THE PROBLEM OF CERTAINTY

by Dan Tappeiner

All unspiritual natures turn the question round. They say: To stake everything upon an "IF," that is a sort of skepticism, is quite fantastic, ..."that is because they will not take the 'risk' -- and that is the crumb of unspirituality which Christianity has carried along with it and which has, in the end, done away with Christianity." — Soren Kierkegaard

"The prophecies, the very miracles and proofs of our religion are not of such a nature that they can be said to be absolutely convincing."

---Pascal

The Formal Nature of Logic

Logic is concerned only with "formal truth." This fact derives from the definition of logic. Logic is the manipulation of an abstract set of symbols according to a previously agreed upon set of rules. "Formal truth" is concerned with the question, "Has this combination of the symbols been reached according to the original rules?" If it has, it is declared to be logically or formally true. If not - not. This formal aspect of logical propositions is easily seen as soon as we try to relate them to any supposed reality. If I say "All A is B and C is a member of the class A, therefore C is B," no one will object. But if I try to relate this logical form to reality and say, "All Christians are skeptics, you are a Christian, therefore you are a skeptic," there might well be an objection.

The Rules of Logic Undemonstrable

Nothing can be clearer than that the basic rules of our little game of logic cannot be demonstrated by logic. This would involve either an infinite regress or possibly circular reasoning. Therefore the rules are arbitrary from the standpoint of logic. Geometry as a formal system is a good example. If one chooses a postulate of parallels of the Euclidean or Riemannian sort, who is to object? True, the theorems which derive from this postulate are then different, but this in no way invalidates the formal truth of these theorems. So long as we do not try to relate these theorems to reality, it makes no more than a curious difference if one assumes none, one or two parallel lines can be drawn through a given point parallel to a given line. But if one does try to relate these theorems to reality, we are immediately faced with the logically unbridgeable gap between logic and reality.

Logical Skepticism

These observations about the nature of assumptions in logic leads us to the following central point: Every judgment, every statement which I make about any (con't. p. 3.)

1 Of course it is possible to make meaningful propositions within a logical system which cannot be either demonstrated or denied. So the question of formal truth in logic is not as simple as all that.

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EDITORIAL

Often the impression is given that a theological student should have no un­ resolved questions in matters of faith. If a theological student should express such questions or doubts, it is inferred that his theological training has somehow failed. Unfortunately this attitude overlooks one of the most important motivations in theology -- the desire to understand what one believes. As theologians, as preachers and as Christians we cannot simply receive from the past and pass on to the future. We have the responsibility to examine, to understand and to appropriate the doctrines delivered to us. John Milton has set us a good example:

"But since it is only to the individual faith of each that the Deity has opened the way of eternal salvation, and as he requires that he who would be saved should have a personal belief of his own, I resolved not to repose on the faith or judgment of others in matters relating to God; but on the one hand, having taken the grounds of my faith from divine revelation alone and on the other, having neglected nothing which depended upon my own in­ dustry, I thought fit to scrutinize and ascertain for myself the several points of my religious belief, by the most careful perusal and meditation on the Holy Scriptures themselves."

So we theological students must also examine those doctrines handed down to us in the light of Holy Scriptures, human reason and Christian experience. Before we assert a doctrine as true we must find out what it means. What does it say about how things are (ontologically) and what I must be and do (existentially). In what historical situation did the doctrine originate, and what does this indicate for its meaning and use. Finally, after we have discovered the meaning of the doctrine, we must decide for ourselves whether we will keep it as an essential truth or aban­ don it.

Let us apply this to a contemporary problem suggested by Mr. Lewis' letter---the inerrancy of Scripture. One might approach this doctrine in several ways. He might find it in the tradition to which he belongs and accept it because it is there (this is probably the most common proc-e-dure). Or he might assert a logical argu­ ment: The Bible is the Word of God, God cannot lie, therefore the Bible cannot contain error. This solution avoids the problem of meaning. What does it mean to say the Bible is the Word of God? What qualifies as error?

Another approach is exegetical and historical. What does the Bible say about itself (the word "inerrant" does not occur in the concordance)? How does the New Testament make use of the Old Testament? What do the Biblical writers say of their own words. If the doctrine of inerrancy achieved its present status in the post­ Reformation period, as is often asserted, what does this say about the meaning and use of the doctrine? Is an appeal to original autographs legitimate? Can we have inerrant records without an infallible interpreter? If we allow a few (or even a considerable number of) grains of sand in the Parthenon, is it no longer built of marble?

The purpose of such questions is not distructive but positive if by use of them we come to a greater understanding of our faith. Again in the words of Milton, "I earnestly beseech all lovers of truth, not to cry out that the Church is thrown into confusion by that freedom of discussion and inquiry which is granted to the schools, and ought certainly to be refused to no believer, since we are ordered to prove all things, and since the daily progress of the light of truth is productive, far less of disturbance to the Church, than of illumination and edification."
supposed reality must finally rest on logically undermonstrable assumptions. This is the central thesis of what might be called logical skepticism. The reason that this point is significant here and not of particular concern as we contemplate the formal nature of logic is that now we are seeking "material truth." Thus in addition to the question of formal truth we now seek to establish an isomorphism between our logical proposition and "reality." It is at this point, in the verification of the desired isomorphism so necessary to material truth, we see the dismal fact that we are able to approach our subject only from the side of logic; and logic cannot bridge the gap. There can be no logical verification which is not based upon assumptions both for its data and its criteria. And reality on its part cannot bridge the gap either, because we apparently must perceive it through the instrumentality of logic. Logic is, as we have seen, inherently bound up in relativism. It matters not that our minds must use the Law of Contradiction to utter meaningful propositions. It matters not that we must use any of the laws of logic, for surely it can only be an assumption that reality is itself subject to these same laws of logic.

We are faced then with the final fact that all our judgments concerning reality are only relative and never absolute. They are relative to our undermonstrable assumptions. Even granting that we are in possession of concepts which are isomorphic to reality, we can never demonstrate that isomorphism logically; so we are limited to a relative assertion of these concepts as being absolute. No amount of subjective or pragmatic certainty can supply a logical verification.

**Christianity and Certainty**

Do Christians in the Evangelical camp feel comfortable with the admission that God is, in the final analysis, only an assumption -- logically, or that it is only more or less probable that Jesus actually rose from the dead, or that He is only probably God incarnate? I think not. But is it not clear from the above that logical skepticism actually forces us to admit that this is really all we can say on the basis of logic? Yes, it is all too clear, too clear for comfort.

We do seek certainty. We even claim certainty in our preaching. But we also see that such a desire cannot be logically satisfied, and such a claim cannot be logically justified. We are forced then to face the central question: Are we wrong in desiring certainty in our Christian doctrines? Refuge in pure subjectivism is more like retreat than refuge. But logic by its inherent deficiency has robbed us of all but probability, if even that is left to us. That then is the end of the matter?

**Freedom and Faith**

We suggest the following two points can be made: first, that logical skepticism preserves human freedom; second, it necessitates faith. Freedom is preserved because no evidence, however convincing to one who accepts certain assumptions, can coerce men's reason, thus making him mentally acknowledge what his will refuses to accept. There can be no choice if evidence is overwhelming. If Jesus had fully displayed His glory, all would have been compelled to believe -- even as all will be compelled to acknowledge His lordship at His glorious second advent. Faith is necessitated because faith is opposed to sight. We could not have faith if the evidence were subjectively compelling. Now such a statement implies a definition of faith. We define faith to be a personal relationship of trust in One who has revealed Himself to be trustworthy.

At this point we would like to examine the idea that faith is a "resting in the sufficiency of the evidence." The first objection is that faith then is seen more as an intellectual activity than a personal, though "resting" implies the personal
aspect. The second objection is to "evidence." What is evidence? Is it not an interpretation of some probable facts which are derived from a set of assumptions? And what of "sufficiency?" What constitutes sufficiency? Clearly such a sufficiency cannot be finally objective in the logical sense. Logical skepticism precludes it. All this is not to deny the need for some kind of "objective" basis for our trust, for our faith is in one who has revealed Himself to be trustworthy. But it seems fair to say that at best Christian evidences can only claim necessity and not sufficiency. Without the evidence we do have, Christianity would really be impossible. But that evidence is not logically compelling. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith is not sight. Faith transcends the evidence to a personal, total acknowledgement of the claims of Jesus Christ on us as persons.

The Christian then finds authority for his judgements not from some final system for all of reality or from some inner psychological certainty of a mystic sort. It comes basically from a Christian's free choice of an commitment to the person of Jesus Christ as made known through the Scriptures. Jesus Christ Himself is the ultimate basis of the Christian position. This commitment to Him is spiritual, moral and intellectual. He Himself is in a real sense, the basic "axiom" of Christianity. Since men must act and men must choose their basic assumptions in order to get on with the business of living, the Christian chooses a person -- Jesus Christ.

When this basic choice is made on an inner level of our being, this choice is met in converging lines with the external evidence of the historical record of the Gospels. The resulting practical outworking of this inner and outer structures serves as a basis for Christian certainty. It is the certainty of an historically revealed person.

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IN MEMORIAM

It is with sadness that we note the passing away of C. S. Lewis, the great defender of the faith. Not only did he speak to the theologian, but his writings and utterances received the attention of laymen (Christian and non-Christian alike) all over the world. As a tribute to the man who has influenced many of us we reprint a letter written three short years ago. Originally published in the March 2, 1961 Wheaton Record and printed here with the permission of Dick Vesperman, the editor at that time, the letter addresses itself to the problem of inspiration. Dr. Clyde S. Kilby, Chairman of the English Department initiated the correspondence by questioning Mr. Lewis on a remark he made concerning "Fundamentalists" in Chapter 11 of his book Reflections on the Psalms.

Dear Dr. Kilby,

Thank you for your kind letter. I enclose what, at such short notice, I feel able to say on this question. If it is at all likely to upset anyone, throw it in the waste paper basket. Remember too that it is pretty tentative--much less an attempt to establish a view than a statement of the issue on which, whether rightly or wrongly, I have come to work.

To me the curious thing is that neither in my own Bible-reading nor in my religious life as a whole does the question in fact ever assume that importance
which it always gets in theological controversy. The difference between reading
the story of Ruth and that of Antigone -- both first class as literature -- is
to me unmistakable and even overwhelming. But the question "Is Ruth historical?"
(I've no reason to suppose it is not) doesn't really seem to arise till afterwards.
It can still act on me as the Word of God if it weren't, so far as I can see.

All Holy Scripture is written for our learning. But learning of what? I
should have thought the value of some things (e.g. the Resurrection) depended on
whether they really happened, but the value of other (e.g. the fate of Lot's wife)
hardly at all. And the ones whose historicity matters are, as God's will, those
where it is plain.

Whatever view we hold on the divine authority of Scripture we must make room
for the following facts:
1. The distinction which St. Paul makes in I Cor 7 between verse 10 and
verse 12.
2. The apparent inconsistencies between the genealogies in Matt. 1 and Luke 3;
between the accounts of the death of Judas in Matt. 27 and Acts 1:18-19.
4. The universally admitted unhistoricity (I do not say, of course falsity)
of at least some narratives in Scripture (the parables), which may well extend
also to Jonah and Job.
5. If every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of Lights, then all
true and edifying writings, whether in Scripture or not, must be in some sense
inspired.
6. John 11:49-52. Inspiration may operate in a wicked man without his knowing
it, and he can then utter the untruth he intends (propriety or making an innocent
man a political scapegoat) as well as the truth he does not intend (the divine
sacrifice).

It seems to me that 2 and 4 rule out the view that every statement in Scripture
must be historical truth. And 1, 3, 5, and 6 rule out the view that inspiration
is a single thing in the sense that, if present at all, it is always present in
the same mode and same degree.

Therefore, I think, this rules out the view that any one passage taken in
isolation can be assumed to be inerrant in exactly the same sense as any other:
e.g. that the numbers of O.T. armies (which in view of the size of the country,
if true, involves continuous miracle) are statistically correct because the story
of the resurrection is historically correct. That the over all operation of
Scripture is to convey God's Word to the reader (he also needs His inspiration)
who reads it in the right spirit, I fully believe. That it also gives true answers
to all the questions (often religiously irrelevant) which he might ask, I don't.
The very kind of truth we are often demanding was, in my opinion, never even
envisioned by the ancients.

Yours sincerely,

C.S. Lewis
YOUNG LIFE by Emile Cailliet, Harper & Row, New York, 1963. 120 pp. $2.95.
Reviewed by Darryl Freeland.

Emile Cailliet, a member of the French Academy, and the most authoritative reader of Blaise Pascal, recently retired his chair at Princeton Theological Seminary. Author of a number of volumes, and an editor of Theology Today, Cailliet writes with wit and intelligent simplicity.

His recent work is published by Harper’s under the title Young Life. Aiming to give a comprehensive introduction to the Young Life Movement, the small volume draws upon hundreds of well-authenticated facts and events. Young Life is traced from obscure beginnings in 1940 when Jim Rayburn befriended high school students in three Texas cities, to the present work involving some seven hundred leaders, nine hundred committeemen, five plush resort properties, and the Young Life Institute: a strategy which means communicating the Gospel to literally thousands of teen-agers each week. Cailliet draws a vivid picture of a "friendship evangelism" which stretches from the overprivileged of Los Angeles to the lost teenagers of Hell's Kitchen in New York City.

Sketching quickly, he then declares that a "church" building is foreign to the New Testament, and constitutes a later development. The New Testament states that any small body of Christians is a part of the Body of Christ. Clearly, then, no section of organised Christianity can claim a monopoly on the Christ. When there is a Young Life leader holding an informal meeting with a group of professing Christians there is present a part of the Body of the indivisible Christ. Presumptuous as the designation may sound offhand, we are genuinely confronted by the ekklesia that is in the house of some boy or girl. Any Young Life leader who has faced the castigation of local clergy will find Cailliet's words at this point more than a little comforting. Cailliet draws no picture of easy evangelism, however. Faced with the staggering figure of some nine million un-churched teen-agers, Young Life still struggles with a public apathy that made Rayburn wish twenty years ago "...that a big semi-truck and trailer job would come along and mow me off that highway. I couldn't stand it to go to those kids. They wouldn't shut up. They wouldn't listen. I couldn't even get the girls to get off the boys' laps. I couldn't get them to turn the record-player off when it was the lousiest music I ever heard...For four straight weeks I never got to say a word about Jesus Christ or anything remotely resembling Jesus Christ..." But despite these frustrations, Cailliet enumerates some of the strategies which has made Young Life so successfully effective; Cailliet firmly believes that Young Life has found the secret of its identity and the nature of its call in a fresh apprehension of the New Testament pattern. At the service of a seeking God, Young Life has restored to full status the command of Jesus to his disciples, "Go ye..."

This friendliness gives way to scattered criticisms. Helpfully, Cailliet lowers his guns on Young Life. He scrutinizes the need for better college follow-up, asks for better public relations, and casts an educator's eye on the Young Life Institute. He jibes at Young Life's recent merger with institutional Church leaders to pick out and train dedicated couples for outreach to outsiders; he considers such a merger but a few drops added to a monumental bucket. It would in the end wipe out both the identity and ministry of Young Life, and that at a time when the movement is successfully specializing in meeting a dire need. The point stressed is that, should Young Life ever lose its identity—should its workers and leaders in some way or other be absorbed by, or assimilated to, the staff of any church, group of churches, or denominations—the over-all situation would merely revert to what it was before Jim Rayburn initiated the Campaign. The

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clearest, most visible outcome would be the fading away of Young Life. No one would benefit; there would be only losers on every side.

Though choppy in spots, the book builds well, and as would be expected is quite readable. Though critical in spots, Cailliet writes with perhaps an abundant flourish which comes from just falling in love; Young Life leaders will probably feel that they've been made out to be better than they are. Cailliet presents a stress on the Holy Spirit that at least I have not experienced in Young Life; to be sure, the movement maintains a healthy doctrine of the Spirit, but by far the weightier emphasis is upon the Person, work and appropriation of Jesus Christ; but perhaps Cailliet has been talking to different people than I have. For those who have been previously related to Young Life, the book will be exciting. For those who are new to Young Life the book will be extremely helpful. And coming from Emile Cailliet, it will undoubtedly cause sparks to fly from several denominational quarters. When a Churchman of Cailliet's caliber endorses a group which is normally considered maverick, the comments will at least be interesting.

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Letters to the Editors...

ATTENTION MEN OF INFLUENCE:

Attention all men interested in maintaining the two-party system at Fuller Seminary!

Attention all men with progressive minds seeking an avenue of expression in the arena of human rights and world peace!

Attention all men actively opposed to a national retreat into the 18th Century!

Leave Fuller at once!

No, seriously, contact us if you are interested in the formation of a Young Democrats Club.

Roger Fung
Jerry Warren

AESTHETICS

Aesthetics plays a more than obvious role in the enjoyment of seminary life. You see this influence in the fellows that go to the mail depot dressed in beige corduroy pants and striking 'T' shirts. Their laxness for colour-consciousness can be more than indirectly traced to the dormitory walls. In fact, dorm 190 has decorated their vestibule with lace and doilies due to the influence of the off-pink paint.

While not meaning to sound critical or sarcastic in any way at all, it seems that those in dorm 98 believe blue or red or any other almost-masculine decorating scheme would have a great effect on the bearing of the students and would be an obvious spiritual uplift.

The Coiffure Stylist of 180
STUDENT COUNCIL CORNER

Presenting a Crisis for the Church and a Challenge for Tomorrow's Ministers --

The coming of the Rev. George W. Webber of the East Harlem Protestant Parish to this year's Practical Evangelism Conference (January 14-17) has prompted the creation of a program unprecedented in the history of Fuller Theological Seminary. Inner city leaders, churchmen and civic leaders will be joining students and faculty in the probing of one of the most thorny problems facing Christendom today.

Is the present national interest on the inner city warranted? Are we a bit too melodramatic about the significance of the conference?

The newspapers keep us well informed about the sensational happenings in the inner city. We grow weary of the daily reporting of the rapes, the robberies, the murders, the vice raids, the narcotics arrests and much more. The average citizen rests in the fact that law-enforcement, churches and social agencies have everything under control. If only this were true. This wishful apathy plagues not only the average citizen, but it has somehow dulled the evangelistic sense of the Christian Church.

Inner city problems in every metropolitan center are growing and continue to grow at a rapid rate. The magnified spiritual, moral and social cancer of the inner city is going to increasingly infect all strata of metropolitan and suburban life. The inner city is challenging the Gospel of Jesus Christ which clean, cultured, dignified, middle class American Protestantism has been preaching for years. If the Protestant Church cannot meet the crises of the inner city with holy boldness, then the future of American Protestantism is feared.

This is the challenge to today's seminarian. It cannot be ignored or sidestepped, whatever the seminarian's future aspirations. Tomorrow's ministry can meet the challenge if it is willing to make the drastic changes necessary in the traditional concepts of the role of the church and the pastor. The Conference on the Inner City has been designed to give the students of Fuller Theological Seminary the insights necessary in order to effectively minister to the world of today and tomorrow.

It is sincerely hoped that the Fuller student body will attend every session possible, including the Tuesday evening banquet. Wives are particularly encouraged to attend, for their understanding of inner city problems and the crises which faces the church and its minister is of particular importance to the future minister and his family.

Robert Broyles
Chairman, Practical Evangelism Committee

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