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### THE DANGER OF LIBERALISM

By Michael Baughen

The greatest problem of the Church is in the insidious derogation of the Scriptures as Holy Writ. The modern mind of man will bring existentialist philosophy to bear, will welcome uncritically the in-club meanderings of the more liberal Biblical scholars, and will delight in the public rubbishing of deeply-cherished Christian doctrines. But it is the same mind of man that in the beginning resolved to take the forbidden fruit, ignored the warnings of God in the time of Noah, built the tower of Babel and crucified the Son of God - the mind that wants to be God, to put God under its feet, in its control and made in its own image or ideas. The battle, as always, is not intellectualism *versus* non-intellectualism but between unsanctified intellectualism and intellectualism which is submitted to the Living God.

#### What God?

We are told that the more liberal approach which can dispense with the accounts of the resurrection or of the Virgin Birth as mere later inventions to explain the experiences of early Christians has enabled many people to come to God. Yet we reply, what God? What sort of God? Is He the God who has revealed Himself in history, in Scripture and by His Spirit before whom we bow in dust and ashes, and from whom we receive redemption and renewal? Or is He the God whom we create from our experience (the way most religions seem to have begun) - forming, reforming our image of Him in a way that is comfortable to *us* as humans?

#### Inter-Faith

It is but a short jump from there to the New Age philosophy - to the God 'inside' and not 'out there', rather than the God who is both transcendent *and* immanent. It is but a short jump to denigrate the uniqueness of Christ as a man-invented doctrine; to re-interpret the Cross so as to remove any sense of sacrifice for sin, atonement, substitution or propitiation, while still incredibly accepting the Communion/Eucharist as central to worship. It is but a short jump to move prayer from living intercession to the Almighty God into becoming only inner meditation with one's own being. It is but a short jump to inter-faith stew that in the same service can use the liturgies of different religions alongside and equal to the Christian liturgies. It is but a short jump to the shadowy Hades-like attraction of astrology, the occult and all so-called spiritual influences on man - for man never wants to admit his own guilt or sin, and in his deep-down desire to say he has no sin, he deceives himself.

#### 'Other Views'

This influence is colossal - for it is fed in endless R.E. lessons, theology schools and theological colleges. I attended a lecture a little while ago at a certain Ordination Course. It was on the New Testament. The total liberalism of the approach was so appalling as to leave me fuming. It was not the presentation of liberal views in themselves but the way in which all other approaches were dismissed in the sentence, used several times, 'there are other views'. I thanked God for my own theological tutors in an evangelical setting who set out thoroughly each of the variant views of theologians and Biblical scholars. I well remember H. L. Ellison that marvellous Hebrew Christian scholar, expounding critical views of the Old Testament with such thoroughness that I felt only a scholastic Houdini could get out of it. Then in his unforgettable way, he would begin 'But . . .'. He would show the flaws and strengths of the different arguments.

What then of those whose theological education is without this balance? They are dismissive of those who seem to hold the Scriptures as authoritative. They will frequently lash out with phrases

like 'closed minds', 'anti-intellectual', 'fundamentalist' as if that settles the matter. It is like the old advice 'when argument is weak, shout'. It is the cheapest and most despicable of attitudes to regard those who disagree with you as having a 'closed mind' when, in fact, they have a *different* mind. So often it is that they have never studied the scholarly approach of so many theologians, patristic, Old Testament and New Testament scholars, who have come more and more to a thorough position of Biblical inspiration and authority.

*Michael Baughen (at time of publication) was Bishop of Chester. This article is an extract from the Bishop's address released to the press.*