that one thing is more and greater than another." But in one domain of thought reason can show us nothing. Luther continues: "With respect to the things of Christ, who enlightens our heart and conscience, everything that is in us is blindness and darkness; if you will not hold fast to the Word, you will remain forever dead and blind." (XI, 2054.) Dr. Pieper: "To set up human reason as the source and norm of theology is forbidden by Scripture, since Scripture declares that human reason, even when the divine revelation is presented to it, is absolutely incapable of understanding it." (Lectures on "The Lutheran Church," p. 29.) "We must remember that the essence of the Christian religion, the vicarious satisfaction, is for all men, including the philosophers, *terra incognita*." (Chr. Dogm., I, p. 17.) And add this thought: "Even reason, in its un-fallen state, is not qualified to sit in judgment on supernatural revelation. How much less is fallen reason able to do so!" (Bibliotheca Sacra, 1939, p. 270.) Now, reason fully agrees with these statements of Scripture. Reason understands that, since it is finite, it cannot grasp and judge the infinite. The philosophers know that. In an article published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, August 5, 1939, "The Crisis of Religion," Will Durant says: "We must beware of expecting a religion to be a body of mathematical truths."⁷ The philosopher H. N. Wieman tells the philosophizing theologian Wm. Adams Brown, who had written a book, *God at Work, A Study of the Supernatural*: "We wish to demonstrate that it is impossible to make any rational statement about the supernatural because it is essentially irrational. I believe this book by Mr. Brown demonstrates quite unintentionally that it is impossible to be rational and at the same time make the supernatural the object of supreme devotion." (The Christian Century, March 7, 1934.) So, what happens when the rationalists write books on theology? They write themselves down as fools. Dr. H. C. Link is saying that. In *The Return to Religion* the chapter headed "Fools of Reason" states: "Religion has been called the refuge

7) Another statement worth quoting: "In our rebellious youth we proudly judged the 'truth' of religion, and our bulging intellects rejected whatever they could not understand." "Bulging intellects"—a synonym of the phrase "puffed up with conceit," used above.

of weak minds. Psychologically the weakness lies rather in the failure of minds to recognize the weakness of all minds. . . . In deifying the mind, we have abandoned God. We have become fools of reason and the dupes of scientific truth." Exactly what Luther said: "Our teachers attempted to fathom it with their reason and in the attempt became fools. Denn es ist kein wort so gering ynn der Schrift, das man mit vernunft begreifen kuende." (Weimar Ed., XVII, II, p. 311.) And when the fools of reason go to work, they produce only foolish fables. A wise man will not write descriptions of a *terra incognita*. And no wise man will base his salvation on such assurances. Luther would not. "I am not so foolish (*unvernuenftig*) as to have fables invented by human reason set above the divine Word." (XVIII, p. 87.) — When the rationalist, proud of his reason, makes it the judge of Scripture, he does violence to his reason. Is that something to be proud of?

A second point. Some of the arguments by which the rationalists seek to establish the authority of reason do not display deep logical acumen. Cadman offers this argument: "The Book itself invokes finite reason and appeals to its decisions." What can he mean? Perhaps what W. E. Channing expresses thus: "We feel it our bounden duty to exercise our reason upon the Bible perpetually, . . . to seek in the nature of the subject and *the aim of the writer* his true meaning," etc. Now, there is a use of reason which is proper and necessary in studying the Bible. You must certainly study "the aim of the writer" and the scope of the text and the context and the words. We need our reason to understand the meaning of the words used in Scripture. We must observe the fixed laws of human speech. And we must be able to think logically. We call this the *usus rationis ministerialis, organicus*.⁸⁾ But after reason has told us what the words mean, it must not go on to tell us: These words spell nonsense. It has not the right to tell us: This doctrine you may accept, that doctrine you must reject. The *usus rationis* MAGISTERIALIS is forbidden. Dr. Pieper: "Human reason must indeed be employed in interpreting Scripture, never, however, as *principle* but always only as *instrument*." (Lectures, etc., p. 50.) Quenstedt: "Theology does not condemn the use of reason but its abuse and its affectation of directorship, or its magisterial use, as normative and decisive in divine things." (See H. Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, p. 35.) Human reason serves as the *ὄργανον ληπτικόν*, never as an *ὄργανον κριτικόν*. When she begins to criticize the Bible, we silence her. "Reason is not a leader, but an humble follower, of theology. Hagar serves as the handmaid

8) See Dr. Sommer's article in *CONC. THEOL. MONTHLY*, X, p. 420 ff.: "The Province of Human Reason in Religion."

of her mistress, she does not command; when she affects to command she is banished from the sacred home." (Hollaz. See H. Schmid, *op. cit.*, p. 36.) "Let theology be the empress, philosophy and other useful arts her servant," says Luther. (XXII, 255.) There is something wrong with the argument that, since a certain use of reason is in place, any and every use of reason is proper. Rationalists are not using their reason when they employ this argument.

Perhaps Cadman's statement that "the Book itself invokes finite reason" means what the Unitarian W. G. Elliot expresses thus: "Christianity never tells us to quit thinking but to prove all things and to hold fast that which is good. We are not commanded to accept any teaching without examination but to search the Scriptures daily to see what is true and to judge for ourselves what is right." (See M. Guenther, *Populaere Symbolik*, p. 94.) Well, think! Then you will soon discover that the statement "You must think" is not the same as the statement "You may think anything." And to say that, because the Bereans are praised for searching the Scriptures in order to compare Paul's teaching with them, they would have been praised for sitting in judgment on the Scriptures, does not reveal deep thought.

Yes, we should make use of our reason (*usus ministerialis*); but when the rationalists insist on having reason act also in a magisterial capacity, something queer happens: they refuse to let reason act in her *ministerial* capacity! Take the words "This is My body, which is given for you." Reason, the servant, says: That means Christ's real body, the body which hung on the cross. Reason, the master, says: It cannot mean that; that would be unreasonable. Reason, the servant, insists that the words and the context ("given for you") indicate the real body of Christ. And the rationalists get indignant and say: Drive out the servant! Not everything in rationalism is reasonable!

Finally, — to give one more instance — the exegetical ability of the old rationalists was not of a high grade. Nothing to be proud of there! One of their leading exegetes was E. G. Paulus († 1851). Do you know how he got rid of the miracles related in the Bible? C. H. Sheldon's *History of Christian Doctrine*, II, p. 295, will tell you: "Paulus goes over the list of the New Testament miracles and endeavors to show how they may be accounted for without any appeal to the supernatural and also without any impeachment of the honesty of the writers. The angelic appearances to the shepherds he explains as meteoric phenomena. The healing of the possessed was the natural effect of such an eminent person as Christ engaging the hearty confidence of such patients as the demoniacs. The five thousand were fed because

those who were provided with food were constrained by the example of Christ and His disciples to share their store with the destitute. Lazarus came forth from the tomb because the loud voice of Jesus roused him from his stupor." (Martha's statement, John 11:39: "Lord, by this time he stinketh," probably was due to hallucination.) "The resurrection of Christ also was not a resurrection of the really dead. We cannot tell how much was done toward reviving Him by the cool air of the grotto and by the spices, and how much by the electric currents that accompanied the storm or earthquake (*Das Leben Jesu*)." Other "miracles of exegesis" performed by these men in order to remove the miracles: Jesus did not walk on the sea but *along* the sea; Christ was conversing with two strangers on the mountain, and light caused by lightning or something illuminated the scene—that was the Transfiguration. So the honesty of the writers is saved, but at the cost of their intelligence. The evangelists, these "noble and wise men of antiquity," did not know how to describe common occurrences in intelligible language. Paulus and his *confrères* have also renounced their own intelligence. Or did they honestly believe that their hearers would believe their "miracles"? This is how Walther sizes up the situation: "The shallowest minds were regarded as great lights and far ahead of their age. For theologians to achieve some renown, all that was necessary was sufficient boldness, or rather audacity, to declare the mysterious doctrines of Christianity errors of former dark ages, which had been without enlightenment." (*Law and Gospel*, p. 258.)

Well, that was in the dark ages of Enlightenment. Can our Modernists do any better? It seems incredible, but the same shallow, flat, and stale exegesis is offered to the present generation—in the holy name of Reason. On March 27, 1938, in Christ Church Cathedral, here in St. Louis, the dean preached on the feeding of the five thousand and told his audience that—those who had bread shared it with the others; nothing miraculous about it. Dr. George M. Lamsa told us the other day that, when going on a journey, Oriental people always carry a food supply with them hidden under their clothes; and when some of the five thousand saw how unselfishly Jesus distributed the five loaves among the people, they felt ashamed of their selfishness, quickly got out their own food, and passed it around. Dr. C. A. Glover writes a book, *With the Twelve*, and performs the same "miracle of exegesis": "Jesus had been speaking of the larger importance of spiritual food over material sustenance, and when the people saw the willingness of the small boy to share the loaves and fishes, they brought out the lunches that they had prepared for themselves and offered them for the common good." (See *CONC. THEOL. MTHLY*,

p. 207 ff.) Dr. Glover can perform better miracles than Dr. Paulus. Jesus' walking on the water means either "that He walked upon a submerged sand-bank" or that he used "his power of levitation"! The Transfiguration was not caused by lightning, but "Jesus admittedly possessed unusual psychic powers, and it is quite credible that the three disciples were in a state of abnormal sensitiveness," etc. All very modern, but just as shallow, stale, and flat as the old rationalism was. Dr. H. L. Willett does not like Dr. Glover's simple explanation of the incidents of Gadara—"the shouts and gestures of the healed maniac filled the swine with panic." He says: "What connection there was between the healing of the maniac and the stampede of the swine we do not know." But he gets rid of the miracle by simply denying it. "The narratives of the destruction of the swine and the cursing of the fig-tree are patently *incredible*. They impose too great a strain on the *moral implications* of the ministry of Jesus." (On three different occasions Dr. Willett discussed this matter in recent years in the *Christian Century*.) On the resurrection of Christ Dr. Willett expresses the same shallow views as Dr. Paulus. Oh, yes, he has found some new terms, but he is convinced, with Dr. Paulus, that the thing did not occur. "Of similar nature was the victory of Jesus over death, although we know few of the facts connected with that experience. The story was told in various ways by the disciples, who, as Jesus, had no other method of interpreting it than as a resurrection, a coming back of his body from the grave." (*Chr. Cent.*, March 3, 1937.) It is nothing but a revamping of the old rationalism, dressing it up in modern style. The poor apostles had only that cumbersome "thought-form," "category," "pattern"—"resurrection of the *body*." We have finer thought-forms and call it "persistence of personality" or some such thing. Dr. Fosdick, too, operates in the style of Dr. Paulus. He is far from impugning the honesty of the writers, but their intelligence suffers sadly at his hands. In his *The Modern Use of the Bible*, chapter IV, "Abiding Experiences and Changing Categories," he states: "The Bible has ways of thinking that are no longer ours. . . . For example, I believe in the persistence of personality through death but I do not believe in the resurrection of the flesh. Many of our forefathers could not conceive immortality apart from a resurrected body. The resurrection of the flesh was a mental setting in which alone they supposed that faith in life everlasting could be found." (P. 98.)⁹⁾ St. Paul was an honest man. He did

9) "Mental setting," "changing categories"—that is simply revamping old Semler's theory: Christ and the apostles accommodated their language to the popular notions of their day.

not want to deceive people by holding out to them the hope of the resurrection of the body. But there was no other "category" available, and he hoped that, when people heard him speak of the resurrection of the body, they would somehow catch the right idea and think of the "persistence of personality" only. Was St. Paul really so stupid? We are not stupid enough to believe that.

Fools of reason! And that does not mean only a *sacrificium intellectus*. Much more, an infinitely greater sacrifice is involved. "*Ratio inimica FIDEL.*" The pride of reason is, as we shall show, destructive of the Christian faith.

TH. ENGELDER

(To be continued)

The Prophets and Political and Social Problems

(Concluded)

IV

In the Old Testament the messages of the prophets were directed chiefly to God's own people, which had a theocratic form of government.

The well-known saying, The exiles returned from Babylon to found not a kingdom but a Church, expresses at best only a half-truth, for the commonwealth of Israel was from its very origin a Church, a state-church, a church-state, a theocracy, and this theocracy was not founded by the returning exiles, but was a divine institution, organized by the Lord immediately after the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. It is rather difficult for us to realize all that the term "theocracy" implies. The Jewish Church was not a Church within the Jewish state, it was the Jewish state; and the Jewish state was not something altogether independent of the Jewish Church, it was the Jewish Church. In Israel the church laws were state laws, the state laws were church laws.

Membership in the Jewish Church and citizenship in the Jewish state were identical terms. If a Jew was deprived of his civic rights, he was by that very act excommunicated from the Church. And if a Jew was put out of the congregation, he lost his rights as a citizen of the Jewish state. No uncircumcized Gentile believer could become a member of the Jewish state-church, just as little as a circumcised idolater could acquire or retain citizenship in the Jewish church-state. A believing eunuch was saved, Is. 56:3-5; yet he never could become a member of the Jewish Church nor a citizen of the Jewish state, Deut. 23:1. He remained without the commonwealth of Israel.