A close-up of some text

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**CAUGHT IN THE MODERN DILEMMA**

We have a problem in our modern society. It has to do with the question of authentic authority. By that I mean: Who today can we listen to with any confidence? Is there really a dependable source of truth for us? Is anyone in our culture speaking on behalf of God? Where are Amos and Hosea when we really need them?

This struggle surrounding truth and authority has been on-going in Western Culture for one thousand years. It began in the scholastic period of the Middle Ages, c. 1050 AD. What I am talking about is the confrontation between the Bible as the revealed Word of God on the one hand and human “reasoned experience” on the other. Which is superior?

The Bible of course held the upper hand for about 1600 years. We see this clearly in the Protestant Reformation. The compelling belief held by Martin Luther in his dispute with the Church over truth was Scripture Only. The Bible was - in the minds of the reformers - the final unimpeachable authority.

This certainty was not to last! The Enlightenment would soon appear and establish new guidelines for truth. Chief among these was scientific method. All truth was held to be subject to empiricism, i.e. demonstrable observation. The goal of the Enlightenment was to banish superstition from the world. As we say in Missouri: “Show me!” Scientific method quickly won the day! Following is an announcement of that victory.

In the 18th century the rule of reason prevailed in the intellectual quarters of Europe against the dogmatic acceptance of the Bible. What was not in line with the eternal truths of reason was taboo.

The joy of being dependent on human “reasoned experience” didn’t last long. David Hume in Scotland and Emmanuel Kant in Germany in the 19th century both demonstrated the fallibility of reason. Kant finished it off with a monumental treatise titled The Critique of Pure Reason. It was very clear to Kant that all human observations were subjective.

Now if the Bible is unreliable as an authority because it is culturally conditioned and therefore unable to speak to us moderns, and if human reason is unreliable as an authority because it is guided by self-interest, where does that leave us. High and dry with no reliable authority to guide us through the difficult struggles of life. What is the answer? We ought to know better! Jesus is always the answer!

An individual named Karl Barth was the preeminent Protestant theologian of the twentieth century. During his lifetime, he was the final authority in Biblical interpretation. Barth wrote a systematic theology which filled thirteen volumes. Someone once asked him at a lecture if it was possible for him to simplify that down to something more understandable. Barth said, “Yes! I can do it in one sentence.” He looked at the expectant crowd and said,

“Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” **Amen**

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