

## An Evaluation of the Claims of Higher Critical Thought to Read between the Lines of History and Scripture

### A Critical Analysis of C. S. Lewis's Position

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#### Abstract

One of the important, if not central, controversies in the conflict between Fundamentalism and Theological Liberalism in the first half of the twentieth century was the argument over the nature of Sacred Scripture. Is the Bible the revealed word of God as the Fundamentalists and Evangelicals proclaim? Or does it only reflect the religious feelings and experiences, first of the Jews, and then of the Christians of the first and second centuries A.C.E. as the Liberals claimed? Are they warranted in making these revisions or are they based on something other than the historical evidence? This paper tries to answer these questions making a critical analysis of C. S. Lewis's position as presented in his widely read *Mere Christianity*.

**Key words:** Fundamentalism, theological liberalism, revealed Word, C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*



C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

Courtesy: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:C.s.lewis3.JPG>

## Is the Bible Revealed of God?

One of the important, if not central, controversies in the conflict between Fundamentalism and Theological Liberalism in the first half of the twentieth century was the argument over the nature of Sacred Scripture. Is the Bible the revealed word of God as the Fundamentalists and Evangelicals proclaim? Or does it only reflect the religious feelings and experiences, first of the Jews, and then of the Christians of the first and second centuries A.C.E. as the Liberals claimed? In making this claim, Liberals were often revising the traditional understanding of the historical record whether of ancient Israel or the early centuries of the Christian church. This historical record was composed of both the rabbinical tradition of historic Judaism and the writings of the historians of the church including the vast amount of literature from the church fathers. In many cases, the modern critics of the traditional account present radical departures from the widely held conclusions of several generations of church historians. For example, The Jesus Seminar included the *Gospel of Thomas* as a legitimate Gospel and even titled the record of their attempt at historical reconstruction, *The Five Gospels* (James K. Beilby & Paul Rhodes Eddy, *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 46).

This choice reflects the attempt of many scholars of the last several decades to develop a historical narrative that describes a competition between various groups in the first and second centuries for dominance of the emerging Christian tradition. Included in these groups were the gnostics (from which the Gospel of Thomas arose), the Ebionites who wanted to retain the legalism of the Old Testament, and the group built around the teachings of the Apostle Paul which will eventually become orthodox Christianity.

One must ask, as we will in this paper, are they warranted in making these revisions or are they based on something other than the historical evidence?

### **C. S. Lewis's Intervention**

In attempting to find an answer to these crucial questions, we will look to a somewhat surprising source, C.S. Lewis. Lewis was a classical scholar who came to Christ in adulthood, and that after a period in which he claimed to be an atheist. As a Christian writer, he stands as one of the most influential Evangelicals of the twentieth century. Lewis wrote prolifically and broadly, his works range from the children's classics, *Chronicles of Narnia*, to possibly the most widely read apologetic book of all time, *Mere Christianity*.

### **The Background of C. S. Lewis**

One of the questions that we must answer at the beginning of this discussion is if Lewis was actually an evangelical, and therefore if he has the credence to speak to the question we are posing. In a close examination of his theology, Bo Smietana, writing in *Christianity Today* says that he was not an evangelical in his view of inerrancy and other issues of importance to American evangelicals (Bob Smietana. "C.S. Lewis Superstar." *Christianity Today*. 11/23/2005).

Yet, in spite of that, no one has been more influential in the area of apologetics among evangelicals than Lewis. His quotes are included in any listing of the great quotations of modern Christian writers. His books have brought many to Christ and helped deepen their walk with the Lord. As an example, the essay that forms the structure of this paper was included as an appendix to Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. Thus while Lewis may not have been an Evangelical in the strict terms that many would use to define the term (and he himself

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proclaimed that he was not a Fundamentalist), his writings influenced and expanded Evangelicalism in America. Further, few men have been as embraced, quoted, read, and eulogized by American evangelicals than C.S. Lewis. He is, without question, one of Evangelicalism's heroes.

### ***Analysis of Fern Seed and Elephants And Other Essays on Christianity***

The focus of this paper will be on a little known essay within a collection of essays entitled, *Fern Seed and Elephants; And Other Essays on Christianity*. C.S. Lewis (Walter Hooper, Ed. *Fern Seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity*. Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co., 1973.)

The collection was put together and published by his estate in 1975. (Lewis died in 1963.) The essay that will guide this study is the last essay in the book, and its title became the title of the book, "Fern Seed and Elephants" (Ibid, 104.) The essay is, in turn, the transcript of a lecture that Lewis gave to a class of seminary students at the Westcott House which is a theological college at Cambridge University on May 11, 1959 (Ibid, 9).

In this "talk" to the future clergy of the Church of England, Lewis confronts the Liberal approach to Scripture as an "educated layman." (Ibid, 105-106).

In other words, as a classical scholar, he knows something about literature and history, and from that perspective poses some probing questions for the advocates of Higher Criticism. We will discover as we move forward that Lewis, as a Christian, is presenting a devastating critique of the presumptions of Liberal Theology.

### **Why Use Lewis' Writing?**

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Why should we build an argument concerning the authority of the Bible from the writings of a British classical scholar with little or no theological training? First, we will let his arguments speak for themselves. As one of the most effective communicators of the gospel in the twentieth century, Lewis has a way of saying things that make his statements deeply compelling and memorable. This essay stands as one of the chief examples of his capacity to clarify and explain the important questions of our time. It is this capacity to think and write that make him such an influential figure in American Evangelicalism.

Second, as a classical scholar he has a deep and detailed knowledge of literature from an ancient historical context. It is this aspect of his “education” that will enable him to be such a devastating critic of the Liberal approach to biblical criticism. As he will point out, if you claim to be able to de-mythologize the Bible, you must demonstrate that you know what is and isn’t a myth.

The first issue in his talk that Lewis raises with this class of seminarians is actually the fundamental question facing Liberal theology and its use in the practical ministry of the church. These men cannot be honest with their parishioners. They cannot tell them they don’t believe in miracles or the historicity of the gospels or the deity of Christ, because, if they do “It will make him (the layman) a Roman Catholic or an atheist,” Lewis tells them (Ibid, 105). And of course, this has been the actual consequence of the dominance of Liberal Theology on the major Protestant denominations. In the pursuit of “relevance” and conformity to the modern scientific worldview these churches have become irrelevant to several generations in the U.S. and Europe, and as result are rapidly declining in membership. One is reminded of what led Karl Barth to develop neo-Orthodoxy. As a pastor in Germany at the end of World War I, he found his Liberal

theology provided no answers to the terrible suffering of his people. He therefore returned to the preaching of the great truths of the Reformation as if they were true (Earl E. Cairns. *Christianity Through the Centuries*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. Co., 1981, p. 445). This is the sad reality of much of Liberal thought, they have abandoned biblical Christianity, yet, because of their position in the church they must pretend that they have not.

After this initial appeal on behalf of the uneducated layman, Lewis begins his specific educated criticisms of the Liberal approach to Scripture. “First, then, whatever these men may be as Biblical critics, I distrust them as critics. They seem to me to lack literary judgment, to be imperceptive about the very quality of the texts they are reading” (Lewis, 106).

### **Importance of Classical Scholars**

It is an interesting fact that three influential Evangelical thinkers and writers are also classical scholars, they are E.M. Blaiklock, C.S. Lewis, and J.B. Phillips. On a per capita basis, it would be remarkable to find a non-theological field better represented in the field of apologetics and evangelism. Blaiklock was the C.S. Lewis of New Zealand, writing an extraordinary number of books, many of which focused on apologetics. Phillips was the translator of a widely used modern English paraphrase of the New Testament, who also wrote an important defense of the faith, *Your God is Too Small*. And, of course, Lewis, who writes, “I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this” (Ibid, 109). He is referring, of course to the New Testament. His understanding of the Classics contributed to his belief in the validity of the gospel accounts. He recognized the difference between history and fantasy because it was his life work to evaluate ancient literature.

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What makes the Classical scholars so important is their capacity to know the difference between a myth or a legend and historical narrative. As Lewis writes concerning the claims of the Bible critics, “If he tells me that something in a Gospel is legend or romance, I want to know how many legends and romances he has read, how well his palate is trained in detecting them by their flavor” (Ibid, 107). Lewis recognizes the uniquely historical nature of the Gospels and his background in the Classics enabled that recognition.

For example, Holland L. Hendrix in the PBS Special, *From Jesus to Christ, Part II*, tells us, “Acts is really a Christian—an early Christian romance, with all the ingredients of romance down to shipwrecks and exotic animals and exotic vegetation, cannibalistic natives, all kinds of embellishments that one finds in romance literature of the time.” (PBS, Frontline, *From Jesus to Christ*, aired April 7, 1998). One wonders if he has actually read Acts. I don’t think anyone would confuse Luke’s narrative of the first decades of the Christian church with *Mutiny on the Bounty*. The fact that Paul suffered shipwreck does not make Acts a fictional romance.

### **The Book of Acts**

Regarding the Book of Acts, at the turn of the twentieth century, a young archeologist traveled to ancient Asia Minor to begin research. He was skeptical of the New Testament, believing it to have been composed by Gentile writers well into the second century. He saw his work as attempting to get behind the stories in Acts and find the real story of the account. To his astonishment, he found Acts to be geographically and historically precise. After his study, the now famous archeologist, William Ramsay wrote, “Luke is a historian of the first rank... This author should be placed along with the very greatest historians” (Josh McDowell. *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. San Bernadino: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972, p.73). When examined by

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men who specialize in history, *Acts* is seen for what it is, a historical narrative. Only a theologian could mistake it for a romance.

### **Contention of C. S. Lewis**

The central contention of Lewis' essay is found in this statement, "These men ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old text; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves. They claim to see fern-seed and can't see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight" (Lewis, 111).

This claim by Liberal theologians to be able to read between the lines of Scripture occurs in several ways in both the Old and New Testament. The first claim is documentary theory with its belief that the Pentateuch was written in the time of the kings or even into the exile by several different authors. Cyrus Gordon writes, "I was trained simultaneously in higher criticism and biblical archeology without at first realizing that the two points of view are mutually exclusive. By this I mean that a commitment to any hypothetical source-structure like JEPD is out of keeping with what I consider the only tenable position for a critical scholar: to go wherever the evidence leads him." (Josh McDowell. *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Vol. 2. Campus Crusade for Christ, 1975, p. 331, from the essay, "Higher Critics and Forbidden Fruit" by Cyrus H. Gordon published in the epilogue of the book). We would include the Old Testament canon, the rabbinical writings, the apocryphal books, and the writings of Josephus among others in this historical record. In other words, the assumption that there are several different authors of the Books of Moses is not based on any actual historical evidence, it is sheer speculation. There is no actual historical evidence that the Pentateuch was a collection of the writings of four different

authors, each with a different cultic agenda in early Judaism. It is an assumption based entirely

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on literary criticism and a desire to fulfill a pre-supposed historical narrative for the development of Jewish nation. A narrative that is greatly at odds with the actual historical record of the Jewish people, by the way.

We would include the Old Testament canon, the rabbinical writings, the apocryphal books, and actual history. In examining a claim made by the Higher Critics that they are able to “see” an alternative historical development of the Scriptures, we find their claim contradicted by actual historical discoveries, and their boast of being able to “read between the lines” falls short.

### **Discrepancy between Bible Criticism and the Discoveries of Archeology**

One of the most important examples of this discrepancy between Bible criticism and the discoveries of archeology is the Hittite Treaty Form. In the first half of the twentieth century, archeologists uncovered the remnants of the ancient Hittite civilization. In this find, scholars discovered the prevalent treaty form of the second millennium (later than 1000 B.C.E.). To the surprise of many, this pattern was recognized in Exodus 20, the entire book of Deuteronomy, and Joshua 24 (Ibid, 96-97). The implication of this finding is that the Pentateuch is a document of the time of Moses (1400 B.C.E.) rather than the time of the kings (900 B.C.E.). Mendenhall writes, “the covenant type which is found in the second millennium B.C. in Deuteronomy ‘cannot be proven to have survived the downfall of the great Empires of the late second millennium B.C.’” (Ibid, 97). And speaking of Deuteronomy Kenneth Kitchen writes, “This is a literary entity not of the eighth or seventh century B.C. but rather from ca. 1200 B.C. at least” (Ibid, 99). The claim, therefore, that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses in the time of the Exodus, but by several different authors in the time of the kings or later, does not pass the test of

actual history. In examining a claim made by the Higher Critics that they are able to “see” an

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### **The Folly of Higher Criticism**

Kenneth Kitchen summarizes the folly of Higher Criticism, “Nowhere else in the whole of Ancient Near Eastern History has the literary, religious, and historical development of a nation been subjected to such a drastic and wholesale reconstruction at such variance with existing documentary evidence.” (Kenneth A. Kitchen. *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*. Chicago: IVP, 1966, 20). Dr. Kitchen is telling us in proper scholarly terms that the Bible Critics are retelling the history of Israel without any real historical evidence to support their allegations.

### **Attempt to Rewrite New Testament History**

The same attempt to rewrite history that we see in Old Testament studies has taken place among New Testament scholars as well. Related to this capacity to read between the lines of the New Testament is this remark by Lewis, “All theology of the liberal type involves at some point—and often involves throughout—the claim that the real behavior and purpose and teaching of Christ came very rapidly to be misunderstood and misrepresented by his followers, and has been recovered or exhumed only by modern scholars” (Lewis, 112).

In other words, the assumption of Liberalism is that they have a more accurate and enlightened understanding of the gospel events and records than the gospel writers and church fathers who were, at most, a few generations removed from the events. One of the most grievous examples of this hubris are the recent attempts to declare that the theology that will come to be known as orthodox, was, at the beginning, in competition with other “versions” such as

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Gnosticism and the Ebionites, and that the debate over the canon of Scripture was really a political battle for the control Christianity between several groups who each had a legitimate claim to define the faith.

For example, Elaine Pagels of Princeton University, who has been instrumental in this latest historical reconstruction of Christianity, says, “As far as we can tell the beginnings of Christianity occurred in many different places, in many different groups. There were wandering charismatics who went around from door to door preaching without an ordinary occupation, depending on people with whom they stayed for hospitality, for food. There were settled groups in little towns. There were radical groups.” (PBS, 20 of 37). It goes without saying that this is an extreme reconstruction of history, with only scant evidence to support it.

### **Fundamental Assumptions in Rewriting History**

One of the fundamental assumptions behind this attempt at rewriting history is the Liberal distrust of the Biblical record. They assume from the beginning that it is *kerygma*, religious proclamation, and because it is, it cannot be historical. Thus Professor Michael White of the University of Texas, Austin, declares, “The problem for any historian in trying to reconstruct the life of Jesus is simply that we don’t have sources that come from the actual time of Jesus himself.”<sup>1</sup> He is, of course, discounting the Gospels which claim to be first-hand and eyewitness testimony of the years the disciples spent with Christ prior to his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. One of those eyewitnesses, who also wrote one of the Gospels, tells

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 2 of 37.

us, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

It is the height of presumption to claim to know more about the first century than those who lived at the time and wrote as eyewitnesses of the events they experienced. The presumption usually takes the form of character assassination, either claiming the Apostles were “religiously” motivated and didn’t care about truth or facts, or believing the writers were simply ignorant and superstitious men who gave supernatural explanations to events that we moderns would explain by natural causes. Further, this rewriting of history has to deny a second prominent set of documents from the time; the writings of the church fathers, which corroborate the New Testament record and give no support to the latest attempts at historical reconstruction.

### **Lewis on Liberalism**

Lewis continues his criticism of Liberalism by saying, “I find in these theologians a constant use of the principle that the miraculous does not occur.”<sup>3</sup> In many ways, this is fundamental presupposition that instructs all of Liberal thought. The denial of the Scriptures as revelation and the denial of the central teachings of the Gospels concerning Christ are all driven by the presupposition that miracles are impossible. For example, the book of Isaiah is said to have at least two authors by the proponents of Liberal Theology. The need for a “Deutero-Isaiah” is driven by Isaiah 44: 28, “who says to Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd and I will accomplish what I please; he will say of Jerusalem, “Let it be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Let its foundations be laid.” The prophet Isaiah, who lived around 700 B.C., is naming the Persian king who will

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<sup>2</sup> | John 1:3.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, 113.

decree the return of the first exiles and the re-building of Jerusalem, more than 150 years before the event. The Decree of Cyrus occurred in 535 B.C. If the Isaiah of 700 B.C. is the one and only author of the book, then Isaiah 44:28 is a miracle. Since, Liberal Theology presumes miracles are impossible they must postulate a second Isaiah who wrote these passages after the exile and the return to Jerusalem.

There are two problems with this. First, the Septuagint (LXX), the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, was translated roughly halfway through the inter-testamental period. It was, therefore, relatively close to time when “Deutero-Isaiah” would have been written and added to the “Old” Isaiah according to the liberal scheme, yet the Isaiah of the LXX is identical to ours, there is no book 1 and book 2, there is not even a hint of the rewriting or adding to the book. Second, the Cyrus prophecy is not the only extraordinary prophecy in the book. Isaiah 50:6, Isaiah 53:2-6, and Isaiah 53:9 predict in graphic detail the suffering of Christ before and during the crucifixion, and even foretells his being laid in a borrowed tomb. It is one thing to say a second author wrote specific details after the fact of the exile, it is impossible to say the same thing about the crucifixion.

### **Rejection of the Miraculous**

It is this rejection of the miraculous that is most troubling. It leads us in a very cynical and hopeless direction. Hans Kung, who appears to hold to a form of Roman Catholic neo-Orthodoxy, writes of Jesus, “He belongs neither to right nor left, nor does he simply mediate between them. He *really* rises *above* them: above all alternatives, all of which he plucks up by the roots. This is his *radicalism*: the radicalism of *love* which in its blunt realism, is

fundamentally different than the radicalism of ideology.”<sup>4</sup> He has obviously read the lines of Scripture and in reading has understood the unique qualities of Christ. He grasps in a significant way, the power of Jesus’s life and example. However, because of his Liberal presuppositions he gives everything away when he writes, “They (the Gospels) are ‘kerygmatic formulas’ which enable Jesus’ way of the cross to be seen as the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation and not the consequence of blind fate. They are not sagacious prognoses by Jesus himself, but interpretations of the Passion by post-paschal Christendom.”<sup>5</sup> This is code for the belief that the Early Christians made up most of the stories about Jesus, because they wanted him to be the savior. Going further, he writes of the historicity of the resurrection, “Since according to the New Testament faith the raising is an act of God within God’s dimensions, it *cannot* be a *historical* event in the strict sense: it is not an event which can be verified by historical science with the aid of historical methods.”<sup>6</sup> We are left, after reading Kung with a profound sadness. Here is a man who takes a serious and thoughtful approach to the text on one level, while on the other hand having to say that on the basis history and scientific reasoning it is nothing more than a glorious fairy tale.

## Jesus Seminar

A final example of the prejudice against the miraculous in theological Liberalism, is the Jesus Seminar. Instituted by Robert Funk in 1985 under the auspices of the Westar Institute, it sought to bring together 150 laymen and scholars to form a consensus around the historical reliability of the sayings of Jesus, and thus of the Gospels.<sup>7</sup> The committee met over several years by evaluating the sayings of Jesus and voting on whether they were “certain” Jesus said

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<sup>44</sup> Hans Kung. *On Being a Christian*. (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976). 262.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 320.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 349.

<sup>7</sup> Westar Institute website, [www.westarinstitute.org](http://www.westarinstitute.org).

this, whether it was “likely” that he said it, whether it was “unlikely” that he said it, or finally that he definitely did not say what is attributed to him. At the end of the process they published a translation of the Gospels color coded according to the “vote” of these scholars. When the leader of the committee begins the proceedings by declaring the Gospels, “religious fictions”<sup>8</sup> you realize where this is headed. These scholars rejected the authenticity of many of the sayings of Jesus, not on the basis of historical evidence but because they involved miracles. Such is the prejudice of our age.

### **Role of Erudition and Ingenuity**

Lewis presents a fourth complaint. He writes, “All this sort of criticism attempts to reconstruct the genesis of the texts it studies; what vanished documents each author used, when and where he wrote, with what purposes, under what influences-the whole *Sitz im Leben* of the text. This is done with immense erudition and great ingenuity. And at first sight it is very convincing. I think I should be convinced by it myself, but that I carry about with me a charm-the herb *moly*-against it. You must excuse me if I now speak for a while of myself. The value of what I say depends on this being first hand evidence. What forearms me against all these reconstructions is the fact that I have seen it all from the other end of the stick. I have watched reviewers reconstructing the genesis of my own books in just this way.”<sup>9</sup> His point is that as a writer, he has had critics review his books, and those critics claim to be able to reconstruct his state of mind or mood while writing, or to imagine all sorts of motives for why the book was written. Lewis sums up their prognostications, “in the whole of my experience not one of these

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, The opening remarks of Jesus Seminar founder Robert Funk, presented at the first meeting held 21-24 March 1985 in Berkeley California.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, 113-114.

guesses has on any one point been right.”<sup>10</sup> Lewis goes on to show how far from the mark were the interpretations of J.R.R. Tolkein’s *Lord of the Rings*<sup>11</sup> as reviewers sought to “read between” the lines of his great novels.

### **Lewis’ Arguments**

Lewis will add the complexity of ancient history to the equation, “Consider with what overwhelming advantages the mere reviewers start. They reconstruct the history of a book written by someone whose mother-tongue is the same as theirs; a contemporary, educated like themselves, living in something like the same mental and spiritual climate. They have everything to help them. The superiority in judgment and diligence which you are going to attribute to the Bible critics will have to be almost superhuman if it is to offset the fact that they are everywhere faced with customs, language, race-characteristics, class-characteristics, a religious background, habits of composition, and basic assumptions, which no scholarship will ever enable any man now alive to know as surely and intimately and instinctively as the review can know mine. And for the very same reason, remember, the Bible critics, whatever reconstructions they devise, can never be crudely proved wrong. St. Mark is dead. When they meet St. Peter there will be more pressing matters to discuss.”<sup>12</sup> It is extremely difficult to “read between the lines” of a modern document, therefore how much more difficult to determine the circumstances of those from which we are 2,000 years removed?

We must also add that these reconstructions fly in the face of the clear statements of the writers of the New Testament. When a modern critic claims that the Gospels are “fictions,” it

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 118.



ignores the clear testimony of the Apostles themselves. Peter, for example, tells us, “For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”<sup>13</sup> Peter, even as he was a Galilean fisherman, a common working man of his day, is clear in proclaiming that he knows fact from fiction, and made up stories from the truth. The disciples were not the creators of an elaborate myth, they were, as he tells us, eyewitnesses. The power of the Gospel is that it is true.

When Liberals attempt to reconstruct the story of Christ, the birth of the church, or the writing of the New Testament, they have to ignore the actual text itself. This is Lewis’s central point, they not only can’t read the lines themselves, they must in the end ignore them or avoid them all together.

Lewis points to an inconvenient truth about modern thought; it is often temporary and short lived. “I have learned in other fields of study how transitory the ‘assured results of modern scholarship’ may be, how soon scholarship ceases to be modern.”<sup>14</sup> His hope is that this period of theological Liberalism will finally come to an end, broken by its own contradictions and lack of real supporting evidence. Lewis refers to the fact that many of the techniques used by the Bible critics, such as determining authorship by “style,” had been tried and abandoned by secular literary scholars.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, Lewis lived through several movements in philosophy such as British Idealism that had their day, but fell under the weight of their internal contradictions. His hope is that something like that is in store for Liberalism.

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<sup>13</sup> 2 Peter 1:16

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 119.

Lewis next gets more specific. He claims to be an “educated layman,” but not having the same kind of education as those he is addressing in this lecture. However, at this point in the talk he betrays his claim to be ignorant of theology as he begins dealing with the details of Bultmann’s theological views as well as anyone in the room. “The sort of statement that arouses our deepest skepticism is the statement that something in a Gospel cannot be historical because it shows a theology or an ecclesiology too developed for so early a date...I could not describe the history even of my own thought as confidently as these men describe the history of the early Church’s mind.”<sup>16</sup> This is the level of presumption involved, men claim to see and know things about the ancient Church that they would not be able to know about their own time and place.

### **Will Durant’s Explanation**

Will Durant, one of the foremost historians of the twentieth century, while not a Christian himself, writes as a historian, “The contradictions are of minutiae, not substance; in essentials the synoptic gospels agree remarkably well, and form a consistent portrait of Christ. In the enthusiasm of its discoveries Higher Criticism has applied to the New Testament tests of authenticity so severe that by them a hundred ancient worthies-Hammurabi, David, Socrates-would fade into legend.”<sup>17</sup> Using the valid standards of historical evidence, one must take the New Testament itself as an important text and resource for our understanding of Christ and the birth of Christianity. To do anything less, is to operate in an ahistorical manner. And that seems to be much of the problem, these “tests of authenticity so severe” appear to be intentional. There is in the modern spirit a desire for the removal of all restrictions, God being the ultimate. There is a deliberate desire to remove God from the picture, to produce a purely naturalistic and secular

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>17</sup> Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ, The Story of Civilization, Vol. III.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944). 557.

perspective for everything, religion included. And while the motive can appear scholarly and be framed as the pursuit of “truth,” it is really founded on a desire to ignore and distort the facts more than it is to find them. I do not mean to imply some deeply sinister conspiracy or motive behind Higher Criticism, but I am putting it into the context of the age in which we live. We want “freedom,” by which we usually mean moral and sexual license. Psalm 2 tells us that world “leaders” “rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, ‘Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.’”<sup>18</sup> What chains we might ask? The chains are the chains of moral restriction, the demands of submission to God and obedience to His word, and the demands of repentance and faith. We live in a libertarian age, and sadly, theologians are as susceptible to these temptations as anyone else.

### **Consequences of Liberal-Fundamentalist Controversy**

Lewis ends his talk almost back where he started, “Once the layman was anxious to hide the fact that he believed so much less than the vicar: he now tends to hide the fact that he believes so much more. Missionary to the priests of one’s own church is an embarrassing role; though I have a horrid feeling that if such mission work is not soon undertaken the future history of the church of England is likely to be short.”<sup>19</sup> It is a sad reality that many of the major Protestant churches in America no longer preach the Gospel, yet in those churches are a sizeable remnant who knows Christ and stand as the prayer warriors and missionaries to their own congregations. This is one of the awful consequences of the Liberal-Fundamentalist controversy, and the irony is that the “Professors,” those who are to know, profess, and defend the truth of the Gospel have become some of its worst enemies. James Davison Hunter’s observation that a

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<sup>18</sup> Psalm 2:2-3.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis, 125.

society does not change from the bottom up but from the top down, has proven true in the case of the church. Theological Liberalism began with the academics who circulated in the world of their fellow intellectuals, and joining their fellows, they embraced the skepticism and rejection of the supernatural of their peers. Their work from this time forward was the adjustment of theology to their naturalistic assumptions. These men were the teachers of the pastors and preachers of the Church. Their skepticism, therefore, infected whole denominations and churches, and as a result, thousands of ordinary people have left the church or no longer believe in its teachings. We are right, therefore, to engage in this controversy over the Bible and the right theological understanding that comes from it. As Lewis made clear, Evangelicals must show the levels to which the Liberal's "reading between the lines" is unwarranted and fails the tests of history and evidence.

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