

# What "Verbal Inspiration" Means

by ALLAN A. MacRAE, Ph.D.

THE claim of historic Christianity that the Bible is verbally inspired is widely misunderstood. Modernists frequently deride the idea of verbal inspiration as if it meant that God dictated all the Scriptures word by word to the writers. They point out that the style of different Biblical writers differs and assert that this proves that verbal inspiration cannot possibly be a fact since the style would be uniform throughout all the Bible if God dictated every word. Such criticism rests upon an entire misunderstanding of what the Christian church means by verbal inspiration.

It is important that we differentiate between inspiration and revelation, both of which enter into the formation of the Bible as Christians have historically considered it.

Revelation means that God presents ideas directly to the mind of the writer. Here actual dictation may occur. God may reveal by making a statement to the writer in words, or by showing him a picture, or by causing him to have an imaginative experience.

As to this third type we find Peter described in Acts 10 as seeing a great sheet let down from heaven with all sorts of animals, and hearing the words, "Kill, and eat." He answers, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." The voice answers, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." Through this experience, Peter received from God

a revelation of truth previously unknown to him.

Many parts of the Bible are made up of such revelations from God to man. Often it is stated that the Lord spoke to Moses, or the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, or a similar expression is used to show that God gave a revelation to the writer.

However, other sections of the Bible make no such claim of being a direct revelation from God. They simply tell what the writer has seen, or experienced, or heard. It did not require a revelation of God for Paul to ask Timothy to bring with him the cloak that was left at Troas, or for Moses to describe the battle with the Amalekites. The Christian doctrine of inspiration has never held that such passages were dictated. The writer simply wrote down the truth, giving it in his own way. Yet, every word written



Dr. MacRae

joint author with Drs. Purves and Gelb, of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, of a recent volume, *Nuzi Personal Names* (University of Chicago Press, \$10), a study of 3,000 names found on a group of tablets dating about 1400 B.C., dug up in Nuzi, not far from Nineveh. Dr. MacRae's contribution to the book is a study of the ancient Assyrian and Babylonian names in this collection. Dr. MacRae's ruling passion is establishing proof of the authenticity of the Old Testament by archaeological research in the Holy Land. ~~But off temporarily from expeditions abroad, he still enjoys an annual solitary 45-day pilgrimage walking in the Grand Canyon.~~