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THE IMPREGNABLE
ROCK OF
HOLY SCRIPTURE

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*Address given at the Thanksgiving Service
of The Toronto Bible College to celebrate the
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“THE IMPREGNABLE ROCK OF HOLY SCRIPTURE”

I would like to begin by expressing my very sincere congratulations to the College for the good success which has attended this growth campaign. Obviously, the hand of God has been upon it, and we here in Knox, along with a great host of friends across the world, rejoice with you tonight in the wonderful issue of all your plans.

I would like also, if I may, to add a very personal word. The Toronto Bible College has meant much to me in my own ministry in this city. The links between the church and the college may at times seem very tenuous. Occasions for joint ministries may seldom arise. None the less, to know that a little to the north of us on Spadina Road this Bible ministry is being carried forward by skilled and dedicated faculty members; to realize that there are still many scores of young people who want to study the Bible and are prepared to give precious years of their life to do so; all this has been a continual inspiration to me and a wonderful means of encouragement. For more than seventy years this College has been kept true to its first charter, holding firmly to the doctrine of the inspiration and infallibility of

the Holy Scriptures—and that in an age when thus to believe is regarded as a sign of obscurantism and ignorance. Steadfastness of this kind has been to me, as I am sure it has been to a great host of people in many parts of the world, a constant source of cheer and joy.

May God continue to grant to you the same quality of faithfulness in years to come.

THE BIBLE OUR SOLE AUTHORITY

Now it seems to me fitting, since we meet tonight under the auspices of a Bible College, that we testify anew to our faith in the Bible. The Scriptures, let me remind you, were the delight of our Lord, His meditation and His food. In the day of temptation, in the shadows of Gethsemane, on the Cross of Calvary, and in the radiant glory of resurrection, the Scriptures were His constant argument and appeal, His inspiration and His joy. He taught that “the Scripture cannot be broken”; and this has been the accepted position of evangelicals ever since. Evangelical Christians have universally believed that all teaching and all truth, all doctrine and all practice must be tested in the light of the holy Scriptures. In the Bible we have God’s revelation of Himself, given in part and portions in the Old Testament with an ever increasing clarity, and crowned eventually in the fullness of time in the perfect, absolute and final revelation in God the Son. He spake with authority, and His authoritative Word was communicated to His apostles. As Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says,

“He, in turn, enlightened and taught His apostles, endowed them with a unique authority, filled them with the needed ability and power, and gave to them the teaching which is essential to the well-being of the church and of God’s people. This together constitutes the Bible and it is this Scripture which cannot be broken.”

This is the evangelical position. It is this position that the Toronto Bible College has consistently upheld.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, on the subject of Scripture, declares,

“We may be moved to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scriptures by the testimony of the church, the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof. All these are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God.”

A MIRACLE IN LITERATURE

What a story lies behind this miracle of the divine library! Nearly two thousand years were needed to complete it. At least thirty authors took part in writing it, most of them living long generations apart from one another. Three continents—Asia, Africa, Europe—shared in the creation. Every literary form is employed—biography, law, history, letters, poetry, phil-

osophy, oratory, and much else. Yet the book is one, an amazing unity and a literary phenomenon without parallel.

Furthermore, these holy writings have been preserved inviolate and secure in spite of almost every form of persecution. In the year 303 A.D., the Emperor Diocletian gave orders that all copies of the Scriptures were to be searched out across the Roman Empire and burned. After this mass purgation and burning of the Scriptures, Diocletian set up a pillar on which he inscribed three Latin words, "Nominē Christianorum extincto"—"the name of the Christians is extinguished." Yet only twenty-two years later, in 325, the Emperor Constantine established the Scriptures as the supreme rule of faith and life within the church and the empire. Then there has been much persecution of another kind—what we may call intellectual persecution. The 18th and 19th centuries produced free thinkers like Voltaire, Bolingbroke, and Hume. The German rationalists like Baur and Strauss followed soon after. It was Strauss who spoke about the Bible as a meaningless anachronism. This was followed by the higher critical school led by men like Graf, Wellhausen, and Kuenen. They taught that the Scriptures were a contradictory conglomeration of many parts. Rationalism soon gave birth to classical liberalism with its doctrine of the exaltation of man, and this in turn has its counterpart in the demythologizing schools of our own generation. In every case, there has been an assault on the integrity and veracity

of the Bible. Yet, in spite of every effort to undermine and diminish its authority, the Bible lives, and in the words of Dr. Dyson Hague, "still stands, brilliant with eternal youth, voice without weakness, skin without scar, step without failure, eye without dimness, the untouched, unharmed, scatheless Word of God." This is the rock on which we build; this is indeed, in Mr. Gladstone's telling phrase, "the impregnable rock of holy Scripture."

AN IMPREGNABLE ROCK

There is nothing like the Bible anywhere. Other books are ephemeral: this book is for all ages. Others speak to a limited class: this is for all men. Other books soon exhaust themselves: this book is inexhaustible. Some time ago I found the following statement written on the flyleaf of an old Bible:

"The Bible contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy; its precepts are binding; its histories are true and its decisions are immutable. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It is a mine of wealth, a river of pleasure and a paradise of glory. It is given in life, will be opened at the judgment and it will be remembered for ever. Its study involves the highest responsibilities, rewards the greatest labour and condemns all who trifle with its holy contents."

This is the Scripture which cannot be broken; this is the impregnable rock on which we build. It is this book which is at the heart of the curriculum of this College, a College established for the study of this immortal library, the book of books, the Bible.

“Of the making of books there is no end,” wrote Solomon long ago, and there are very few books that last beyond their own generation. There are millions of books in the libraries of the world but by far the greatest proportion of them is out of print. The Bible, however, continues to be demanded in ever increasing numbers today. In Canada, during 1964, 511,565 copies of the Bible or portions thereof were circulated. In the same year, world circulation of portions or full copies of the Bible was 70,000,000. According to Unesco reports, the Bible is still the world’s most translated book—no less than two hundred and fifty-one new translations of parts of the Scriptures were made during 1964. It is undoubtedly true that Communist printing presses are pouring out fantastic quantities of propaganda material and doing so in many languages and dialects. But the Bible is still, according to the latest Unesco surveys, the book most in demand. Clearly the circulation of the Bible must be regarded as one of the supreme wonders of the twentieth century.

Since these things are so, I feel we should tonight commit ourselves again to a statement of faith concerning the holy Scriptures; and I want to do so in the following terms.

ONE

We believe that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and that the entire canon of Scripture is included in the word "all." When our Saviour said, "The Scripture cannot be broken," He was referring to a canon of Old Testament Scripture that was already closed. This is the canon of sacred Scripture that we have today in our Old Testament. The evidence for a closed canon before our Lord's advent seems unassailable. Josephus, the Talmud, and the Council of Jamnia (90 A.D.) all support this contention. Likewise, we believe that in the closure of the New Testament canon there was a similar superintendence of the sovereign Spirit of God. This is, of course, a statement of faith; but it is a statement on which we as evangelicals are united and unanimous.

TWO

We believe that the Scripture thus given is the Word of God—that it does not merely contain the Word of God. This raises the great question of the extent of inspiration as well as in some measure the question of the mode of inspiration. Our basic affirmation is that in employing language, God saw to it that the right words were used in the right way at the right time. In making this affirmation, we therefore stand committed to a doctrine of verbal inspiration. We affirm that the Bible is the Word of God and not just a pointer to the Word of God. Modern theology may contest

this position when it stresses a necessity to separate the Word of God from the written text of Scripture. But over against this, we affirm that the Bible is objectively the Word of God, that it is "written with the finger of God." Writing of this, Dr. Adolph Saphir has some very pertinent words for us today,

"Nothing is in Scripture that does not belong to it, and nothing is outside Scripture that ought to be introduced into it. It is perfectly true that there are parts of Scripture which are more vital, more noble than others. The book of Genesis, for instance, is like the 'head' and the gospel of John is like the 'heart.' But as the Apostle explains to us in his splendid comparison of the body with the church, all the members are members of the body and life goes through them all. It is not for us to separate anything that belongs to the sacred body of Scripture. If Scripture only contains Scripture, who is to judge what is the Word of God, and what is not the Word of God."

The same dilemma faces us in any attempt to say when the Scripture is the Word of God and when it is not. The dialectic of neo-orthodoxy which can say that all the Bible is the Word of God and yet none of the Bible is the Word of God is in fundamental contradiction to the historic evangelical position. We believe that the Scripture is indeed the Word of God, objectively as well as experientially, and that nothing is to be believed, nothing is to be demanded of God's people, unless it be founded upon the Word of the living God.

THREE

We believe that the Scriptures are infallible and inerrant—infallible in the sense that they are wholly reliable, wholly trustworthy, never misleading; and inerrant in the sense that they are wholly true. This is the inevitable outcome of our faith in an infallible and inerrant God. Since the written Word comes from the heart of the living God Who cannot lie—"from Him Who is the Father of lights with Whom is no variableness, neither shadow cast by turning," it can be trusted and believed implicitly. In thus affirming our faith in an infallible and inerrant Word, we accept the position of the Westminster Confession of Faith that—

"The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them."

At the same time, we must add that no true evangelical will ever hesitate to admit all the rigorous discipline of textual criticism. It is our responsibility to search the Scriptures and to get back as nearly as we can to the original texts. Yet it is also true that at no single point which enters into the substance of the faith is there any emendation of text which would complicate the issue one whit.

FOUR

We believe that in thus providing an infalible, inerrant and wholly-inspired Bible, God used men to write for Him, and yet in such a way as never to annul or abrogate their personality and their gifts. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." They were not mere robots or automata in the hand of God. They were not simply amanuenses or penmen for God, although that surely would in itself be amongst the highest callings to which a man could ever be summoned. The evangelical doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture maintains that every faculty of the writer was alive and quickened as never before when the Spirit gave the inspiration. God gave to them power in their utterance so that every faculty was employed to its very highest potential. This and this alone is divine inspiration. They spake the Word which God intended they should speak and they did so with all the powers of their personalities alerted and invigorated. In George Matheson's wonderful phrase, they were "captives of the Lord, and yet most free." A perfect marriage of the sovereignty of God and the free will of man is to be seen in the writing of the Scriptures.

FIVE

We believe that the Bible's reading of history is the only adequate one. This declares God's sovereignty in and through all history, the ultimate overthrow of all evil, the estab-

lishment of new heavens and new earth wherein righteousness will dwell. At the same time it recognizes that God Who is over all and yet in all our human history has declared that "evil men shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." The Christian need never be surprised at the prevalence of sin and its exceeding sinfulness. And why? Because Jesus Christ has told us that this is the pattern history is going to follow. There will be no inevitable upward progress. Instead of the world developing onward and upwards—working out the beast and letting the ape and tiger die—man is in reality on a progressive decline and iniquity is going to abound more and more. There will be only one answer to this—the return of the Lord; and this is the only adequate answer. It is only as the Lord from heaven breaks in again on human history in personal appearance, that there will be any hope of ultimate redemption.

SIX

We believe and affirm that the Bible is the supreme charter of human liberty. A love for the Bible and obedience to its precepts have always issued in a rugged independence which in turn has fought oppression and defied tyranny of every kind. "He is a free man whom the truth makes free and all are slaves beside"—so wrote Cowper in "The Task"; and this is simply the Biblical position. Freedom is the birthright of the Christian. This is written

into every part of the Bible. "A Christian man," declares Luther, when writing of the liberty of the Christian man, "is the most free lord of all and subject to none." The imprisonment of the human spirit, the attempt to deny man essential freedom, the resolve to force men into similar patterns and moulds, all this is in the Bible's eyes an unpardonable sin. Mankind's best charter of individual, social and political liberty is the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. The dignity of labour is undergirded by the Word of God. The freedom of the franchise of all men is guaranteed and underwritten by the Word of God. When men turn from this, we may well fear for the liberties and civil rights of men.

SEVEN

We believe that the Scripture must rule the Church, and that only as Scripture rules a church is she really a church. What is it that makes a congregation of men and women into a church of the living God? It is the supremacy of the Word of God. This is the gospel age, the age of the freedom of the holy Scriptures, and it is in the Scriptures that the glory of Jesus Christ is revealed. Therefore, only as the Scriptures rule the Church is Christ really seen, worshipped, and adored. This is what the reformers were emphasizing when they said that the Church must continually listen to Christ the head of the Church, must listen to

Him speaking through His Word and obey. Over and over again we must ask ourselves, "What saith the Scriptures?" This must be our constant court of appeal in all matters concerning doctrine, church government, discipline, fellowship and missionary action.

EIGHT

We believe that it is the Christian's responsibility and bounden duty to search the Scriptures daily and to do so continuously and with discipline. "Search the Scriptures," said Jesus, and in the day of resurrection "He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." If we are rightly to preach and to teach the Word, we must be diligent searchers of the Scriptures. We must search them patiently, tirelessly, fearlessly and life-long. We must do so if we want to know true victory over sin, joy in service, a love for souls, guidance in our lives, power in our testimony and an ever deepening love for our Lord and Saviour. Evangelicalism holds a very high doctrine of the Scriptures; but it is possible to have a high doctrine of the Bible and yet to have a low use of it. As evangelicals, surely it is our first duty to know the sacred text and to dwell continually within its gracious teachings.

NINE

We believe it to be our duty to declare the truth of the Scriptures to our generation, to

formulate its doctrines as clearly and exactly as we can, and to contend earnestly for the faith which has been delivered unto us. Now this is what the Toronto Bible College has been doing. You have a wonderful record to date. It may well be, however, that this College will be asked to assume a further responsibility. If our evangelical testimony is to be strongly maintained in Canada, there will undoubtedly be a need for the establishment of an independent and evangelical seminary. If the pulpits of our land are to be filled with preachers who are both evangelical to the core and superbly trained in theological disciplines, then the establishment of a Biblical seminary on reformed, orthodox, and evangelical foundations must become the vision of God's people. I see this as one of the greatest needs of the hour if our evangelical witness is to be strengthened and expanded. This is something for which we all must pray. Is this not an area into which this College might expand?

TEN

We believe that in all our searchings of the holy Scripture, and in all our presentation of the truths of the Scripture, our total aim must be the glory of Jesus Christ "to Whom all the Scriptures bear witness." To this end, we who name Him as Saviour and Lord must submit ourselves anew to His gracious and sovereign leading.

And now a prayer.

“Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire;
Let us Thy influence prove,
Source of the old prophetic fire,
Fountain of life and love.

Come, Holy Ghost, for moved by Thee
Thy prophets wrote and spoke;
Unlock the truth, Thyself the key;
Unseal the sacred book.

God through Himself we then shall know
If Thou within us shine,
And sound, with all Thy saints below,
The depths of love divine.”

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and
to the Holy Ghost, evermore.

Amen.