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BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

BIBLICAL
INTERPRETATION

THE OLD DIFFICULTIES
AND THE NEW OPPORTUNITY

E. C. BLACKMAN



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PREFACE

THE aim of this book is to serve the cause of true exposition. The three longer chapters IV–VI are more obviously related to that purpose than the others. Chapter IV is historical, and tries to give an impression of how Christian teachers and preachers through nineteen centuries have in fact expounded the Bible. Chapter VI is intended to be a climax in that it ventures to lay down canons of exegesis for the preacher today. It seemed advisable to preface these larger chapters with some discussion of issues about which it is essential for the preacher to have a right judgment: the significance of the Bible as Revelation, the authority of the Bible in the setting of the general problem of moral and spiritual authority, and the function and limits of historical criticism as applied to the Bible.

Bible quotations are mostly from the Revised Version. In a few cases they are my own rendering.

My thanks are due to my colleague, the Rev. R. Bocking, M.Th., for his careful reading of the proofs and preparation of the index of Biblical passages.

E. C. BLACKMAN

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January 1957.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

IT is a tempting, though perhaps rather useless, pastime to try to find the adjective which most aptly describes the present generation. The applicability of such epithets as "technical" or "atomic" is obvious enough. There would also be general agreement that "Bible-reading" is not applicable. The people of England have ceased to be, in J. R. Green's phrase, "the people of a book, and that book the Bible".

This constitutes a challenge to the Church, which stands on the conviction that the Bible is of unique value, and that without it humanity is bereft of something vital for the understanding of life. The Bible may be a best-seller, if the whole world is in view, but this is hardly true of England and Europe. And where it is read, is it understood?

For the Bible needs to be interpreted. That has been admitted from the beginning. The Jewish Rabbis did it in their own way, both for their own people and for Gentiles. Among the New Testament writers we find Paul and John using Hellenistic terminology in order to make basic Christian truths intelligible to those who had no contact with Judaism. By the second century the allegorical method of interpretation was already at home in the Church, and during the course of the same century increasing attention was being paid to the Church's tradition as a guide to the correct exposition of the Scriptures.*

The scholars of medieval Catholicism were diligent in elucidating the various senses of Scripture. The Reformers of the sixteenth century, having reset the Scriptures in the central place which they

* cf. R. P. C. Hanson: *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition* (1954).

had lost, realised that they must give guidance concerning its true meaning, and their vernacular translations were a part of this endeavour. In the later Protestant Scholasticism there was a rigid Biblicist wing, deriving from Calvin more than Luther, which developed into modern Fundamentalism or Literalism, and this is reinforced today by the authoritarianism which is in the air and appeals to those who prize definite direction more highly than absolute truth. The Church's problem in this generation—a problem of some urgency—is to enable those who come into church membership, particularly young people who have had training in Sunday schools and religious instruction at day school, to handle their Bible with ease and find their way about it confidently, so that their reading ministers to their appreciation of it and satisfies their intellectual and spiritual need. Only so can they be built up in Christian conviction, and in capacity to make a Christian impact on society. This is a pressing need. It can hardly be expected that the teaching of our primary and secondary schools, even when in the hands of trained specialists who are also committed Christians, should have precisely this end in view. Their aim must be mainly intellectual. In the churches, on the other hand, the aim is more definitely the production of Christian character and commitment. Now the Bible is a difficult book and the achievement of this aim calls for the greatest care and persistence. Here, as in other spheres, those who show the greatest zeal are not always the most effective teachers, and those who tremble for the sacred ark are not necessarily its real champions. Many of the young people who are ripe for exposition of the Bible are the very ones for whom a literalist or excessively dogmatic handling of it will make it unintelligible.

Fundamentalism trembles to admit the difficulties the Bible presents. It comes near to saying that it needs no interpreting but only to be read and re-read. And it can fall back on the authority of the redoubtable Luther and affirm that Scripture is its own interpreter.

Of course the Fundamentalist will when pressed admit the need of proper exposition, and his own expository preaching is often

most effectively illustrated. He is anxious above all things lest any of its precious truth should be missed, and for this he merits respect. Nevertheless, Fundamentalism must be confronted with the very real difficulties it raises. It tends to quote rather than explain, in other words it burkes the real problem of exegesis. Again, it tends to shut God up within the covers of the Bible, thus failing to see the Biblical doctrine of the living God in all its breadth and depth. Fundamentalism thus falls into the condemnation of straining at the gnat and swallowing the camel. Too much straining over the letter makes a live interpretation impossible.

This is not a dead issue. It must be remembered that the majority of church members and adherents in the Younger Churches outside Europe and America are literalist in their use of the Bible.* Most discerning readers find it impossible to believe that the Bible is true in every detail and that its inspiration attaches to the very words and in fact implies inerrancy. That is not Fundamentalism in the proper meaning of a noble word, for it obscures the fundamentals instead of bringing them out in relief. Brunner accuses it of getting in the way of faith. "The authoritarian faith in the Bible, when tested by the Biblical idea of faith, is both religiously and ethically sterile. . . . Whether the Biblical writers, and the various facts which they record, are credible has nothing to do with 'faith' in the Biblical sense. Such 'faith' makes us neither penitent nor thankful nor converted nor sanctified."†

The Fundamentalist then is an opponent of the Gospel and not its sole champion in the battlefield against secularism. At the same time, the intention to conserve the vital elements, even though not always successful in the event, is worthy of respect. The Fundamentalist must be given credit where credit is due. He has never had any doubt that the business of the preacher is not literary essaying, nor popular philosophy, nor dabbling with religious ideas, nor even ethical improvement. So he may well feel that those who cannot agree with him on that are not able to touch him with their criticism. For they are on different standing ground;

* cf. an article by A. M. Chirgwin in the *Congregational Quarterly*, July 1954.

† Brunner: *Revelation and Reason*, p. 176.

they are not concerned for the same Gospel verities as he is, and thus their eloquence and their learning are expended on lesser ends. The critic of Fundamentalists has to convince them that he is doing battle on the same ground against the same enemy, and that he too is contending for the same everlasting Gospel and appealing to the Bible as the book where that Gospel is recorded, treasuring it in fact as the Word of God and not simply as inspiring literature which happens to have survived from the ancient world. Only so can the Fundamentalist be shaken out of his assumption that while he is attending to the weightier matters his "modern" fellow Christian is merely tithing mint and anise and cummin.

Moreover, cognisance needs to be taken of the fact that many serious and able people, not unacquainted with the modern scientific world-view, do feel that they must take the Fundamentalist side if they are to give the Bible its rightful place. If they argue that it is possible to cut out dead wood so ruthlessly as to damage the life of the tree, they are on safe ground; but they are wrong to infer that it is better not to cut away the dead wood at all. The doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible is a yoke which our fathers have been able to bear, but that is no final reason why this generation in its responsibility for commending the Bible to the world should be shackled with it.

Barth in the preface to one of the editions of his *Romans* remarks that if he had to choose between Fundamentalism and modern criticism he would have to choose Fundamentalism. (He adds that he does not think the choice is as limited as that.) There is an alternative to the Fundamentalist use of Scripture, but it appears that it has not been made sufficiently clear, either to the long-established Fundamentalist population of the churches, or to their new recruits such as the converts and camp-followers of an evangelist like Dr. Billy Graham, or to the mixed multitude of general readers and casual inquirers. To the task of making clearer the alternative the following pages are devoted.*

* I am in agreement with Dr. W. Neil's important book *The Rediscovery of the Bible*, 1954. In the last chapter, dealing with the problem of how to communicate the essential Biblical teaching to the modern man, he writes: "We must steer a middle course between a fruitless effort to reinstate Biblical words and ideas which are now

The alternatives to the Fundamentalist-literalist attitude to the Bible are, in the main, two.

The first is Roman Catholicism, which is simply the Fundamentalist position as regards the Bible taken up into that larger whole of Catholic dogma upon which the Roman Church takes its stand. Within the Biblical area of reference it is still Fundamentalism, and we need discuss it no further here. The second alternative is the modern critical method. This needs to become more sure of its goal and more aware of its responsibility. It is not enough to analyse documents, define authorship and dating, and do all that goes under the heading of Biblical Introduction, and then leave the preacher and teacher to do his best. Even the mastery of the original languages is not enough in itself. What avails it to be informed about, say, the expansionist policy of Tiglath-Pileser III, or the equipment of a Hebrew prophet, or the correct order of the Pauline epistles, or the original Aramaic in which Jesus pronounced the Beatitudes, or even the identity of the Fourth Evangelist, unless all this background knowledge is made to set in clearer light the gracious dealing of the Living God? Our study should set that in the foreground. It is always for the Bible the centre of the picture. Dr. John Mackay has well written: "It is always possible to believe the Bible from cover to cover without uncovering the Truth it contains. It is equally possible to know the historic truth regarding the documents that make up the Bible and egregiously fail to hear the voice of the Eternal in Biblical history. A profitable and scientific study of the Bible must be preceded by a spiritual encounter with the God of the Bible."* It should be axiomatic in critical study that the element of divine action, not only causing the Bible to be written (inspiration) but causing the events to take place which have saving significance (revelation of the Lord of History), is taken with the utmost seriousness. The outcome of study is then a quickened awareness of divine initiative all along the line, which

merely lifeless relics of the past, and the equally profitless endeavour to lose contact with the historical basis and restate the Bible in the terminology of Marx or Freud or the Existentialists."

* *Preface to Christian Theology*, p. 67.

reaches right to the modern reader. At that point spirit as well as mind is engaged,* and study passes into adoration.

Two things are imperative as critical work proceeds. First, more consideration of the uniqueness of the Bible as a whole and of its distinctive place in religious literature; second, agreement on principles of interpretation, such as might narrow the gulf between critical scholars and literalists, perhaps actually bridge the gulf!

Firstly, modern method has too long gone on with the assumption that the Bible is no more than a very important piece of ancient literature, worthy of meticulous analysis. But the fundamental question of its nature and authority has often been ignored. This must be faced without further delay. Criticism precipitated an issue concerning the Bible's right to claim unique veneration, and it must make clear what sort of veneration—if any—it is proper to ascribe to this book. If we may venture to compare the attitude of the first critics to the removal of the object of their analysis from its glass case, we may go on to suggest that they have forgotten to indicate whether at the end of their examination they feel that a special glass case is the proper place for it, or whether it is simply one among the many survivals of classical antiquity and should stand with its fellows on an ordinary bookshelf.

It seemed to many people impious to raise the question at all whether the Bible was in a class of its own or not, as apart from all secular books and also from other sacred books, such as the Koran. The acclimatising of the methods of historical research in the religious sphere involved, among other things, the setting aside of St. John's Gospel as less historically reliable than the other three, and the denial of the possibility of miracle. This could not but appear to the faithful of that day sacrilegious. Their Saviour was being taken away from them, and they knew not where men had laid Him. How could they hope that the Saviour might be restored to them, or believe that, like a picture after restoration, He might then stand out with a new and hitherto unperceived splendour? Similarly, when the critics began to take account of advances in the sciences.

* cf. I Corinthians ii.

In the seventeenth century, it is true, mathematicians like Newton, and naturalists like Ray, found no conflict between their scientific knowledge and their religious faith; nor had Kepler the astronomer before that. We remember Galileo's telescope, of course, but he had more timidity than faith, as was also true of the bishop who silenced him. But in the middle years of the nineteenth century there was a growing challenge from the sciences, more especially biology and geology. A good picture of the tensions it caused is given in Edmund Gosse's book *Father and Son*. Our most significant date here is 1859 with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. This focused attention on Genesis i-ii and drew forth conservative theologians in alarm for the defence of the Biblical account of Creation. The truth about man's origin reached by observation and inductive method made necessary a revision of opinion about the details of the Bible story, considered as fact in the realm of biology. But it did not affect the main point of that story, viz. the affirmation of the dependence of all things on God, and the nature of both man and universe with all their wonders and mysteries as essentially creatures, created things, i.e. derivative from a higher Source. This is the fundamental religious *a priori*, and the deductive method which the Bible and theology relies on as it proceeds from that assumption is not incompatible with, certainly not invalidated by, the inductive method which was leading scientists to such brilliant discoveries. In other words, Genesis i-ii rightly understood, in the light of scientific discovery accepted by critical Biblical research, remains a Word of God for theologian, scientist and ordinary Christian. This was not perceived by earnest Churchmen in 1860, and those who did perceive it failed to make themselves clear. It was not only bishops, like Bishop Wordsworth at the 1860 meeting of the British Association, who were roused to protest, but no less a person than Mr. Gladstone entered the lists to do battle in defence of *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*. The orthodox were manœuvred, or manœuvred themselves, into a false position, and felt obliged to contend not for the Bible's inspiration, but for *verbal* inspiration, a quite different and less defensible thing. Fundamentalism as we meet it at the present time had a new

start in those years of intense heart-searching among Christian people.*

How stands the matter today? What does the battlefield look like now that the dust of conflict has settled? It has been a protracted conflict, and it may indeed be reckoned the most serious test the Church has had to face through nineteen centuries (with the possible exception of the division of Christendom between East and West in the tenth century). The sixteenth-century division was a lesser upheaval. For the main issue at the Reformation was the authority of the Church. This was redefined by the Reformers, and the authority of Scripture was set above it; and this continued to be for Protestantism the highest authority. But now in the nineteenth century that authority was called in question. When this is realised it becomes clear that the real point at issue was the question of the ultimate authority in religion and ethics. This can be formulated in Biblical terms, such as What is the abiding truth in Scripture? or, What is the nature of Biblical revelation? but it is an aspect of an overriding question which concerns all men and not merely all Christians, the question of absolute standards or authorities. We shall consider the authority of the Bible more fully in a later chapter, but must here more briefly indicate our main thesis, and the lines on which the principles not only of Biblical authority but of interpretation also must be worked out, in reliance on the results of critical scholarship during these truly "critical" years to which we have been referring.

If we put the question, as every earnest person must, What is the heart of the Bible, its central message? the answer is: The Kerygma,

* Some words of Gunkel in his outstanding commentary on Genesis, published in 1901, are still worth quoting: "The historian feels no surprise at all that the references of Genesis i to the field of natural science do not agree with the results of our modern science. . . . It is only a quite unhistorical sense that can attempt to harmonise Genesis i with modern science or set Darwin in opposition to Moses. The fact that educated or half-educated people on hearing of a 'scientific account of Creation' can suppose that the Bible is contradicted is very real matter for regret, and shows that our Church has still not clarified her attitude to Genesis i in a way that does her credit. Religion must leave it to natural science to do the best it can to explain the origin of the world and of mankind. Natural science also must keep within its sphere and neither deny nor affirm the dogma of Creation."

or message awaiting proclamation, concerning, and created by, Jesus Christ. That is not a mere rehash of what orthodox Christians have always taught; it is the direct result of the best critical scholarship. And the precise definition of what that Kerygma consists of is now at last made available by critical scholarship. But we need to be more conscious of it. It needs to be made known, to be put right at the centre of our thinking, and of our official theologies. We can be positive about this in argument with the timid conservative. It can be affirmed with a conviction deepened and purified by the fires of searching intellectual inquiry. This is now possible as never before. The critical years since D. F. Strauss have not been years that the locust hath eaten. Now is the time to say to the cities of Judah (i.e. the Christian churches): Behold your God! Thanks in part to Fundamentalism's defensive action, but in the main to critical scholars of the type of Westcott and George Adam Smith and Sanday in the last century, and of Peake and Howard and Dodd and T. W. Manson in this, the essential teaching of the Bible has become clearer and more real. The contours have been redrawn and the really high points stand out in strong relief, and among them a hill called Calvary, at the very centre. The Bible can still be called the veritable Word of God, and with a new understanding of what that classic designation implies. The Bible can be handled as God's Word, with ease and confidence and without fear of being regarded as old-fashioned or intellectually dishonest. It can be seen as not merely a literary and historical but as a *religious* classic. Doubt and despair have like roaring lions sought whom they might devour; the acids of modernity have spread their corrosion. But now is a time of confident and urgent proclamation. There is a new ripeness of opportunity to reiterate and expound that ancient Word which the Lord hath spoken, meaningful for this present day as for past generations, in and through Jesus Christ.

It may certainly be said that such an understanding and use of the Bible is made possible as a result of critical study. There need be no hesitation, no inclination to regard the past three or four generations as a period when Christians were unfortunately bound

to use critical methods on the Bible, but the present time as the opportunity to give up that as wasted labour and confine ourselves to theological exposition. There is a sense in which certain results of criticism may be accepted, and there is no need to take time testing them and producing counter-hypotheses (e.g. the priority of Mark among the Gospels, and of the prophets among the Old Testament books). But it is also true that the critical method is always to be used as an approach to Exposition: i.e. in order to get the Word for us out of the Word as it came to Isaiah or Jeremiah we must be prepared to go into the questions of the dating of their oracles and the structure of their books. The main point is that there can be no ignoring of the work of the critical scholars; no reading their books once in a lifetime—in student days and for examination purposes—and shutting them for ever.

Criticism must not be bypassed; that is not the way of advance. This does not, however, mean that we have to be for ever occupied with the literary and historical problems. We have to use them as a framework. That is what they are essentially, and our generation is likely to be more clear about that than previously has been the case. Let us be explicit in one particular case, that of the Book of Psalms. Here the explosion of the dogma of Davidic authorship is not an end in itself, but only a means to clearer perception of what the author is saying to God, or asking of God, in his particular situation or need (which is not that of King David, 1000–960 B.C.); and that perception in turn is a step on the way to our own sharing of the experience of worship, faith, hope, penitence, etc.

The theologian's task is to define Word or Gospel, and ensure that what is being preached is not less than this (as in Modernism and such reconstructions of Christianity as Miss Wodehouse's *One Kind of Religion*), nor an obscuring of it in irrelevant detail (as in Fundamentalism), nor a confusing of it with side issues (as in Pacifism, Christian Science, British Israel, etc.). This leads on to the question of interpretation. As we mentioned above, the second main desideratum is agreement about principles of interpretation. It is agreed that there is a Word from God. We are also agreed that this Word is mediated by the Bible but not coextensive with, or

identifiable with, the books of the Bible. The Word is identifiable with Jesus Christ; but how much does that imply? There is still a problem of interpretation, even though in one aspect it means a great clarification to identify the Word of God with Jesus rather than with the Bible generally (as in Fundamentalism). But the exegetical difficulty arises from the fact that in the Gospels we have the Christ of A.D. 30, and exegesis is not complete until the significance of Christ (or the Word) for 1957 becomes clear. Is such a translation or transposition possible? The answer to that is Yes, but it is not always easy to arrive at. One notable feature of the new American publication *The Interpreter's Bible* is the distinction between the explication of the full meaning of the original passage for its own time, and the application of it today. The distinction is even more marked by the fact that the two tasks are entrusted to different scholars. The transposition of the Christ of A.D. 30 into (as it were) the Christ of 1957 has many pitfalls to avoid. Sometimes it is straightforward enough, as in John xiv. 6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life". That must mean substantially the same for a modern reader as it did for the first readers of that Gospel (whatever rich exposition the commentator may provide of the connotation of the individual terms; how much has been written on "truth", for example, and on the regal significance of the Johannine "I am"!). But sometimes the sense is baffling, even forbidding; in Mark viii. 27-38, for instance, or the eschatological passages generally, especially Mark xiii. Some scholars—Harnack for example in his famous *What is Christianity?* (1901)—tended to ignore these passages in the sense that they had meaning only for that period of Jewish apocalyptic, and not for our own time. Others—notably Schweitzer, following Johannes Weiss—underlined and magnified these passages, without, however, explaining their significance for any later age than that time of fervid Jewish apocalyptic hopes. The obligation remains to reinterpret the sayings which seem confined in meaning to the time in which they were originally spoken so that they have significance still. It may not be possible in every case—and indeed there may be something significant for a modern reader in those words of Jesus which appear to have no relevance to the

modern world*—but the attempt must always be seriously made. The question of the relation of form to content in those passages is involved. A simple separation of the content from the form (time-reference, Greek language, etc.) in which it is expressed is not always easy. It is certainly not as straightforward an operation as cracking a nut and extracting the kernel!—though this analogy is often quoted. Something essential to the meaning may reside in the form in which the meaning is conveyed. The well-known Professor Bultmann a few years ago set German theologians by the ears with his demand for the “de-mythologising” of the Bible. We can see what he meant. He was concerned that the Gospel should be made intelligible to the modern secularised man, and probably he was more conscious of the urgency of this task than many of his critics. But can it be done? Can the mythology be taken out without leaving a shapeless jumble of words or ideas? Must not some mythological trappings remain if the Gospel is to be preached at all—for the same reason that words in some human language must be used if any communication to human beings is to be made?†

Conservative Christians tend to minimise the difficulty of interpreting the Bible, and not to see it as a real problem. Their attitude is to stress the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible, out of fear of losing any of its precious value. The saints must guard “the faith once for all delivered” to them, and any lack of vigilance might be sin against the Holy Ghost. To experiment is to betray. The ark of the covenant must not be treated like a common box: do not risk putting it on an ox-cart; leave it in the house of Obed-Edom‡—or perhaps it is safer to leave it among the Philistines! In such wise devout men have felt and argued. Trembling for the ark is no doubt not the most heinous of sins; there may indeed be something respectable about it. But it is

* This might be very significant on the limitations which incarnation entailed; cf. *Philippians* ii. 6–9.

† On this whole subject there is a considerable amount of writing since Bultmann opened it in 1941. See *Kerygma and Myth*, by H. W. Bartsch, translated by R. H. Fuller (1953); *Myth in the New Testament*, by Ian Henderson; *Christology and Myth in the New Testament* by G. V. Jones. ‡ cf. II Samuel vi.

insensitive to the world-wide need of the benefits of religion, of the world of sinners outside the Church of the redeemed; of Gentiles who are also God's children. This excessive conservatism in regard to the Bible is now reinforced by L. S. Thornton* with his conception of the Bible as more like an onion than a nut, in the sense that it must be taken as a whole and no amount of stripping off will penetrate to a removable core of timeless truth. A. M. Farrer† also ministers to it with his great ingenuity in discerning patterns in Scripture. And there is strong support from the new advocates of typological exposition, following W. Vischer.‡ These are not content to affirm that the Old Testament witnesses to Christ, but insist that it witnesses to Him everywhere. But there is an important distinction, pointed out long ago by P. T. Forsyth, between the Bible as a whole and the whole of the Bible. The inability to see the point of this is the basic error of the literalist approach, and there goes with it the inability to tackle the task of interpretation sensitively. The days are long past when the quotation of Scripture in sermon or discussion seemed to be the last word on a subject and to make further discussion unnecessary. A great deal of expounding and commending the Bible has to be done today, and mere repetition of Biblical phrases is little better than speaking a foreign language. What is still necessary, however, is reverence in our approach to Scripture: a willingness to admit that we are not wiser than God and His written word; that we cannot substitute for it something of our own, something of Barth or Calvin or those philosophers and scientists whose pronouncements the modern world is disposed to accept as authoritative.

As we face the problem of interpretation and recognise that it calls for the best reasoning we can offer, we may be thankful that critical study in the last hundred years has claimed the service of the best minds, scholars who from the academic standpoint were of the first rank. There is no inevitable conflict between faith and reason, though there has been, and always will be, tension between timid

* In *Revelation in the Modern World* and *The Dominion of Christ*. These are discussed more fully below (p. 164 f.).

† In *Rebirth of Images* and *A Study in St. Mark*.

‡ In *Christuszeugnis des alten Testaments*.

faith and prejudiced reasoning. Genuine faith welcomes the help of the keenest intellect. It says not: Keep away from my preserve, but: Search and admire my treasures. Moreover, as D. S. Cairns used to say, a strong faith is not curious about details. As we have already indicated, there is a literalist approach to the Bible which is over-curious about details, and unwelcoming to honest reason. It tends to quote again rather than interpret. Unable to distinguish form and content, it implies that the swaddling-clothes, as it were, are as important as the baby, and that is a confusion against which both reason and faith protest. The literalist professes to revere the Holy Scripture, and that we need not deny; but do not we also? And may we not reply to his claim, as Paul did to his critics: Are they believers? So am I; Are they ministers of Christ? I more.

In the last resort the word of God is more than we can comprehend, for it is always true that God has many things to say unto us, but we cannot bear them now. Recognising this we may approach without arrogance, and to our reading of this book two of its most pregnant sayings will be applicable: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" and "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom".

CHAPTER II

THE MEANING OF REVELATION

WHAT is meant by revelation? Is the word to be taken to mean special intervention by God in human experience, over and above the knowledge of the divine available to man through his normal experience, in contact with his fellows, or through reflection upon the beauties and uniformities of Nature and the vicissitudes of history? The question obviously does not arise for those who have no belief in the divine; but even for those who have such belief the conception of revelation may be suspect. One thinks, for example, of a well-known book by Julian Huxley with the title *Religion without Revelation*. The scientific humanist may honestly desire not to dispense with the concept of the divine, but the concept of revelation may appear silly and unworthy. More generally, to quote a recent Jewish writer, "To the average mind revelation is a sort of mental outcast, not qualified to be an issue for debate. At best it is regarded as a fairy tale, on a par with the conception that lightning and thunder are signs of the anger of sundry gods and demons, rather than the result of a sudden expansion of the air in the path of an electric discharge. Indeed, has not the issue been settled long ago by psychology and anthropology as primitive man's mistaking an illusion for a supernatural event?"* The secular mind has difficulty with the idea of revelation, because it has no room for God and is thus unaware of the question to which revelation is the answer. If secularism could be brought to diagnose the human problem as the need for what God alone can provide, it would at least be asking the right question, and language

* Professor A. J. Heschel in *Essays presented to Leo Baeck*, 1954, p. 29 (Horovitz Publishing Co.).

about revelation would at least have meaning. To quote Professor Heschel again: "The man of our time may proudly declare: nothing is alien to me but everything divine is. This is the status of the Bible in modern life: it is a great answer, but we do not know the question any more. Unless we recover the question there is no hope of understanding the Bible."

In the teeth of the widespread assumption that religion and revelation are absurdity, "intellectual savagery", apologetics in the old argumentative sense is not of much avail. But a patient exposition of Biblical faith can hardly be without effect, and may in fact be the most powerful apologetic. Christianity affirms that there is a movement of God towards man; more generally, that the universe is intelligible and not unfriendly. That might stand indeed as the testimony of the rationalist stream in European thought as a whole, partly under Christian influence. But we must hasten to add that it is not the testimony of Eastern thought, which is fatalistic rather than rationalistic, and far less inclined to believe that there is any response to human questionings and strivings. In our Western tradition, however, a marked feature is the desire to attain knowledge, to make the universe yield up its secrets, to "voyage through strange seas of thought". This proceeds from the hypothesis, the conviction rather, that the knowledge is attainable and the secrets are waiting to be made known to the earnest inquirer. This impressive striving and reaching out stands equally to the credit of ancient philosophy and modern science. It may not be religious in the sense that its object is explicitly conceived as the knowledge of God, but the whole movement may fairly be regarded as divinely inspired and divinely rewarded. If God is the Author of all existence, the Ground of Reality, ultimate Being, then all truth is His truth, and man's discovery of it is at the same time His revelation.

In so far as God is Creator of the universe and Lord of human existence, the possibility that He has revealed Himself in more ways than those to which the Bible bears witness must be admitted. But our present concern is for the right valuation of the Bible record of revelation. We are now attempting to set in clear perspective the

element of Divine initiative and self-presentation in the central affirmations of the Bible. We must speak of the Biblical *revelation*, with full awareness that this is not simply another way of saying that during the centuries before Christ gifted men found out many useful truths about religion. We must insist that in this realm revelation and discovery are neither synonymous nor continuous; they are not the obverse and reverse of the identical coin. Unless we can allow that there was a "break-in" from God's side, we do not begin to do justice to Biblical statements. The objection may be made that this throws the door open to obscurantism, irrationalism and all kinds of nastiness. Nevertheless, it is necessary to grasp an essential concerning the Bible; a presupposition without which our appropriation of Biblical insights is ruled out from the start.

Can man by searching find out God? The answer to that question, according to the Biblical understanding of the nature of the God "with whom we have to do",* is NO. Not such is the Living God to whom the Bible introduces us. Tribute must be paid of course to the achievements of philosophy and science, the centuries-old searching of man both for God and for other aspects of truth. This will never fail to impress and astonish, whether one has in mind the individual thinker, a not inglorious Newton or Einstein, "a mind for ever voyaging through strange seas of thought alone", or whether the general progress of science is being considered. But such knowledge of the universe, and inferences about the God who made it, by ordinary ratiocination, is to be distinguished from the knowledge of God offered in the Bible. This means an opening of the door from within, i.e. by God, without waiting for the knock from outside, i.e. by the human seeker.

That is our axiom as we speak about Biblical truth. This is not a tenuous distinction, for everything turns on it. The revelation in the Bible is to be distinguished from the revelation of truth to the scientist. But as Christians we have to be more specific. We cannot be content with an impersonal conception of the ultimate goal. We are not really happy to talk about Being, Reality, the

* Hebrews iv. 13; the God we are talking about.

Absolute. Not that such conceptions are meaningless; but for those whose faith and thought are nourished on the Bible they fall short because they are impersonal; they are too cold and abstract to do justice to the great Object of Biblical faith. For that Object is really Subject; not It, but He; not *to theion*, as with the ancient Greeks, but *ho theos*; not deity, but God; yea more, Yahweh; yea more, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".* This sense of how much more God is than our conceptions of Him is the point of the oft-quoted words of Pascal, found on a paper hidden in his doublet as he lay dying: "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not of the scholars and philosophers. Serenity, Joy, Peace". The almost untranslatable Hebrew of Exodus iii. 14 is cleverly rendered in the Septuagint by a masculine participle: I am the (personally) existent One. The pull of Greek usage was in the direction of rendering by a neuter participle: Being (abstract and impersonal). Fortunately the Septuagint translators had sufficient realisation of what was distinctive of Biblical religion to avoid this pitfall, and to refuse to dehydrate the richness of the Hebrew thought in this key passage.

This needs to be grasped very clearly. The God to whom the Bible introduces us is "the living, i.e. personal, God". Our dealing with Him is of the nature of dialogue rather than philosophic reflection. Revelation, then, in the Biblical sense, is a personal matter, not academic, as with a set of truths or propositions. Much Christian theology, it is true, has caused confusion here. Both Catholic and Protestant thinkers have been at fault, and have made the mistake of treating the Gospel as if it were philosophy, or speaking of it in terms of truth, but forgetting that it is always *personal* truth. But recent Biblical scholarship has shown how misleading this is. God is not a principle, not even the principle of Love. The Johannine writer permits himself to state that "God is love", but on the whole the Bible prefers to say God *loves*.† The verb comes nearer than the noun to expressing the dynamic

* cf. Exodus iii. 13-15, vi. 2-8; John i. 1-18, v. 17-18, xv. 14-16, xvii.

† I John iv. 8 needs to be considered in relation to John iii. 16. See further Dodd's note on the passage quoted: *The Johannine Epistles* (Moffatt Commentary) pp. 109-13.

conception of God's nature which is the real basis of Biblical thought. He is the Living One who is known in His "mighty acts". He transcends man and the world, but not passively, for He comes forward, as it were; He shows His hand, intervenes savingly for mankind; in the classic phrase of the Bible itself, He speaks his *Word*.

Pause to consider the implications of the phrase: the Word of God. It has become so stereotyped in the language of the Church that we are partially blinded to its meaningfulness and splendour. It is by no means an obvious assumption that God should *speak*. A good deal of religion has got on very well without finding it necessary to conceive of God so. Serious and respectable people, for instance the Greek philosophers, and more recently the Deists of the eighteenth century, have not needed that hypothesis. One recalls the Deity of Aristotle, necessary as a causative principle, but not at all going out towards the world in fulfilment of a saving purpose, and certainly not troubled with concern for mankind. It is the Mover, but itself Unmoved; a proper object of human love, but feeling no emotion itself; "it moves [the world] as that which is being loved", i.e. not as itself loving. There was an impressive tradition in the ancient world about the divine silence. This did not carry the implication that gods did not exist; the ancients were not all atheists or Epicureans, even if they did hesitate to ascribe personality to deity. It seemed fitting to conceive deity enveloped in stillness. There were doubtless motives of reverence behind this; the dignity and majesty of divine beings seemed to require it. And when a modern poet writes of the "silence of eternity", is not that to some extent the same thought? The early Christian writer Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (A.D. 115), in a reference to the Incarnation speaks of Jesus "coming forth from Silence". He does not feel it necessary to give any explanation of the phrase. He does, it is true, sometimes use theological phrases which are too much for him (and many have imitated him in that!); but in this case the meaning was doubtless familiar to his readers, in the sense we have indicated. The notion is presupposed more than once in Scripture itself. Paul and Barnabas are acclaimed as gods on earth by the pagans of Lystra: Paul because

he is the chief speaker is thought to be Hermes, the messenger of the Olympians, but Barnabas is likened to the King of Olympus, the highest god, Zeus, because of his dignified silence. The implication is clear enough, although the narrative of Acts makes nothing of it.* The idea of the silence of Deity is not unimpressive. It implies the contrast between the noise and bustle of earth and the calm of Heaven; restless motion is the characteristic of things human, but things divine are still and undisturbable—the Mover of all is itself unmoved, as Aristotle held. The notion has even left traces in the Bible, as we have indicated, and Greek Christian theology was to develop it into its insistence on the divine impassibility. But the characteristic Biblical thought of God is otherwise, and we have drawn attention to the widespread ancient conception in order to bring out what is typically Biblical by way of contrast. The Bible proceeds from the quite contrary assumption that God *speaks*. He does not contain Himself within the silence of eternity, but projects Himself to communicate with man. He addresses His word to us. To the query of despair or timid agnosticism: Is there any word from the Lord? it confidently declares: There is!†

This is not a conventional idea, a necessary element in religion, for Buddhism and Hinduism maintain themselves without it. But it is distinctive of the Bible's message about God's initiative in redemption and concern for mankind. "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto our fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us in a Son."‡ He steps out of the silence, and out of the shadows which hide Him, and reveals Himself to men. The hidden God becomes God revealed. If we retain the classic title Word of God, we must mean no less than that God breaks silence, that is, does not wait for man to seek Him out or cry to Him, but Himself takes the initiative and makes Himself known. In other words we are committed to a conception of revelation, and moreover of revelation as more than an equivalent term for discovery, human thinking about or movement towards

* Acts xiv. 8-12. One might refer to the "still small voice" of I Kings xix. 12 which is actually "sound of quiet stillness" in the Hebrew.

† Jeremiah xxxvii. 17.

‡ Hebrews i. 1-2.

God. "In the beginning was the Word . . . all things were made through him . . . the Word became flesh." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son."* There is lack of clarity on this point. The doctrine of divine impassivity is very old; many have held that it is unworthy of God to reach out towards mankind, to be disturbed with the concern of love. It has even maintained its hold in Christian theology in spite of the basic conviction that God is in some sense manifest in the incarnation and passion of Christ.† Again, the mystic may hear God say "Thou hadst not sought Me if thou hadst not already found Me", implying not that God moves towards us, but that He is ubiquitous—a static conception. "Closer is He than breathing, nearer than hands or feet" is another expression that serves to remind us of God's nearness, and there is precious truth that we would not for a moment discount. But it is well to be on guard lest such expressions blur the distinctiveness of the Christian thought of God as One who is not, so to speak, always and everywhere available, but who has *made Himself available*, and has shown Himself willing to manifest Himself. He has done something which could not have been predicted; spoken a word to human beings who were accustomed to silence. There is a movement towards man on God's side. The Christian deity is the complete antithesis to Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, or Prime Cause of all, which is itself static and impersonal. The God of the Bible is dynamic and personal—not a Cause but a Creator. Much would-be Christian thinking is not emancipated from the Deism that stems from Aristotle, and modern science makes it difficult not to think statically, mechanistically and impersonally. Our thought of divine revelation proceeds from the axiom that there is something given from God's side that depends on Him, not us. It believes that God has made the first move, and that there is a religious datum which human reasoning would not

* John i. 1-14; I John iv. 10.

† cf. *Theologia Germanica*, one of the classics of medieval mysticism, Chapter X: "God is without needs, actionless, apart, above all things . . . immovable and takes part in nothing. God in eternity is without pain, suffering and trouble, and lets nothing of all that is or befalls grieve or hurt Him at all. But where God is man it is otherwise."

have excogitated for itself. So far from waiting to be approached by man, He initiates man's search for Him. Human reasoning is not self-propelled; its motivation comes from God. Revelation and discovery are not the obverse and reverse of the same coin; so that if you are religious or pre-scientific in mentality you use the term "revelation", where modern thinkers use the term "discovery", both parties meaning the same thing. The Biblical affirmations "Thus saith the Lord" imply very much more than that.*

Scholars have sometimes made a distinction between general and special revelation. By the former is meant what is to be learnt about God in Nature and history. The term "natural revelation" may be used in the same sense. The distinction must not be held too rigidly, for by either mode revelation derives from the same Author, who is understood as both transcendent over His creation and immanent within it. But there may be degrees of effectiveness or intelligibility; in one sense the whole universe is a revelation of God.† To quote Temple: "all is alike revelation, but not all is equally revelatory of the divine character". In order to say all that is necessary for our argument at this point we may be content to quote more fully a notable paragraph from the same volume of Gifford Lectures: "Either all occurrences are in some degree a revelation of God or else there is no such revelation at all . . . only if God is revealed in the rising of the sun in the sky can He be revealed in the rising of a son of man from the dead; only if He is revealed in the history of the Syrians and Philistines can He be revealed in the history of Israel . . . only if nothing is profane can anything be sacred. It is necessary to stress with all possible emphasis this universal quality of revelation in general before going on to discuss the various modes of particular revelation. For the latter, if detached from the former, loses its root in the rational coherence of the world, and consequently becomes itself a superstition and a fruitful source of superstitions. But if all existence is a revelation of God, as it must be if He is the ground of its existence, and if the

* On the relation of Word and Bible see below in Chapter V on Interpretation.

† cf. Romans i. 19-20. We agree that "the age of science is one of the great ages of revelation" (N. Goodall: *One Man's Testimony*, p. 44).

God thus revealed is personal, then there is more ground in reason for expecting particular revelations than for denying them.”*

By special revelation is meant revelation through prophetic men, and especially through Christ Himself; in other words, through the Bible, with its particular witness to God's mighty acts for the salvation of man. It is better not to follow Roman Catholicism in extending it to include revelation through the Church. The above schematism will appear to some as too neat, and as not really corresponding to the evidence we are considering. For instance, revelation through history may be taken to belong just as much to special as to general revelation. Our main concern here, however, is with the significance of the Bible for revelation and we need not dispute about terms as long as the uniqueness of the Bible is recognised. The common distinction of general and special revelation, to which we have referred, is useful in that it conserves the special place of the Bible without denying that there has been revelation through other channels. It seems to us essential to admit this, against influential trends in present-day theology. On the other hand, the distinction between revelation in phenomena and revelation through personality, which might satisfy some scholars, does not get us very far and certainly does not do justice to the claims of the Bible. Similarly with the antithesis of natural and revealed religion.† Brunner in his book *Revelation and Reason*‡ speaks of “revelation in the creation” as the presupposition of the revelation in Jesus Christ. It corresponds roughly to what others call general revelation. It is a more specific term, though less inclusive in its range. It means that man is related to God, a dependent and responsible being, and therefore “inexcusable” (Romans i. 20) in his sin. Full saving significance attaches only to the full revelation in Jesus. Biblical passages which Brunner relies on for his concept of revelation in the creation are such as: Genesis i-ii, Psalms xix, civ; Isaiah xl; Job passim; Romans i. 19-20,

* W. Temple: *Nature, Man and God*, p. 306 f.

† “. . . natural religion is that in which man finds God; revealed religion is that in which God finds man.” Martineau, quoted by Fairbairn: *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 494.

‡ See pp. 59 f., 77.

ii. 14-15; John i. 4-9; Acts xiv. 17, xvii. 26-7; and many parables of Jesus. This idea of revelation, and particularly the affirmation of the supreme or final significance of Christ, is offensive to those who operate with evolutionary categories of thought. There is no absolute truth, it is held, and no final religion; but Christianity may be accepted as the best that has been evolved so far. This type of relativistic thinking was more in vogue a generation or two ago, and one of its best Christian exponents was Ernst Troeltsch.* It is now rightly abandoned, because it cannot do justice to the central affirmation of Christianity and the Bible that in Christ God was so completely revealed that no extra revelation of His saving purpose is needed. The conviction has finality in it, and no modification is possible; and some intransigence in the testimony is unavoidable. We humbly reiterate with the first Apostles: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved". "No one has ever seen God: the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" . . . "I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers. I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture."†

The faith once for all delivered to the saints must be maintained, without contempt for other faiths, but firmly and without modification. Of the claim of other religions we may say with Brunner: "none of them is without its impressive truth, and yet none of them is the truth; for their truth is Jesus Christ"‡

With regard to the characteristic Biblical emphasis on revelation presented in a series of saving *acts*, we have to add that the act needs the prophetic word to interpret it, and without such interpretation the acts could not have become effective as revelation. (Our doctrine of inspiration has to take account of this, and not be exclusively concerned with *verbal* inspiration.) The providence of

* See his article on Revelation in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (first edition). The other side is represented firmly in Kraemer's great apologetic and theology for modern missions: *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*.

† Acts iv. 12; John i. 18, x. 7-9 (R.S.V.).

‡ *Revelation and Reason*, p. 270.

God had, so to speak, to arrange that there should be not only the intervention in history, but also the inspired interpreter, the Moses or Jeremiah or Christ or apostolic witness, if there was to be any awakening of faith and realisation that God is at work in His world for the good of man His creature. The book of Jonah bears its own curious testimony to this. Too much has been made of it as a universalist tract protesting against the nationalist exclusiveness of post-exilic Judaism, and the detail of the "great fish" has been grossly exaggerated by the literal-minded. In addition to the specially inspired person who can point out to his contemporaries the hand of God in events, there is need also of the believing heart that will "call to mind" and "meditate" on these events with their revealed significance.* We may add that there was revelation through words as well as through acts in the Bible; for instance, prophetic passages spoken without reference to actual events; e.g. Isaiah i-v generally speaking, as contrasted with vi-x; Isaiah lv; Ezekiel xl-xlvi, and many of the purely predictive utterances. There is a sense in which the perfect unity of act and word is given in Christ.

We cannot be drawn here into the delicate question of the analysis of the prophetic consciousness, and of the mode of reception of revelation.† This is related to the question of the nature of faith and its connection with reason. We have emphasised the personal quality of revelation and this implies that faith is of the nature of personal response. If this is realised, there is no need to define it as blind acceptance of truths which reason forbids. The antithesis between faith and reason is a false one. So far from suspecting reason, religion summons it to its highest use. Not reason, but prejudice, is the foe of faith. "Revelation does not extinguish the human reason, but claims it wholly for the process of reception."‡ Reason is a divine, not a devilish gift to man, and piety needs to use it properly, not to spurn it. The function of reason is to make things

* Psalms lxxvii. 11-15.

† cf. H. Knight: *The Hebrew Prophetic Consciousness*, pp. 91-120; H. W. Robinson: *Redemption and Revelation*, pp. 95-157.

‡ Brunner: *Revelation and Reason*, p. 16. Again, p. 15: "Revelation is always a mystery, but never magic."

intelligible and to penetrate mysteries. And there is even a kind of moral obligation about this, which makes it appear almost sinful if people are content with ignorance and partial knowledge. Even religion with its claim to possess divine revelation should not withdraw itself from reason's scrutiny; what indeed is more worthy to be reasoned about? Nevertheless there are religious verities which do not yield their secret to the unaided reason. It is not irreverent to try to understand them by reason, but it is not possible to understand them fully. For that purpose reason needs to be illumined, and inspired, by faith. In some senses the revelation that faith can offer may be described as the goal of reason's quest. It is wiser to say *Intelligo ut credam* ("Reasoning makes faith possible for me") than to say *Credo ut intelligam* ("My faith makes reasoning possible"). For "reason is to faith but overture".* We prefer that poetic insight of Dr. Micklem's to the statement to which Brunner once committed himself: "Reason has certainly a great share in faith, but so participates that it recognises rationalism as the fundamental sin. For rationalism is reason without God, but faith is reason healed through the word of God".†

What part then does faith play, granting that it has reason for a partner, not a rival? How does it advance in its awareness of divine things? We are concerned of course not for the advanced and specially gifted in the matter of faith and intellect, but for the average man, to whom we must affirm that God wills to be revealed just as much as to the *élite*. Let us then take a case of prophetic insight which does not depend on abnormal psychical experience or mystic vision. Jeremiah, perhaps during the course of his morning stroll, has paused at the potter's house. Doubtless they pass the time of day and go on to discuss the news. Are the Babylonian armies on the move again? How powerful are their new chariots? What chance of survival is there for little Judah? (This news of six centuries before Christ is not so completely irrelevant to our own time: we have only to substitute "modern air forces" for

* Dr. N. Micklem in his volume of poems entitled *The Labyrinth*.

† Article on "Reason in Religion" in *International Review of Missions*, July 1938, p. 339.

“Babylonian” and “bombs” for “chariots” and the meaning is identical.) All the time the potter’s wheel is turning, and Jeremiah is watching the sensitive progress of the fingers of the potter. Suddenly the potter gets excited as the conversation proceeds and one careless movement spoils the shape of the jug he is moulding. In a moment he has squashed the clay together and started again. This becomes significant for the prophet standing by: “the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the Lord came to me: O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done, says the Lord.”* Now what is going on in Jeremiah’s mind? An idea occurred to him, one may say; “a sudden inspiration,” says Skinner.† But that must be analysed a little deeper. At least we must say: a new idea, an idea from outside his normal consciousness, a controlling of his reflection as he strolls home by a power outside himself whom he knows as the Lord his God, Israel’s God, the Lord of the destinies of men and nations. The general inference from this kind of experience, which is constant in the pages of the Hebrew prophets, is that stimulus from outside, in fact from God, does impinge upon man’s normal thought, his observation of everyday occurrences on the world around, reflection upon experience, etc. The breaking-in of God is much more than a possibility; it is a common fact. Not all are sensitive to it. Religious education should promote sensitiveness, and unfortunately most of us decline from sensitiveness to hard-heartedness in this respect. But the Bible sets before us again and again the glorious possibility, and the prophet and the mystic are those who have sharpened and developed their power of receiving divine quickening. The illumination of their minds is not for their private edification, but for the guidance of all who will listen and learn. Divine self-communication is a spiritual fact. Its first reception may be the prerogative of the prophet, but it is held in trust for his fellow worshippers and indeed his fellow men. And if his contemporaries should prove obtuse, later generations may be

* Jeremiah xviii. 1-11.

† Skinner: *Prophecy and Religion*, p. 162.

more receptive. "If God ever speaks to the conscience of any man, He speaks at the same moment to all men."*

There is of course an element of mystery beyond our fathoming in the fact that when God speaks man can receive and transmit the message; God's Word can become human words, better, submits to transmission through the words of human speakers and writers. Doubtless God takes a risk in thus committing His message to human agents, but this need not be viewed negatively, but rather as an aspect of the divine purpose, thus determining that the revelation shall be conveyed to recipients whose life is meaningless without it. The human factor in this divine-human communication is not therefore to be set in too rigid contrast with the divine (as Barthian dialectic does); but, to quote Florovsky: "the human tongue does not lose its natural features to become a vehicle of divine revelation. If we want the divine word to ring clear, our tongue is not to leave off being human. What is human is not swept away by divine inspiration, it is only *transfigured*. The supernatural does not destroy what is natural: *hyper physin* does not mean *para physin*. The human idiom does not betray or belittle the splendour of revelation, it does not bind the power of God's word."†

There is naturally a great possibility both of deception and self-deception, and not all who have claimed to convey divine messages have in fact done so, as Jeremiah well knew.‡ The false claim to supernatural revelations is a "very horrid thing", as Bishop Butler once remarked to John Wesley. But the prophet does not lose his authority because false prophets also are to be found; nor is mysticism debunked because some mystics have been unintelligible. Many may be aware of the mystery of God's action without being able to interpret it to others, or to find a "luminous image".§ It is granted to some to have knowledge or intuition of truth and of God while the majority lack this power of intuition.

* Fairbairn: *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 496.

† *Biblical Authority for Today*, p. 172 (ed. Richardson and Schweitzer, S.C.M., 1951).

‡ cf. Jeremiah xxxviii.

§ A. M. Farrer: *The Glass of Vision*, p. 42 f.

One man may be on the summit of a mountain watching the sunrise while the valley below is still in the shadows before the dawn. The sun is shining, though many are still in darkness. There is a revealing God, though tracts of His creation have not yet felt the warmth or seen the glory of His presence. But He has His media and His interpreters, and their testimony is available and may become meaningful to all.

To sum up: There is the objective fact of God's revelation. But we can testify, with the Bible open before us, that it does not remain objective. God has seen to it that the revelation carries its reception with it. It creates the relationship in which there is not only the revealed and revealing Object, but also the perceiving Subject, i.e. man who has faith, who becomes a "believer". From the human, subjective, side we define faith as not simply perception of an Object but as being drawn into a personal relationship with the One who reveals Himself. This, which is pre-eminently true in the sphere of religion, is also of general relevance, for all truth is self-authenticating. It carries within itself the power of creating conviction in its percipient, and this perception may not unfairly be compared to what the Bible calls faith.* "In and through the Bible the God who seeks man and the man who seeks God meet in unmistakable recognition and response."†

If then we are briefly to summarise the content of revelation in the Christian view of it, our obvious reply is the Bible. But that is too facile, unless we are more specific. The answer was uncritically accepted down to the time of the Reformation; we are now required to indicate what it is in the Bible which gives it this significance. "The authority that belongs to the Bible belongs to it not as a book, but as a revelation."‡

* cf. A. V. Murray (*Truth and Certainty*, p. 21), on appreciation of truth as an act of faith, requiring no external authority or proof.

† P. L. Lehmann in *Theology Today*, October 1946, p. 341.

‡ Fairbairn (*Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 505), writing as long ago as 1893, discerned that this was one of the main perceptions gained through critical work on the Scriptures. Revelation is prior to the Bible and causative of it. Strictly, the Bible is the *record* of revelation. The nature of Biblical authority will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter.

What understanding of God and man is there offered which man could not have thought out for himself? Can there be a summary of Biblical revelation? To this we must answer: Christ. The Word of God is essentially Christ, not the Bible as a whole. To quote Fairbairn again: "The Bible is a revelation, not because it has been canonised, but because it contains the history of the Redeemer and our redemption". To define revelation in terms of Christ means Christ together with the prophetic witness which points forward to Him and the general Old Testament narrative which constitutes the framework in which alone He fits significantly; and also Christ including the apostolic witness to Him throughout the New Testament. Christ as the centre and focal point, that is, with the record of what led up to Him, and of what He effected in those who were united to Him in the new society of faith which he founded; Christ as the one in whom for the first time in human history the sovereignty of God was fully embodied, and through whom the embodiment of the divine sovereignty remains a permanent factor in human experience. Christ in the Biblical setting and framework means no less than this.

It need not be feared that the uniqueness of Christ is prejudiced by this extension of the effects of His incarnation, nor that His "finished work" is represented as unfinished. There is indeed a sense in which it is a finished work, and He alone could have achieved it. But there is also a sense in which it is unfinished, in so far as He himself continues it through His second body, the Church. The whole is to be understood as the saving activity of God. We find support in Brunner again, when he writes: "The Apostolic word itself shares in the uniqueness and historical exclusiveness of the historical revelation of Christ. . . . Had there been no Apostle the story of Jesus would not have become a revelation to humanity; it would not have become the Word of God. It would have echoed and re-echoed like a sound which passes unheard in a primeval forest. It would have been like a bridge which had been begun from one side of a river, but which never reached the other side. In the Apostolic Word . . . the historical revelation of Christ

is completed. . . . The Apostle stands on the border line where the history of revelation becomes the history of the Church; he has a share in both; he is the final point of the history of revelation as something unique; and he is the starting point of the history of the Church as a new continuous entity, based upon revelation.”* We find the same emphasis in Professor John Knox’s small but important book *Criticism and Faith*, where the Event, i.e. the supreme saving act of God, is interpreted to include the activity of the Spirit in the New Testament Church. But this goes too far and obscures the distinctiveness of Christ. We must not allow His uniqueness to be minimised. Christ was not the first Christian, but the Founder of Christianity. There is a clear dividing line between Christ and His followers, including even the Apostles, and between the Resurrection and the Acts of the Apostles; a dividing line, but not a full stop! Christ remains in a unique sense the Revealer of the saving purpose of God, who is His Father and ours.

This is not a conception of the Bible which implies inerrancy in the narrative. But it is a treatment of the Bible which takes it with full seriousness as the record of the revelation of God, culminating in Christ as the perfect Word of God to men. Christ is the revealer of God not as primal Creator, nor as transcendent Deity, ultimate Fate, President of the Immortals, or what you will; but as the Creator who re-creates, who is determined to remake humanity and to make the End as the Beginning, i.e. perfect, in contrast to the imperfection, finitude, brokenness that characterises human existence as we know it. Christ therefore is made meaningful in the Bible with reference to man’s pathetic failures to attain perfection and achieve his full destiny, either individually (saints) or corporately (Israel). The Biblical revelation thus includes a demonstration of human nature, in its degradation in the life of ancient Israel, but also in its full potentiality, in the Messiah, in Christ, in the new Israel. It contains the truest teaching about the human predicament, as well as the assurance of salvation from that predicament. Prophetic insights, confirmed by Christ and re-emphasised by Paul and John,

* *Revelation and Reason*, p. 122 f.

have this double reference to sin and grace, law and Gospel, judgment and mercy. The particular circumstances referred to may be those of 586 B.C. or A.D. 30; they may be corporate or individual. But they become of universal import, and contemporary. As such they are made to stand in relief by that peculiar flash of event plus interpretation which constitutes revelation.

CHAPTER III

THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

IT may no longer be true of the people of England, as it was in the sixteenth century according to the historian J. R. Green, that they are "the people of a book, and that book the Bible". But it is still the case that regular Bible reading is felt by the majority of Christians to be obligatory. It may no longer be true that the Bible is the world's "best seller"; but its sales are still high, and in the number of languages into which it has been translated it far outdistances any other book, and a new version into English even of a part of it can reckon on being a publishing event, as has recently appeared in the case of the Penguin version of the Gospels by E. V. Rieu, and the translation of the Gospels and Pauline Epistles by J. B. Phillips. All this is evidence not merely of the literary charm of the Bible, but of its uniqueness; in other words, of its authority. Why do so many people still want to read it; why do Christian believers feel that they ought to read it? The devout Jew doubtless feels the same obligation, but does a reading Moslem feel so about the Koran, or a committed Marxist about *Das Kapital*?

Two answers are possible: (a) The Bible is God's book—in classic phrase, it is the Word of God; (b) The Bible is Christ's book, in the sense that it is indispensable for the knowledge of Jesus Christ. These answers are distinguishable, but by no means exclusive. We shall deal with them in order.

The authority of the Bible can be fruitfully discussed only in the context of the authority of God. If the Bible cannot claim any stake there, it has no authority that ranks it higher than any other ancient book. Inspiration may be allowed to it, just as the great tragedians of Athens may be regarded as inspired, but no one would have

ventured to speak of it as infallible. That is only done if it professes to mediate to man something of the divine. But the Bible has always been so regarded in the Church. It comes as the work of many authors, and in the case of some of them their literary talent, as distinct from their divine inspiration, is rated highly. But the differentia of the Bible is in this factor of the divine inspiration of the writers, that is to say, in their primary motivation from God. Some of course will deny this claim; but this claim has always been made for the Bible by those who regard it as authoritative. It is in the last analysis God's word, not man's; not even the Christian man's. A Protestant Christian, in contrast with his Catholic fellow, is inclined to sharpen this antithesis by asserting that the Bible is not even the Church's word, but only God's. "The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or Church; but wholly upon God (who is Truth it self) the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God."* As the great Calvin had said, God is the author or speaker in Scripture.† And even the Roman Catholic agrees about this, though inclining to different phraseology, e.g. that God is the principal cause, the human writers the instrumental cause.

There is a great deal to be said about the precise meaning of inspiration. The whole question of the Bible's authority narrows down into the question of how it is mediated to man, and this we shall consider later. We simply record here the opinion that the Bible's authority is an aspect of the authority of God. Truism as it may seem, it needs to be asserted here, both because of its logical priority, and also as a safeguard against mere Bibliolatry and excessive emphasis on the letter of Scripture. Moreover, as will be pointed out in our discussion of Interpretation, some modern criticism is open to the charge of having become oblivious of the fact that the Bible derives its authority ultimately from God.

The second answer we mentioned revolves round the testimony

* The Savoy Declaration of the Congregational Churches in England (1658). This article of the Declaration agrees to the very letter with the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of 1647. † *Institutes*, Vol. I, vii. 4: *hominum ministerio, ab ipsissimo Dei ore.*

of the Bible to Christ. Christianity, as the very name implies, is Christ-centred, and naturally, in the actual daily business of living out the Christian religion, the standard and motive power must be the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible is relevant here in so far as it makes this possible; in other words, in so far as the authority of the Bible and the authority of Christ are synonymous, or at least overlap. The Bible is the indispensable means of learning about Christ in that high sense which leads to committal, personal contact. This is the language of poetry and devotion, admittedly; but if the Christian is debarred from using that language, his mouth is closed; his pen may be ready in his hand, but the inkpot has no ink! It is affirmed then that the Bible's significance, and indeed authority, lies in this, that Christ is to be found there, and, in a sense, only there; for apart from it men cannot keep contact with Him. "Search the Scriptures . . . for these are they which testify of Me" (John v. 39). Or as a hymn writer puts it:

" Here the Redeemer's welcome voice
Spreads heavenly peace around. . . .
Teach me to love Thy sacred word
And view my Saviour there."

If we are not in the garden, like Mary, we shall not see Christ as He comes resplendent from the open tomb. Mary was in the right place, while the other disciples were away in Jerusalem, otherwise occupied. The argument for the Bible is that it is the right place, the sacred spot where Christ appears to those who need Him. And their business is to be there where this meeting can take place. "I go to the Bible because I feel how much darkness surrounds you and me; because I believe that He in whom all light dwells is ready to meet us there."*

But, it may be argued, this begs the question. We are not talking about the "devotional" use of the Bible, but about the proper critical study of it; our concern is not for spiritual enlightenment in the old-fashioned sense, but for knowledge. This is a fair objection. We admit that the distinction of "devotional" reading from

* F. D. Maurice, as quoted by Wand: *The Authority of the Scriptures* (title page).

ordinary reading of the Bible ("educational", "academic", or what you will) was a direct outcome of the Higher Criticism. Before the critical movement got under way there was no hiatus between study and edification. The Bible was divine, and whether you were reading it privately or expounding it publicly in pulpit or schoolroom, it was all the same; no distinction could be made between the human or historical aspect of it and the divine or religious aspect. The distinction was inevitable, and need not be regretted. What now needs to be attempted is a reformulation of the terms of the distinction. The real contrast is not between devotional reading and reading for pleasure or study, but between the *Christian's* and the *non-Christian's* reading. To the Christian the Bible is the book which testifies to the Lord, and reminds him of a relationship which means more than anything else to him. The Christian can only read the Bible devotionally. But this does not mean uncritically. It means that he is a committed person and can never take the detached point of view of mere inspection and interest. He is not a solicitor examining title deeds for a client; the document being examined is the title deed of his own house, where he lives and belongs. Thus there may be said to be two kinds of people, and parallel with them two classes of Bible readers. There are those who take Christ as the supreme authority for their lives, and those who do not. Those who have found, and been persuaded, that in Christ are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden can never go back on that conviction; and their Bible reading is always a looking-for and a looking-at Christ—never a weighing of pros and cons between Christ and, say, Mohammed or Shakespeare or Karl Marx or M. Jean-Paul Sartre. They are not general believers, "honorary members of all religions", with option to withdraw. Their belief is focused upon Christ, and that is an exclusive allegiance.

Christ is to be found in the Bible, and in the Bible alone, we have argued. Is that claiming too much? Is it not being illiberal and obscurantist, lowering the authority of great Christian writers and prophets like Augustine and Calvin and Pascal and Kierkegaard? No, for there is a line of demarcation which should be quite firmly drawn. There are the Christian Scriptures in a place by themselves,

and Christian Dantes and Miltons do not belong to that category. This is not only because they are later in date, but because they are secondary in quality and character. Not necessarily by literary standards; indeed, considered as literature, these and other Christian authors may rank higher than the Biblical writers. The superb achievement in literary merit of some modern translators of Scripture—our own Authorised Version and the recent version of Mgr. Ronald Knox, for example—has curiously obscured the essential facts here. Our primary concern, however, is not for literary excellence, but for the presentation of Christ, the power to make Him living and contemporary and real. It is not denied that many Christians—preachers from John Chrysostom to John Wesley, theologians like St. Thomas and Karl Barth, simple Christians like Hermas in the second century or Billy Graham in the twentieth, brilliant laymen like Tertullian in the Early Church and T. R. Glover and Dorothy Sayers in our own time—have made powerful witness to Christ, with literary effect and without it. We may even venture to describe them as inspired, though that would be a derivative use of the adjective.* If any Christian, ancient or modern, succeeds in making his contemporaries see the glory of Christ, it is because he himself has first learned it from the Bible. That is our main point. The Bible has primacy, and is indispensable as the touchstone of what is truly Christian, and as the fountain-head of the knowledge of Christ. We were not there when He walked the hillsides of Galilee, or faced his critics in the Jerusalem temple. We did not stand by the cross, nor witness the open tomb. What bond then is there between the Christian and his Lord? We are not content with the memory of a dead teacher, nor can we claim to have direct contact with Him by contemplation or ecstasy, as the mystics do.† Our only sure means of apprehending Him is the

* "The inspiration of the Bible is the substance of which the inspiration of Virgil, Shakespeare and Goethe is the shadow." Wand: *The Authority of the Scriptures*, 1950, p. 53.

† We are not forgetting the mystical experience of union with Christ which according to Paul takes the form of a going through the experiences of the Lord, even His crucifixion (cf. Galatians ii. 20; Romans vi. 4; Colossians iii. 4). In this sense the believer was "there when they crucified my Lord", as the negro spiritual suggests. See also Marsh: *The Fulness of Time*, p. 148 f.

literature written under the immediate impression of His life on earth, that series of events in Galilee and Judea which constitute the total Event of supreme significance.

In this sense we maintain that in the last analysis knowledge of Christ is beyond our reach, apart from the Bible. That is a Reformation insight. It means not only that for our knowledge of Christ we do not rest ultimately on the Church's pronouncements or traditions; it also implies that there is no *final* authority in the imaginations or private experiences of outstanding Christians or the august coterie of those called saints and mystics. We shall not despise the statements of such gifted ones, for they are more experienced travellers on this royal road than we are. But here as elsewhere the rule applies that the secondary authorities are to be set aside when the primary authority is available; that is, the Bible itself. There Christ is to be found at first hand, as it were; and its authority is none other than the authority of Christ Himself. The Bible is essentially *Christuszeugnis*, testimony to Christ.* Or, in the language of the Reformers, Christ is *Dominus et Rex Scripturæ*, Scripture's Master and King.

This may seem to require an addition which Reformed theology has always made: that such apprehension of Christ presupposes the aid of the Holy Spirit, ordinary reading and study of Scripture, however earnest and unprejudiced, not being capable of attaining this goal. Full Christian faith is ultimately a gift, and it is given when the one who contemplates the page of Scripture is illumined by the Spirit. This illumination is referred to, in the classic phrase minted by Calvin, as *testimonium Spiritus sancti internum*, the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. We are of course in agreement with that. But even before we come to the consideration of how the Spirit interprets Scripture to the believer, there is a point to be made concerning the uniqueness of Scripture as distinct from all other literature. Apart from the subjective factor of the reader's attempt to understand, the Scripture in itself, objectively, contains the record of the ministry of Christ, and is the only primary source for it. This sets it in a category of its own. It is the written deposit of

* cf. the title of Vischer's four-volume work *Das Christuszeugnis des alten Testaments*.

events which were of unique revelatory significance, whether that be conceived philosophically as the impinging of the Eternal upon Time, or theologically as the Incarnation of the Son of God, or in a more moral reference as the inauguration of a new order in which man's redemption comes within reach because new moral resources are available. All these ways of conceiving the central Event are suggested in the New Testament, and we have no occasion here to consider in detail any one of them. Our sole purpose now is to point out that what makes the Bible unique is its indispensability for the knowledge of that divine invasion of history; that is, its record of the life of Christ with the earlier events in Israel's history which provide the framework in which alone it can be seen in true perspective and without distortion. The Bible's authority, as well as its uniqueness, thus lies in its capacity to make Christ intelligible to men. It is derivative from Christ, as the Church also is, and the real authority that may be claimed by either is the authority of Christ. But we must add: God was in Christ; Christ is the revealer of God. He is one with His Father, and yet the Father is greater than He. The whole work of which He is the agent is God's work of redemption. In this way we bridge over the distinction we made at the beginning of this chapter between the Bible as God's book and the Bible as Christ's book. It is a unified testimony, and a unified authority.

At the time of the Reformation the great issue was that of authority. Men argued about Pope or Church only in so far as they were channels of authority. Reactionary Romans and pioneering Protestants; impetuous Luther and logical Calvin, as well as their equally-intransigent opponents on the Pope's side, were all agreed about that. Our English Henry and his untheological henchmen contrived to make the matter appear as a political one; but the real factors were on a deeper level, and the political changes were the outcome of decisions in matters of religion. The Reformation turned on the question not of the Pope's authority, nor of the Church's authority; nor even of the Bible's authority. It obscures the main issue to say, as is so often said, that the Reformers put the Bible where Catholics put the Church. Both

sides were at one in perceiving that what had been raised was the question of the *ultimate* authority in religion, viz. the authority of God Himself. That of course becomes the question of how this authority is made known to men, and on this question Reformers and Roman Catholics went into different lobbies. Against the traditional Catholic affirmation that it is the Church which mediates God to men the Reformers objected that the Church was too corrupt to do so; moreover, even a reformed Church could not, *qua* institution, aspire to such mediation. The Church's task, when reformed, was to preach the WORD, God's Word; that alone was the authority to be invoked. And the divinely appointed source of the WORD was Scripture, which Catholicism had with various subterfuges hidden and obscured. The place which that corrupt institution, the medieval Church, had arrogated to itself properly belonged therefore to the Bible and to nothing else. (In this sense the Reformation did substitute the Bible for the Church.) As for the Roman Catholic claim that the bishop of Rome was the mouthpiece of God, could anything be more perverse and arrogant? No individual, no prophet, no institution could be so thought of. This Luther asserted with great clarity and force.

We must not bog down our discussion in the sixteenth century. Our justification for referring at this length to the Reformation is that the points which were then raised are still relevant. Real insights were then gained which have to be pondered, and maintained, in the spiritual climate of our own time. That climate is a colder, rougher one. There is a storm of secularism and materialistic humanism now blowing, which the sixteenth century did not know, and which in fact no generation of mankind has previously experienced. The winds are blowing, the floods have risen, and are beating upon the houses which man's spirit has erected for itself, and already those built on insufficient foundations have been hurled down, and great has been the fall of them. The Church too is rocking on its foundations, and is having to look to those foundations, as it did in the sixteenth century. The challenge today is greater than it was then, for what is being asked is not: Church or Bible?, but: Why Bible? Why any supernatural authority

at all? Not the claim of the Church, but the nature of the Gospel is now called in question; not the media of revelation, but revelation itself. Supernatural factors are widely denied, and the common assumption is that there is no source of authority and no revelation of higher standards for human life outside the stream of history itself and the sum total of human experience. The issue is between humanism in all its varieties—scientific or philosophic, nihilist and pessimistic, like Sartre, or hopeful and optimistic, like Camus—and the transcendentalism of Christian faith, with its assurance that there is light from on high for man's darkness, and its warning that man's authority is not in himself, but in God.

We may distinguish four types of answer to this question of authority as it is posed before our uncertain generation. There is first the attitude of the literalist which is tantamount to a denial that a problem exists. Scripture is divine and conveys all the guidance man needs and it can be relied on absolutely; man has only to accept it unquestioningly. Its words are quite literally God's words, and no place is allowed for the possibility of mistake by the human medium, i.e. the actual writer. On this view there is no mediation at all. The writer was completely controlled, and his inspiration was simply this mechanical control, and extends to the detailed words. Thus the written word, and also, in the case of the prophets, the original spoken word, is infallible. This conception of authority is confined within the narrow groove of the infallibility or inerrancy of the record.

Let us remember that this literalism is also the Roman Catholic view with regard to the Bible and is not confined to Protestant Fundamentalists. God is the author of the Bible and therefore there is no error of any kind in it, and no possibility of error. This was stated in the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* of 1893, reaffirming the dogmas of the Council of Trent and the Vatican on scriptural inspiration. (Loisy was removed as a result from his professorship at the Institut Catholique in Paris.) Just before that a liberal group within the French Church had been trying to make room for less rigid orthodoxy; they wanted it defined that the Bible is inerrant on "faith and morals", but not on purely scientific or historical matters. We can see what they were driving at: they were fighting

a good cause (and we must remember they had a dogma of Inspiration to get round, apart from the Bible itself). Their argument was easy to answer: where was the line to be drawn? It made the Bible a mosaic of infallibilities and fallibilities, as Loisy himself perceived. His own words are worth quoting, because they put the real point about the Bible more positively:

“ Il ne s’agit plus de savoir si la Bible contient des erreurs, mais bien de savoir ce que la Bible contient de vérité.”*

The official view of the Roman Church has also been stated in the Decree of a Biblical Commission (1909) and more recently in the encyclicals *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943) and *Humani Generis* (1950). The supreme Pontiff is concerned about the growing interest in a spiritual or symbolic sense of Scripture, and these last two encyclicals warn against going too far in this direction and relying on imagination or mere piety. It is safer to keep to the plain literal sense, and to use only the recommended textbooks and commentaries! As the Jesuit scholar Professor Lambert, of Louvain, writes in an article on *Humani Generis*: “ It is the joy of the Catholic exegete to know that in the analogy of faith, the tradition of the Church and the guidance of his superiors if he studies them thoroughly [*les directives de l’autorité bien comprises*] he finds the guarantees he needs if his exegetical work is to lead to firm and reliable results.”† For a recent statement on the Catholic side of the insistence on the literal accuracy of the Bible in every detail we may quote Professor Lambert again, from the same article: “ All the books written by the Church in the canon of the inspired Scriptures have God for principal cause and the sacred writer [*l’hagiographe*] for instrumental cause. Divine causation, on which inspiration rests, was in operation during the whole composition of each book, from the first to the last line, from Genesis to Revelation. The formal result of this inspiration is inerrancy which extends over as large a field as inspiration itself.”‡

* See Vidler: *Modernism in the Roman Church*, p. 85.

† *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 1951, p. 227.

‡ *ibid.*, p. 225.

Secondly, there is the further Roman Catholic answer, which, in addition to the literalist presuppositions we have just mentioned, exalts the authority of the Church. The Church guarantees the Bible, and declares that every Christian doctrine must be proved by reference to it. But the Bible's authority is subtly conflated with the authority of the Church itself. The Protestant feels bound to make a distinction here, and to subordinate the Church's authority to that of the Bible. But the Catholic draws no such distinction. The Church speaks directly in the name of God, and there can be no divergence between this and the Scriptures rightly understood. The Church is in charge of truth (*traditio veritatis*), and is the infallible guardian of an infallible book and its correct interpretation.

Thirdly, we have the intellectualist answer, the attitude of the philosophers, which emphasises the power and the rights of the human reason. Not all philosophers speak like Plato of eternal truths, noumenal, non-sensible realities which it is the privilege of mind to contemplate; but all are agreed that in everything that concerns knowledge and duty the reason has a decisive part to play; and many would argue that it is his reason alone to which man can look for guidance. There may be an anti-supernatural and anti-religious bias here, but not necessarily so. This intellectualist emphasis was not ineffectual at the time of the Reformation, and was as a matter of fact the contribution of the Renaissance to that movement. Luther's suspicion of reason as the "Devil's bride" is well known; a similar prejudice had been known in the Church as far back as Tertullian,* and is still in evidence today. But the great theologians have realised that reason must not be outlawed from their province. More particularly, in connection with the subject of this book, the modern critical approach to the Bible obviously presupposes the right of reason to a place in religion and theology.

Fourthly, there is mysticism or pietism, with its appeal to inward experience and the guidance of the Spirit. Not all men, but some indubitably, it is affirmed, have a direct awareness of, or contact with, God. To those who have the faculty of reception the Spirit reveals truth and whispers divine imperatives which bear the

* To say nothing of Paul, e.g. in I Corinthians i-ii.

stamp of authority upon them. This has a long history in the Christian Church. It started with those enthusiasts whom Paul tried to restrain at Corinth, but encouraged at Thessalonica (cf. I Thessalonians v. 24: "Quench not the spirit"). In the second century we meet it in the Montanists and Gnostics. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we find it in the *Schwärmer* who caused trouble to Luther, and in a restrained form in our own Quakers. Even disciplined and logical Calvin recognised the need of the "inward testimony of the Holy Spirit" which has points of contact with the Quaker doctrine of the "inner light". The classical mystics are too well known to need separate mention. Anglicanism has always been suspicious of enthusiasm, and the great Continental theologians have glanced contemptuously at pietism, but the enthusiastic-pietist type is a hardy breed, and it will be a spiritually impoverished Church which no longer produces them.

There is truth in all these four attitudes, and they are not mutually exclusive. The problem is to try to combine them in the right proportion. Luther could burst out vehemently against the exaltation of reason, where he felt that the prerogatives of faith were being denied; and he could be even more vehement against the second attitude, the exaltation of the Church, and we are not surprised to note that Lutheranism has not developed a very adequate doctrine of the Church. Calvin, the other main protagonist of Protestantism when it first seceded from Rome, is more balanced than Luther both on the authority of reason and on that of the Church. Modern liberal Christianity has allowed proportionately much more place to the third and fourth attitudes. C. J. Cadoux, for example, is typical of many who pinned their faith to a combination of these two. "The final authority (under God) as to what God requires is not the written word, venerable as that is, but the leading given by God's own Spirit to the insight of the inquirer."* "We find ourselves driven inexorably to the conclusion that indispensable and authoritative as Scripture is, its authority is secondary to that direct voice of God audible to us in the consecrated

* C. J. Cadoux: *The Life of Jesus*, p. 144.

intelligence and conscience of men.”* Catholicism clearly stands for the first two emphases, and gives a place to the other two also, though on a slightly lower plane, and it is always alert to see that private judgment does not exalt itself unduly. By contrast, Protestantism has tended to conserve a special place for the right of private judgment and the individual conscience; ultimately nothing is either true or right until it is apprehended as such by each individual—it must be seen to be so *by me*. And in the most fundamental experience of religion a man must come to the point where he can say not only “Our Father”, but “O God, thou art my God”. No one can be saved by proxy, even though the proxy be conceived as the authority of the Church. The only authority which can save in this sense is the authority of the experienced presence of God. And this experience is what both Church and Bible exist to make possible.

So much, then, concerning mediation. We return to the consideration of the Bible’s authority in itself. The Bible is a book, a written record. Its value and authority reside only secondarily in its actual words, and primarily in that to which it testifies, the events it records and their divine Author. For those events are actions of God. Thus we recognise in the Bible the authority of God in His acts of self-revelation. That is our claim for it, and apart from such a valuation it has no authority to distinguish it above other literature of worth which has survived from antiquity.

Modern methods of introduction to Biblical study have of course helped towards the clarifying of this understanding of the Bible’s authority. Criticism has rejected the literalist view of the Bible, and, as we have said, it has laid emphasis on the third of our four approaches, which we named the intellectualist. The Fundamentalist naturally regards modern criticism as a broken reed, alleging that it has not concerned itself sufficiently with the question of the Bible’s essential authority. There is some point in the allegation. In the work of some scholars one can get the impression that the question implicitly raised by the beginning of critical study a hundred years and more ago has never been properly answered; the question, that

* Article in the *Christian World*, April 27th, 1944.

is, of the differentia of the Bible as compared with other books. Some have forgotten the question as they have become engrossed in their ancillary studies; even such matters as the nature of inspiration and prophetic psychology have sometimes been discussed without reference to the divine causative factor. If more time had been devoted to thinking simply what it is in the Bible which justifies all this meticulous and painstaking research sustained throughout generations, it might have been possible to feel more unqualified satisfaction with the total output of scientific discussion of Biblical literature, history and archaeology. Criticism began by daring to treat the Bible like other books, and measure it by the ordinary apparatus of analysis. Is it to remain on the level of other books? Many denied the legitimacy of the attempt so to evaluate the Scriptures. They, and also those who watched the progress of critical evaluation not without misgiving, are entitled to hear a definitive verdict from a consensus of critical scholars, as to whether the Bible's authority still asserts itself and rises above the heat of debate. Can it still be handled with confidence as divine revelation, as the record of the "mighty acts of God", as a disclosure of the truth about human nature and its problems, and as God's answer to those problems? Have such magnificent expectations based on the Bible now to be revised? Have the critics been so much occupied with the words that they have lost sight of the WORD? Are they not able to assure us that the classic phrase "the Word of God" is still applicable to the Bible, and that it is not inappropriate to speak of "the Scriptures"? And has not criticism justified itself precisely in this, that it enables a modern reader to find the real word of God for today more luminous and challenging? These are fair questions, and an answer is required. Professor E. F. Scott, doyen of critical scholars, contributed to the *Abingdon Bible Commentary* (1929) an article on "The New Testament and Criticism". His own critical acumen and power of exposition made Professor Scott a most appropriate contributor on this subject. One trembles a little in reading his demand that the New Testament is to be examined "without any preconceived ideas of what it ought to be".* What

* *Abingdon Bible Commentary*, p. 886.

he means is that critical study must be free from prejudice and obscurantism; but is it mere prejudice to start one's criticism with the conviction that God has spoken his Word? If the critic is to open up the treasures of the Bible he must not throw away that key at the start! If having an open mind—another of Dr. Scott's desiderata—means laying aside that conviction, then we must reply that open-mindedness in that sense is no part of the equipment of the expositor of Scripture. We are relieved to read in Dr. Scott's concluding paragraphs: "As a result of all this sifting many of our old conceptions of the New Testament have been changed, but its claim has been established more surely than ever. It stands out, not on any dogmatic grounds, but by its own intrinsic worth, as the chief spiritual possession of mankind." . . . "We have a right to believe that the critical movement of our own day has its ultimate spring in a new sense of the value of the gospel, and that it is preparing the way for some fuller revelation of Christ."* In a more recent and most useful book, Professor Manson's *Companion to the Bible* (1939), which offers a summary of the results of critical scholarship, we find that the opening article is on "The Nature and Authority of the Canonical Scriptures". The significant thing is that it is now seen that some discussion of that subject is necessary, and may claim pride of place, and that all matters of Biblical Introduction should properly be in that setting. This is more clearly realised than it was in the one-volume Bible Commentaries of Peake (1915) and Gore (1928). Some hesitation about the work of critical scholarship was understandable, but a consistently negative attitude to it is ridiculous, particularly now that criticism increasingly insists on the unique place and authority of the Bible. No considered result of criticism has rendered meaningless this statement of the Westminster Confession:† "The heavenliness of the Matter, the efficacy of the Doctrine, the majesty of the Style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, the full discovery it makes of the

* *Abingdon Bible Commentary*, p. 890.

† The fundamental creed of English-speaking Presbyterians. It dates from 1647, and was accepted with small modifications by the Congregational Churches in their Savoy Declaration of 1658.

only way of Man's Salvation . . . are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence it self to be the Word of God; yet notwithstanding, our full perswasion and assurance of the infallible Truth and Divine Authority thereof, is from the inward work of the holy spirit". That language sounds rather antiquated, but there is nothing antiquated in what it affirms. We may stand by the affirmation, not without confidence that critical scholarship will set it in even clearer light.

In this connection there needs to be some consideration of the canon of Scripture itself, and of the essential meaning or idea of a canon. The limits of our Bible, that is, the fact that it contains these particular thirty-nine plus twenty-seven writings and no others, is not without significance. This requires not simply a study of the growth of the canon, which would be in the main an historical study; but a theological or philosophic treatment, an examination of what canonicity really implies. That is why this matter belongs to an examination of the authority of the Bible. There is no English book which deals satisfactorily with this question, though H. Cunliffe-Jones's *The Authority of the Biblical Revelation* indicates a new approach and has a chapter explicitly on "The Meaning of the Canon". Our best-known books are those of Ryle on the *Canon of the Old Testament* and Westcott on the *Canon of the New Testament*, but these are historical treatments, describing how the two canons attained their present form and extent at the end of gradual processes of testing and usage. What we are here concerned with, however, is the significance of the fact that there is a canon of Scripture at all, with its own peculiar authority, in distinction from other books. It is somewhat remarkable that scholars have been so slow to see the need to say something about this, as well as about the Biblical writings individually, and about the process by which they came to be regarded as canonical. That is in the main an historical question, but the theological aspect of it remains, and criticism is at last admitting its obligation to deal with it. It is deeper than the evaluation of the intrinsic worth of the various books, and it is to be distinguished from the more subjective matter of the influence of the Holy Spirit in vivifying a Biblical passage so that it becomes

veritably a Word of God to a modern reader. "The theological question of the canon is the question of that body of documents which authoritatively declare God's final revelation of Himself, which are in this decisively different and differentiated from other documents."*

The subject may be approached in this way: It is not simply the analysis of the Bible and detailed study of each book or section which has to occupy the scholar; he must raise, and so far as possible answer, the question of why they were put together into the form in which we now have them; for example, in the Old Testament the combination of the J E D and P sources into the Pentateuch, and its ascription as a whole to Moses, claims proper consideration; and in the New Testament the significance of the structure of fourfold Gospel plus Apostolic writings plus Acts plus Revelation must be brought out. And all this needs to be treated not as a matter of human preference, but as the working out of a theological principle, or a selection, in the light of faith, determined by the nature of the religion itself.

To the "eminent nonconformist divine" of the second century, Marcion, belongs the credit for making the Church face this question of canonicity, and so become conscious of what it was doing in recognising certain writings in its worship. It is a pity that Harnack's great monograph on Marcion has not been more noticed in this country, for Marcion is a subject more likely than most to direct attention to what a canon of Scripture means. Marcion's own answer—exclusion of the Old Testament and admission of Luke's gospel and ten Pauline epistles only, all carefully "edited" in conformity with his own theories—was wrong; but he performed a negative kind of service in forcing the orthodox Church of his time to make up its mind where the line of demarcation was between canonical works, which definitively declared the Gospel, and therefore had the highest authority, and others which had merely edificatory value. There is an essential antithesis here. Luther referred to the Apocrypha, which the Reformers, in contrast to Roman Catholics, decided no longer to recognise as

* Cunliffe-Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

canonical Scripture, as books "good and useful to read".* By contrast, the Scriptures were the sole books which could be appealed to for proof of essential doctrines. The distinction must be kept clear. We do not nowadays speak much of "proving doctrine", but we must conserve our sense of the Bible, *qua* canon of Scripture, as the record of the basic data of our Christian faith. In one sense it is a product of faith, but there is also a sense in which it is the norm and standard of faith, the record of God's revelation which is offered to men even before they respond to it. This is the point we are now emphasising, the strict meaning of canonicity, as the very word implies (canon = standard or rule). This is the objective quality of the Bible, over against not only secular writings but also all other Christian writings. The latter are subjective in comparison with this objectivity of the Bible; they are expressions of human response, reflections and even developments of faith, but never the basis of faith, and therefore not on the same side as the canonical books. In so far as these are canonical they, and they alone, are the object and standard of faith rather than expressions of it. They, and they alone, are the touchstone or criterion of what is truly Christian, what is the true knowledge of God, what conforms to the final revelation of His purpose in Jesus Christ. The fixation of the canon of Scripture was the imposition of this meaning on the Bible. This is just as true of the judgments of Christians during the second century, before there was general agreement, as of the final fixation at the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397 when both East and West at last agreed on the limits of the New Testament. This date is usually regarded as the *terminus ad quem* in the process of canonical development. The abiding factor is the conviction that certain writings are definitive for faith and for knowledge of the basic events of revelation. That the Bible is the record of such events, revelatory of God and His saving activity, cannot be proved by ordinary reasoning; it can only be witnessed to. Full conviction about it comes by the influence of the Holy Spirit. But it is

* cf. Article VI of the Anglican Articles: "the other books [i.e. the Apocrypha] the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet it doth not apply them to establish any doctrine".

axiomatic in discussion between Christians, and exegesis should proceed more confidently on this assumption of the distinctiveness of the Bible, which is implied when it is described as canonical Scripture.

The closed canon thus has significance as the criterion or fundamental testimony as to what is essential for the Christian faith; and this even apart from, or prior to, the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. It is not necessary to bring in reference to the Spirit's illumining before the uniqueness of the Bible can be made clear. Even as they stand, those so-called canonical writings, thirty-nine of the old covenant and twenty-seven of the new covenant, constitute the irreplaceable witness to the basic Christian facts, the distinctive data of the Christian religion. The Church must always make use of the Bible thus understood as the final court of appeal when defining its doctrine or correcting false notions. Orthodox Churchmen and heretics alike may lay claim to the guidance of the Spirit. But there are certain primary events centring in the life and death of Jesus Christ; and the Bible is the record of those events. No subsequent enlightenment can ignore the record or interpret it away or replace it. In fact the validity of all subsequent enlightenment or interpretation depends on its conformity with that record. Thus the Bible stands in its objectivity, not refusing critical scrutiny, as the criterion of Christian truth and the defence against every kind of subjectivism and false mysticism. We fully admit that a man does not attain full conviction about the lordship of Christ without the illumining of the Holy Spirit. But it is always these canonical scriptures to which the Spirit leads a believer for the testing and enrichment of his faith. Conceivably the Spirit might wake a conscience even by the reading of something secular, a novel or newspaper perhaps. But again the Biblical record is indispensable if the awakened conscience is to be informed and developed in the Christian faith. The unique character of the Bible is to be asserted, whether they be many or few to whom its pages become veritable words of God through the activity of the Holy Spirit. Without the Bible there would be no authentic source of knowledge about Jesus Christ. By this is meant not the indispensability of the

Gospels only, but also of that reference forward (Old Testament) and backward (Epistles) to Christ which constitutes its Christ-centredness and acts as a principle of cohesion. It has indeed to be said that proof of the authority of Jesus is not given by Scripture, but only by the Holy Spirit. But this presupposes reference to Scripture, objectively considered, as the only direct evidence available about Jesus. "Can it not be proved from Scripture that Jesus is the Christ? No, only the Holy Spirit brings this proof. The question of the truth of Christianity is decided only by grace and faith. But it is precisely this decision to which proof from Scripture leads."* This proof from Scripture should be taken account of before the meaning of

" The Spirit breathes upon the Word
And brings the truth to light "

is considered. The need of the Spirit's aid for the full understanding of Scripture is admitted on all hands. Origen, the outstanding theologian of the early centuries, is very insistent on this; he spoke of the deepest meaning of a Biblical passage as its "spiritual" sense. The medieval exegetes maintained this insistence on the inner or spiritual sense, and Luther did not entirely give this up, as we shall see later. Calvin's recognition of the inward illumining of the Spirit we have already referred to. We conclude with a further quotation from Vischer concerning this spiritual enlightenment: "The reader reads not of strange people and their thoughts about God, but God's thoughts about himself, the reader; the reading of an otherwise strange story says 'Thou art the man' to him; and he in his present wanderings is met by his Creator and Judge saying: 'I am the Lord thy God; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine.'"† Thus the Spirit has its opportunity of transforming the detached objective attitude into subjective commitment, and the interest of the historian into the faith of the believer.

We need a final word about inspiration, as applied to the text of Scripture itself, as distinct from the mind and conscience of the

* W. Vischer: *Das Christuszeugnis des alten Testaments*, Vol. I, p. 40.

† *ibid.*, p. 37.

reader. When it is clear that the Bible's claim upon men is related to the claim of God their creator, and that it aspires to no authority apart from this, the definition of inspiration is straightforward enough. Behind inspiration is divine action, the "mighty acts" of God, not ideas or dogmas. Inspiration means basically this derivation from God. That is the objective factor which needs to be kept in mind throughout all the discussion of mediation which is involved. Inspiration and mediation are inextricable. It is one of the most central, and at the same time most difficult, problems of religion to explain how a human mind, whether in divine "possession" or ecstasy or ordinary meditation, whether thinking, speaking or writing, can be a mediator of divine truth to other human minds. But experience affirms that this does happen. We insist that inspiration is related to this whole problem, and not merely with the subjective factor in it, viz. the condition of the mediator or medium, whether normal or abnormal, ecstatic, psychopathic, or what you will.

One further thing must be definitely asserted in this connection, although it has been touched upon already. In the case of the Bible inspiration has not resulted in inerrancy in the record. When it is stated that the Bible is inspired, or is God's word, the unreflecting mind hastens to attach labels: for some, inspiration is not a colourful enough term, and inerrancy is preferred; or it is not precise enough, and the adjective "verbal" is inserted; and in the whole context of these ideas authority comes to be defined as infallibility. This view is untenable when the real data, that is, the experience itself, are examined. It obscures the main issue. The Bible is the *record* of God's acts or revelation, not the acts or revelation themselves. The element of divine causation is presupposed, and we may venture also to assume as axiomatic that there was divine action in the prompting and guidance of the minds of the human observers (prophets and historians and apostles) who interpreted it to their contemporaries in the spoken or written word. But there is no need to assume that they were simply passive in this reporting; merely strings of the lyre, as it were, on which the divine plectrum played the tune; recipients of the Spirit's dictation (*spiritu dictante*),

as the Council of Trent declared—and as many beside Catholics are disposed to agree, understanding thereby mechanical accuracy in the records. A saner interpretation of the phrase about this spiritual dictation would be “spiritual control”, and we should extend it to include the original events behind the record. The implication would then be that for the full understanding of the significant events through the Biblical record their elucidation by the same Spirit who was behind the events is necessary. The analogy of poetic inspiration offers more helpful parallels for religious inspiration and should be kept in mind,* although the uniqueness of divine intervention as the Bible speaks of it must also be kept fully in mind. This, however, does not require the theory of mechanical causation advocated by the ultra-conservative temperament. It is neither called for as an *a priori* assumption, nor can it be founded *a posteriori* on the evidence of the Biblical writings as we have them. Their record is the work of human pens, and shows clear marks of the writers’ inability to apprehend fully, and write down adequately, the revelations God offered. Honesty demands this admission, and it should be made ungrudgingly. There is no need to tremble for the ark of God. Why should it be expected to be otherwise? Everything divine or superhistorical has to be mediated, and the medium is always imperfect. We have this treasure in earthen vessels. Christ’s human body was imperfect.† The rebukes given to the disciples, which are a prominent feature of Mark’s gospel, are significant in this connection.‡

The disciples were in daily contact with Christ; what opportunities they had for understanding their Master and His message! He could say of them, in contrast to the “Outsiders”: “To you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God”.§ And yet they misunderstood and blundered, and at the end they fled, denied, betrayed. For they were human and fallible, and even the presence in their midst of the Word made flesh did not make them fully receptive. “They did not understand about the loaves; their hearts

* See Dr. N. Micklem’s *Prophecy and Eschatology*.

† cf. John iv. 6; Mark ix. 19.

‡ Mark iv. 40, vi. 37, 52, vii. 18, viii. 17, ix. 6, 18.

§ Mark iv. 11.

were hardened".* Their Master resignedly compared His experience of them and their fellows with that of a prophet of old: They see but do not perceive; they hear but do not understand.† This feature is toned down in the other Gospels, but it is noteworthy in Mark's frank record. We call attention to it here because of its bearing on our problem of the self-presentation of the divine to the human, the problem of the barrier which humanity offers to God's revelation, the problem of man's unwillingness or inability to acknowledge the authority of that One to whom he owes his being. Christ Himself submitted to these conditions, for they were inevitable if contact was to be effected between God and man; they were, so to say, a risk that God had to take. Theories of infallible mediation have not taken full account of this significant fact, which is incidental to revelation and man's apprehension of it, even at its supreme moment, the Incarnation in Christ.

NOTE

We are glad to refer to the useful chapter on "The Problem of Authority" in Willis B. Glover's recent book *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the 19th Century*.‡ Dr. Glover points out that an absolute authority can only authenticate itself; it cannot be proved by argument and needs no logical crutches. This is the Reformation principle of *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*, Scripture its own interpreter, to which we have referred. In describing the contribution of individual scholars the chapter brings out the importance of Forsyth's formulation of the nature of authority, and his presentation of the authority of the Bible as the basic authority mankind needs. This was far more relevant to the real problems of the time than the distinction between the spheres of faith and reason or religion and science. Moreover, it shows how Forsyth belongs to the twentieth century as well as to the nineteenth. We regret that Dr. Glover depreciates the significance of Fairbairn in exalting that of Forsyth. But Fairbairn belongs more to the nineteenth century, and even to a certain extent to the eighteenth,

* Mark vi. 52.

† Mark iv. 12, referring to Isaiah vi. 9.

‡ Independent Press, 1954.

for example, in the way he appeals to reason as the final authority. Forsyth, on the other hand, represents the anti-intellectualism which is more typical of the twentieth century. He re-establishes as a fundamental principle in theology, and also for man's total understanding of his position in the world, Anselm's *Credo ut intelligam*, i.e. faith as the basis of understanding, not as antithetical to it, or even ancillary to it. As Dr. Glover (p. 274) quotes him: "The Redeemer from moral death is the seat of authority for all mankind, in their affairs as in their faith".

CHAPTER IV

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXEGESIS

SO far we have considered the traditional valuation of the Bible in the Church. We have observed how this has sometimes been wrongly conceived, and how in the recent period of critical study its distinctiveness as revelation or as the Word of God has tended to be obscured. It is now time to discuss its interpretation. As a preliminary to this it was essential to have a correct conception of what the Bible properly claims to be, for if we make the wrong claim for it we shall assuredly go wrong in our interpretation of it. We proceed to review the ways in which the Bible has been expounded, beginning with the treatment of the Old Testament by Jewish teachers before the Christian era. Their influence on Christian exegesis was not great; but the formidable fact is that the first Christians regarded the Old Testament (in its earliest Greek version*) as their Scripture, and themselves as "heirs of the promises" recorded in it. Next we shall study more at length the allegorical treatment which, though Greek in origin, had already been applied to the Jewish Scriptures by the eminent Hellenist Jew, Philo of Alexandria. This method became very influential in Christian exegesis from the second century onwards, and may be said to dominate Biblical exposition down to the Reformation. Since then, though regarded by some with favour and by others with distaste, it has never been altogether expelled. We shall look closely at the alternatives to it which Reformation theology and modern critical study have proposed, and finally try to decide on what conditions it has a right to stay.

* The Septuagint, begun in the third century B.C. Christian monopoly of this seems to have put the Jews off, and to have occasioned the later alternative version of Aquila (about A.D. 130). Aquila was a proselyte to Judaism from Christianity.

A. *Rabbinic Exegesis*

The activity of Ezra was a creative turning-point in the development of Judaism. In later tradition he and his contemporaries, who were referred to as "the Great Synagogue", were believed to have compiled the collection of the sacred Scriptures, and to have prescribed the liturgy and all necessary religious ordinances. They were not a synagogue in the later sense of local place of worship, and the traditional phrase *keneset ha-gedolah* (great synagogue) would be better rendered Convocation or Assembly. What it really signifies is the authoritative body which took over the religious heritage of the past (Moses and the prophets) and gave it a form which could be the basis of all subsequent development. This is aptly put in the opening words of the rabbinic tractate *The Sayings of the Fathers*:* "Moses received Torah from Sinai and delivered it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets delivered it to the men of the Great Synagogue. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence for the Torah." The phrase "make a fence for the Torah" means: define its limits and magnify its authority in such a way that men know precisely what their obligations are and can avoid transgression. Doubtless the regulations of several later generations of scribes were referred back to the time of Ezra. The instinct to do that was right, for his generation was the decisive one. He was regarded as the first of the scribes, though also a priest, "a scribe skilled in the law of Moses" (Ezra vii. 6; Nehemiah xii. 26). The apocalyptic work known as IV Ezra, which dates from the first century A.D. attributes to him the special revelations contained in this book, i.e. ranks him in that class like Enoch who received special illumination in vision; and the redactor of the book in a final verse salutes him as "the scribe of the knowledge of the Most High for ever". There grew up the notion that the age of the Holy Spirit

* *Pirke Aboth*, part of the Mishnah, the great rabbinic *corpus iuris* published about A.D. 200. See below. On this whole subject the most useful work, apart from the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, is G. F. Moore: *Judaism*. See especially Vol. I, pp. 29-36, 110-73, 235-50.

terminated with Malachi and that there was no inspiration after Ezra. The concluding section of IV Ezra, immediately prior to the redactor's note just quoted, relates how Ezra received the cup of inspiration which enabled him to dictate afresh the twenty-four books of the Old Testament, together with seventy others which were not to be published but reserved for "the wise among the people". This refers to the apocalyptic writings of the type of IV Ezra itself.

We quote a further saying, notable for its comprehensiveness, from Pirqe Aboth: "Simeon the Just was of the remnants of the Great Synagogue. He used to say: On three things the world standeth: on the Torah, on the Service, and on the doing of kindness".* In other words, the essentials for the stability of the world and human life are revelation or the primary divine impulse in religion, the outward organisation of religion, and moral conduct. The hair-splitting exegesis and casuistry of the rabbis do not always make a good impression; but it is impossible not to feel the highest respect for a religion which is fairly summarised in the phrase just quoted.

If we raise the question, what was the earliest inspired Scripture? [that is, when was a written book, in contrast to the spoken word of prophet or priest, regarded as having divine authority?] we must point to the Book of Deuteronomy for our answer. "The Deuteronomic code was the outgrowth of prophecy but marked its doom by substituting a book for inspired speech as the ultimate divine authority".† Deuteronomy became the nucleus of what after the Exile became the Pentateuch and was introduced by Ezra and then became the Law (Torah) and established its unique hold on Jewish reverence and loyalty. The Old Testament as we know it was not yet complete and was not recognised as a closed canon until A.D. 100. But its foundations were already laid by Ezra and his school, and their work was the origin of the Jewish canon of Scripture. Their legacy was a documentary basis for religion and

* Pirqe Aboth i. 2. Simeon was probably a high priest of the second century B.C., not a contemporary of Ezra.

† R. H. Pfeiffer: *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 55.

their people became the people of a Book, whose authority was final, and whose exposition was the chief responsibility of religious leaders.

Before we are in a position to consider the rabbinic method of interpretation we must refer to the development of tradition in addition to the Torah and the other books which were subsequently recognised as canonical, making up what we know as the Old Testament. This development is mentioned in the Gospels as the *paradosis* (tradition), and it is clear from Mark vii that Jesus was not prepared to place the tradition on the same level of authority as the Torah: whereas the Torah was God's word, the tradition consisted of merely human enactments. In this Jesus was definitely countering the opinion of the rabbis, and challenging the Pharisaic party, and in this matter he probably had the support of any Sadducees who were in his audience.

The rabbinic view, shared by Pharisees in general, was that the tradition had the same sanctity as the Torah. There even grew up a theory that it had been revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai, but that Moses had been expressly ordered not to commit it to writing. It was therefore, in the time of Jesus, oral tradition. Eventually it was committed to writing, as we shall see, about A.D. 200, but even then objections were raised, and the process of oral development was still not halted, but continued in the form of comment on the old Scriptures and this new codification. Thus the mass of traditional Jewish lore continued to grow, and it was all believed to have connection with the main root, viz. the revelation vouchsafed to Moses on the holy mount after the Exodus from Egypt. The God who delivered by His mighty act also provided for the continuous understanding of His nature and purpose. The full revelation was given once for all; its gradual explication was to be the responsibility of recognised expositors through the centuries.

The general term for exposition or commentary was *midrash*, from the common root *darash*, to seek out, investigate. This sense of *midrash* is regular in post-Biblical Hebrew, but it derives from what is said of Ezra in Nehemiah viii. 8-9: "And he [i.e. Ezra, or possibly "they" as in A.V. and R.V. and R.S.V.] read in the book, the law of God, distinctly [literally *meporash*, "explaining" or

“ separating ”, i.e. separating the words from one another so as to get the meaning clear; or possibly the reference is simply to the distinctness of the elocution, “ clearly ”, as in R.V. and R.S.V.; yet a third possibility is the rendering “ section by section ” suggested by the German commentator Siegfried], and they brought out the sense, and caused them to discern the passage read ”.

Again in Ezra vii. 10 we have “ Ezra had made up his mind to interpret [*derosh*] the law of Yahweh ”. Here we have the origin of the technical sense of the verb *darash* which became usual in rabbinical Hebrew. The new development of meaning may be discerned also in I Chronicles xxviii. 8: “ observe and *seek out* all the commandments of Yahweh your God ”; and in Psalm cxix: “ I have *sought* thy precepts ” (verses 45 and 94; but the wicked neglect this duty of scriptural study, verse 155). Ezra came to be regarded as the founder of exegesis. *Midrash* in rabbinic usage is defined by Danby as “ interpretation of Scripture, originally in the sense of deducing an idea or rule from Scripture. . . . The term is used also of systematic verse-by-verse commentary of Scripture, as contrasted with *Mishnah* which teaches Halakoth (rules of conduct) independently of their Scriptural basis ”.*

The term *Mishnah* (literally repetition) is used as the title of the first codification of the oral tradition, to which we referred just now. The extent of the oral commentary had become so great as to make it unmanageable without recourse to fixation in writing, and the Patriarch Judah undertook this task about the year A.D. 200. Although much feeling was against the writing down, it had by now proved inevitable, and Judah’s reputation was great enough, together with his claim to embody the teaching of the celebrated rabbis Aqiba and Meir, to secure recognition of this *Mishnah* both in Palestine and Babylon. Sooner or later the theory got round that it had actually been communicated to Moses, though not then written. And it became possible to argue whether the *Mishnah* was equal in importance to the canonical books.

The continuation of the oral tradition is known as the Gemara (literally completion). After two centuries or so this also was

* From the glossary at the end of Danby’s translation of the *Mishnah*, p. 795.

written, and that, combined with the Mishnah, constitutes the Talmud (literally, that which is learned).

Throughout this Jewish *midrash* two elements are to be distinguished: Halakah, or binding rule, and Haggadah, narration. The former was the more important, for it was concerned with action and conduct, which took pride of place in Hebrew religion. It was that aspect of it which Christian theologians, following Paul of Tarsus, incline to disparage as "legalism". And certainly the Hebrew religion did hold that faith without works is dead; there must be correct observance as well as true understanding. Not orthodoxy but orthopraxis was its chief aim. Because of this the rabbis set higher value on Halakah, which prescribed action, than on Haggadah, which was edificatory and doctrinal, and resorted to anecdote for that purpose and gave a much freer rein to imagination. The Mishnah on the whole contains Halakah; a significant exception among its forty-three tractates is the Sayings of the Fathers, which is pure Haggadah. We quoted from it above. Both Haggadah and Halakah may be found in the same work, but it is possible to characterise the various *midrashim* as halakic or haggadic, e.g. the third-century commentary Sifra on Leviticus is halakic; for haggadic commentary on Leviticus we have the *midrash* called *Wayyiqra Rabbah*. The most important of the haggadic works is the *midrash* on Genesis known as *Bereshith Rabba*, from which we quote the famous dictum offered as part of the comment on Genesis i. 1: "Six things were in existence before Creation . . . Torah, the throne of glory, were actually created; the fathers, Israel, the sanctuary and the name of the Messiah were kept within the creative idea". This may illustrate the kind of thing that occurs among haggadic *midrash*. For an example of Halakah we quote from the tractate Sanhedrin, which deals with legal procedure: "He that curses his father or his mother is not culpable unless he curses them with the Name (i.e. of God). If he cursed them with a substituted name Rabbi Meir declares him culpable but the Sages declare him not culpable".*

* Danby: Mishnah, p. 393. This translation is the most convenient book of reference for the Mishnah.

We must not omit to mention the custom which grew up in the synagogues, probably well before the time of the New Testament, of following the set passage read from the Law and Prophets with a paraphrase in the vernacular, i.e. Aramaic. This has to be borne in mind when Luke iv. 16-22 is considered. The paraphrases, originally oral and extempore, gradually became stereotyped, and took on a written form. These are known as Targums, and there are extant two on the Pentateuch, one on the Prophets and one on the rest of the Old Testament. As we have them they are a Babylonian recension of the third century A.D., but they probably contain earlier material of Palestinian origin.

We may take a brief glance at the great names in Jewish exegesis after the period of the codification of the Talmud (fifth century A.D.). The more fantastic exegesis was challenged by the Karaites in the eighth century, who aimed at getting behind typical midrashic interpretations to the text of Scripture itself. They were followed by Saadya (892-942) with his emphasis on the "simple" sense, which is regarded as the opening of a new period in Jewish exegesis. The "simple" sense signified the plain or natural meaning of a passage as opposed to those interpretations arrived at by the application of elaborate rules.* Rashi (Solomon ben Isaac, 1040-1105) also stood for the Peshat or "simple" sense in reaction from the excessive subtlety of many rabbis in their treatment of the sacred text. He made exegesis much more linguistic, and is particularly important because of his influence in this respect on Christian exegetes who had acquired some knowledge of Hebrew. This influence was not great, but it was significant in the pre-Reformation scholar Nicholas of Lyra, and the Reformers were prepared to follow this line more than their Catholic contemporaries. Maimonides (Moses ben Maimon, 1135-1204) stood for a reconciliation of the Bible with philosophy. In this he is comparable to Philo twelve centuries earlier, with the difference that for him not Plato but Aristotle was the master in philosophy.

* cf. Bonsirven: *Exégèse Rabbiniqne et Exégèse Paulinienne*, p. 34 ff. On these later exegetes see articles in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, and Oesterley's contribution in *Record and Revelation* (pp. 403-26).

He distinguished an exoteric and an esoteric sense and was thus led to allegorise; but he also laid stress on reason. His contribution therefore was different from that of Rashi, but it was like that of Rashi in influencing Christian scholars of the late Middle Ages, as we see in the systems of Albert the Great and Aquinas.

We must now return to the more traditional rabbinic work before the two developments just mentioned had been pioneered—developments in the direction of stressing the literal and linguistic sense on the one hand, and of philosophic generalising on the other—and survey the typical method of the rabbis in handling Scripture. By “typical” we mean normal during what may be called the classical period, i.e. roughly the first six centuries of our era; in rabbinic terminology, the age of the *Tannaim* (teachers) and *Amoraim* (expositors). Seven rules for interpretation were attributed to the famous Rabbi Hillel (c. 30 B.C.). These were later expanded to thirteen, which were actually recited daily in the morning devotions. Rabbi Eliezer ben Jose the Galilean (second century A.D.) was credited with an expansion of these rules till there were thirty-two of them; that seems to have sufficed!

We must be content with a brief summary of the original seven, although it is difficult to see the precise intention of the rule from a mere heading and without illustrations.* Rule 1 was called “light and heavy” and signified the inference *a minore ad maius*, from the less to the greater. Rule 2, “equal decision”, meant discernment of analogies and comparisons. Rules 3 and 4 were concerned with deducing the general implications from one passage, or from more than one passage; Rule 5 with a more precise statement of the general by reference to the particular, and vice versa; Rule 6 with the use of one passage to interpret another; and Rule 7 with the use of the whole context to elucidate a verse or passage. Evidently the rabbis knew something of logic and did not disdain its use in their exegetical instruction. These rules are

* For fuller information Schürer's *History of the Jewish People* may be consulted. Also G. F. Moore: *Judaism*, Vol. III, p. 73, where the references are given and other literature mentioned. More recently (1939) we have the important study of the Jesuit scholar Bonsirven: *Exégèse Rabbinique et Exégèse Paulinienne*.

satisfactory enough in themselves, but it must be confessed that in their application much that was arbitrary and fantastic crept in. We find a rabbi playing the trick of substituting for a letter its corresponding letter at the other end of the alphabet (changing A into Z, or B into Y, as it were), or taking each letter as the first letter of another word, reckoning the value of the letters as numerals and guessing at another word whose letters yield the same total (cf. "the number of the beast" in the Christian Apocalypse). It is difficult not to find this tedious, and even ridiculous. It is exegesis of the letter in the most extravagant sense (cf. II Corinthians iii. 6). But it must be remembered that it proceeded from the conviction that every word, indeed every letter and part of a letter in Holy Scripture has its significance. Perhaps the classic example is the use of Genesis ii. 7 as the scriptural basis of proof for the doctrine of the double (i.e. good and evil) inclination in man. The argument moved in this wise: the verb "and he formed" (wayyetser) has a double jod—this must be divinely intended to stimulate thought about the two jods; now yetser (inclination) is a jod word, and the hidden meaning must be that there are two yetsters! Therefore they are wrong who speak only of the *evil* yetser. Moreover, it is herewith revealed that both yetsters were created by God!

Bonsirven comprehends the rabbinic methods under four main headings: (1) Simple, i.e. that which comes directly and naturally out of the text, without resort to cunningly devised "rules". This is what Saadya and Rashi insisted upon (it is not quite the same as the "literal" sense of Christian exegetes); (2) Dialectical method, i.e. that of the seven rules; (3) Philological method; (4) Allegory or symbol; Bonsirven prefers the term "parabolic", and insists that the rabbis did not allegorise in the accepted sense of that word. He perhaps protests too much over this, and it is probably wiser not to distinguish rabbinic method so rigidly from that of allegorists in general. The terms he coins to express what is typical of the rabbis (parabolic, mashalic) are not very much at home in English—or French, for that matter—and are better avoided. What we can say is that allegory did not obtain such a hold on rabbinic (i.e. Palestinian) Judaism as it did on Hellenistic Judaism. The rabbis

were too concerned for the "simple" sense to launch out into the deeper waters of allegorism. Their habit of mind was not philosophic, nor was their method systematic. The rabbinic literature is more like an anthology than a treatise of philosophy or series of essays. "They do not distinguish in Scripture a body and soul, a literal sense and a spiritual sense" says Bonsirven, meaning that they do not proceed in the characteristic manner of allegorists. "They discern in Holy Scripture only a unique meaning and content, God, Israel, Israel's history and theocratic institutions, objects which can be expressed by all the inspired words. The art of the exegete consists in bringing out these significances with the aid either of subtle comparisons (*rapprochements*), or of ingenious interpretation, or of exegetical tradition".* That is a weighty and clarifying judgment. We still feel, however, that allegory must be allowed to have left some marks on the work of the Rabbis. It is confusing to draw fine distinctions between what is genuine allegory, and what not. "The allegorical method essentially means the interpretation of a text in terms of something else, irrespective of what that something else is".†

We may agree then that allegory was not missing from the stock of exegetical tools which the rabbis used, but we can also agree that the whole-hearted and systematic use of it must not be ascribed to them. For that we must wait till we consider Philo. But before we leave rabbinic Judaism we must record to its credit one main feature of its handling of Scripture. It was governed by a sense that the whole of Scripture holds together and is homogeneous; it was nowhere self-contradictory, and all differences are merely apparent. The weirdest fantasies of interpretation are still expressions of this conviction. In the moving words of G. F. Moore: "The conviction that everywhere in His revelation God is teaching religion, and that the whole of religion is contained in this revelation, is the first principle of Jewish hermeneutics. To discover, elucidate and apply

* Bonsirven, *op. cit.*, pp. 250-1.

† Wolfson: *Philo*, Vol. I, p. 134. At the end of his section on Philo's use of allegory Wolfson makes reference to rabbinic use of it (*op. cit.*, pp. 115-38). See also, against Bonsirven, the article "Allegorical Interpretation" in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

what God thus teaches and enjoins is the task of the scholar as interpreter of Scripture. Together with the principle that in God's revelation no word is without significance, this conception of Scripture leads to an atomistic exegesis which interprets sentences, clauses, phrases and even single words, independently of the context or the historical occasion, as divine oracles. . . . The conception of development as applied to revealed religion . . . is eminently modern. To the rabbis, if it could have been explained to them, it would have seemed a contradiction of the very idea of religion: the true religion was always the same—how otherwise could it be? ”* Among Jewish teachers of the ancient world this is not confined to the Palestinian and later rabbis. We find it also, though more philosophically expressed, in Philo of Alexandria, the most famous representative of Hellenistic Judaism at the opening of the Christian era, as we shall see presently. The whole of Scripture is divine; if anything appears otherwise, or incomprehensible, it is not so really. The function of critical study is to penetrate deeper than superficial obscurities to true unchanging meaning. That conviction is part of Judaism's legacy to Christianity. It has never been more fervently and tenaciously held. In Christianity it figures less prominently because the centre of Christian devotion is not a Book but a Person.† As compared with other religions, the closest parallel would no doubt be Islam with its Koran, and even in face of that analogy Jewish devotion to the Scriptures stands unique. In more general comparison, what is offered in other religions is conceptions of truth or revelation ever newly presented and apprehended, rather than unalterable scriptures sacred in every letter and regarded as sovereign over the whole of life.

We who are accustomed to the thought of revelation as

* G. F. Moore: *Judaism*, Vol. I, pp. 248 f.

† But of course in so far as Christians concentrate on their Bible as the authentic witness to that Person, they will appreciate the almost fanatical emphasis which the rabbis laid on their Scriptures. “All the best intellects of a subtle people had been concentrated . . . on mastering the whole body of traditional scriptures and making one text the comment on another. It is not surprising if they were better at this sort of thing than we are, nor if they made immediate associations where we lumber after them by the aid of concordances and reference margins” (A. M. Farrer: *A Study in St. Mark*, p. 264).

progressive need to make a sympathetic mental adjustment if we are to appreciate the strength of Judaism. It took the element of revelation with utmost seriousness; indeed for the Jew religion *was* revelation and revelation *was* religion, to an extent Christianity has never surpassed. But the Jewish conception was of a revelation that was at the very beginning perfect and therefore unalterable. That original deposit of revelation was granted to Moses on Mount Sinai. Some of it was written down then; some was written later—the whole being transmitted orally from generation to generation by the scribes.

If we draw a parallel with a later Christian conception we should have to speak of rabbinic succession from Moses where the Church speaks of episcopal succession from the Apostles. The problem of conserving divine truth once imparted is of course common to all religions. When faith is once for all delivered to the saints it becomes questionable whether succeeding generations will contain enough saints to appreciate it, and it is easy to defy the contingencies of history by incredible theories or crude safeguards of continuity. Judaism is certainly open to criticism on that score, as are some Christian theories. But our present point is the definiteness of Judaism's affirmation of its basic constitution in the divine self-revelation on Sinai. Whether there was or was not to be any progression, either in the revelation or in men's apprehension of it, here was a positive self-disclosure of God, a *charisma veritatis certum*, a basis on which religion could stand sure against the devices of Satan. Judaism's survival through all the accidents of time and the misunderstanding and malice of men bears impressive testimony to this. Without such confidence in God's communication of His will to the forefathers a religion is not sure to survive.

B. *Allegory*

PHILO TO AUGUSTINE

In seeking the meaning and motive force of allegory we have to look to that later period of Greek literature when men felt that the real masters belonged to a past time, and that true literary standards

and genuine inspiration were only to be found in the old writers. This backward look and idealisation of the past focused on that genius who could claim the greatest antiquity: Homer, and it is the veneration for Homer in particular, and the scholarly interpretation of his text in the schools of Alexandria and Athens, which gave rise to the allegorical method we are interested in. For as Hatch pointed out: "The verses of Homer were not simply the utterances of a particular person with a particular meaning for a particular time. They had a universal validity. They were the voice of an undying wisdom. They were the Bible of the Greek races." Moreover, Homer was much more than a bard, an entertainer for tedious hours. "It was impossible to regard Homer simply as literature. Literary education was not an end in itself; but a means. The end was moral training."* Thus Homer was made to give guidance about the whole of life, and eventually not about the moral aspect of life only, but about physics and philosophy, and even, according to Pseudo-Plutarch, about military science and surgery. In order to make him applicable to these purposes new methods of interpretation were developed.

It is one thing to read doctrine into ancient poetry. It is another thing to assume that the poems were written in order to be treated thus, i.e. that it was the original author's deliberate intention. For allegorisation implies much more than that the author had a moral or didactic aim, such as was indeed common with ancient authors.

The primacy of Homer has been generally allowed, and of course his poems were the oldest literature which the Greeks possessed. We should not, however, drop into the assumption that allegory arose as a purely literary method, directed to the revised interpretation of ancient texts, and of Homer in particular.

The Stoics were very active in this, from the third century B.C. onwards, but they were by no means the originators of the method. Plato refers to it in his *Republic* (378). Not even with its aid as a safeguard for worthy interpretation does he permit poetry to be salvaged for the educational programme of his ideal State. The method goes back at least a century before Plato's time, and no

* Hatch: *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, pp. 51, 53.

single person can be named as the inventor of it, though a certain Theogenes of Rhegium (c. 520 B.C.) has been described as the first Homeric allegorist. It is more satisfactory to consider the nature and implications of allegory in itself, and we note with approval the opinion of J. Tate: "Allegorical interpretation did not spring suddenly from the brain of the grammarian Theogenes. More probably it grew up gradually with the growth of the more scientific use of mythical language to express religious and philosophic speculations".* Tate's views are expounded more fully in a long article on "Plato and Allegorical Interpretation",† and they merit our consideration. He holds that allegory originated not in the literary treatment of ancient poets, defending them from abuse and misinterpretation, but in the more positive aim of the philosopher: "the desire of speculative thinkers to appropriate for their own use some at least of the mythical traditions". The method was already fully developed in the fifth century, e.g. in Metrodorus of Lampsacus, that is, before Plato's strictures on it. Plato's often-misunderstood attitude is that though a passage may indeed convey an "undersense" (*hyponoia*), i.e. an allegorical meaning, this can never be more than right opinion (*orthē doxa*). The aim of the philosopher on the other hand is truth or real knowledge (*episteme*). He will therefore not show exaggerated respect for the written word of any poet, nor waste his time in ingenious guessing, which is all the efforts of the interpreter or allegorist amount to! That is why Plato will not have poets in his Republic, not even Homer, "either with allegories or without them".

Stoic thinkers tried to harmonise their philosophy with popular beliefs and especially with Homer, which was a great fountain-head of popular belief, even if not exactly the Greek Bible. The inner contradictions of Homer's narrative, particularly where he mentions the gods, necessitated allegorical interpretations; otherwise Homer could not be cleared of the charge of impiety. A first-century A.D. Stoic writer named Heraclides of Pontus is quite frank about that,

* *Classical Review*, Vol. XLI (1927), p. 214 f.

† *Classical Quarterly*, Vols. XXIII-XXIV (1929-30).

and naïvely describes allegory as a "prophylactic against impiety".* Great use could be made of names and their etymology, in the worthy process of extracting an acceptable symbolic meaning. The gods, for example, could be regarded as representing natural elements: Zeus stood for the upper air (*aether*), Hera his consort for the lower air; Poseidon meant water, Athena the earth, and so on. On this presupposition the unedifying squabbles of the Olympians need not provoke contempt and irreligion, but could be understood as the clashes of the elements. Wonderful things in the way of interpretation could also be done with numbers. The number 1, and odd numbers generally, especially 9, were good, while 2 meant evil. Siegfried distinguishes two main classes of allegorical interpretation, the physical and ethical. The words "Ocean, who has been set as origin for all things" (*Iliad*, XIV, 246) really is a reference to Thales' doctrine of the origin of all things from water, and *Iliad*, VII, 99, "may ye all become water and earth", is clear support for the doctrine of Water plus Earth as primary elements which was taught by Xenophanes of Colophon. The famous passage about the Shield of Achilles being made by Hephaestus (*Iliad*, XVIII, 468 ff.) is really the doctrine of Heraclitus about Fire as the all-inclusive element. Thus ancient science, or at any rate that part of it which Stoicism approved, could be justified out of Homer. Ethical teaching also could easily be discerned. The well-known opening verses of the *Iliad*, for example, which ascribe the fall of Troy both to Zeus and to the wrath of Achilles, could be taken to mean the Stoic doctrine of Fate. Again, the Pythagorean conception of metempsychosis, i.e. the transmigration of souls, could find support in the passages where Achilles and Hector speak to their horses, and where Odysseus on his return from wandering is recognised by his dog; quite evidently Homer attributed souls to these animals!

In the sphere of religion too Stoicism was making its contribution, by its development of allegory, towards the conservation of the

* In his book *Homeric Allegories*, Chapter XXII—quoted in Siegfried: *Philo von Alexandria als Ausleger des alten Testaments*, to which I am much indebted in the following paragraphs.

religion of the Greek world. "The Homeric gods and the whole pantheon could be so discreetly allegorised as to make it possible for a philosophic mind to worship according to the tradition of his fathers without the disturbance of an undue number of mental reservations."* The method was, however, by no means unchallenged in the Hellenistic world. The Academy, i.e. the philosophic heirs of Plato, built up a whole system of destructive criticism against ancient religion. Traces of this are to be found in Cicero's treatise *On the Nature of the Gods*. Later it was used by the Christian apologists of the second and third centuries; and even by Origen, although he made such a wide use of allegory as well. But this is to anticipate. We must return and trace the links between the perfection of the allegorical method among the Greeks, and its adaptation by the theologians of the new religion which in its conquest adopted their culture.

But Christianity had first appropriated its Jewish heritage, and Jewish thinkers had already gone some way with allegory in the exposition of their Scriptures, and in the apologetic they directed to Gentiles. The Jew Aristobulus seems to have been the pioneer in applying Stoic allegorical methods to the Old Testament. We should like to know more about him. The title of his book was *Expositions of the Mosaic Law*, and fragments are preserved in Eusebius. His date is the first half of the second century B.C. He was bold enough to assert that Moses was really teaching philosophy as the Greeks understood it, and that they, not he, are the borrowers in this great quest. This claim was later made by Philo in his statement that Plato is "Moses speaking in Attic Greek". The treatise or sermon called 4 Maccabees in the Pseudepigrapha shows traces of Stoicism. The author had got this from his philosophical training, but fundamentally he is a keen Jew and he holds fast to the letter of Scripture. His Greek culture inclines him to present the patriarchs as models of the virtues, but he comes up against difficulties in Moses' anger, David's adultery, etc. It is at these points that he resorts to allegory. The allegorical treatment of the Old Testament is developed further in the *Letter of Aristeas*, an earlier writing which

* H. Chadwick: *Origen contra Celsum*, p. x.

one of its editors claims to be the first use of allegory in the history of Jewish apocalyptic.* Aristeas purports to be a Greek court official writing to his brother about the circumstances of the translating of the Jewish Scriptures into Greek (the famous Septuagint version). Actually the author is a Jew, probably of Alexandria, who adopted this guise in order to appeal to Greek readers. His main theme is the commending of the Jewish Law, and what we are now interested in is the fact that in order to do so he makes use not only of the Greek language, but also of the Greek method of dealing with the difficulties of a prescribed text, that is, the method of allegory. We quote illustrations from the central section (paragraphs 128-71) where the purpose of the Law is vindicated, although with the admission that many of its enactments seem incomprehensible, e.g. the distinction between clean and unclean meats: "You must not fall into the degrading idea that it was out of regard to mice and weasels and other such things that Moses drew up his laws with such exceeding care. All these ordinances were made for the sake of righteousness to aid the quest for virtue and the perfecting of character." . . . "The birds which are forbidden you will find to be wild and carnivorous, tyrannising over the others. . . . All the rules he [i.e. Moses] has laid down with regard to what is permitted in the case of these birds and other animals he has enacted with the object of teaching us a moral lesson. For the division of the hoof and the separation of the claws are intended to teach us that we must discriminate between our individual actions with a view to the practice of virtue. . . . The act of chewing the cud is nothing else than the reminiscence of life and existence."

In the Apocrypha we note traces of allegory in the Book of Wisdom. This writing is probably to be dated in the first century

* H. T. Andrews in Charles's *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. II, p. 85. The dating is difficult and disputed. Schürer was certainly wrong to date it as early as 200 B.C. Wendland suggested 96-93 B.C. Andrews favours a partition theory of the composition, some parts, which betray no indication of the Roman occupation of Palestine, belonging to the period 133-70 B.C., but some parts being as late as the Christian era. The date suggested for 4 Maccabees in Charles's volume is 63 B.C.-A.D. 38.

B.C. The statement of ii. 24, "By the envy of the devil death entered into the world", is clearly an interpretation of Genesis iii, or, as some think, of Genesis iv (Cain); but this is not allegory in the proper sense of the word. More definite allegorising is found in chapter x, where the pillar of salt (Lot's wife) is taken as a symbol of unbelief, Jacob's wrestling as a symbol of piety ("in his sore conflict she, i.e. Wisdom, guided him to victory, that he might know that godliness is more powerful than all"), and the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night mentioned in the Exodus narrative of the wilderness wanderings are interpreted as appearances of Wisdom. (Already a hundred years before, Sirach had made Wisdom say: "My throne was in the pillar of cloud".) In xvi. 25-9 the true meaning of the story about manna is taken to be that God's word is food, for which man must daily give thanks, i.e. at morning prayer. In xvii. 21 the darkness in Egypt is called an "image" of future punishment. These are occasional allegorisations. It would be misleading to assume that the writer used the method wholeheartedly and systematically. He misses too many chances! For example, in a reference to Noah's Ark he contents himself with the remark: "Blessed was the wood through which cometh righteousness" (xiii. 7). What a contrast to later Christian allegorists who saw in the Ark a symbol of salvation, the Church, etc., and also appealed to this verse of Wisdom as a prophecy of Christ's Cross! The author of Wisdom is more like the writer of II Peter (cf. II Peter ii. 5). Generally, his treatment of the Old Testament is more properly described as haggadic or rabbinic than allegorical in the strict sense; for allegory means more than a simple development of the plain literal sense of a passage.

We come to Philo of Alexandria (49 B.C.-A.D. 20), the greatest name in the history of Jewish exegesis in pre-New Testament times, and a complete master of allegory who uses this method regularly, and in fact bases his Scripture interpretation upon it. A recent book speaks of his "amazing virtuosity"* in its use. We shall do well to linger a little on Philo in order to observe what allegory has become

* R. H. Pfeiffer: *History of New Testament Times* (1949), p. 334. See also H. A. Wolfson: *Philo* (1947), Vol. I, pp. 115-38.

capable of in his hands as applied to the Old Testament. He is the main, if not the only bridge between pre-Christian and Christian allegorisation.

Philo's primary assumption is that the whole of Scripture is divine, and consequently anything which strikes the reader as incomprehensible or incompatible with divine origin must be so in appearance only; the true meaning must be sought for at a deeper level. To suppose that God really planted fruit trees in Paradise, when no one was allowed to live there and when it would be impious to fancy He needed them for Himself, is "incurable silliness". The reference must be to "the paradise of virtues . . . implanted by God in the soul" (*On Noah's Planting*, ch. 8-9). The six days of Creation must not be taken literally, Philo argues; they really stand for the orderly arrangement of creation (*The Allegories of the Laws*, i. 2). Sometimes the literal meaning of a passage may be allowed to stand; the ceremonial laws, for example, are not to be neglected, although they also have a spiritual significance (*The Migration of Abraham*, 16).

We see then that Philo proceeds with a clear distinction of the literal from the spiritual or allegorical sense. He affirms the former, even though he regards it as hardly worth a real scholar's trouble. In his comment on the Babel story (Genesis xi), Philo remarks: "Those who follow only what is plain and obvious think that what is here intended is the origin of the languages of the Greeks and barbarians. I urge them not to be content to stop at that point, but to go on to look at the passage *figuratively* [literally, to move on to tropic, i.e. allegorical, renderings], realising that the mere words of Scripture are, as it were, mere shadows of bodies, and the real truths to be considered are those meanings which study brings to light deeper down than the words." (*On the Confusion of Languages*, 38.) This literal sense, here called "plain and simple", elsewhere "open", is but the gateway or starting-point for the true meaning which is to be sought at a deeper level. One must not stop at the literal sense, but go on from there. Other metaphors Philo uses for this comparison are that of body and soul—we shall meet this again in Origen—and the description of the literal as no more than an

accommodation to human need; it has in view "the foolish", "the majority". This implies, of course, that only a select few are capable of the full understanding of Scripture; the rest must be content with "the plain rendering" designed for "the majority". Is there a trace of mild contempt here, similar to that which is conveyed in the Roman Catholic use of the term "the faithful", who are expected simply to accept the teaching of the clergy in matters theological, without presuming to develop their own thinking in this realm?

By contrast with the literal sense there is the allegorical; and as the former is depreciated so the latter is exalted. "All or nearly all the Law is allegorical" (*On Joseph*, 6), that is, it was definitely intended to be interpreted at a deeper level than that of the obvious literal meaning. Not all readers may be capable of this understanding, but the possibility remains. Something more than the superficial sense was designed by the divine Author, at any rate for the true interpreter. This is "the secret rendering intended for the few" (*On Abraham*, 29). Elsewhere Philo refers to it as the underlying meaning, "the rendering by means of under-senses" (*hyponoiai*, a Platonic word), "symbolically by means of symbols", "the tropic rendering", "the rendering which has in view behaviour (*to ethos*)", i.e. pertaining to manners or conduct. This latter sense deserves to have a place by itself. It is what the medieval expositors were to define more precisely as the "moral" sense of Scripture. Examples from Philo are where he takes the Flood to mean the confusion of man's soul when passions and vices run away with it; and when he makes the Sodomites surrounding Lot's house signify temptations to the house of the soul which has its holy reason inside (*On the Confusion of Languages*, 7 and 8).

Philo is not arbitrary. There are canons or standards or "laws" of allegory (*On Abraham*, 15). For example, the literal sense is inadmissible (a) in a passage which says *something unworthy of God*, e.g. the frequent anthropomorphisms; (b) in a passage which says *something unworthy of Scripture* or involves contradiction; e.g. Genesis iv. 17: How could Cain build a city when only one family of three people was in existence; moreover, where did Cain

get his wife?! This hoary old chestnut did not originate in modern rationalism, or in the repartee of Hyde Park orators, but is already thought of and dealt with by Philo, and Philo is not a writer whom one easily credits with a sense of humour! (*On the Posterity of Cain*, 11 and 14); (c) in a passage which is manifestly allegorical, e.g. where the serpent speaks (Genesis iii). A less obvious case is Deuteronomy x. 9, which Philo cites, where God calls himself the "lot" of the Levites—because, remarks our author, God cannot be owned by anyone. Such general indications of the inadmissibility of the literal meaning might be considered clear enough for any reader. Philo does not need that guidance. His mind is much more subtle, and his scent more keen. Many small features of the sacred books which most readers pass over or regard simply as stylistic are full of significance for Philo. They are clearly marked keyholes, and a deft turn of his magic key in them can open up a wealth of meaning unsuspected by the cursory reader. A repetition or change of expression shouts to be looked at; the doubling of a word (the repeated command: Go! in Genesis xii. 1—missed in our English versions*) or an apparently superfluous word, are the broadest of hints that treasures lie beneath the surface here. Nothing is superfluous in Scripture: all is charged with precious significance for the student who keeps his wits on the alert. Genesis xv. 5 says that God brought Abraham *outside*; outside might be taken as redundant or merely pictorial by the unwary who get no further than visualising the patriarch prompted to go outside his tent and look up at the stars. Such an interpretation is mere trifling, according to Philo's principles. The word "outside" must mean the freeing of Abraham from the bondage of the body! (*On the Allegories of the Laws*, iii. 13). Very great attention must be paid to words which bear more than one sense, and the occurrence of synonyms must not be dismissed as linguistic variation; a subtle distinction is surely intended. Philo fastens on the different verbs used for God's creation

* Our versions (and LXX) are correct, but Philo evidently vowelled the Hebrew differently. It is good to note that he did refer back to the Hebrew text sometimes. But generally he relies on the LXX, and when he says "our language" he means Greek (*On Confusion of Languages*, 26).

of man in Genesis i. 27 and ii. 8 respectively, and bases on this his well-known theory of the existence of a heavenly man prior to the existence of earthly man, i.e. mankind generally (*On the Allegories*, iii. 12 and 16). It did not occur to Philo of course that the explanation was simply in the twofold authorship of these two chapters. Omissions in the Biblical account could also become a stimulus to speculation. Why does God call Adam only and not Eve, asks Philo apropos of Genesis iii. 9 (Where art thou?), and presents as his answer: Eve is included, because mind (*nous*) includes sense-perception (*aisthesis*)! Prepositions, particles and the most minute features of the Greek language are worthy of careful scrutiny, and even punctuation may offer hints that should not be missed. In his discussion of Jacob's dream (Genesis xxviii, 16-17) Philo seems to be tempted to emend the punctuation, in order to avoid being committed to the doctrine that God can be in any one place, which on his principles is "something unworthy of God" and philosophically unsound. Philo would have preferred Scripture to present Jacob as saying: "I knew not that the Lord was in this place" (*On Dreams*, i. 31-2). Similarly with the Greek accents and breathings: if a superior sense is attained by altering their position this should be done. Number and tense in verbs and the gender of nouns must be specially noticed; and in some nouns the presence or absence of the definite article may vary the significance: e.g. *theos* with the article means God, without the article it means the Logos (Word of God, the chief of the divine powers or attributes, in Philo's theology). Numbers generally can be juggled into the queerest symbolism; if there be a special Muse of allegory surely number is one of her greatest gifts to her devotees. Philo takes the number 1 to signify God (One is one and all alone and evermore shall be so!): "God is alone and by himself, being one, and there is nothing like unto God . . . it is good that he who only has a real existence should be alone . . . neither before the creation was there anything with God, nor since the world has been created is anything placed in the same rank with him; for he is in need of absolutely nothing" (*On the Allegories*, ii. 1, translated by C. D. Yonge). Similarly the numbers 4, 7, 10, 70 and 100 may be taken to represent perfection,

and 9 to represent strife. Once the possibility is conceded, procedure can be understood, provided only that it is consistent. We find animals regarded as symbolic of the passions, i.e. the element opposed to reason, the Greek view being that possession of reason was what distinguished man from the animal creation. Birds, however, are more favourably regarded and can even be compared to wisdom or Logos. Reptiles are in a lower symbolic class, and on the whole stand for sensual appetites. Plants, if good and useful, symbolise virtues; if harmful, passions.

Such then is allegory and its method. Often in Philo's pages one gets the impression that the scheme is so complex as to make striving for consistency pointless, for it appears that anything can be taken as symbolic of anything else. That impression is revived in the pages of later Christian authors who are captivated by this method. But before one turns from it in a kind of despair, and rejects it as fantasy unlimited, one must appreciate the intensity of the allegorist—this is certainly to be allowed in the greater masters of the method, of whom Philo was one—and his sense of the supreme importance of the sacred literature which is his subject-matter. Our detailed examination of Philo's principles and method of working is justified because in him we see allegory fully and systematically applied by a subtle mind. We see it as it were "writ large", and can survey its possibilities—and of course its limitations also. Philo does not attempt to justify allegory; he assumes that it is both applicable to sacred scripture, and necessary for the full application of sacred truth. It no more occurs to him to vindicate his use of allegory than it occurs to any of us to apologise for breathing. This lengthy review of Philo is not therefore otiose or disproportionate. It was good to linger with him before we pass on to consider Christian authors, and see whether their use of this method perfected by their Jewish forerunner enabled them to interpret more effectively the Christian Bible. "The main thing is that by the time of Philo the principle was already established in native Judaism that one is not bound to take every scriptural text literally. . . . The principle that Scripture is not always to be taken literally, and that it has to be interpreted allegorically came to him as a heritage of Judaism;

his acquaintance with Greek philosophic literature led him to give to the native Jewish allegorical method of interpretation a philosophic turn.”*

In the New Testament itself we have two passages of Paul which may be reckoned as allegorical. Galatians iv. 21-31 is explicitly so named by Paul himself; and I Corinthians x. 1-4 is very similar. But these are occasional exercises, rather than regular practice, for Paul and his theological method cannot be termed allegorical. That would put him into far too close a relationship with Philo. It would be fairer to describe his methodology as rabbinic, but even that applies only to some of his epistles (Galatians, for example). His debt to Stoicism, and the Stoic literary form called the diatribe, must also be recorded. Of course, he shows the influence of rabbinic *ideas*, as recent scholarship is pointing out;† but we are now considering only his forms of expression.

If there is any one of the New Testament writers on whom the mantle of Philo might be said to have fallen, it would be the author of Hebrews. He certainly observes four of Philo's canons of exegesis: he agrees that the literal sense is to be rejected when it raises a contradiction (iv. 8-9); and that the silence of Scripture is very significant (i. 5, 13). He can fasten on a single word and make it bear a great weight of interpretation, as when he brings out the force of the “new” covenant (viii. 8-13). And he can make etymology serve the interests of his theology in true Philonic style, as in the passage about Melchizedek (vii. 1-3). This, together with some correspondence of thought, e.g. parallels between the opening verses and the language Philo uses about the Logos, make it possible to say that if this author had not actually read Philo, he did share some of Philo's fundamental ideas. With regard to the parables of Jesus it perhaps hardly needs saying nowadays that they were not allegories. In the history of Christian exegesis they have often been treated as such, by both Catholics and Protestants, liberals and

* H. A. Wolfson: *Philo*, Vol. I, pp. 134, 138.

† Notably W. D. Davies: *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (1948). But Paul's training for the Rabbinate is not too confidently to be assumed. See J. Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul*, 1954.

literalists. But critical treatment since the publication of Jülicher's great study in 1888 is clear that in the intention of the Lord they were not mysterious truths, intended to be enucleated as allegories in every detail, but illustrations of some aspect of Jesus' own teaching and work, to be interpreted with reference to that great crisis in which He was the chief actor.*

But although allegory received neither dominical sanction, nor any general encouragement in the usage of New Testament writers, we find that it has established itself in Church usage by the middle of the second century. The *Epistle of Barnabas* applies some of Philo's canons, and also shows independent allegorisations. Philo's principles are again much in evidence in Justin Martyr, whose Dialogue with the Jew Trypho provides many examples of allegory in the Philonic manner (c. A.D. 150). It is now self-evident, apparently, that there is special significance in repetitions or contradictions in a Bible passage; similarly in silence or apparent omission. Every possible meaning of a word must be taken account of, and when the regular meanings furnish nothing striking enough then a new application must be ventured. Justin is also familiar with the symbolism of numbers and of objects. We will illustrate this latter, because of its preponderance in Christian writing generally from this time on. There is no space here to offer detailed justification of the other judgments about Justin's use of allegory, but the inquiring reader can easily consult the treatise itself.

It is not Philo only whose influence is operative at the end of the second century, but the Alexandrian school of Greek philology, which had made notable contributions in textual criticism and commentary-work on ancient authors, particularly Homer. The work of Latin commentators on Virgil in other places must also be mentioned. Educated Christians did not fail to apply similar treatment to their own sacred authors, evidencing therein greater aptitude than Jewish scholars, apart from Philo, in the elucidation of their Scriptures. This has been pointed out recently by C.

* A. Jülicher: *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (1888). C. H. Dodd: *The Parables of Kingdom* (1935). J. Jeremias: *The Parables of Jesus* (1954).

Schneider.* It was Christians rather than Jews who carried on the Greek philological tradition. Schneider refers to the commentary on Habakkuk discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls as an example of the meagreness of Jewish commentary-work. The outstanding Christian commentators are Clement and Origen in Alexandria itself. Their work covered almost the whole of the New Testament and Greek Old Testament. Unfortunately but a small part has been preserved.

The belief in symbolic objects is the fountain-head of what has come to be called typology, and it has recently been claimed, by Daniélou in his book on Origen, that this is the distinctively Christian method of treatment of the Old Testament. We shall have to consider that judgment presently, but for the moment we note the evidences of typology in Justin and his junior contemporary Irenaeus. For the fuller and more intelligent use of this kind of exegesis we must wait till we come to the great Alexandrian masters, Clement and Origen, but we need to note that they were not the pioneers in this matter. Justin remarks (*Dialogue*, ch. 138) that as Noah was saved by wood and water, so Christians are saved by the Cross and Baptism. This is more than mere parallelism. Justin is looking back into the Old Testament for "types", or prophecies, or foreshadowings, of what the Church recognised as the great realities of its own experience and pre-eminently of the passion of Christ. He could appeal for justification to the argument of Paul in I Corinthians x. As further types of the Cross, beside Noah's ark, we find Justin pointing to the roasted Passover lamb (ch. 40), Moses praying (ch. 90), and the staves of Moses and Aaron and Jacob (ch. 86). The extravagance of the last comparison prompted Farrar's witticism that any piece of wood in the Old Testament was liable to be called a type of the Cross.†

Irenaeus was a more important figure in the Church of the late second century, and also more definitely a Biblical theologian than Justin. He took a firm stand against the fanciful exegesis of the heretics of his time. His main weapon in his fight against them was

* *Geistesgeschichte des antiken Christentums*, Vol. II, p. 36.

† *History of Interpretation*, p. 173.

the appeal to the primitive tradition of the Church, and in this sense he is called by Professor R. M. Grant "the father of authoritative exegesis in the Church". He did not profess to be a philosopher like Justin, but based his arguments upon the Bible, being thus "an interpreter of Scripture rather than an original thinker."* We cannot, however, say that he shows no trace of allegorising. But one thing should now begin to be clear about the attractiveness of allegory. The conception of divine revelation as progressive had not yet been grasped. This inevitably meant that the difficulties of the Old Testament could only be accommodated to Christian faith if some byway to a different meaning than the crude literal one could be found. Now this is in principle what allegory does. And that is why Irenaeus has to make use of it, even though he condemned its arbitrary application by heretics. There were heretics (the Marcionites) who rejected the Old Testament as Christian Scripture, and it is not surprising that they refused the allegorical method as well. The orthodox Church had the wisdom to keep the Old Testament among its Scriptures, but it was forced to make allegory also at home, in order to obviate the difficulties raised by many passages for the Christian conscience. This was inevitable. It turned out to be both a strength and a weakness. The critic Celsus was able to make it appear a weak spot in the Church's armour (see Origen's *Treatise against Celsus*, iv. 48-50). If Scripture was divine revelation it must be retained, but this involved searching for deeper senses than the superficial sense if that superficial sense cast doubt upon the revelation, or the character of the divine Revealer. Nothing "unworthy of God" could be allowed to stand. We must content ourselves with quoting one passage which indicates Irenaeus' general saneness and also his admission of allegory or typology as the only means of conserving the meaningfulness of Scripture as a whole. "With respect to those misdeeds for which the Scriptures themselves blame the patriarchs and prophets, we ought not to pronounce moral judgments. . . . With respect to those actions on which the Scriptures pass no censure (Irenaeus has in mind the incest of Lot's daughters narrated in Genesis xix) we ought not to become critical,

* E. Evans: *Tertullian's Treatise against Praxeas*, p. 37.

for we are not more careful than God, nor can we be superior to our Master; we have to search out a type. For nothing is meaningless which finds an uncensured place in Scripture.”*

Philo had not worked out his system of Biblical allegory in vain. These leaders of the Church had transplanted his spreading tree into Christian soil where it was to yield similar fruit in greater profusion and of slightly different flavour. We may agree with Hatch† that “whereas Philo and his school had dealt mainly with the Pentateuch, the early Christian writers came to deal mainly with the prophets and poetical books; and whereas Philo was mainly concerned to show that the writings of Moses contained Greek philosophy the Christian writers endeavoured to show that the writings of the Hebrew preachers and poets contained Christianity.” We may add that Irenaeus began the application of this method to the New Testament.‡

By this time certain distinctions are becoming clear. The difference between allegory and typology has already been mentioned, and this will occupy us again shortly. We see also that in allegorising the Old Testament Christian exegesis is concerned for something more than tracing the fulfilment of predictions, or with what has often been called the argument from prophecy. Typology is nearer than allegory to that argument. But allegory in the strict sense is a search for an underlying truth rather than for repetitions or fulfilments in history. We must remember that its origin is Greek, not Hebraic. The term “mystical exegesis”§ we prefer to avoid altogether, rather than define carefully, in distinction from allegory. We are content to use allegory in the sense of the elucidation of an inner meaning where the obvious or literal meaning is ambiguous or in any way objectionable from the orthodox standpoint. We accept the opinion of Professor Wolfson that it is a mistake to make over-subtle distinctions between what is genuine allegory, and what is not. “The allegorical method

* Irenaeus, IV, 31; Harvey, Vol. II, p. 251.

† *The Influence of Greek Ideas*, p. 72.

‡ So Harnack, referred to by Lawson: *The Biblical Theology of St. Irenaeus*, p. 83.

§ See the article by Darwell Stone in Gore's *Commentary*, and a chapter in Newman's famous *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.

essentially means the interpretation of a text in terms of something else, irrespective of what that something else is.”*

With this clarification of terminology in mind we are ready to approach the great Alexandrian exegetes, Origen and his predecessor Clement, in whom at last we find a precise formulation of allegorical method and a systematic idea of how the expositor has to deal with a given passage.

The literal sense must not detain us, says Clement. To stop there is the misuse of Scripture typical of heretics. The true exegete must press on. It is a mark of heresy “not to look to the sense, but to make use of the bare words. For in almost all the quotations they make, you will find that they attend to the names alone, while they alter the meanings.”† There is much in Clement’s wordy pages that might have come straight out of Philo: treatment of numbers and interpretation of names, for example; the horse representing passion, and the snake representing pleasure, and so on. Sometimes he actually quotes Philo. Again, Clement affirms with Philo that Scripture says nothing unbecoming to God; hence the statement that God rested cannot be taken literally, nor can the description of Creation as completed in six days, for time is not meaningful for God. For an example of Clement’s treatment of a leading Old Testament character we may put together various opinions about Abraham strewn throughout his work (Clement is a very unsystematic writer) and construct the following total portrait. Character studies in the modern manner were not part of Clement’s stock-in-trade, and we are not suggesting that he had an interest in portraiture. He does build up a conception of the “true Gnostic”, that is, what we should call the ideal Christian; but that is something different from the character construction of a play-writer or novelist. Our concern at the moment is to illustrate his method of idealising or spiritualising factual statements in the Bible, and it is convenient to take the figure of Abraham as a unifying framework. This then is what Clement’s going beyond the bare literal sense

* H. A. Wolfson: *Philo*, Vol. I, p. 134.

† *Stromata*, VII, 16 (translation in the Ante-Nicene Christian Library, *Clement*, Vol. II, p. 478).

(*psile lexis*) can result in: Abraham began as an astronomer; his living with Agar means that he was introduced to ordinary educational subjects; his numbering of his 318 house-servants (Genesis xiv. 14) suggests that he was specially good at arithmetic! In this period of his life his wife Sarah was unfruitful, i.e. his knowledge did not produce any virtue. His association with Agar, who stands for worldly wisdom, engrosses him too much and he neglects true philosophy. But Sarah reproaches Agar, and Abraham realises that she, i.e. true philosophy, is his real wife. Here the change of name fits in (Abram—Abraham), and is understood to mean Abraham's ceasing to be a mere student of Nature (*physiologos*) and rising to the status of a philosopher (*philosophos*). As such he is on the highest level possible for a man, and the opposite of such as Cain.*

It has already been pointed out that allegorical treatment of the New Testament as well as of the Old had found a footing in the Church, Irenaeus apparently being the pioneer here. We see this in Clement also, and what calls for particular notice is his handling of the Gospel miracles as if they were parables; for example, with reference to the Feeding of the Five Thousand he says the barley loaves mean the preparation of the Jews for divine knowledge (barley ripens earlier than wheat!), and the fishes mean the preparation of the Greeks by philosophy (because philosophy was born amid the waves of heathendom and given to those who lie on the ground).† The treatment of the Parables themselves allegorically required even less excuse. It is really difficult for Clement on his own principles to make a distinction between a parable or parabolic language and ordinary language, as far as the Bible is concerned, for he treats every passage as if it were a parable or mystery whose real meaning had to be sought deeper down than the surface meaning.

One final thing we must note in Clement. He distinguishes the body and the spirit of Scripture. Occasionally he makes a more refined distinction,‡ but this twofold distinction is more common.

* A good deal of this may be found in *Stromata*, I, 5. I am indebted here to Siegfried, op. cit., p. 349 f. † I owe this point to Farrar: *History of Interpretation*, p. 186.

‡ e.g., *Stromata*, I, 28: Symbolic, moral, prophetic senses, in addition to the literal.

We need take no time to illustrate it, because it is taken up and developed by Origen; we simply make this our introduction to Origen himself, who uses the stratagems of allegory with more pronounced mastery and is much more entitled than Clement to be known as an expositor of the Bible. Erasmus says of him that in this section of theology (allegory) he easily won the chief place. He is indeed the first of the great Biblical exegetes, basing his whole theology on the Bible and to that end taking great trouble to establish the actual text as accurately as possible, and equipping himself with knowledge of Hebrew as well as Greek.

It is unfortunate that Origen's numerous writings are only fragmentarily preserved. The excessively orthodox-conscious fifth century pronounced him in some respects heretical and this had a twofold effect; first on his disciples, who did their best to play down this criticism, at the risk of not reproducing the Master's thoughts in all their challenge and subtlety; secondly on his critics, who tended to retain only those parts of his writings which justified their negative criticism. This must be borne in mind when reading his works. There is, however, a fair amount still extant, either in his own Greek or in the Latin of Rufinus. His exegetical work extended to almost every Biblical book, and represented his daily lectures to students. His mature work *Concerning First Principles*, which is really the first Systematic Theology, devotes its fourth and last book to the Scriptural basis, and we may well commence our own examination at this point.

Origen opens with an affirmation of Christ's divinity, as prophesied in the Old Testament. Then he says the "divinity" and "inspiration" of the Old Testament—we might say its meaning—was not clear until Christ came. This is not equally plain to everybody; but neither is the providential order of Nature plain everywhere. Some parts of Scripture will inevitably appear obscure. Its treasure may be concealed beneath undistinguished language. Its wisdom is not capable of being expressed in everyday human words because it is not of this world. Elsewhere Origen quotes Romans xi. 33 (O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and

his ways past tracing out!) and emphasises that the meaning is the sheer impossibility, and not simply the difficulty, of tracing out God's ways. What a long way we have travelled from the parables of Jesus!

Origen proceeds to point out how both Jews and heretics have been prevented from true understanding of the Old Testament because they took it literally. He refers to Isaiah xi. 6-7 with the Jews in mind, and to Isaiah xiv. 7 f. with reference to the heretics and their inference that God (or a god) is evil. As for that higher or spiritual meaning which Origen desiderates, there is of course need of guidance how to attain it, and as a preliminary to this one must be clear about the distinction between the three senses of Scripture: as the human constitution is divided into body, soul, spirit, so it is with Scripture. Origen uses a number of expressions for these three types of interpretation, more than twenty, in fact, for the spiritual sense, which was his main interest. He did not mean that every verse is patent of all three senses. "Many texts have no literal sense at all. Some, like the Decalogue, have a moral signification, of such a kind that it is needless to seek farther. The distinction between the two higher senses is not always very clearly drawn as there are regions where the one shades off into the other by very fine gradations. But there is an abundance of passages where they are so sharply defined as to show us exactly what Origen meant. The grain of mustard is first the actual seed, then faith, then the Kingdom of Heaven. So again the 'little foxes' of the Song of Songs are typical, in the second sense of sins affecting the individual, in the third of heresies distracting the Church. The moral embraces all that touches the single soul in this life, in its relation to the law of right, or to God; the spiritual includes all 'mysteries', all the moments in the history of the Church in time and still more in eternity."*

We may accept this threefold differentiation in principle, but we shall sometimes find ourselves in perplexity over its application. For instance, Origen's citation of John ii. 6 ("two or three firkins apiece") as an illustration of the *bodily* sense is at first somewhat

* Bigg: *Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, pp. 174-5.

surprising. He does not indicate precisely what it is, but simply states that it is a source of edification for simple believers. He is intrigued by the mention of "two or three": the two firkins is a hint of the twofold sense, i.e. psychical and spiritual, and the addition of "or three" may be taken as an indication that a third sense is possible, and this for Origen means the bodily. Some passages do not admit of a bodily sense, he says, but the possibility must be left open that there is such a sense, as well as the two superior senses. Thus he has not really illustrated what he understands by the bodily sense. All we learn from this passage is that it is plain enough for the uninstructed Church member to perceive and get benefit from, and we are glad to note Origen's concern for the needs of this section of the Church, which is after all, as he himself realises, the majority: "the mass, who are unable to understand profounder meanings". He refers to I Corinthians ix. 9 as an example of that sense of Scripture which is comparable to the soul, but does not stay to explain it fully, and we are left to infer that this sense deals with human duty. Origen hurries on to speak of the spiritual sense in which he is most interested. It is that meaning of which the actual words of the passage are a mere shadow; it is the hidden wisdom mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians ii, the divine reality of which Scripture provides many narratives as types. He refers also to I Corinthians x. 11; Galatians iv. 21 f.; Colossians ii. 16; Hebrews viii. 5. Generally, we may say the spiritual meaning has as its content the nature of God or of Christ and the divine purpose in redeeming human souls from sin. Later Origen speaks of this sense as "the treasure of divine meaning enclosed in the frail vessel of the common letter". Scripture is like a vast field planted with all kinds of plants; what matters is not what is above ground and everyone can see, but what is stored within, i.e. treasures of wisdom.

Origen allows—like Philo before him, to whom his debt is obvious—that the bodily or literal sense sometimes stands, even for those who are capable of penetrating more deeply, e.g. in the Commandments. Sometimes it is impossible, as when it speaks of God walking in Eden, or of the Devil taking Christ to a high

mountain. But on the whole, passages which are to be taken literally are much more numerous than those of purely spiritual significance. One is in a way relieved to find Origen admitting this in the more systematic discussion he devotes to this subject in *First Principles*, because many times in his commentaries themselves he shows a curious insensitiveness to the plain meaning. In the *Treatise on Prayer*, for example, he will not allow the clause of the Lord's Prayer "Give us this day our daily bread" to be used as a petition for material bread: it can only mean Christ, the true manna, etc. And on the clause "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" he is not content to let earth mean this earth, and heaven mean heaven, but makes earth stand for the Church and heaven Christ. Such subtleties are beyond the capacity of most readers, however. Simpler minds are not able to "stand the strain" of seeking for the inner meaning veiled by the actual words of the narrative; indeed, difficulties and even impossibilities were designedly introduced into the narrative in some places in order to exercise the more able inquirers "by the torture of the examination", for only "a mind worthy of God" can penetrate these mysteries. In mitigation of the charge of intellectual snobbishness against Origen we must remember that he was contending for the rationality of the Christian faith against its detractors like Celsus who regarded it as a superstition only fit for slaves and the uneducated.

It is time to take stock of the variety of suggestions available to Christians by that time in the matter of the understanding of their Scriptures. Origen has gathered up and massively developed what had already been attempted in the way of penetrating the depths of meaning of the sacred text. His own great authority imposed upon this ensured it a future in the Church's handling of its Bible through following centuries. His orthodoxy and personal authority was called in question, but the allegorical method of interpretation had come to stay.

What can be made of the threefold sense of Scripture which Origen advocated? Can it be retained, or redefined for our use still today? We need not dismiss it contemptuously as a form of outmoded allegory. There is point in speaking of the *body* of

Scripture, if we understand thereby the outward form, i.e. that which meets the reader first and foremost; the surface of the ground, before any real digging is done, or at any rate before the deeper digging is begun. And what precisely does this mean, in non-metaphorical terms? It includes outward events and all material references, what is a matter of time and space, pure history and geography, the movement of armies, building of temples, organisation, the outward scene generally, the setting or framework of life. This of course cannot be simply distinguished by a clear line of demarcation from the rest of the Bible books and set aside in order that the rest may be studied. It is not a case of the bodily sense being contained in certain chapters, and other chapters being concerned with the other senses. But precisely as in the human being, the soul and spirit are within the body, and express themselves through it, and in no other way. The analogy Origen fixed on was a pertinent one. It is an obvious priority to start with the bodily sense, or the "material" sense, as it might be called. Later generations were to call it the "literal" sense. But Origen was again right in insisting that we go on from there. The bodily sense must not be given greater importance than it merits. It is the vehicle or container of more important meanings. An engineer is more important than the machine he operates, and personality than body.

We turn to what Origen compared with the soul in the body, and this also is worth retaining, although the adjective "psychical" which Origen used will hardly serve us, because of its monopoly in another sphere. "Moral" is sometimes used, but this expresses only half of what Origen understood by this sense. For it covers not only what concerns conduct and duty, but all the activities of the soul, fear and joy, faith and confidence, despair and hope, contrition and praise. "Experiential" might be pressed into service. What is desiderated is an adjective connoting human experience in all its range, "feeling" in the best sense of that overworked word. This aspect of the Bible is brought before us in what deals with human character, presented of course in relation to the divine purpose, either serving it or obstructing it, praising God or sinning against

Him. Most of life's ups and downs find a mention in the Bible, and our human nature is shown in all its exaltation and degradation. What a revelation of human moods is the Book of Psalms! What fascination for psychology in the characters of Jacob and David, or Peter and Judas! Where in all literature is to be found a more moving description of the troubled conscience than in Genesis iii? And how true is that statement in IV Ezra: "each man is the Adam of his own soul"! There is what has been called a "warm human side of the Bible", and this is what the "soul sense" is concerned with.

There remains the "spiritual" sense, compared by Origen to the spirit, or noblest part of the human constitution, that in man which brings him closest to God, and constitutes his only claim to affinity with God. This is why Origen reckons it as of the highest importance, and we must agree with him. It is this sense of Scripture which makes known to us the essence of the Biblical revelation. Its subject-matter, so to speak, is the nature and gracious purpose of God in dealing with mankind. Involved in this of course is all the Biblical teaching about Creation and Incarnation and Resurrection, Christ and Satan, Justification and Sanctification, Heaven and Hell, Judgment and Final Consummation.

In this way we have attempted to reconstruct what Origen meant by his threefold distinction of ways in which the Bible may be expounded. We have not rejected it as fanciful or hypercritical, but have tried to do justice to his intention, and to share his seriousness in this matter of the interpretation of the Bible. He certainly realised that there is a problem of interpretation, i.e. a need to lay down rules or methods by which the Bible can be properly understood. He took account of the fact that many Bible readers will not get very far. This problem is still with us. Origen's way of stating it is implied in his definition of the bodily sense, and his admission that the majority of Church members are not capable of going on to grasp the other senses. But there are the other two senses open to the earnest inquirer. Origen believed that Scripture contained the highest truth available to man, and if he insisted that this was revealed truth, imparted only through and to religious

faith, he had most of his non-Christian contemporaries with him, for even the Greek philosophy of his time was more religious than in the classical period of its origins. He stood for nothing less than for Biblical knowledge as the supreme truth, and he was vindicating the supreme reasonableness or philosophic respectability of Christianity. This is his object in defining the "soul" and "spirit" of the Bible. These two deeper senses are as it were methods by which the deepest truths may be attained. The bodily or literal sense takes a man only part way to the goal; the "spirit" sense takes him right to the goal of the supreme Truth. So much must be stated in fairness of appreciation. On the other hand, it must be admitted that in his actual work as an expositor Origen often takes ingenuity to the point of incredibility and stretches the imaginative until it becomes fantastic. His strictures upon the Gnostic commentator Heracleon apply with equal justice to some of his own statements. (Both wrote commentaries on St. John's Gospel: our knowledge of Heracleon's is derived from the copious extracts which Origen made from it for the purpose of refutation in his own work on St. John.) Thus he is not immune from the common criticism of allegory, that it opens too wide a door to fantasy; it turns away from the level ground of sober comment and embarks on imagination, a slope too slippery to permit a safe return. More simply, allegory may be accused of treating every statement of a sacred text as if it signifies something else; and that something else generally turns out to be what the reader already believes, or wants to believe. But if we make this criticism we must recall also that the intention of allegorists is to salvage a reasonable interpretation which takes account of other aspects of truth as well as the teaching of Scripture in its wholeness; and guards against crudities of exegesis which turn potential converts into "cultured despisers" (e.g. Celsus in the second century, and Voltaire in the eighteenth, and the scientific humanists of the twentieth).

An important recent study of Origen, by the French Jesuit Jean Daniélou, offers a defence of Origen by distinguishing his allegorising from his typology. Typological interpretation was already in use earlier, as we have seen, and it figures prominently in

Irenaeus's use of Scripture. This Daniélou regards as the distinctive Christian usage, and he shows how Origen developed it in his own way. Allegory, on the other hand, he regards as a "non-Christian exegetical tradition". As we ourselves have seen, its origins were Greek, and it was mediated to Christian scholars by Philo's adaptation of it. We believe Daniélou to be wrong in assuming that Origen could have kept clear of allegory, while maintaining typology. The distinction is too neat, and it is forcing the evidence to suggest, as Daniélou does, that allegory was in keeping with Gnostic exegesis (Heracleon), whereas Origen's use of it was a retrograde step which led him beyond orthodoxy. We prefer to draw the distinction between allegory and typology in another way, understanding them not as alternative methods of interpreting Scripture, but as different in kind, allegory being, properly speaking, a literary method, applied to the text of Scripture, whereas typology is strictly a method of interpreting events of history and thus not on the same plane as allegory because not directed in the first place to the literary texts. This view of allegory as concerned with exegesis of a *text*, contrasted with typology as concerned with the significance of *events*, is put forward by Florovsky in a recent essay.* We do not dispute the view that typology was a distinctively Christian development. It was necessary if Christian theologians were not to follow Marcion's primrose path, and cut loose from the Old Testament altogether. This was a real temptation in the second century. But the Old Testament had to be retained if the Christian Gospel was to be made intelligible and related to the world and to history; the Redeemer had to be recognised as the Creator also, and redemption if it was to be made credible had to be understood as progressive. Typology was the only way in which the Church of the second century could make Christian sense of the Old Testament, and express what is meant in modern theology by progressive revelation. In this sense it was an essential element in the theology of the Fathers. Our proper attitude is not to smile indulgently, but to realise what it really signified, and perceive the element of truth

* *Biblical Authority for Today*, p. 175. The references to Daniélou are from his book *Origène* (1948), pp. 137-98.

in it which an enlightened theology must not discard. In the detailed exposition of particular passages allegorising came in as a natural ally.

Before we pass on to Origen's allegorical continuators in later centuries we may well ask whether there were in his time no representatives of a saner exegesis which did not expose itself so openly to unregulated imagination. The answer is that there was the school of Antioch, rival of Alexandria in this as in other things, with its two outstanding representatives, Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia (350-428) and St. John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (347-407). Of the latter Thomas Aquinas is supposed to have said that he would rather possess his homilies than be master of Paris. It is not inapposite to speak of "the sound grammatical and historical principles and healthy common sense which mark the exegetical school of Antioch".*

We note in the first place that this school or tradition of exegesis rejected in principle the allegorical method characteristic of Alexandria. We notice four other things. First, the difference between the Old and New Testament was more honestly recognised. Theodore was called a "Judaizer" (as was Calvin later) because he understood the Old Testament in its historic sense and refused to read Christian doctrines into it, as was increasingly being done in his day. (We must remember the heat of theological controversy at that time, to which there has since been no parallel. The protagonist of a theory about Christ was almost bound to assume that it was contained somewhere—or everywhere!—in Scripture.) Theodore allowed that some Old Testament passages were fulfilled in Christ, Psalm xxii for example, which although originally written with reference to David and Absalom (thought Theodore) was taken by the Evangelists quite justifiably to refer to Christ's passion. Similarly Joel ii. 28 was appropriately claimed by Peter as illuminating the first Christian Pentecost, although that cannot have been the conscious intention of the old prophet. Thus we may infer that typology was not entirely dispensed with by the Antiochene school. Generally, however, they are characterised by

* Article on Chrysostom in the one-volume *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, p. 168.

a much greater attention to the literal or original sense.* This leads us to notice a second feature, viz. Theodore's practice of studying a passage as a whole and in its context, and moreover in the context of the whole of Scripture, rather than in isolation, as a peg for some theory of his own or for refutation of an opponent's theory. It must be admitted that there is plenty of theological argument in Theodore's pages, and this of course breaks the exposition proper and lowers his value as a commentator; but his expository method is clear enough apart from these digressions, and its significance is in its contrast with that of the Alexandrians. He took pains to ascertain the aim and method of each writer and his characteristic usage (*idioma*). He was painstaking and acute on points of grammar and punctuation and even doubtful readings. We must pronounce him a true scholar. But as compared with Origen he lacks something; "a want of spiritual insight" suggests Swete.† "Often there is over-simplification, and a mere substitution of abstract for concrete statements, as in modern advocates of Demythologising", says Schneider.‡ If Origen is too rationalist and imaginative, Theodore is too jejune and moralistic.

Our third point to note is that the Antiochenes not only rejected the subtleties and inner meanings of the Alexandrians, but also took up a more independent attitude to the Church tradition which the Alexandrians as well as their predecessors, Tertullian and Irenaeus, had upheld. Harnack is not willing to allow this to the Antiochenes, but they deserve credit for it in comparison with their rivals of Alexandria. Harnack accuses them of not freeing themselves from the domination of tradition and the Church's rule of faith (is this a sign of Lutheran presuppositions rather than objective scholarship in the great German scholar?); they were still under the spell of

* Harnack (*Dogmengeschichte*, Vol. II, p. 77) gives a less appreciative judgment on the Antiochenes. He accuses them of retaining the double sense, and thus of showing a certain lack of logic and failure to achieve a fully critical attitude to Scripture.

† Article on Theodore in the one-volume *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, p. 972. We are also indebted in these pages on Antioch to Farrer: *History of Interpretation*, pp. 210-22.

‡ C. Schneider: *Geistesgeschichte des antiken Christentums*, Vol. I, p. 322, referring to the recent study of Theodore by the French scholar R. Devreese.

authoritarian exegesis which goes back to Irenaeus. We may, however, discern in their method and intention something bigger and freer, which might be formulated somewhat as follows. Scripture itself was to be the basis of knowledge, not any concomitant tradition of interpretation or general summary of belief however official and however much approved by successive Church leaders. And the meaning of Scripture could be ascertained by patient thinking without the need to resort to inner meanings or abstruse guesses. Scripture is not a great enigma or series of enigmas; nor is it to be handled as a collection of proof-texts or commonplaces. The prerequisites for its understanding are humility, patient search under wise guidance, and the aid of the Holy Spirit. Fourthly, we observe that the inspiration of Scripture is no longer regarded as received in a trance or abnormal state—so the Alexandrians, claiming the authority of Plato—but as received through the quickening of the perception of the various Biblical authors, through the heightening of their consciousness of spiritual matters rather than the suspension of consciousness. By this critical approach the Biblical writers were allowed to retain their individuality and human characteristics.

Chrysostom is rightly regarded as the prince of the exegetes of the ancient Church. As compared with his contemporary Theodore he is “a homilist rather than a scientific expositor”. That is the authoritative opinion of Swete in the dictionary article already referred to. We may quote also the later judgment of Swete in his edition of the Latin version of Theodore’s commentary on St. Paul: “His [Theodore’s] treatment of the Epistles is grammatical rather than theological; as a theological expositor he yields the palm to his friend Chrysostom”.* Inferior to Theodore in pure scholarship, Chrysostom makes up by a fine urgency and moral passion. He ranges over the whole Bible with masterly good sense, and expounds its plain meaning as a guide of conduct to his fashionable congregations in the metropolis. “There are fewer errors and vagaries in his writings than in those of any one of the fathers”, wrote Dean Farrar. Chrysostom does not rule out allegorical

* H. B. Swete: *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Pauline Epistles*, p. lxxv.

meanings, but he insists that Scripture itself indicates when a passage is patent of such interpretation and actually provides it. This is explicitly said in his comment on Isaiah v. 7,* a very convenient passage on which to ground this argument, for the prophet himself makes plain at the end of his parable of the vineyard that "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant".

It is good to know that there were these beginnings of a more sober exegesis, which bears comparison with the modern critical approach, even though we must agree with Harnack that it was still in the grip of ancient presuppositions and did not succeed in working out a satisfactory ruling principle of Biblical exegesis. The methods of Antioch were mediated to the later West by Junilius Africanus (c. 550), but the next ten centuries were to be more under the influence of Alexandria. Thus its influence remained restricted until after the Reformation, and the intervening centuries belonged rather to its Alexandrian rival with its allegorising and its subtle search for the threefold sense. What beginnings had been made in real historical criticism ceased with Jerome, and the industry which might have kept it going was switched over to mere antiquarian research. We must notice the medieval development briefly, before we deal with the Reformation, although it added nothing of moment to the elucidation of Scripture. The delayed legacy of the Antiochene school will be noticed in Luther's exaltation of what he called the "grammatical" sense, and in the historical comments of Calvin, though we shall see it disappear again under the new Biblicism of Reformed theology.

There remain, however, two other great names of the fifth century which claim some mention, Jerome and Augustine. Jerome's lasting fame is connected with the revision of the Latin Bible versions which he undertook at the call of Pope Damasus in 384, and which became the famous Vulgate. He was a very industrious scholar, and for sheer learning only Origen among the

* Quoted in Bardenhewer, *Patrology*, E.T., p. 338. Harnack's section, referred to above, is most worth consulting, and very suggestive; also his article on the Antioch School in Herzog-Hauck.

Fathers of the Church can be compared with him. All that interests us in the present connection is his distinction between the historical exegesis and tropological (i.e. allegorical) exposition in Scripture: *historica expositio* and *explanatio tropologia*.^{*} On the basis of the historical truth (*veritas*) can be erected a "spiritual building". While dealing with Amos ii he contrasts the splendour of the spiritual meaning with the ugliness (*turpitudō*) of the literal. We find the same distinctions made by Augustine. On the whole we may infer that by the fifth century some sort of balance was held between the literal or historical meaning and a higher or spiritual interpretation. Thus the contribution of Antioch counted for something throughout the Churches generally. We note the summary judgments of Harnack:† "In the course of the fifth century a certain 'common sense' established itself, which can be regarded as a middle way between the exegetical methods of Chrysostom and those of Cyril of Alexandria against the Anthropomorphites . . . the Antiochenes were suspected of an anthropomorphism which did not do justice to the divine dignity. . . . On the other hand, even the Cappadocians objected to allegory being carried too far, involving risk of influence by heathen philosophy. Epiphanius had earlier written: 'Scripture does not need allegory; it is as it is. What it needs is contemplation and sensitive discernment.' The mutual balancing up between the literal and the allegorical and typological interpretation which characterises the Biblical work of the fourth and fifth centuries was not inconsiderable in its total result, and it has remained more or less the same in all churches up to the present day, imparting no small degree of conviction."

The second outstanding figure of that period was Augustine. Our mention of him must not be taken to imply that he was interested first and foremost in Biblical exegesis, in the same way in which Origen and Theodore were. He was a theologian, and more of a Biblical theologian than his Eastern contemporaries; but we must say that his interest was in exposition, rather than in *methods* of

^{*} Farrar: *History of Interpretation*, pp. 391-7, referring to Jerome's comments on Jeremiah xi and Habakkuk i. 11.

† *Dogmengeschichte*, Vol. II, p. 76.

exposition. His contribution to the thought and praxis of the Church was along more than one line; he was theologian and philosopher, statesman and pastor, a comprehensive genius with rare insight into the human heart; and his authority in later centuries is acknowledged by Catholic and Protestant alike. Farrar* impugns him for subordinating the authority of the Bible to that of the Church, adducing the well-known sentence: "I should not believe in the Gospel unless prompted by the authority of the Catholic Church". Farrar suggests that Augustine had the right principles, but did not keep to them. This is a very partial view. There are two points about Augustine which are significant for our present study, and both of them are embryonic in the other oft-quoted dictum of Augustine's: "Love and act as you like". This has primarily a moral reference, but it carries implications for the understanding of the Scriptures in so far as it is the Scriptures which teach the meaning of Love. We infer (a) that if the significance of Scripture is thus defined, we have a unifying principle in its interpretation; (b) that Love being the supreme end, Scripture is not itself an end, but a means.† This remarkable insight did not govern all Augustine's treatment of Scripture. Scripture was for him an *indispensable* means. It was conceivable that occasionally a perfect Christian life might be lived without use of the Bible, e.g. by a monk in a lonely cell. But normally Augustine would argue that the Bible is indispensable—and so is the Church with its sacraments and rule of faith.

C. *Medieval Exegesis*

Before we come to weigh up what the Reformation contributed in understanding of the place of the Bible in the Church we must take account of the medieval achievement. It is customary to regard the Middle Ages as a period when the Bible was virtually set aside, and when Churchmen turned for authoritative guidance to

* *History of Interpretation*, pp. 234-9.

† For supporting quotations cf. Harnack: *Dogmengeschichte*, Vol. II, p. 79, note 2, also Vol. III, pp. 91-2. A full study of Augustine's use of the Bible is needed. Burleigh's chapter in *City of God* (1949) needs expansion.

tradition and the pronouncements of the great Councils of the Church. There is truth in this. There had developed a regrettable shift of emphasis from the Bible to the Fathers, and from seeking the direct guidance of the Spirit to reliance on established usage, so that the main task of the Reformers in the sixteenth century was to redress the balance, and put the Bible back in the central place. Nevertheless we do well to note that important work in Biblical interpretation was done by some medieval scholars. This has been demonstrated in an important book by Miss Smalley.* Moreover, we must admit the positive value of the *Glossa Ordinaria*, i.e. Standard Gloss or Explanation, a kind of rudimentary commentary, to which teachers could refer for guidance about a chapter or verse they proposed to expound. It must not be forgotten that not all medieval preachers, certainly not all parish priests, could read, and the vast majority of their audiences could not read. Modern parallels are to be sought only outside Europe and America.

We shall refer to the *Glossa*, and to St. Thomas Aquinas and Nicolas of Lyra as representative of the great medieval scholars. But first let us note the usual criticisms of medieval exegesis.†

According to Dean Farrar scholastic exegesis was defective quite basically in that it started from a false view of the Bible itself and its inspiration. It tended to treat the Bible as one mysterious enigmatic collection, miraculously communicated to man, and to be expounded without regard to the original circumstances of its communication, the times at which it was written down, the idiosyncrasies of its human authors, etc. The scholastics had no historic sense. Gregory the Great (A.D. 600), one of their pioneers, had said definitely that it did not matter who wrote a particular book, because we do not inquire with what pen a writer composes! The sacred writers are simply pens of the Triune God. The greater scholastics, such as Hugh of St. Victor and St. Thomas were above this kind of thing, but it was widely held. Further, there was an excess of dialectics. Theology was treated like a proposition of

* B. Smalley: *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (1941). My references are to this edition, but there is a much expanded second edition (1952).

† The next paragraph is based on Farrar: *History of Interpretation*, p. 283 f.

Euclid, and an elaborate phraseology developed for it. There was jugglery with words, and subtlety of speculation exceeded all bounds; e.g. Is the correct expression with reference to the divine and human natures of Christ conflate, or commixed, or conglutinate, or coagmentate, or copulated? (This is a real problem, of course.) Is the Host still the body of Christ, if eaten by a mouse? (Protestants at least will be disposed to deny that this is a real problem.) It is easy to caricature here, and one must express appreciation of the powerful acumen and industry of the medieval theologian. But surely enough a false conception of distinctively Christian, i.e. Biblical, theology had been introduced. Theology had been allowed to drift from its Biblical moorings. We find this point well made by R. M. Grant,* when he characterises scholasticism as divorcing theology from exegesis, which the early Fathers had not done, and allying it with philosophy. The fashionable philosophy in the Middle Ages was that of Aristotle, who was now as it were pressed into Christian service, if not actually baptised into Christianity. Dante has to portray Aristotle with the other great philosophers of antiquity as in Hell, but he refers to him as "the master of those who know". Thus Aristotelianism was made the basis of Christian theology. In the first Christian centuries it had been some later form of Platonism which the Fathers used to underpin the faith philosophically. Reformed theology, following Luther, has tended to be suspicious of philosophy. Luther, however, is much more akin to the Fathers, and against the scholastics, in refusing to divorce theology from the Bible. The Reformation had to bring theology back from the wilderness into which scholasticism had allowed it to stray. It had to reset it upon its proper fulcrum.

Dean Farrar does not fail to point out the ignorance of the Biblical languages, Greek and Hebrew, during the medieval period, and regales us with illustrations; e.g. Durandus attempts to explain Alleluia as compounded of Alle = *salvum*, leu = *me*, ja = *fac*, i.e. Save me! Here again it is easy to drop into caricature. There was widespread ignorance, in fact insensitivity to the need for precise

* *The Bible in the Church*, p. 108.

linguistic knowledge. But the depth of the general ignorance and the very darkness of the Dark Ages must not be forgotten. We must not too easily assume that the scholastics could simply carry on where Origen and Jerome left off. Moreover, Farrar does not take account of the fact, which Miss Smalley has brought to the fore,* that from the thirteenth century onwards "Hebraic truth" ceased to mean what Jerome had made it mean, the Vulgate version from the original Hebrew; it was now used with reference to Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament.

The third point of criticism, and this is the chief one, is the development of the multiple sense of Scripture and the tendency to ignore the original or literal sense. This is not to be laid entirely to the charge of the Middle Ages, for we have already seen how far Origen and the Fathers went in this direction. But the medieval exegetes certainly went farther. Origen's spiritual sense was subdivided into allegorical and anagogical, and this with the literal and moral gave a total of four senses. The stock illustration is the exposition of Jerusalem, which signified, literally, the actual city in Palestine; morally, the faithful soul; allegorically, the Church militant on earth; anagogically, the Church triumphant in Heaven. There is something satisfying in that, but it is too neat and schematic, and of course Jerusalem is rather too hand-picked as an illustration. One trembles to think what a simple congregation had to put up with if a preacher applied this fourfold classification of senses to more ordinary terms and more out-of-the-way passages of Scripture. A fair summary of what the fourfold sense implied is contained in the medieval Latin couplet which runs: "The letter of Scripture gives plain teaching, the moral sense is about what you are to do, the anagogic about what you may hope, the allegoric about what you are to believe". It was the latter two senses which received most attention, though the importance of the literal sense was not entirely forgotten, as Pepler and Smalley have recently shown, and as we shall see presently. But the overriding consideration with the medieval expositor was to make every passage proclaim and support the teaching of the Church, and to

* Smalley, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-65.

this end he might bring any one or all four of the recognised scriptural senses to bear by the exercise of his own ingenuity. For had it not been written by St. Augustine, whose words came down authoritatively to the medieval centuries almost like the words of the Lawgiver Moses from the mount of revelation to the people of God: "scriptura non asserit nisi fidem catholicam": Scripture teaches nothing but the Catholic faith?

The title "Allegories of Sacred Scripture" or something similar is very frequent in the works of medieval theologians. They are really collections of allegorical interpretations, some perhaps being the original work of the individual author, but mostly they consist of interpretations carried forward from earlier scholars. To quote one example of the kind of information offered: "sea" is said by Alanus de Insulis* to carry the various meanings: gathering of water, Scripture, the present age, the human heart, the active life, heathen, baptism. That is to say that where the word "sea" is in the text, the meaning is not sea, but one (or more) of these definitions. To call these works lexicons would be saying too much, but they aimed at fulfilling the function now performed by the theological dictionaries. More important than these anthologies was the *Glossa Ordinaria*, which had the authority of a standard work in the sphere of exegesis. Its method is to quote the opinions of the Fathers, notably Jerome, Augustine and Ambrose, but also the earlier medieval authorities such as Bede and Isidore of Seville. This is done to distil a consistent verdict out of the opinions cited, and the effect is that of a patchwork. The exegetical method is often referred to as "historical" or "mystical" or "moral" or "typical", but the exegesis is not systematic according to a threefold or fourfold scheme. It consists of individual "glosses" or comments, written in the margin and between the lines of the text. Each book of Scripture is provided with one or more prefaces, which again go back to Jerome. As a compilation it is the work of more than one author, but the circumstances of its origin are not very clear. The traditional ascription of it to Walafrid Strabo (died 849) is legendary, though Ebeling thinks it had some

* *Liber de distinctionibus dictionum theologialium.*

connection with him, and certainly the section on the Pentateuch was based on his work. Miss Smalley shows that Anselm of Laon (c. 1100) was responsible for Psalms and St. Paul, and also for much more, if the contribution of his pupils is considered. The authority it enjoyed in the twelfth and following centuries implies some centralisation of teaching. It is with reference to this exegetical norm that the completed theological systems (*Summae*) of the medieval masters were developed.

Outstanding among the scholastics was Thomas Aquinas, the "angelic teacher" of the Church, whose system has been adopted as normative for Catholicism. It was he who gave final authority to the conception of a fourfold* sense of Scripture. At the beginning of his great work of Systematic Theology (*Summa Theologica*) he discusses the questions whether sacred Scripture is justified in using metaphors and whether sacred Scripture contains more than one sense in a single passage.† According to his method all possible objections to the thesis proposed (*Quaestio*) are considered and refuted. The difficulty he feels about the multiple interpretation is that it might confuse people, and "Scripture must be able to demonstrate without any fallacy". But this objection, though understandable, cannot have the last word, because God, as author of Scripture, can impose meaning not only on words (as men do) but also on the things signified by the words. In Scripture we are dealing not with an ordinary science, but with the will of God. The ordinary meaning common among men is the literal sense, the other is the spiritual sense. This may be subdivided into allegorical, moral and anagogic. "In so far as what belongs to the old law signifies the things of the new Law, we have the allegorical sense; in so far as Christ's deeds or what relates to Christ contain signs of what we ought to be doing, we have the moral sense; in so far as they relate to the state of eternal glory, we have the anagogic sense." It is clear that for Aquinas the literal sense is primary. It may be more important than the other meanings which may be deduced from it, but it is related to them and they to it. "Nothing

* The notion of a fourfold (as distinct from Origen's threefold) sense seems to go back to Augustine.

† Sections 9 and 10 of the first *Quaestio*.

necessary for faith is contained in the spiritual sense, which Scripture does not in some other place plainly state by means of the literal sense." Elsewhere it becomes clear that for Aquinas the literal sense is basic as giving what the author intends; that is, in the case of the story of the Good Samaritan, for example, not simply an actual incident on the Jerusalem-Jericho road, but neighbourliness; or in the parable of the Sower, Mark iv. 1-8, the literal sense is the explanation given in the following verses 13-20; or in the Book of Job the literal sense is the demonstration of divine providence in spite of all the appearances to the contrary in poor Job's experience.* We shall hardly be prepared to follow Aquinas as far as this. If literal interpretation carries him so far afield, his spiritualising ventures will assuredly take him where most will not dare to follow. Nevertheless he must be given credit for redressing the balance of Biblical exegesis in favour of the literal interpretation. He was not the pioneer in this, as Miss Smalley has shown,† but it was his own great authority which established the new tendency. The literal sense for Thomas is much more than the outward form of words, or what modern criticism is accustomed to call the historical meaning; it is the whole intention of the human author as contrasted with the divine author, who is trying to communicate His will through the "things" (*res*), i.e. events recorded in the Bible; that is, as we express it today, through the Biblical narrative understood as the record of God's self-revelation or saving acts. The drawing out of the intention of the divine author was what Thomas understood as the spiritual sense. And if what he offers under this category still strikes us as fanciful, we should remember that he recognised the primacy of the literal sense upon which alone theological arguments could be based. A method of treatment of the parable of the Good Samaritan independent of St. Thomas and going back before his time is quoted by Father Pepler: the Good

* See Pepler's chapter on the "Faith of the Middle Ages" in *The Interpretation of the Bible*, pp. 40-2.

† Smalley, *op. cit.* (1st edn.), p. 233, gives credit to Albert the Great: "With St. Albert the literal truth takes on a new meaning"; it is compared to the bones in a body, not as dry bones, but as that which gives solidity, and contains the rich marrow (i.e. spiritual sense).

Samaritan stands for Christ and the man robbed and left by the roadside means humanity in its need. The priest represents the patriarchs, the Levite the prophets, all of whom failed to minister to that need. We quote this as an example of how medieval preachers allegorised and also of how they held together the Old and New Testaments, the one foreshadowing, the other referring back. Certainly the Bible was treated as a unity by the medieval expositors. "It could be shown that the whole of Aquinas's treatment of Scripture as the foundation of sacred doctrine is based on the conception of the fulfilment of the Old by the New, of the complete unity of the two making the Bible one book telling one story."*

We do well to note what Miss Smalley says about the effect of the introduction of Aristotelianism into theology in the thirteenth century, the peak period of scholastic exegesis: "Scripture began to seem less like a mirror of universal truth, and more like a collection of works whose authors had intended to teach particular truths. . . . The exegete fastened his attention on the letter, which represented the words chosen by them or their translators as the aptest to express their meaning."†

The Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra (died 1349) deserves special mention among medieval commentators, partly because of his influence on Luther, mainly because he aimed at tracing the development through a whole passage and resisted the temptation to allegorise individual verses. He shows independence also in his quotations from the Fathers. Miss Smalley gives reasons for not regarding him as the first to show the influence of the Jewish scholar Rashi, and as we have seen he was not the pioneer in magnifying the importance of the literal sense. But he continued the practice of stressing the literal meaning, and insists, following Thomas, that it is the basis of any other meaning which may be developed, and that any deviation from it brings the most elaborate allegorical superstructure down in ruins. Nicholas's *Postillae* (sermons) were printed together with many copies of the *Glossa*.

Our final reference to medieval writers is to the *Theologia Germanica*, that classic of mysticism which even Luther appreciated.

* *The Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 28.

† Smalley, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

In this book we notice, beside the distinctive mystical ideas and the influence of Aristotle, much sound Biblical interpretation. Chapter XVI, for example, grasps the essential Pauline meaning of the terms Old and New Man, and re-expresses it in contemporary language, i.e. that of the fifteenth century. Similarly, though the doctrine of sin as *aversio a Deo* and *conversio ad creaturam* which is found here (and was at the bottom of much scholastic exegesis) seems to have moved a long way from what the Bible teaches about sin, the actual exposition is Biblical enough. Compare the following with Ezekiel xviii:

“ Sin is the turning away of the creature from the Creator. He who is in disobedience is in sin, and sin can never be atoned for or amended but by returning to God. . . . When a man returns into obedience all is amended and atoned for and forgiven . . . if the Devil himself would come into true obedience, he would become an angel again, and all his sin and wickedness would be amended and atoned for. . . . And should an angel fall into disobedience he would straightway become a devil.”

Or this, on Genesis iii:

“ God says to Adam, that is, to every man, ‘ Whatever thou art, or doest, or leavest undone . . . is all lawful and not forbidden if it come not to pass from thy will but from Mine ’.”*

D. *The Reformation and After*

With the Reformation came a fresh approach to the Bible and a reassertion of its centrality, in fact of its supreme authority. The importance of Luther's inner experience can hardly be overrated. Out of it was born his conviction that salvation was “ by faith alone ”; in other words, salvation is a gift of God and not simply a prize for human endeavour; and this became a basic principle of Reformed theology.

In the light of this the first Protestants felt justified in turning

* Quoted from the edition published by Gollancz in 1950, pp. 141 and 209 (Winkworth's translation, revised by W. Trask).

their back on traditional theology and the Roman ecclesiastical system. Against the authority of the Pope and the Fathers Luther set the authority of Scripture. How could he do otherwise, when it was directly out of his reading of Scripture, and particularly Paul's Epistles, that illumination had come to him? Once and for all he learned that the veritable Word of God is imparted through Scripture, not through the Church or its ministers, except in so far as they witness to Scripture. Scripture is above the Church, not the Church above Scripture. The Church's representatives might appeal to the venerable Augustine and his famous saying: "I should not believe in the Gospel, did not the Church's authority compel me to do so"; but that was deception. Not even Augustine must be allowed to throw dust in men's eyes. God's word must be heard through reading the Bible or hearing it preached. That is the vital thing. The Word is prior to the Church and even in a sense to the Bible itself. "It is the Word which creates the Church, and not the Church which disposes of the Word." It is not for the Church to decide what Scripture teaches, but for Scripture to be allowed to reveal what the Church is to teach. Scripture is on this treatment regarded as a book of testimonies to the realities of divine revelation, and its expositors need to understand their task accordingly, and to have such training in language, logic and philosophy as fits them to be effective witnesses; in Melancthon's words, they must be "first grammarians, next dialecticians, then witnesses". A certain ambiguity remains with regard to what Luther means by the Word, but when we interrogate him closely we find that he means not the Bible itself, but the divine self-offering to men, God incarnate in Christ, as stated in the opening of John's Gospel. "Take Christ out of the Scriptures and what else will you find in them?" wrote Luther in argument against Erasmus. This was a real clarification which we shall be well advised to maintain. Calvin is in full agreement with Luther in this, and it is one of the most fruitful insights of the Reformers. Unfortunately Calvin obscures it because he was more inclined than Luther to equate the Word with the Bible. It is Calvin rather than Luther who can be claimed as forefather of modern literalist interpretation.

So much for the new insights of the Reformation. We go on to examine in more detail the principles of interpretation which were evolved out of this new approach to the Bible. In the first place, the medieval fourfold interpretation was given up. Luther seems to have been clear about this as early as 1517 when he wrote a commentary on the Penitential Psalms. It is true that he can be found using the allegorical method in some of his later work, but he certainly did not rely upon it, and he could in his forthright way be very contemptuous of it. He calls it mere juggling, or "monkey tricks" (*Affenspiel*). Origen's allegories are not worth so much dirt, he says. But it was not to the battle against allegory that Luther brought his heaviest artillery. In his judgment a more dangerous enemy than traditionalism was the obscuring of the essentials of the Gospel, the Word. His real point against the theology and churchmanship he had been brought up in was that it resulted in a corruption of the Gospel, a hiding of it from the ordinary man. On behalf of the ordinary man he avowed that the Word was for all, and was essentially simple, not needing elaborate safeguard or detailed interpretation. Scripture too was simple, and the preacher must expound not its multiplicity of meaning, but its single fundamental meaning: *simplicissimae Scripturae simplicissimus sensus*. Allied with this was Luther's feeling that Scripture could be understood by all. It was not for trained theologians only. The common believer should have access to it, and was capable of receiving the Word through it. All that is necessary for salvation is plain enough, as Chrysostom had said a thousand years before. In Luther's own phrase "Scripture is its own interpreter". Or, to quote the Westminster Confession of 1647 which is normative for Presbyterianism, "those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned but the unlearned, in a due sense of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them".* Luther meant that Scripture is on a higher level of authority than the tradition of the Church, and that it explains itself to the earnest reader without resort

* Quoted from W. P. Paterson: *The Rule of Faith*, p. 437.

to a tradition of exegesis or learned commentaries. The Holy Spirit is better than Aristotle! "The Scriptures can only be understood by the same Spirit by which they were written, and that Spirit is nowhere to be found more livingly present than in the sacred letters themselves." "I have observed that all the heresies and errors have arisen not from Scripture's own plain statements (*simplicitas verborum*), but when that plainness of statement is ignored, and men follow the scholastic arguments of their own brains."* It was as an expression of this conviction that Luther proceeded to translate the Bible into German, a great piece of work which, like our own Authorised Version, had a widespread effect on the social as well as on the religious life of German-speaking people. Heinrici has well said of it: "Luther not only translates, but makes the Gospel a German book [*er verdeutscht das Evangelium*]; he learns from the people how they speak, and as a Christian experiences what God's word proclaims".† His aim was to render the thought of Paul in the language of "the mother at home, children in the street, men at market". So he tells us himself in his *Essay on Translating*.

It could be objected that Luther was opening a door for every crank to approach Scriptural truth and wrest it to suit his own opinion. Certainly there was that risk and Luther had to defend his position against spiritual enthusiasts and humanists, as well as against Catholics. He had counted the cost and when the time came to pay he paid it. But the risk he took was one that had to be taken if the Bible was to be set free to make its own impact on the modern world. As Romanism has always contended, private judgment is dangerous from the point of view of Church authority. It is to be hoped that in using their private judgment men will accept the authority of the Church, and it is unfortunate that they do not always do so. On the other hand, those who passively bow to authority, whether that of the Church or any other institution, without responsible exercise of their own judgment, are behaving

* G. Ebeling: *Evangelische Evangelienauslegung*, pp. 297 and 313, a book to which this section is much indebted.

† Article on "Hermeneutik" in the *Real-Encyclopädie*.

as slaves; and the authority which accepts their allegiance on those terms is enslaving the human spirit. Luther was claiming freedom for men, and pioneering a way out of spiritual serfdom, when he took the Bible out of Church control and put it in the hands of the man in the street. He was not contending primarily for the right of private judgment, but for the freedom of faith. He was by instinct conservative, and he could be authoritarian in practice. The only private judgment he valued was the private judgment of him who reads the Bible with faith and prayer. The meaning of the Bible is perspicuous to faith by the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Faith as Luther speaks of it is not in the category of mere opinion. In so far as it is directed to God it is lifted out of the realm of private judgment. Now faith in God is faith in the God who is known in the Bible. Thus the Bible is the objective factor which saves the believer from falling into a subjectivism against which Protestants need to be on guard, particularly those who talk much of the guidance of the Spirit.

Following the movement of later scholastic exegesis which we have noted, Luther took his stand on the literal sense. He preferred to call it the grammatical sense. That is basic and primary. But there is an inner or spiritual sense, the true meaning, the Word itself, to which we must penetrate. It is not additional to the grammatical sense, but mediated by it, and by it alone. Luther himself somewhere uses the analogy of a picture. It is not necessary to give two meanings to a picture, namely the actual painting as distinguished from its real reference, i.e. to the person portrayed. No more is it necessary in the case of the Bible to make a distinction between the literal and spiritual reference. In opposition to Scholasticism Luther gave up the notion that Scripture has a multiple sense. And yet he did not entirely reject the spiritual meaning, nor the allegorical method. What he does, with a really new emphasis, is to relate the literal and spiritual senses much more intimately to one another. Moreover, he affirmed that the discerning of the spiritual sense comes from the illumination of the Spirit, and not as the product of an exegetical method. His objection to allegory was that it did not result in opening up the real meaning, but only

in a display of the exegete's ingenuity, which might sometimes be "monkey tricks". Luther always wants to make room for the activity of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the hearer or reader, and compared with that he did not set great store by the commentator's skill or learning in the ancient Fathers.

In stressing the grammatical sense Luther was demanding in the interpreter hard study of languages, history, etc. His *Essay on Translating* (1530) gives evidence of the trouble he took in his version of the Old Testament. He says that his two helpers once spent four days over three lines of the Book of Job! Any knowledge that throws light on the sacred text is worth acquiring. Somewhere in the *Table Talk* Luther calls his companions to the window to look at an approaching storm: it will help them to understand Psalm xxix better, he says! But it does not follow that the better historian or philologist a man is, the better he will be as an interpreter of Scripture. It may be right to insist on a learned ministry, but it is not the learning itself which makes that ministry a true ministry of Christ. The truth of Scripture is not on the same level as truth in any other field of knowledge. How then does Luther define this something which is desiderated over and above learning or theological training? We may describe it as a certain power of perception or spiritual insight, derived from and growing out of faith, that basic faith without which a man is not a Christian at all. This must be distinguished from the illumination of the Spirit, though it is no doubt akin to it. It is perhaps proper to describe it as a faculty which is sensitive to the inner Word of Scripture and capable of pointing to it, so that the hearer is ready for that quickening of the Spirit which makes the Word in Scripture a veritable word of God in his own heart. Holl calls it the capacity of "feeling oneself in" to the meaning of the Bible passage (*sich einföhlen, sich hineinleben*). In some sense it means a sharing of the experience of the Biblical authors, in other words, a continuance of the living faith of the New Testament. It was a daring and surely a divinely inspired venture of Luther's to reach over the intervening centuries of Christian experience and learning, right back to the first generation, in this way. This is distinctive of the Reformation

in its attitude to the Bible, and this must be preserved even if the negative judgment of the Reformers on the achievements of Catholicism is discarded. One who is to open up the meaning of Scripture must have that in his own experience which tallies with the experience the first Christians had of Christ himself. Apart from that there may be learned historical or theological discourse, but not real exposition of the Bible. Luther's criticism of Erasmus was that he "translated but did not feel" (*transtulit et non sensit*). "Thou must feel Christ himself in thyself, in thy conscience, and unshakably experience that it is God's Word, even if the whole world argues against it."* Of course there is a very great danger of self-deception when so much is said about the importance of feeling. Luther was aware of those dangers, and it is not among those who put religious experience in the central place. What he is contending for is the need in an expositor of something more than orthodoxy, something more intimate than learning; not knowledge *about* God, but knowledge *of* God; that development of faith which enables a man to say like Job at the end of God's dealing with him, "I have heard of Thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee".

This leads us to a further main principle of Luther's Biblical interpretation. Understanding the Bible means finding Christ in it. It is essentially *Christuszeugnis*, testimony to Christ. Find Christ everywhere, says Luther. "Poor and mean may be the swaddling-bands, but precious is the treasure that lies in them." This is a more important perception than the new emphasis on the literal sense. It is really the main application of that emphasis, for we might say, speaking of Scripture as a whole rather than a particular passage, that the literal sense is Christ. "Every prophecy and every prophet should be understood as referring to the Lord Christ, except where the reference is explicitly to something else."† From another point of view we could say that Christ is the spiritual sense of Scripture, and Luther might agree that this is the outstanding example of how the literal and spiritual senses are one. "Take Christ out of Scripture and what more is there to find in it? Scripture must be interpreted

* Quoted in O. Scheel: *Luthers Stellung zur heiligen Schrift*, p. 37.

† Quoted in Ebeling, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

to mean nothing else but that man is nothing, Christ is all.”* “That which does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even if a Peter or Paul taught it.” It is this perception which formed Luther’s standard of judgment concerning the varying authority of different parts of the Bible: his high valuation of the Psalms in the Old Testament for example, and of Paul’s letters in the New Testament, or St. John among the Gospel writers; and his poor opinion of the Apocalypse and the Epistle of James. He says in the *Prefaces* (1522): “The Gospel and first Epistle of John, the Epistles of Paul, especially Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, the first Epistle of Peter, these are the books which acquaint us with Christ and teach all we need to know for salvation, even if you never see or hear of another book”. With regard to the Apocalypse he remarks “my spirit cannot get on with this book. . . . I hold to those books which present Christ clearly and purely”. Bucer, the Swiss Reformer, and also Calvin, put a higher valuation on the Synoptic Gospels than Luther did, as Strohl points out.

Luther’s insistence that the Bible justifies itself and makes its highest claim by its presentation of Christ is a proper canon of interpretation, as well as an indication of its authority and unity. The Bible is strictly derivative. The real source of authority is Christ, and the Bible is authoritative as it mediates Christ to men. Christ, not the whole Bible, is the Word of God.

Luther’s statements about the Word can be confusing at first reading, and it is well to justify what has just been written by reference to a recent study of Luther. “When Luther speaks of the Word of God he means, on the one hand, the Law as interpreted by Christ, and on the other, the Gospel constituted by Christ, who is Himself the Word. This Word is the essential content of both Old Testament Scripture and New Testament preaching, through which He is set forth and presented to men. . . . Christ as the Word of God is the concrete expression of the divine will of love. This love, which is in God’s heart from all eternity, has found its fullest and deepest and most decisive utterance in the Word incarnate . . . it speaks to us still in the apostolic preaching of the

* Ebeling, *op. cit.*, p. 454.

Redeemer, whether as written in the New Testament books or as spoken by the mouth of a contemporary of our own. This means that for Luther, wherever there is a manifestation or utterance of the divine will of love, there is the living Word of God.”* A modern Lutheran scholar writes similarly: “The Bible is the Word of God put into letters, as distinct from preached or embodied in Jesus Christ ”.†

Having brought to light the Bible’s main theme, and established it as a principle of interpretation, Luther could be quite frank about the difficulties of interpreting it in detail. His view is that in the greater matters that relate to salvation, saving faith, Gospel and grace, Law and Promise, Scripture is perspicuous. There are, however, passages which are obscure on the lesser matters. But if one starts with the clear passages these will throw light on the less clear. One should recall the general sense of a book or of the Bible as a whole. Thus although the Book of Psalms is a “murky labyrinth” its teaching is a kind of summary of the message of the Bible. The majesty of the subject-matter may be in some contrast with the obscurity of its expression. But if grammar and the searching of faith provide no light, the Spirit itself may give understanding.

So far we have quoted only Luther, the pioneer among the Reformers. Strohl says that Zwingli was the first to make the scriptural principle the very foundation of theology.‡ This can be asserted of his work from 1523 onwards at Zürich, and it influenced the Swiss Confessions of 1534 and 1536. His insistence on the unique authority of the Bible, more particularly of Christ in the Bible, is the more significant in that his was not so profoundly religious a nature as Luther’s, and his training had been more humanist than Luther’s. The outstanding exegete among the Swiss Reformers was Oecolampadius, who gave special attention to the Old Testament and made himself familiar with Jewish commentaries. In distinction from Luther, who tended to set the

* P. S. Watson: *Let God be God!*, pp. 151-2.

† H. H. Kramm: *The Theology of Martin Luther* (1947), p. 116.

‡ H. Strohl: *La Pensée de la Réforme* (1951), p. 72.

Old Testament and the New Testament in antithesis as Law and Gospel, Oecolampadius saw them rather complementing one another as two stages of the divine revelation.* It is regrettable that Reformed theology did not make more of this. Calvin's mighty contribution, for example, is blemished by failure to distinguish between the authority of the two Testaments.

This section about the Reformers fittingly closes with a brief reference to Calvin, who was more than any other the architect of Reformed theology. Luther was the prophet, Calvin the logician and organiser. As a commentator he is more balanced and precise than Luther, and more massive with his learning. He was rigid dogmatically, but could be very free in historical and literary comment. He treats the Bible as a whole more objectively than Luther does, and loses sight of Luther's principle that the essential Word in the Bible is Christ.

For Calvin the Bible itself, rather than Christ in it, is the final authority. Thus Calvin is the progenitor of Biblical literalism. The modern reader is occasionally jarred by comments that derive from Calvin's grim predestination theory, or his rigid view of the divine sovereignty. For example, on Luke ii. 17 he could write: "The design of publishing this report [i.e. the shepherds' report of Christ's birth] was not so much for their salvation, as to render the ignorance of the whole people inexcusable".

Calvin's was a logical and systematising mind, as Luther's was not, and he is in this more comparable with Thomas Aquinas. It may be said that his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* takes the same place in Reformed theology as Thomas's *Summa* does in Catholic theology. The first of the four books of the *Institutes* deals with Knowledge of God, and Calvin argues that there is no knowledge of God which matters for man's salvation apart from the Bible. There may be a certain knowledge of God through Nature, and a certain sense of God inherent in the human mind. But Nature is a dumb teacher, and the human mind needs more than that. It needs the self-revelation of a supreme God who speaks.

This revelation is offered in the Bible and its authority is not

* Strohl, *op. cit.*, p. 74 f.

guaranteed by the Church, but is intrinsic. It is not commended by impressiveness of style or outward form, as in the classical writers of antiquity ("divine" Cicero, "divine" Plato, "divine" Seneca, as the Humanists, and even some Reformers, were accustomed to name them), but by its own "majesty of matter" (*majestas rerum*—Luther's phrase). But the full conviction of the Bible's authority, and understanding of its message, depended on the illumination of the Holy Spirit. This of course was held by Luther, in fact by all the Reformers, but it is Calvin who sees the full implications and gives them the more perfect formulation. He speaks of the Spirit not only as causative of the genuine faith and understanding of the believer, but as the inspiration of the sacred writers. Calvin was the first to speak of the Spirit as author of Scripture.

This definition of the Spirit's action in relation to the Bible and the Bible-reader had to guard against the view that the Bible is not distinguished from other literature of antiquity, and that the ordinary methods of philology suffice for its elucidation; and in another direction, against claims to divine inspiration and the leading of an "inner light", which made some men reject the authority not only of Church and Bible, but even of common morality. In that exciting century when so many familiar landmarks were uprooted such enthusiasts were not uncommon. Calvin argues that the subjective experience which may claim to be due to inspiration must submit to the objective standard of the Bible. "God's children know that the Word is like an instrument by which the Lord imparts to believers the illumination of his Spirit."* Thus while the believer does not find the Word fully until the Spirit lights up the Biblical page for him, the Spirit also needs the Bible as an external criterion by which men may test the divine origin or otherwise of the feelings of their hearts. The Spirit and the Bible depend upon one another. "Only he who accepts the Word receives the Spirit, for the Spirit works only through the Word", as Luther had said.†

We must mention also Calvin's treatment of the Bible as a whole. He did not overlook the characteristics of the various

* *Institutes*, Vol. I, ix., p. 3.

† Quoted by Scheel, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

authors, and he noted differences of emphasis, e.g. James as compared with Paul, but he always harmonised these differences. All must be understood as expressions of one basic principle. One gets the impression that Calvin has surveyed the whole field more carefully than Luther. But it was at the cost of introducing a certain rigidity and literalism. Calvin equates the Bible with the Word, where Luther tended to regard the Bible as the vehicle of the Word. Calvin's more cautious strategy provided against the charge of subjectivism, which might be made if the principle of justification by faith was used as a means of distinguishing between different parts of Scripture, and as the criterion of what was, and what was not, of final authority. Safer to accept the Bible as it is as God's word, and all its parts as the rule of faith and life.

This results in a doctrine of the fixity of Scripture and the unalterableness of the Canon, which modern Calvinism maintains even after a century of historico-critical study. We find Lecerf arguing in his *Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics* (1949) that Luther and Zwingli were wrong to make distinctions within Scripture according to a general principle such as justification or the glory of God; that is "introducing subjectivism into the heart of the formal principle of the Reformation". "The body of Scriptures of which the Church is the guardian is the Word of God; a statement of Scripture, even if it shocks the reason or the subjective sensibility, must be received solely on the authority of God teaching through His written Word." The continuing recognition of this is the work of the Holy Spirit, which brings out the divine character of the Bible and its quality of revelation, and thus makes it appear not as an external authority but as the gift of God for the guidance of human life. "The Church, the guardian of Scripture, has for its function to show us where is this New Testament, of which books it consists, and how we are to recognise the marks of its divinity. The Holy Spirit alone can raise to the level of the certainty of faith these data of common sense and of the testimony of the Church."*

In the post-Reformation period the first task was to consolidate

* Lecerf, *op. cit.*, pp. 327, 332, 334, from chapter on "The Testimony of the Holy Spirit and the Authority of Scripture".

the achievements of the Reformers. Unfortunately this was not secured without a certain rigidity. A new era of scholasticism settled like a depression on the Protestantism of the seventeenth century. This is perhaps less true of British than of European Protestantism, and there are special features which defy this general statement, but on the whole it has to be said. The authority of Scripture tended to be stressed more than faith, and the inspiration of Scripture was understood too much as a kind of verbal dictation; there were even some who said the Hebrew vowel-points and accents were inspired! "The post-Reformation theologians . . . were not faithful enough to believe that the divine revelation could stand without the dense hedge of human dogmas which they erected in its defence. They idolised the record to such an extent as to miss its essential. They strangled all spiritual life or at any rate impeded all spiritual growth, by the tight-bound swaddling-bands of polemic orthodoxy."*

There were significant exceptions, for example Grotius, who carried forward the tradition of classical humanism, and was thus to some degree parallel with Erasmus on the Catholic side a century earlier. He represents academic study on the Bible free from dogmatic presuppositions. This is partly why he is found among the Arminians who broke out of the rigid Calvinism of Holland. The orthodox jibed that while others found Christ everywhere in Scripture Grotius found Him nowhere. It is not extravagant to see in Grotius something of the spirit of the nineteenth-century critical scholars. His significance, however, is chiefly in other fields than the Biblical.

There was also the scholarly pietism of which Bengel is so notable a representative. In him we find classical scholarship plus pietism and fundamentalism protesting silently against the arid dogmatics of his day (the early eighteenth century). He is best known for his *Gnomon*, a commentary on the New Testament, written in a Latin that is both clear and epigrammatic. In the introduction he defines theology as philology dealing with the Holy Spirit's language (*grammatica in Spiritus sancti verbis occupata*).

* Farrar: *History of Interpretation*, p. 375.

The eighteenth-century reaction replaced the excessive fervour of the seventeenth century by rationalism. That was understandable. But what now was the way forward for Biblical exegesis? How could the clearer insight into the meaning of the Bible which Luther and Calvin had made possible, and the new vernacular versions had broadcast into the homes and hearts of all who could read, be preserved in an age which exalted reason above faith and allowed religion a place only as the handmaid of culture? It was hard for Biblical truth to make itself known where Christianity could justify itself only on the ground that it was "not mysterious",* or because it could bring forward as evidence its connection with Platonism. Gibbon could write with reference to the beginning of the Dark Ages: "We have witnessed the triumph of barbarism and religion". There were far too many among his contemporaries who not only appreciated the wit of that epigram, but shared the sentiment behind it.

The way out of rationalism was a better historical study, and in the field of religion the way out of Protestant dogmaticism was historical treatment of the Biblical sources. This was becoming clear, even before the eighteenth century closed, in Herder and Goethe and Semler. Exegesis had to be freed from the dictation of Dogmatics. The Bible had to be viewed not only as theology, but as literature. This meant a more analytic treatment, and more consideration for the personal factor, viz. the human authorship, and the historical factor. Philosophy might make its own search for truth, but in the Bible eternal truth could not be separated from historical facts. This new interest in the factual basis is a marked feature of nineteenth-century theology and Bible study, i.e. of modern criticism. In our next chapter we shall attempt to describe this more fully. In assessing the achievement of the critics we shall incidentally be mapping out the contemporary task of Biblical scholarship, about which our final chapter will aim at making some positive suggestions.

* cf. the book of Toland with the title *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1698).

CHAPTER V

MODERN CRITICISM: A NEW APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION

THOSE who take a modest pride in being critical in their treatment of the Bible might do well at intervals to ponder the question: Are we really taking the Bible as seriously as Fundamentalists? Is our modern approach a "more excellent way"? Have historical and literary criticism availed to bring out more clearly the real religious value of the Bible? Or have they done no more than demonstrate that "the glory is departed"? The year 1860 may serve as well as any if a precise date is desired. In that year F. C. Baur died. That year saw the publication of *Essays and Reviews*, and Darwin's *Origin of Species* had appeared in 1859. Rénan's *Vie de Jésus* came out in 1863, followed by Seeley's *Ecce Homo* in 1865. And Strauss brought out a popular edition of his *Leben Jesu* in 1864.* From the middle of the last century, the time when criticism was getting under weigh, we may date the rise of Fundamentalism. Up to that time of course everyone was more or less a Fundamentalist—apart from the relatively few cultured sceptics like Gibbon and Hume. The main body of Bible readers might be called humble believers (before 1860). From then on we have (a) fundamentalists—massing for their first counter-attack, snuffing the battle from afar; (b) the new critics, an untried force, divided into Higher and Lower, also eager to join the issue; believers, yes, but not so humble, reported to have their base of operations in Germany. Whatever labels may be attached and however the blame is to be apportioned, the real question is whether there is going to be a new third group of convinced believers

* The original (1835) work had been translated into English by George Eliot in 1846.

distinct from these old believers and suspected *unbelievers*. The question is still a live one: Now, when so few read the Bible at all, where are the convinced believers, free from antiquated Bibliolatry and above merely negative criticism, who yet understand the Bible's message and live by it as *God's* word to *our* world?

Let us then consider what critical study of the Bible has actually done.

(1) First, its underlying principle. What was actually in train when men like Baur, Wellhausen and their English collaborators submitted the Biblical writings to their acute analysis? And let it be quite clear that they were scholars of the first rank, considered from the point of view of academic ability alone. There were many in the churches who trembled for the ark and protested against what these scholars were venturing, like Uzzah stretching out his well-meaning hand to protect that which needed no human protection, or like Mary in the garden fearing that her Saviour had been taken away. To the well-meaning but unadventurous faithful of those days it seemed as if Strauss and Rénan were certainly the Devil's disciples. There was some comfort for the insular English in the thought that they were foreigners! But there was that eloquent and penetrating book of Coleridge's, published posthumously in 1840: *Confessions of an Enquiring Spirit*. Here Coleridge pleaded for a recognition of the human element in the composition of the Bible, and for a less mechanical method of interpretation. He was not rejecting the Bible's authority, or its inspiration; it is in this writing of his in fact that we come across his famous definition of inspiration: "whatever finds me must have proceeded from the Holy Spirit". All this of course was not welcome to the orthodox, but the fact that Coleridge was a layman no doubt rendered his ideas less alarming on this theological subject; the professionals in this field could afford to smile on his amateur efforts. But it was a much more serious matter when *Essays and Reviews* appeared in 1860. "Here were six clergymen openly making light of their sacred profession, and apparently worse than regardless of their Ordination vows"—so wrote Burgon as he hurried to the press with his counterblast volume which carried on

its title page the text: "I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war". And there was soon to come the defection from truth of Colenso, an ordained bishop, albeit in far-off Natal! Thus the comfort of ascribing the new errors to over-industrious Germans and inexact laymen was taken away.

The publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 caused a positive furore of protest at the way in which its learned and respected authors conceded points to the new critical ideas and even to the infamous theory of evolution announced by Darwin a year before. The last essay was a long one on *The Interpretation of Scripture* by Jowett, the famous Master of Balliol. In defence of the Bible did not the mighty W. E. Gladstone gird up his loins and enter the lists with his *Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*? As if the new study was nothing but a hostile attack on Scripture and a new modern blasphemy against God; or as if the critics regarded the Bible as *Holy Scripture* no more, but only as scripture. J. W. Burgon, Fellow of Oriel and Select Preacher at Oxford (later prominent as Dean Burgon in the controversy over the Revised Version) canalised his indignation into sermons before the University. Seven of these—one for each of the Essays as it were—he collected, prefaced with over two hundred pages of Preliminary Remarks on *Essays and Reviews*, and published in a volume entitled *Inspiration and Interpretation* (1861). Not till then was his indignation stayed. Burgon made no concessions to the new ideas. He stood for "the plenary inspiration of every part of the Bible, vindicated and explained" (title of Sermon IV); he would have no comparisons drawn between the dukes of Edom (Genesis xxxiv) and St. John's Gospel; he could write, even of the stories of the Patriarchs and Judges, that "every word is weighed in a heavenly balance, fraught with a divine purpose, and intended for some glorious issue". Again: "In every mere catalogue of names, be resolved to find edification. Feel persuaded that details, seemingly the driest, are full of God. Remember that the difference between every syllable of Scripture and all other books in the world is not a difference of degree, but of kind." Further, as an indication of how the orthodox

and those in official positions reacted to the challenge of the *Essays* we note the following: "The entire Bench of Bishops condemned the book and both Houses of Convocation endorsed the episcopae censure . . . punctilious courtesy in dealing with such opinions becomes a species of treason against Him after whose name we are called. . . . No other than an attempt to destroy Man's dearest hopes, is this infamous book. . . . The most foolish composition of the seven is Dr. Temple's; the most mischievous is Professor Jowett's. . . ." Burgon is nothing if not thorough, though he often becomes feverish; but his long argument does from time to time point to the real issue: "the principle on which Scripture is to be interpreted. . . . Is the Bible an inspired book, or not?"*

A lawsuit over *Essays and Reviews* gave judgment which allowed the legality of Biblical criticism in the Church of England. Unfortunately there were more legal battles to come. The protests over Colenso's three volumes on the Pentateuch (1862) eventually got to the stage of an appeal to the Crown. Some years later the unsavoury thrills of heresy-hunting followed the publication of an article on Israel by Robertson Smith in a new edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and Robertson Smith was removed from his teaching post in Edinburgh. These appear now as "battles long ago", but they were significant battles. By the time of the publication of *Lux Mundi*, a successor, in some senses, of *Essays and Reviews*, in 1889 the atmosphere was less charged, and it was possible to feel with more conviction that "the truth is great and it shall prevail".

The appearance of Schmiedel's article on the Gospels in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1901, or the translation into English of Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus* in 1910, were really a bigger challenge to traditional views than the introduction of new theories about the Old Testament in Robertson Smith's article just mentioned. But there was no more heresy-hunting. It was now clear that radical criticism could be answered only by more detailed scholarship, not by indignant protests such as that voiced by Dean Burgon, which was an appeal to the pew rather than to the study.

* Burgon, *op. cit.*, xiv, xxiv, xxvi, clxxvii.

The challenge could not be ignored as proceeding from patently extreme presuppositions, a view which did have justification in reference to Strauss. This had long been clear to scholars, and was becoming recognised by increasing numbers of thinking people.

The whole movement of opinion on these matters is studied, with acute comment and reference to a wide range of writers, in Willis B. Glover's recent book *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century*. Here the point is made that Higher Criticism became acceptable when seen to be advocated by men of manifest piety and orthodoxy like Delitzsch in Germany, whose O.T. commentaries began to be translated in the 'sixties. "The caution of such a man and his concern for evangelical truth did more to secure the acceptance of higher criticism than all the brilliance of Kuenen and Wellhausen." Even Robertson Smith was condemned not for unorthodoxy, but for unfitness to hold a teaching post in a Scottish college. He claimed to stand by the Biblical views of the Reformation. A "black and white division between Christians and critics" was no longer possible after about 1880, and by that date the subject of controversy was not whether the Bible ought to be studied by the methods of historical criticism, but whether the views of the outstanding critics were sound. Glover distinguishes the type of criticism that was based on rejection of the supernatural (i.e. miracles) and which was often labelled "rationalist" in the same sense as the Deism of the eighteenth century, from that which was simply an application to the Bible of the historical approach which had become generally accepted in the nineteenth century (as contrasted with the eighteenth). The former type was not compatible with Christian faith, but the latter was. When towards the end of the nineteenth century this grew more and more clear the bias of thinking Christians against critical methods dissolved away.

The aim and object of the critics may be reconstructed as follows: If the Bible is indeed God's truth, that means that it is truth and as such subject to examination and comparison with other aspects of truth that are commonly recognised. As literature it falls to be measured by the literary and historical criteria which are applied to

other literary masterpieces of antiquity or of the modern period. Why talk of its truth or its sacredness being lost in the process? Why not take it out of its glass case and have a real look at it?—and then put it back again with better appreciation of its right to be so placed. Indeed it seemed as though since the time of the post-Reformation scholasticism it had been put in a glass case or separate shelf all on its own apart from all other literature, that its uniqueness might be recognised and remain unquestioned. (It might be said, on this analogy, that in the Middle Ages it had not been on view at all, and that Catholicism lived on such digests of it as were contained in papal decrees and Church tradition.) The beginning of modern criticism might be described as a daring to take the holy book out of the glass case—in the conviction that this would make possible a better understanding of its contents. It was unfair to assume that the intention of the critics was sacrilegious and blasphemous. We in our day are in a better position to give them credit for their venture. For we can see more clearly than their contemporaries could that their object was not to do away with the Bible, but to define its relationship more precisely with other sources of knowledge, and so make for it a secure place among the books that claim to have enlightened the human race. So far from being degraded it was being freed from the veil of unreality that had gathered round it. Part of the object of the apparent sacrilege was thus to throw light on the Bible's proper authority.

Notable among the protagonists for critical treatment of the Bible was Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol, who entered the lists with his essay on the *Interpretation of Scripture*, to which we have already referred.* He stood boldly for a reconciliation of Christianity with modern thought: "The Christian religion is in a false position when all the tendencies of knowledge are opposed to it". He maintains that the critics "wish to preserve the historical use of Scripture as the continuous witness in all ages of the higher things in the heart of man, as the inspired source of truth and the way to a better life. . . . When interpreted like any other book . . . the Bible will still remain unlike any other book; its beauty will be

* *Essays and Reviews*, 1861, p. 375 ff.

freshly seen, as of a picture which is restored after many ages to its original state; it will create a new interest and make for itself a new kind of authority by the life which is in it”.

(II) There was also a new approach to the Bible as history. Critical treatment obviously had to establish as accurately as possible the basic historical facts on which the faith of the Church was built. Strauss had pronounced much to be mythical; on his presuppositions there could be no miracles. Moreover, he was not really interested in history, but only in eternal ideas, which, as in Lessing's famous dictum, alone give the truth which can never be revealed by the “contingent facts of history”. For Strauss an historical narrative could be no more than an illustration of the theory which for him as a Hegelian was all-important. Criticism following Strauss had to do more justice to the facts of the Gospel narrative. The *a posteriori* method must be granted its rights against excessive reliance on the *a priori*. Inferences and theories must wait until the alleged facts are proved or disproved! Apart from the problems raised within the field of theology itself by the excessive speculation of Strauss and Baur, the new emphasis on accuracy in historical research connected with Ranke and his school could not be ignored by theologians.*

Although Strauss was far more of a Hegelian than an historian, and could even apply his philosophic theory to do violence to the plain statements of the Gospels, nevertheless he did demonstrate that the Gospels and their central Figure must be the foundation in theological reconstruction. But the real critical work, the proper sifting of the available sources, still waited to be done. Strauss's method could not be labelled scientific. “He is no critical historian, but a dogmatic controversialist”, says Fairbairn.† He was satisfied to regard the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ as eternal verities, independent of whether they were actual history or not. The real meaning for modern men was that humanity dies and rises again. It is the higher spiritual life that matters, and Christ is the

* cf. *History and Historians of the Nineteenth Century*, by G. P. Gooch.

† Fairbairn: *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 236, to which I am indebted for these remarks about Strauss.

symbol of this for all time. Whether he lived in A.D. 30 in Palestine or A.D. 1957 in London does not really matter.

Clearly a new start would have to be made. "Strauss had solved no problem, had instead raised a multitude, had made the most remarkable moment and the greatest event in history less intelligible than they had ever been before. It was necessary by new methods and from fresh points of view to begin the work of research and discovery."* This is where F. C. Baur took up the task. He came to critical grips with the New Testament documents much more than Strauss did, but curiously enough not with the Gospels and Jesus primarily, but with the early Church and with the antithesis between the universalism of Paul and the more primitive but nationalist Petrine position. This antithesis, according to Baur, found its solution in the synthesis which was the essence of the later Catholic Church. It strikes us as curious that these factors, and not Jesus Himself, were regarded as the creative ones. This placing of the centre of gravity in the faith of the Church (*Gemeinde-theologie*) rather than in the ministry of Jesus gave a false slant to German New Testament criticism from which it has never fully recovered. (It is very marked in the work of Form Criticism, and in the theology of R. Bultmann today.) We must pronounce Baur's achievement preliminary and propaedeutic. It was not till after him that criticism settled down to really creative work. Fairbairn† sums up the work of Baur and the Tübingen school as follows: "It had made a more radical, and therefore a more historical criticism an imperious necessity, and had defined as its final yet primary problem the discovery of the historical Christ". The continuing quest of the historical Jesus was the answer.

For the details of this we refer to Schweitzer's famous book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (English translation, 1910), and the more recent work of A. M. Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus* (1950), together with the first two chapters of D. M. Baillie's *God was in Christ* (1948). We deprecate the contempt which efforts to elucidate the original circumstances of the ministry of Jesus have received from some quarters. Schweitzer's own conclusion was that the

* Fairbairn, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

† *Op. cit.*, p. 277.

quest was hopeless (his own life has given the lie to this!). Brunner has somewhere remarked that the historical Jesus of liberal theology is a corpse. In 1938 he wrote: "That which mere scientific investigation can know of the actual Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, is an abstraction from the real Jesus Christ".* Such superciliousness on the part of the theologians has forgotten the task which critics of the nineteenth century had to tackle, and is incapable of rightly estimating their achievement. To regard the attempt to attain knowledge of the actual personality of Jesus as waste of labour must be pronounced defeatism, and it is to be hoped that it is but a "transient nightmare of Gospel criticism".†

The quest of the historical Jesus was necessary, and has in fact been salutary, for at least three reasons. First, it recognised the primacy and centrality of Jesus both in New Testament criticism and for the faith of the Church. Secondly, it has disposed of the criticism that Jesus was a mythical being (J. M. Robertson early in this century, and in part Bernard Shaw), or that He was an invention of the early Church (some aspects of Form Criticism) under the influence of Hellenistic mysticism, Iranian redemption myths, etc. It takes Jesus as a real historical person and the Gospel records as substantially historical, though admitting that there are legendary accretions and that the authors' motives were not merely historical but theological (as is affirmed in John xx. 31).

This involves, in the third place, that the humanity of Jesus was taken seriously. It has been a perpetual temptation in the development of the Church's thought about Christ to minimise this, and the theology which has had the greatest vogue in this century, that of Karl Barth, has not managed to avoid falling into this temptation. Barth has interpreted theology as the doctrine of the Word of God, but has not done justice to the fact that the Word became flesh. (It might be said in Barth's excuse that the Fourth Evangelist himself hardly keeps clear of this condemnation!) However that may be,

* *International Review of Missions*, July 1938, p. 339.

† D. M. Baillie: *God Was In Christ*, p. 58. Unwillingness to face up to the historical aspect of the Incarnation is part of the demand for infallible revelation and inerrant Scripture. This is to misunderstand the conditions of revelation, as we have indicated at the close of a previous chapter.

the effect of critical efforts to reconstruct Jesus as He was, even if they were over-optimistic about the likeness of the portrait, has been a salutary reminder of His reality as a man, and the roots of the Gospel of our salvation in real history. Jesus the Christ has the significance of actuality which cannot be ascribed to Osiris or Saoshyant, or the Superman or the ethical Absolute, or to a mere symbol of perfect humanity. The Incarnation was history, not mystic dreams. Christ "took to heaven a human brow"; that is a fact for ever and ever. And interest in the Jesus of history keeps this fact to the fore. The minute critical labours that it has inspired are not to be disparaged as waste of time and as a blind-alley pursuit that was bound to end up against a brick wall. They should not be regarded superciliously as a search for a Holy Grail that could never actually be found. They are a most impressive part of modern Gospel research.

D. M. Baillie, in the book above referred to, has some wise remarks on this subject, of which the following may serve as a sample: "however defective theologically the 'Jesus of history' movement may have been, however unscientific and over-imaginative its confident reconstructions of the historic portrait, and however one-sided its attempt to make a religion out of such a reconstruction alone, the reaction against it has been equally one-sided and gives up something that we cannot give up if Christianity is a historical religion at all".* It is of course not contended that the historical Jesus as reconstructed by the critics' research is all that we need in Christology. But it is the indispensable basis for all Christological thinking, and if it is kicked aside Christology is no more than mythology. The Jesus of history *is* the Christ of Faith. We must not tolerate these two titles being used as antitheses. The Christ of later faith has to be thought of always in relation to the original Jesus. Fairbairn wrote a wise reconciling word on this: "A Christian theology means a theology of Christ at once concerning Him and derived from Him".† We have known theological statements concerning Christ which even pose as orthodox, but which make no attempt to derive from Him. We cannot get back, it is alleged, farther than the faith of the first Christians; the Church

* *God Was In Christ*, p. 28.

† *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 297.

is founded on the Easter faith, and need not trouble to inquire about the fact of the Resurrection. Against this, concern for the historic Christ is a needful corrective; and the historical lives of Jesus, even those whose results are to some extent negative, have a precious significance in that they aim at letting Jesus stand out with a glory that is natural to Him, rather than with the artificial splendour of theological orthodoxy—or the pathetic gloom of agnosticism.

On the significance of the plain historical facts of the earthly life of Jesus we may quote the judgment of Brunner: "Christian faith cannot arise, nor can it exist, without an historical picture of Jesus, or without knowledge of the fact that this picture corresponds with reality, that He was 'this kind of person' and that He lived in such and such a way, and behaved in a particular manner. . . . The picture of Jesus in the Gospels, unaltered in essentials, is together with the witness to Christ of the Apostles, the means through which God quickens faith within us, without which . . . faith never has arisen, nor can arise."* It is important to be able to claim the authority of Brunner, and we do so after noting that he has modified his earlier opinion. His influential book *The Mediator* (which first revealed, at least to English readers, his great stature as a theologian) had not attributed such vital significance to the earthly life of Jesus and the Synoptic narrative. He now admits that he was open to criticism on this point.† The minimising of the importance of the historical facts about Jesus is widely represented still, of course, in modern theology. Kierkegaard is partly responsible for it, but it goes back to Luther's preference for the Pauline Epistles and John's Gospel as against the Synoptic Gospels. We may be content with Brunner's appraisal of the effects of the last century or so during which critical methods have been at work, alternately welcomed and rejected, all the time leavening Christian thought: "In the long run historical criticism has never been able to maintain a 'denial' which affected any vital point in the faith; and the theology of the

* *Revelation and Reason*, p. 283 f. Brunner can still maintain (p. 290): "no one rightly knows who Jesus Christ really was who has not read the Epistle to the Romans and the Gospel according to John".

† cf. also his unfortunate effusion in *International Review of Missions*, 1938, quoted above.

church on the other hand has had to renounce many 'historical facts' hallowed by tradition but not forming part of the substance of the faith, and has had to recognise the claims of historical research." . . . "Even were we forced to eliminate as much as the most radical critics would consider necessary from the Synoptic narratives, yet the picture of the life and person of the Lord remains in essentials the same as it was in the days of our fathers, who lived before historical criticism had arisen, and drew their spiritual nourishment from these same gospels."*

(III) We allow then the inevitability and indeed rightness of critical handling of the Bible both in its literary and historical dimensions. Great successes can in fact be put down to its credit: concerning the historical setting of Jesus' ministry, for example, as we have just emphasised. More generally, we may quote in evidence the veritable flood of light thrown on the Old Testament by the new literary analysis associated with Graf and Wellhausen; and the similar stripping down, as it were, of the New Testament into its component parts and varieties of authorship, in which the patient examination of the Synoptic problem claimed the greatest attention, and of which Streeter's *The Four Gospels* (1924) is the most splendid monument.† Wellhausen's achievement was to make possible the understanding of the Old Testament in terms of progressive revelation; this was a real liberation, difficult for those to appreciate fully who have been brought up with the notion of progressive revelation as axiomatic. In the New Testament field the harvest took longer to ripen, but at last the detailed analysis of the documents was made to yield a synthesis in the new comprehensive view of New Testament theology. Here the name of Professor C. H. Dodd of Cambridge comes into prominence, and the significant

* *Revelation and Reason*, pp. 283, 284.

† The name of W. Sanday must receive honourable mention in this connection, for Streeter's work was inspired by Sanday's New Testament Seminar in Oxford, and was its ripest fruit. See *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem* (1911). German scholarship did not produce such a masterly finished product on the Gospels, and before Streeter's work appeared had started off on the new method of Form Criticism. On the Fourth Gospel Streeter's work is now supplemented on the same high level by C. H. Dodd's *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1952).

publication is his *Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (1936). This modest volume of less than two hundred pages has an importance far out of proportion to its size, and it is not too much to say that this book together with its more recent companion *According to the Scriptures* (1952), an even slimmer volume, lay down the lines upon which Biblical theology must proceed henceforward. Dodd has demonstrated the original faith and *Kerygma* (proclamation or basic tenets of preaching), and shown how it was related to the faith of the Old Testament, that is to say how the work of Christ was understood as part of the continuing purpose of God; and also how that basic inheritance of conviction about the saving purpose of God was developed in various ways, culminating in the work of the outstanding theologians of the first century, Paul, John and the author of Hebrews.

Thus we may say that in the case of Old Testament and New Testament scholarship alike analysis paved the way for synthesis, and literary-historical examination resulted in better theological understanding. This deserves to be more fully realised and brought to the fore. Only so can the critical enterprise be justified and vindicated against its own critics. It was long in reaching these results, and some critical scholars seemed oblivious of the obligation to attain such results in the realm of truer grasp of the import of the Biblical message. The theologian has a claim here; he has a right to have materials furnished to him by the philologist and historian. The ordinary Christian has a claim too. He needs to know what the "back-room boys" (theologians as well as critical scholars) are doing; he has a right to expect their report, and he cannot wait for ever!

It is not impertinent, therefore, to try to survey the work of criticism during the last hundred years or so, and to call for a balance sheet. How far has the enterprise succeeded? Is the message of the Bible now better understood and its authority more widely admitted and more intelligently appreciated? Can we still call it Holy Scripture, or have we in fairness to school ourselves to call it simply scripture? In terms of our crude analogy, can it now be put back in its glass case, or has study really forced the admission that it has no claim to any special place or pedestal, but must stand on the same

shelf as the Ancient Books of the East, or be classed simply with other religious and philosophic books of the ancient world like Plato and the Hermetica and the rabbinic literature? In brief, what assessment of Biblical criticism is now appropriate? Ought its terms of reference to be more precisely defined? Is it proper to see some things as part of the researcher's business now, which could not be brought forward fifty or a hundred years ago; the present theological climate in the churches, for example, or the far greater challenge of secularism?

Fairbairn, writing in 1897, has some judicious pages on "The Scriptures and Criticism".* This is how he summarises the varied reactions as critical work made itself increasingly felt throughout the churches towards the close of the nineteenth century: "Criticism has affected the authority of the Bible in matters of religion—therefore, says the rationalist, since criticism is true, the authority is at end; therefore, says the conservative, since the authority must be maintained, criticism must be resisted; therefore, says the neo-Catholic, since, keeping as regards the Bible an open mind, we must confess the difficulties created by criticism, let us rest in the authority of the Church". Fairbairn is aware of the confusion, but sees a way through, without taking refuge in Roman Catholic authoritarianism, or in that irrationalism which has come into vogue in the twentieth century, largely under the influence of Barth. He gives a fine apologia for criticism, and sturdily maintains "where scholarship has the right to enter, it has the right to stay: and it cannot stay in idleness. What it decides may be wrong, but the wrong must be proved by other and better scholarship. Once analysis of the objects or material of faith has been allowed, a process has been commenced by reason that only reason can conclude". But at one point we feel he needs supplementing. He writes: "The discoveries in Egypt and Mesopotamia have made forgotten empires and lost literatures rise out of their graves to elucidate the contemporary Hebrew history and literature. . . . The growth of skilled interpretation, exercised and illustrated in many fields . . . has trained men to read with larger eyes the books and peoples of the past". Here we must

* *Christ in Modern Theology*, pp. 500-8.

interject, for that is not the point about the Bible as holy Scripture. What we need to be able to do with the results of archaeology and critical philology is not simply to understand the ancient past of the Hebrews, but so to understand what became divine direction in their experience that it may become divine guidance for us; in short, to transpose the Word of God addressed to their circumstances so that it may be equally a Word of God to ours.

In surveying the achievements of criticism we may gratefully admit that the original historical sense of the Biblical books chapter by chapter has been laid bare as never before. This has included the construction of a correct text, accurate dating of the books and sections of books, analysis into its individual parts and composite sections as in the Pentateuch, which was formerly known as the five books of Moses, but is now treated as an interweaving of four sources by different (and unknown) authors.* Similarly in the case of the first three Gospels we have now learnt that they were not written by Matthew, Mark and Luke, but by Mark, Q, M, and L—behold, is it not written in the book of Streeter? We cannot refrain from quoting Mgr. Ronald Knox's delicious mockery of Biblical criticism in his "Absolute and Abitofhell"†

" Twelve Prophets our unlearned forefathers knew
 We are scarce satisfied with twenty-two:
 A single Psalmist was enough for them,
 Our list of authors rivals A and M;
 They were content Mark Matthew Luke and John
 Should bless th' old fashioned beds they lay upon:
 But we, for every one of theirs, have two,
 And trust the watchfulness of blessed Q."

* Referred to by the labels J (in which God is mentioned by the personal term Jehovah), E (in which God is referred to by the generic term Elohim, i.e. God), D (Deuteronomy), and P (the later school of Priests roughly contemporary with Ezra). For a magnificent example of source analysis in a specific case we refer to Gunkel's treatment of the Abraham stories in his commentary on Genesis, pp. 146-8, 237 f.

† A satire in verse on the composite volume *Foundations* which appeared in 1911. A more serious questioning of the methods of source-criticism on the Gospels is to be found in the writings of A. M. Farrer. See his essay on "Dispensing with Q" in *Studies in the Gospels*, edited by D. E. Nineham (1955).

The great overriding aim was to discover what was originally said by prophet and apostle and Jesus (of course the historic Jesus, not the Christ of faith). That was a great task and a mighty labour has been expended on it, not least in this present century, by some of the best minds in the academic world. Let us recognise that fully. This insistence on clear and honest thinking about the Bible and the faith is most impressive, and it is a great achievement to have vindicated for theology a secure place among the sciences. (The opening of the theological faculties in some of our modern universities may stand as witness of this.) There can now be no questioning that we must work on the Bible also with all the painstaking research and regard for truth which is characteristic of the scientific method. Moreover we should not forget that the pioneers of Biblical research were not critics attacking from without, but sincere believers within the churches: need we mention Adam Smith and Westcott* in the last century, or Peake and Wheeler Robinson in this; or those modern masters of the craft who are still with us, C. H. Dodd and T. W. Manson? Nor is a scholar's critical ability to be assessed from the negative character or mere novelty of his conclusions. Conservative results may arise out of the most vigorous critical method, as we observe in the work of Westcott and T. W. Manson. Even the redoubtable Bultmann, who invented that form of Biblical debunking known as *Entmythologisierung* (Demythologising), remains, in spite of his scepticism in detail, a devoted Christian who was among the seven thousand in Germany during her temptations who never bowed the knee to Hitler's Baal.

Let all that be said, and with emphasis; nevertheless—it may be felt that, on the whole, criticism has not taken in sufficient earnest the claim of the Bible to be *God's Word* in the midst of all its words of human mouths and pens concerning human situations. If criticism is not at the last showing prepared to allow that claim it should say so definitely. Most critics do allow the claim and presuppose it;

* For Westcott see quotation from him in Bentley: *The Resurrection of the Bible* (Daere Press, 1940), p. 21: "Christianity is essentially miraculous. This is a postulate of Biblical criticism."

they do not, however, always demonstrate how it is related to their critical studies! There is something worth pondering in the remark of Ehrenberg* that if you wish to find the Holy Spirit in the Bible you look for Him first in passages marked R (Redactor, i.e. later additions) by the critics. Nor must we overlook the truth in Luther's remark that the Devil is the original exegete of Scripture! Luther's provoking depreciation of reason as the Devil's bride plays a part in this; but it serves to remind us that a rational explanation of a passage with historical references, etc., is not necessarily an exposition of the real Word of God in that passage.

It is possible to make too much fuss of the historical sense of Scripture. As if saying: In our fortunate days God has bestowed upon us the historical meaning; surely there is nothing else to be learnt from the Bible; all the rest that the old expositors set such store by (allegory, etc.) was completely wrong and we are well rid of it! But such cavalier treatment is not worthy of serious scholarship. The persistence of the search for a non-literal sense calls for more careful examination. The "spiritual sense"† has been the goal of commentators both Greek and Latin, Catholic and Reformed, through all the Christian centuries. Admittedly it is an advantage that such difficult verses as Job xix. 25 can now be more satisfactorily elucidated than formerly (Handel was quite wrong of course!), and that we no longer have to try to interpret Isaiah xl with reference to the eighth century B.C., and that we are clear about the priority of Mark to the other Gospels. But that is not everything! For such corrections of earlier mistakes in specific passages attain their full significance only as they are taken up into a whole context of reinterpretation.

We must insist that the Bible is much more than ancient literature and history. Certainly, it *contains* history; it can even be said that the ancient history of the Near East could not be written without making use of the Old Testament. But we must contend for the distinctive nature of the Old Testament as contrasted with the

* Quoted by D. Jenkins: *Tradition and the Spirit*, p. 43.

† "The spiritual sense which is founded on and presupposes the literal" (Aquinas: *Summa Theologica*, I, 10).

Greek historian Herodotus or the Assyrian chroniclers. We must say very much more than that the Bible contains historical narrative. The events to which the narrative refers are events in which it is affirmed that something of the divine purpose was being worked out. They were far from being understood as ordinary contingent events, the result of sociological or economic factors. It is *de fide* with all the Biblical writers that God has revealed Himself in historical events, and it is one of the achievements of modern criticism to have brought this out. The Christian revelation is an historical revelation and for that reason we need as accurate knowledge as possible of the circumstances in which the revelation was mediated. All this must be frankly admitted. The present argument, however, is stressing that the ultimate aim of Biblical study is the understanding of the revelation. The historical situations were the media of revelation, not the revelation itself. Has this not sometimes been obscured in critical discussions? For an example of this inadequacy consider the following quotation from a general article which appeared in the popular religious press a few years ago:

“The Bible is an inexhaustible library. To read ‘the Book’ without comparative references is to lose a large part of its significance. The Book of Genesis, for example, regarded only as myth or history presents a limited viewpoint of significance in it, but an exploration of some of the many avenues opened up by its study is a rich experience. It leads us to a reading of the earliest Israelitish records; an exploration of the history of ancient Egypt, our oldest known civilisation; a desire to know something of the Middle East and its geography; and part of the story of the most world-old myth religions. A man who sets out on these investigations will find the days only too short in which to complete them. The same method may be applied to all of the other Biblical books: these will involve a study of hygiene, poetry, the drama, the history of many of the earliest races, archaeology, and many other of the fascinating viewpoints which open up to the diligent reader. But that will, of course, become

the search of a lifetime. No man can ever complete it, but in the process of his discoveries he will become richly educated indeed and will understand something of the significance of the Master's counsel—' Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life '."

All this may be a satisfying interest, if not exactly a rich education. But it is not to be regarded as that deep searching of the Scriptures which imparts life eternal.

The Bible is not in the first place a history book. Nor is it a piece of literature. The Everyman edition (four volumes) of the Old Testament is entitled: *Literature of the Hebrew People*. Yes, but how much more! Much of it is beautifully written, especially in the Hebrew Old Testament; with the Greek New Testament it is a little different, and the modern translations may be superior to their original by the standard of literary style. This would be generally allowed in the case of the Authorised Version, and many would argue similarly on behalf of the recent translation of Mgr. Knox. But literary style is not the main thing in the case of the Bible. What is in question is not literary value, but the subject-matter, the truth of God, the revelation of what God speaks and does and wills. And this in the providence of God can just as well be made clear by the pen of a simple person like Mark as by that of a gifted writer like Luke or the prophet Isaiah. "The style is the man", said Bossuet; that is exemplified in the pages of the Bible as in other books; but the overriding question in relation to the Bible is not that of human authorship, but of divine revelation; and precisely the charge against some scholarship is that it has given too much notice to this matter of the human factor. Sir Edwin Hoskyns used to lay emphasis on the "roughness" of the style of the New Testament which would be a sort of *skandalon* to the cultured Greek reader, but would thereby remind him that he is not to concentrate on the outward literary form, but on the content, the earthen vessel in some sense advertising the treasure it contains.

Yet another consideration may be submitted to critical discussion. Is it clear that the truth of Scripture is something other than the best

human thinking? This is a somewhat risky claim to make, but we must conserve something vital, while avoiding obscurantism and cheap comparisons. The philosophers (even the existentialists) and the scientists (even the astronomers) have right in their own spheres, even if they assert that on the data available to them a Christian interpretation of the universe is untenable. That must be fully recognised and the believer must avoid the mental laziness of not caring to know what the scientific world-view is.

We are, however, entitled to raise the question whether critical work on the Bible has not too unguardedly applied a method appropriate in other studies, especially those dealing with the inanimate (e.g. the physical sciences), but not appropriate to the different subject-matter of religion. Up to a point the use of scientific method on the Bible has been legitimate, as in its application to history. But the distinctiveness of the subject-matter of the Bible must be kept to the fore. It is not unscientific to admit that the Bible is *sui generis*; it would on the contrary be both unscientific and uncritical to ignore the nature of the essential data in this particular object of study, viz. God in his dealing with man. Whatever similarities the Bible shows with history and other literature, in the last resort it is to be treated as a book of religion, and in that field too it must claim a category of its own, as the record of a unique revelation. It has a right to be judged according to its own standards. Its principles are not to be confused with those of Hellenistic mysticism (the temptation of Christian intellectuals in the second century), nor with the philosophy of Aristotle (the assumption of Roman Catholic scholasticism), nor with Hegelianism (as by D. F. Strauss, and even by Hegel himself), nor with present-day Existentialism or Kierkegaardianism (a fashion which Barth has encouraged even if he did not inaugurate it).

The tendency of scholars in the late nineteenth century to be influenced by modern liberal thought and humanitarianism has been effectively rebutted by Dr. T. W. Manson in his contribution to *The Interpretation of the Bible*.^{*} Writing on the failure of liberalism to interpret the Bible as the Word of God, Dr. Manson

^{*} Ed. by C. W. Dugmore (1944). The quotation is on p. 94.

says: "The focus of interest was moved from theology to *Religionsgeschichte*; from a body of divine truth making claims on believers to successive generations of aspirants seeking for something to believe. . . . Evolution abhors finality; so the most that can be claimed is that Christianity is the best that has been achieved up to date. . . ." God ceases to be thought of as the living active One who intervenes in history. There is no revelation, only human convictions and ideas. Religion is reduced to "an element in human civilisation, the sum of man's deepest and gradually achieved convictions about ultimate reality". A similar criticism is offered by the American scholar R. M. Grant:* "For most historical interpreters the rationalist attitude towards miracles was taken for granted. Later in the century the Hegelian distinction between external ideas and temporary forms was employed. And in the course of the century the differences between Biblical writing and other writings came to be ignored." In the same connection we may further quote a leading Old Testament scholar: "Most of our histories of Israel attempt to marshal the facts, and the theories based upon them, in a secularised manner, without any serious attempt to deal with that which was the chief concern of the Biblical writers themselves. The Church cannot afford the luxury of such a seemingly 'objective' approach. Its primary aim must be to view Biblical history through the eyes of its interpreters, grappling with those vital questions of faith and meaning with which the Biblical authors themselves were concerned."†

The foregoing argument means that Biblical study forfeits its right to exist if it loses the awareness that the Bible belongs to a category of its own, in that it offers what we cannot expect to find anywhere else, namely the claim of our Creator and Redeemer, without which life is meaningless. This is not to pose an unbridgeable gulf between the Bible and ordinary human experience, as Continental theology tends to assume. Uniqueness is not untouchability! Daniel Jenkins has a suggestive paragraph‡ where

* *The Bible in the Church* (1948), p. 132.

† Professor G. E. Wright of Chicago in *Biblical Authority for Today* (ed. Richardson and Schweitzer, 1951), p. 222.

‡ *Tradition and the Spirit*, p. 25.

he argues that in treating the Bible like any other book critics have been justified because they re-established its meaning for ordinary folk without destroying its authority: "The talent of the Word of God is no longer buried, but is put out to usury in the world of everyday . . . where it has the chance to prove that it is indeed good money". This, Jenkins claims, is a continuation of the Reformation: "in placing the Bible in the hands of the people once more. It has rescued it from the idealists, the antiquarians, the clericalist diehards and the precisians who would make of it a new Torah."

Those who have made use of current terminology and ideology to express the Gospel must be given credit for their sense of urgency and of the need to convey Biblical truth to their contemporaries. They may even appeal for precedent to the Apostle Paul! But what their praiseworthy endeavour has to guard against is dilution of the Gospel, and the assumption that what is palatable to a particular age is the whole Gospel. There is need of a theology and of Biblical interpretation which is intelligible to the modern man, but not accommodated to the thought-forms of a particular period. Our criticism amounts to a charge that scholarship has been inclined to be too proud of its results and methods, forgetting that these are means to an end, viz. the making real and contemporary of the Word of God.

The results of critical study have been compared to a bunch of keys, or to tools—things that have no virtue in themselves but have to be used for something else. The owner of a new car is not content to invite his friends to come and look at it in the garage; he takes them for a ride. We must then press the question: Are the new keys being put to use and opening up the Bible so that its central truths are released from the eighth century B.C. or first century A.D. to become compelling for the twentieth century A.D.; that is, to become living English instead of dead Hebrew and Greek?

R. M. Grant* describes the nineteenth-century method of historical criticism as "a compass and a pruning hook. Both

* *The Bible in the Church*, p. 132. The whole chapter on the nineteenth century is well worth study.

Schleiermacher and Ritschl were proficient in New Testament criticism and in systematic theology alike". It is good that the function of criticism should be defined positively as that of a compass as well as more negatively. It may be doubted whether this was sufficiently realised in the nineteenth century. As Grant points out, in Schleiermacher rationalism triumphed over Reformation principles, as witness his posthumous *Leben Jesu*. In our time perhaps the negative function of critical treatment is more likely to be overlooked. Is it really "making the Bible come alive" if we can be persuaded that the walls of Jericho did fall flat, and that the date was 1406/7 B.C.? That may be archaeology coming alive, and there need be no objection to that. But "salvation is of the Jews" means more than "salvation is of the archaeologists". Those who are trying to commend the Bible to modern readers need to do clear thinking here, and refuse to have archaeological dust thrown in their eyes. We need clearer recognition than we have yet had that literary analysis of Biblical documents is only the first step. Research into the historical setting, and philological research which establishes more certainly, perhaps for the first time, the actual meaning of the Biblical writer, is preliminary to the main task of understanding the witness to the saving actions of God, the revelation of God's truth which makes all the difference between perishing and being saved (I Corinthians i. 18). We need clearer recognition that critical studies are means to that end, not ends in themselves; essentially tools, digging tools, to be used for uncovering divine treasure. To be interested in simply admiring the tools, however sharp and shining and modern, is tantamount to admitting there is no treasure worth finding. But if that is the pass to which we have come, then (like poor Richard II):

"For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground,
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:—
How some have been depos'd; some slain in war;
Some haunted by the ghosts they have depos'd;
Some poison'd by their wives; some sleeping kill'd;
All murder'd:"

All murdered: *Christ* murdered—and some of us supposed it had been He who should have redeemed Israel. We may be thankful that it has not come to that pass. But it is well to be clear about it, and get our proportions right.

Let us evaluate correctly the work of the great pioneers, and let us be duly grateful to those who instructed us in their methods. But let us not be mesmerised by them, but keep the high goal clearly in view. We may admire, but not worship, Wellhausen and Baur and Holtzmann and Lietzmann and Harnack—and their English imitators and collaborators Charles and Driver and Creed and Burkitt and Streeter and Lightfoot. We may assign them a place in the providential educating of the Church, but would do well to add, as does the writer of Hebrews in his catalogue of the outstanding men of faith: These all died in criticism, not having received the promise, God having reserved some better thing for us! What the textbooks call Introduction must be taken for precisely what it is and not allowed to have pride of place. It was perhaps inevitable that it should have been so in the days when criticism was establishing itself, but those days are happily past. Introduction must be used as a stepping-off ground for interpretation. It is no more than a half-way house, and is far short of the real goal. This is not the Promised Land, but the plains of Moab still. The desert is certainly far behind and Jordan is waiting to be crossed, but that crossing means turning the back, with appropriate thanks, on the old leader Moses, and going forward under the new leadership of Joshua, the Saviour, Jesus. We can no longer be content with Histories of Old Testament Religion, such as were provided for us when the first harvests of criticism were reaped (e.g. the well-known *Geschichte der israelitischen Religion* by Stade, and of course Wellhausen's famous *Prolegomena*, and more recently the clear and masterly works of the French scholar Lods, and our own Oesterley and Robinson's *Hebrew Religion*, to which so many of us were indebted in our student days). What we need even more is Old Testament Theology. This need is now being in good measure supplied. A. B. Davidson's posthumous volume (1904) has done great service, and is still not fully out of date, though needing

rewriting. In German there are splendid books by Köhler and Eichrodt, and America and Scandinavia are making their contributions. Companion volumes on New Testament Theology are an outstanding need.

(IV) Having thus redefined the goal of critical work on the Biblical documents, how do we summarise its basic truth and testimony? It is most succinctly stated of course as Christ in whom God's redemptive dealing with mankind is most convincingly mirrored. The Gospel of our salvation is, in one word, Christ. Christ is, in the primary sense of the classic term, God's *Word*. The Bible is the Word of God in a secondary sense. It is useful to have this made clear beyond confusion. To insist on the Bible itself as the Word of God is the Fundamentalist heresy, which creates more problems than it solves. The safe affirmation is that the Bible contains, or mediates, the Word of God, which found its clearest self-expression in Jesus Christ.

Luther, who was no Fundamentalist, saw the need of having a summary conception of the Bible's message. He found it in the doctrine of Justification by faith alone. This he maintained was the Biblical writers' dominant theme all through. There might be in many passages *obscuritas verborum*, but to know of justification and forgiveness was to know a *majestas rerum* which rose glorious above all obscurities. Justification was the primary article of faith and the clearest aspect of *the Word*. No single text could be interpreted to conflict with this underlying truth of Scripture as a whole. In this way Luther provided himself with a principle of unity among the complexity of the Bible's many pages.

We need, however, to visualise the Word and the central message of the Bible less in terms of a proposition, and more dynamically, in terms of personal intervention. "The word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews iv. 12). This passage is useful in introducing a conception of the Word of God apart from any written records of its activity among men. It conceives of God dynamically, and guards against static and petrified notions of revelation. This is a necessary axiom for our thinking about the Word in the Bible, and more particularly

for our understanding of its activity in Jesus Christ, which forms the luminous centre of the total picture of its activity. We may distinguish four aspects of the historical revelation of the Word: in Creation (Genesis i); in the moral leadership of mankind (Moses and the Prophets, Exodus iii, Jeremiah i, etc.); in the Incarnation (John i. 14); and in the extension of the Incarnation into the life of the Church (Acts ii; I John i. 1; I Corinthians i. 17-18). We are mainly concerned with the third of these aspects, i.e. with the incorporation of the Word in Christ, whereby it becomes more recognisable to men than in any other mode of presentation; but we need to see it in the progression of the four. The original word of creation became a word of redemption and reconciliation (II Corinthians iv. 6, v. 17-18).

If then the activity of the Word, culminating in the Incarnation, is rightly understood, the uniqueness and indispensability of the Bible can be seen in the fact that it is necessary for the knowledge of Christ the Word. Christ is to be found only in and through the Bible. If anyone finds that provoking and question-begging, because Christian experience or the authority of the Church is ignored in this dogmatic assertion, our answer can only be to maintain the assertion. For the Church is a product of that divine activity to which the Bible bears witness. It is that activity which is the ultimate authority and court of appeal, and we need the Bible for an understanding of it. The imperfections of the Bible as a record we have already admitted, in rejecting the Fundamentalist hypothesis.

Luther's well-known saying about the Treasure wrapped in the swaddling-bands, with reference to the incarnate Christ, is illuminating just here. We are not concerned for the swaddling-bands, but for the Treasure; not for the Bible merely as literature, in all its detail, as a mass of words in the languages of the ancient Hebrews and Greeks, for that is really the wrappings. Our concern is for that which they contain and convey. Fuller treatment of this is reserved for a later chapter. At the moment we are emphasising the point that critical study has not justified itself until it has made this clear, and enabled the wrappings to be distinguished from the

contents. Its function is to indicate where Christ is, and the relation of each book or particular passage to Him. It must point always towards the centre, and not get too much involved at the circumference. In terms of Luther's metaphor, it must uncover the Baby, and not keep on describing the swaddling-clothes, whether well fitting or ill fitting.

Even Schleiermacher, who did not allow a unique place to the Bible among literature, could say "the person of Jesus Christ with all that flows immediately from it is alone absolutely normative". We have criticised Fairbairn, but we appreciate the clarity of his insight on this point. He realised that the goal of criticism is a clearer setting forth of the Bible's authority, and that this authority centres in Christ. "He created the Scriptures as He created the Church; both are forms of His activity, valid as they derive their being from Him, authentic and authoritative only as possessed of Him and authorised by Him."* For evidence from a present-day scholar we quote C. H. Dodd, whose right to speak as a Biblical expert is unquestioned: Dodd points out that Christ both uttered God's Word to men with final authority, and also constituted representatively in His own self-offering man's response to that Word: "Here then we have the perfect meeting of God with man towards which the whole course of events was tending. It is at last realised in the unity of the single personality. . . . The coming of Christ completes the Biblical history, and seals its character as a course of meaningful events which are the mighty acts of God, and also His Word to men."†

This Christocentric understanding of the Bible is the right way of approach. The Bible is *Christuszeugnis*, witness about Christ. He is its focal point, its essential content and meaning, its principle of unity and authority. In a scholastic phrase we may say that Christ is the "spiritual sense" of Scripture. This is clearer and more satisfactory than the treatment of the Bible which professes to be critical but still thinks of the Word of God in an *impersonal* way, as a shattering authority which is suddenly made known from above through the Bible's words and before which the poor reader must

* *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 505.

† Dodd: *The Bible Today*, p. 110 f.

bow in unquestioning faith. Many who have been influenced by Barth incline to this attitude; but it is not personal, not Christ-centred enough. "The Bible is not God's Word if it lies unread, or if it is used as a source-book for the history of Israel or the early Church. The Word of God makes its authority felt in the Bible only when it grips us as we read and listen, compels us to decision, and becomes a compelling Power exerting its challenge upon our present existence."* This reminds us of Coleridge's view that an inspired passage is what "finds" me, and there is truth in this perception. But it remains academic, and is not to be regarded as the final definition.

What the Bible offers is not in the category of abstract truth, but in the category of encounter between persons. Its revelation is personal, as we have already argued in a previous chapter. This is safeguarded by our insistence on its Christ-centredness. In Him more unambiguously than anywhere else we see God at work, and understand His nature and purpose. Christ is a kind of fulcrum, as it were, in the Bible. Law, Prophets, Poets, Apostles, Evangelists all point either forwards or backwards to Him. The New Testament carries the Old Testament with it and needs it for its proper appreciation. The Old Testament is neither discarded, nor retained in an uncertain or mechanical way, as a sort of optional preface, a plus or minus. It is related organically to Christ, and the whole Bible then takes shape as the book of the saving acts of the majestic God whom men can know as Redeemer. The Jews gave pride of place to the element of Law; Christians agreed, but saw Law incorporated in Christ,† rather than simply mediated by Moses. Many illustrations could be given of this kind of fulfilment in Christ. The elements of Law and Gospel, or Law and Prophets and Evangelists are not different blocks of material which somehow add up to God's revelation. They find an organic unity in Christ. The first Christians discerned this, and both appropriated the Old Testament and proceeded to work out their own Christology in the light of this discernment. In their use of the Old Testament they

* From an article on Biblical authority and criticism by E. Dinkler in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (1950), p. 92.

† Galatians vi. 2; Romans x. 4.

were right in principle, even if their appeal to it in particular places strikes us as unconvincing. This whole subject has recently been illumined by Dodd's book *According to the Scriptures*. A sound exegesis must assume with the first Christians that the New Testament is embedded in the Old Testament and needs it for its full explication; and with Augustine that "*Novum Testamentum in vetere latet; vetus Testamentum in novo patet*"—"The New Testament lies hidden in the Old; the Old Testament is made manifest in the New".

CHAPTER VI

THE PRESENT TASK IN BIBLICAL EXPOSITION

THERE is need for a new positive exposition of the Bible which will do for the twentieth century what the Reformation did for the sixteenth. We emphasise again the point made in the last chapter in our discussion of the modern approach to the Bible, that the critical and historical work of the nineteenth century was inevitable and necessary. It was the only way forward, and we may be grateful that it was pioneered and passed through then. But the present need is equally if not more urgent, and the present opportunity is perhaps unprecedented. If the sixteenth century may be described as the opening of the modern Western world in its early confidence, the twentieth century is to be regarded as the time of that same world's loss of confidence. It is conscious of its power, but hesitant about the proper use of this power. Precisely on this account mankind is open for a fresh confrontation with the Gospel, and a fresh vindication of the claim that the Bible declares "the only way of man's salvation". As was indicated at the close of the previous chapter, the central truth of the Bible, brought out by critical inquiries, as God's Word in Christ is ready for urgent proclamation. The present chapter is an attempt to show how this can be done in the handling of the Bible—a tentative methodology of Biblical exposition.

Increasing attention was bound to be given to interpretation when it was realised that critical study had done its work, and "introduction" inevitably led on to exposition. Strictly speaking, preliminary critical work on the Bible is never finished; it has to go on in every generation, and may not be by-passed. But it does not now claim the major attention of theologians as it had to a few decades ago.

There was a crucial stage for critical studies, when they had to take priority, and only by that discipline could a foundation be laid for the Gospel in the modern world, that is to say, for the possibility that men in the twentieth century would be able to understand the Gospel and recognise in it not simply a relic of the Middle Ages, but truth of timeless relevance. Those crucial years were roughly the latter half of the nineteenth century. No precise dating can be given, but convenient years to reckon from might be 1859, when Darwin's *Origin of Species* appeared, or 1862, when the furore began over Bishop Colenso's views on the Pentateuch, or 1875, with the appearance of Robertson Smith's article on the Bible in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Now that the relation of truth in religion to truth in science has been made clearer, and the distinction between faith and obscurantism, and also between faith and reason, has been defined, it may be held that the critical approach to religion has been vindicated, and in consequence the distinctive character of religion can be more truly appreciated. More specifically with reference to the Bible it is affirmed that the parts into which it was divided up can now be effectively reassembled; after the introductory approach the central treasury is open, and a new key has been provided.

If we may change the metaphor yet again, we recall the phrase of Ignatius (A.D. 115) likening Christianity to "medicine of immortality". The work of critical scholarship might be compared to the provision of a new bottle for that life-giving medicine; a century ago it was necessary for the old cracked bottle to be replaced. But now it is time to take the dose as prescribed! And there is no need to waste time admiring the new bottle! It appears that today, much more than a generation ago, people recognise their need and are ready to take their regular dose; though there are still those who scorn directions; in other words, deny the necessity of interpretation. But the Bible is not an easy book and we must be prepared for the taste of difficulties. We may well wonder what our Bible-reading forefathers, Cromwell's troopers with field copies of the Scriptures in their saddle-bags, and other hardy Biblicists of earlier generations, made out of their reading when they got away from the more familiar passages. We know indeed

what they made of Old Testament narrative, and how it influenced their ethics. We have an example in South Africa of how the literalistic reading, especially of the Old Testament, encouraged by the Dutch Reformed Church justifies a racial policy which appears to many to be quite unjustifiable by Christian standards. But the difficulty is not merely that of the pre-Christian morality of some parts of the Old Testament. It arises from the general complexity and also from the sheer size of the Old Testament; its more abstruse portions for example, such as the Minor Prophets, or the later chapters of Isaiah or Daniel, or the detailed legislation of the Pentateuch. Or consider individual verses straightforward enough at first reading, but whose precise significance can only be discovered by recourse to dictionaries or commentaries, e.g. Psalm xix. 8-9: "The commandment of the Lord is pure . . . the fear of the Lord is *clean*"; or Job v. 7: "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward"; or Psalm cxix. 83: "I am like a bottle in the smoke".

Such difficulties as these must be kept in mind when people are urged to read their Bibles. Is there any justification for pulpit references deploring the loss of the practice of daily Bible-reading? The preacher himself has leisure for study and learned books to refer to when the text presents a puzzle. But how much can fairly be expected of the man in the pew? Bengel's famous dictum "Apply thyself fully to the text; apply the meaning fully to thyself" comes as meaninglessly to many today, as if they were suddenly commanded to swim the Channel or fly a jet aircraft. Guidance and instruction must be provided. Exhortation and the example of previous generations are not enough. It is some comfort to find even the Savoy Declaration of 1658 admitting "all things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all".*

Such help as is provided by the Bible Reading Fellowship is not to be despised; but something better than daily selections with notes is desiderated. The need is to enable people to find their way about in the Bible, so that they can move easily from one Biblical author to another, illustrating this passage by that, finding light in a clear

* Chapter I, section vii.

passage to illumine an obscure one, and generally being familiar enough with the deep central things to put the less central in their proper place nearer the circumference. In other words, the task is to introduce church members to the Bible so that they have a sure grasp of its teaching and purpose, and are, so to speak, at ease in handling it, and can be regularly persuaded both of its divine source and of its relevance to everyday living. This means a new perception which shall be widely shared among Christians, that the Bible is "the story of our redemption". Such is the classic phrase; we do not contend about its precise formulation; a more homely statement like "the Bible is the story of God's activity in seeking to deliver man from all that spoils his life"* has much to commend it. But a new clarity about this is indispensable if Christians are to face the world with any impressiveness of conviction. If that can be attained then would come to pass again the saying that is written (to quote the Savoy Declaration again, as it continues after the words quoted above): "those things which are necessary to be known, believed and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them".

Among those who urge us to move on from the restricted field of "Introduction" and to come to grips with the Bible itself in all its stimulus and richness of meaning as God's Word about human life, we must mention three outstanding scholars, whose views must be reckoned with, but who seem to err by a kind of over-eagerness, and to imply a general approach and presupposition which are untenable. We refer to Dr. L. S. Thornton and Dr. A. M. Farrer in this country, and Professor Vischer of Montpellier.

Dr. Thornton expresses himself in a massively planned trilogy entitled *The Form of the Servant*, of which two volumes have so far appeared. The first of these, as its title "Revelation and the Modern World" indicates, considers God's revelation in the widest setting, and is not confined to exposition of Biblical concepts in and for themselves. The second volume, "The Dominion of

* J. A. Allan: *Galatians* (Torch Series), p. 54.

Christ", keeps more within the range of Biblical terms. What makes us hesitate in our welcome of Thornton's work is his insistence that the Bible must be accepted as a whole, with the implication that distinction between its parts and relative valuation of one part as compared with another is inadmissible. One passage may not be pronounced more Christ-revealing than another; nothing is detail, for every apparent detail may have significance. This strikes us as basically denying criticism its rights, and as giving too many hostages to obscurantism. Thornton will not allow us to speak of central truths, or to think of the "letter" of Scripture—even in more abstruse passages—as the outer shell which must be removed in order that its kernel of spiritual truth may be extracted. Thornton will have none of the kernel-shell distinction; he prefers the analogy of the onion. The Bible is more like an onion than a nut. No amount of peeling will lay bare a core, and therefore it must be accepted *in toto*. The WORD is the totality of words, as well as *in* the words. It should not be differentiated from the Bible, but identified with it. Distinction of revelation from the words by which it is reported only results in misinterpretation of it. "We may speculate as to the exact form of the *ipsissima verba*; but what is given to us in the Gospels is the revealed Word of God, whether verbally identical with Christ's spoken words or not."*

We welcome Thornton's Christocentric treatment. He accepts from Luther that Christ is *Dominus et Rex Scripturae*. "The whole design of creation was Christ-centred from the first."† Christ's sovereignty is understood as a divine activity restoring the original plan of creation. There is a cosmic drama of creation, conflict and rebirth discernible in Israel's history and recapitulated in Christ. "Jesus is not simply the principal actor; He is the whole action in which each of the actors in turn plays his part."‡ In this sense the Old as well as the New Testament is witness to Christ. But there is an insensitiveness to history which makes one feel doubts; and the idea of revelation as progressive seems to have been wholly jettisoned.

We feel similar hesitation about the ingenious books of Dr.

* *Revelation and the Modern World*, p. 53.

† *The Dominion of Christ*, p. 4.

‡ *Revelation and the Modern World*, p. 221.

Farrer: *A Rebirth of Images*, which is an exposition of the Apocalypse, and *A Study in St. Mark*. Using "image" in the sense of an expression or thought-form essential for the presentation of any truth, and more particularly of religious truth (e.g. Messiah, Son of God), Farrer conceives Christianity in its original creative stage offering "a visible rebirth of images", Christ himself of course providing the initial impulse ("the primary rebirth"). A change of basic images would mean a new religion. That is intelligible enough. Our doubts are occasioned not by this definition of terms but by the detailed application of it in Dr. Farrer's numerous and entertaining pages. His ingenuity often approaches the fantastic. We recognise that he is concerned with something deeper than source-criticism. This makes him scornful of some commentators on the Apocalypse, because they expended their energies analysing the book into its sections and sources and redactions, and in ransacking ancient literature for parallels, without really demonstrating what holds the book together, and attempting to expound its meaning. One can feel sympathy with this criticism of the critics. But in his own exposition Farrer goes beyond plain sense and outrages reasonable criticism. Concerning the mysterious number of the Beast in Revelation xiii. 18 he is not content with the usual explanation, which sees a reference to Nero, but quotes I Kings x. 14 where the same number 666 is given as the amount of Solomon's annual income of gold. It evidently had a significance for more than one Biblical author, and the reason for this, it is argued, is that it was the triangulation of 36 (modern mathematics has given up bothering about "triangular" numbers, but they had a great fascination for the ancients); $36 = 6 \times 6$. Farrer refers also to the Biblical use of the simple 6: e.g. 6 days of Creation, Christ condemned by Pilate at the 6th hour, etc.* (according to John's Gospel, but according to Mark Christ expired at this hour; but Farrer ignores such difficulties). This is very ingenious, but is it really exposition? When Farrer writes "geometrical nonsense must be spiritual sense"† does he expect to be taken seriously?

Mark iii. 6 records how the Pharisees and the Herodians plotted

* *A Rebirth of Images*, p. 258 f.

† Farrer, op. cit., p. 251.

to get rid of Jesus. Is this an historian's statement indicating that there was actually a political move against Jesus, involving partners so unequally yoked in common enmity as Pharisees and Herodians, and that from then onwards Jesus had to be careful to avoid the police? No, there is something more than history here, says Farrer, in the course of a chapter dealing with the problem of whether Mark has historical value or not. "Why did St. Mark record the plotting of the Pharisees with the Herodians and place it in a position of emphasis? The prefigurative scheme gives us a sufficient answer. The event is important, not because of its political consequences, but because it foreshadows what would happen at Jerusalem. The Pharisees consulting with the Herodians prefigure the priests compassing Christ's death by bringing the secular power into the case."* This can only be pronounced a reading into the verse what is not there, an importing of a spiritual sense without regard to the plain literal sense. The justification for it is the theory of a "prefigurative scheme" which Farrer outlines in the rest of his study. We recognise that he starts from the right presuppositions concerning the uniqueness of the Bible, but this notion of prefiguration opens the door too wide to fantasy.

Professor Vischer of Montpellier has written four volumes on the witness of the Old Testament to Christ.† One grants the thesis that the Old Testament contains such a witness: the Church has all along maintained that it is essentially "preparation for the Gospel". But Vischer's attempt to illustrate this in the grand manner chapter by chapter gives rise to similar doubts to those we felt concerning Farrer, whether ingenuity has not outrun reason.

The Old and New Testaments belong together; each presupposes the other, and the chief subject-matter which they have in common is Christ. "The Old Testament teaches *what* He is, the New

* *A Study in St. Mark*, p. 188; cf. p. 280 (on Mark i. 12-15): "Christ takes man upon him where he finds him . . . not in paradise but expelled and in the wilderness. Adam is tempted in paradise and then driven forth; Christ is first driven forth and then tempted, for he begins where Adam is, not where Adam was." Is serious exegesis or theological inventiveness weighing down the balance here?

† The first two volumes have been translated into English by A. B. Crabtree (Lutterworth Press).

Testament *who* He is." That smacks of over-simplification, but it is simplifying what is real and true. But the detailed exegesis causes graver doubts. What are we to make of it when Vischer, following Luther, insists that the "man" who wrestles with Jacob at the ford Jabbok is Christ, and that in the episode of the wrestling we have affirmation of how "God in Jesus Christ appears on earth as a man, to struggle with mankind and even to let himself be overcome by them". That is true enough, concerning the Incarnation, but it is not to be founded on so flimsy a basis. Moreover, Vischer seems to assume the historicity of this and other episodes concerning the Patriarchs, ignoring the questions which most readers are bound to raise. He is insensitive to the historical problems, which sometimes involve ethical problems, suggested by the Genesis narrative, and one longs for the frank discussion of these that is to be found in the commentaries of Gunkel and Skinner. He differentiates himself too Pharisaeically from "*der wissenschaftlich Denkende*", i.e. the scientific approach, and sidesteps the honest inquiry: What actually happened? Did it really happen? Are we dealing with history or myth? A distinction needs to be made between what Abraham and his contemporaries understood about their experiences and the divine hand in them, and what men of faith subsequently understood those experiences to mean when they composed the Biblical narrative. We can agree that faith is more important than history (though we must not allow a false antithesis to be erected here); but there are prior historical questions which have to be faced more squarely than Vischer admits. How far-fetched are many of his parallels between the Old Testament and the New Testament passages! (e.g. his quotation of John i. 13 in reference to the institution of circumcision in Genesis xvii). How naïve his assumption that Genesis xlix is genuine prophecy! Of the priestly legislation he writes: "A Christianity which is not prepared to receive over and over again the testimony of the book of Leviticus to Christ basically refuses to recognise Jesus as God's Messiah and High Priest". Surely that is very questionably put. The real point—made clear in Hebrews—is that Christ does actually effect in Christian experience what the ancient system of sacrifice prescribed in Leviticus failed to effect.

The second volume deals with the historical books Joshua-II Kings and multiplies material for the same criticisms. Among the more fantastic correspondences with the New Testament which Vischer discerns are the comparison between Joshua x. 12, "Sun stand still upon Gibeon", interpreted as a day of victory, and the earthly day of Jesus culminating in the all-determining victory of the Resurrection; and the parallel between the sword of the murderer Ehud (Judges iii. 22) and the two-edged sword to which God's Word is likened in Hebrews iv. 12. Why was not Jael's tent-pin (Judges iv. 21) drawn into this comparison, we might ask! We find again the naïve assumption of a narrative's historicity. For example, the treatment of II Samuel vii, the chapter about the covenant with the house of David, leaves us wondering whether Vischer raised the question: Did David himself actually hold this conception, or is it due to later writers of the Deuteronomist school? In this case it is not an historical problem, but a problem of literary analysis, which is by-passed. It is perhaps his exposition of the judgment of Solomon upon the two mothers (I Kings iii.) which shows Vischer at his most extravagant. There are non-Biblical parallels, and the honest course is to admit their relevance. Vischer points out rightly that these do not prove that Solomon never gave this famous decision; the peculiar significance of the narrative by the writer of Kings waits to be brought out. In attempting this Vischer insists on the actual happening and on the uniqueness of Solomon as realising in his own person the possibility of a man becoming God's spokesman: "Solomon's verdict is a divine verdict". The historical problem should be treated with greater respect than this, and Vischer's insensitivity to it shakes confidence in his method. His approach to the Bible promises so much, and his results are worth consideration, and it is the more regrettable that his argumentation is often uncritical and leaves the impression that the Bible is treated like a collection of riddles and that exegesis is only a form of decoding.

"The description of Solomon's reign in the first book of the Kings is no more, and no less, than an outline, albeit a shadowy one, of the Kingdom of Glory." That judgment can be accepted, so

long as we do not assume with Vischer that Solomon himself was conscious of it, as a matter of history. It may well have been the theological assessment of Solomon's reign by later priestly editors to whom we owe the present selection and arrangement of the Old Testament which in itself is significant and calls for interpretation. What Vischer does is introduce a non-Biblical conception of symbolism, by which he makes I Kings iii mean many things which would have astonished both Solomon and the fifth-century scribes: e.g. his connection of the child concerning whom Solomon gave judgment with the Messianic hope, the presentation of Christ in the Temple, and the Crucifixion! And as if this does not provide sufficient stretch for our credulity we are invited to see in the mother who overlay her child a symbol of Israel crucifying its Messiah! Apart from these excesses of ingenuity, it is a disproportionate assessment of Solomon.

The treatment of the Book of Judges is in general more satisfactory. The theme is taken to be: Yahweh is King of Israel, and the vital questions were whether Israel was prepared to acknowledge it, and whether it involved for her only temporary human rulers (the "judges"), or a proper king, as in other nations. Was Israel prepared to be a unique people in order to serve the divine purpose, or would she prefer to step down on to the lower level of conformity with the usual practice of nations? Vischer interprets the book as definitely pointing forward to David as king by divine intention, the history developing providentially to that point. For David is more than an ordinary ruler: he is Messiah and the forerunner of Christ. Through this treatment it is easier to recognise, underneath the strained application and cross-referencing, an endeavour to lay bare the inner core of the Old Testament and the line of progression which carries it forward naturally into the New Testament.

Our final judgment on these three scholars is that they are disturbers of the peace rather than inaugurators of a new peace in positive Biblical affirmation. Though making a correct emphasis at the outset, and in the case of Thornton indeed aiming at a reconciliation between Biblical faith and the scientific world-view, they must be said on the whole to obscure rather than illumine.

They read too much in, and the patterns they discern in Scripture originate in their own inventiveness. They do not admit that distinctions must be made in Scripture, and that some parts have more, some less, relevance to the main theme, which is Christ and human redemption. It is but honest to make distinctions, to judge this passage more Christ-revealing or more significant for faith, than that: II Isaiah more important than Leviticus, for example, Ruth than Esther, Psalm cxxxvii than Psalm cxxxix. It is obscurantism to deny this. Anyone who is inclined to deny it would do well to ask himself whether in his own Bible-reading he does not thumb certain chapters constantly and leave others unread.

Dilettantism and subjectivism are waiting to devour the unwary here, of course. One must not expect the food of the soul and the nourishment of faith to be always to one's taste. Nor is a passage a word of God for us because it appeals to a temporary mood or feels "inspirational". And there is danger of avoiding what is difficult, and of refusing to go deeply into a passage because its outward form or phrasing or context is forbidding. In this connection a sentence of Dodd's is worth pondering: "The mythological forms in which Jesus's proclamation of it [the Kingdom] is handed down . . . preserve something essential to the idea, which we were in danger of losing altogether in our haste to modernise what He is reported to have said". Again: "Who will venture to say: Here He speaks as a Jew of the first century, there as the Eternal Word; as the theologians once presumed to distinguish what He did as man from what He did as God?"* This is also Thornton's point when he insists on the importance of the form and all its details for the conveying of the true meaning to the modern reader. Unfortunately in his application of this canon of exegesis it becomes a dangerous insistence on trivialities. The WORD is imparted in and through the words, and only so. Form is an essential vehicle for the matter, and yet must not be emphasised to the obscuring of the matter—as happens, we submit, in Father Thornton's work, and in Fundamentalist exegesis.

If we regard Christ as the centre of Scripture, it means making

* C. H. Dodd: *The Authority of the Bible*, p. 237 f.

distinctions, seeing some passages as nearer the centre and others as nearer the circumference, i.e. some as more revelatory of Christ than others. Thornton with all his subtlety, and Fundamentalism with all its reverence for Christ, remain unhelpful and obscurantist at this point. In their anxiety not to empty out the baby with the water they have to pretend the water itself is significant! They will not admit that a problem of interpretation exists, the problem of the hidden Christ, hidden in the practices of Hebrew religion, in the customs and geography of Palestine, in the personal and stylistic idiosyncrasies of Biblical writers, in the linguistic difficulties of Hebrew and Greek. The student of the Bible has to be patient with all this if he is to penetrate the veil and enter the Holy of Holies which is the presence of Christ. As Forsyth once phrased it, the Gospel has to be released from wrong views of the Bible.

The controversy raised by Bultmann concerning demythologising bears upon this. In order to make the matter of the New Testament intelligible to the twentieth century Bultmann thinks it necessary to provide a complete new form; we must demythologise, i.e. strip away the mythological expression. It is easy to see what he means and to appreciate his concern that the essence of the New Testament should be communicated to the secular intellectual. But can the Bible thus be divested of its mythological form? It is impossible to give the result of a cricket match without mentioning runs and innings and wickets. In a similar way the declaration of the Gospel requires some use of language that is not of the market place or of every day, but which has a certain colour and imagery calling for effort and understanding. Discussing this issue Professor A. N. Wilder of Chicago has well written: "The basic problem is not one of obsolete conceptions, but of the very language of religion and its interpretation. It is a problem of semantics. We are dealing with mythopoetic language, and our problem is to understand what it tells us. We are dealing with the imaginative language of faith to be interpreted, not with dead myths."*

* *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1950), p. 124. cf. also Bonhoeffer's criticism of Bultmann: "The N.T. is not a mythological dress put on a general truth, but this mythology (Resurrection, etc.) is the very subject-matter" (quoted in *Die mündige Welt* (1955), p. 66).

One aspect of the difficulty the Bible presents is its size. Where does one begin, and how does one find one's way about? Origen calls it a forest, and Luther refers to the Psalms as "a sacred but gloomy labyrinth". The late B. L. Manning celebrated the quartercentenary of the Coverdale version (1938) by reading the Bible right through during that year, starting at Genesis and reading a daily ration of two chapters of Old Testament and one of New Testament. That is technique for giants, and we cannot all follow that example. Most of us do well to use daily selections. There is need of a sort of master-key or summary, which keeps the reader aware of the main themes, so that even when he is wandering about near the circumference he knows where the centre is. Our Bible-reading forefathers, those spiritual giants and pioneers who made the English, in J. R. Green's well-known phrase, "the people of one book, and that book the Bible"; who read the Bible from cover to cover until its most out-of-the-way chapters were familiar, and Jacob and Hephzibah seemed more suitable names for their toddlers than James or Mary; those first readers of the Authorised Version did not delight in their Bible only because there were no newspapers or Penguins in those days. They had a conception of the "scheme of salvation" to pilot them in their reading, that is, a clear grasp of the fundamental truth which served as a guiding thread. God was real and near and active in history, *their* history, moreover. They thought of Him more as God of battles than as God of love, but at least they took His will for them with utter seriousness. Their fondness for Old Testament names is an expression of their feeling that the Old Testament people were their own contemporaries.

Consider Luther, who was no literalist in his attitude to the Bible. He could be very frank about its obscurity in detail though he never lost sight of the majesty of its subject-matter. For him justification by faith alone was the overriding theme all through, the primary result in human experience of the Word itself. There could be many variations, but always this one dominant theme. No single text might be interpreted to conflict with this basic meaning of Scripture as a whole. One quotation must suffice, from his

commentary on the Psalms, a book which he valued most highly after the New Testament: "We shall see with what copious speech the Holy Spirit is able to announce and describe in varying modes the one unchanging subject-matter. For the subject is everywhere the same and teaches nothing different, but with changes of garment or embellishment adorns and illustrates the same theme, namely faith or the article of justification."* This provided Luther with a principle of unity among the Bible's complexity, and that is essential. For our part we do better to visualise the unity of Scripture more personally as Christ, as we shall consider presently. He is for us the guiding thread, the summary, the master-key.

It is time to indicate more positively the principles on which we would have the Bible expounded. We do so in terms of the old distinction of the different senses of Scripture. Honest search for the literal sense, i.e. the meaning originally intended by the author addressing his own contemporaries, is an indispensable preliminary. It ought not to be necessary to say this, but in view of wrong methods of interpretation which are still used it is still necessary to make this point. The function of critical study is to make possible the discovery of the literal sense.

What does this elucidation of the original sense involve? It means not being afraid to examine the text with most minute attention to detail. Much of this work will appear as tedious detail, but only through such meticulous sifting can anything of real importance be brought to light. For the unearthing of the Oxyrhynchus papyri Egyptian rubbish-heaps had to be ransacked and a vast amount of real rubbish examined as well. Similarly in the case of the Dead Sea scrolls. There is no other way in these matters.

As an example from the Bible itself consider Hebrews ii. 9. This verse has an important variant reading which the serious student has to bother about. In the final clause some manuscripts read not "by the grace of God he should taste death" but "without God he should taste death", the alternative depending on a difference of only three letters in the Greek. The variation of meaning here is so significant that it demands to be weighed very carefully, and the

* Quoted by Ebeling, *op. cit.*, p. 405, n. 233.

grounds of preference for one reading over the other established if possible. This means that the rules of textual criticism have to be applied. The philologist takes over, and the theologian has to wait for his verdict and to accept it as part of his own data. There can be no avoiding this labour. "Be suspicious of any suggestion that we can afford to by-pass criticism. The way of advance lies through and not round the critical problem."* The easy way of the literalist who merely quotes and quotes again must be refused. It is not honest to pretend that "blood" as used by an O.T. prophet can be simply quoted to a modern congregation. Ezekiel's theme that "the Lord hath forsaken the earth" (Ezekiel ix. 8-10, xi. 22-3) has deeper significance than modern secularism will naturally give it, for "God-forsaken" in normal parlance means no more than "boring". The tendency to read into a passage of the Bible a meaning which really is a concept of modern humanism must equally be avoided. Biblical words are there to be weighed and explained in the light of their original reference. This involves patience with the circumstances of a culture and environment alien from our own, and its difference has to be recognised. In many cases the expositor's verdict may be that this or that verse has no applicability to the modern world. Sometimes the very contrast may have significance, but this will not always be the case and honesty demands frank admission. In this connection we have in mind passages like Exodus xxxv-xl, most of Leviticus, Jeremiah xlvi-li, Zechariah ix-xiv, Daniel vii-xii.

What actually happened? How much of the original facts can be recovered? What was the intention of the author at the time? These are the obvious questions. In the case of the Bible in view of the nature of its subject-matter they will not always be as direct and obvious as that, but will come more obliquely and concern circumstances and attitudes rather than concrete events. For example, a full grasp of what happened in Paul's shipwreck described in Acts xxvii involves some knowledge of ancient shipbuilding and seafaring. Deissmann remarks somewhere that anyone who wants to get the "feel" of the Mediterranean world must know what an

* C. H. Dodd: *The Bible Today*, p. 27.

olive tastes like. What were the roads and villages of Palestine like? What sort of food did people eat, and how often? What was the proportion of rich to poor? What was it like to be a carpenter, and is that what the word *tekton* (Mark vi. 3) means? Books which help elucidate these queries are indispensable.*

There are pitfalls, of course; prejudice can masquerade as intellectual honesty. But there is neither dishonesty nor lack of faith in confessing that many details even in Bible-reading are in themselves unprofitable. For gems in religion as in literature are often hidden in much dull earth. Therefore if one chapter proves to contain useless stone, the digging must go on; farther on there will be precious ore. What we are insisting on is that the real ore, i.e. the spiritual in the literal, the truth for all generations as distinct from the truth for a bygone day, is to be found in the stones and rubble, not fetched from somewhere else and imposed upon them.

This hard digging and patient searching is, however, as we said, a preliminary; not the searching but the finding is the thing to be advertised and proclaimed abroad. The preacher's task is not to report the results of criticism, and discourse of the Synoptic problem, or the dates of the kings of Israel, or the three Isaiahs, or the three strands in Genesis. These things in themselves are not the ground of jubilation. They signify only that Jordan has been crossed, at most that Jericho has been captured. The possessing of the Promised Land still lies ahead. "The shekels and denarii of the past have to be figured afresh in the pounds, shillings and pence of today if they are to count as credit and circulate as effective currency in the modern world."† The Bible must not be left with an antiquarian flavour attaching to it; Scripture knowledge needs to be turned into religious knowledge if the man in the street is to realise its relevance. An historic situation when clearly re-created, whether that of Isaiah in 700 B.C. or that of the Apocalypse in A.D. 90, is still only the occasion of revelation, not revelation itself. The aim of the

* Their number is legion. We recommend M. Entwistle: *A Bible Guide-Book*, and also an older book, G. M. Mackie: *Bible Manners and Customs*, whose only defects for those who are spoiled by the strip cartoon are its small print and lack of pictures.

† W. A. Curtis: *Jesus Christ the Teacher*, p. 215.

exegete is to present it so that it may become revelation to a modern hearer, the ancient Word revived so as to be contemporary, and the ancient believers ranging themselves alongside us as our contemporaries. This is, in the older terminology, the finding of the spiritual sense.

We need not disdain the term "spiritual sense", nor even allegory, provided it be properly defined. The allegorists of the Middle Ages and back to Origen were aiming at elucidating that true and permanent meaning which is within the original meaning; the latter is comparatively superficial but the former is at a deeper level. We should not allow their excessive fancy to blind us to their aim. Abuse does not invalidate proper use. Allegory may be right in principle even though wrong in method. Moreover, in the case of a book like the Bible which makes use of symbolism there is an open invitation to the allegorist because the bare literal sense would not be sense at all in some passages.* Contempt is often expressed for allegory in the name of scientific exegesis. That is understandable, but it should not be forgotten that the allegorist stands in defence of the richness of Scripture and of a depth of meaning which he feels, by a kind of spiritual intuition, is not reached by the usual methods of exposition. That is surely worthy of respect. A practice which commended itself to Paul, the author of Hebrews and Bernard of Clairvaux must not too easily be ruled out of order. We are not contending for a type of exegesis which assumes that anything in Scripture can be made to signify anything else, according to the fancy of the expositor or the need of a particular congregation. Nor are we attempting to vindicate a method which presupposes a peculiarly trained or gifted class of Christians as its users (who will deny, however, that in every generation some Christians will be more spiritually perceptive than others, both as regards the Bible and generally?). Nor again do we suggest that any and every passage can be forced to yield a deep inward sense by the application of special rules. There are limits which reason will not overstep, and we have insisted on the primacy of the literal meaning for this purpose. There can be no inward or spiritual or allegorical meaning

* cf. Paul's treatment of Hagar in Galatians iv.

which is not compatible with, and in fact does not arise out of, the basic literal meaning. That meaning constitutes the anchor or moorings, without which the balloon cannot safely rise to make its observations, but floats aimlessly away, and may be a positive danger. The objection to allegory is not that it goes beyond the literal sense, but that it ignores it altogether. We prefer the term spiritual sense as the complement of the literal, understanding by it the deeper significance of a passage, extracted from the original reference and having timeless applicability. All through the centuries the Church has justified this search, and there is no need for the Church today to think that the critical approach has left no place for it. Its maintenance is obligatory if the Church treasures its Scriptures and honours its Lord. For it is essentially the continuous attempt to make the historic revelation in Jesus Christ contemporary, and the Word spoken in time past a living word for today.

The problem which faces us is one requiring delicate surgery. The use of this metaphor implies that the permanent truth of a passage has to be extracted from surrounding tissues (which may even be diseased tissues if some of the verdicts of critical scholars are correct!). But we do not stand or fall by the use of this particular metaphor. There are less violent metaphors like taking the kernel out of the shell, or folding back the wrappings. Metaphor or no metaphor, the task remains of bringing forth from the Bible the meaning it has for men of the modern world after consideration of its meaning for the ancient world.

We will now examine some passages which are both difficult and important, to indicate more precisely how these two meanings are related to one another, and how we conceive the spiritual sense to emerge when the literal-original sense is established.

Genesis iii: This classic chapter affirms something quite basic in the Biblical understanding of man's problem and God's answer to it, and it is most regrettable that the prevailing literalist interpretation of it obscures its real intention, and makes it difficult for many serious people to believe that the Bible has anything material to say about human nature and its needs. A detailed and colourful

picture is set before us in this chapter, and one must be on guard against being dazzled by the colours and engrossed too much in the details. For the subject-matter is not the serpent, nor the cherubim, nor the Garden of Eden. Nor was the writer mainly concerned to tell us the reason why men and women wear clothes, or child-bearing is painful, or hard work is a necessity. His vivid imagination plays round all these things, but they are incidentals. He certainly has difficulty in restraining his powerful fancy; he cannot forbear working in a reference to our instinctive tendency to tread on snakes, and the curious diet of snakes.* But this is all subordinate to the total impression he aims at conveying, and the reader has to make an effort not to let these fascinating details throw dust in his eyes so that he cannot perceive the meaning of the total picture. First then we suggest that the details must be recognised as details. Next we go on to discern that the central theme is a man and woman endeavouring to hide themselves and cowering with shame before One upon whom they know they utterly depend. That may be called the literal sense of the story: that central motif together with the subordinate figures grouped around. There is no need to confine the literal sense to the details only. We may add that the literal sense includes the information that the human pair dwelt in an earthly paradise named Eden, that their own names were Adam (man) and Eve (living one), and that they were the *first* human pair, the mother and father of the human race. Having said so much, however, we are on the dividing line which separates the literal from the spiritual sense, and hovering between symbolism proper and its interpretation. We may be content to equate the literal sense with the whole picture, in this case a crowded canvas which makes it more than usually needful to take care to "see it steadily and see it whole". Or it may be likened to an intricate weaving, where the master pattern does not at first glance stand out prominently from the smaller figurings.

Before we have finished with it in its literal sense we may label it myth. That is a term which rouses negative reactions in some people, who make too much of the distinction between myth and

* In eating dust; so the ancient Hebrews believed apparently (verses 14 and 15).

history. But we use the term purely descriptively for a narrative that does not profess to be factual statement, but which nevertheless conveys meaning. Some things can only be conveyed by this medium, and the medium ought not to be suspect because it is not of the same type as a newspaper report, a history textbook, or a mathematical formula. Not all truth is of the scientific sort.

“ Truth in closest words may fail
When truth embodied in a tale
May enter in at lowly doors.”

Genesis iii belongs to the category of myth. It is not history or science. But that does not at all imply that it is not true. It is in fact the embodiment of most vital truth. When that truth of eternal import is elicited from the story we have the spiritual sense. The literal sense, which has mythical form, yields a spiritual sense of profound import and eternal validity. It can be stated somewhat as follows:* Human life has never been one of idyllic happiness and outward perfection. Even in a perfect environment the human factor would be imperfect. As a matter of fact man has never had a perfect environment; Eden is on no map and Genesis iii has no date; human history begins as it were not in the third but in the fourth chapter of Genesis. Adam and Eve are not the first man and woman, but Everyman and his wife (which includes me and my wife, and my sons and their womenfolk “to the last syllable of recorded time”). And whenever since the first generation man is found, he is guilty and inwardly disintegrated; in disharmony with his environment, his fellow beings and himself, and also, if he is aware of God his creator, fundamentally in disharmony with Him. The chapter suggests that alienation from God is the root of all man’s misery, even though he is not aware of God. Where in all literature is there a more moving description of the troubled conscience than in verses 8–13 of this chapter? Simultaneous with

* cf. what the *Theologia Germanica* makes of it: “God has created the will, but not that it should be self-will. Now comes the Devil or Adam, that is, false nature, and takes this will unto itself, and uses it for itself and its own ends. And this is the ruin and wrong, and the bite that Adam took of the apple, and this is forbidden because it is against God.” (Gollancz edition, 1950, p. 212.)

consciousness of duty comes consciousness of not having done it. That may not be very flattering towards human nature, but the real question is not whether it is pleasant for us to learn, but whether it is true. We may well ask whether it is not more true both than the optimistic assumptions about man's unconquerable soul and innate freedom which attracted the nineteenth century, and also than the grim doctrines of despair advocated by some of our twentieth-century Existentialists. There is a further implication to be drawn: the root of the trouble is seen not simply as man's offence against his fellow man (crime) or even against himself (vice), but as offence against God (sin). The moral problem is fundamentally a religious one. This is presupposed in everything the Bible says about conduct and duty, and man's moral failure.

The Biblical doctrine is too true to be flattering, but it does not despair, because it takes account not only of man's degradation, but of God's power to uplift him out of it. This also is contained in our chapter. "They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden." Even after their disobedience. That is to say, the Creator does not wash his hands of men because they violate His commands, and do not conform to the law of their nature which He has appointed. He is still committed to them and undertakes their redemption. That is the message of the closing verses of the chapter. It is stern treatment which is meted out to Adam and his wife, but in so far as it means that their sin has not put them beyond God's reach and that God still, so to speak, regards Himself as responsible for them, it is a word not only of judgment but of comfort. It is, in fact, the germ of the Gospel.

II Samuel vi: This is an account of David's regulation of worship in his new capital town of Jerusalem by fetching thither the ark of the covenant which had for so long been abandoned in alien territory. It is straightforward enough, and the spiritual sense or abiding truth of the chapter is clearly the centrality of worship. This is given a sharper point by the clash between David and Michal at the end of the chapter. David's devotion to Yahweh is unbounded and even causes him to forget certain proprieties, but he is held up for our admiration while Michal's frigid conventionality

is condemned. This permits an easy generalisation: true religion has a place for enthusiasm, and the genuine worshipper is not deterred by the criticisms of the conventional or secular-minded. We may note that in deducing this application we have discarded the primitive features which are part of the literal sense of the narrative: (1) the idea that God's presence was localised in a plain box and that prosperity came as a divine blessing to those in whose territory the box happened to reside for the time being. (2) The tabu conception, according to which death quite naturally punished poor Uzzah because he laid hands on the ark. This is shocking by comparison with the Christian conception of how divine influence operates, but caused no shock at the time when the history of David was composed (? tenth century B.C.). It seemed obvious then that if an unauthorised person touched a sacred object sad consequences would ensue, just as today we realise that contact with an electric cable may cause death, and no moral objections are suggested. (3) The idea that childlessness was inflicted on Michal as punishment for her opposition to the champion of true worship. We have here a case of the literal sense having to be rejected altogether, though its import has to be weighed before the spiritual sense can be inferred.

These two examples are both from narrative portions of the Old Testament. In the legislative and prophetic parts of the Old Testament the difficulties for a modern reader will often be greater. We have already indicated that sometimes there will be no reward for his searching; in other words, he will find no spiritual sense, but only the literal sense, which he will discard as no longer meaningful, but relevant only to the original situation of the writer. It may be of course that two readers will differ in their judgment about the same passage, one receiving guidance, the other not. But the possibility of no spiritual benefit being obtained must be frankly admitted.

In the case of the prophets the ancient word of condemnation or comfort will often apply directly to modern circumstances, the spiritual sense being almost identical with the literal. Isaiah's counsel about the true security which derives from faith, given to King Ahaz when he was frantic about the threats to his people's

political security, does not need much reapplication to be made relevant to the tensions of the world today which longs for security and cannot attain it, and still appears to believe the old Roman delusion that "if you want peace prepare war" (Isaiah vii-viii). But there are pages in the prophets where it is difficult enough to be sure of the original references, let alone the permanent significance. Amos and Isaiah xl-lv are perhaps the most straightforward prophetic books, as regards both literal and spiritual meanings. In the case of Isaiah liii, curiously enough, the literal meaning in its detail is uncertain, though the spiritual is clear, viz. the power of vicarious suffering. We have help from the fact of the realisation of this prophetic vision by Jesus, though the original intention of the prophet remains an enigma. A most suggestive chapter where the concrete references when precisely considered yield a very rich spiritual sense (the love of God towards refractory mankind) is Hosea xi. For a more detailed example we take the three opening chapters of Hosea where his home background, which coloured his whole outlook upon his duty, is referred to. His conception of God's treatment of the people is determined by his own domestic worries, and therefore these must be reconstructed as clearly as possible if the precise point of his message is to be grasped. Here is a good instance of the need to establish the literal sense as accurately as possible. It is clear that his wife Gomer proved unfaithful, and that his personal distress deepened into reflection on the unfaithfulness of Israel, which yet could no more terminate the covenant-love of Israel's Maker than his own affection was quenched for the wretched woman who was in the marriage-bond with him. Chapter ii. 2-13 is a curious admixture of illustration and application. "Plead with your mother; she is not my wife . . ." The main reference cannot be to Gomer, however, but to the land and people, as is required in verses 8 and 11. But Hosea means it all to be interpreted by reference to his unhappy marriage. We therefore look more closely at the meagre information the prophet gives about it. "Yahweh said to Hosea: Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom: for the land doth commit great whoredom" (i. 2). Did he marry, we wonder, by command

of Yahweh, without personal feeling but under a sense of divine compulsion, and as an acted parable of the national apostasy? The names given to his children (i. 4-9) definitely have this parabolic intention. That he should have gone into marriage like that seems incredible, but it is not inconceivable in the case of a Hebrew prophet. Jeremiah was forbidden to marry, and Isaiah made similar use of his children as national "signs".*

So we press the possibility in Hosea's case, and even put a more precise question: Was Gomer a harlot before Hosea married her, and did he know it? This suggestion shocks the commentators, but it must at least be raised in our effort to get as detailed a picture as possible of the original circumstances (i.e. the literal sense). Moreover, the possibility must be weighed that iii. 1, "Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend and an adulteress", means that Hosea later took a second harlot into his house! All these alternatives have to be examined if we are to gain a sure grasp of the basic circumstances, which will then yield with greater certainty a meaning concerning the divine tenderness to man, and not merely concerning Hosea's domestic affairs. We need to consider in all this the Hebrew idea of causality, according to which events not understood at the time are later seen to have been caused by God; they can then be described in such terms as : Yahweh said to me, Do this—although there was actually no consciousness of such motivation at the time. In the light of this our verdict about Hosea may be that he married Gomer with tender hopes, not knowing her propensities, and that his home life, even though he did not at first realise it, was divinely controlled so as to become a sign of divine forbearance. Later there came understanding of that bitter home life as illustrative of God's problem with refractory mankind. The spiritual sense of these opening chapters is the wonder of God's love, and the inexplicable combination of justice and mercy in it—inexplicable, that is, in terms of ordinary human ideas of justice and mercy. This is the teaching of the book as a whole, though in relation to all the chapters the elucidation of the literal sense involves exposition of what the covenant meant in ancient Israel, and the

* Isaiah vii. 3, viii. 1-4; cf. Ezekiel xii. 1-11.

political situation of Israel *vis-à-vis* Syria, Assyria and Egypt, as well as her kin-neighbour Judah. We might add two corollaries to the main spiritual sense: (1) The terrible possibility of apostasy; (2) The overriding claim of God, on his prophets, i.e. ministers, at least, sweeping aside considerations of personal comfort, careerism, etc.

The Psalms are at the same time a very familiar section of the Old Testament and a source of forbidding difficulties for the expositor. The spirituality of the authors is often beyond question, and adaptation for a modern congregation performs itself. But sometimes the literal sense will get in the way of a spiritual sense. Even in so well beloved a poem as Psalm xxiii there is a jarring note with the mention of enemies in verse 5. And what are we to make of the last two verses of Psalm li? If we may follow those critics who regard them as an addition by a later redactor who believed whole-heartedly in the sacrificial system of the restored temple, we can ignore them and confine our attention to the major part of the psalm, which is one of the most moving expressions of penitence in all religious literature, and needs no emendation before use in the most spiritual worship: the attitude of the heart is more acceptable to God than ritual acts; "a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise". On the other hand, if those two final verses are from the same heart and pen as gave us the first seventeen, then the force of "thou delightest not in sacrifice" and "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit" is broken. The honest interpretation of the psalm is beset with these perplexities. Elsewhere in the Psalms the literal exposition includes the Psalmists' illnesses, resentment at opposition ("my enemies"), and most baffling of all, their feeling of superiority and self-righteousness. This must be fully admitted before the spiritual meaning is drawn out. Intensity of feeling and indeed of devotion to God is unmistakably there, but there is also a Pharisaism which in the light of the Gospels does not appear so admirable. This incidentally reminds us, as we noted with reference to Isaiah liii just now, that the spiritual sense of most passages in the Old Testament is not complete without reference to the New Testament.

To move on to the New Testament. Here many difficulties arise

from the eschatological references. One is inclined to assume at first that in the words of Jesus at any rate we have an absolute norm, the literal sense and the spiritual being identical, and no distinction requiring to be made between the original application and the timeless relevance. It is, however, not quite so simple. Generally it is true that Jesus' words to the crowd by the Lake of Galilee apply directly to the masses of the modern world. But there are also contradictions, or apparent contradictions, to be resolved even here: e.g. Mark ix. 40, "he that is not against us is for us", contrasted with Matthew xii. 30 (=Luke xi. 23), "he who is not with me is against me"; Mark i. 34, "He would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew Him", contrasted with Mark iv. 22, "there is nothing hid, except to be made manifest". There is also the whole problem of the difference of presentation in John's Gospel as compared with the other three. But it is eschatology which causes the major perplexities. What is a modern man to make of such language as "You will see the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark xiv. 62); "We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (I Corinthians, xv. 52); "Our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (Philippians iii. 20, R.S.V.)? And if we can come to terms with this doctrine of divine intervention at the end of history, which was not peculiar to Jesus and the New Testament but was part of their heritage from Judaism, can we go on to make sense of what was distinctive of Jesus, viz. His affirmation that the End of history was in some sense anticipated, precipitated as it were into time; the Kingdom or Kingly Rule of God, so long the object of pious prayer and hope, was no longer future, the climax of human experience, but present; not Then but Now; at Jesus' invitation men could enter it and find it real?

It is not intended here to suggest that these difficulties are insurmountable. But they are very real for people conditioned more or less by the modern scientific outlook, and this must be sympathetically remembered by the Bible expositor. There is some

comfort in the reflection that many of the first converts to Christianity felt this difficulty with no less perplexity, conditioned as they were by the presuppositions of Greek philosophy which did not think in terms of an end of history, nor take the passage of history seriously, but rather thought in terms of a realm of perfection contrasted with human activity which was marked by imperfection; or in terms of Truth or Pure Being by contrast with which earthly experience was partial and relative. Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom as present could be made meaningful in those Greek categories, and we already see one New Testament writer attempting this transposition—the author of John's Gospel (and to a lesser degree Paul and the author of Hebrews). What Jesus meant basically was that the God and Father whom Judaism had known for centuries as the Lord of History was now in and through Himself, the poor prophet of Galilee, operating redemptively as never before; that divine redemptive activity which Jewish piety connected with the conclusion of the human drama was now on the human stage, as it were; the final act had been brought forward into Act III. Jesus was motivated by nothing less than the power and love of God Himself. It was divine energy which prompted His miracles and brought Him back from the grave on the third day. This same energy was creating a new society, the Church, as the earthly embodiment of Divine Sovereignty, and was introducing new possibilities into human experience. That is what the ministry of Jesus meant, and only eschatological language was adequate to explain it. Once the meaning is perceived the New Testament message in all its unprecedentedness becomes luminous. Eschatology is queer, and its terminology alien, to a generation which has grown used to not taking the idea of divine activity seriously. But if the conception of God as redemptively caring for mankind comes alive, then eschatology takes a natural place in a revived theology. Nothing else can do justice to the Biblical doctrine of the Living God who has made Himself known in Jesus as the Saviour of men.

A generation or two ago the common distaste for eschatology was shared by many theologians, and attempts were made to

jettison the eschatology of the New Testament as an optional extra, taken over from first-century Judaism, but not at all necessary for twentieth-century Protestants. Harnack's *What is Christianity?* (1901) is often taken as the prime example of this non-eschatological liberalism in theology. The most notable protest was that of Schweitzer in his *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1910). But Schweitzer did not really explain the eschatology. He said in effect that eschatology was Jewish and ancient and impossible for the modern man, but that Jesus retained it and that no presentation of Jesus' teaching which excised his eschatology was worthy of respect. For a real reinterpretation of New Testament Eschatology we had to wait till 1935 when Dodd's *Parables of the Kingdom*, following Otto's *Kingdom of God and Son of Man* (1934), pioneered a new and positive approach to the whole problem of eschatology. Thanks to this it is possible to interpret the main lines of the New Testament teaching, and the purely enigmatic element may be said to reside only in the details. The details must be wrestled with, as part of the literal sense, although the final judgment may have to be that they must be set aside in order to make a spiritual sense possible. Or in some places the verdict may be that there is no spiritual sense. It may have been possible for Jewish Christians of the New Testament period to deduce a spiritual sense, but for the modern Christian, whose mental background is full of different images, interpretation may halt at the literal sense and he may have to turn away feeling that the literal sense is *non-sense* for him. We take an example to make explicit what we mean. In I Thessalonians iv. 13-18 Paul gives his Thessalonian converts some advice about eschatology, with particular reference to their anxious query whether Church members who had died had lost their chance of sharing in the final blessings promised to believers. No, says the Apostle, but in fact they have a certain advantage over the living, for they will be united with Christ before the survivors on earth; at Christ's descent from Heaven they will first be raised from their graves, and after that living believers "shall together with them be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air". Obviously the literal sense here includes a literalism which is impossible for most intelligent

Christians, and the pictorial details must be stripped away, and then the abiding spiritual truth of ultimate union with Christ stands clear. Paul actually puts it in plain words before he closes the passage: "so shall we ever be with the Lord". II Thessalonians i. 7-10 is more difficult on this subject of the final coming of Christ, as is also ii. 1-10 in the same epistle, which draws more freely on traditional apocalyptic ideas. The difficulty is so great that some scholars have doubted whether the second epistle is a genuine work of Paul in the light of what he wrote in the first. That is by no means a necessary assumption, and we are concerned here only with the problem posed by the eschatological language, whether Paul or another was the author of it. We must be content here to say that the establishment of the literal meaning here involves comparison with other passages of the same author (Paul's thought on this matter developed considerably, as we may see from examination of I Corinthians xv, II Corinthians v, and Philippians i side by side with the Thessalonian passages); with other New Testament authors (e.g. I Thessalonians iv. 17, "ever with the Lord", compared with John xiv. 3: "I will come again and take you to myself that where I am you may be also"—how plain and unpictorial this Johannine language is, as if John is deliberately avoiding such colourful imagery as Paul uses); and above all with the teaching of Jesus Himself. In the epistles of Jude and II Peter, and in the Apocalypse most of all, difficulties of eschatology abound and luxuriate. Our final judgment will be that details are not to be pressed, and that the spiritual sense is discernible only when they are ignored. It needs to be borne in mind that language is never a perfect instrument for the conveyal of thought, and that religious thought more than most calls for suggestive and symbolic language. The relation of form to matter is a relevant consideration in all this discussion. Truth in religion as elsewhere cannot be presented formlessly, and something essential to the subject-matter is contained in the outward form (i.e. words) of its presentation. Perhaps this is nowhere more pertinent than in eschatology.

One further example, from a passage which in addition to the eschatological reference makes use of a myth which the modern

mind finds perplexing—I Peter iii. 19: “he went and preached to the spirits in prison”. The spirits are the dead, and their prison means Hades or Sheol or whatever conception is held of the limbo where the shades of the departed assemble. The conception itself is not difficult to understand, even for those who have no belief in survival after death. The particular challenge of this passage is the notion that Christ in the interval between His death and resurrection exercised a ministry of preaching among the dead. Is that to be rejected as mere mythology, all of a piece with the unrestrained fantasy of its later medieval development in the doctrine of the Harrowing of Hell? We submit that the right inference is much more appreciative. The establishing of the literal sense means getting as fully cognisant as possible of the mythology and its implications. It is then permissible to see how that crude conception is here made the vehicle for a sublime hope. Quite primitive eschatology has been Christianised so as to make intelligible the superlative range of the salvation Christ offers. For clearly what the author of I Peter had in mind was that redemption could not be conceived of as available only for Christ’s earthly contemporaries and their posterity; it was far more comprehensive in its scope; Christ as Saviour was far more powerful than that; God as author of man’s salvation was from everlasting to everlasting. Thus a verse baffling at first sight proves to be pregnant with a moving assurance of the Christian hope in all its range and comfort. But again we point out that so rich a spiritual sense emerges only after the original crudities have been accurately measured.

A second main difficulty, particularly in the exposition of the Gospels, is the question of miracles. There is one basic miracle about which Christian faith can make no parley, the miracle of God’s redemptive activity. Christians are committed to the belief that God is living and active for man’s redemption, and miracles may be defined as the evidences He has provided in human history that He is such a One, and that his purpose is being worked out. Miracle is thus essentially God’s action. The supreme miracle is His disclosure of His purpose in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Fruitful discussion can proceed for Christians only on that

presupposition. What we have outlined above as the meaning of New Testament eschatology is quite consistent with this understanding of miracle. Nevertheless difficulties arise in the interpretation of many accounts of individual miracles in the Gospels, and we must indicate how these difficulties are to be tackled. In general we concede that our affirmation of the primary miracle of divine intervention, without which there would be neither Gospel nor Gospels, does not guarantee the historicity of every miracle that is attributed to Jesus or His followers, nor the factual accuracy of every detail of the records in our Gospels. We take three examples of where we pronounce a negative verdict on the historicity of the record, and shall try to show how a positive judgment and a strengthening of faith may still result, and the literal sense even though attenuated by our criticism may yet produce a much needed permanent truth. Our object here is to take the full measure of the difficulties felt about miracles by honest inquirers, and to allow fully for the difference between the mentality of the Gospel-writers and the mentality of modern readers, understanding by mentality not intellectual ability, but conditioning by the culture of the period. At the same time we hope to make it perspicuously clear that criticism need not degenerate into vandalism; surgery may be necessary, but it need not cut away living tissues as well as diseased ones.

Let us examine Matthew xvii. 24-7, Matthew xxvii. 51-3 and Mark iv. 35-41. These incidents cannot be regarded as having taken place exactly as recorded. Their literal sense is inadmissible; they must be pronounced unhistorical. Reason permits no other verdict, and adoration does not forbid this verdict. But let us make it clear that this is not a judgment on Jesus, but on the mentality of the early Christians and particularly the Gospel-writers, as being more credulous than that of a modern biographer would be. They had not the questionable advantage of living in an age of science and scientific history, and of being schooled to a conception of the uniformity of Nature which leaves no place for divine intervention. But the modern student does come to the Gospel records with these presuppositions, and the difference of approach must be fully

allowed for. When a modern reader feels after honest reflection that a Gospel incident cannot have taken place as recorded, or perhaps not at all, this has reference in the first instance to the pre-scientific mentality of the writer. We have ventured to pronounce that verdict on the passages just mentioned. But we still have to raise the question why the Biblical writers thus wrote. After all, even the credulity of the first century had to have an adequate stimulus (and we ought to be humble enough to admit that we ourselves would hardly be a big enough stimulus!). Their story-telling was drawn forth by the impact of Jesus upon their consciousness. Now if we read on as far as verse 54 of Matthew xxvii we are told the effect of the death of Jesus on a neutral bystander, the Roman centurion; it meant to him that Jesus was a divine being. In the light of this we may take the import of the abnormalities of Nature recounted in 51-3 to be the same: something more than is normal in human experience has been achieved; someone more than human is on the earthly scene.* What the whole passage is testifying then is that in the manner of His dying (as in all His life) Jesus impressed on people His divine sonship, i.e. the fact that in and through Him the very activity of God was manifest. This may stand as the meaning of the record for us (its spiritual sense) whatever opinion we form of the miraculous details.

We might look more closely at Mark iv again and ponder the question in verse 41: What manner of man is this? That is the supreme question to which the evangelist wants his readers to find the answer. Our reflection should be that most of us are like the cowering disciples in the boat, "men of little faith". But He who does so decisively in a crisis the thing we cannot do is "the pioneer and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews xii. 2). The description of Jesus walking on the water (Mark vi. 45-52) may be compared. In this case the disciples are hardly able to take it in that His power should

* The rending of the Temple veil (v. 51) signifies more than this. According to Jewish belief it guarded the place of God's presence, and its removal would mean that God no longer willed to be present on earth (cf. Ezekiel ix. 9, xi. 22). That is suggested as the effect of the crime perpetrated upon Jesus: a pregnant suggestion. But whether the veil was actually torn may be doubted.

so much transcend their own, though they realise that He is not in the same category as ghosts (verse 49). Mark emphasises their hesitation on this occasion, not their adoration (verse 52), but Matthew, in his reproduction of the incident with the additional feature of Peter's walking towards Jesus on the water (Matthew xiv. 22-33), makes of it another occasion when the disciples were persuaded of His divine sonship.

Matthew xvii. 24-7 we reject in so far as it presents Jesus as a kind of magician, not primarily because we have a distaste for magic or regard it as a fake, but because it is not consistent with the Gospels' presentation of Jesus as a whole. For example, the Temptation narrative (Matthew iv. 1-11) strongly asserts that Jesus refused to use His power to minister to His personal needs. We must let clear passages interpret the obscure, and we must be guided by the total impression Jesus makes in the testimony of the Gospels, and not by conflicting impressions suggested by odd passages. Consistency is very important here. We are not allowing twentieth-century prejudices to influence our attitude to the religion of the New Testament, but simply making a reasonable and in fact necessary demand for the harmonisation of the New Testament evidence. If the fundamentalist asks for every statement to be accepted at its face value that is an impossible demand, because the difficulties are there in the record itself, not merely in the attitude of the twentieth-century reader. They cannot be ignored, any more than white can be treated as the same as black, or oil and water made to mix. There is a real problem of the dissonances even in the Gospels, but many literalists are insensitive to them. Source criticism sometimes helps, as in the case of Matthew xvii. 24-7, which is shown to be peculiar to Matthew, i.e. to lack support from another evangelist. But even when source criticism does not ease the problem, the problem must be frankly faced.

Surveying these passages together, with all their question marks about them, we may still affirm that though they appear mean enough as swaddling-bands they are the swaddling-bands of Christ. For they declare something of the impression He made on those who were around Him. Those first witnesses did not know how to

describe that impression and sometimes blundered into exaggerations (which are patent to us). But they aim at telling that He was unique, all-powerful, above fear and panic Himself yet wonderfully solicitous for his friends in their panic, understanding enough to bother about an irritating necessity like paying taxes and to relieve his colleagues of anxiety about it. And if those disciples later on, in their eagerness to impart to others their own faith in Him, made use of myth and legend as well as more sober statement, is the modern reader to be so obtuse as to do no more than label their narratives history or myth or wonder-story, and not go on to note what is being affirmed, by means of these various types of writing, about the central Figure? Mythical and biographical narrative, poetry and prophecy, rhyme and reason are all in turn used as swaddling-bands, and precious is the treasure they contain. Hallelujah!

The drawing out of the spiritual sense of Scripture is equivalent to the preservation of it as God's living word which becomes contemporary for every generation. Augustine well says that "In Scripture it is God who is speaking, though through men and in human fashion". Sir Charles Marston, the archaeologist, has an arresting title for one of his books: *The Bible comes alive*. That end is not achieved only as the result of archaeological discoveries, however. It is the function of the exegete, and the goal of the spiritual sense, to cause the Bible to come alive, not merely as a true record of a distant past, but as a divine message to reason and conscience through all generations.

It was perhaps inevitable that critical examination of the Bible book by book should lose sight of the claim of the whole to be the **Word of God**. The impression is given by some critical studies that the Bible is no more than a venerable piece of literature from the ancient world. The task is now to see that the Bible is evaluated as what it claims to be, and not in a merely secular way. Critical work is preliminary to this, and the presupposition of the true critic should be that behind and prior to all the events recorded in this ancient book is the action of God. The initiative was with Him, and thus through these innumerable human words the divine **WORD** is being mediated.

We have already in Chapter II made clear what the conception of the Word means. Here we have in mind its dynamic character. Static conceptions of God as a distant Cause, however dignified, are quite out of order if we are true to this Biblical characteristic. Once we have opened our understanding to the Bible as God's word we recognise God's lively interest and persistent initiative. The great gulf which philosophy tends to leave between the world and its Originator, time and eternity, is bridged by divine decree. "God from on high hath heard." God from His side as it were has bridged the gulf, and made traffic possible. That is His way. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" says a Psalmist. To which we must add that this divine interest has continued all through, inspiring the moral and intellectual leadership of mankind (in our time as well as in the time of Moses and the prophets), and finding its most significant expression in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. In our handling of the Bible we should take care to allow fully for this element of the divine action and initiative.

The Word comes to clearest focus in Christ. As we have had occasion to mention more than once, the Word may be identified with Christ, though not, or at best in a derived sense, with the Bible. Strictly speaking, the Bible is not revelation, but the record of revelation. Similarly, the Bible is not redemption, but the story of our redemption, the pointer to the acts in which God is manifest as the Redeemer of man. As such the Bible is the cardinal evidence of redemption, and Christ the Redeemer is its heart and centre. The thread which holds it together is the series of events which led up to and included the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, plus the testimony to those events; more simply, Jesus with what prepared the way for His coming in the life of old Israel, and what flowed from His ministry in the life of the Church, the new Israel. The Bible in declaring what redemption and revelation mean does so by reference to this thread of development. Christ is a central point on this line, and in Him the import of it all is made luminous; but he is a part of the line and not an isolated point. In this sense John v. 39 can be understood: "Search the Scriptures . . . they bear witness of me"; and the hymn-writer justified for making us sing

“Teach me to love Thy sacred word
And view my Saviour there.” (C.P. 227)

When it comes to detailed interpretation this can be uncritically applied, as we have noted in the case of the imposing work of Professor Vischer, but as a fundamental principle it should govern our Scripture-searching. We have to pilot ourselves through the pages of the Bible, the book of redemption, by our knowledge of Christ, the chief Agent of redemption. If technical language were required we should call this Christological interpretation, as distinct from allegorical or spiritualising or mystical interpretation.

There are difficulties of course, as our examination of Vischer showed, and they arise mainly in the treatment of the Old Testament. These difficulties are not all of one sort. On the one hand there is the temptation to allow too much to the imagination and to read too much into the Old Testament narrative. We have accused Vischer, Thornton and Farrer of falling into this temptation. On the other hand there is unwillingness to launch out upon this interpretation of the Old Testament as the story of God's redemptive treatment of man which led up to Christ. This is the temptation—hesitation is perhaps a fairer word—of the more rational-minded, and the discipline of critical study lays many open to it. But it is not a truly Christian use of the Old Testament which treats it as simply the literature of that race, peculiarly gifted in religious insight, into which as a matter of history Christ was born. The right kind of treatment, in our estimation, is that given in a recent book by W. Neil: *The Rediscovery of the Bible*,* and in A. G. Hebert: *The Bible from Within*.†

In making Christ the centre and controlling principle of the Bible we are not overlooking the difficulties this view causes when some passages (mainly of the Old Testament) are under consideration. Not all parts testify equally to Christ. We have objected to Vischer's treatment on the ground that he seems to assume this.‡

* Hodder & Stoughton (1954), esp. pp. 117-247. † Oxford University Press (1950).

‡ A witty epigram from the days of Protestant scholasticism objected to Grotius because he read the O.T. without reference to Christ, and to Cocceius because he found too many references to Christ there. The latter is Vischer's forerunner!

And we have indicated frankly that the relevance of some passages to Christ is hard to discern. This difficulty arises mainly in the case of shorter passages, and not so much in whole books like Esther and the Apocalypse, or whole chapters like Genesis xxxiv which are ethically sub-Christian, for these may have a negative value as showing "how much it costeth not to follow Christ". Following our insistence that there is one main line of development through the Bible we must point out that there are also side-tracks. There is no inconsistency in admitting this. It must suffice to make this clear in a general way, without any attempt to list primary and secondary elements. But we have said enough to indicate that it is part of the task of exegesis to decide whether the passage to be expounded is part of the main theme, or part of a subordinate theme. In the event of it appearing to belong to a very subordinate theme and to be very far from the centre, the expositor is well advised to put it aside and deal with something more definitely related to Christ. Two elements which might be reckoned outside the main thread and yet are very important are: 1. *General moral teaching*—part of the distinctive Jewish emphasis on Law. The Christian emphasis is different in so far as it distinguishes the ritual from the purely moral more definitely, and also guards against the development into legalism which is embryonic in the Law of the Old Testament. Apart from this possible degeneration the moral element points forward to realisation in Christ (cf. Matthew v. 17-20; Galatians vi. 2; James i. 25 and all the teaching about love). 2. *Teaching about God as Creator*. Both Testaments are chiefly concerned with God as Redeemer, and this is always to be understood as presupposing that He is also Creator. The New Testament hardly ever mentions this, but it assumes the truth of Genesis i-ii and Isaiah xl as much as the Old Testament does. This is the larger context required for the redeeming work of Christ. The world which God is reconciling in Christ is no alien domain. The Marcionite heresy—soteriology without cosmology—cannot find support in the Bible. The Bible sets its doctrine of salvation on the broad basis of God's action in the beginning and indeed before the beginning. *Heilsgeschichte* must not be isolated from *Geschichte*.

and *Natur*. Sacred history is not to be kept out of relation to secular history, or from its physical basis in the external world. "Thy mercy, O Lord is in the heavens." . . . "His tender mercies are over all his works."

Before we leave this subject of the Christian use of the Old Testament, we should acknowledge indebtedness to many hymn-writers who have had true insights here, and may be said to have pioneered a route for theologians to follow. Watts and Wesley are the outstanding examples, although they had many predecessors in the early and medieval Church. Since the Reformation the Scottish metrical psalms made a new beginning, but perhaps it was Watts who first really Christianised the Psalms; and he did not confine his labours to the Psalms as a fount of Christian hymnody. Sometimes the transference of a Psalm to Christ is very straightforward, as in the case of Psalm xxiii and Psalm lxxii; e.g. (on lxxii)

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run. (C.P. 158)

Sometimes it is done more subtly, with delicate interweaving of the Old Testament phraseology into the new Christian pattern:

I love my Shepherd's voice,
His watchful eyes shall keep
My wandering soul among
The thousands of His sheep:
He feeds His flock, He calls their names,
His bosom bears the tender lambs. (C.P. 176)

Or this play on Isaiah xlii. 3:

He'll never quench the smoking flax
But raise it to a flame;
The bruised reed He never breaks
Nor scorns the meanest name. (C.P. 97)

Or with a more general emphasis on the redemption hinted at in the Old Testament and openly shown in the New Testament:

His very word of grace is strong
 As that which built the skies;
 The voice that rolls the stars along
 Speaks all the promises. (C.P. 65)

and

See where it shines in Jesu's face,
 The brightest image of His grace;
 God in the person of His son
 Has all His mightiest works outdone. (C.P. 177)

An even finer sense for picking up the suggestiveness for Christian themes of Old Testament phrase and story was Charles Wesley's:

On the Ascension:

He who walked with God, and pleased Him
 Preaching truth and doom to come,
 He, our Enoch, is translated
 To His everlasting home.
 Now our heavenly Aaron enters
 With his blood within the veil;
 Joshua now is come to Canaan
 And the kings before Him quail;
 Now he plants the tribes of Israel
 In their promised resting place;
 Now our great Elijah offers
 Double portion of His grace.

On the Resurrection:

The foe behind, the deep before
 Our hosts have dared and passed the sea;
 And Pharaoh's warriors strew the shore,
 And Israel's ransomed tribes are free.
 The Lord hath triumphed gloriously,
 The Lord shall reign victoriously!

Seals assuring,
 Guards securing,
 Watch His earthly prison;
 Seals are shattered,
 Guards are scattered,
 Christ hath risen!

Now once more
 Eden's door
 Open stands to mortal eyes;
 For Christ hath risen, and man shall rise!
 Where our banner leads us
 We may safely go;
 Where our Chief precedes us
 We may face the foe.

These two examples are taken from the 1904 *Methodist Hymn Book*,* which has a useful index of texts illustrated in the hymns, in addition to the more usual indices. It is regrettable that not all hymn collections contain such a Biblical index. Among much that is fanciful there is also much true Biblical exegesis in the hymns, and we have Watts and Wesley as our masters in this exercise.

This all too brief consideration of hymns opens up the question of the place to be allowed to imagination in Biblical exegesis. Clearly, effective preaching which really carries over a Biblical doctrine and rouses the mind and conscience of a congregation depends largely on the use of imagination. Equally clearly no rules can be laid down in a matter of this kind, and expositors will differ in their capacity here; some have much (? too much) imaginative insight, some none at all. The faculty can of course be a source of deception if it is not controlled by sound scholarship and awareness of the great themes of the Bible. But if that is presupposed it is a powerful part of the preacher's equipment. Those who are familiar with Alexander Whyte's *Bible Characters* will remember the moving little fancy on

* Nos. 187 and 180. We have deliberately refrained from quoting the outstanding example from Wesley: "Come O Thou Traveller unknown", which Christianises Genesis xxxii.

Jacob's staff; this seems to us a perfect example of the use of imagination in preaching.* Another obvious use of this power is in the reconstruction of the background of a passage to be expounded—for nearly always the assembling of historical and geographical details, and the elucidation of the literal sense generally, will need some lighting up, and the minds of the listeners some focusing upon these facts. It may be said that all great literature requires more than exact philology and background information for its perfect understanding. There is need also of sympathetic penetration; perhaps even more than insight into the mind of the author. Dilthey held that there is an element of what he called divination in true interpretation. We have used the simpler word "imagination", as more appropriate to ordinary preaching from the Bible, but it is this faculty which we have had in mind.

We suggested that even intuition of the author's meaning may not in every case be adequate for the interpretation of literature. For great writing may in its power and suggestiveness go beyond what its writer consciously intended. That is a mark of truly great literature, and our theory of inspiration must explain it. Thus a passage means what it comes to mean. A good example of this is provided by Psalm xxx, one of those psalms which celebrate their author's recovery from sickness, which appeared to be likely to be fatal: "Thou hast brought up my soul from the grave" (verse 3). But how much more the words can express than simply relief because pain has stopped—"weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (verse 5)—or the fear of death removed. The passage by its own momentum as it were develops a meaning of far wider and more spiritual reference than the original one: the continuing providence of God: "His anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life". It is recorded of Elgar that once after hearing one of his pieces played by another musician he remarked: "I never realised it had so much in it". We may recall also the oft-quoted (and equally oft-misinterpreted) saying of John Robinson: "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His word". New translations of Scripture open up new possibilities and new

* A. Whyte: *Bible Characters*, Vol. I, p. 190 f.

insights. One may legitimately wonder whether there can be such a thing as an inspired *mistranslation*, for assuredly some of the renderings of the Authorised Version which are recognised as incorrect have been a benediction to countless souls; Job xix. 25, for example, "I know that my redeemer liveth" (Handel's *Messiah* must take some of the credit here, but did not the same Spirit which inspired the writer of Job and our Authorised Version translators also inspire the musician?). Again, Isaiah xxxv, 8: "The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" gives the assurance that in the redeemed society even the simplest are protected from error, though this is quite contrary to the Hebrew sense, viz. no fools shall be found there, any more than the unclean, or the ravenous beast of the next verse!*

This affirmation that a passage may take on new colour or depth of suggestion is not opening the door to mere fancy, or encouraging the crudities of the "manifold sense" of Scripture. Rather are we refusing to be shut up to the view that the meaning God was trying to convey through Hebrew prophet or Christian apostle was exhausted in the understanding of the utterance which the prophet or apostle and their contemporaries were able to give to it. It passes into the custodianship of later generations of believers in the same tradition, and in new settings may reveal new meaning and reference. It signifies something that the faith is "delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The faith of Christians who have lived by Scripture, though it does not add to it, is nevertheless something of a commentary on it, which the interpreter does well not to ignore. "The ultimate significance of prophecy is not only what it meant for its author, but what it came to mean for those who stood within the tradition which he founded or promoted. . . . It is a thoroughly unhistorical proceeding to attempt to read the Biblical documents as if they were newly discovered Ugaritic texts, coming to us out of a forgotten age. . . . They have had a continuous life within the

* This is clearly the meaning, although the text of verse 8 is a little uncertain. Revised Version and Revised Version margin do not help much, and we may translate: "it shall be for his people when they walk in the way, and fools shall not go to and fro in it".

community to which they belong, and belonged from the first, in its changing forms, Israelite, Jewish and Christian. . . . The meaning of the writings cannot remain static while the life to which they belong changes with the centuries.”* “Just as the meaning of a Charlemagne, a Roosevelt, is not merely in what he seemed to be in his lifetime, but also what he came to mean to his nation and to the world, so also the prophets and apostles of Jewish and Christian history are meaningful not only in their original context but also in the light of later history. A document is not entirely understood when its sources are analysed, or even when its author’s thought becomes clear; its subsequent use is also of importance.”†

From this consideration we move naturally to the part played by the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the Bible. The need for this has always been recognised, and the classic formulation is the phrase of Calvin’s: “the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit”. Apart from this there is neither full understanding of the Bible nor genuine faith. When it is said that Scripture is its own interpreter, the activity of the Spirit is implied. We cannot control this, or lay down conditions of its operation. But Bible readers in all centuries agree about it, and this testimony is incontrovertible. Whether we think of the Spirit inspiring the original writers or the later generations of readers and believers, we must recognise the activity of the living God which is the presupposition of man’s existence and his hope of redemption.

It goes without saying that there is a great risk of self-deception, and we can readily understand why the Roman Church stresses the need of authoritative guidance for the laity in their Bible-reading. This is a marked lack of eagerness to put the Bible in the hands of the laity, particularly new converts. At the other extreme is the viewpoint of rationalism—inside the Church‡ as well as outside—that reason alone is a sufficient guide. At both extremes there may be suspicion of enthusiasm, and distaste for claims to private revelation. The more balanced view of Reformed Christianity is

* C. H. Dodd: *According to the Scriptures*, pp. 131-2.

† R. M. Grant: *The Bible in the Church*, p. 174.

‡ e.g. in Jowett’s contribution to *Essays and Reviews*.

that Scripture is perspicuous and self-authenticating, not to the unaided reason, but to the honest searching of reason and faith piloted by the Spirit, whose aid is granted not only to scholars, who know the original languages, nor to ministers only, but to all earnest believers who "search the scriptures" according to the Lord's invitation (John v. 39), and after the example of the people of Berea (Acts xvii, 11). Such reading is a Christian's obligation. It implies "private judgment", of course, but there is no need to caricature that as arbitrary or profane. Catholicism makes this objection, because its concern for uniformity is greater than its concern for truth. Protestantism is more insistent on the need to disseminate Biblical truth, and also more willing to take account of human capacity to discover for itself, and therefore allows for the responsible decision of the individual. Even the truth of the Bible has to be perceived by *me*, to become *my* truth. Then there is faith; but short of that there is only respect for the authorised teaching of a Church. Revelation is not complete until the mind and heart of the individual has accepted it. It implies that the believer not only joins in saying "Our Father" in the company of his fellow believers, but that he can also in the privacy of his own chamber and heart say, in the words of the Psalmist, "O God, Thou art my God".

It is time to sum up. How does the expositor proceed as he begins to deal with a passage of Scripture? He has in mind as a general principle that this literature is unique in that it conveys to men God's Word in Christ; it makes possible a knowledge of Christ which means actual contact with the redemptive action of God. Each passage should be related to that central affirmation, and the expositor's aim is so to set it forth that the Jesus of history becomes the Christ of faith; in other words, that the original Jesus does not remain the Man of Galilee, but emerges as the contemporary Master of the believer today.

We have frankly suggested in criticism of Fundamentalist exposition that some passages have to be pronounced far from this centre and therefore not worthy of emphasis in modern preaching. They might be said to have a literal sense, but no adequate spiritual

sense. We have not scrupled to use this traditional terminology, but have pointed out that it means ascertaining the original meaning of a passage in order that a contemporary application may be developed out of it. This involves both a critical approach and willingness to take the trouble of going into much ancient detail, and also constructive treatment in the reference to modern situations.

It will generally be useful to distinguish the following four features:

(I) What does a passage teach about God? Little more need be said on this in view of the main argument of this book. For the Christian expositor God means always God in Christ; "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (II Corinthians v. 19). The Living God who is from everlasting to everlasting may be affirmed to have concern for men today and even for me, as well as for men of former centuries.

This thought of God's reconciling purpose has its correlative in teaching about human nature which is the object of the divine mercy and condescension. This is the second feature to which we would call attention.

(II) What does a passage teach about man? Man in his sin and degradation, and also in his God-given potentialities. Christian ethics and the doctrine of sin come in here.

The Biblical teaching about man and his need is directly applicable to modern man in so far as man's nature and disposition have not changed. Human behaviour varies with the difference of external setting in which man finds himself. But the nature of man is what it always was, and if the Bible speaks truly here this truth is relevant today, and the distinction between the twentieth century and the first falls to the ground. For many people this will be the point where Biblical teaching makes contact.

Those who are antagonised against religion can have their minds made receptive again only if religion is presented as involving an adequate conception of man and the world. We would even go so far as to say that the Gospel must be preached today in its anthropological rather than in its theological implications. Otherwise

those who have been nourished in the dogmas that God is dead (Nietzsche) or that religion is the opium of the masses (Marx) will remain impervious and only be confirmed in their alienation. As long as the man in the street is allowed to go on thinking that religion is concerned with God and the life to come, whereas for advice about this life's problems and prospects man must turn to the psychologist and physicist (and if there be a prophet like Mr. George Orwell or Mr. Arthur Koestler let him prophesy!), so long will he be justified in regarding the Church as an irrelevant institution, and in talking of this century as the beginning of the post-Christian era.

Because of this the doctrine of man implied in the Biblical proclamation of God as man's redeemer needs to be fully elucidated and emphasised. Christ is the divine Seeker, therefore man is in some sense lost, and this condition of lostness can be very abundantly illustrated.

God in Christ *reconciling*. . . . Apart from the Bible those good tidings are not to be heard. Men have to choose between idealism and existentialism, between optimism and despair. They may dream of a Superman, or of Utopia. They may grimly disclaim any superiority to the beasts that perish, and live and think on the animal level.* But with all this there is no hope or purpose, and these conceptions cannot satisfy. Only as man is seen in relation to God is human nature adequately defined, and life made meaningful. Secularism needs the Bible and scientific research needs Gospel direction, because the full truth even about this life is not stated without the Biblical reference to God, who is the author as well as the redeemer of life.

It must be made clear that the Biblical teaching on man is not confined to the communion of God with each individual soul. Individualistic mysticism or pietism cannot claim to represent fully the Bible's range. The Biblical doctrine of man has its setting in the

* One thinks of such a book as *Molloy*, by S. Beckett, following influential French writers, of which a reviewer (Mr. Philip Toynbee in the *Observer*) remarked that the characters can only be described as "figures", because the term "man" would imply more dignity than the author attributes to any one of them.

doctrine of God's concern not for the individual only, certainly not for the righteous individual only, but for the totality of men. And it leads on to its doctrine of election, i.e. of the redeemed society. These are the third and fourth features to which exposition must do justice.

(III) What does a passage teach about the world, the whole of mankind? "God was in Christ reconciling *the world*." We must not miss the reference to the masses of men, i.e. the unbelievers as well as the believers, lacking faith, following false prophets, sunk in despair. The Johannine writer in the New Testament declares that "the whole world lieth in the evil one". But is that really the end of the matter, and must we not maintain that the unredeemed section of humanity is ultimately destined to be redeemed? The ultimate purpose of God is in question here, not merely the realisation of that purpose in this life. The love of God, even if one aspect of it is God's wrath, must include the unbeliever as well as the believer. The God with whom we have to do in Biblical doctrine is as wonderful and incomprehensible as that. His ways are "past finding out". This may be too much for our logic and our sense of what is possible or appropriate. The Bible testifies to a God who is at work for man's liberation to be all that God wills him to be, and the end of that divine activity is "that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy ii. 4).

(IV) Fourthly, what has a passage to say about the Church, the redeemed society? What are the especial privileges and duties of those who have responded to God's revelation? The message about the ancient people of God must be relevant to the Church today, and this relevance must be sought in every passage.

What has just been said about the Biblical concern for the whole world must be held in relation to this. It is a sign of the taint of Pharisaism when the Church makes too much of what sunders it from the rest of mankind. Christians have clear obligations to their non-Christian fellow men, to serve them in love and to win them to Christ, and all this not simply out of their own sense of duty, but in the deep conviction that God's purpose includes all men. There is danger of insufficient emphasis being given to that parable which

speaks of the divine Seeker leaving the ninety and nine, and going after the lost sheep until he find it. "Outside the Church there is no salvation" may be a necessary emphasis in some contexts, but it must never be understood as limiting the range of the divine power and grace. The distinction between the Church of the redeemed and the world of the unredeemed should not be made too rigid. In the purpose of God the gap between those realms is bridged, however much the exigencies of clear definition or a cautious theology may need to draw a line of demarcation. The unredeemed should be regarded as the to-be-redeemed. There are grim facts of human experience which warn that some men are capable of choosing Hell rather than Heaven. Nevertheless those who have learned from the Bible about the ineffable grace of God will not permit the fact of human recalcitrance to formulate the terms of this distinction between world and Church, justice and mercy, sin and grace.

Our final word is a combination of the counsel of the pietist Bengel with that of the Platonist Jowitt. Said Bengel: Apply all thy powers to the text, and all its meaning apply to thyself. And Jowitt declared: The true use of interpretation is to get rid of interpretation, and leave us alone in company with the author.

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