

Religion Today  
October 12-18, 2003  
*Divine or Human?*  
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The balance between human and divine activity has been a matter of ongoing debate throughout Christian history. Not only do believers daily attempt to distinguish God's guidance from the human-generated noise and activity of their lives, but many of the big debates of the church have focused on the extent a key point of belief or theology derives from God, human beings, or both.

This was certainly true of the previous column's topic, namely, the centuries-long debate over defining the nature of Jesus. Some Christians argued he was human only, while others argued he was essentially divine. In the end, it was decided that he was both fully God and fully human.

Over the last century or so, the debate over "is it divine or human?" has erupted over another subject, namely, the Bible. The debate began in the 19th century with the rise of "Higher Criticism," a scholarly movement aiming to understand the human processes in the formation of the scriptural books and the human character of the activities they record. Although the academic minutiae interested only a few people, many Christians in mainstream denominations saw this development as helpful, for it enabled them to relate the biblical stories, rules and guidelines to their own lives in the "modern world." It made Scripture more human.

Many other Christians did not like this development, however. They had always considered the Bible to be the Word of God, and saw the increased interest in the human aspects of Scripture as an attempt to remove its divine character. In the early 20th century, this view became one of the driving forces behind the formation of the Fundamentalist Movement, a loose-knit association of Christians who wished to return Christianity to its biblical fundamentals, that is, to the Bible as the divine message that God gave to his followers.

The way the Fundamentalists defined the battle over the Bible revealed their view of the issues at stake. They declared Scripture to be "inerrant," that

is, it contained no errors. The Bible was always accurate, whether the subjects being discussed were of a historical, moral or scientific nature. By making the debate one over inerrancy, the Fundamentalists revealed that they thought Higher Criticism and other scientific movements pointed out mistakes in Scripture. And, if Scripture came from God, then this meant that God could make mistakes. Such a thought was simply inconceivable to them.

But another problem underlay their difficulty with these approaches, one which they did not formulate in clear terms. And this problem makes it clear that the battle was not just over errors, but over the entire divine nature of Scripture. This is the unspoken belief that if Scripture was given by God, then it has no human characteristics whatsoever. Despite its unacknowledged character, this view has a strong impact on those who hold it.

In my talks to university students and other adults, I often receive stronger negative reaction to discussion of the literary characteristics of biblical stories than I do to comments indicating historical problems with the biblical narrative. Comments about the use of puns or slang in the biblical text, about the composition of stories using literary devices such as type scenes and plot, about the shape of stories that have tension increasing to a climax and a closing resolution, all of these are difficult notions for fundamentalists. And the reason is because, although they do not contradict the Bible or reveal errors, these literary features indicate human activity. Such indications of human activity are seen as denigrating the belief in the divine character of Scripture.

This debate over the character of Scripture will most likely continue. Is it divine, human, or both? This debate is indeed necessary, for it defines the limits of allowed interpretation. A God-given text is seen to have a fixed interpretation and is authoritative in its unchanging character, while a human text, although authoritative, is more flexible to meet the needs of human development. Will a middle ground be identified, or will the debate go on unending?