

# From Authority Religion to Spirit Religion



From Authority Religion to Spirit Religion:  
An Intellectual Biography  
of George Burman Foster,  
1857-1918

By

W. Creighton Peden

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SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-4853-0, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4853-4

On behalf of your late Grandmother,  
“Frissy” McKnight Peden,  
We welcome you to the world.

Keaton Taylor York  
September 28, 2011



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## PREFACE

My writings for the past fifty years have explored the empirical tradition in American Liberal Religious Thought. The first part of this tradition was centered in the Free Religious Association, which was formed in 1867. It was composed of thinkers who had accepted Darwin's findings and were committed to the scientific method in all areas of their exploration. Free Religion meant freedom from all religious traditions, holy books, and superstitions. The second phase of the empirical tradition focuses on those philosophers and theologians who composed the early Chicago School. A key figure in the early Chicago School was George Burman Foster.

If you will explore the Table of Contents, you will note that we first consider the development of Foster's thought presented in his major publications. Next, we will consider his thought in a selection of his diverse shorter writings. A conclusion follows each major publication and the shorter writings. Finally, there will be a "Summation."

Members of the Baptist ministry in the Chicago area considered Foster to be a radical. We will devote a chapter to the mock heresy trial held by these Baptist ministers. It was a mock trial because Baptists do not allow for a church court above the local congregation. If there was to be a heresy trial, it had to be by the congregation that ordained the minister. Since the congregation that ordained Foster was no longer in existence, no trial was possible. The mock trial called for the University of Chicago to fire Foster, but the University made it clear that Foster would not be fired.

I am indebted to Jerome A. Stone, a friend since our student days at the University of Chicago for serving as an external critic for the book. He provided detailed suggestions, for which I would like to express my appreciation. I am also indebted to Ann and Lewis Doggett for their historical research. I want to thank John N. Gaston, a close friend and fellow graduate of Davidson College, for his computer assistance, as I am more than technological challenged. I would also like to express my appreciation to the University of Chicago Libraries, Meadville Theological School's library, and to Hudson Library in Highlands, North Carolina.

—W. Creighton Peden, 2013



## HISTORICAL SKETCH

On April 2, 1857, George Burman Foster was born at Wolf Creek, Monroe, West Virginia to Louisa Ann Bobbitt Foster and Oliver Harrison Foster. Young Foster was a grandson of Gibson and Permillia Bobbitt, who in 1853 had founded the Baptist Church in Monroe in which Louisa and Oliver were married in 1856. Oliver's parents were James and Mary Pownell Foster.

Foster was born at a very difficult time in the history of America as the Civil War was on the verge of commencing. When he was five years old in 1862, Louisa Ann Foster died. About the same time, Oliver Foster was called to the Civil War in a regiment from Tennessee, leaving his son to be raised by grandparents. Following the War, Oliver Foster returned and after some years married Mary Barton. Oliver and Mary had several children during the 1870s and 80s that provided for George Foster a family situation for the remainder of his childhood.

Even as a young boy, George Foster was recognized as being very bright. In a retrospective article, Mrs. L. G. Hoover, Foster's sister, described the emotional religiousness of his nature as "perhaps his most outstanding characteristic. He was free from Puritanic severity, or disagreeable sanctimony."<sup>1</sup> J. V. Nash offered an interesting physical description of Foster: "Almost as an apparition, he came. He was a large man with something Lincolnesque in his tall, ungainly figure and the broad, stooping shoulders. For so massive a frame, he had—or so it seemed—very small feet, and touched them so lightly upon the floor that he made scarcely any sound as he walked along the corridor or entered the room. His figure was indeed an unusual one. His head would have attracted attention anywhere; it dominated and threw into the background, as it were, all else. There was a reminiscence of Cardinal Newman in that esthetic face, with its forward thrust, the prominent nose, the forehead with its crown of gray hair, the beetling eyebrows, and the eyes with that far-away look, peering one might fancy, into another world. His clothing was gray, like the locks thrown carelessly back from the sloping forehead, gray, indeed, was the habitual tone of his external make-up. Gray, the gray of eternity and infinity, it seemed naturally associated with him."<sup>2</sup>

Foster started college work at Shelton College and completed his course as an honors student at the University of West Virginia, receiving

the A.B. in 1883 and the A.M. in 1884. While as a student, Foster fell in love with Mary Lyon and they were married. Her father was president of the University of West Virginia. Foster later graduated from the Baptist Theological Seminary in Rochester, New York. Having previously been ordained, he undertook his first pastorate at First Baptist Church in Saratoga Springs, New York, from 1887–91.

McMasters University had suggested that Foster spend a year studying at Gottingen and Berlin. A member of the congregation was John D. Rockefeller, who became an ardent supporter of Foster and paid for his studies in Germany. It is probably in Europe that Foster became interested in Friedrich Nietzsche, which led him to write his book on Nietzsche. Upon returning from Germany, Foster joined the philosophy department at McMaster University in Canada. He left McMaster in 1895 to become associate professor of systematic theology, and in 1897 professor of theology in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. While at Chicago, he published two acclaimed books: *The Finality of the Christian Religion* based on lectures at Yale University, and *The Function of Religion in Man's Struggle of Existence*, based on lectures at Berkeley. The publication of *Finality* and *The Function of Religion* served as the foundation for a concerted attack in 1906 and 1909 on Foster as a Baptist minister by the Baptist Ministerial Association of Chicago, which we shall consider later. In 1905, Foster asked to be transferred from The Divinity School to the department of Comparative Religion, as professor of Philosophy of Religion, which made him a member of the faculty of Arts and Literature. Although he was no longer in the Divinity School, his classes were generally filled with Divinity students. Foster's *Friedrich Nietzsche* was published posthumously. He also published studies of Norwegian playwrights Henrik Ibsen, Bjørnson and the Belgian poet Maurice Maeterlinck.<sup>3</sup>

Foster's best friend was Clarence Darrow, the lawyer. They did public debates on topics such as "Do Human Beings Have Free Will." The debates were popular and added to Foster and Darrow's public awareness. Darrow also delivered Foster's funeral oration. Although Foster was strongly influenced throughout his life by evangelical Christianity based on his Baptist heritage, he was always testing his faith by his increasingly liberal or radical theological views.

G. B. Foster and his family were very much involved in the Hyde Park Baptist Church upon moving to Chicago. William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, was also a member, as were many members of the faculty. One of Harper's first concerns was in building a new facility for the Hyde Park Church. By 1894, the new Church building

was underway, with the Church being closer to the University of Chicago. It took ten years for this process to be completed. The Chapel was dedicated on February 9, 1896, which was a year after the Fosters moved to Chicago and joined the Hyde Park Church. Although the Foster family was involved in the Church, Foster was most often preaching at various Unitarian Churches within the great Chicago area and beyond.<sup>4</sup>

Foster's home life was dominated by afflictions, death, and heavy financial burdens. He wrote a desperate letter in 1900 to President William R. Harper seeking a raise in pay of at least \$500, citing his wife's constant invalidism. Mary Lyon Foster suffered from neurasthenia (which today is described as "chronic fatigue syndrome"), and she bore five frail children. Death claimed their eldest son, Raymond by drowning in Lake Marie, Illinois, on July 10, 1901, just before he was to begin college. As Foster noted, Raymond was the apple of his eye, was very bright, and in who Foster had built his hope. Mary was Foster's favorite, who died the day before her wedding. Harrison, their youngest son, died from pneumonia while serving at a Texas army camp in 1918. Death captured another son and another daughter, which at that time was described as the mind dying while the body lives.

In 1918, influenza swept the country with deadly force. In November of 1918, President Van Hise of the University of Wisconsin succumbed. Foster was invited to perform the funeral service. Although Foster was having chills and not at all feeling well, he accepted the invitation. His lodging in Wisconsin was not adequately heated, and he returned to Chicago with an even harsher chill. On Thanksgiving Day, with the weather warmer, he played a little golf, his favorite outdoor recreation. Soon after his condition worsened, with his being taken to St. Luke's Hospital. Fatal complications developed, with the cause of Foster's death attributed to abscess of the spleen. He died on December 22, 1918. Mary Lyon Foster took her husband's remains for burial in West Virginia. She did not live long after his death.

A memorial service was held on Jan. 12, 1919, for G. B. Foster at the Garrick Theater. This was the Theater where Clarence Darrow and Foster had debated. The memorial address was delivered by Darrow. He noted that in this Theater the two had discussed the problems of life and death: "But the answer is that George Burman Foster is dead and that his brain, today, is less potent than the puny babe's; that all that was stored within during a long and useful life, is dead."<sup>5</sup> Darrow noted that many had called Foster a religious man, and he replied, "If religion means creeds and dogmas, he was not a religious man. If it means specific belief in a supreme being, he was not. If it means a firm conviction of immortal life,

he still was not; but if it means infinite love, gentleness, charity and kindness to all living things, George Burman Foster was the most religious man I ever knew!”<sup>6</sup> Darrow later said of Foster, “Of course, he believed in no personal god. But, if there is no personal god, there is no god; and if there is no personal immortality, there is no immortality.”<sup>7</sup> Darrow said in his personal testimony: “George Burman Foster was one of the rarest men I ever knew. He was tolerant to all who lived... He had no use for any of the creeds that bind, and fetter man. He believed in freedom. He believed that the greatest thing was to be an individual and to live your own life unafraid... He would a man lived free and wrong, than to be bound to the right... He believed that men should make their own mistakes and blunders, and that their bodies and souls should be left unchained... He had a way of balancing one thing against another and trying to find out which after all was best and how far the mind could go before it reached the end of human knowledge.”<sup>8</sup>

A service in memory of G. B. Foster was held in Leon Mandel Assembly Hall, the University of Chicago, on January 29, 1919. Addresses were delivered by J. M. Powis Smith, William Wallace Fenn and James Hayden Tufts.

Powis Smith noted, “He had no patience with opportunism in any sphere, and gave it short shift. He saw clearly the desired goal and made straight for it. Such undeviating directness naturally brought friction... few of those who denounced him ever really knew him. No one could come into close contact with him... without yielding to the charm of his personality. He was endowed not merely with brilliancy of mind, but even more generously with the warmth of heart. He gathered up people into the glow of his affections which speedily melted all traces of suspicion and hostility.”

William Wallace Fenn, Dean of the Harvard Divinity School spoke on “Professor Foster as a Theologian.” Dean Fenn postulated, “...that he was the most profoundly, purely, genuinely, religious man that I ever knew... Religion was not a side of his nature; it was his nature, in its wholeness... as a systematic theologian, for breadth and depth of learning, for keenness, vigor, and originality of mind, he had not a peer in the world, unless perhaps it be Troeltsch... With the mighty mind was associated the heart of a child... It was his way to take a current tendency, follow it relentlessly to its logical conclusion, and then seek to estimate its consequences for the life of the spirit... With him, there was no finality. There were but stages in the pilgrim’s progress.”

Professor James Hayden Tufts, head of the department of philosophy at Chicago, said: “His peculiar power and widespread influence were due

largely to the intimate interaction between the world of thought and the life of feeling, between pursuit of truth and the pressure of humanity's needs... He studied therefore: (1) religion as a type of experience, (2) the views of the world and of man which religion implies, and then (3) more definitely the question whether Christianity can be regarded as the ultimate religion—a question which involved in turn the question 'What is Christianity?' ...Religion was for him in part an attitude of personal companionship... with the morally ideal person... He stood for his convictions with absolutely unfaltering courage; he met misunderstanding and opposition unflinchingly; more he met even severer tests of successive bereavements, and kept gentleness, sweetness, and serenity of spirit. His was a soul that had overcome the world."





# THE FINALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

## Introduction

Foster discusses his approach to the topic under consideration, while noting that other approaches would differ according to historical circumstances.<sup>9</sup> Orthodoxy of Catholics or Protestants rests upon speculative ideas and a method of argumentation concerning the passage of the divine to the human. These ideas and methods are currently discredited in the modern world by our “convictions of immanence and growth.” Employing the word *perfectibility*, one assumes that Christianity is constantly being modified and developing. *Absoluteness* signifies that Christianity in comparison to other religions is essentially religion in its perfect form. This position is evident in modern evolutionism and especially in Hegelian philosophy, but it fails to deal with the historical development and the resulting relativity of Christianity. Applying “finality” to Christianity includes “(1) the horizon of universal religious history; (2) the recognition of all non-Christian religions as relative truths; and (3) the appreciation of Christianity as that form of religion which rounds out these relative truths to the ‘absolute’.”<sup>10</sup> Foster used the word “finality” not as the last but as the perfect.

Foster employed also the religio-historical method, which views Christianity in relation to other religions, from which it has borrowed ideas and values. Such interaction negates the supposed singularity of Christianity. Since Christianity claims its existence upon the finality of Jesus, it is difficult to support this claim of an ideal religion for advancing humans based on a historically relative figure. Modern philosophy contends that there is nothing fixed or final as all things are constantly becoming, which means it is the very nature of the *absolute* to grow. No message can be claimed the same for all times.

Foster sought the reasons for claiming Christianity to be the ultimate religion. He noted that Christianity is revealed in two historic forms—either an authority religion or a religion of the spirit which involves humans’ moral consciousness. “Our first duty is to trace the rise, development, and disintegration of Christianity as authority religion; our

second is to define Christianity as religion of the spirit, with a view to determining whether the highest spirit of the modern world can and will in the long run call itself Christianity.”<sup>11</sup> His method will be destructive concerning supernaturalism and naturalism and then constructive based on scientific judgment instead of faith. By this approach he does not primarily consider what is passing and what is permanent in Christianity but contends with whether there is anything permanent—“whether the finality of the essential nature of Christianity can be maintained.”<sup>12</sup>

A significant issue is the notion that Christianity rests on the contention that it has the perfect knowledge of God through Jesus Christ. According to Bernard Hermann, Jesus stands over against humanity, not as the climax of religious evolution but as Redeemer over against the redeemed. Foster suggested that his consideration of these issues must deal with the reality that the scientific impulse so dominates that we feel the obligation to search for the truth “without regard to conventions, fears, or prejudices, to make everything an object of investigation which can be an object of human knowledge.”<sup>13</sup> Employing sciences will contribute to an adequate theological conscience that will insist upon honest dealings even with difficult or dangerous questions. If we seek scientific proof of the finality of the Christian religion, we soon realize that all forms of scientific investigation, including the theological, are limited. Science cannot penetrate the mystery of religion, with Christianity being no exception. Foster contended that theologians and ministers must face “the scientific doubt as to the finality and indispensableness of our Christian Faith.”<sup>14</sup>

Christianity as authority religion, based on the old static view of reality, is negated by a process of immanent criticism, which makes possible a return to the religion of Jesus, a religion of the spirit. Jesus did not base his ministry on external authority. Rather, he based his faith on a moral orientation. Jesus’s attitude toward authority supports our modern concern regarding the autonomy of the human spirit. If we hold to the guarantees associated with authority religion, we must confront the destructive work of criticism.

Foster’s consideration of authority religion is devoted to logical criticism that focuses on inner consistency and truth from the modern perspective. By establishing this approach, “my task precludes an expression of the veneration and valuation which I accord to the system of religious control, with its pedagogic urgency upon life.”<sup>15</sup> He also noted that he had neither criticized fully authority religion nor intended to disturb anyone’s faith. However, he suggested that now having an unsettled faith was not evil because one’s interior attitude to reality is more important than one’s creedal perspective. Foster opined, “Religion in

the peculiar sense of the word is a state of the human subject. The objective historical doctrinal traditions and institutions are not primarily cause, but effect; are never ends in themselves, but only means to the end of expressing and arousing subjective religious life in the soul. An objective historical religion lives only so long as it finds confessors.”<sup>16</sup>

Foster rejected naturalism because it only allows for demonstrable knowledge and omits personal convictions. Both naturalism and materialism fail to include the spirit of the thinking subject and its drive for constructing a world-view. However, he supported naturalism’s view that Christianity and all religions are the focus of religio-historical study. “In a word, naturalism, clinging too closely to natural science and mathematics in its study of the human, fails to do justice to the *whole* of the human, and hence to the Christianly human.”<sup>17</sup> Naturalism fails to consider the meta-historical character experienced as revelation in Christianity and other religions. Foster illustrated this perspective by pointing to the traditional claim that Jesus was perfect or he would have been unable to mediate between God and humans. Naturalism correctly indicates that we have inadequate data on Jesus’s actions and inner life by which to make this judgment. It can neither support nor negate the claim of Jesus being without sin.

## Historical Review

The issue remains the perfectibility of revealed religion. Support for this position viewed the New Testament as perfecting the revelation in the Old Testament. If the Old required the New to perfect its revelation, does the New Testament need to be supplemented by new revelations? From one perspective, no progress in revelation is possible because the Godhead dwelt in Jesus. From another, progress in revelation is possible, according to the Gospel of John, because Jesus taught further development of his teachings as the disciples matured and through the new truth to be set forth by the Paraklete.

Montanus maintained that the rule of Faith was incapable of improvement, with further development being essentially disciplinary. This further development was possible because God sent the Paraklete to advance the foundation of righteousness known through the law and the Gospel. Foster noted that this theory put in jeopardy the theory of Scripture being sufficient. The Catholic doctrine rejected further revelation while contending that the Holy Spirit works through the Church in the development of doctrines and institutions. By the Middle Ages, the Catholic form of Christianity developed diverse religious orders. Joachim by 1260 postulated the age of the Spirit in which the Spirit will replace the New Testament's Gospels with the eternal Gospel. In the eternal Gospel the truth of the Old and New Testaments are revealed by the Holy Spirit independently and transcending the written word of God. The Protestant Reformers thought that there was no reason for further revelation because the Scriptures were complete in doctrine and in the way of the Christian life as imitating Christ.

By the seventeenth century, there emerged a new fountain, in opposition to orthodoxy, which was the "human spirit's own self-reflection, self-exploration."<sup>18</sup> In many ways, the human spirit transcended the biblical writers because their writings were dependent upon their secular knowledge. The eighteenth century bought new development by renewed interest in philology and historical criticism.

Gotthold E. Lessing followed the Montanistic stages of revelation related to the stages of human life. The Old Testament contained the wisdom that a parent tries to convey to a child. He held the New Testament to be a better book than the Old but of the same kind, with the additions of the doctrine of immortality and future retribution as incentives to righteousness. The time of consummation will bring the eternal Gospel. Then humans will be convinced of a better future in which they will do what is considered good because it is good.

The German philosopher Wilhelm T. Krug also supported the notion that Christianity required further development by means of human reflection. He contended that “the concept of the absolute perfectibility of revealed religion contains a contradiction in itself; a knowledge communicated at a given point of time cannot be absolutely perfect.”<sup>19</sup> Krug viewed the apostles to have increased in knowledge based on the Holy Spirit, which suggested that the Scriptures required criticism. He did not think that Jesus provided a final and unchangeable religion because God had sent him only to reveal the first impulse to the human spirit.

Christoph Friedrich von Ammon, a German theologian, considered the perfectibility of Christianity by it developing into a world religion. Even in its Protestant form, Christianity is not the same as the Christianity of Christ. All changes in Christian development, Ammon considered, brought great progress and freedom. He perceived the task of the time to require the elevation of the idea in Christianity above the empirical.

Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher shifts from the finality of Christianity to the perfection of Jesus. Foster suggested that Schleiermacher’s Christology was the last important effort “to make the ecclesiastical Christ acceptable to the spirit of the modern world.”<sup>20</sup> Schleiermacher argued that the God-consciousness of Christ was unsurpassable. However, like Hegel, he considered the popular forms of Christ’s teachings and life should be surpassed in order to retain its original unsurpassableness. He further affirmed the sinlessness of Jesus because Jesus actualized the pure ideality of humankind. By viewing Jesus as a full and real human being, he rationally considered the Church’s Christ and supported those characteristics necessary for Jesus to continue as our redeemer and archetype. Foster considered Schleiermacher’s Christ to be no more a real human than the Christ of the Church.

## The Foundation of Authority Religion

Every religion shares the conviction that it is based on revelation from God. These religions viewed revelation from the perspective of a traditionalist, a rationalist, and a mystic. The traditionalists are the ecclesiastical, which defined Christianity as authority religion. Revelation came to pious men, which is expressed in the Bible.

Foster first considered Paul's doctrine of revelation expressed in the old Greek Church. For John of Damascus, God revelation is endowed in all humans. Justin Martyr considered the Logos to be in all persons who live rationally, with Jesus being the whole Logos. Thus, all who live according to reason are Christians. Quintus Tertullian viewed the witness of the soul to be the essential values of the Christian faith, with the Church founded in order "that men may be the more easily and surely saved."<sup>21</sup>

Foster considered the making of divine revelation into ordinary revelation and the doctrine of human depravity to be wedges in the development of the church. Augustine held that external revelation was necessary, along with the Holy Spirit to enable the revelation to be effective. Of course, the church became the keeper of both revelation and Spirit, turning Christianity into an absolute supernaturalism. For Saint Augustine, revelation was external but blunted by sin. Thomas Aquinas held that the truths based on reason are validated by revelation. The Formula of Concord postulated that since the *Fall* humans had a natural feeling of God, but this natural revelation was inadequate. Huldrych Zwingli held a similar view, with feeling only of the existence of God but not of God's nature.

The Socinians denied hereditary sin and the possibility of natural religion, but stressed the necessity of special revelation. By the seventh century, orthodox theologians distinguished between God's revelation in the Bible and natural revelation. If one has not received revelation in the Bible, one was damned. "The Book is thus the basis of authority religion... revelation is a supernatural communication of doctrines guaranteed to be divine by the miraculous mode of their origins."<sup>22</sup>

The authority religion claimed proof of revelation based on miracles, prophecy, the moral character of the prophets, and beneficent doctrines. Augustine viewed miracles as relative and subjective. The Scholastics defined a miracle as phenomenon with no known cause, which was also the view of Protestants or dissenting groups.

A basic issue was preserving the revelation. The church had canonized and interpreted them, relying on churches founded by the apostles to be in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. The ecclesiastical extra-canonical

tradition was not contained in the Scriptures. “The canon of Scripture was the Word of God.”<sup>23</sup> Councils claimed guidance by the Holy Spirit, which in modern times was expressed as their infallibility and later as the infallibility of the Pope.

The doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures was supported by the contention that God had inspired the writers of the Old and New Testaments. However, some Fathers claimed degrees of inspiration in the Scriptures. Martin Luther found limited inspiration to parts of the Old and New Testaments, which introduced subjectivity as a disturbing factor. John Calvin claimed all scriptures to be the Word of God. “No limits can be set in the process of valuation.”<sup>24</sup> However, Catholics relied on the primacy of the Church and not the Scriptures. The Orthodox Church doctrine was that the sacred writers were directed by divine impulse and command, whether or not they understood what they wrote. There remained the issue whether the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was relative in depending on human weakness.

The issue remained whether the Scriptures were inspired. Calvin warned of building faith on divine words interpreted by human reason. The Protestants rejected the Catholic position of the divinity of the Church. Calvin held that the testimony of the Spirit is superior to all forms of human reason. This same Spirit conveys to humans the feeling that the divine word is true. The rationalists sought guarantees that the feeling in humans is the work of the divine Spirit.

Even if the Scriptures are divinely inspired, how can we be saved by them? We understand, and are saved by, an interpretation of the Scriptures that is either ecclesiastical or scientific. When the Scriptures were culturally based, the allegorical or pneumatic method was employed. It was by this method that all extra-scriptural doctrines were imported into the Scriptures and secured divine authority for the developing authority religion. However, this method brought problems to an authority religion. At first, the Reformers rejected the allegorical method but returned to it in a limited degree. The Arminians held that because the meaning of Scripture is doubtful, one should prefer the meaning that did not contradict sound reason. Benedict de Spinoza, in his rationalistic way, noted unethical elements in the principle of accommodation. “Conscious accommodation was transformed into unconscious accommodation. Instead of the writers *adaptations* to their times, they shared in the ideas of their time.”<sup>25</sup> For authority religion, biblical revelation is revitalized by interpretation or it returns to an infallible book infallibly interpreted and appropriated.

## **Dissolution of Authority Religion**

Protestants held to a rigid doctrine of inspiration that was supported by the mechanical view of the world in the seventeenth century. In this doctrine, the Scriptures were identified as the Word of God. The Protestant principle was that no human authority should come between God and man. Since the Scriptures are the sole source of the knowledge of salvation, they must be considered as divine. Protestants relied on the inner witness of the Holy Spirit for establishing the supernatural divinity of the Scriptures.

The question arose: "How is the inner to be recognized as divine and infallible?"<sup>26</sup> Since Jews and Mohammedans also claim the same inner witness, it appears that these share a common prepossession based on the sacred book. Foster noted that this supernatural witness of the Holy Spirit for modern theologians is viewed as the spiritual energizing of one's true nature.

Authority religion, as discussed, affirms the inerrancy of Scriptures based on the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. The problem is that the Scriptures are expressed by human authors in a particular context, making it difficult to support their inerrancy. However, faith in the divinity of the Bible was affirmed by Socinians and Arminians who contended that the divinity of the Scriptures was proved by their genuineness. God would not have allowed Jesus to teach untruth, which was also true of the apostles. "In a word, the contention with which we have now to do in this form of the argument is that the evidence proves historicity, and that historicity proves the supernatural divinity of the Book."<sup>27</sup>

Upon this new perspective, the supernatural divinity of the book-religion was established. Gotthold E. Lessing influenced the development of this view by distinguishing between historical belief and religious faith. He said, "Accidental truths of history can never become proof of necessary truths of reason."<sup>28</sup> Lessing held that one's belief in the resurrection does not prove that Jesus was the Son of God. One should not jump from historical truths to a different class of truths. For Lessing, the biblical books could never provide the certainty that faith requires.

From this perspective, verbal inspiration as well as prophecy, history, and doctrine were attacked and only conceded to Sacred Scriptures. Spinoza held that doctrine arose in "natural light" aided by the divine Spirit. The new supernaturalism resulted based on "the divine impulse to write."<sup>29</sup> God was still considered the primary author of the Scriptures in the sense that all good comes from God. George Hegel broke the confidence of this position by noting that the first expression of a religion is of less value than the last expression, based on the premise that reality is



a process that is always *becoming*. Hegel's view rejected Friedrich Schleiermacher's contention that the "beginnings" are the most perfect because they are by the immediate Disciples of Christ.

David F. Strauss, who moved the discussion to modern Philosophy of Religion, contended that the error was equating the Christian spirit with the absolute spirit. The dogma of infallibility was considered historically untrue and psychologically impossible. For the Protestants only, the biblical tradition was the "Word of God."

Foster focused on whether canon and "Word of God" are of a similar nature. From the dogmatic-theological approach, the "Word of God" in its fullness is not equal to the canon. Marcion could not accept the Old Testament's God to be the same as God in the New Testament and contended that the Old Testament was the revelation of a Demiurge. The Antiochian School, which turned from allegorical to grammatical exegesis, doubted the holiness of some biblical books. Baruch Spinoza limited the book to be the Word of God only to those parts that were revealed religion's fundamental truths. Martin Luther rejected the canon as "Word of God" because it was a return to Catholicism. He held this position from a dogmatic rather than historical criticism. George Calixtus limited the divine to that which was primarily redemptive. Foster considered these shifts epoch-making for it shifted the focus from its roots to its fruits. "The criterion of miraculous supernaturalism according to authority religion yields to the criterion of serviceability."<sup>30</sup> Lessing met these attacks on the Bible and Christianity by noting that the Bible is not religion but only contains religion.

Schleiermacher led the transition from dogmatic to historical criticism. Spinoza, the founder of biblical criticism, limited his doubts to the Old Testament. He necessitated for the modern world critical investigations of each book in the Bible anew. The English and French freethinkers followed his criticism. Richard Simon, a German, considered the Old Testament books later extractions from Israel's historical records. The followers of Spinoza did not limit biblical criticism to the Old Testament, but also applied it to the three synoptic Gospels, which are related to the fourth Gospel. The Gospel of John had greater appeal, as John was considered a reliable historian, with less interest in the synoptic. Romanticism, early in the nineteenth century, continued to lessen the historical and attempted reconciliation between the old and new views. Foster opined, "But the thing for which I care in this connection is the inevitable result of the development to the point reached above, viz., that the *fides divina* in the Scriptures of modern supernaturalism has come thus to be founded upon the *fides humana* in the Sacred Scriptures."<sup>31</sup>

The thesis that the entire Bible is “Word of God” was supported by the contention that the Bible also expressed the value of the word of God. Matthew Tindal pointed out that Cicero had established the doctrine of human duties, which the Scriptures had treated indefinitely. To interpret the Scriptures by themselves would lead to dangerous errors. These are the reasons why the canon cannot provide adequate authority, especially when it is understood how knowledge of Greek and Hebrew is required. Lessing added to his contention that the Bible is not religion, that the letter is not the Spirit. Although we depend on the Scriptures, the entire truth of religion is not dependent upon them. Lessing noted that Luther had freed us from tradition, but questioned who would free us from the yoke of the letter.

For the Quakers, especially Robert Barclay, the Scriptures were based on an inner revelation to great individuals. Thus, the Scriptures are not the source of revelation but are from the source. It is the inner revelation of the Spirit that makes one spiritual. Spinoza held a similar view. God’s word was not spoken to a single people, for it is an eternally speaking Word. This view was held by rationalists and mystics who rejected tradition as an external authority, which is the foundation of authority religion. Modern theologians have mainly altered this view by including sacred history into the flow of history. They also applied the rejection of miraculous supernaturalism to the canon, which further contributed to the rejection of authority religion.

Foster contended that the origin of the New Testament was a historical question. The New Testament presupposes the Old Testament, from which it often quotes. Gentile Christians, employing the method of interpretation, were able to claim a Christianized Old Testament as their own. Modern Christians sought to rescue the words, deeds, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus from the oral tradition. The message and life of Jesus, depending on the Gospels, was the center of a New Faith. The Gospels contained the words of Jesus and were sacred. The apostles in time were included as holy men because they had composed the Gospels.

The canon of the New Testament had been established by the Catholic Church, which had emerged in opposition to heresy under the label of Gnosticism. It became necessary for the Catholic Church to establish the characteristics of a Christian as opposed to a heretic. “A Christian was one who: (a) confessed faith in Father, Son, and Spirit, according to the rule of faith, *regula fidei*, handed down by the apostles; (b) acknowledged the *Scriptures* originated or handed down by the *apostles*, and read those Scriptures in the light of the rule of faith; (c) held to bishops ordained by the apostles, or inducted into office by the apostles—bishops and their

congregations; in short, held to the *Catholic church*. The very instant these three criteria were consciously employed, the Catholic Church was, in *principle*, completed...<sup>32</sup> It was in adopting the Catholics' canon that Foster suggested was the Achilles of Protestantism.

In summation, Foster noted the results of his review of authority religion: (a) the Bible was the result of divine miracles; and (b) today, we must establish another approach to secure the meaning and value of the Bible. The allegorical method was employed to interpret prophecy, but the method was discredited. Early Protestants attempted to harmonize the New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament by emphasizing the local meaning of passages. The Socinians and Armenians held that passages from the Old Testament did not predict events in the New Testament. The German rationalists contended that the Old Testament contained no predictions of Jesus Christ. However, the new religion followed the Catholic canon and was under pressure to find proof from the Old Testament regarding the life and mission of Jesus. The importance of miracles to authority religion remains even in modern times. Luther rejected nature miracles but supported Spirit miracles. Calvin emphasized the proof from miracles. G. W. Leibnitz (Leibniz) conceived angels to be responsible for miracles. Spinoza considered God and nature to be one, with nature being the self-realization of God. He valued the biblical tradition not because of miracles but for its historical and psychological role, which replaced authority religion by the religion of personality. David Hume attacked miracles by noting the inadequacy of human testimony. He also noted that miracles are violations of the laws of nature and support for the truth of miraculous events is inadequate.

Immanuel Kant concluded his criticism of miracles by discussing redemptive faith being based on Jesus's moral will. Miracles as an outward sign do not belong in moral faith. When a miracle-faith focuses on redemption, redemption sacrifices its religious importance. In reality, for Kant there is no experience of miracles. "Theistic miracle annuls the possibility of a theistic idea, and therewith itself as well. But in that case theistic miracle can no longer be distinguished from demonic, since the criterion of evaluation is gone."<sup>33</sup> Because miracles are violations of natural law, Kant opposed them for religious as well as scientific reasons.

Schelling and Hegel supported the possibility of miracles based on the relation of Spirit to nature. What is willed in the spirit of truth reflects the Spirit of God. Strauss considered the Divine Will as supporting the laws of nature. Hegel held that nature offered no opposition to the will of the Spirit. Christ was free from the limitations of nature. However, Strauss suggested this all leads to absurdities, if one's view is based on judging

facts from something as indefinite as the power of the Spirit over nature. Hegel's view of miracles was not based on miraculous accounts. He viewed the Spirit as functioning in nature as natural laws based on formative impulses. Kant's denial of the possibility of knowing miracles was re-examined by rationalists and naturalists with their result offering nothing new.

The Catholic views of miracles were so incredible that Protestants limited miracles to the apostolic age. Friedrich Paulus, Spinoza and others abandoned miraculous supernaturalism, leaving them with two alternatives: "(1) explanation by insertion of the natural causes—rationalism; or (2), since this was difficult with regard to so distant a past, the mythical and legendary hypothesis."<sup>34</sup> They held the miraculous accounts to be an expression of faith. Myths were not claimed to be historical reality but are neither illusion nor superstition. Myths, viewed disengaged from temporal form into a process, became the essential view of every religion. Lessing, rejecting miracles as proof of a divine religion offered in his famous statement: "The accidental truths of history can never prove the eternal truths of reason."<sup>35</sup> Faith was self-authenticating rendering other proofs as unnecessary. For Lessing, one can believe in miracles as the natural powers of a higher order, which effectively denied miracles as an effect in nature caused by a supernatural divine power.

Jacques Loeb viewed the virgin birth as a form of parthenogenesis similar to the development of earlier forms of life. This means that the virgin is both mother and father of the child, but this notion was in conflict with the Holy Spirit being the father of Jesus. Foster noted that a naturalistic view of miracles destroys their value for authority religion. Protestants soon arrived at the point that miracles played no part in their lives, for the time of miracles belonged to a past age. Hume confronted orthodoxy by contending that miraculous supernatural events in the Bible are reported by persons who lacked adequate knowledge of the relations and laws of nature. Foster suggested that a person who affirms faith in such stories lacked intellectual honesty.

The idea of testimony, as well as the idea of God and of nature, is imperfect. Spinoza was right that God cannot be both natural and supernatural for the natural law is the will of God. The help of God is sought when we think that nature cannot meet our needs. The miraculous faith in God is sought when we cannot reach our goals. Foster suggested this is an illusion because faith from an earlier time cannot apply to all times. A human Christ, who only interprets God's revelation in human nature, leads us to his supernatural Sonship, which is no more adequate than the superhuman Catholic Church. Although many modern persons do

not believe in miracles, they do believe that God acts above and around us. It remains difficult for Christians not to believe in miracles because the doctrine of Jesus's bodily resurrection lacks adequate evidence. Foster opined, "The bodily resurrection is a fact which can or cannot be maintained by historical science... If the Fact is not proved—and not convincingly proved—to the scientific intellect and conscience, religion can never make it a duty to let that pass as proved which has not been in truth proved; can never make it a duty to proceed less critically, less conscientiously, in so cardinal a matter. In other words, the acknowledgment of a single historical fact is a thing of knowledge and not of faith. Faith—let this not be forgotten—is directed only to that which is of a timeless character, which can disclose itself as immediately present to anyone anywhere."<sup>36</sup>

With faith in the divine truth of Christianity not founded on the resurrection, the focus shifts to the world of love and grace. Foster indicated that an affirmation of historical faith is really an affirmation of unfaith in the spiritual and divine life at the expense of a religion of Spirit and personality.

In the eighteenth century, local criticism was in favor. Orthodox supernaturalistic apologetics held to the old worldview that the intellect is primary in human nature, as knowledge is in religion. It affirmed that humans were endowed with a perfect knowledge of God, which was lost in the Fall, but the original impulse toward God remained. Humans remain in need of help from superhuman divine power exempt from human fallibility and weakness: "the gist of the argument for this finality on the part of orthodox supernaturalism is the use it makes of the category of causality. Christianity is directly due to the miraculous causality of God, and nothing else is. Hence: revelation by direct and exclusive supernatural communication of ideas, and the Bible by exclusive miraculous inspiration, and conversion by 'miracle of grace'."<sup>37</sup>

There remains the issue how one knows that events are the result of miraculous divine causality. The current issues of rationalism are duplicated by historical science, which excludes the finality of the Christian religion. "Thus it would seem that modern history was the end of any dogmatic formation which hypostasizes its naïve claim to validity by the use of the concept 'revelation'."<sup>38</sup> From the perspective of developmental history, all is in the process of becoming. The human story becomes a general view of becoming humanity. Christians are viewed as being in history but not of or through history. The old view of secular history included sin and error, with ecclesiastical history being "absolutely true" and "miraculously authenticated" by divine communication.

Modern historical science joined rationalism in its attack upon orthodox supernaturalism. Christianity became involved in the attack which relativizes all that is historical. Foster questioned whether any conception of Christian finality is possible due to universal historical relativity. Both orthodox Catholics and Protestants relied upon a miracle interjected by God in human history, which leads to conversion or regeneration and authenticated their faith. By subordinating the outer to the inner miracle, supernatural authentication now rests on immanent psychological factors. God's miraculous revelation now authenticated itself in the Bible.

The historical problem with miracles applied to the new position. If God is the direct cause of historical reality, which includes error and evil, the ecclesial tradition has relativized Christianity. This is demonstrated in the separation of pre-biblical order, extra-biblical and psychological science's analysis of conversion. The new faith was thought to provide a more healthy religious development of focusing on order instead of miracles. Foster reminded his readers "that the dignity of things, even Christian things, is disclosed, not in their cause, but in their end... Not in their structure, but in their function; not in their credentials, but in their service..."<sup>39</sup> The new world has shifted from Thomas Aquinas to Immanuel Kant and Charles Darwin, leaving no room for the theory of Christian supernaturalism since the divide between human and divine has been overcome, "and all is human and all is divine at one and the same time."<sup>40</sup>