

The Word of the Lord Endureth Forever

This year has been very significant for evangelicals in North America as well as in Russia. In North America, evangelicals have found themselves in the focus of attention. Thanks to media visibility, and with the now president-elect Mr. Carter openly professing his faith in Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour, they are capturing the public's interest. A recent U.S. poll, undoubtedly triggered by Mr. Carter's profession of being "born again," found that 50 million adults make the same claim. "Born again" was defined by Gallup as having experienced a "turning point in one's life when one committed himself, or herself, to Christ." Polls, however, determine neither one's entry into heaven or commitment to truth. After all, the percentage of Protestants who attend church during a given week (38 percent) is less than the percentage who claim that they are "born again" (48 percent).

Polls or no polls, evangelicals have been making rapid gains this year. But how long will this advance last? Will evangelicals be able to consolidate their gains, or will their momentum be sapped away through controversy? This is a question that must be asked now.

One of the great strengths of evangelicals has been their emphasis upon the authority of Scripture. The Bible has been the rapier in the hands of evangelists, pastors and missionaries, slashing deeply into men's consciences, leading them to surrender to the living God.

If preaching is to be authoritative, then the Bible must be the source and basis. Only a man who is convinced of the truth of Scripture will dare to preach: "The Lord says." However, 1975 has seen the beginning of a new debate in North America on the Bible. Is the Bible infallible in its entirety, or is it limited in its inerrancy? In other words: Are there errors in the Bible?

Dr. Harold Lindsell's best seller *The Battle For The Bible* has sparked the debate. He says: "Today the great watershed is the issue of Scripture. This struggle over Scripture is unique in the history of the church. How the issue is settled remains to be seen. But if it is finally settled that Scripture can err, then the church and its theologians will learn that no source and no standard remains to solve further doctrinal problems that may arise."

The perplexing question of the inspiration of Scripture is endangering the advance and unity of the evangelical movement. The battle is shaping up. Sides are being taken. I hope and pray that evangelicals won't be so busy debating the Bible that they have neither the time nor the energy left to proclaim its message.

This year is also very significant for Russian Christians, as they celebrate the 100th anniversary of their Bible translated into their common language. In a country such as ours, where there are numerous numbers of Bibles available for each church member, this anniversary may go unnoticed. But Russia's story is so different. The continued

scarcity of a Bible in their language gave the Russians special appreciation for a precious possession.

In 1876, for the first time in Russian history, the Bible appeared in one volume, which was called the "Synodical Version." The power of God's Word worked in the hearts of many Russians. During the past 100 years "the Word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed."

One participant in the movement of evangelicalism, in the last part of the 19th century, described the work God's Word accomplished in Russian hearts: "Peasants, beginning to read the Bible, began to notice the incongruity between the teachings of Christ and life around them... Serious study (of the Bible) worked a miracle: people gave up drinking vodka, smoking, profanity - they were born again and were made completely different people. "The general secretary of the Evangelical Christian Baptist Union Mr. A.M. Bychkov declared in 1974: "Let the centennial jubilee of the Russian Bible be observed in all our churches with prayers of thanksgiving."

In Russia, the church is not engaged in a battle for the Bible. A church persecuted for the truth proclaims "This says the Lord. "No church in persecution has ever debated Scripture. "It is written" was always the answer to every question. Let North American evangelicals rejoice with the Russian Christians. But let them also continue to proclaim the Bible as God's inspired and infallible Word.

Over a hundred years ago a theologian gave a warning that should be heeded by all evangelicals today: "The question, therefore, is one of life or death. We will not, we can not give up our faith in the Bible. To do so is to surrender ourselves to blank despair. It is to blot out the sun from the heavens and extinguish at once the very source of light and life and holiness. 'All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away; but the Word of the Lord endureth forever."

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