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# Biblical Authority

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by G. Herbert Livingston

The basic purpose of this essay is to probe the phenomenon of authority which pervades both the Old and the New Testaments. The authority of the Scriptures has been at the center of debate and commitment within the believing community through the ages. Authority remains as one of the most crucial elements of the acceptance of Christianity in the modern world.

Briefly, the discussion will touch upon the following conceptual categories of biblical authority: (a) The biblical means of portrayal of the God of authority, (b) the credentials of selected persons through whom authority was channeled, (c) the authenticating marks of God's messages as authoritative, (d) the alternatives facing those who receive the authoritative message, whether oral and/or written form, and (e) the burden resting on ministers today to proclaim an authoritative word.

In regard to the first three and the fifth of these categories, three elements will be discussed: (a) the right to exercise authority, (b) the power to carry out authority, and (c) the integrity which undergirds authority. In the fourth category, those factors which account for variations in the response of the audience to which God's word and action is directed, will be examined.

Due to limitations of time, the observations presented here must be general in nature; affirmations must be compressed and concise. The temptation to supply careful exegetical support for each statement and to draw upon many biblical stories and speeches for illustrations is great. This temptation has been resisted. The appeal to supply a philosophical and/or a theological rationale for biblical authority is alluring, but also has been rejected. Since the writer specializes in Old Testament studies, there has been a tendency to

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draw heavily from that portion of the Scriptures, but the New Testament has, by no means, been neglected.

### **God's Authority**

Dominating the Scriptures from beginning to end is the vision of the majestic sovereign God, Who leaves no doubt by word or action that ultimate authority is His possession and His alone. The second Person of the Godhead, the incarnated, resurrected Christ shares that same authority.

To convey an overview of God's authority, the Bible makes affirmations about God's identity and power, utilizes the ancient frameworks of covenant and communication constructs, and insists on the integrity of God.

The Old Testament does not discuss abstractly God's authority on the basis of His right to have such authority, but it does affirm repeatedly that God is powerful, is mighty, and is without peer. The Old Testament is replete with descriptions of God acting powerfully as the Creator and Preserver of nature, as the One Who works miracles in the natural realm and in the affairs of men, as the One Who creates anew the individual and the nation. The devout Hebrew believed that the manifest power of God was adequate basis for recognizing the Living God to be the supreme authority figure of the universe.<sup>1</sup>

For the New Testament, the situation is much the same. Instead of an academic analysis of the authority of God, there are affirmations that God is powerful and testimonies of a divine display of His miraculous acts. All other possessions of authority ultimately have their source in the Almighty Himself.<sup>2</sup>

The supreme power of God is communicated in ways other than through more or less impersonal demonstrations in nature and human history. In the Scriptures, there are frameworks of personal relationships which function to reveal to man the person-to-person dimensions of divine authority.

A primary structure by which God chose to reveal His sovereignty is the covenant. Students of the Bible have long been aware of the theological significance of the covenant in God's relationship to man. They have clearly seen in the covenant God's superior status. However, archaeological discoveries in recent decades have opened to us new vistas which have broadened the horizon of our understanding of the covenant relationship. Much of this new

knowledge has deepened and reinforced the long-held conviction that God, from the beginning, revealed Himself as the ultimate source of all power and authority.

A significant number of inscriptions found in ancient Asia Minor and throughout the Mesopotamia Valley record covenant agreements. These covenants were political in nature and represent treaties between an emperor and lesser kings in his empire. Many are dated in the Late Bronze Age, approximately from 1500-1300 B.C.<sup>3</sup>

These new discoveries suggest that God took up from the overall Semitic civilization a basically political construct of person-to-person relationship, transformed it into a vehicle for revealing His will to man, and filled it with profound theological truth. All evidences of polytheism were stripped from the covenant structure. Old Testament scholars have called this a suzerainty covenant, because in it the covenant-maker is supreme over all other participants in the covenant. This characteristic fits well the sovereignty of God over all mankind. Basically, this kind of covenant has three foci: the supreme covenant-maker, the selected human mediator of the covenant, and the covenant community. All are regarded as persons in dynamic relationship to each other. A better framework, current in ancient Near East cultures, could scarcely be found and adapted to the revelations of the Living God to mankind.

The key elements of the ancient covenant model which bear upon ultimate authority are (a) only the covenant-maker initiated and established the covenants described in the Old and the New Testaments; (b) the covenant-maker set up the regulations which governed the covenant relationship; (c) the covenant-maker set up the sanctions in the form of curses should the covenant be broken; and (d) the covenant-maker had the exclusive right to reconstitute a broken covenant.

Many biblical passages show how the supremacy of God was communicated in ancient times through the covenant. In the light of the above-mentioned features of the covenant-maker's status, one can examine with profit the import of the prohibition given Adam, and the promises and/or commands in the accounts of the prohibition given Adam, and the promises and/or commands in the accounts of God's covenants with Noah, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Israel at Sinai and at Shechem, and with David. The book of Hebrews can also be instructive.

In biblical accounts of miracle authorization, God's commands

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are cast in the imperative mood. Moses was the first to be authorized to perform miracles, and the rod became the symbol of the announcement and the performance of God's wonders during the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings. Explicit instructions were given to Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, and a host of prophets in relation to the preparation for the performance of God's marvelous miracles.

Another related framework, well-known in ancient times, is the messenger construct, in which there were the messenger-sender, the messages, and the individuals or groups addressed.

According to the Scriptures, God began to relate to man in this manner with Moses, and it became a common pattern in the God-prophet relationship. In addition to God's identification of Himself, there are certain verbs which stress God's supreme position. One verb is **salah**, normally translated "send." This is a commissioning verb and is found with God as the subject in regard to Moses (Ex. 3:12-16), Samuel (I Sam. 15:1), Isaiah (Isa. 6:8,9), Jeremiah (Jer. 19:14+), Ezekiel (Ezek. 3:6+), and Zechariah (Zech. 2:12). The other basic verb used is **natan**, which is, in the messenger context, translated as "put," "ordained," "appointed," or by other synonyms. The call of Jeremiah is a prime example (Jer. 1:5,9: cf. Deut. 18:18). The verbs "go" and "speak" with their synonyms, in the imperative mood, highlighting the Lordship of God over the messenger. These verbs are often followed by a designation of the addressee and coupled with the well-known statement: "Thus saith the Lord," in its various formulations. This statement is a prime signature of authority in the Old Testament message-sending situation. Hannaniah misused this authority formula with fatal consequences (Jer. 28).

Correlative to the right of authority and the power to back up authority is the integrity of the authority figure. We have seen in our present national crisis, called the Watergate affair, the intimate relationship of integrity to the authority of the top governmental leaders. In the Scriptures, integrity of being and action is fundamental to the viability of divine authority.

Integrity has to do with a state of being whole, of being unimpaired in basic qualities, and/or of being organically entire. Integrity has to do with soundness of moral character in which honesty, sincerity, dependability, and consistency are untainted by deception, artificiality, or guile. In the Old Testament, this concept is primarily carried by the verb **tāman**, and its derivatives,<sup>4</sup> which depict man's relationship to God and to each other. It also designates the quality

of a sacrificial animal. Twice the verb refers to God's work, way, knowledge, and law (Deut. 32:4; II Sam. 22:31, Job 37:16; Ps. 19:7). In the New Testament, the equivalent word is *téleios*, which twice designates the perfection of God (Matt. 5:48; Rom. 12:2).

In a variety of ways, the integrity of God is affirmed in both the Old and the New Testaments. These affirmations generally draw upon words which are equivalent to the English words "oneness," or "simplicity," because there is a strong emphasis on the self-existence, the self-consciousness, and self-decision of God. He is distinct from all aspects of nature. In contrast to the deities in polytheism, He is not confused with natural objects, or with man. He cannot be manipulated. The integrity of God is implicit in declarations on the holiness, fullness, righteousness, justice, omnipresence, omniscience, faithfulness, truth, and eternity of God.

Both the Old and the New Testaments present men and women of faith as grounding their lives and their messages upon the reality of a God of authority, power, and integrity. This conviction was no less intense in regard to Jesus Christ. A minister of Christ must be just as convinced that the ground of biblical authority is also the Living Lord. From this foundation we may now examine the human side of biblical authority.

### **The Mediator-Messenger's Authority**

According to the Scriptures, Moses was the first man to serve authoritatively as God's surrogate. In him was combined the functions of both the covenant-mediator and the covenant-messenger. As covenant-mediator, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt to Sinai, where the covenant was forged. Then he organized them and led them through the wilderness to the east side of the Jordan River. As covenant-messenger, Moses received from God a series of messages to be delivered to the Pharaoh and others, with Aaron as his helper.

Moses' authority was rooted in his commissioning to these tasks by God at the burning bush (Ex. 3:1-4:23), and later in Egypt (5:22-6:13; see also 6:28-7:7). In reference to basic Hebrew words of commissioning, mention has been made of God's authoritative status which is reflected in them. These verbs, particularly "send," also portray the conferral of authority on Moses to act for God (3:10) as deliverer. Throughout Moses' meetings with Pharaoh, God's commands authorized Moses to perform miracles for Him. In the

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call experience, the rod was given to symbolize this God-given power, which was displayed in a series of miracles after the Exodus till the end of Moses' ministry. The power of the mediator was also evident in Moses' shining face when he descended from Mount Sinai with the second set of law tablets (34:29-35). On one occasion, Moses sought to take personal credit for the power vouchsafed to him with drastic consequences. God forbade him to enter Canaan (Num. 20:10-13).

Moses' authority as mediator was evidenced with special force by his access to the presence of God on Mount Sinai during the covenant-making event (Ex. 19-24). Only Moses could receive the divine instructions, the law, and the right to officiate as leader of the covenant ceremonies. To a lesser extent, Joshua was promised authority and power to lead Israel into the land of promise (Josh. 1:1-9). Joshua realized that power at the Jordan River, at Jericho, and at the battle of Beth-Horon. Joshua demonstrated his authority at the covenant renewals at Shechem (Josh. 8:30-35; 24:1-28).

At a higher level, Jesus Christ possessed authority and power as Mediator of the New Covenant; for He, the Son of God, was sent into the world to establish it. New Testament passages in support of this assertion are widespread, but the Gospel of John and the book of Hebrews are especially rich sources.

In regard to Moses' function as messenger, similar observations can be made. Against Moses' protest, God commissioned him to transmit messages and finally gave him Aaron as an assistant. Moses was commissioned to speak repeatedly in the name of Jahweh; the three books, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, are replete with "The Lord spoke to Moses," and the repetition of the divine message to the designated audience.

The same divine commission to speak is found in the opening chapters of Joshua and in relationship to a host of prophets during the Kingdom Period. Their credentials lay in the commissioning by God and the varied formulae based on "Thus saith the Lord."

The inner experience of being commissioned was matched by an inner enablement to speak. Several of God's men protested their own inadequacy to do the task but God touched them, changed them, and filled them with courage and power to face the most awesome audiences. The stories of these encounters show that these people performed miracles, and endured suffering and death without fear. An important aspect of their power lay in the fulfillment of their

predictions, often dramatically.

The personal integrity of the servants of God were credentials of authority and evidence of power; they were able to come through periods of crisis as more mature persons. A basic aspect of their crisis was a dilemma which arose from their relationship to both God and man. The clearest statement of this dilemma is found in Jeremiah 1:17-19. A paraphrase may put it thus: "Go out and speak; if you crumble under the opposition; God will punish; if you continue to speak faithfully, everyone will fight against you." During forty years of prophesying, Jeremiah was gored by the sharp horns of that dilemma, but the display of poise and fearlessness in trial and in prison made clear to all the quality of his integrity. The same was true of Moses and many another Old Testament worthy.

And what shall we say of the dilemmas of Christ who spoke with authority and healed with power? What of the quality of His life of love as well as His steel-like opposition to sin and cruelty? He died with forgiveness on His lips and rose from the grave with power. What of the apostles who were authorized by Christ to proclaim the gospel? From Pentecost on, they were flames of fire and power, willing to take up the cross without flinching and suffer joyfully for Christ's sake. They knew the compulsion of the commission and the: "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (I Cor. 9:16). They held true and died gloriously.

### **The Message's Authority**

The foregoing comments have tried to demonstrate the biblical ground of authority in the one true God and His delegation of authority to the covenant-mediators and the covenant-messengers in both the Old and the New Testaments. This authority will now be examined in terms of the ancient means of conveying it via oral and/or written messages, and sanctions which backed them up, the basis for canonicity, and the evidences of biblical authenticity.

The Word of God was not proclaimed to Israel in a cultural vacuum; "earth vessels" were utilized to bear it and to preserve it. Reference has already been made to the ancient treaties as structural models by which God was portrayed as Sovereign with Moses and Christ as covenant-mediators. These same treaties provided a model for messages which were intended to be authoritative. Many treaties had clauses which ordered that their texts should be written, that copies be made for the vassals, and that a written text be deposited in

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the national temple. Strictures were declared against unilateral changes in the written text, and curses were pronounced as sanctions against all illegal acts. These features were adapted to the needs of establishing a covenant with Israel.

Most of the reference in the Pentateuch to materials put into writing have to do with covenant law, covenant curses, and covenant commitment (Ex. 24:3; 31:18; 34:1,27-28; Deut. 6:9; 27:3,8; 31:9-13,19-22,24-26; cf. Deut. 4:13; 5:22; 10:2,4; also Josh. 1:8; 8:32-35). But the greater portion of God's word is depicted in the Pentateuch as transmitted orally to the people through God's messenger, Moses. No less authority is ascribed to these oral proclamations, which provided instructions in time of crisis, laws for community organization, blueprints for tabernacle construction, and regulations for worship procedures. There were moments of rebellion against the message delivered, but the exhibition of divine power soon put a stop to them. The oral messages also effectually declared God's victory over all enemies, and the achievement of deliverance of His people from bondage. The word of power constituted Israel as His own: "I take you to me for a people . . ." (Ex. 3:7; Deut. 4:20). God's presence coincided with the declaration of the word: ". . . that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee forever" (Ex. 19:9).

Whether in oral or written form, the word of God was backed by sanctions of curses and threats of punishment should His words be rejected. These were not idle words, for God repeatedly carried out His word in acts of retribution.

Meredith Kline has maintained that all the literature of the Old Testament bears the canonical authority of the constituting event of the covenant-making at Sinai. Genesis and Exodus 1-18 make up the historical prologue which records the acts of God leading to Sinai. Numbers recounts the acts of God throughout the wanderings. Deuteronomy is the retelling of the covenant event, and is structured according to the key components of the ancient suzerainty treaty. The historical books highlight events of covenant-breaking and covenant renewal. They provide the framework for the prophets, who served as God's persecutors against a people which had forsaken the covenant. The prophets were also evangelists who called Israel back to a covenant renewal, who pointed to the future plans of God to fulfill His covenant and to forge a new covenant.

The Psalms are expressions of commitment, or recital of God's deeds, and of participation in covenant fellowship before God within



a structure of worship. The wisdom literature is the transformation of law into maxims and teachings of how an upright man walks before God, and the wicked man pollutes the covenant community and experiences the covenant sanctions.

On the basis of covenant renewal and the changes evident in covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and David, Kline holds that the New Testament is also a body of literature grounded in the salient features of the ancient covenant, yet with differences. Through His death, Jesus Christ put the new covenant into effect. He called into being a new community, the church, rooted the law in the inner being, and proclaimed a new commandment, love. Jesus Christ gathered to Himself the functions of prophet, priest, and king and all that pertained to them. In the combined events of Resurrection and Pentecost, spiritual life and power became realized as never before, in the new community which now broke all barriers as it spread out into the world.

The oral words of Christ and the written words of the gospels bear the authoritative impress of the new covenant; so also do the oral words of the apostles and the written account of their acts, which provide the historical framework of the epistles. The epistles draw heavily on the prophets, the Psalter, and the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, and time them to the new covenant. New obligations are set forth and sanctions are proclaimed and enforced against those who turn their back on the Lord of the new covenant. The book of Revelation consummates the new covenant in the triumphal word of the victorious, returning Christ; it goes full circle to the Garden of Eden with its Tree of Life. The New Testament literature has authority as canon because it revolves around and explicates the new covenant.<sup>5</sup>

In neither the Old Testament or the New Testament is there an indication that authority was conferred upon their literature by act of human decision, whether done in assembly or in one's inner being. Rather, the context of personal encounters with God and covenant-making assemblies is interlaced with recognition of the intrinsic authority of the oral messages and written materials declared as the Word of God.

The integrity of biblical literature is grounded in the legitimacy of its source in the one true God who revealed His will to man. The Bible is His vehicle in written form to convey His message. It is the

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sole record and the authentic interpretation of the events of history in which God acts as Judge and Savior. Only from the Bible do we have information of the birth, life, death, resurrection, and Second coming of Jesus Christ and the significance of that information to us.

The integrity of the Scriptures is rooted in the validity and authentic quality of the mediator-messenger relationship with God, and in the responsible leadership of the persons who experienced this relationship as they functioned in the establishment of the covenant with the covenant community. The Scriptures record the messenger's responsible transmission of God's message to His people and contains a trustworthy transcript written either by those select servants or their close associates.

The integrity of the biblical literature extends to those who wrote the Scriptures. If these servants of God had been involved in recording events that never happened, guilty of falsifying the past by distorting it with unwarranted religious interpretation, or participants in pious fraud, then their integrity would have been dealt a fatal blow. A credibility gap at this portion of the chain of authority would invalidate whatever supposed genuineness the other foci of authority may possess. If the intention and conduct of the biblical writers were not pure, our ability to reach through to the hearts and minds of the apostles, to the Person of Jesus Christ, to the reality of God's dealings with the ancient Hebrews is incapacitated. We are at a loss to make an authentic contact with more than a present subjective experience.

The integrity of biblical literature bears upon its relationship to succeeding generations, to differing cultures, and to men in every variety of lostness. To be effectual in bringing a message of judgment and salvation, the Bible must continue to be universally, infallibly authoritative for faith and practice. It was not a simple operation to maintain the viability of the covenant theology in the presence of the stifling, oppressive polytheism of the ancient Near East. The Old Testament was a daring challenge to paganism and its temptations. Most remarkable is the persistence of the Old Testament in our Bible in the face of centuries of Marcionism and allegorizing tendencies within Christianity. Both attitudes have been detrimental to the validity of the Old Testament's theological witness. And the New Testament literature has had its battles with Gnostic and mystic emphases in the church, but has stood its ground and maintained its authenticity.

### **The Audiences Response to Biblical Authority**

There is still a vital segment of the chain of authority which must be discussed; it is the response of the listening audience. The factors which account for variations in the response of the audience are freedom of choice, a fundamental dilemma, a conceptual construct of faith statements, and a practical application to lifestyle.

A most significant aspect of the covenant at Sinai was the voluntary, whole-hearted affirmation: "All the Lord has spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8; cf. 24:7b). Similar commitments were made in the presence of Joshua (Josh. 24:16-22); in the presence of Josiah (II Kings 23:3); and in the presence of Ezra (Neh. 8:6).

The Israelites were not always positive in their responses to the messages delivered by God's messengers. The Old Testament is replete with accounts of Israel's rebellions and apostasies. There is nothing in the Old Testament which indicates that positive responses conferred authority on the messages, or that negative responses withheld authority from them. It is no different in the Gospels or in the Acts of the Apostles. Decisions made by individuals or groups affected their lives profoundly, but did not affect the reality of God's authority, the authority of the messenger, or the authority of the message.

Positive commitments did recognize the identity and authority of the Message-Sender. Since the messenger was physically present, people could examine and recognize his authority and if they rejected it, they could abuse him; but God was beyond their grasp, and could not be man-handled by them. People could hear or read the messages and accept or reject their authority, but even a king—Jehoiakim—could not burn a prophet's scroll without bringing upon himself divine sanctions. Though God is invisible, He must be taken seriously.

After receiving a message, the audience often found decision-making difficult. The Message-Sender was not a physical object, the messenger was often a lowly, unknown person, and the message was frequently very critical. A painful dilemma normally accompanied the message. If the sinful Israelites responded positively they would have to repudiate the pagan practices they had come to enjoy. If the Israelites responded negatively, they would have to face the covenant sanctions.

Those who listened to Jesus faced the same dilemma, and many decided to crucify Him. The congregations who listened to the

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apostles were no different. Some said yes; some said no. Those who listen to the Word of God or read it today must too make decisions in the presence of the same dilemma so bluntly put by Jesus: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24).

It is not the privilege of an audience to confer authority on all or parts of the Bible, or to withhold authority; it is their responsibility to yield to the Lord of the Scriptures and to feed on the written Word, illuminated and guided by the Holy spirit and the fellowship of the saints.

In ancient times, the pattern of authority was the Sovereign Revealer, the commissioned messenger, the message transmitted in oral and/or written form, and the listening audience. Today, the structure of authority is the living Word, i.e., Jesus Christ; the written Word, i.e., the Scriptures; the preacher, and the congregation.

Within recent times, philosophical idealism, positivism, and existentialism, separately or in combination, have been inclined to reject this framework of authority and to question the theological concepts of Scriptures, and to recast its doctrines and terminology into more acceptable thought patterns.

The Scriptures remain a challenge to all attempts to subvert or transform their basic theological proclamations. The living, triune God is not dead; He is still the creator and sustainer of all nature. Jesus Christ, the Son of God is the contemporary Christ, redeeming sinners. The Holy Spirit is working in the hearts of a multitude of believers. Sin and judgment are still realities; conversion and sanctification are still experienced by those who turn to God by faith.<sup>6</sup> Suffice it to say, the authority of the Scriptures remains viable. It is effective in leading sinners to God, in illuminating the depths of sin and the possibilities of grace, which is the representation of the power of biblical authority. The Bible is indispensable for maturing saints as persons, which is illustrative of its integrity. The written Word places on each believer the responsibility to witness in an evil age, which is an extension of the right of biblical authority.

The Bible remains authoritative in the area of practice, but here the problem of applying its authority is not easily solved. The simplistic approach is to regard all divine commands touching on practice in isolation from historical, cultural contexts, and to therefore bind believers for all time regardless of differences of culture.

It is instructive to note that those divine commands which the

prophets, Jesus Christ, and the apostles regarded as permanently valid were the Ten Commandments and, with Christ, the two supreme laws state in Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18. These commandments were each directed to the individual. Many of the other laws, mostly case law, had to do with the lifestyle of the community, and these changed to some extent at each covenant renewal. In the covenant renewal called the New Testament, radical changes were made in regulations related to the community way of life, mostly by rooting motivation deeply in the inner life.

Nevertheless, at the very beginning of Israel's national life, the laws governing many phases of her lifestyle represented a radical change from the cultures which surrounded her on every hand. Perhaps these changes can be labeled as cultural adaptations. A century and a half ago knowledge of the cultural environment of the ancient near East was exceedingly limited and students of the Bible did not recognize this element of adaptation, for there was little with which the Old Testament could be contrasted. Now the contrast is quite clear in the areas of theological concepts of God, man, sin, and salvation. The differences are striking in terms of the manner in which God, nature, individual, and practice of divination, magic, kingship, law, and cultic worship on the one hand, and the Hebrew understanding of prophecy, miracle, leadership, law, and worship practice on the other hand.

By counterbalancing the similarities between the Hebrew and the pagan with the differences between them, one can grasp some of the guidelines governing changes of community lifestyle. A key guideline was the clear prohibition of any practice contrary to the nature and will of a God of holy love and contrary to healthy, moral living among men. Another guideline was the lifting up of neutral terms and practices from common Semitic culture, the cleansing of these terms of pagan connotations and the attaching to them of new meanings and overtones consonant with the covenant theology. Much of the case law, dealing with domestic, economic, and governmental matters found in the Old Testament, was constructed according to this guideline, and many of the changes of cultic practice in the Old Testament seem to follow this procedure. The radical changes proposed by Jesus, illustrated in the Council of Jerusalem, and provided by the epistles seem to be motivated in much the same way. Each covenant in a new culture needed new expressions.

In a similar fashion festivals common to the Semites were replaced

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with celebrations rooted in events of supreme importance to the Hebrews. The feasts of Passover, of Pentecost, and of Tabernacles are illustrations. In turn, these Hebrew feasts were replaced in the church by the Lord's supper, by Easter, and by Christmas, for these festivals were grounded in events in Christ's life. Event and feast were closely tied together.

Another guideline was a reorientation of vocations in the New communities. As Hebrew priest was different from pagan priest, so the Christian minister was different from either one, because the covenant was different; hence, leadership developed along different lines than in either paganism or in Israel. So also the structure of the individual church was adapted to each new culture which it penetrated.

Cultural practices which were adapted to Israelite or church life were transient elements and for that reason posed danger. When spiritual life was at a low ebb, the customs, institutions, laws, and rites which were adapted from surrounding culture, and thus similar to the pagan lifestyle, could be polluted by pagan attitudes and emphases. On the other hand, when adapted practices became obsolete cultural changes, the very: "Thus saith the Lord" formula which initiated them would seem to prohibit further change. So obsolete regulations would become a burden on future generations.

The Christian church has faced problems of cultural adaptation as it has evangelized people of differing ways of living. This problem is crucial today as Christians face rapid cultural changes at home and engage in missionary activities in all areas of the world.

It may be that an in-depth study of how God revealed Himself to the Hebrew people, how he led them to build a new community with new ways of practice, how Jesus fulfilled the law of the Old Testament, and how He and the apostles build the church would provide guidelines for living in today's world. The precepts must be sifted for principles so the Scriptures will truly serve us authoritatively in our practices.

Since Asbury Theological Seminary is a seminary training preachers for future service, a word about preaching and biblical authority may be in order as a conclusion. A preacher without an authoritative message is an anomaly; he is a living contradiction. Several factors must combine to transform him into a transmitter of the authority of God.

Like the messenger of old, a true preacher must experience a call to

preach; he/she must receive a commission from the Holy Spirit to perform the preacher's task. This divine call should be augmented by the church's commissioning of the preacher, who in response must have a deep conviction that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. The preacher should study the whole Bible with diligence, care, and honesty.

The preacher must know the reality of the regenerating and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Authority and power go together and they must be joined in the preacher's life if he/she is to deliver Scriptural messages effectively. Followers of John Wesley often refer to the unction of the Holy Spirit, which may be defined as God's present support and help during the preaching of the Word.

The preacher must be a real person. He/she must be open before God and man, and be willing to pay the price of faithful proclamation of the Word of God. The preacher must be a person of integrity, honest, pure in motive, permeated with love, and outgoing in concern for others. Priorities must be fixed on service to God and man rather than on such peripheral matters as salary or status.

The exhortation of Paul to Timothy still rings out across the years: "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Timothy 4:2). ■

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>A study of Hebrew or English words for power in standard lexicons and concordances will provide many passages to support these assertions.

<sup>2</sup>Consult standard Greek lexicons and concordances for the usage of *ἐξουσία* and *δύναμις*, or English concordances for equivalents, such as "authority" and "power."

<sup>3</sup>D. R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), pp. 25-45. Also, D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), pp. 28-106.

<sup>4</sup>The derivatives are *tōm*, *tummā*, and *fāmim*.

<sup>5</sup>Meredith Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 27-110.

<sup>6</sup>Donald G. Miller, *The Authority of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 70-91.