



The Authority of the Word

Our summer issue will focus on the world, specifically on the world of experience. We shall want to stress that Christian faith never exists in a vacuum, that human experience in the world and of the world is always not only the inevitable arena, but also an inescapable component of Christian faith. We shall do our best to put together an issue which will deal with this matter honestly and responsibly.

But this issue focuses on the Word, specifically that form of the Word which is the Bible. Christianity is not a religion of the book in the sense that Islam or Mormonism, or even Judaism, is. But no Christian community now functions without some relation to those documents which Jesus and his followers used as scripture, and to those new documents that grew out of the origins of the Christian movement. It ought to be obvious to anyone, we believe, that these are very worldly documents. They arise in concrete historical situations that now often elude us. The extant copies are not identical to one another. We have to make judgment calls, on the basis of the evidence that we have, about the text that was originally written. Different combinations of these documents, at different times and places, have been considered worthy of use in worship. They were soon, and continue to be, translated into hundreds of different languages, subjected to all the human decisions that this process entails. They are used as icon, as fortune cookie, as guru. They are read as interesting observations on religious and cultural history. They are used to support every conceivable brand of political opinion and action. But these documents which make up the Bible are also looked to as authoritative for faith and life in diverse communities of Christians throughout the world, are read and taught with care and respect, are the source to which groups of believers go again and again. The Bible functions as scripture.

We want in this issue to explore how that happens. We are not interested in simply asserting that the Bible is scripture. We want to explore the various ways in which the Bible functions as scripture. Those who expect intricate discussions of various theories of inspiration will be disappointed. Readers who look for a compendium of scriptural proofs that the Bible is scripture will look in vain. It may or may not be that such things can be done well, but we intend here some-

thing quite different. We want to chart the course of the Word moving in the world, of the Bible serving the Church, of the Word of God expressing itself in human words. That means paying attention *at the same time* to the God who speaks to his people, acting redemptively in their history (and in all history) and to the history of interpretation (and to historical and critical methodologies that work with the tasks of interpretation). We know that for some readers it will not be easy reading. But we don't claim to be easy. We do aim to be clear. And we do promise to those willing to make the effort that the conversation will be not only valuable, but exciting.

We begin with a short piece by Robert Marshall. It is, we believe, an intriguing statement of personal choice, in the context of the Bible and the Church, from seminary professor to synod president to church president of the LCA (with incredible numbers of duties and associations and responsibilities along the way) back to seminary professor of Old Testament. It sets the stage for the more thorough investigation of the theme in the articles. We know that few people read through a journal from article to article. But we want to make some attempt at order nevertheless. The lead article on “The Childs Proposal” is exactly that. It brings the reader into the whole issue by stating the primary concerns of contemporary Biblical interpretation. Klein, Stansell and Brueggemann help to open up the discussion. We move, then, to two very straightforward articles. Paul D. Hanson struggles with the Bible in times of crisis, stating that we are definitely now in a time of crisis. He sees in the exodus and the cross important symbols for our Christian response to this crisis. Darrell Jodock is very sure that different times and different places require different words. The two articles are back-to-back because they raise similar issues in different ways. Against the background, then, of the personal choice by Robert Marshall and the cracking open of the question of interpretation with the symposium, and two statements of the present situation, we offer two articles exploring the contemporary situation in hermeneutics. Each is clear and readable, but we think the most sophisticated of interpreters will also appreciate the deft handling of the immensely complicated jungle of current methodologies. Both Karlfried Froehlich and Patrick Keifert have the technical skills and the writing abilities to bring any willing reader into this very important conversation. Our *Resources* section features a bibliographical map to the work of Old Testament scholar Claus Westermann, charted by James Limburg, and an appreciative evaluation of the “Word and Witness Program” by G. Frederick Schott. Perceptive readers will see that the Schott article links our last issue on “Evangelism” to our next issue on “Christian Faith as Experience.” As usual, we conclude with *Reviews* of current literature.

We are solidly established and off, we believe, to a very good start. Again, we want to thank our readers (especially our subscribers) for confidence placed in us. We continue to work very hard to deserve that confidence.

J.H.B.