

Week 11 Documents – Fundamentalism and the Scopes Trial

From Lyman Abbott – The Evolution of Christianity

The Christian evolutionist, then, will expect to find modern Christianity more complex than primitive Christianity. For the purpose of this comparison, I do not go back of Bethlehem: then, the confession "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," — now, the Episcopal Thirty-nine Articles, the Methodist Episcopal Twenty-four Articles, or the Westminster Confession of Faith of Thirty-three Chapters, with their numerous sub-sections; then, the simple supper-talk with the twelve friends, met in a fellowship sanctified by prayer and love — now, an elaborate altar, jeweled vestments, pealing organ, kneeling and awe-stricken worshipers; then, meetings from house to house for prayer, Christian praise, and instruction in the simpler facts of the Master's life and the fundamental principles of his kingdom, — now, churches, with preachers, elders, bishops, sessions, presbyteries, councils, associations, missionary boards; then, a brief prayer, breathing the common wants of universal humanity in a few simple petitions, — now, an elaborate ritual, appealing to ear and eye and imagination, by all the accessories which art and music and historic association combined can confer; then, a brotherhood in Jerusalem, with all things in common, and a board of deacons to see that all were fed and none were surfeited, — now, a brotherly love making its way, in spite of selfishness, towards the realization of that brotherhood of humanity which is as yet only a dream of poets. And he will expect to find that the Christianity of the nineteenth century, despite its failures and defects, is better, intellectually, organically, morally, and spiritually, than the Christianity of the first century.

The doctrine of evolution is not a doctrine of harmonious and uninterrupted progress. The most common, if not the most accurate formula of evolution is "struggle for existence, survival of the fittest." The doctrine of evolution assumes that there are forces in the world seemingly hostile to progress, that life is a perpetual battle and progress a perpetual victory. The Christian evolutionist will then expect to find Christianity a warfare — in church, in society, in the individual. He will expect Christianity to be a Centaur, — half horse, half man; a Laocoon struggling with the serpents from the sea; a seed fighting its way against frost and darkness towards the light and life. He will recur continually to his definition that evolution is a continuous progressive change by means of resident forces. He will remember that the divine life is resident in undivine humanity. He will not be surprised to find the waters of the stream disturbed; for he will reflect that the divine purity has come into a turbid stream, and that it can purify only by being itself indistinguishably combined with the impure. When he is told that modern Christianity is only a "civilized paganism," he will reply, "That is exactly what I supposed it to be; and it will continue to be a civilized paganism until the civilization has entirely eliminated the paganism." He will not be surprised to find pagan ceremonies in the ritual, pagan superstitions in the creed, pagan selfishness in the life, ignorance and superstition in the church, and even errors and partialisms in the Bible. For he will remember that the divine life, which is bringing all life into harmony with itself, is a life resident in man. He will remember that the Bible does not claim to be the absolute Word of God; that, on the contrary, it declares that the Word of God was with God and was God, and existed before the world was; that it claims to be the Word of God, *as perceived and understood by holy men of old*, the Word as spoken to men, and understood and interpreted by men, who saw it in part as we still see it, and reflected it as from a mirror in enigmas. He will remember that the Church is not yet the bride of Christ, but the

plebeian daughter whom Christ is educating to be his bride. He will remember that Christianity is not the absolutely divine, but the divine in humanity, the divine force resident in man and transforming man into the likeness of the divine. Christianity is the light struggling with the darkness, life battling with death, the spiritual overcoming the animal. The end is not yet. We judge Christianity as the scientist judges the embryo, as the gardener the bud, as the teacher the pupil, — not by what it is, but by what it promises to be.

Washington Gladden – from *Who Wrote the Bible?*

Our study has, indeed, made a few things plain. Among them is the certainty that the Bible is not an infallible Book, in the sense in which it is popularly supposed to be infallible. When we study the history of the several books, the history of the canon, the history of the distribution and reproduction of the manuscript copies, and the history of the versions,--when we discover that the "various readings" of the differing manuscripts amount to one hundred and fifty thousand, the impossibility of maintaining the verbal inerrancy of the Bible becomes evident. We see how human ignorance and error have been suffered to mingle with this stream of living water throughout all its course; if our assurance of salvation were made to depend upon our knowledge that every word of the Bible was of divine origin, our hopes of eternal life would be altogether insecure.

The book is not infallible historically. It is a veracious record; we may depend upon the truthfulness of the outline which it gives us of the history of the Jewish people; but the discrepancies and contradictions which appear here and there upon its pages show that its writers were not miraculously protected from mistakes in dates and numbers and the order of events.

It is not infallible scientifically. It is idle to try to force the narrative of Genesis into an exact correspondence with geological science. It is a hymn of creation, wonderfully beautiful and pure; the central truths of monotheistic religion and of modern science are involved in it; but it is not intended to give us the scientific history of creation, and the attempt to make it bear this construction is highly injudicious.

It is not infallible morally. By this I mean that portions of this revelation involve an imperfect morality. Many things are here commanded which it would be wrong for us to do. This is not saying that these commands were not divinely wise for the people to whom they were given; nor is it denying that the morality of the New Testament, which is the fulfillment and consummation of the moral progress which the book records, is a perfect morality; it is simply asserting that the stages of this progress from a lower to a higher morality are here clearly marked; that the standards of the earlier time are therefore inadequate and misleading in these later times; and that any man who accepts the Bible as a code of moral rules, all of which are equally binding, will be led into the gravest errors. It is no more true that the ceremonial legislation of the Old Testament is obsolete than that large portions of the moral legislation are obsolete. The notions of the writers of these books concerning their duties to God were dim and imperfect; so were their notions concerning their duties to man. All the truth that they could receive was given to them; but there were many truths which they could not receive, which to us are as plain as the daylight.

Not to recognize the partialness and imperfection of this record in all these respects is to be guilty of a grave disloyalty to the kingdom of the truth. With all these facts staring him in the

face, the attempt of any intelligent man to maintain the theoretical and ideal infallibility of all parts of these writings is a criminal blunder. Nor is there any use in loudly asserting the inerrancy of these books, with vehement denunciations of all who call it in question, and then in a breath admitting that there may be some errors and discrepancies and interpolations.

William Jennings Bryan from *Seven Questions in Dispute*

Is the Bible true? That is the great issue in the world today, surpassing in importance all national and international questions. The Bible is either true or false it is either the Word of God or the work of man. If the Bible is false, it is the greatest impostor that the world has ever known

As there can be no civilization without morals, and as morals rest upon religion, and religion upon God, the question whether the Bible is true or false is the supreme issue among men. As the Bible is the only book known to the Christian world whose authority depends upon inspiration, the degradation of the Bible leaves the Christian world without a standard of morals other than that upon which men can agree. As men's reasons do not lead them to the same conclusion, and as greed and self-interest often overthrow the reason, the fixing of any moral standard by agreement is impossible. If the Bible is overthrown, Christ ceases to be a Divine character, and His words, instead of being binding upon the conscience, can followed or discarded according as the individuals convenience may dictate.

If, on the contrary, the Bible is true - infallible because divinely inspired, then all the books that man has written are as far below the Bible in importance as man is below God in wisdom. The only ground upon which infallibility or inerrancy can be predicated is that the Book is inspired. Man uninspired cannot describe with absolute accuracy even that which has already happened

The Bible not only gives us history, and that, too, written in many cases long after the events transpired, but it gives us prophecy which was fulfilled centuries later. The language of the Bible cannot be explained by environment, for environment, in most instances, was entirely antagonistic. It cannot be explained by genius of the writers, for they were largely among the unlettered. The Bible could not have lived because of favouritism shown to it, because it has been more bitterly attacked than any other book ever written. The attacks upon it probably outnumbered the attacks made upon all other books combined, because it condemns man his face, charges him with being a sinner in need of a Saviour, indicts him as no other book does, holds up before him the highest standard ever conceived, and threatens him as he is threatened nowhere else.

And yet the Book stands and its circulation increase. How shall we account for its vitality, its indestructibility? By its inspiration and by that alone. Those who accept the Bible as true, inerrant, and infallible believe that the original autograph manuscripts which, through copies, are reproduced in the Old and New Testaments, were true, and true because divinely inspired -- "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter I :21). Because they were moved by the Holy Spirit. they spoke with accuracy and with the truth of God Himself

Orthodox Christians believe in plenary inspiration: that is, that all of the Bible was given by inspiration. They believe in verbal inspiration; that is, that the words used in the original manuscripts were the actual words of God as spoken by holy men of God "as they were moved

by the Holy Ghost." They accept the Bible as true and divinely inspired, beginning with belief in God as Creator of all things, continuing Ruler of the universe which He made, and Heavenly Father to all His children. They believe that God is a personal God, who loves, and is interested in, all His creatures. They believe that He revealed His will unto men, and they accept the testimony of the writers of the Bible when they declare that the holy Ghost spoke through them or through those whom they quote

The real conflict to-day is between those, on the one hand, who believe in God, in the Bible as the Word of God, and in Christ as the Son of God, and those, on the other hand, who believe in God but who believe that the Bible is inspired only in part - differing among themselves as to how much of it is inspired and as to what passages are inspired. The latter set up standards of their own, and there are nearly as many different standards as there are believers in partial inspiration. When they deny the infallibility of the Bible, they set up a standard that they regard either as infallible or as more trustworthy than the Bible itself. They really transfer the presumption of infallibility from the Bible to themselves, for either they say, "I believe this part of the Bible to be untrue because my own reason or my own judgment tells me that it is untrue:" or they say, "I believe it untrue because So-and-So, in whose judgment I have confidence, tells me it is untrue." Whether one trusts in his own judgment as to the truthfulness of a passage, or trusts the judgment of someone else who denies the truthfulness of a passage, he is, in fact, trusting his own judgment because if he does not rely on his own judgment in rejecting the passage it is his own judgment that substitutes the authority of the individual selected by him for the authority of the Bible.

It need hardly be added that such a rejection of the Bible, however the objector tries to limit it, is equivalent to a total rejection of the Bible as an authority, because an authority which is subject to be overruled on any point on any subject by anybody who cares to take the responsibility of overruling it, ceases to be of real value

A sophomore in a Georgia college informed me, at the conclusion of an address in Atlanta, that in order to reconcile Darwinism and Christianity, he only had to disregard *Genesis*.

Only *Genesis*! And yet there are three verses in the first chapter of *Genesis* that mean more to man than all the books of human origin: the first verse, which gives the most reasonable account of creation ever advanced; the twenty-fourth verse, which gives the only law governing the continuity of life on earth; and the twenty-sixth which gives the only explanation of man's presence here.