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CHRISTIAN BRETHERN REVIEW

THE BIBLE IN THE EIGHTIES

Ed: G. John Polkinghorne

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Preface

The Journal of the C.B.R.F. now appears for the first time in its new style as the CHRISTIAN BROTHERS REVIEW and we offer it to our reading public as a more broadly based, discerning and informative periodical coming from within the provenance of the Brethren movement. It is hoped that its new A5 format and modern layout and typeface will encourage even better application to its contents and further contribution from the readers. It is intended that it should develop a growing interest in reviews, commentaries, correspondence and news — as well as continuing to publish studies and surveys as a major part of its content as before.

We are much indebted to John Polkinghorne for his editorship of this current number. The subject of biblical understanding and interpretation is one which needs constant updating and the two short papers by Prof. F. F. Bruce and the Rev. John Goldingay, delivered at a C.B.R.F. seminar in June 1980 and which formed the basis of this symposium, have been much enriched by papers commissioned especially for the occasion. These now represent a collection of well researched and valuable insights into the themes which they treat, together with useful practical advice to those of us who tread warily in our attempts to teach the 'whole counsel of God'.

We commend and commit this work to the Lord and to his people.

JOHN BOYES
Chairman

The Bible in the Eighties

It is easy enough to subscribe to the statement, 'The Bible is the Word of God', but to say exactly what that implies is quite another matter. How, for instance, do the undoubtedly divine and the obviously human relate? And when you have made up your mind on such issues, you then have the task of interpretation. These subjects have occupied the minds of Christian people very much, especially of late, so that it is appropriate for a Research Fellowship to survey the ground.

This will be done in three areas. First, the *Nature of the Bible* will be considered, with a paper committed to inerrancy and another presenting a different view — both by men with a high valuation of the authority of Scripture. Our intention is to set you thinking out your own position! The second section takes up the *Meaning of the Bible* and looks at meaning, critical disciplines, hermeneutics and cultural influences, as well as the time-honoured technique of allegorical interpretation. An important paper considers whether there is more than one biblical theology. At the end of each section, some books relevant to the themes are reviewed.

The third section recognizes that theory without practice is so much wind, and treats the *Use of the Bible*. Its public image, methods of study and private, family and corporate use are considered. The final paper sums up generally.

It is stressed that the ideas presented are not necessarily those of C.B.R.F. nor of the editor, but of the individual contributors. They will start you thinking and direct you to further literature which handles the themes more extensively. We offer them with the prayer that the Lord will use them to clarify our minds and sharpen our understanding, so that we will be more ably equipped to represent him in a doubting world.

G. J. POLKINGHORNE

A. The Nature of the Bible

'What Scripture Says, God Says'

PETER LOWMAN

Peter Lowman, B.A., is Editor of In Touch, an organ of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, and very active in witness among students. He is currently working for a Cardiff Ph.D. on 'The Presuppositions of the English Novel Tradition'.

Christianity is a religion of revelation. The God of Christianity is a God who spoke the command, 'Let there be light', and there was light; who revealed himself to a chosen people, giving them a written law, the observance or neglect of which would determine their future history — a history that would still be punctuated and illuminated by confrontation with the verbal 'Word of the Lord'. Finally, having 'spoken to our forefathers at many times and in various ways, he has spoken to us by his Son', the Living Word. God's revelation, then, is central to Christianity: central because, uniquely among the world's belief-systems, Christianity is built upon grace, upon the divine initiative, the epic of God stepping in to redeem the lost, the dead, shining his light into the darkness of our fallen and distorted thinking, the shepherd seeking the lost sheep, calling us that we may respond and follow.

And certainly Christ emphasized clearly (if the Gospels can be trusted in the very least) the centrality, reliability, and unique authority of the biblical revelation. He was born among people whose history and behaviour were shaped by a written revelation: and though Jesus used his messianic authority to challenge much that was apparently sacrosanct, this fundamental orientation he endorsed unflinchingly. Nor was he committed to the Old Testament in a merely general way, as if it were the container, the dispensable verbal embodiment, of some transcendental 'Living Word'. Rather, he declared uncompromisingly that 'till heaven and earth pass away' — though cultures may rise and fall! — 'not an iota, not a dot, shall pass from the law until all is accomplished' (Matt. 5:18).

Faced with Pharisaic traditionalism or Sadducee anti-supernaturalistic rationalism, his response was continually, 'Have you not read . . .' (Matt. 12:3, 5, 19:4, 21:16, 42, Mark 12:26): he challenges the rebellious Jewish theologians, 'Are you not in error because you do not

know the Scriptures . . .?' (Mark 12:24). In Matt. 19:4ff., he quotes a comment by the narrator of Genesis (or possibly Adam) as an utterance of God himself. It is on his authority, therefore, that we can affirm with Augustine, 'What Scripture says, God says'.¹

Prophecy, likewise, is not merely a humanly-flawed veil for timeless truth; rather, it is God's Word whose fulfilment governs the unfolding of future events. Continually Christ pointed out how his life, death and resurrection were to be in total conformity with OT prophecy (e.g. Luke 4:18ff., Matt. 26:24, Luke 22:37, 24:25-27, 44-48).² In Gethsemane he reminds Peter that twelve legions of angels were available to him, 'but how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled?' (Matt. 26:54). Biblical prophecy has no capacity for error: 'the Scripture must be fulfilled' (Mark 14:49).³

Thus his insistence that 'the Scripture cannot be broken' (John 10:35) goes beyond its ethical and doctrinal content: and it extends to biblical history. His sayings are frequently concerned with the very passages that have made nineteenth century liberals quail with embarrassment! 'As *were* the days of Noah, so *will be* the coming of the Son of Man' (Matt. 24:37). Sodom, a city that might conceivably have 'remained until this day', will be judged alongside Capernaum, and it '*shall be* more tolerable' for Sodom (Matt. 11:23-24). Jonah's audience in Nineveh will arise in the judgment with the current religious gurus of the Pharisees and condemn them (Luke 11:32). It is hard to see how these statements could have the same force if they were equivalent to 'As *were* the days of King Lear . . .', 'Camelot would have remained . . .', 'Macbeth will arise at the judgment . . .', etc. 'As the prophet Jonah was three days in the fish's belly, so the Son of Man was to be three days in the heart of the earth' (Matt. 12:40): the one event is as historical as the other. How meaningless Christ's remark would be if Jonah was a figure on a par with Merlin or Hercules: the suggestion would be that the resurrection had a similar status. Rather, Christ's repeated reference to Jonah surely assumes that the repentance of Nineveh was an historical event by which his hearers would do well to measure themselves.

For him, Scripture is God's Word without reservation, without adulteration. If we are his followers, our submission to its authority and reliability must be equally unqualified.

Two Alternatives

Such, surely, is the basis for the evangelical affirmation of Scripture: not that we can prove it point by point, or that there is currently a

favourable scholarly consensus, or that we have videotapes of Eve taking the fruit, Noah entering the ark and Jonah emerging from the whale. Rather, our commitment to the full authority of Scripture is a part of our obedience to Christ, our conviction that he knows all things and he knows better than we do. While there is a place for apologetics, our business is not to 'prove' biblical infallibility to non-Christians, so much as to challenge them to expose themselves to it; indeed, to preach it. (There are probably few better ways of removing doubts about the Bible's inspiration than by demonstrating its relevance in thorough and enthusiastic exposition.)

Logically, this must be so. Many of the events with which Scripture is concerned — the Fall, Abraham's offering of Isaac, the giving of the law, the feeding of the 5000, the parousia — are amenable neither to verification nor falsification. A deeper question is at stake: which is to be the final judge, Scripture or our contemporary opinions? Are we to correct Scripture by what we (at this moment) consider reasonable? Or do we allow our limited, twentieth-century European thinking to be corrected by the eternal Word?

Marxists, of course, are highly sceptical of 'commonsense reasonableness', pointing out that it can often be the depository of unexamined prejudices and assumptions. And certainly what appears 'reasonable' to one era may appear questionable or even absurd to another. The innate inferiority of women, the gross folly of teaching the lower classes to read, the institution of slavery — all seemed reasonable enough not long ago. How then can we get outside our twentieth century prejudices without a sure foothold in something that transcends cultural parochialism? Even scientific viewpoints change: cosmology changes. Academic fashions rise and fall. Moral attitudes change too: attitudes to divorce, sexuality, abortion. If the Bible's reliability is to be subject to the approval of our latest opinions, then we cannot speak with confidence as mouthpieces of the God who sees from beyond our uncertainties: we will be blown around by every breeze of intellectual style. The church will be modishly conservative and anti-communist in one decade, modishly liberal and socially concerned in the next, as Ellul points out. Without an authoritative revelation, we will have certainty neither in our doctrine nor in our ethics.

When Paul reminds the Corinthians 'in what terms I preached to you the Gospel', there is a heavy emphasis that what happened was 'in accordance with the Scriptures' (1 Cor. 15:1-4). God speaking through Scripture determines what exactly is the Gospel (which is why agreement on scriptural authority is an important presupposition to cooperation in evangelism. Only on that basis can the whole church, from its youngest members upwards, proclaim with joyful certainty,

'Thus says the Lord.' Opinions are not enough when salvation is at stake! Only if our teaching and action are based on a trustworthy Bible can we be certain that they are more than our own bright ideas; free from any error caused by its cultural setting, and only then will we go confidently against the fashion of our particular decade. Prophetic critique and radical holiness are built on the certainty that 'this is the Word of the Lord'.

The Undiluted Word

How such a view of biblical authority is best described is an open question. 'Inerrancy' is the word in the limelight in current debate in the USA.⁴ Oliver Barclay has argued for the advantages of 'infallibility';⁵ the IFES doctrinal basis has 'entire trustworthiness'; Ramsay Michaels prefers 'verbal inspiration'.⁶ Packer defines 'infallible' and 'inerrant' as meaning that

we may not (i) deny, disregard, or arbitrarily relativize anything that the writers teach, nor (ii) discount any of the practical implications for worship and service which their teaching carries, nor (iii) cut the knot of any problem of Bible harmony, factual or theological, by allowing ourselves to assume that the writers were not necessarily consistent with themselves or with each other.⁷

And this, surely, is the essence of the evangelical position. We reject any reductionist statement such as 'the Bible is not the Word of God, it *contains* the Word of God'; and any notion of a 'canon within the canon': we cannot see that human reason is competent to make such distinctions. We affirm the Bible and the whole Bible.

Above all, this is a practical matter. It is an affirmation that no matter how crucial the issue, we will not reject the biblical imperatives on the grounds that they are culture-bound, that that was 'only Paul' (although we may have to search and pray to understand their contemporary application). And that by God's grace we will seek to avoid bending Scripture to make it say what we want to hear. Likewise, we will try to avoid the kind of examination of a controversial issue (e.g. homosexuality) that attempts only to show that the biblical references are ambiguous (which for practical purposes means silent), and then decides the issues on the basis of other data: clearing Scripture out of the way to make room for our own opinions. The crucial test of our submission to God's Word is when it says something we do not want to hear. Then the difference between a full affirmation of scriptural authority, and a use of the Bible controlled at crisis point by human reason, becomes apparent. This may be illustrated from Stephen T.

Davis' book *The Debate About The Bible*. Davis is honest enough to follow the logic of his position through to this point:

... the whole community of Christian believers helps me to decide what I will believe, whether or not there is compelling reason to reject some biblical claim. For me this does not occur often, but it does occur occasionally. It has never yet occurred on a matter of faith or practice, and ... I hope it never will ... I believe that the Bible is or ought to be authoritative for every Christian ... unless and until he encounters a passage which after careful study and for good reasons he cannot accept ... (pp.76, 117).

The problems are obvious: even supposing the voice of the 'whole community' could be located church history shows how far it can go astray. Presumably Davis would have us side with the prophetic minority when it does so. But then there is no sense in which we are 'under authority'; there is no control to set against the secret machinations of our sin-tainted reason. Our opinions would have the final say.

Our rejection of any concept of a 'canon within the canon' must rule out the kind of approach taken by one contributor to the recent *New Testament Interpretation* symposium who argued that not only did Jesus not speak a particular saying in Matthew, but it represents 'a later acceptance of attitudes which Jesus himself had resisted', connected with 'the Pharisaic membership and theological influence within the church' (p.168). That is, the Bible is giving us a totally unreliable picture in this instance of what Jesus taught. It is separating commitment to Christ from commitment to Scripture — but straight-away the word 'Christ' is in danger of contentlessness: we ourselves will pick and choose within the Gospels according to our preferences, constructing a Christ who has done what we think likely. We are perilously close to making an idolatrous God in our own image: just as nineteenth century liberalism drifted into a near-panteism that refused to believe in a God of judgment. We need the Lord to speak to us, to 'rebuke and correct' us as he shows us just what he is like (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16), challenging us when our picture is too small.

To set aside the divine guarantee of the reliability of the Gospel records increases massively our capacity for subjectivism. And so much is at stake. 'Every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand', Jesus told his hearers; 'the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.' New Testament reliability matters!

Still, the prime area where a 'canon within in a canon', selected by human judgment, is currently advocated is biblical history, which serves to demonstrate what a curious thing theological fashion is. Not long ago the emphasis was all on the 'God who *acts*' in mighty deeds

throughout salvation-history: and evangelicals were having to demonstrate how, biblically, God's Word prepares for God's deed and vice versa, how verbal revelation does not militate against personal relationship with God but is the vehicle of it, etc. Now in liberal evangelical circles, the boot is on the other foot: we are told we must affirm that God has spoken, about salvation and ethics, but it is less important to affirm that he actually *acted* to save his people. Thus, a wedge is driven between the Word and the event: God promises both judgment and deliverance, but we are cautious about claiming that these things have actually occurred at any given point.

4004 and All That

This approach may be conveniently illustrated from David Winter's recent paperback, *But That I Can Believe*. Winter (who, we should add, is a man who has rendered yeoman's service for the Gospel) is aiming in undoubted good faith to help 'orthodox Christians' troubled by doubt by showing that they can 'believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, from start to finish, and yet reject ideas of biblical infallibility over matters of history and cosmology.' He feels that 'many of the things' that doubters have 'found so incredible in the Bible are peripheral to' the truth of salvation.

But a lot gets to be peripheral as the book progresses. The historicity of Adam and Eve is, predictably, 'irrelevant' (51), and the Tower of Babel 'quite obviously . . . is not history' (52). Sections of Numbers, Joshua, Judges and Kings follow suit: the Old Testament is historically factual only in patches. At the beginning of the Gospels 'the discrepancies . . . are enormous' (56), though the ones he lists don't seem to be, consisting largely of what one writer states and another omits. 'The evidence is overwhelming' (what evidence is a little unclear) that the Magi and the flight into Egypt are 'poetic elaboration' (63). The miracles, or 'signs' that John recorded 'that you may believe' (John 20:30,31) are not necessarily to be taken literally (92,93).

Nor is Winter an isolated voice: several writers at present are arguing that Bible narratives are only historically reliable when directly 'salvific', directly concerned with salvation — whichever those may be. Winter distinguishes between 'history that conveys spiritual truth and history that is irrelevant to it' (82). These are not easy distinctions to make: one might argue that the Genesis narratives are as clearly concerned with salvation and spiritual truth as anything in the Bible.

The whole approach is inherently reductionist, of course, and leaves us impoverished. It is true of literature generally that to simplify a

great book to a single theme is to emasculate it. Only as we stand back and see it as a whole do individual parts — that choice of vocabulary, this deceptively simple image — become significant: and then, if the writer is good enough, we will dig into all the odd corners that remain to find their place. Not unless we are convinced that we have mastered all a book has to offer can we classify any of it as dispensable or merely circumstantial. In John's Gospel, for example, we will be the losers if we fail to notice the thematic significance of the feasts referred to in the narrative: these minor chronological details might seem irrelevant but certainly convey 'spiritual truth'. The more we study Scripture, indeed, the more it begins to look as if 'all Scripture is . . . profitable for teaching'. In that case the reliability of biblical historical narrative must be affirmed as a whole.⁸

But one suspects that this criterion is problematic. Some of these writers are not apparently intending to affirm the historicity of all passages that are *concerned with* salvation (in its widest sense, one trusts: narrow definitions of salvation are rightly unpopular these days). Rather the criterion seems to be — or under pressure tends to become — one whereby we need only affirm historicity *where the plan of salvation would collapse without it*. Winter follows his distinction about conveying spiritual truth by saying that 'The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and his ascension to the Father clearly fall in this category, because they guarantee doctrines of the faith which are central to our salvation' (82-83). Not all liberal evangelicals would follow Winter in affirming the ascension, alas, and Winter's own statement has disturbing implications. It suggests that passages whose historicity must necessarily be affirmed are very few. Most of these writers will in practice defend a great deal more besides but the logic of their position is ominous.

Perhaps we should learn from what has happened in Catholicism since Vatican II. B. C. Butler, for example, stresses that the truth in Scripture that was 'without error' was . . . that 'relevant to God's saving purpose summed up in Christ', and, as Wells comments,

The point he is making is that many truths of science and history have no part to play in our salvation . . . But Gregory Baum has trimmed this core even further. To be saved, he says, we need to know exceedingly little: exceedingly little, then, is inerrantly taught in Scripture.⁹

Liberal evangelicals have not gone that far,¹⁰ but it is not clear that they have formulated a consistent approach to Scripture that will preserve them from an increasing withdrawal from biblical historicity.

From History to Poetry

Recently, a few writers have begun presenting biblical narrative passages as 'poetry' or 'story', intending to preserve their doctrinal content without defending their historicity. But biblical history is not so easily separable from doctrine as this. And Christian doctrine is not a collection of Hellenistic abstractions, it is in good measure about history. Unlike, say, Hinduism, Christianity is emphatically an historical religion. The good news that Paul proclaimed 'as of first importance' is that Christ historically died and rose again 'according to the Scriptures' (1 Cor. 15:3,4). If Christ be not risen, as a matter of historical fact, says Paul, 'we are to be pitied more than all men' (v.19). Christianity is not about myths. The apostle Peter knew the difference between myth and history and wanted his readers to be sure that his account of the Mount of Transfiguration was the latter and not the former (2 Pet. 1:16). The 'spiritual truth' many Bible passages convey is that the things they mention actually occurred: these are the ways that God acted in historical reality.

To the evangelical the crucial point is Christ's attitude to the Old Testament narratives. But Winter's criteria for recognizing 'poetry' deserve critical attention. For it seems all too likely that he often assumes the original authors were writing 'poetry' when there is a miracle in view. Certainly it is the more supernaturally-inclined OT sections that get termed 'magical' and hence (whether or not there is any sign of poetic structure) 'poetry'. As Winter notes himself, our attitude towards miracle narratives tends to be controlled by what sort of thing one expects God to do (85). But once again, those expectations will be finally determined either by Scripture or by our culture's opinions. We should be cautious about using the latter as a basis in asserting what God would not have done.

(In passing, it seems possible that this is really the hesitancy many people have about the historicity of Jonah. The question of a 'great fish' being 'prepared' to swallow a prophet is really a question about the nature of God: is God really the kind of God who breaks into history for the sake of a prophet's education, 'preparing' a marine creature for this purpose? Does he really value the laws of nature less than our spiritual maturity, is he so intimately in control of events that he brings about the kind of coincidence whereby the prophet is swallowed, and then, in answer to prayer, vomited out on dry land? Or is the 'problem with Jonah' more that we have been brainwashed by our culture into preferring a distant God, a safely predictable God, not a God who (on rare occasions — Jonah's experience is unique in Scripture) can break into history with glorious and majestic abandon?)

Winter suggests that the Gospel miracles are more likely to be historical than those in the OT because they are 'miracles *with* nature rather than against it' (93). But does it make any difference to our Creator God whether he is speeding up a natural process or suspending the laws he made and doing something radically new? Or is it just that we find the miracles 'with nature' easier to swallow? (Perhaps deep down we feel that if God made a 'long day' as in Joshua, he was in danger of upsetting the universe?) That is a fact about our twentieth century psychology, not about the power of God.

Winter also refers to 'the way they' (the OT miracles) 'are related' and the 'absence of reliable historical points of reference': but is there any difference between the way that, say, the axehead miracle is related in 2 Kings 6 and the account of Jehu's *coup d'etat* in 2 Kings 10? And what is a 'reliable historical point of reference' — the connection with Syrian monarchs in the various miracle narratives in 2 Kings, perhaps? Criteria like these leave too much room for subjectivity. But actually, says Winter, these aren't the real questions;¹¹ the real issue is, "What did the writer intend?" With many of these saga-like narratives I have little doubt that the writer's primary concern was to illustrate the power or purpose of God rather than to document historical events' (92). This is a false either/or. Winter seems to believe that these stories illustrate the truth that God *can* and *does* deliver a whole nation by a means as small as one man (Samson is the immediate context), but that he didn't actually *do* it in Samson's time. But surely the illustration makes much more sense if it records actual historical events? If such divine deliverances occur, should we not expect the Bible to record them? Otherwise, what do the doctrines mean in historical terms?

The same problem occurs in his treatment of Genesis, where he attacks the belief in 'a literal Garden of Eden, a literal Adam and Eve, a literal temptation and Fall' and describes the doctrine that 'Adam and Eve, the fruit and the serpent, are part of the historical record of the planet' as 'nonsense' (114). But here the heartaches begin: Winter still holds to the biblical answer to the problem of evil, and writes elsewhere, "The 'Fall' is central to any adequate understanding of the Bible . . . Man was created good, but a free moral agent, and by his own choice has declined to obey God and instead pursued his own ends' (87). But has this happened in history? If not, how can it adequately explain how a good God permitted the existence of a flawed universe — and as the problem then goes back to the Creation, what does that do to our doctrine of God? Or else the Fall actually occurred — which involves a literal Fall, and, if we believe in the devil, a literal temptation. And it makes at least as much sense to believe that the Fall

occurred to the first genuine 'man' ('Adam', after all, merely means 'Man', and 'Eve', 'mother of all living') as anything else. So it will not do to say that the Bible is speaking 'not of scientific or historical facts, but of ultimate, theological truth' (50). The 'theological truth' is about history: 'Man' ('Adam') was (historically) created perfect, he made an historical decision, he historically fell. If this is not history, it is not 'ultimate, theological truth' either.

A final example may be taken from Winter's treatment of the Gospels. Matthew's infancy narratives, he tells us, are 'structured to present an argument (that in Jesus Judaism is fulfilled), not to report events' (58), whereas Luke, he says, is 'trying to write an accurate, reliable, chronological record' (60). So Matthew gives us the 'beautifully imaginative' stories about wise men, rabbinic-style 'sermon illustrations' (62), whose historicity is irrelevant, while Luke gives us — well, actually, an angel striking Zacharias dumb in the temple and more angels filling the heavens with their praises: sober history, rooted in 'verifiable events' (61).

And the problem is not merely that Winter has jumped onto the latest (and not entirely stable) scholarly bandwagon, saying that Matthew is 'midrash', rabbinic-style, when it is debatable how far the rabbis used 'midrash' in a coherent narrative or in any other form that was disconnected from the OT text. There is a problem in his whole line of thought. Matthew, he says, is arguing a case. Certainly: and this does not destroy his historicity — many of the greatest historians were arguing a case in one way or another. But what more dubious way to argue a case than to invent the evidence? If Matthew wishes to assert that Jesus is Messiah because in many ways he fulfilled the OT, then if he makes up his fulfilments he is not a poet but a liar. We would not welcome it if we found the same thing being done by, say, the followers of Sun Myung Moon. It is precisely because Matthew is arguing a case that the events he presents must be historical. (Incidentally, as R. T. France points out, in the case of the massacre of the innocents it is odd the Matthew could not invent a story more obviously fitted to its OT prophecy, if indeed he really felt free to invent whatever narrative he pleased.)¹²

It seems, then, that this kind of approach has fundamental weaknesses. There seem to be no certain criteria to distinguish with any certainty between narratives that are historical and narratives that are not: Winter is in continual danger of slipping into what other disciplines call the 'intentional fallacy', interpreting a piece of literature by a predetermined authorial intention, when in fact the only possible evidence for that intention is the text itself. All too often the poetry category is being invoked for the miraculous elements in biblical narrative,

when in fact evangelicals need not share the liberal distaste for such elements. In the absence of objective criteria there is a real danger of vast areas of Scripture being emptied of their historicity, with a consequent impoverishment of our sense of God as a God who acts. We have seen that the category of what conveys 'spiritual truth' melts away on inspection. 'Spiritual truth' is in good measure about what happens or has happened in history, and many of Winter's 'poetic truths' depend on historical embodiment if they are to be meaningful. In short, biblical historicity is indispensable. We had better stay with Christ's attitude to Old Testament narrative.

But before we leave Winter, there is one fascinating point about his book namely that (like another anti-inerrantist, Robert Webber, in *Common Roots*) he ends up bolstering a weakened concept of the authority of Scripture by recourse to 'the authority of the church'. A whole chapter is devoted to the topic. Winter tells us that the Church is far more likely to guard the Scriptures than 'individualistic commentators or self-appointed prophets'(102). All things considered, one wonders where this leaves 'individualistic commentators' like Athanasius or Luther — or Paul, challenging Peter when the truth of the Gospel was at stake (Gal. 2:11): or what the 'self-appointed prophet' is to do when, with the unfashionable perspective of Scripture, he sees the ecclesiastical establishment all around him infected with materialism or racism or humanism or Pharisaism.

In fact for a liberal evangelical to lean on the authority of the church is even more hopeless than for a Catholic: for Catholicism at least has traditionally located the voice of that authority in the papacy. But the liberal evangelical has nowhere to locate it, since there are (alas) few controversial issues where Scripture is unclear on which even the evangelical community, let alone Christendom as a whole, speaks with a united voice. The crucial point, however, is surely Christ's teaching for, so far from promising a continuous work of the Spirit within the church to guarantee an authority capable of being set against Scripture, he clearly sets the Word of God over against, and in judgment upon, human tradition, even that of the leaders of the chosen people (Mark 7:6-13). Likewise, when debating with the Galatians about circumcision, Paul argues from Scripture, not from the decisions of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15.¹⁵

We have, then, no meaningful alternative to the supremacy of Scripture: and for that reason piecemeal affirmations of biblical authority are a trap. They leave every Christian unable to pin his faith to any but a very few passages: how can he be sure that this is not 'the one that got away'? At the practical level, one wonders how many Christians taught to treat Babel in Genesis 11 as myth will treat Abraham's

story in Genesis 12 any differently: and how many will in practice dig into Abraham's life story for spiritual nourishment if the events did not happen. Likewise, one wonders how many churches taught in this way will spend time grappling with the question of what, say, 2 Kings is doing in the Bible. The narrative sections of Scripture are thus all too easily turned from God's own record and commentary on history into something like a ragbag of half-remembered, exaggerated travellers' tales (although, like all good tales, they contain an edifying, abstract, moral). Certainly the vast majority of churches where the Bible is lovingly and extensively expounded, where real time is given to its exploration, are those committed to its full authority. Still, the final issue is not that the anti-infallibilist position is in itself inconsistent, and has to be rescued with an equally unhelpful concept of church authority: nor yet that, pragmatically, any position short of the full authority of Scripture debilitates the churches holding it. The crucial point is Christ's own attitude to Scripture, with which we began. To this reader there is in Christ's teaching a full affirmation that 'what Scripture says, God says', ethics, doctrine and history, without qualification. With our fallen reason, then, we must not dare to pick and choose.

What Infallibility Does Not Involve

Several points need making here, to avoid misunderstanding.

1. Infallibility does not necessitate literalistic interpretation where it is genuinely not appropriate (e.g. the symbolism of Revelation). The Psalms do not ask us to postulate a scientific rationale for the hills clapping their hands, no matter how much we enjoy the things that go on in Narnia!

2. Infallibility does not involve the claim to be able to supply instant harmonization of all apparent difficulties, because it is in the first place rooted in Christ's teaching on Scripture. Hence, it will not trouble us if difficulties remain (as with the continual movement of scholarship they are liable to do), or if for a decade or two the preference of critical opinion (which is not the same as incontrovertible proof) is against the reliability of a particular passage. These things can change (cf. the effect of J. A. T. Robinson's unexpectedly conservative *Redating the New Testament*). In the meantime, contrived harmonizations do no credit to scriptural authority or our own integrity. As Stott says, 'the wise Christian keeps what might be called a suspense account or a pending tray. That is, he suspends judgment, and goes on looking for harmony rather than giving up, because he is

sure that one day what is obscure will become plain, as in other major areas of doctrine — God's love in the face of suffering, for example.¹⁴

3. Infallibility does not deny the human element in Scripture. Nor does it involve asserting that Scripture was 'dictated'. God was entirely able to inspire his chosen human vehicles in such a way that his message was expressed without error, exactly according to his will, and yet in idioms, thought patterns, grammatical and stylistic idiosyncrasies, etc., that are those of the human writer. The interweaving of divine and human action may be as mysterious as divine foreordaining and human freewill, but it is no less real. Sometimes it is said that in denying error in Scripture we are falling into a trap analogous to docetism (the heresy that denied the humanity of Christ). But, of course, the genuine humanity of Christ did not involve sin. Nor does the humanness of Scripture need to involve error.

4. The infallibility of Scripture is not the same as the infallibility of our own interpretation, or the existence of one legitimate interpretation only. For example, infallibility does not render essential our believing that the world was created in six 24-hour periods in uninterrupted succession unless the text rules other alternatives out.

5. But in fact infallibility is not even a total doctrine of the authority of Scripture. It is possible to hold to infallibility or inerrancy and yet nullify its authority by other means: by reading it through our church tradition (of whatever kind) and ignoring anything it says that does not fit what we already believe; by incautious work in the area of genre criticism;¹⁵ by overstressing the 'culture gap' that can render biblical commands irrelevant, ignoring those things — the nature of God, the atonement, many aspects of human nature and discipleship — that do not change with time. It is worth remembering that the Sadducees had problems with the existence of supernatural powers — which is to say that Christ actually encountered and rejected, a demythologized approach in this area.

'Hermeneutics', the science — or art — of interpretation is currently in the limelight, and rightly. But there are ways of carrying out this vital exercise that hinder our hearing God speak, by overemphasizing the multiplicity of implications in a passage to the point where it says nothing clearly or authoritatively;¹⁶ or by allowing too much authority to a pre-understanding of what it can say (whether it be that of liberation theology, or that of the gospel-meeting sausage-machine that turns every passage into a springboard for the four spiritual laws!!); or by carrying the essential act of seeing the text in its context so far that all we retrieve is a truism. Indeed, the whole business can be made so obscure that we produce an intellectual elitism where hermeneutical dexterity matters more than spiritual maturity, assiduous and prayer-

ful Bible study and the enlightenment of the Spirit; so depriving all but academics of the confidence that God will speak through his Word, and landing us back in the pre-Reformation situation of a Bibleless laity. As so often, the cure is a thoroughgoing supernaturalism that trusts the Spirit to 'lead us into all truth'.

6. Infallibility — or inerrancy — is not an end-point for another reason too; it still needs definition. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy affirms that it is not 'proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its truth and purpose':

Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: since, for instance, non-chronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers . . . Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focussed truth at which its authors aimed.

We . . . deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as . . . irregularities of grammar and spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods (e.g. the lies of Satan), the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.¹⁷

Undoubtedly we should expect biblical writers to record events according to their own historiographical conventions rather than ours. For such conventions exist: in our culture we willingly accept as accurate a considerably abridged account of, say, a parliamentary speech — even if it omits the asides and tidies half-sentences — *provided that* we have faith in the person who is doing the abridging. In quotation, our culture has the convention that if we commence 'He said that' we are allowed greater liberty for shortening or clarifying thought without being inaccurate than if we use 'He said' followed by quotation marks. Such conventions vary from culture to culture. We are likewise ill-advised to mistake the biblical equivalents of 'My heart sank' or 'The sun rose' for precise scientific descriptions. Indeed, in a non-technological era, such things as the meaning of 'cubit' or the method of dating reigns may vary from situation to situation or book to book, as Nicole points out.¹⁸

7. Finally, infallibility does not preclude responsible biblical scholarship. The more we can learn about the meaning and context of any passage, or the purpose with which God inspired any particular writer, the better. Of course, there exist areas where to join in the dialogue can involve presupposing a view of Scripture considerably lower than that of the Lord and the apostles, an anti-supernaturalistic world-

view, a denial of predictive prophecy,¹⁹ or of the reliable transmission of Christ's teaching. Evangelicals can be under pressure to forget Christ's teaching on Scripture, and act as if the reliability of a particular passage had each time to be decided on its own merits. This is to set human reason to judge Scripture once again: and the results will change from decade to decade as one dominant academic philosophy (e.g. existentialism) is dethroned by another (e.g. structuralism). Still, all these areas call for thoroughgoing and scholarly critique, not for obscurantism.

Infallibility is, indeed, a charter for exploration. Our faith in the canon of Scripture prompts us to ask, 'What is this doing here?' To us, nothing in the Bible is dispensable: therefore we will expect that the effort spent digging into any passage of Scripture will be rewarded. And our faith will not be in vain.

Infallibility is Not a Game

To submit to scriptural authority is not to give mental assent to a principle but to embark on a lifetime of seeking out what God is saying, and obeying it.

Therefore, if we really believe the Bible is God's Word we shall read it in quantity (we read no other book in shreds and patches as we do Scripture), giving quality time to studying it. If we spend less time on the Bible than the newspaper, then assuredly at a deep level of our personality we believe the newspaper to be more relevant, more indispensable: and in turn it, rather than the Bible, will provide the norms and frameworks through which we view reality. (The ideal is, of course, to be a prayerful reader of both!) Similarly, the fact that 'Brethren' churches seem less willing today than previously to set aside a whole day to study God's Word should make us wonder if our belief in biblical authority is all that we claim. The desire to read through the *whole* Bible (in a year perhaps?), to understand it, to take notes so that we retain what we learn, to pray over them in obedience — these are the marks of a 'sound doctrine of Scripture'.

It is perfectly possible to have sorted out the finer points of prophecy or predestination and yet ignore completely the fundamental biblical imperatives: to read 'Go into all the world and preach' and yet restrict our evangelism to expecting others (unaccountably) to come to us; to read 'Love one another' and yet treat a brother in Christ as feckless because his views on a few difficult passages are different from ours. To do such things is to deny the authority of Scripture. To hear the demands of the prophets that the poor and hungry be fed, and yet

to go along with the norms of a self-seeking, materialistic Western society, doing what is *reasonable* according to the neighbours and the adverts — this is to exalt the human reason, blown around as ever by the powers of this world, over the Word of God. Here, as clearly as in any of the liberal attempts to pick and choose a 'canon within the canon', the enemy is still posing the age-old question: 'Has God said?' Such disobedience is not evangelicalism: it is worldliness.

If Scripture is indeed the undiluted Word of God, we must continually be open for it to surprise us with fresh insights, passages we 'would not have put quite like that'. Let us not try to domesticate them into the shapes of what we already know, so learning nothing. Let us allow God, in his majesty, to teach us (for we have hardly begun) things greater than we have asked, thought or dreamed. That is to submit to Scripture as authoritative over our thinking.

And it is the only true radicalism. Nothing must quench our thirst to discover afresh what it means to be biblical people and biblical communities in the new era in which God has placed us, but the presupposition on which everything is founded must be our commitment and obedience to the entire Word of the Lord. In all our radicalism we must be, in Stott's fine phrase, 'radical conservatives', rooted unshakably in Scripture. Any other radicalism, daring to decide by its own opinions what it can and cannot obey and believe, will be swayed by every change of fashion in the world's thinking.

'What Scripture says, God says.' That was Christ's teaching, and his whole life was shaped by his unqualified obedience to the flawless Word of God. As his followers, we cannot do otherwise.

NOTES

1. J. I. Packer notes, 'Christ and his apostles quote Old Testament texts not merely as what, e.g., Moses, David or Isaiah said . . . but also as what God said through these men (see Acts 4:25; 28:25, etc.), or sometimes simply what "he" (God) says (e.g., 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:5,8), or what the Holy Ghost says (Heb. 3:7; 10:15). Furthermore, Old Testament statements, not made by God in their contexts, are quoted as utterances of God (Matt. 19:4f.; Heb. 3:7; Acts 13:34f.; citing Gen. 2:24; Ps. 95:7; Isa. 55:2 respectively). Also, Paul refers to God's promise to Abraham and his threat to Pharaoh, both spoken long before the biblical record of them was written, as words which *Scripture* spoke to these two men (Gal. 3:8; Rom. 9:17); which shows how completely he equated the statements of Scripture with the utterance of God' (*Under God's Word* (Hodder), p.117-8). Incidentally, this last point also demonstrates how the NT writers saw Scripture as a divinely-inspired *whole*, not something heterogeneous containing the Word of God in some of its parts.

2. These passages demonstrate, incidentally, that Christ's attitude to the Old Testament was not a minor accommodation to the (non-Sadducee) Judaism of his time. Rather, his attitude to Scripture was fundamental to his self-understanding, and his presentation of his person and ministry to others.
3. Cf. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, pp.54-62.
4. We should not think of it as a recent invention, however: Augustine and Luther use the concept.
5. *Christian Graduate*, June 1980.
6. Cf. his essay in Nicole and Michaels, *Inerrancy and Commonsense*.
7. J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Hodder), p.112, the best popular introduction to the authority of Scripture currently available.
8. R. T. Beckwith has commented on the importance of the minor points in the historical narratives, "The historical minutiae are stressed by the Bible itself. Think what use Hebrews 7 makes, in the case of Malchizedek, of his name, his realm, his tithing, his blessing, even of the silence of Genesis; think how Galatians 4 stresses the details of Hagar's and Sarah's history, one bond, one free, one bearing a child by nature, one by miracle, the mocking of Ishmael, God's words to Abraham; think of the name of the pool in John 9:7; of the interpreting of the unbroken bones and water from the side in John 19:36f. Again, that David in Spirit called the Messiah "Lord", and that God made promise to Abraham "and to thy seed" (not "seeds") are really incidental historical details, by no means essential to the main drift of those particular revelations seemingly, yet insisted on by the New Testament. Our Lord insists on the length of time that Jonah spent in the whale's belly (Matt. 12:40). Think too how Paul (2 Cor. 3:13-18) argues from the veil Moses put on his face, and the fact that he took it off when going before the Lord, as well as from the glory itself.' Quoted by John Wenham, in an unpublished essay entitled 'True, Trustworthy, Infallible, Inerrant'.
9. David Wells, *Revolution in Rome* (IVP), p.30. Cf. also *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Pickering and Inglis), pp.74-76 (arguably the best scholarly symposium on biblical authority published over here thus far: and a model of courtesy to its opponents).
10. Although Winter's conclusion that the Bible is "infallible" where it matters . . . teaching us reliably all we need to know for our salvation' (84, summarizing a chapter) leaves the door open for Baum's approach.
11. Although he has used these criteria a paragraph earlier. The NT miracles, he says, 'took place in known and identified places, and involved named people' — but so did Joshua's long day, Elisha's axehead, and the narratives of Balaam and Samson. He also comments that the NT miracles 'were written up within the lifetime of eye-witnesses', but it would take a fairly authoritative piece of source criticism to show that this was not true of Kings or Judges.
12. See his essay in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, Vol. 2 (JSOT), which provides a solid defence of the historicity of the Matthaean infancy narratives. Also noteworthy is Aune's review in the same volume of Talbett's *What is a Gospel?*, another book on which Winter bases his case. It seems that Winter has assumed for the scholars he quotes an authority that they have yet to earn.
13. It is sometimes argued that the church must have an authority alongside Scripture, since it was the church that established the canon. As early as 1 Corinthians and 2 Peter the idea is assumed of the new covenant being embodied in authoritative Scripture. But what was at stake in the church's discussions of the canon was not Scripture's authority, which was presupposed, but rather which books were included.

14. 'The Authority and Relevance of the Bible in the Modern World', printed in *Crux*, June 1980.
15. Genre criticism is a difficult area. The structuralist Todorov, for example, has demonstrated that the definition of a genre is varied by every new work. To show that a work belongs to a particular genre in five respects does not guarantee how it will behave in a sixth. (Aune's essay, cited above, has some useful comments on this.)
16. A. C. Thiselton comments in *New Testament Interpretation* on the lack of concern among such exponents of the 'new hermeneutics' as Fuchs and Ebeling as to understanding the text *correctly*, p.323.
17. The Chicago Statement, the clearest contemporary statement of the conservative inerrantist position, was signed in 1978 by many (mostly American) evangelical leaders. John Stott has described it as an 'extremely judicious document'. It is reprinted in *God has Spoken* and the *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 4, No. 1.
18. In an essay in *Inerrancy and Commonsense*. Also R. T. France, 'Inerrancy and New Testament Exegesis', *Themelios*, autumn 1975.
19. We should take careful note of Isaiah's firm and repeated insistence that predictive prophecy is a proof of the truth of the God of Israel.

Biblical Inerrancy: An Alternative View

J. KEIR HOWARD

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One of the central problems faced by all religions is that of authority. The answers to this problem have been many and varied, but the great historical religions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity have tended to adopt some form of objective, external frame of reference as the final arbiter. This is by no means true without exception and there have been and continue to be many groups within each of these religions who hold to some form of 'inner' authority (for the Christian usually defined in relation to the Holy Spirit). For a variety of reasons, however, some theological and some historical, the conservative Protestant tradition within Christianity has looked to an external source of religious authority, less arbitrary than either the fiat of an institution or the promptings of an inner light. The Bible provided this final, externally 'given' authority.

It was, perhaps, inevitable that, because the Bible has this supreme position, there should be a tendency to protect its status and buttress its authority by 'building a hedge about the Law', as did the Pharisees of old. Because the authority residing in Scripture has this unchanging and unchangeable character, then the biblical text must needs be established as equally immutable on the one hand and entirely trustworthy on the other, by virtue of its God-given nature. Thus the conservative view of the verbal inspiration of the Bible came to be formulated. In fairness, it should be added that this view was also held by many Christians who, nonetheless, looked to the institutional church for final authority. From a general view of biblical inspiration which accepted Scripture's reliability as an historical record and as the authoritative source of guiding principles for the life of the church, there came an insistence that the Bible is verbally inspired by God in every word and without any form of error in every detail. Thus the 'hedge' was built with a series of terms such as 'inerrant' and 'plenary inspiration' added to the concept of a literal verbal inspiration.

This short paper addresses itself to the important question of how

far this 'fundamentalist' view of Scripture can be maintained. The problem will be approached from the standpoint of the biblical witness itself and from a general theological viewpoint. It should be appreciated that limitations of space make it impossible to develop the discussion to the extent the author would prefer. Consequently, at the risk of some (perhaps inevitable) misunderstanding the arguments developed will be considerably compressed. Firstly, however, one or two general remarks should be made.

Behind the biblical record as it exists today there lies a variety of oral traditions which were eventually collated, edited and set down in writing. These written documents themselves underwent a further process of editing and revision until they reached forms that were relatively fixed, by which stage documents were being copied rather than edited. Even at this stage there might be significant variations between the texts of divergent or parallel traditions. Such statements may seem self-evident, but claims for verbal inspiration and inerrancy sometimes fail to take this long process of development into account. The attempts to overcome the more obvious problems by the use of escape clauses, for example 'as originally given', found in various evangelical statements of faith are not really successful. At what point in the long chain of oral and written tradition, of interpretation and reinterpretation, does the single point of 'originally given' occur? The matter could be pursued at length.

The other general observation that should be made is that Scripture should be set firmly within the broad cultural milieu in which it developed. The Bible is a product of its times and it is a serious misunderstanding and misuse of the biblical record to attempt, for example, to harmonize the early chapters of Genesis with each new scientific theory in cosmology or anthropology. These chapters provide important and valuable spiritual insights and underline essential truths about man's relationship with God, but they are not a literal description of how God made the world and its inhabitants. Attempts to force the record of the Bible into conformity with current knowledge in the interests of a preconceived concept of 'inerrancy' or 'infallibility' are distortions of the meaning of Scripture and make nonsense of its primary purpose.

The Biblical Witness

The purpose of Scripture is stated expressly at 2 Tim. 3:16 and as this verse is frequently used as a proof text in support of verbal inspiration it is necessary to devote some attention to it. Firstly, it is important to

note that the key word in this verse is not 'inspired' (*theopneustos*), but 'profitable' (*ophelimos*). The emphasis lies on the purpose of Scripture (here specifically the Old Testament) which, as the record of God's saving acts, is above all 'for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be holy' (Jer. Bible). Scripture, however, is not merely a record of history, it is not merely a source book for ethics or theological principles, it is an essential part of the process of the revelation of God's salvation. It is set apart from secular books because of this unique quality that God has, as it were, breathed his life into it, and because that process of inspiration continues for the reader today through the Holy Spirit, Scripture comes as a living word pointing to the fullness of God's Word in Christ. This verse then, has nothing to say about verbal inspiration as generally understood today.

The other passage which is frequently used to support the concepts of verbal inspiration and inerrancy is 2 Pet. 1:21. The verse forms part of a paragraph which emphasizes the value of the prophetic word and concludes with the statement that when 'men spoke for God it was the Holy Spirit that moved them' (Jer. Bible). The writer is saying no more, however, than that the message of the prophet is a proclamation of the Word of God, he speaks with God's authority, he is empowered by God's Spirit. Such inspiration in the proclamation of the Word of God is equally needed in the church today. The verse underlines the importance of the prophetic oracle as a word from God, but it says nothing about the oral tradition, the process of interpretation and re-interpretation that continued until the oral message was eventually written down. Once again there is an underlining of Scripture as the vehicle of God's Word, but there is no hint that the writer was thinking of a fixed verbal inspiration in the written documents.

Finally, mention should be made of the way in which the early church used the text of Scripture, as witnessed to by the New Testament writings. One thing is clearly evident: the apostles and other members of that infant community showed none of the reverence for an exact text so often evidenced by conservative Christians today. For the early church, the Old Testament was part of an ongoing tradition, recording and interpreting the acts of God in his world. In the light of the coming of Christ it was to be given a new interpretation to meet the needs of the new community — it was written for their learning as the repository of a nation's experience of God and its awareness of how he had dealt with them in his promises, his punishments and his principles for life. Because it was part of a living tradition, the early Christians felt free to utilize variant versions which best suited their purpose in interpreting the new act of God in Christ. Thus James, for example, according to Luke's account in the Acts, utilized the LXX

reading of Amos 9:12 instead of the very different Massoretic Text in order to provide a biblical prophecy of the coming together of Jew and Gentile on an equal footing in the church (Acts 15:13ff.). Other examples are plentiful, demonstrating that a theory of verbal inerrancy was not universally held in the early Christian church.

The Theological Perspective

There are two dangers inherent in theories of verbal inspiration and inerrancy. In the first place there is the very real danger of turning the dynamic revelation of God's activity into a static, almost fossilized verbal record. Reverence for the written word at the expense of the vital spirit that underlies it is lethal, for the letter kills, be it the Law from Sinai or the Bible, transformed into a rigid and systematized authoritarian code. More importantly, however, there is the greater danger of putting the Bible above the Living Word, Christ himself. There is a very real tendency to make Christ's authority derivative, secondary to that of the Bible. Christ virtually becomes important because he is the theme of a supernatural book in which resides the primary authority, because it is the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God.

Such an approach to the Bible, which begins from a stated premise about inerrancy, infallibility or inspiration, inevitably shuts up Christ in a box: the vehicle of revelation becomes more important than the message it conveys. Not only so, but insistence upon these dogmatic assertions leads almost inevitably to a rigorous application of the words of the Bible in a literalistic manner to situations far distant from the cultural and religious background to which they applied originally.¹ The result is a hard, legalistic and authoritarian religion far divorced from the spirit of the New Testament. Not only has the Bible become fossilized, but so also has the community.

The Bible can only be effective in its witness as it is set free from the restrictions, the 'hedge', that well-meaning persons have placed about it. It forms part of a living tradition as God works in the minds of his people leading them to see what he has done and what he is doing. Scripture is thus dynamic, even fluid, in its essence. At every stage, from oral tradition through written record to fresh interpretation, God's Spirit has been active. Indeed, his inspiration is as real (and necessary) for the church's proclamation as it was for an Amos or for a Paul. The Spirit works in the congregation in the ministry of word and sacrament. Through his work what was a Word of God to an Israelite under siege or a first century Christian in perplexity becomes a Word of God to his church today.

The Bible thus stands within an ongoing process by which God's Word is brought to his world through his Spirit, who is none other than the continuing presence of that Word which was the fulness of God's self-revelation. The Bible does not stand apart from the ongoing tradition of interpretation, it is part of it, bringing men into the sphere of God's continuing activity, not merely recording his past acts. As part of that tradition, it is a human book with human imperfections. Those imperfections were not magically removed when men recorded their apprehension of the Word of God to them, any more than they are removed today in the proclamation of that same Word which brings the Living Word, the Bible's centre of gravity, to meet men in the way. It is to this supreme task that the church should be directing its energies, rather than tearing itself apart on the rocks of legalistic dogma and sterile scholastic obscurantism.

NOTES

1. An example familiar to the CBRF background would be the literalistic approach to the dress and ministry of women in the church. *

Book Reviews

The Foundation of Biblical Authority

Edited by James Montgomery Boice

Pickering and Inglis. 172pp. £2.25. (Paperback.)

There was established in the U.S.A. in 1977 by a number of evangelical theologians 'The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy'. Those who established it had observed that significant sections of evangelical Christians were abandoning belief in the inerrancy of Scripture, and the aim of the Council was to endeavour to stem the drift by showing that this doctrine is an essential element of the Christian faith, and necessary for the spiritual well-being of the church. The book under review (published originally in 1978 by The Zondervan Corporation, U.S.A.) is a product of the Council's work. It consists in a symposium on various aspects of the subject, written by seven contributors (six of whom are American) the best known of whom to British readers are Dr. Francis Schaeffer, and Dr. James Packer of the U.K.

The viewpoint (current among many modern evangelicals) which, in this book, is being contested is the attributing to the Bible of a certain 'limited inerrancy', the idea, that is to say, that the Bible is trustworthy when treating of faith and morals, but not necessarily reliable in its statements concerning history and science. Attention is drawn to alleged discrepancies between how some event is described in one Gospel and how it is described in another, and between what is stated in the Books of Kings and what is stated in a parallel passage in the Books of Chronicles, and so on; and the deduction is drawn that this proves that the Bible is not inerrant.

The following are some of the points made here and there by the contributors in reply to this position:

(i) Those who allege that parts of Scripture are inspired and inerrant whereas other parts are not, are bound to be very subjective when pronouncing as to which passages belong to which category. And are not the statements of faith based on the statements of history?

(ii) To claim that certain statements of Scripture are erroneous is to set foot on a slippery slope. The floodgates of scepticism are apt to be

come opened, and the whole principle of biblical authority is liable to be undermined. It can have a damaging effect, furthermore, on the quality of Christian preaching. Dr. Boice contends that 'the contemporary decline in great (expository) preaching is due, in large measure, to a loss of belief in biblical authority, and that this loss is itself traceable to a departure from that high view of inspiration that includes inerrancy' (p.126).

(iii) The claim that the Scriptures are inerrant, far from being a modern notion conjured up by a handful of evangelical extremists, is, in fact, the historic Christian position. The contributors show that this was the general view of the earliest Church Fathers (the statements of many of them being quoted and discussed); that this has been the standard view of the Roman Catholic church throughout the many centuries of its history down to quite recent times; and that this has been the emphatic view of Protestant leaders from the time of the Reformation till the rise of Theological Liberalism during the last century. (Occasional instances of dissent from this position are noted, such as the attitude of Luther to the Epistle of James.) These leaders were no less aware of the instances of 'apparent discrepancy' between various biblical passages than are Christians today, and many of them commented on these; but the grounds which they felt they had for believing the Bible to be inerrant they considered to be greater than the difficulties caused by a few 'problem passages'.

(iv) The apostles, clearly, regarded the Bible as inerrant. This is shown by the manner of their preaching as recorded in the Book of Acts. They started their sermons from the words of Scripture, and introduced other Scriptures into their sermons as they proceeded, and they expounded and applied them. The fact that the apostles, in their letters, often made their quotations, not from the Hebrew Old Testament, but from the Greek Septuagint text does not disprove the point. Their adopting this practice was necessitated by the rapid spread of Christianity throughout the cities of the Roman Empire. But 'No New Testament writer would dream of questioning a statement contained in the Old Testament' (p.16).

(v) Most importantly, Jesus Christ regarded the Bible of his day as inerrant. This is shown by his statements of Matt. 5:18 and John 10:35. On certain occasions Jesus based his teaching on the exact wording of the Hebrew Old Testament (cf. his reference in Matt. 22:32 to Exod. 3:6, and in Matt. 22:43f. to Ps. 110:1). It is evident, furthermore, that he believed in the literal truthfulness of the Old Testament stories of Adam and of Jonah, which are often today regarded as unhistorical. The idea, propounded by some, that Jesus knew of various historical mistakes in the Old Testament, but, for the

sake of being able to present his theological and ethical teaching more effectively, accommodated himself to the widely-held views of his contemporaries as to the Bible's inerrancy, must be rejected out of hand as incompatible with the holiness of our Lord's character.

The position presented in this book is one which the reviewer has always held, and with which he has full sympathy. He would indeed have appreciated an extra chapter in which some of the well-known 'apparent discrepancies' in the Bible could have been particularly discussed (e.g.: In what sense is the prophecy quoted in Matt. 27:9 'by Jeremiah', rather than by Zechariah? Did Jesus heal Bartimaeus when approaching Jericho — Luke 18:35, or when leaving the city — Mark 10:46?); but he feels, with Dr. Boice, that consistent evangelicals should hold that 'in spite of those things (in the Bible) that they themselves may not fully understand, or that seem to be errors according to the present state of our understanding, the Bible is, nevertheless, the inerrant Word of God, simply because it IS the Word of God' (p.141).

And he would agree with the contributor Professor Gleason L. Archer, who writes (p.98): 'No reasonable alternative is left but (a) to reduce the Bible to the status of a mixture of truth and error, requiring the validation of its truth by human reason, (b) OR ELSE to take our stand with Jesus Christ, and His Apostles, in a full acceptance of the infallible, inerrant authority of the original autographs.'

Stephen S. Short

Under God's Word

J. I. Packer

Lakeland. 159pp. £1.50. (Paperback.)

Jim Packer has seen 'the ghost of an untheological inerrancy' which has scared many thinking Christians away from the concept (and appends a review of a book by Lindsell haunted by that very spectre) but lays the ghost and spells out inerrancy in a balanced, careful, scholarly manner that will command widespread acceptance. Inerrancy does not mean 'confidence that by our own independent inquiries we can prove all Scripture statements true . . . but certainty that all Scripture statements can and should be trusted.' Nor does it entail a 'commitment to treat all Scripture as consisting of didactic propositions' like a textbook of physics. But it does mean that 'whatever Scripture, interpreted with linguistic correctness, in terms of each book's discernible literary character, against its own historical and cultural background, and in the light of its topical relation to other books, proves to be saying should be reverently received as from God.' It is

essentially an interpretative principle, so that all that Scripture declares is to be harmonized and integrated without remainder and taken as God's message to us.

Thus defined, inerrancy allows full scope for reverent scholarship — textual, historical, grammatical, literary, theological. Attention is diverted from alleged discrepancies in history or science and focused on moral, theological and spiritual truth, entirely in accord with 2 Timothy 3:15ff.

Included in the book, giving it a right balance, are chapters on the understanding and use of the Bible by individuals and churches. He is especially keen on the Anglican lectionary, with its provision for the regular reading of Scripture in public. (Cranmer originally wanted the OT read through once a year and the NT thrice.) How many assemblies achieve — or even attempt — that? A very useful little book!

John Polkinghorne

B. The Meaning of the Bible

What Does It Mean?

F. F. BRUCE

Professor F. F. Bruce, M.A., D.D., F.B.A., hardly needs introduction in C.B.R.F. circles. Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at Manchester University from 1959 until his retirement in 1978, he has written numerous valuable books on biblical themes. The paper printed below was originally delivered at a C.B.R.F. Seminar in June 1980.

This paper deals with some of the more apparent issues involved in the interpretation of the Bible: more far-reaching issues are dealt with later in David Clines's paper.

1. Preliminary Remarks

The Bible was not intended to be a book of riddles. Each part of it was meant to be understood by the people for whom, in the first instance, it was written. Sometimes, indeed, they found the message unpalatable and complained that it could not really mean what it appeared to mean, but that was perhaps because its meaning was all too plain. (One sometimes gets the impression that certain objections to modern versions of the Bible may be due to the starkness with which they thrust the plain sense on the reader, whereas the more archaic idiom of the older versions carries a kind of 'distance' with it.)

The Bible is composed in human language: the Word of God comes in the words of men and women. The biblical languages are foreign to most of us, but they were not foreign to the first readers and hearers. Since about a hundred years ago it has often been emphasized, sometimes to the point of exaggeration, that the Greek of the New Testament, which was once described as a special 'language of the Holy Ghost', has turned out to be the language of the common people. Quite a number of the idiomatic expressions of the original languages have been translated literally into our common versions and have become naturalized in our own tongue — not always, however, in the sense which they bore at first.

A debate has been conducted for long, and is still in progress, about the best technique for Bible translation. Many modern versions aim at the ideal of 'dynamic equivalence' — that is to say, they endeavour to make the same impression on the modern reader or hearer as was

made on the original readers or hearers when the words were first written or spoken in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek. This is a praiseworthy ideal, but its attainment is more difficult than is often realized, because the impression made by the words depends so much on the presuppositions and the social and cultural circumstances of those addressed. It is doubtful, for example, if any version of one of the cultic psalms can make the impression today that was made on worshippers attending a sacrificial service in the Jerusalem temple. This consideration is independent of translation: even a modern Israeli or Greek, reading the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament in the original, is unlikely to experience the same response as was experienced by a reader in the first century A.D. or earlier.

The Bible student who has no direct access to the Hebrew or Greek texts will probably find it helpful to use two versions — one in more traditional 'Bible English', like the Revised Standard Version, which preserves something of the flavour of the original idiom, and one in more contemporary language, like the New English Bible. In this way it will be possible to sense the remoteness of the Bible's historical and cultural setting simultaneously with the immediacy of its moral and spiritual impact (Since I have Bible students in mind, rather than Bible readers in general, I say nothing here of such simplified versions as the Good News Bible or the Living Bible.)

2. Primary and Plenary Interpretations

The question, 'What does it mean?', may be understood in more ways than one. It may imply, 'What does it mean for me, or for us, today?' Or it may imply, 'What did it mean when it was first said? What did the speaker or writer intend to convey by this, and how was it understood by those for whom it was first designed?' When we have found the answer to the last question (or set of three questions), we have found the primary interpretation. We have to do more thinking if we are to discover what it means for us today, but if its meaning for us today is to have any validity it must arise out of its primary meaning. The plenary sense of Scripture consists of its primary meaning *plus* whatever further meaning has been validly discerned in it by the people of God in succeeding generations. The plenary interpretation of Scripture in the church, it has been said, accrues like compound interest, but there must be a secure relationship between the compound interest and the primary deposit.

For example, the story of Jacob's encounter with the unnamed stranger at the ford of Jabbok (Genesis 32:22-32) is not all that easy to

interpret even in its primary sense, but it was plainly a crucial occasion in Jacob's experience of God. We know what Charles Wesley made of the story in the twelve stanzas of his 'Wrestling Jacob'. 'The story', according to A. S. Peake, 'has been so filled with deep, spiritual significance (Charles Wesley's "Come, O thou traveller unknown" is a classic example) that it is difficult for the modern reader to think himself back into its original meaning.' But Wesley's hymn is, in fact, a superb example of plenary interpretation. If Jacob's experience taught him the lesson which Paul summed up centuries later in reference to a disability of his own — 'When I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Cor. 12:10) — then Wesley got to the heart of the matter in his concluding couplet:

*And when my all of strength shall fail,
I shall with the God-Man prevail.*

One specially important aspect of the plenary sense is that which a biblical passage acquires not in its own immediate context but in the context of the whole Bible. In that context we can see better the part it plays in the progress of divine revelation. This is so particularly in the application which New Testament writers give to Old Testament texts which they quote. This application cannot be allowed to obliterate the primary sense of those texts, but the primary sense may be seen to present a preliminary or limited instance of a principle which has a wider reference in the completed revelation. For instance, when Paul and Peter apply to the ingathering of the Gentiles Hosea's prophecy about 'Not-my-people' becoming 'My-people' and 'Not-pitied' becoming 'Pitied' (Hos. 2:23; Rom. 9:25,26; 1 Pet. 2:10), we may say that a pattern of divine mercy which was first manifested in Hosea's domestic life and in the nation of Israel is re-enacted on a wider scale in the Gospel age. Or if we are perplexed at first by Matthew's application of Old Testament texts in his nativity narrative (when their original reference is to something quite different), light may dawn when we realize that he is bringing out the way in which the experiences of the messianic people are recapitulated in the history of the Messiah himself. This is one of many ways in which the New Testament writers emphasize the christocentric relevance of Old Testament prophecy: 'to him bear all the prophets witness' (Acts 10:43).

3. Historical, Geographical and Literary Factors

The biblical writings have come to us out of the past, and inevitably bear features which belong to their historical setting. Not only so: they

represent a wide chronological range; when the Gospels and epistles were being written in the Graeco-Roman world of the first century A.D., the earlier Old Testament writings, to which they frequently make reference, belonged to what for their authors and readers was the distant past. The revelation recorded in the Bible is progressive in the sense that each of its phases points on to something which lies ahead. Moreover, each of its phases reflects in some degree the cultural background against which it was given. It is anachronistic, therefore, to pass moral judgments on the people who figure in one stage of the record by the standards of a later stage. This consideration by no means solves all the 'moral problems' of the Old Testament, but it helps.

For example, when our Lord replaced the law of exact retaliation by the principle of non-retaliation, he referred to Exodus 21:23-25 ('... eye for eye, tooth for tooth ...'). But no criticism is implied of the men of old by whom or to whom these words were spoken. On the contrary, when the law of exact retaliation was first laid down, it marked an ethical advance by limiting the operation of vengeance: one life, and no more, for a life; one eye, and no more, for an eye. The law of exact retaliation, as it was applied in the ancient Near East, must be assessed in the light of the unlimited blood-feud which it replaced and not in the light of the principle of non-retaliation which our Lord recommended to his own followers.

Any one who visits the Holy Land comes back with an impression of its geography and climate which proves to be very helpful in reading the Bible. 'The shadow of a great rock in a weary land' is more than a memorable figure of speech to one who has gratefully enjoyed the shade provided by such a rock in the Judaeian desert. But the help given by some knowledge of the geography and climate of Bible lands is more than literary. These factors powerfully influenced religious beliefs and customs. When the Israelites were on their way to the promised land, they were told how different that land was from Egypt, which they had recently left. The fertility of Egypt depended on the annual rise of the Nile, which also determined the Egyptians' religion and whole way of life. The fertility of Canaan, on the other hand, depended on regular rainfall, and the whole rationale of Baal-worship was based on this fact. It was important therefore that the Israelites should learn as early as possible that the fertility of the land to which they were going depended not on Baal but on the God of their fathers: it was 'a land which the LORD your God cares for' (Deut. 11:10-12). They were long in learning this lesson properly: as late as Hosea's day the God of Israel had to complain that the nation 'did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine and the oil' (Hos. 2:8). And if

we wish to understand how they found the lesson so difficult to learn, we must recognize the close relation which existed for ages between Baal-worship and the local weather patterns.

Again, to take quite a different example, there are nuances of emphasis in the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3 which can be appreciated only by some acquaintance with the history and topography of the cities in which those churches were planted.

The literary features of the biblical documents come even closer to the heart of interpretation than their historical and geographical settings, important as these are. It is an elementary principle of interpretation to recognize that poetry and prose differ in their modes of expression. While most of the biblical material is in prose, much is in poetry, and not only those documents which are conventionally called the 'poetical' books. There are poems embedded here and there in the prose narrative (such as Deborah's song in Judges 5; David's dirge over Saul and Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1, his song of thanksgiving to God in 2 Samuel 22). Many of the prophetic oracles are poetical in form; so is much of the teaching of Jesus, both in the synoptic record and in the Gospel of John. The language of poetry is more figurative than that of prose. To force a literal interpretation on the metaphors of poetry would be ludicrous in any literature; yet attempts to do this with the poetry of Scripture have been defended on the supposed ground that a literal interpretation is more honouring to God.

Biblical poetry — especially in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament — is characterized by parallelism, a repetitive feature which serves the same kind of purpose as rhyme does in our own tradition. Parallelism may take several forms: the same thought may be repeated in different words, or a statement may be followed by its anti-thesis, or part of a statement may be repeated and its sense amplified or completed in the next clause. An author who, following the laws of what is called synonymous parallelism, makes a statement and then repeats it in a fresh set of words, is liable to have his meaning distorted if an interpreter insists that, because there are two different sets of words, there must therefore be two different thoughts. I have known it to be asserted that God in the days of the wilderness wanderings dealt with Moses otherwise than he did with the Israelites, on the ground that Psalm 103:7 says:

He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.

No doubt God did deal with Moses in a special way, but I should infer this from a passage like Numbers 12:6-8 and not from the synonymous parallelism of Psalm 103:7. A similar failure to recognize parallelism

for what it is could lead to the supposition that the prophet who described the Messiah's entry into Jerusalem pictured him as riding on two animals, 'upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass', as the A.V. of Zech. 9:9 has it, whereas the 'colt' in fact is as much synonymous with the 'ass' as 'the king's son' in Psalm 72:1 is with 'the king' in the preceding line.

In biblical literature, as in all other literature, it is important to determine the literary genre with which we are dealing and interpret it according to the interpretative principles appropriate to that genre, be it prose or poetry, praise or prayer, history, parable or story with a moral, legislation or exhortation.

4. Prophetic Interpretation

Whereas many of the literary genres in the Bibles are familiar to us in other literatures, biblical prophecy, which bulks so prominently in the Old Testament especially, is a genre that we are not likely to have met elsewhere.

Biblical prophecy may include prediction, but is by no means limited to prediction. Among the rules laid down for distinguishing a true prophet from a false one, one simple test is to wait and see if his predictions are fulfilled: 'when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the LORD has not spoken' (Deut. 18:22). But he is not necessarily a true prophet just because 'the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass', if he tries to entice his hearers away from the worship of the true God: 'that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death' (Deut. 13:1-5). When Jeremiah's predictions of doom were contradicted by more popular prophets, the only effective argument he could use to prove that their sayings were false and his were true was to invite them to wait and see whether his predictions or theirs came true. But some of Jeremiah's prophecies could not be validated in the experience of his hearers: his prophecy of the new covenant, for example, had to wait six centuries for its fulfilment (Jer. 31:31-34). And even his more immediate prophecies were not bound to be fulfilled: prophecies of doom might be averted if the people paid heed to them and amended their ways (Jer. 18:5-10). Jeremiah's prophecies of doom were not averted because his hearers did not repent, but Jonah's preaching at Nineveh had a happier outcome. Jonah was not proved a false prophet because Nineveh was not overthrown in forty days, as he had announced. Indeed, he was sure in advance that his announcement would not be fulfilled, that it would be effective in

bringing the Ninevites to repentance, and that God would pardon them. The fact that much Old Testament prophecy is morally conditioned has to be borne in mind by the interpreter: it will not do to argue that, because this or that prediction has never yet been fulfilled, it must be fulfilled in the future if God is to be true to his word.

The predictive element in biblical prophecy can be helpful in dating. A genuine prediction is to be dated earlier than the events which it foretells but not earlier than the events which it presupposes as a background. Thus, if a prophet, speaking against the background of Cyrus's meteoric rise to power, foretells his capture of Babylon, his prophecy can be dated within a few years. The dating of a document, whether prophetic or not, can be quite important for the wider task of interpreting it.

Some interpreters of prophecy have made play with the 'apotelesmatic' principle of interpretation — the principle according to which, in Francis Bacon's words, 'divine prophecies . . . have springing and germinant accomplishment throughout many ages, though the height or fulness of them may refer to some one age.' The 'apotelesmatic' principle is sometimes used as a device for circumventing problems raised by a lack of congruity between prediction and event, but it certainly makes a positive contribution to biblical interpretation, as may be appreciated especially when we consider the NT application of OT prophecy.

According to the consensus of NT writers, the dominant theme of the OT prophets was the forthcoming person and work of Christ. According to 1 Peter 1:10-12, the OT prophets had themselves to 'search and inquire' in order to identify the person and time indicated by the Spirit who spoke through them, when he bore witness in advance to the 'sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow'. But Peter and his readers had no such need: the person, they knew, was Jesus; the time was now. To quote Peter's words from another context, over the whole Gospel story could be written the confident declaration: 'This is that which was spoken by the prophet' (Acts 2:16).

For example: the prophet like Moses whom God promises to raise up in Deut. 18:15-19 is identified with Jesus in the NT: twice explicitly (Acts 3:22,23; 7:37) and several times by implication. We know that about the same time other circles in Israel expected the prophet like Moses to be raised up in the last days. But in the context where the promise appears no one individual appears to be intended. There the people of Israel are told by Moses that when they settle in Canaan and wish to know what to do in unforeseen circumstances they must not imitate their neighbours and have recourse to mediums: when God wishes to make his will known to them he will raise up a prophet and

speak through him. It is easy for us to see how this promise, repeatedly fulfilled in the course of OT history, received its definitive fulfilment in Jesus. But when the NT speakers and writers applied the promise to him, did they make allowance for those partial and preliminary fulfilments? Perhaps they did, but we cannot be sure.

Again, when we read Isaiah 40-66 we can see how these chapters largely point forward to the events leading up to Judah's return from exile and the sequel to that return. We can see, too, how the figure of the obedient and suffering Servant depicted from time to time in the course of these chapters remained unrealized when the prophecies which form its context were fulfilled. But in the NT not only are the Servant oracles presented as fulfilled in Jesus: the whole corpus of twenty-seven chapters is interpreted not of the liberation experienced under Cyrus but of the greater liberation procured by the redemptive act of Christ. The 'voice' of Isa. 40:3 is the ministry of his forerunner John; the new heaven and new earth of Isa. 65:17 and 66:22 mark the consummation of his saving work, and all that falls between these two poles bears some relation to the Gospel: the feet upon the mountains (Isa. 52:7) belong to the preachers of the Gospel, the question of Isa. 53:1 is their comment on unresponsive hearers, especially the 'rebellious people' to whom God spreads out his hands (Isa. 65:2), whereas those who did not ask for him but now prove as ready to find him as he is to be found by them (Isa. 65:1) are the Gentiles who embrace his salvation so eagerly (Rom. 10:15,16,20,21). We may say, and rightly so, that the earlier liberation foreshadowed the later one, just as the still earlier liberation of the Exodus foreshadowed it; but is there any sign that the NT writers recognized the immediate reference of Isa. 40-66 to the deliverance from Babylon and its aftermath as well as its final reference to the event and proclamation of the Gospel? Again, perhaps they did, but we cannot be sure.

We can and do, at any rate, heartily accept the Christian interpretation of OT prophecy as set forth by our Lord and the apostles. But if we see in their interpretation an example of the 'apotelesmatic' principle, let us beware of thinking that therefore we can go on to envisage further and future fulfilments of prophecies which they declared to be definitively realized in the Gospel. For instance, if Peter on the day of Pentecost told his hearers that the outpouring of the Spirit the effects of which they witnessed was the outpouring spoken of in Joel 2:28-32, we are not justified in arguing that a fuller realization of that prophecy is yet to be experienced. True, the Spirit was not poured out literally on 'all flesh' on that one day, but that day saw the beginning of an outpouring which is still going on and increasing and will continue so to do until the promise is totally fulfilled. Strictly speaking, there was

only one Pentecost just as there was only one Good Friday and only one Easter Day; but we live for ever in the good of the acts of God associated with these unrepeatable days.

As has been said above, the NT interpretation of the OT is a special form of plenary interpretation, but there is a basic analogy between the plenary interpretation and the primary interpretation. The primary interpretation foreshadows the plenary; the plenary interpretation reflects the primary.

5. Apocalyptic Literature

Apocalyptic literature is a special development of prophecy. As its name indicates, it is devoted to the 'unveiling' of things normally hidden from human knowledge, like the mysteries of outer space or, as in the canonical apocalypses, the mysteries of future time. The principal examples of apocalyptic in the Bible are the visions in the book of Daniel and the NT Revelation to John — the Greek title of which (*apokalypsis*) has given its name to the whole genre.

In both these biblical apocalypses the events of the future are already recorded in a heavenly book, the contents of which are made known, in one way or another, to the seer, who in turn discloses them to his readers. Thus the interpreting angel, about to give Daniel the forecast of things to come contained in Dan. 11:2-12:4, says to him, 'I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth' (Dan. 10:21); and 'the revelation of Jesus Christ' is given to him by God in the form of a seven-sealed scroll, the contents of which are imparted to his people through 'his servant John' (Rev. 1:1; 5:7).

Apocalyptic literature makes lavish use of symbolism, which is sometimes accompanied by an explanation and sometimes not. Even when it is accompanied by an explanation, we find ourselves at this time of day asking what the explanation means: one may think, for instance, of the various interpretations of the explanation of the beast's seven heads and ten horns in Rev. 17:7-14. The Revelation to John, in particular, has been described as a 'rebirth of images'; images from primaeval times (like the dragon, the woman and the man-child of chapter 12) are revived in it and given a fresh significance in keeping with the purpose of the work. This imagery is sometimes so foreign to our way of thinking that its elucidation calls for patient study. Sometimes the meaning of a symbol may be lost beyond recall. Many, but not all, of the symbols are taken over from pictorial OT language. But patient study will yield its reward if it is kept in mind that the purpose of the book is to affirm the triumph of Christ, in his own person and in

his people. In a day when the defeat and obliteration of Christianity seemed certain, John's readers are encouraged to believe that the victory of the Lamb, which has already been won, is the guarantee of the victory of his hard-pressed followers, and that their victory will be won, as his was, 'by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony' (Rev. 12:11).

6. Typology and Allegory

Typology involves the recognition of recurring patterns in the course of biblical history — patterns of divine action and patterns of human response. The outstanding instance of typology in the biblical narrative is provided by the account of the Exodus and accompanying events. As an archetypal example of divine deliverance the Exodus supplied a form of language and symbolism which was applied centuries later to the release of the exiles from Babylon, and centuries later still to the redemption accomplished by Christ. As at the Exodus God made 'the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over', so the exiles in Babylon are assured that 'the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing' (Isa. 51:10,11). So too in the NT Christians are reminded that, because 'Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed', they should have done with 'the leaven of malice and evil' and keep festival 'with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (1 Cor. 5:7,8). There is a noteworthy passage in 1 Cor. 10:1-11 where the Israelites' passing through the Red Sea and feeding in the wilderness on bread from heaven and water from the Rock are viewed as anticipations of Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper — sacred experiences which nevertheless will no more protect Christians against divine judgment if they indulge in wrongdoing than the Israelites were protected against it when they were disobedient during the wilderness wanderings. Of their wilderness experiences Paul says that they happened to them 'typically' — that is, as a warning — and he adds that 'they were written down for our instruction' (v.11). That this application of the wilderness narrative was common to early Christian teachers and not peculiar to Paul is evident from Heb. 3:7-4:11 and Jude 5.

To accept typology like this, which is part of the text of Scripture, is one thing; to search for typological analogies without setting sober criteria for their recognition is quite another.

Much that is commonly called typology is really allegory (and it may be noted in passing that when Paul in Gal. 4:21-31 attaches an 'allegorical' lesson to the story of Hagar and Sarah, he means by 'allegory'

what we understand by 'typology'). There are some passages in the Bible that are self-evidently allegorical in intention — one thing is said, but another is meant. When Ezekiel (17:2-10) describes the great eagle that broke off the topmost shoot of the cedar of Lebanon, he really refers to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, carrying King Jehoiachin into captivity; when later (19:2-9) he describes a lioness and her whelps, he really refers to the royal family of Judah. It would be wise to restrict the allegorical interpretation of Scripture to passages which are clearly intended to be interpreted thus. It is unwise to extend it to the historical narratives of the OT, to the details of the levitical cultus, or even (as has been done) to the record of Paul's voyage and shipwreck in Acts 27. When one comes across an allegorization of the book of Esther in which Esther represents the church, Ahasuerus represents our Lord and Mordecai represents the Holy Spirit, it is necessary to protest that even in allegory there should be some moral affinity between picture and reality. Or when one is asked who is meant by the 'nearer kinsman' of Ruth 3:12, it is assumed by the questioner that the whole story is to be allegorized, and he is shocked if he is asked in return why the 'nearer kinsman' should stand for any one other than himself. The best advice that can be given to those about to engage in allegorical interpretation of Scripture is: 'Don't!'

7. Interpretative Framework

Many students of Scripture have felt the need of some organizing principle by which the greater part, if not the whole, of the biblical material can be classified and brought into some kind of order. To use some such organizing principle or interpretative framework can be quite helpful, provided it is borne in mind that it serves the purpose of scaffolding and is not part of the building proper.

For example, 'covenant theology' has recommended itself to many as a framework of this kind. Biblical history knows of a succession of covenants made by God with his people, and these have been viewed as stages in the outworking of the divine purpose. The first of these covenants (so far as the use of the actual term is concerned) is that made with Noah, but one well-known system of covenant theology envisages an earlier and quite crucial 'covenant of works' made with Adam. God did indeed lay an injunction on Adam, but it did not take the customary form of a covenant. Yet the notion of the covenant with Adam, while many have found it helpful, has been responsible for a good deal of trouble, as will be realized by any one who recalls early

nineteenth-century controversies over the degree to which our Lord was involved (if at all) in Adam's 'federal headship'.

Another framework widely accepted is that which arranges the stages of divine revelation in a sequence of 'dispensations'. There is no harm in dispensationalism, provided it is borne in mind that it is one of our convenient devices for organizing the biblical material, and not necessarily God's own chosen way of dealing with mankind.

A more adequate organizing principle than either of these is 'salvation history'. This views the biblical record as the process of God's saving purpose, promised with increasing clarity throughout the OT age and fulfilled in Christ. It traces from first to last the biblical witness to the bringer of salvation (the Son of God), the way of salvation (faith in God) and the heirs of salvation (the people of God). But even salvation history can be pushed too far as an organizing principle, to the point where some important elements in Scripture (e.g. the Wisdom books) are left out of the scheme because they cannot be fitted into it. Our systems of classification are useful, but none of them is perfect.

The biblical witness cannot be properly appreciated without the illuminating aid of the Spirit. The illumination which he imparts to the believing reader may differ in degree, but does not differ in kind, from the inspiration which moved the original speakers or writers, so that their words became the vehicle of God's Word. The Spirit's role is to testify of Christ, and he does so not least in Scripture. The Christocentric understanding of Scripture is not imposed on it from without, and not read into it by allegorization or any other artificial means; it is implicit in the message of Scripture, as that message is made plain by the Spirit. To grasp the witness of Scripture to Christ is the chief end of biblical interpretation.

The Value of Critical Disciplines

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For the sake of convenience, the critical disciplines discussed will be dealt with under a series of separate headings, but it should be observed at the outset that they ought not to be thought of as mutually exclusive. Nor is it always possible to distinguish clearly between their different applications. However, we must catalogue them for the sake of our own clear thinking.

Literary and Historical Criticism

In years gone by, this discipline was known as Higher Criticism in order to distinguish it from Lower Criticism (now referred to as Textual Criticism), i.e. the art of comparing ancient manuscripts of biblical books with the aim of arriving as nearly as possible at an edition of the original text. There is not space here to enlarge on the complexities of Textual Criticism, since it is our purpose to describe the critical disciplines which proceed from the established text.

Literary and Historical Criticism work hand-in-hand. By Literary Criticism we mean the examination of such matters as authorship, purpose of the author, integrity of the text, and its authenticity. These may be determined with the help of grammatical and philological analyses of the text. Historical Criticism, however, looks not so much at the text itself, as at its context, both its historical situation and its prehistory. It takes into account archaeology, as well as the religious, political, social, and literary life of the contemporary world. It will also examine the history of religions and how the religious thought-forms current in Bible times and lands were dealt with by biblical writers.

There are two aspects of Literary and Historical Criticism which are worthy of special attention. These are Comparative Religions Criticism and Source Criticism.

Comparative Religions Criticism

In the words of G. E. Ladd, 'this method represents the most thorough-going application of naturalistic historicism to the study of the Bible'. It sees biblical religion not as the progress of divine revelation, but as an evolution of religious ideas influenced by and borrowed from the religions of the neighbouring environment. It was a discipline popularized by J. Wellhausen in his *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (1878; first published as Bd. 1 of *Geschichte Israels*).

Using this approach, Jesus comes to be viewed as a Jewish apocalypticist who proclaimed an event (the immediate catastrophic end of the world) which did not happen (so A. Schweitzer). At the other extreme are those attempts to interpret the New Testament in the light of the dying and rising cults among the Hellenistic mystery religions.

It is plain that such theories are dictated not by an objective assessment of the biblical text, but by presuppositions concerning the nature of history and religious development. The witness of Scripture is forced into a preconceived philosophical mould. While the Christian may recognize that God has made use of ancient religious rites and practices (e.g. sacrifice, circumcision, and ablutions), just as he has used the language and history of mankind to reveal his will, this in no way implies that the religion of the Bible is a mere human synthesis of religious concepts. Conversely, revelation does not necessitate uniqueness at every point.

Source Criticism

Source Criticism attempts to discover constituent documents which have been brought together in the production of a biblical text. It may be seen to lie mid-way between Form Criticism (the oral stage) and Redaction Criticism (an author's editorial use of sources). Thus, for example, Source Criticism of the Hexateuch (i.e. the first six books of the Bible), classically formulated in the nineteenth century by J. Wellhausen, has proposed four prior sources in the composition of these books. The two earliest sources have become known as J (from the use of the name 'Jehovah') and E (from the use of the name 'Elohim'). These two sources are said to differ in other points; e.g. the emphasis on Abraham and Judah in J, but on Jacob, Reuben, and Joseph in E, the different use of synonyms (e.g. *shiphah* in J, but *'amah* in E, both meaning 'female slave'; and 'Sinai' in J, but 'Horeb' in E), and a whole multitude of other details. The third and fourth sources deduced were labelled D, i.e. the Deuteronomic Code said to have been discovered in

the temple in the time of King Josiah, and P, the Priestly Code. However, the unravelling of Hexateuchal sources is not today considered to be quite so simple as it appeared at the beginning of the century.

In the New Testament, Source Criticism's most notable achievement has been its application to the Synoptic Gospels. Here its application was seen to proceed with the greater ease, for in this case three documents were ready to hand for comparison and provided a firm basis for critical enquiry. The most enduring theory here has been what is popularly known as the 'two-source theory', i.e. the theory that Matthew and Luke made use of Mark and Q. Q (from German *Quelle*, 'source') is a hypothetical body of material common to Matthew and Luke, but not found in Mark and sometimes thought of as an oral source, or as used by Matthew and Luke in different editions. It should not, however, be assumed that alternative theories have ceased to be propounded, e.g. the priority of Matthew, or B. H. Streeter's four-document thesis which postulated the additional sources M (used by Matthew alone) and L (used by Luke alone). Other sections of the Bible in which parallel passages have provided grist for the source critics' mill are Kings/Chronicles, 2 Peter/Jude, Micah/Isaiah, and some Psalms.

There is no need to think of the biblical writers' use of sources in terms of modern notions of plagiarism and some passages in the Bible itself would seem to acknowledge the use of sources: e.g. Num. 21:14; Luke 1:1; and cf. 2 Mac. 2:19-32.

Where the Source Critic has parallel passages to work with, his analysis of the sources will deal with points of similarity and difference in wording, order (e.g. in Matthew the Q material is scattered throughout the Gospel, while in Luke it occurs in two main blocks: 6:20-7:35; 9:57-13:34), contents (e.g. does Mark's omission of large portions found in Matthew indicate Mark's priority or his desire to omit specifically 'Jewish' material?), style (is Mark primitive?), ideas, and theology (is a high Christology always a late Christology?). Where there are no overlapping texts, the work of the Source Critic is more difficult and some would say, more hypothetical. We may compare it to looking for stitches in a garment, the 'stitches' being the apparent tell-tale signs of awkward breaks and dislocations (a possible example being the section 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 which seems to interrupt the line of Paul's argument), stylistic variations (e.g. does Luke's nativity narrative demonstrate a Palestinian Aramaic style?), and supposed inconsistencies, whether theological or historical. It should be observed that other explanations of these phenomena may perhaps be given without resorting to the Source Critic's scissors.

But what are the values of Source Criticism for the intelligent Chris-

tian? First of all, it should be recognized that Source Criticism may help to shed light on the relatively 'dark' period of history between the events described in the Bible and the actual record of those events which lies in our hands. Secondly, a recognition of a writer's use of sources may deepen our awareness of the historicity of biblical events, since a writer has taken the trouble to document his account from earlier material. We see that the biblical writers did not feel free to write just as they pleased, but were concerned to preserve an authentic account. In addition, Source Criticism may help to reveal a writer's distinctive outlook. We may take for example the question whether Matthew's Gospel was particularly centred on the Jewish people. If we can demonstrate that he used Mark (a comparatively 'unJewish' Gospel) as a source, we will probably answer the question in the affirmative. But if we feel that Matthew used as a source some strongly Jewish traditions emanating from the Jerusalem church, we will probably answer the question in the negative.

Form Criticism

Unlike Source Criticism, which concentrates on the study of written documents underlying a text, Form Criticism is an attempt to analyze the types of oral traditions which have been incorporated into an ultimate literary work. Although anticipated earlier (e.g. in the study of folk literature and classical literature), the discipline was developed after the First World War by a number of German scholars: H. Gunkel (who was influenced by the Grimm brothers' classification of folk traditions into categories such as fairy tales, myths, sagas, and legends), A. Alt, and a number of others working on the Old Testament; and K. L. Schmidt, M. Dibelius, and R. Bultmann in the New Testament. In the Old Testament it was first (and perhaps most successfully) applied to the Psalms, while in the New Testament it was first applied to the Synoptic Gospels and later, following the lead of E. Lohmeyer, to the Epistles and Revelation.

The form of each 'unit of tradition' is said to depend on the function it performed in the believing community. The technical term for this occasion which demands the tradition is *Sitz im Leben* ('life-situation'). As an example of a *Sitz im Leben*, we may take von Rad's analysis of Deut. 26:5ff. ('A wandering Aramaean was my father . . .') as a nucleus around which the Exodus legends are said to have been gathered in a formula which had its life-setting in the celebration of the Feast of Weeks. An obvious *Sitz im Leben* for a Psalm is Israel's worship or thanksgiving. It should be observed, however, that a passage may have

more than one *Sitz im Leben*. For example, a prophetic speech may have its setting in the life of the prophet himself, in the cultic, legal, or other institutions, and in the situation whereby the speech was collected. We should beware, however, of hypothetical *Sitze im Leben* which depend upon certain preconceptions. A radical Form Critic may, for example, assert that the pericope in which Jesus speaks of the founding of his church cannot have its *Sitz im Leben* in the life and teaching of the historical Jesus (since he is viewed by this critic merely as an apocalyptic prophet to the Jews), but rather in the apologetics of the Christian church, which was anxious to vindicate its existence by appeal to a supposed saying of the historical Jesus. A careful scholar will need to beware of drawing conclusions such as these, based as they are on certain preconceptions about the historical Jesus.

The form of the narrative will vary according to what is deduced to have been its original *Sitz im Leben*. As S. H. Travis puts it, 'Just as information about the qualities of a particular toothpaste will be told in a distinctive manner by an advertisement, but in a quite different manner by a scientific report, so stories about Jesus acquired different forms or shapes according to their *Sitz im Leben*.'² The particular *Sitz im Leben* may sometimes be betrayed by some introductory or concluding formula. We may for comparison consider how in modern literary conventions, the phrases 'once upon a time' and 'they all lived happily ever after' commence and terminate the specific genre of fairy tales, the original *Sitz im Leben* of which was evidently the adult's desire to amuse children by story-telling. This stereotyping of formulae arises from the recurrence of the same, or similar, life situations. From the biblical point of view, we may note how such stereotyped formulae as 'the word of the LORD came . . .', or 'thus says the LORD . . .' may introduce a prophetic speech, or how the use of symmetric parallelism may indicate the extent of a poetic fragment.

Some of the commonest forms, or literary genres, which have been deduced are *paradigms* (i.e. episodes culminating in an authoritative saying or 'punch-line', e.g. Mark 12:13-17), *tales* (most frequently miracle stories told not so much to point a lesson as to gratify by narrative and to demonstrate God's power), *legends* (which may be historical, illustrating the lives of God's messengers, e.g. Elijah, Peter, and especially Jesus), *myths* (in which the supernatural breaks in on the human scene, e.g. early chapters of Genesis, the baptismal miracle, and the transfiguration — cf. however 2 Pet. 1:16), *fables* (which point a lesson, e.g. Jotham's fable, Judg. 9:8-15), and *exhortations* (e.g. sayings of Jesus). Other forms include speeches, records, annals, sagas, laws, songs, hymns, laments, thanksgivings, liturgies, royal psalms, oracles, riddles, allegories, early creeds, etc.

What value may the methods of Form Criticism have? Firstly, we may gain clues about early Christian preaching, teaching, and debate. Secondly, it may aid hermeneutics, since the *Sitze im Leben* once deduced may be seen to recur in later ages and so we may understand how to re-apply Scripture. Thirdly, it may aid exegesis. For example, a comparison with similar forms in ancient Near Eastern literature may help to shed light on the structure of the ancient Israelite covenant ceremony.

Against these advantages to be gained, however, we must place certain reservations. To balance the last point made, we should remember that a literary form in the Bible ought sometimes to be *contrasted* rather than *compared* with an extra-biblical form; e.g. A. Alt's analysis of the apodictic form of law in the Old Testament, a form which is seen to be distinctly Israelite in origin. Again, while Form Criticism may on occasion assist in exegesis, it is no *substitute* for exegesis. It merely suggests the possible background(s) against which a passage is to be understood. Furthermore, there is disagreement among critics over the classification of supposed forms; e.g. is it structure or content which denotes a form? It is also impossible to fit all passages neatly into form categories. Mongrels stalk the text and pigeons sometimes lose their wings as they are forced into their holes; e.g. the doctrinaire assumption that a parable must only teach one point and that any second point must be an addition of the church. The 'laws of tradition' (e.g. that traditions develop from the simple to the complex) are also assumed to be beyond question, but E. P. Sanders has demonstrated that this is a dubious assumption. Generally speaking, Form Criticism gives too much license to the supposed creative imagination of the believing community. More attention ought perhaps to have been focused on rabbinic faithfulness to detail in transmission. This fault may, however, be on account of the fact that the leading exponents of Form Criticism have been German liberal theologians. A more conservative Form Critic, such as Vincent Taylor, has come to radically different conclusions, expressing a high view of the Gospels' historical reliability.

Tradition History

Tradition History is another attempt to analyze biblical material in order to show how it has developed before assuming its final form. It considers not so much the influence that any one individual may have had on the formation of a literary document (see Redaction Criticism below), but rather the influence exercised by communities or groups:

the priestly circle in ancient Israel, 'wise men', prophet groups (said e.g. to be influential in the formation of 'Second Isaiah'), and perhaps preachers (so von Rad interprets the background to Deuteronomy).

Where there are differences in two or more accounts of the same events, Tradition History seeks not to show that more than one event is being described, or that the accounts may be conflated to produce a coherent whole, but rather to separate the 'real' event from the accretions it has assumed before being reduced to its final literary form. It is clear, for example, that the relationship between the ancient Mesopotamian flood stories and the Genesis account is more than a matter of Source Criticism. The differences in underlying viewpoint (e.g. polytheism over against monotheism) as well as the many details are too striking to pass off as variant sources. It is the religious outlook of the different peoples that has moulded the tradition in different directions.

As well as the influence of the community, Tradition History is concerned with the influence which a particular geographical location may have had in the formation of a narrative, since certain traditions appear to be closely associated with specific locations; e.g. some Jacob traditions and Bethel, and some covenant traditions and Shechem (Deut. 27; Josh. 24; Judg. 9). Tradition History also seeks to take account of the social, political, and cultic milieux in which the literature developed (cf. Form Criticism's *Sitz im Leben*).

To some extent Tradition History represents a revolt against Source Criticism (conceived as a critical method founded on Western assumptions about the ways in which a literary document is produced) and in favour of emphasizing the part played by oral tradition in the formation of a written account. This was the particular thesis of the Swedish Old Testament scholars H. S. Nyberg and I. Engnell, but it has had to be modified to some extent by later research.

We may note some of the weaknesses of this critical method. First of all, Tradition History as commonly applied appears to disregard all attempts to harmonize apparently conflicting accounts (e.g. the resurrection appearances) and seems positively to look for and even create discrepancies as grist for its mill; e.g. the suggestion that there is a conflict in the reasons given for Jacob's migration to Padan-aram, one tradition viewing it as a flight from Esau (Gen. 27:41-45), the other as an expedition in quest of a wife (Gen. 27:46-28:2). The emphasis on creative tradition tends to minimize the historical accuracy of Scripture. A buffer of uncertainty is thus erected between the modern reader and the historical events. This is because the task of the Tradition Critic is so intricate and so many different Tradition-historical interpretations may be given of an apparent problem, that the resultant impression is often one of vague uncertainty. The cause of this

may in part be our actual lack of knowledge about the supposed communities within which accounts are said to have developed.

Redaction Criticism

Although anticipated earlier, Redaction Criticism is a discipline which generally took off after the second World War, propounded by the three German scholars: G. Bornkamm, H. Conzelmann, and W. Marxsen. By way of a simple definition, Redaction Criticism may be said to be the study of observable changes made by biblical writers in the traditional materials used by them. While Form Criticism views the writers of books as 'scissors-and-paste' compilers of units transmitted by the believing community, Redaction Criticism is more concerned with the end of this process, whereby the compiler impresses on his material his own personal interests and emphases. To take a simple example, Matthew favours the expression 'the kingdom of the heavens' (which may have been more suitable to Jewish readers), while Mark and Luke favour 'the kingdom of God' (which seems more meaningful for Gentiles). Similarly, Redaction Criticism is interested in the writer's ordering of events to achieve different emphases; e.g. the temptation narrative reaches its climax in Matthew (unlike Luke) with the invitation by Satan to worship himself.

Redaction Criticism clearly has the advantage of treating biblical books as whole units and thus it somewhat makes up for the dismemberment which attends Source, Form, and Tradition Criticism. Furthermore, it helps us to appreciate more clearly the distinctive viewpoints of biblical writers such as the four evangelists and to appreciate the unity contributed to by diverse analyses.

Redaction Criticism is not, however, without its weak points, not least of which is the subtlety of analysis achieved by Redaction Critics, a subtlety which might have amazed the biblical writers themselves, since their imagination has frequently led them to widely divergent views of the tendencies evidenced by different redactors. Furthermore, Redaction Criticism presupposes that the special contribution of biblical writers may only be detected when they diverge from their source in one way or another. However, their concurrence may equally well be evidence of their personal approach, since the unaltered tradition may have adequately expressed their own understanding. Redaction Criticism seems to suggest that authentic history may only be arrived at after a writer's redactionary work (as well as the Form-critical and Tradition-historical moulds) have been stripped away. The remaining 'authentic' words are, needless to say, often very sparse indeed. But

this approach too readily assumes a complete dichotomy between history and the way in which it is handled orally and in written form. A redactor's distinctive material may be just as authentic history as anything else. Redaction has been too easily equated with inventive composition, whereby history has been swallowed up in theology.

Structuralism

In a survey of critical disciplines as brief as this, it is extremely difficult to give a coherent and meaningful description of Structuralism, since its approach to biblical criticism is altogether novel and bears little resemblance to anything discussed so far. Nevertheless, we must make the attempt for the sake of completeness and in view of the undoubted fact that Structuralism is attracting more and more attention. It is in fact a new vogue, beginning in the mid-1960s in France, later gaining ground in Germany, N. America, and S. Africa. At the risk of stating generalizations which explain nothing, we may define it as an attempt not at exegesis of the text, but a resolution of the mental patterns on which the text is structured. These patterns are seen not necessarily as conscious creations, but as expressions of the sub-conscious ordering of data which is common to all human minds. It derives its inspiration from psycho-linguistics and from folk anthropology and it is seen by its literary practitioners as part of the enterprise of semiology or semiotics, i.e. the science of signifying systems.

A structure may be defined as 'a whole formed of mutually dependent elements, such that each depends on the others and can only be what it is by its relationship with them.'³ Basic to Structuralism is the distinction between 'syntagms' and 'paradigms'. A linguistic unit stands in linear relation to other units placed before or after it in a sequence. This is a syntagm, related by association to its context. However, the unit is also related to any other units which might be substituted for it in a context so as still to produce a meaningful combination. In this sense it is a paradigm. For example, in the phrase 'the blue light', 'blue' stands in syntagmatic relation to 'light', but in paradigmatic relation to 'green'. Thus meaning is produced by combination and choice, so that different units may be arranged together in a system of relationships within a formal structure. These units may be words, pieces of narrative ('narremes'), parts of myths ('mythemes'), or other semantically meaningful units ('semes'). What interests the structuralists is not so much *parole* (the individual spoken message), as *langue* (the 'code' by which paradigmatic relationships are stored in the subconscious).

We may take as an example R. C. Culley's analysis of six Old Testament 'deception stories': 'the midwives and the king of Egypt' (Exod. 1:15-21); 'the patriarch, his wife, and the foreign king' (Gen. 12:10-20); 'the Gibeonites' (Josh. 9:3-15); 'Michal's helping David escape from Saul' (1 Sam. 19:11-17); 'Ehud kills the king of Moab' (Judg. 3:12-30); 'Jael kills Sisera' (Judg. 4:17-24). Many details recur in each of these narratives (e.g. relations with foreigners; a king versus the weak), but in general it may be said that they all 'share a three-phase structure moving from an opening situation which calls for action to a response which involves a deception and finally to an outcome which is an improvement over the original situation' — crisis, response, denouement.⁴

Does this kind of Structuralism have any value for the intelligent Christian? Well, it may serve to discover some new relationships between narrative themes and so help to structure sermons,⁵ but we should remember that structural analysis derives from radically different presuppositions than those which underlie traditional text-outlines; it is totally humanistic. Structuralism may, however, act as a corrective to some extreme forms of Source Criticism. Instead of dissecting the text into various documents, Structuralism actually *seeks* repetitions, parallelisms, and inversions. Likewise, it may also counterbalance the extremes of Form, Tradition, and Redaction Criticism which seek to prune away 'accretions' in a quest for authenticity. Structuralism regards no text as irrelevant and treats the text as a given whole.

But is Structuralism a new kind of demythologism? Indeed, in its quest for 'universal values', it has so far shown a complete lack of interest in history⁶ or 'surface meanings' in the quest for symbolic relationships. In its quest for the code or system, the actual text frequently becomes obliterated so that instead of exegesis we have only vague generalizations — many trees, but no wood. We should bear in mind that biblical revelation is not merely an expression of the human spirit and should not be reduced to that level. In the words of Günther Schiwy, "The prophetic talent consists precisely in the ability to transcend the linguistic and conceptual categories of a system."⁷ Structuralism makes a very fine show of supposedly scientific analysis, but we are left wondering if anything really substantial is achieved by it. Perhaps we may dare to suggest that this 'emperor' has in fact no clothes.

Some Conclusions

'The Bible is the Word of God given in the words of men in history.'⁸

This is a useful definition and teaches us to regard as of importance both the divine and human aspects of Scripture. Yet, 'no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God' (2 Pet. 1:21). If this be so, then we must beware of placing too great an emphasis on the human origins of Scripture. It will be apparent to those who have attempted to understand the critical methods briefly reviewed above, that modern critical methods of Bible study were in the main developed by rationalistic scholars who saw the Bible as *only* a human document. In the use of critical methods therefore, one should take great care in sifting critical arguments to discover on what preconceptions they may be built, in order to avoid arriving at some of the 'conclusions' which have been reached by liberal scholars. Take, for example, the sweeping comments which appear in a recent work by A. T. and R. P. C. Hanson: 'These doctrines (the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible) have been rendered impossible for intelligent people to hold today because of the rise of historical criticism . . . once historical criticism was seriously applied to the Bible the old doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy became no longer tenable. They vanished like shadows in the light of day.' This is, of course, not the kind of language that the Lord or the apostles used of Scripture (cf. John 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:16) and a reverent Christian would not wish to pervert critical methods to these ends.

There is indeed a human element in Scripture, but, to quote the words of J. N. Darby, it is not 'as if God's using man — his lips, or his understanding, his mind in every way — meant the same as leaving him to himself, and me to his folly, so that what God did give should be uncertain, as inescapably mixed up with what is man's.'¹⁰ Scripture is indeed both human and divine, but not a mixture of the divine with human error. It is not men left to their weakness and mistakes, but men divinely inspired and sustained against error. 'Critical science does not keep its place when, instead of being a scientific inquirer, it would be a judge; when, not content with collecting together the oracles of God, it sets about composing them, decomposing them, canonizing them, decanonizing them; and, when it gives forth oracles itself! Then it tends to nothing less than to subvert the faith from its foundation.'¹¹ We should take heed then to the insinuation made to our first parents by Satan himself: 'Has God said . . .?' Could it be that the formulation and use made of the critical methods, reviewed above, by liberal scholars is merely the same insinuation in modern dress? So often the biblical text appears to be treated like so many tea-leaves which the ingenuity of the modern interpreter re-arranges into a pattern to tickle the intellectual ears. Is the result godliness, or is it the god Diffidence? Perhaps these comments may appear too scathing, but

I believe that when we are considering the critical methods which men have devised to analyze the Word of God, we should remember at all times that it is not we who shall judge the Word, but the Word which will judge us.

'And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers' (1 Thess. 2:13).

NOTES

1. *The New Testament and Criticism* (London, 1970), p.196.
2. 'Form criticism', in I. H. Marshall, ed., *New Testament Interpretation* (Exeter, 1977), p.154.
3. E. Benveniste, *Problems in general linguistics*, tr. M. E. Meek (Coral Gables, 1971), p.82.
4. 'Structural analysis: is it done with mirrors?', *Interpretation*, vol. 28 (1974), p.171-180.
5. Cf. for example the comparison drawn by R. A. Spivey between John the Baptist and Jesus, in 'Structuralism and Biblical studies', *Interpretation*, vol. 28 (1974), p.139.
6. I.e. the concrete and particular events in time that are recounted in the biblical narratives. Cf. the unguarded comment of E. Leach: 'King David and King Solomon are no more likely to be historical than are King Agamemnon and King Menelaus' ('The legitimacy of Solomon: some structural aspects of Old Testament history', in *Structuralism: a reader*, ed. M. Lane (London, 1970), p.449).
7. *Structuralism and Christianity* (Pittsburgh, 1971), p.37.
8. G. E. Ladd, *op. cit.*, p.12.
9. *Reasonable belief* (Oxford, 1980), p.42.
10. 'The human element in inspiration', in *Collected writings* (new edn.), vol. 6 (Kingston-on-Thames, 1964), p.375f.
11. L. Gaussen, *The divine inspiration of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, 1971), p.324.

Biblical Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice

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'Hermeneutics' is a term for the arts and sciences of interpretation. It means no more, etymologically speaking, than 'interpretation', but the term has gained acceptance because it covers the methods of interpretation and not only the result. Thus, the term 'interpretation' in reference to a passage would be likely to refer to the end product of a hermeneutical process. Interpretations are arrived at by hermeneutical (interpretative) means.

One may refer to the 'sciences' of interpretation since there are aspects of the process of interpretation that resemble the activities of the natural sciences. The case of the dictionary meaning of words is an example: a Hebrew or Greek word is believed to have a certain meaning; this belief can then be tested by checking all the passages in which it occurs to see if it makes good sense there. In this respect, hermeneutics is dealing with verifiable data which can be tested again and again by various 'experimenters'. Of course, even the meaning of words is not completely clear-cut, and the analogy with the natural sciences is not wholly appropriate. But there is a host of individual pieces of data, and of systems of data (like grammatical constructions or the use of synonyms from cognate languages to reconstruct the meaning of an obscure and rare word) that have a definite affinity with the natural sciences.

One may also refer to the 'arts' of interpretation since it is apparent that *understanding* — which is a prerequisite for interpretation — requires not only the manipulation of data but a 'feel' for the subject-matter of the interpretation. Empathy, though not necessarily whole-hearted agreement, with the material being interpreted is essential; many issues of interpretation hang upon the interpreter's judgment, which has been built up over a long period and which consequently cannot always be fully explained or justified at any one moment; large-scale presuppositions on the part of the interpreter (e.g. about moral values or the nature of the supernatural) enter into and sometimes

determine the kind of interpretation that is produced; questions of sensibility and taste on the part of the interpreter are also relevant.

Because hermeneutics is an art as well as a science, there can be no such thing as an objective, neutral, interpretation that does not to some extent bear the stamp of the interpreter. Whether this state of affairs is good or bad, and whether one should always strive for the most objective interpretation possible, are other questions, that will arise again from time to time in the course of this essay.

It should be stressed that although the focus of this essay is *biblical* hermeneutics, there is nothing about hermeneutics peculiar to the Bible. Every time anyone reads anything or attempts to explain what someone else is saying, a hermeneutical process is going on. The same principles and methods apply, though the *content* of what is being interpreted may be radically different. Where biblical hermeneutics may be said to differ from general hermeneutics is in the particularly *pressing* and urgent need felt by most of its readers to interpret what by many standards would not be regarded as so highly significant for the contemporary age. But that difference stems from the value put upon the Bible by its readers, and not from the hermeneutical task as such.

Biblical hermeneutics is a subject of urgent attention in the contemporary church because of increasing dissatisfaction with the methods and results of purportedly 'objective' exegesis, and because of a growing awareness of the significance of the interpreter in the process of interpretation. The question is increasingly taking the form, not 'What does this text mean?', but 'In what way is it meaningful?' and 'To whom is it meaningful?' This move signifies a shift of attention from 'What does this text mean?' to 'How does this text mean?', i.e. a shift of focus to *hermeneutics*, the art and science of interpretation.

1. Hermeneutics in Historical Brethrenism

It must not be supposed that when the term 'hermeneutics' is not being used, hermeneutics is not being practised. Within the Brethren movement a variety of hermeneutical postures can be identified. For communities that associated themselves closely with the Bible rather than with church tradition, it was essential and inevitable that hermeneutical procedures should have been developed.

First, the decision that the Bible must be its own interpreter, viz. that Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture is itself a hermeneutical decision. It has often implied the negation or minimal estimation of traditional patristic, reformed, or (to a large extent) contemporary biblical interpretation. Such a hermeneutic is not necessarily so inward-

looking as it has proved with Brethren interpretation until the last few decades, but it does tend in that direction without some powerful countervailing force. The hermeneutic of 'Scripture is its own interpreter' also tends to play down the role of 'private' interpretation in the guise of 'spiritual' or 'Spirit-taught' interpretation; any novel interpretation is bound to have to run the gauntlet of scriptural passages apparently opposed to it. Herein lies both a great strength and a great weakness of this hermeneutic: it tends to protect and defend the unity of Scripture, but at the same time to reduce all Scripture to an unvariegated uniformity. If everything must be harmonious, no creative dissonances are allowed.

Secondly, a feature of historical Brethren hermeneutics very striking to the present-day student is the sharply polemical use that has been made of the Bible. The Bible has been seen as an arsenal of proof-texts for theological warfare, whether the pamphlet wars of the nineteenth century over the finer points of eschatology or Christology or the contemporary struggles over the role of women in the church or the charismatic movement. This function of the Bible is founded upon particular views both of the nature of the part (e.g. the verse) in relation to the whole of Scripture and of the nature of biblical authority as essentially that of a court of final appeal. Both these hermeneutical views are open to criticism, as will be pointed out below.

Thirdly, the proof-texting hermeneutic has found a further manifestation in the atomistic (verse-by-verse) exegesis familiar in Bible study groups, sermons and expositions. An atomistic hermeneutic springs, of course, from an entirely admirable desire to pay close attention to the text, but it often results in failure to see the wood for the trees, and opens up the possibility for an arbitrariness in interpretation (e.g. when the presupposition is entertained that two lines of OT poetry in parallelism must say different things *because* they are two lines).

Fourthly, dispensationalism, though not indigenous to the Brethren movement nor by any means confined to it, has been a powerful hermeneutical principle within Brethrenism, though its influence has greatly diminished in some parts of the world. Dispensationalism exists as a solution to the alienness of the Old Testament. By Judaizing it completely, i.e. referring it to Israel exclusively, dispensationalism makes the Old Testament irrelevant to the church except by the use of some further hermeneutical process such as typology or allegory — which will be mentioned below. Dispensationalism's fundamental principle is an absolutizing of the distinction between Israel and the church; in so doing it fails to recognize that the alienness of the Old Testament and the alienness of the New Testament from our own

time differ only in degree and not in kind. With the one hand dispensationalism pushes the Old Testament too much into the past, not to say the *passé*, with the other it pulls the New Testament too much into our world, as if there was no significant difference, for example, between the church at Corinth and a British congregation of the twentieth century. Dispensationalism has been the most powerful instrument in alienating Christians of the Brethren movement from two-thirds of their Bible, and has thus proved the single most deleterious factor in Brethren hermeneutics. Its influence persists long after the full-scale elaboration of the theory has been forgotten. Its only positive contribution has been to serve as a warning against a simple identification of Israel and the church, such as is to be found, in tendency at least, in Reformed and Puritan biblical interpretation.

Fifthly, typological and allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, while not necessarily supportive of a dispensationalist hermeneutic, has proved effective in promoting it. It is unquestionably true that typological patterns and correspondences exist between the Testaments (and within the Testaments for that matter; e.g. the 'exodus — new exodus' theme), but that is no reason for adopting typological relationships as the primary model for the relationship of the Testaments. The Old Testament exists in its own right as Word of God, and needs no New Testament to bestow or affirm its validity as revelation. Given the Old Testament, the New Testament offers a surplus; but we may also say that, given the New Testament, the Old Testament offers a surplus. Allegory, though much abused (ill-used and ill-spoken of), is no bad thing in itself: it has a certain decorative function, and can appeal to the imagination more readily than more sober statements of truth often can. But its role, hermeneutically speaking, is parasitic upon other, more prosaic, hermeneutical decisions and processes. In sum, typology and allegory in Brethren hermeneutics have alerted Bible students to patterns of correspondence between the Testaments, but have done more harm than good in obscuring or overriding the reality of Old Testament faith and history and its genuine experience of the true God.

Sixthly, a tendency is observable within the Brethren movement (as also in other evangelical circles) to delimit a *de facto* 'canon within the canon'. This hermeneutical principle, hotly resisted when stated as such, not only victimizes the Old Testament, but also within the New Testament tends to give priority to Pauline theology, second rank to the Johannine writings, and third place to the Synoptic Gospels. One has only to consider the normative function of typically Pauline concepts such as justification, redemption, and the church, or the use of the Johannine imagery of the second birth compared with the lan-

guage of Jesus in the Synoptics, to see this hermeneutical principle at work. Interpreting Scripture by Scripture ought not to mean making everything fit the categories of a Paul or a John. Unease with the principle of a 'canon within the canon' need not lead to the (possibly meaningless) assertion that all parts of Scripture are of equal weight and value, but ought at least to open-us to questions about our unexamined presuppositions and to a greater eagerness to listen to the whole of Scripture in all its diversity.

What has been described in this section are some methods of Brethren hermeneutics that have struck me as typical. In every case I have found fault with the method in question, though with some there have been positive benefits. Standing back a little now from the hermeneutical methods as such, I conclude this section by asking, What lies at the root of these manifestations? There has surely been, and still is, an immense concentration of energy upon the precise and proper meaning of the Bible, sometimes pseudo-academic and practically speaking irreligious, but more often, I judge, the result of intense love for Scripture. Can the concentrated energy bound up too often in a faulty or stultifying hermeneutics be released for a productive and creative use of the Bible? I believe so, and I suggest that some attention to current hermeneutical theory can be turned to good account in our churches' use of the Bible.

2. Hermeneutics in the Contemporary Church

Biblical hermeneutics is a topic much considered in the church today, for various reasons, some legitimate, some illegitimate. Among legitimate reasons is the lately awakened recognition (in evangelical Christianity at least) of the culture-conditioned nature of the Bible and the consequent impossibility of transferring the Bible and its teaching 'neat' into the twentieth century. In more radical circles the problem is being posed more sharply: whether it is possible at all to translate a book like the Bible from one culture to another (so Nineham, *The Use and Abuse of the Bible*), or in what sense, if any, the Bible may be said to have authority (so Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World*). Another way of expressing this legitimate concern is the desire to do justice to the meaning of Scripture in its original setting and the consequent unease when a distance between the original meaning and any possible meaning today opens up.

Among illegitimate reasons for an interest in hermeneutics is the hope that in a methodology dignified with such a prepossessing name there must be a basically simple formula that can deal with problems

of cultural relativity and can with assurance direct us to 'the correct' interpretation. Such a hope is ill-founded.

Hermeneutical theory concerns the nature of understanding; it can expose false interpretations and perhaps put us on the track of better interpretations, but it cannot provide a method or set of rules that will turn out a 'correct' interpretation. Hermeneutical theory is concerned with the problem of cultural transposition, and offers guidance to those wrestling with an ancient text, but it cannot remove the problem.

Some aspects of contemporary hermeneutical discussion that may be helpful here are these:

1. *The significance of presuppositions.* There is nothing novel about the view that we always bring our own presuppositions to the text we are reading or interpreting. What is difficult is to recognize our own presuppositions for what they are, especially if we have become used to understanding a text in a particular way. Often the existence of our own presuppositions only comes out into the light when we encounter people or traditions who are used to interpreting a passage in a quite different way.

Sometimes it is thought that, once the existence of presuppositions has been recognized, presuppositions should be abandoned altogether, as far as possible, and that our approach to the text should be that of an 'open' (or empty) mind. Not only is such a goal unlikely to be achieved, but also it is doubtful whether an attempt to shed presuppositions or preconceptions is always the best way of achieving openness to the text. For preconceptions, unless they are simple misunderstandings of fact or based on an easily-remedied ignorance, are likely to form part and parcel of the interpreter's whole outlook; which means that one can 'shed' such preconceptions only by a conscious suspension of belief, that will probably prove only temporary and that will catch up with one again when one comes to integrate one's new understanding with one's total outlook.

To put it positively, presuppositions are not merely inevitable, but actually indispensable, since without any presuppositions or 'pre-understanding' on our part, a text would remain meaningless to us. We need to have some preconception of 'sin', 'forgiveness', or 'God', for example, before any passage that uses these terms can begin to be understood at all. On the other hand, presuppositions, preconceptions, and 'pre-understandings' should not only be acknowledged, as if it did not matter how many and what presuppositions an interpreter has, so long as one frankly confesses them, but should be progressively corrected by the text. The process of progressive correction takes place by means of the 'hermeneutical circle'.

2. *The 'hermeneutical circle'*. This term describes the continuing process of interaction between the text and the interpreter. One takes one's own pre-understanding and expectations to the text, and thereupon finds, if one is open to the text, that its interests and concerns are not necessarily one's own. Thus the text 'responds' to the interpreter by divulging how it differs from the reader's pre-understanding, and thereby it invites the reader to revise one's pre-understanding and to address the text again. This process goes on even when people are totally unaware of the process; it is the only process by which an interpreter can attain a deeper understanding of the text. If the text means exactly the same thing to the reader every time that one reads it, the probability is that one is not gaining in understanding and appreciation of the text, but blocking the text out in favour of one's preconceptions. The image of the 'hermeneutical circle' conveys the idea that the movement from interpreter to text is neither a once-for-all event nor simply a one-way traffic system. It is a continuing process.

3. *'Distancing' the text*. An almost inevitable result of a serious study of the Bible that respects its historical origins is a sense of alienation or 'distancing' from the text. This often disturbing experience can be avoided only by a naivety that has no element of historical awareness. Most students involved in academic study of the Bible have this experience, and non-academic students of the Bible are increasingly brought within range of this experience through the issues raised in all but the more elementary helps to the study of the Bible. This aspect of the hermeneutical process at least goes against the grain, if it does not in fact prove positively traumatic, to the Christian reader of the Bible, who expects the Bible to speak to him or her directly and personally. But we cannot expect the Bible to speak to us unless we are prepared to listen to it on its own terms, i.e. in the context in which it was written. (That the Bible *does* speak to people who know nothing of its historical setting I do not deny; I am speaking only of what we have a right to *expect*.) We owe it to the text to recognize that it was not spoken to us or for us when it became a text, no matter how loudly and clearly it may seem to speak to us now. 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel' was not addressed to *us* initially, however much it may address us now, nor was 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' spoken to us, however comprehensive its scope may appear. To 'distance' the text is to recognize how 'other' the text is from the interpreter, and to see that it is a matter for objective study and not just a trigger for the reader's subjective reaction.

However, it must be stressed that 'distancing' is only a means to an end, and of course by no means an end in itself. It is valuable in recog-

nizing the time-conditioned nature of *all* the Bible, and not only of those parts that happen to be matters of contemporary dispute.

4. *The objectivity of the text.* In her book, *The Business of Criticism*, Helen Gardner speaks of the nature of literary criticism (which essentially means understanding, interpretation, and appreciation) thus: 'The beginning of the discipline of literary criticism lies in the work of art's objective existence as the product of another mind, which exists not to be used but to be understood and enjoyed. Its process is the progressive correction of misconceptions, due to ignorance, personal prejudice, or temperamental defects, the setting of the work at a distance, the disentangling it from my personal hopes, fears, and beliefs, so that the poem which my mind re-creates in the reading becomes more and more a poem which my own mind would never have created . . . The enlarging and continual reforming of one's conception of the work by bringing fresh knowledge and fresh experience of life and literature to it, this process of continual submission and resubmission to the work, is highly delightful and perpetually renews the original sense of delight from which the critic began.' *Mutatis mutandis*, these remarks apply excellently to the nature of engagement with the biblical text. The note of self-interest too prominent in many Bible discussion groups and devotional commentaries is put in its place by the principle that the text exists in the first place not to be *used* but to be *understood* and *enjoyed*. Above all the text of the Bible must remain an objective reality that stands to some extent over against us as readers as a reality which we never fully assimilate, however much we may come to agree with the text and make it part of our being. John Baillie, in speaking of the reality of the presence of God, might as well have been speaking of the continuing objective reality of the biblical text when he wrote: 'The test of reality is the resistance it offers to the otherwise uninhibited course of my own thinking. Reality is what I 'come up against', what takes me by surprise, the other-than-myself which pulls me up and obliges me to reckon with it and adjust myself to it because it will not consent simply to adjust itself to me' (*The Sense of the Presence of God*, p.33).

5. *The subjectivity of the interpreter.* Of what has been said above about the nature of hermeneutics, very little is novel. But at this point the insights of the 'new hermeneutic', inspired by philosophers and theologians of language, become relevant. In traditional hermeneutics, the interpreter has been regarded as the active subject, and the text as the passive object of his scrutiny, examination and knowledge. Now, with a fuller recognition of the role of the hermeneutical circle, it is being realized that the text's action upon the interpreter is at least as important as the interpreter's activity directed toward the text. The

text addresses, questions, and challenges the interpreter. Meaning results from the interaction between the text and its reader(s); it does not make sense to say that the text has meaning irrespective of the meaning perceived by its readers. To take this view of meaning is to bring the interpreter's reaction — one's personal and subjective thinking, feeling and willing within the area of the meaning of the text. Meaning can no longer be defined in terms of the verbal meaning of the text nor solely in terms of the author's intention, but partly also in terms of 'what it means to me', the reader. There is no room here for arbitrariness or unbridled subjectivity, because the meaning of the text in its original historical circumstances has to exercise some control over the possible re-interpretations and new, subjectively-oriented, meanings it has for its various readers. How such control is to be formulated is a difficult question, but a tendency to antinomianism is probably to be preferred to a too rigidly prescriptive statement of the possibilities of meaning inherent in a text.

6. *Text and context.* It is an ancient rule of interpretation that a text (passage) must be interpreted in the light of its context. Precisely what this rule means, however, has now become a critical issue. It is accepted that the part can only be understood in terms of the whole, just as the whole can only be understood in terms of its parts. A movement towards understanding has to operate in two directions to be effectual: from the small to the large and the large to the small. The questions are: How large must the large be? and, What if text and context are not apparently in agreement? Ultimately the context for the interpretation of any passage of Scripture must be the whole of Scripture; but it is questionable whether the whole of Scripture has necessarily to be brought into the interpretation of every passage. The problem particularly arises in connection with the Old Testament, where some would argue that the Old Testament can reach a Christian audience only through an interpretation that involves the New Testament as context, and others would claim that the Old Testament can speak directly to a Christian audience without the intervention of the New Testament. Here I think that various levels of meaning may be allowed to stand, and that the interpreter may be free to interpret the text within a narrower or broader context as he chooses. It is impossible to say everything at once, and it would be a pity if the exposition of Genesis 1 had necessarily to take care at the same time of Revelation 22. The Old Testament, therefore, does not *need* to be interpreted Christologically, though it *can* be, and John does not *have* to be interpreted in the light of Paul, though no doubt he *can* be. There would be something absurd in insisting upon setting every biblical utterance so firmly within a total biblical context that the particularity and pungency of the utter-

ance should be overwhelmed by the qualifications, extensions, analogies and comments that the rest of the Bible may offer. It may even be that the text is in tension with other texts or with the whole canonical context. It would indeed be unlikely that such should not be the case, given that the whole is so complex. The temptation is to disguise or dismiss the singularity of the particular in favour of an all-inclusive harmony. But to succumb to this temptation is to have decided in advance the nature of the unity of the Bible, which is unfair to its diversity. The unity of the Bible is a matter of faith and hope; it is not immediately apparent, and it is not produced by sleights of hand that make tensions and irregularities invisible.

3. Hermeneutics in the Local Church

The subject of hermeneutics has aroused suspicion and fear in some evangelical quarters. It has been seen as relativizing, detracting from the authority of the Bible, putting the interpretation of the Bible exclusively in the hands of professionals, producing a smokescreen to cover indecision and inaction.

These fears are not entirely without foundation, and one can imagine 'hermeneutics' being used as a 'cop-out' for all kinds of embarrassing situations. If it turns out, however, that there are sharp operators in the field of hermeneutics, it will be no different from any other area of legitimate activity, and there will be no reason to blame 'hermeneutics' as such — since after all it is little more than the contemporary word for 'interpretation', a respectable and necessary activity.

Does hermeneutics tend to relativize the Bible? Hermeneutics can hardly do that; what it does relativize is our interpretation of the Bible, warning us that we cannot hope to reach a final, definitive interpretation, but one that must change from time to time and from culture to culture. This fact is already obvious from the history of the interpretation of the Bible from the earliest Christian centuries to our own day; but the significance of the fact may be wrongly understood as simply a progressive movement towards *the* correct interpretation. Rather, since the subjectivity of the readers is included within the meaning of the text, interpretations of the Bible are *bound* to change or vary. This is not to say that there are not better and worse interpretations of the Bible, more faithful and less faithful. But that is precisely what relativity signifies. While there are completely wrong and downright impossible interpretations of the Bible, most interpretations that are offered are relatively good or relatively bad. Where modern hermeneu-

tical theory scores over traditional hermeneutics is that it can accept the possibility of a multiplicity of meanings. The effect of this openness is not to affirm that one interpretation is as good as another, for there is still room for debate about the value of an interpretation; it is to remove from the art of interpretation the triumphalist mentality that insists that because one interpretation (usually that held by oneself) is correct, all others are wrong.

Do the current trends in hermeneutics tend to weaken the authority of the Bible? No, they make more clear the nature of the authority of the Bible. In the first place, it becomes clearer that the authority of the Bible, however it is defined, is an authority held by the Bible as a whole, and not by its parts as distinct from the whole. So while it would be true to say of a verse one is quoting, 'The Bible says . . .', it might be misleading; for that verse may mean, within its own immediate context or in the context of the Bible as a whole, something quite different from what it means, or appears to mean, when taken in isolation. So the authority of the Bible is not transferable to its parts, unless these parts can be shown to be in harmony with the thrust of the biblical message as a whole. This view undoubtedly leaves the way open for unprincipled sophistry denying the authority of the Bible on one issue after another; but what is the alternative? It is impossible to maintain that the full weight of Scripture stands behind every one of its parts (e.g. the speeches of Job's friends, or the sayings Paul quotes only to refute immediately).

In the second place, it becomes clearer that the authority of the Bible does not consist in its being an ultimate court of appeal in matters of faith and doctrine, true though that may be in certain situations. The kind of setting envisaged by the concept of an 'ultimate court of appeal' seems to be the medieval disputation and its modern analogues, rather than the everyday world of Christian experience of Scripture. It limits the authority of the Bible intolerably to think of situations of *dispute* as the typical situations in which the authority of the Bible is experienced. The Bible is functioning well and properly, and exercising its authority most appropriately, when it is influencing the sympathetic reader or the believing congregation. Its authority is best spoken of as the authority of the performer rather than that of the despot; that is, its authority consists principally in its *function*, in its genuine ability to bring the Word of God to men. It extends, rather than limits, the authority of the Bible to look for its authority in its everyday power over the way people shape their lives, think of God and act towards one another. *How* it exercises that influence is hard to pinpoint. But it is the fact that matters, and it is certainly not the case that its influence is limited to its clear-cut moral or religious teaching.

Its stories, parables, and visions are as much life-enhancing and world-transforming as its directly didactic elements.

Does the present insistence on hermeneutics put too much authority in the hands of the academic specialists? To be sure, the very word 'hermeneutics' makes the business of interpretation more complicated than it need. There is no particular value in even using the term in the context of a local church as long as its implications are recognized. If the text is recognized as an objective entity in its own right, if the question, What does it mean to me?, is constantly being asked, if divergences of interpretation are allowed, if the part is constantly being examined in the light of the whole, and so on, then sound hermeneutical method is being used, and it does not matter whether or not the term is used. It would be better, in fact, to eschew the term and attempts to explain it in favour of getting on with the business of interpretation.

The church's interpretation of the Bible is too important a matter to be left in the hands of the professionals. While their expertise should always be appreciated as one of the Spirit's gifts to the church, and not simply humanly-acquired knowledge, the fact is that no group has a monopoly on interpretation. Every Christian who reads the Bible for himself or herself is an interpreter, or else not understanding what is being read. To be sure, there are good and bad interpreters, skilled and unskilled. One person's interpretation is not necessarily as good as another's. But far from a 'professional' interpretation being delivered as a package to a simply receptive community, the desirable aim is for a communal interpretation to develop. By a 'communal interpretation', I do not mean a more definitive or authoritative one, but one that contains more dimensions, one that reflects the variety of meanings the text of the Bible actually has to the congregation.

Does a concern for hermeneutical method lead simply to more talk, masking indecision and inaction? I would argue the contrary. It may be thought that a systematic confusion between 'interpretation' and 'application' has run through the previous paragraph. That is indeed the case, and deliberately so, for the Bible admits of no interpretation that does not issue in questions of application. To 'understand' in this context must mean 'to understand in relation to ourselves or myself'. There is indeed an historical-critical interpretation that rests content with an interpretation of the Bible in its original setting and considers it no part of its business to project the meaning of the biblical text beyond its past and to interpret it as a living word in the present. The encapsulation of the Bible in the past, which I think to be appropriate not even in the academy, certainly has no place in the church. Nor can the particularity of the biblical texts be transformed into 'general

truths' in such a way that the Bible becomes relevant to the church only through the interposition of a generalizing morality and theology. Except of course when the Bible itself is generalizing, it must be allowed to speak from its particularity to the particularity of the present personal, communal, or social situation. In that way the Bible's interpretation is engaged with action; the Bible does not stand in the background as a book of principles or simply a resource tool, but is involved in action. This view of the hermeneutical task negates the doubt that hermeneutics is a 'cop-out' from the pressing needs of the day.

This section of the paper has taken the form of a response to various suspicions of hermeneutics; but it has not been primarily defensive, for on every issue I believe that reasonable questions that may be asked of the current concern about hermeneutics prove to be opportunities for a positive account of its function in the local church. There are further levels of specificity that can, and must, be explored, but I have in this paper refrained from particular applications, on the whole, in order that this approach can be digested and assessed without direct involvement in current burning issues.

A Defence of Allegorical Interpretation

L. L. FOX

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‘— to understand a proverb and an allegory’

Prov. 1:6 (JND)

‘It is . . . folly to mock things as mere dreams or fancies because we cannot see them’
Andrew Jukes

Prologue

The speaking (Heb. 11:3) whereby God framed the worlds was such that visible things are emblematic of the spiritual world; those without Scripture can understand something of God (Ps. 19 etc.). In the record, OT and NT, of God’s subsequent speakings (Heb. 1:1,2), spiritual truths are expressed in terms of man’s life and environment (Isa. 66:13; Deut. 32:11,12; 1 Cor. 15:42-44). Against this background allegorization arises. While the letter of Scripture is precious, much more so is the spiritual sense that its words enfold.

Allegory in Revelation

According to some contemporaries of Paul, ‘saying one thing and signifying something other than what is said is called allegory’.¹ Paul appeals to the Galatians (4:21-26) on the basis of the account of events in the life of Abraham, adding, ‘This contains an allegory’, i.e. tells us something beyond the historical sense of the Genesis account. This is not an isolated instance, as 1 Cor. 10:11 attests. Remarking on typological allegory, MacQueen notes that it ‘forms an important subdivision of the more general prophetic and situational allegory, which is characteristic of Old and New Testament alike.’²

Allegory in Interpretation

The NT can behold in the OT what the OT does not appear to mean,

as Matt. 2:15 and Hosea 11:1 strikingly exemplify. It was early felt that there is more to Scripture than the historical sense, often called the 'literal' sense. In this connection, Mauro pointed out that — in Scripture the contrast is not between the spiritual and the literal, but between the spiritual and the natural; . . . the literal interpretation may call for a thing which exists in the realm of nature, or for the counterpart of that thing which exists in the realm of spiritual realities (1 Cor. 15:46).³³ So too Danielou: 'In Scripture the literal meaning is often figurative.'³⁴

Some early allegorical interpretations appear fanciful to us, but not to those who perceived them. Their authors were right in feeling after a richness and depth in the Scriptures. Thus, the writer of Ps. 119 knew the words of the law, yet prayed that God would *open* his eyes that he might behold wonderful thing hidden therein. The Lord interpreted to those on the Emmaus road the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures; and their hearts burned while he *opened* to them the Scriptures. C. S. Lewis realized that in principle, 'the allegorical way of reading the Psalms can claim the highest possible authority'.⁵

The fact that it was first that which is natural and afterwards that which is spiritual has wide application. The Genesis account is not primarily to impart information about 'evolution' or to date creation, but to convey spiritual truths e.g. under the figure of light and darkness (2 Cor. 4:3-6; Col. 1:12,13). How interesting then to find Hans Kung saying, about God and creation: 'Thus the Bible in the metaphors and analogies of its time answers questions that are infinitely important also for people today — in metaphors and analogies, it must be noted. *The language of the Bible is not a scientific language of facts, but a metaphorical language of images.*'³⁶ (HK's own italics.)

Of crucial importance for a Christian understanding of the Scriptures is that Christ has brought us into the good of the new covenant (Luke 22:20; 2 Cor. 3:6), not of the letter but of the Spirit. R. M. Grant seems to be quoting Michel in saying, most perceptively: 'The letter is not the Old Testament as such; it is the Old Testament as a legal document, as the unconverted Israelites interpret it. By the aid of the Spirit we are able to understand the Old Testament as a spiritual book.'³⁷

The old (Mosaic) covenant had ordinances of divine service, concerned with meats and drinks and diverse washings and carnal ordinances, and also festivals, new moons, sabbaths. All those rites are collectively a shadow of the reality found in Christ (Col. 2:16,17; Heb. 9:1-10). Their performance was done away through his death and resurrection (Heb. 8:13; 10:5); here is contrast between new and old. Their prescriptions are still God's words (Heb. 1:1) and are all *for our*

sakes. We have been redeemed to serve God, we are a chosen people — the Israel of God; we have a passover, a high priest, an altar, a place of refuge, a mediator, bread from heaven; we may offer sacrifices. Here is comparison between new and old.

The performing of their rites by Israelites who saw only the outward, profited them nothing (Heb. 4:2, 13:9). The reading of the prescriptions of those rites will profit us nothing unless, according to our measure (cf. Rom. 12:3), we receive them (Matt. 11:14) even in all their details as redolent of the things of God's spiritual kingdom (John 18:36; Acts 1:3); i.e. perceive them spiritually, allegorically. Those prescriptions are not merely recipes for bygone procedures of the Jews' religion; God speaks in them today, super-charging them by his Spirit with spiritual significance (cf. 2 Pet. 1:20).

The contrast and comparison is reflected in the following, attributed by White to Tyndale: 'Sacrifices and ceremonies can be no ground or foundation to build upon, yet when we have once found Christ, and his mysteries, then we may use figures, similitudes, etc., to open Christ, and the secrets of God hid in Christ, even to the quick.'⁸

Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction (Rom. 15:4). Thus, the regulation about such an apparently mundane matter as 'not muzzling the mouth of the ox . . .' was not given because God cares for animals, which he does anyway, but 'no doubt' and 'altogether *for our sakes*' (Deut. 25:4; 1 Cor. 9:9,10; 1 Tim. 5:18; Jonah 4:11). Of the tabernacle, A. T. Pierson wrote: 'But of this we are sure: that there is here a wealth of meaning yet unexplored and unsuspected by even the children of God, and which only the ages to come will fully unveil and reveal.'⁹

The allegorical in interpretation is not limited to Mosaic rites. The following cogent comment relates to Melchisedec.

We have . . . a very striking illustration of the way in which the Spirit of God makes use of Scripture here. Not even the most fanciful interpreter would have got as much out of this occurrence (and I say it reverently) as the Spirit of God has got out of it. If we had taken up a Scripture, and had endeavoured to get meaning out of the names, out of the official position, out of the place where a man was king, and, more than that, out of the very order in which his personal name and his official position were given, it would have been said, You are carrying this too far; you are indulging in fanciful interpretation of Scripture. Furthermore, if we had gone on to say that Melchisedec had no genealogy mentioned, there is nothing said of his parents nor of his successors — neither his birth nor death recorded — and therefore he is a type of the Son of God, who abides forever, people would have said, 'If this is to be allowed in the interpretation of Scripture, where will it end?'

And yet that is exactly what is found here . . . It means that God's word is so perfect that you can take every jot and tittle of it, and need not be afraid, in a reverent, prayerful, dependent way (using this as an example), to go through that whole Word and seek for the treasures which you will find everywhere in it.¹⁰

J. G. Bellett described Genesis as 'a book of "allegories", as Paul speaks — divine stories written for the school of God'. It may be noted that the exercises in that school do not consist of sitting down to work out for ourselves, independent of the teacher as it were, what the Scriptures could mean. That way lie unacceptable fantasies that debase allegorization. It is as the spirit of our mind is renewed and we lean not on our own understanding that we shall have the spirituality of profit from the 'typical, symbolic, parabolic teaching' latent in the 'divine stories' of Genesis and the rest of Scripture.

According to the measure of our understanding of the new covenant, we shall realize that it inheres in the liberty wherever the Spirit is, that we are not, as some suppose, limited to only those interpretations of the OT for which there is specific NT warrant. Those instances are grapes of Eshcol (Num. 13:21-24; cf. Deut. 8:7-9, 11:11,12).

We have been blessed with all *spiritual* blessings, and the apostle prayed that we might be given the spirit of wisdom and *revelation* in the knowledge of him; the eyes of our understanding being *enlightened* (Eph. 1:17,18). The Scriptures were inspired to make wise unto salvation. Emphasis on the so-called literal sense of the Scriptures rather than their spiritual, allegoric, parabolic sense, regrettably overlooks that their primary purpose is not to convey historical information but, as illuminated by the Spirit, to disclose the Word — message — of God.

The leaders of the Jews treasured the letter of Scripture, but nevertheless failed to recognize Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah of the OT. Around 1900, F. E. Raven remarked that 'Protestantism makes everything of the letter of Scripture, but the Spirit is what we have to depend upon.'¹¹ In our day, let us beware of becoming spiritual Jews; of handling the Scriptures 'intellectually', as one has put it. Rather let us pray that the Spirit will remove the veil of the letter, and enable us to perceive spiritual realities (cf. 2 Cor. 3:14-16).

NOTES

1. R. M. Grant, *A short history of the interpretation of the Bible*, revised edition, 1965, p.19, 20.
2. John MacQueen, *Allegory*, p.23.
3. Philip Mauro, *The hope of Israel*, Reiner Publications, 1974, p.14.

4. Jean Danielou, *Origen*, 1955, p.179.
5. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, p.102.
6. Hans Kung, *Does God exist?*, p.639.
7. *Op. cit.*, p.23, 24.
8. Frank H. White, *All of blue* (1882), p.6.
9. A. T. Pierson, *Knowing the Scriptures*, p.283.
10. S. Ridout, *Lectures on Hebrews*, p.117.
11. *Ministry by F. E. Raven*, New Series, Vol. 3, p.206.

Unity and Diversity in the Two Testaments

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What is the precise relationship of the New Testament to the Old? Is one of the two Testaments more important than the other? Are there parts of the Old Testament which ought to be minimized in the teachings of the Christian church? Should the Ten Commandments be recited today or at least taught as a Christian standard? Is it proper to argue that the church will not pass through the tribulation on the grounds that the church is distinct from Israel and that the tribulation will afflict Israel only? How can Paul say we died to the Law and yet go on to insist that the Law is good? Did Jesus challenge the Old Testament in Matthew 5:21-48? How should a Sunday School teacher handle the commands in the Old Testament to kill off the populations of defeated nations, or the sordid stories in the book of Judges? Does every detail of the tabernacle have to find meaning in the person and work of Christ? Were people saved by grace through faith in Old Testament times or on some other basis? Should we ignore all the instances of praising God through the use of musical instruments because they are (with the important exception of Rev. 5:8; 15:2) in the Old Testament? How is it that Jesus brought something so new that the old wine skins could not contain it (Mark 2:22), yet goes back even beyond the Pharisaic traditions to 'Moses and all the Prophets' to explain 'what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself' (Luke 24:27)?

These are just some of the theological and practical questions, crucial for teachers of the Bible, which grow out of the basic issue of the relationship of the two Testaments. The purpose of this brief article is not to solve all such issues, and it may be justly feared that more questions have been asked already than can possibly be answered in such short compass. The article will rather have served its purpose if it stimulates deeper inquiry into the Scriptures themselves, suggesting some guidelines for understanding, and providing a survey of some of the recent contributions to the issue. It is an issue which has occupied scholars who specialize in both the New Testament and Old

Testament fields, especially in the last twenty years or so. At the same time there has been much discussion about unity and diversity within each Testament. Although these questions are all interrelated, we shall concentrate on only a few major issues which concern both Testaments. To some there is no 'issue', because both Testaments can be seen to have meaning when Christ is the key. To them the matter is expressed satisfactorily in the ancient couplet: 'The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed.' If this was good enough for Augustine, should it not be good enough for us? But the very existence of the couplet testifies to the fact that from the church fathers on, Christians have recognized that there are two very different Testaments which need to be understood in proper relationship to each other. The approaches made to this relationship over the centuries have varied considerably from each other.

Approaches to the Issue

1. One of the most famous attempts to deal with the Old Testament from a post-New Testament standpoint was made by *Marcion*, a church leader in the second century who was excommunicated as a heretic. Marcion considered Christianity to be so radically different from Judaism that even the New Testament itself needed to be edited to exclude those parts which established a close connection with the Old Testament. He denied that the creator-God of the Old Testament was the same as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Marcion's concepts were extreme, but others more recently, such as Adolf von Harnack and Rudolf Bultmann, have also minimized the place of the Old Testament.

2. Another approach was to *give due honour to the Old Testament emphasizing its points of similarity with the New, but at the same time stressing the diversity*. Luther is known for his strong distinction between Law and Gospel. It may be said that Luther stresses the distinctions between the Testaments more than did Calvin, who saw a strong covenantal relationship.

3. An approach which many have used in recent years to address such problems as the toleration of polygamy among Old Testament saints and the seemingly brutal warfare carried on by the people of Israel under the direction of God is that of *progressive revelation*. This is not a cure-all for problems of morality in the Old Testament, but it does recognize that with the passage of time God revealed more to his people and, in turn, expected more from them. Progressive revelation applies not only to enlightenment concerning moral standards, but

also, and more importantly, to the development of doctrines, e.g. the concept of the Servant Messiah or the significance and destiny of the 'Land'. Jesus' words, 'You have heard . . . but I say', is sometimes viewed as an instance of progressive revelation (though the terminology may not be used), but this by no means solves all the questions regarding Matthew 5:21-48.

4. Yet another approach is that of *dispensationalism*. This posits a difference in the way God rules his people from age to age. Each age, or dispensation, has been a test which ended in failure. Recent exponents of the system have seen less discontinuity between the Testaments than formerly. If it was earlier thought by some that Old Testament saints were saved on some principle other than faith, it is more difficult to find this position today. One of the most significant emphases of dispensationalists still remains: the distinction between Israel and the church. Readers are well aware of the influence dispensationalism has had on the brethren movement. Even those who do not follow dispensational thought completely are affected by the *kind* of attitude toward the Old Testament which characterizes it (as well as some other approaches). Thus a good deal of the doxology of the Old Testament, including vocabulary of worship (e.g., in the Psalms and Chronicles), the use of musical instruments, and physical expressions of spiritual joy are missing from much brethren worship. This is also related to a particular understanding of John 4:23,24.

5. Certain Christian thinkers, notably Origen (who lived approximately 185 to 254), attempted to preserve the Old Testament for Christians by assigning not only a literal meaning but also an *allegorical meaning* to the text. This was not totally different from what was done by some Greek thinkers after belief in the Olympian gods began to disintegrate and the Homeric theology was hard to maintain. This comparison is not meant to minimize Origen's work, but to show that such an approach to religious literature prior to one's own time and outlook is not uniquely Christian. As a matter of fact, a characteristic both of neo-orthodox theology and of the 'demythologizing' of the New Testament critical scholar, Rudolf Bultmann, has been an attempt to salvage spiritual meaning from the Scriptures without being tied to issues of their historicity or of the miraculous element in Scripture. It is paradoxical that many Christians who would recoil from the excesses of neo-orthodoxy and of Bultmannianism have in effect done something rather similar. The tendency to 'spiritualize' Scripture, ignoring the historical context, can in effect make it of little matter whether there is an historical foundation or not.

6. Another attempt to find significance in the Old Testament is through *typology*. This approach has been in and out of favour in

recent years. It is a valid approach when properly followed. However, some of the popular brethren writings, both early and recent, give the impression that the value of the Old Testament is realized mainly, if not only, to the extent that it can be shown to prefigure Christ in typology. There are two possible hazards in this regard. One is to impose on a passage in the Old Testament a significance which God himself did not give it. There has been much debate as to whether it is legitimate to call any person, event, or thing in the Old Testament a type if it has not been so designated (either explicitly or implicitly) in the New Testament. The other hazard is equally serious. It is that by typologizing a passage we may well bypass its contextual significance. To give a practical example, one sometimes hears sermons on Joseph which present him as a type of Christ. Generally absent from these sermons is a balanced presentation of the providence of God in Joseph's life, of the significance of the events in the ongoing history of Israel, and (apart from simple moralizing) of the response of Joseph personally to the changing circumstances which helped him mature in his faith.

7. For some time it has been common to explain the relationship between the Old and New Testament in terms of the service performed by the Old Testament in *preparing the way for Christ*. (This 'preparatory' view overlaps several of the other approaches mentioned here.) Such a perspective is certainly true and to be found in the New Testament. A problem does exist, however, when this viewpoint includes the assumption that the Old Testament is inferior to the New because it is only a forerunner to the fuller revelation. We must be careful not to confuse function with value. The Old Testament is as fully the Word of God as is the New. The affirmation, 'All Scripture is inspired to God and is profitable . . .', refers to the Old Testament.

8. The term, '*salvation history*', has been popular for several decades now. There have been various understandings of this, but for our purposes we may think of it as the work of God through history, stage by stage, among his people in both Old and New Testament times. In a sense, this is a corollary to the idea of progressive revelation. This approach is sometimes thought to have less value because it deals with history rather than doctrine, but to some extent the one does involve the other.

9. The Reformed Churches hold to the concept of '*covenant theology*' as a way of seeing the unity of the two Testaments. The so-called covenant of grace, which God made with Christ and with mankind is seen to extend back into Old Testament times. Believers were saved then by grace as they are now. The present covenant is a 'better' one just as the ministry of Jesus is better than that of Moses (Heb. 8:6).

10. The concept of *promise and fulfilment*, or simply of promise, is offered as a central theme connecting the Testaments. This differs from covenant theology and from dispensationalism, as well as from the idea of mere 'preparation', though it is compatible with them. The continuing theme of promise is affirmed by New Testament statements on fulfilment, even by a continuing use of the term, promise, itself (e.g., regarding the Holy Spirit, Luke 24:49; Acts 2:16-29; Gal. 3:14; David's Son, Acts 13:22,23; and the resurrection of Christ, Acts 26:6-8).

These do not exhaust the attempts to resolve the issue. They will be sufficient, though, to show the diversity of approaches. The reasons for such a diversity are clear. There are elements both of continuity and of discontinuity between the two Testaments. The New Testament is consciously an extension of the Old, and its interpreter. This implies continuity. At the same time the coming of Christ brought a new situation which implies discontinuity. How far-reaching is this difference? The difficulty in deciding is best seen by selecting several aspects of New Testament theology which illustrate a theological unity between the Testaments at the same time that there is a radical break.

Examples of Unity and Diversity

1. *The people of God.* This is a great theme in Scripture. It also constitutes a major issue between covenant theology and dispensationalism. To the dispensationalist, the church is a new creation of God. To the covenant theologian, there is one people of God. The dispensationalist would emphasize the newness of the 'mystery' of the church in Ephesians 3:4-6. The covenant theologian would observe that the words, '... was not made known . . . in other generations as it has now been revealed . . .' imply that at least some revelation was given on the subject in Old Testament times. Should the church understand itself to be the 'Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16)? The term probably refers rather to 'those within Israel to whom God will show mercy' (Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, p.82). Paul's words, 'For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel' (Rom. 9:6), have sometimes been taken to mean that there are Israelites spiritually (i.e. the church) who are not Israelites physically. This would be contrary to the context in Romans 9 to 11. Perhaps the best translation is the NIV, 'For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel'. Paul seems to distinguish clearly between the historical people of Israel and the church. This is not to the detriment of the former. Indeed the Gospel is 'to the Jew first'.

The figure of the olive tree in Romans 11:11-24 carries the message that the Gentiles are 'unnatural branches' and that the tree itself, Israel, continues to stand ready to flourish again. There is therefore an aspect of discontinuity between Israel and the largely Gentile church. At the same time, the church has inherited many of the blessings of spiritual Israel. This is clear from 1 Peter 2:9, 'You are a holy priesthood . . .' and from the fact that Christian believers look back to Abraham as the father of their faith.

This aspect of continuity is especially characteristic of Luke-Acts. At every point in his history, Luke is trying to connect Christianity with its Jewish roots. This is apparent from the very beginning of his Gospel, when, using a semitic style, he begins his story in the very centre of Jewish religion, the temple. Luke refers frequently to the city of Jerusalem as the place of Jesus' destiny, the city which is lamented because of its rejection of its own Messiah, and the city from which the Gospel proceeds to the whole world. Luke carefully distinguishes between the 'crowds', who are neutral or even hostile toward Jesus, the Jewish leaders (such as the chief priests, Pharisees, etc.), and the 'people' (*laos*), those who are true believers or potentially such. While the term 'people' refers, naturally, only to Jewish people in his Gospel and in most of Acts, the term also refers to Gentile believers in Acts 15:14 and, by implication, in 18:10.

This has been a sketchy treatment of this particular issue, but perhaps enough has been observed to show both an element of continuity and one of discontinuity with regard to the people of God. It seems right, therefore, both to distinguish between Israel and the church and to understand ourselves in substantial continuity with God's people in Old Testament times.

2. *The Covenants.* This is such a vast and detailed topic, that even to begin to discuss it is to hazard superficiality and obscurity. Each of the passages referring to the idea of a covenant should be studied individually. And such study does not always yield to a simple dialectical approach; some texts do not neatly fit one system or another. W. C. Kaiser's emphasis on the 'promise' can be seen as a middle way between covenant theology and dispensationalism. T. E. McComiskey (in a forthcoming work) deals with promise as distinct from covenant and as a unifying theme between the Testaments. McComiskey treats covenant both in a formal sense and as the expression of a promise which continues even though the formal aspect of the covenant may be altered. (We inherit the promise of Abraham, but the covenantal element of circumcision has been terminated.) An approach of this sort can help us to hold on to important elements of continuity while yet acknowledging a certain discontinuity as God's covenants change age

by age. The term, 'new covenant', occurs in Jeremiah 31:31-34 (where it carries with it the inward power to obey) and in Luke 22:20. Jesus established a new covenant in his blood when he instituted the Lord's Supper. It is striking to find the statement, 'and I confer on you a kingdom' in the same context of the Supper (v.29). The verb, 'confer' (*diatithemi*), sounds like covenant terminology. One forceful statement about God's covenant in Luke 1:68-79 is usually overlooked. The song of Zachariah contains a series of significant terms which are then repeated in reverse order (i.e., in a chiasmic structure). These include 'come', 'people', 'salvation', 'prophet(s)' and the 'hand' of the 'enemies'. The pivotal terminology at the middle of the chiasm, i.e., last of the first series and first of the second (reversed) series, is 'covenant . . . oath' (vv.72,73). The literary structure thus focuses attention on the central element of the covenant or oath of God which continues in force through the two Testaments.

Naturally the book of Hebrews provides insight on the covenant. 'Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant' (Heb. 7:22). Consistent with the whole thrust of Hebrews, the 'better' aspect of the covenant is Jesus himself. This does not denigrate the Old Testament any more than Hebrews 1:1-3 does.

3. *The Law*. It is clear that the Lord Jesus, while challenging the oral law of the Pharisees, never violated any of the commands of the Mosaic law. Not only was his life morally pure, but he observed the external provisions of the Law (e.g., payment of the temple tax) as well. From time to time in Jesus' ministry he cited the Old Testament. In the Sermon on the Mount, as mentioned earlier, he said that he did not come to destroy but to fulfil the Law (Matt. 5:17). This statement has received a variety of interpretations. It has been understood to mean that Jesus obeyed the Law, that he affirmed it, that he gave it a new interpretation as Messiah, or that he fulfilled the Old Testament Law in the same sense that he fulfilled prophecy, among other interpretations. How do we understand the 'antitheses' which follow in Matthew 5:21-48? Was Jesus abrogating the Old Testament Law? This cannot be sustained from the text. Did he 'radicalize' it, bring such new force that, at least in some cases, the original meaning is left far behind? Did he merely explain the Law, bringing out its inner meaning or perhaps extending it? Did he treat the different laws in different ways in the antitheses? Was he dealing not with the Law, but only with the Pharisaic interpretation of it?

One thing must be made clear: however we may understand the antitheses, Jesus opposed any attempt to break or annul the Old Testament Law (Matt. 23:23; Mark 7:8-13; cf. John 10:35, 'the Scripture cannot be broken'). To 'fulfil' the Law is the opposite of annulling it.

There can be no question but that Jesus upheld the Law as such. However, he did not insist on detailed observance of every provision in the Law, when the circumstances for which that provision was intended had been changed. Jesus' teaching in the Sabbath controversies (Mark 2:23-3:6) does not set such principles as the love command and regard for human need over *against* the biblical Law of the Sabbath, for these considerations were already *contained* in the Law. Jesus may have deliberately healed on the Sabbath when he could have waited in a non-emergency situation, partly to assert his own authority and partly to illustrate that his coming brought a new 'Sabbath'. (Cf. his sermon in the synagogue at Galilee, which clearly links his ministry with the Jubilee year, Luke 4:19.) Far from seeing his own ethical demands as contradicting the Law, Jesus said that the Law and the Prophets 'hang' or 'depend' on the love command (to love God and neighbour; Matt. 22:40).

Paul's strong statements about the Law, e.g., Romans 6:14; 10:4; Galatians 3:19,24,25, certainly show discontinuity with the Old Testament economy. At the same time Paul is concerned to vindicate the Law (Rom. 7:7,12) as good and holy. He conceives the Law as being fulfilled through the love command (Rom. 13:10), much as Jeremiah saw it as the Law being written on the heart (31:31-34). We do not follow the specific rules of the Old Testament Law, but rather the 'law of the Spirit of life' (Rom. 8:2), the 'law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2). For Paul the specific code of the Law was a thing of the past. It was 'added' and was in effect 'until' the promised one came. It led those under its charge to him (Gal. 3:19,24). If Jesus said that he came to 'fulfil' the Law, so Paul could say that Christ was the 'end' (*telos*, which also means 'goal') of the law (Rom. 10:4).

This is a vast and complex subject, but once again perhaps enough has been said to show how our understanding of the role of the Law in the New Testament is a factor in our understanding of the relationship of the two Testaments. It is not possible here to discuss such crucial texts as Romans 10:5 ('The man who does these things will live by them') dealing with the function of the Law within the Old Testament itself. What we have seen now from our three examples is that with respect to the people of God, the covenants and the Law, we must understand the present nature and continuing importance of each, while at the same time affirming the change brought by the coming of Christ.

Unifying Themes

One way to appreciate the unity and continuity which does exist

between the two Testaments is to study those themes which are prominent in both. Before looking at two of these, the kingdom and the servant Messiah, we should consider two facts so obvious that they are likely to be taken for granted.

One is that the God of the Old Testament is also the God of the New Testament. To be sure, even this has been disputed by as diverse figures as Marcion, mentioned above, and some twentieth century thinkers. Yet it should be clear that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is the same God who created man and woman, who established marriage, and who redeemed Israel through the Exodus, foreshadowing the redemption of believers through Christ. The Lord Jesus' concept of God as Father contained a truth not characteristic of the Old Testament, but yet not negating any Old Testament teaching about God.

The second fact is that both Testaments are the revealed Word of God. The past decades have seen an emphasis on the personal revelation of God with, in some quarters, a de-emphasis on 'propositional revelation' (objective statements). The former is commendable; the latter is to be lamented. The effect of denigrating the idea of propositional revelation was, from one theological viewpoint, to free the Bible from allegedly embarrassing statements about science, history, geography and even some standards of morality in the Old Testament which Christians find hard to explain. We must squarely face the fact that belief in propositional revelation does commit one to upholding certain statements in the Scriptures which are difficult to understand. It makes the task of presenting the two Testaments as a unified whole more difficult. Nevertheless the burden must be assumed. God's Word is truth, in both Old and New Testaments, and this fact finds the two together, difficulties notwithstanding.

The Kingdom of God is a great theme which characterizes both Testaments. It is true that dispensationalists have tended (with differences in detail) to see the kingdom as significant in the Gospels only until it is rejected by the Jews. After the Gospels (and here they are unquestionably right) there is very little mention of the kingdom. To be sure, all believers have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the kingdom of God's dear son (Col. 1:13). Dispensationalists will see different meanings for the word, 'kingdom', and will want to distinguish carefully the 'Davidic kingdom'. Certain key verses (e.g., Matt. 21:43) need careful consideration, impossible in this brief article. The fact that I want to emphasize here, however, is the truth that God is seen as King in both Old and New Testaments, and that the kingdom of God as a prominent place in the New Testament. Again and again in the Old Testament, poets and prophets alike look

forward to the time when God's name will be known throughout the earth. He will be recognized as the true God who comes to the aid of his people, and Gentiles eventually will come to him in truth.

The theme of the exaltation of the name of God through his victorious kingdom is characteristic not only of the Old Testament but of the Lord's Prayer: 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven . . .' The book of Revelation foresees the ultimate victory of God and the vindication of his name. The song of Moses and of the Lamb in Revelation 15:3-4 honours God as 'King of the ages' and says that all 'will bring glory to your name', and 'all nations will come and worship before you'. 'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns' (19:6). The triumphant writer whose name is the Word of God is identified as 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords' (Rev. 19:11-16). Whatever distinctions may be legitimately made between different kingdoms, or different phases of one kingdom, the fact of God's kingdom and the glorification of his name through the kingdom is an unifying theme in both Testaments.

Christ is the great theme of both Testaments. This has been the Christian affirmation since resurrection day, when Jesus 'explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself' (Luke 24:27). The emphasis in this chapter of Luke on the blindness of the disciples giving way to belief is extremely important. Their eyes were 'opened' (v.31), Christ 'opened' the Scriptures (v.32), and he 'opened' their minds (v.45). Note the emphasis on the Scriptures here. It was when the risen Christ opened the Scriptures that their hearts 'burned' within them (v.32). We may assume that the church's later explanation of Christ as the Messiah, whose death had to precede his glory, derived initially from Jesus' teaching in the period following his resurrection. This was not completely new, for he had previously said concerning the Old Testament that these are the Scriptures 'that testify about me' (John 5:39). The idea of 'testimony' or 'witness' is important in the Gospel of John. If Jesus had not been on solid ground (and John likewise as he related this) it would have been futile to appeal to the Old Testament support of his claims.

It is unfortunate that so much of the preaching one hears stretches the Old Testament Scriptures to try to find Christ on every page. This is done no doubt devoutly, in a sincere desire to honour the Lord Jesus. Others have done it in a desperate attempt to find some value in the Old Testament for Christian use. Not only does this result, as observed earlier, in passing over the important message of certain passages, but it may displace the exposition of those Old Testament passages which do indeed speak of Christ. He is the 'prophet like Moses'

(Deut. 18:15; the term, prophet, being a more significant appellation of Jesus than some realize). He is the suffering servant of Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12. He is the 'passover, sacrificed for us' (1 Cor. 5:7), the 'bread from heaven' (John 6:32-35), our 'great high priest' (Heb. 2:17; 4:14-16), and the 'Lamb of God' (John 1:29). Although the New Testament writers occasionally used a methodology of interpreting the Old Testament Scriptures which is somewhat strange to us today, they approached the Old Testament with a reverence and concern for its meaning in context. The very fact that they quoted, alluded to, and constantly employed the vocabulary of the Old Testament shows how important the Old Testament was to them. We need not engage in typological speculation on the one hand or in a distortion of Old Testament passages on the other to find Christ throughout the ancient texts.

There is a diversity of contexts, a diversity of concepts and a diversity of applications of the Old Testament texts in the New Testament. Nevertheless there is a unity around the person of Christ. There is one God and Father and there is one eternal Son, the Servant Messiah. His coming and that of the Holy Spirit were promised in the Old Testament. The true people of God, both the Jewish 'remnant' and the largely Gentile church welcomed the fulfilment of God's promise. The Law and the Prophets were fulfilled. God remembered his oath and gave us a better covenant through the One who was his final Word.

This article has been written with considerable concern. The distillation of such a large subject into a brief article opens the possibility of omissions, distortions, obscurities, and superficiality. As a guide to further study I am providing a bibliography in three categories. The first is of works which address themselves mainly to the relationship between the two Testaments. The second group is of books which deal with the Old Testament primarily but contain some significant observations on the relationship of the Testaments. The third contains works primarily on the New Testament, but which contain some useful comments on the issues with which we are here concerned. Selection has been on the basis of significance and usefulness rather than of agreement. The bibliography is not exhaustive, but is simply a list of some of the works which I have had opportunity to use. I have not included any which are not available in English, nor any of the journal articles which have also made a contribution from time to time.

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Culture Then and Now

DAVID J. CLARK

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Introduction

None of us can view the circumstances and events of our own lives objectively. We can only view them through the spectacles formed by the combination of our cultural background and individual experience. Anything we may write or read is affected by these same spectacles. This has always been so, and in relation to the Bible, it influences both how the original writers wrote, how their messages are translated, and how we read those messages. The divine revelation was given through a variety of people living in different times and places, and each one expressed the message God gave him in terms of the speech patterns, thought forms and cultural attitudes with which he was familiar. No other option was open to him.

In the same way, we read that message in terms of our speech patterns, thought forms and cultural attitudes. These may be very different from those of the original writers, and may cause significant distortion. In order to get a clearer idea of what is involved, we shall look first at the cultural background of the Bible, next at our own cultural background, and then at the manner in which the two may interact, and the types of interference that may arise. Finally we shall try to draw some conclusions, both theological and practical.

The Cultural Background of the Bible

For convenience, we may speak of the Bible's cultural background, but in reality, this is a serious over-simplification, and we should speak of backgrounds in the plural. Geographically, the settings of the biblical narrative extend from Susa in the east (Esther) to Rome in the west (Acts 28:16-31) — space enough for wide variation in the climate, vegetation, economy, religion and social life. Historically, those parts of

the Bible which can be dated cover a period of about 2,000 years — time enough for radical cultural changes to take place. We could mention the discovery of iron, and the introduction of coined money as significant examples.

Do we make a serious attempt to grasp this? Do we try to understand the vast differences between, say, the patriarchal period and the period of the Judges, between the days of Solomon and the days of Zechariah? Do we realise that Samson and Ezra would have been aliens to each other almost as much as both are to us? Even among contemporaries, what would James have had in common with Luke? Not nearly as much as we generally assume.

What of the other nations who set the political stage on which the events of Old and New Testaments were played out? So often the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans seem to us just an undifferentiated mass, notable only for their uniform passion for funny clothes. Yet in reality each nation formed a coherent social unit with its own attitudes and values. Each provided elements of major significance in the lives and times of the people of God. Each is deserving of study in its own right, as part of our task in understanding the Bible.

This is not the place to try to delineate the actual features of the cultural backgrounds of the Bible. An appreciation of them can only be built up gradually by careful reading in the historical and social life of ancient times, and by a study of commentaries on particular books. (For this purpose, two excellent and very readable volumes are *The Lion Bible Handbook*, and *The Lion Bible Encyclopedia*.) Our purpose here is rather to call attention to the existence of this backcloth with all its richness and variety, and to urge that we pay more attention to it in our efforts to hear the message of Scripture, and to apply it in and to our own times and situations.

Our Own Cultural Background

Probably we should again use the plural backgrounds, in view of the pluralistic society which we see in Britain today. However, we will for convenience assume that most readers of this paper share more or less similar circumstances and outlooks. (We could note in passing that in so far as this is true, it says something about both our successes and our failures in evangelism; but that is another matter.) How shall we characterize our own background? There are many features which we could explore, but for present purposes, let us pick out a few which

show distinctions or analogies between us and our times, and the people of Bible lands and times.

We live in a well-watered land with temperate climate which supports patterns of vegetation, agriculture and animal husbandry quite different from those of the eastern Mediterranean. Only a small percentage of our population is involved in agriculture, and consequently there is an almost complete absence of a feeling of dependence on any supernatural agency for daily food. Our economic system is mainly industrial and capitalistic, and is heavily dependent on both imports and exports. All this is a far cry from the largely self-sufficient subsistence farming economy of the ancient world.

Our people are generally prosperous in spite of increasing unemployment, and poverty such as is taken for granted in many parts of the world has been virtually eliminated. Most people have access to technologically advanced services (running water, gas, electricity, mains sewage), and even luxury items are common (refrigerators, cars, telephones, televisions). People are very mobile, and many travel long distances to work each day, and even greater distances for holidays. Communications are quick and reliable. Several media purvey news and entertainment to the masses, most notably television, radio and newspapers. Health services and education are available to all, and literacy is practically universal. All this is in stark contrast with life in Bible times.

Our political system is one of (declining?) parliamentary democracy, which has no outward resemblance to any of the forms of government that we meet in the pages of Scripture. In the larger world, we have close economic ties within the EEC, military alliances within NATO, and rather ill-defined historical and emotional links within the Commonwealth. We have a relatively small standing army which consists of volunteers. The average citizen does not take part in military activities. We are not a superpower, or rather, we are no longer a superpower, but one of a group of smaller nations who have to try to balance their interests against the interests of larger powers, and their independence against their need for protection. In this last feature at least we have something in common with Israel and Judah, caught up as they were in the recurrent rivalry between Egypt and the Mesopotamian powers.

A particular form of religion is acknowledged by the state, but its practice is largely neglected by the majority of the population. In its place, a vague kind of humanism dominates most people's minds, giving rise to a relativistic and largely egocentric view of ethics. These features certainly have some parallels in the Bible.

The main social unit is the nuclear family, and the extended family

plays rather a limited role. Marriage is in theory monogamous, but divorce is common, and 'serial polygamy' increasingly frequent. This is all markedly different from the strong clan and family loyalties of ancient Israel.

What attitudes are currently influential in our society? For a person like myself, who in the past decade has not spent more than a couple of months at a stretch in Britain, it would be precarious to pontificate. However, several recent comments elicited from better informed observers have emphasized what could be called 'the Nescafé mentality', the desire for instant everything. This manifests itself in such diverse areas as hire purchase, premarital promiscuity, and even attitudes to evangelism. Though this attitude is not without biblical precedent (Amos 8:5; Micah 2:1-2), it is very different from the patient dependence on the annual round of the seasons that no one could avoid in Bible times (cf. James 5:7).

There are of course many other features of our culture that could be mentioned, but these are some of the main ones that are formative in our outlook on life.

The Interaction of Biblical and Modern Cultures

If we were to represent the biblical and modern cultures diagrammatically, we could show the one as a circle and the other as a square, as in figure 1. The lack of overlap between them symbolizes the time

Figure 1

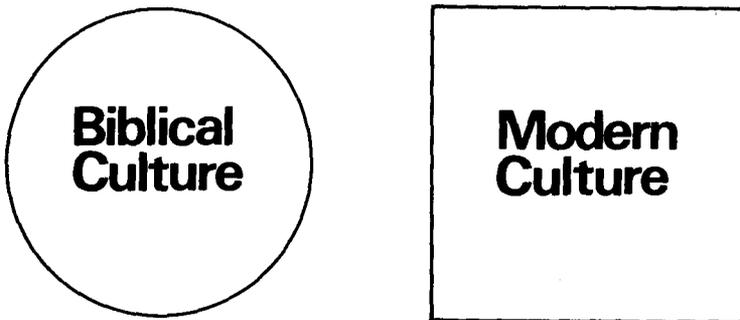
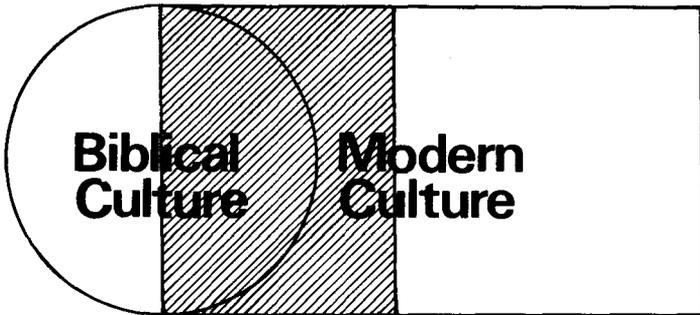


Figure 2



gap between Bible days and our own. If the message of the Bible is to permeate a modern society, it needs first of all to be translated into the language spoken by members of that society. This can only be done if some members of the modern society learn the biblical languages and familiarize themselves as much as possible with the biblical cultures. These people must try to cross the time gap and extend their 'square' cultural background into the 'circular' background. We could represent this process as in figure 2. The modern translators can never become participating members of the biblical cultures, but they can develop enough understanding to express the message given through the biblical background in such a way that other members of their culture will also be able to understand it. This understanding will never be total even for the translators, but it can nevertheless be adequate to 'reincarnate' biblical faith in a modern cultural expression.

This indicates the key role of translators in the long term building and development of the church. The translator functions both as a prism and as a filter. As a prism, he allows the light of the biblical message to pass from its source in the original language and culture into his own (or indeed into some other) language and culture; but in

the process he to some extent deflects it, and gives it a different direction. As a filter, he impedes some part of the spectrum of the biblical message, and perhaps gives a new emphasis to some other part. The conscientious translator tries of course to minimize both these effects, but because the biblical languages and cultures can never be completely congruent with any modern language and culture, these effects can never be completely eliminated. For this reason, serious Bible students should never rely exclusively on only one version.

There is one ironical factor in the situation of the Bible translator that should not pass without notice. In order to carry out his task, he familiarizes himself as much as possible with the biblical languages and cultures. Yet the more he does so, the less typical he becomes of his own culture, and the harder it is for him to remember how much background knowledge is available to the average member of his target audience. As in any specialized subject, it is easy to take for granted more knowledge than the readers actually possess. For this reason, an effective translation committee almost always contains at least one person who is not an expert on the biblical background, in order to make the others keep their feet on the ground!

Some Types of Interference

Various types of interference can arise from the lack of congruence between the biblical languages and cultures and our own. One obvious type is linguistic interference — forcing the sentences of a translation into patterns which are unnatural in order to make them as close as possible to the structures of Greek or Hebrew. Older English translations such as AV, RV or even RSV, show a lot of this sort of interference, but in more recent versions (like JB, NEB, GNB, NIV), it has been largely eliminated, or at least kept down to an unobtrusive level.

A second type of interference comes from unfamiliar items of biblical culture. What are mandrakes (Gen. 30:14-16)? What is an ephod (Exod. 25:7 etc.)? What are Urim and Thummim (Exod. 28:30 etc.)? What is hyssop (John 19:29 etc.)? Or chalcedony (Rev. 21:20 etc.)? Or myrrh (Matt. 2:11 etc.)? A lack of knowledge of such items may be an irritation to the reader, but yet it may not prevent him from grasping the overall thrust of a passage. In some Bibles, such things are explained in footnotes or in a word list. In any case it is not difficult to obtain information about them from a commentary or Bible dictionary, so long as one knows a language like English in which commentaries and Bible dictionaries are available.

A third type of interference arises from a failure to understand

everyday practices of biblical culture. Why did Sarah give Hagar to Abraham? Why did Rachel steal Laban's household goods? Why would Isaiah not want Ahaz to enter an alliance with the Assyrians? What was special about a man carrying a water pot? Why did Jesus choose a donkey on which to ride into Jerusalem? If unanswered, such questions can hinder or even prevent the overall understanding of a passage. We all tend to interpret the unknown in terms of the known, and this habit may cause us to think that we understand when in fact we do not. Sometimes commentaries help with this sort of problem, but sometimes they do not. The author may assume that the reader does not need such a point explained, and may be reluctant to talk down to him. Or the author may be interested in other aspects of the text.

A more subtle type of interference comes from presupposition in the biblical cultures which are never explained in the text. We encounter one such in Gen. 1, in the repeated expression 'there was evening and there was morning' (RSV). The average English reader will be vaguely puzzled, as I was myself on first reading these words, because he 'knows' that morning comes before evening. What but sheer perversity would make anyone put them the other way round? Nowhere does the Bible itself explain that the Jews regarded the day as beginning at sunset. Biblical writers had no need to explain this because all their potential audience already 'knew' it. To explain it would have been as unnecessary as explaining to an Englishman that January is the first month of the year. This example is of course a trivial one, and an ignorance of Jewish time reckoning will not prevent an English reader from grasping the main thrust of Gen. 1.

However, there are much more serious problems behind other passages. The complications in counting regnal years and accession years have made for many chronological problems in the books of Kings. The selectiveness of certain genealogies has given rise to serious misunderstandings about such a matter as the date of creation. What exactly is the logic behind Jesus' argument about the Son of Man being able to forgive sins (Mark 2:9-11 and parallels)? How does Jesus prove his point about the reality of the resurrection (Mark 12:26-27 and parallels), and why did his audience accept his argument as conclusive? We may easily take it for granted that we understand, but could we actually explain the presuppositions that allowed Jesus to argue as he did?

The saving work of Christ is explained in Scripture by a variety of analogies, each highlighting a different facet. Inevitably the analogies are drawn from first century Mediterranean culture. Some, such as that of redemption, with its background of release from slavery, are

more culture-bound than others, such as that of reconciliation. The analogy of a ransom probably speaks more potently to us today than it did even ten years ago, because of the increase in well publicized political kidnappings. (What new analogies could we use to bring home the contemporary relevance of the cross?)

A recent book entitled *Poet and Peasant* by Kenneth E. Bailey explores the culturally conditioned implications of some of Luke's parables. Even readers who do not wish to follow Bailey's exegesis in all its details will hardly fail to gain a greater insight into the importance of the cultural setting of the New Testament, and its significance for our understanding and interpretation. This is true not only of admittedly difficult parables such as that of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-9), but also of a very well-known one like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). If even familiar passages like these may hold hidden obstacles, then how much more may Romans or Hebrews?

In this brief survey, we have concerned ourselves only with some salient features of the biblical background that may interfere with our understanding. It is also possible for such interference to arise from more deep-seated factors such as world-view, epistemology, social structure and so on. (Compare Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-culturally*.)

It is, of course, possible for interference to arise from the cultural background and presuppositions of the reader. A Papuan pastor preaching on the parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21) made his main point that the rich man deserved a sudden death because he had been foolish enough to speak to his own soul (verse 19). This may seem to us a ludicrous mistake, but to him the parable appeared to be reinforcing a taboo he had accepted unquestioningly from childhood. How often do analogous mistakes occur in our preaching? And how often do they pass undetected because the entire audience shares the presuppositions, and consequent misconceptions, of the preacher? Naturally, the greater the cultural distance between the Bible and the modern audience, the greater the likelihood of errors in the interpretation. (We should not assume that we are at an advantage over other cultures in this. Many a rural culture is significantly closer to the biblical background in practices and values than our urban, industrial society is.) Some culturally based errors may turn out to be of major importance. For instance, the theory of evolution has had a strong influence on the attitude of the general public towards the Bible; how much of this negative impact arose from the misinterpretation of Gen. 1 by both sides in the debate?

Cultural interference with the understanding of the Bible can and does affect all of us at times. This includes translators, preachers and

hearers. We may reasonably expect translators to be sufficiently well equipped for their task that they are aware of the problems, and are able to handle them competently and honestly. In this way, they can minimize the difficulties for their readers, though they will never be able to eliminate them entirely. There remain historical, geographical and cultural references in the Bible which even the experts cannot now explain, and perhaps never will be able to. With respect to preachers, may we not expect that they too will do all in their power to understand the background of the Bible before expounding it to others? Many do of course, but not all, and there is always more to be learnt than time to learn it. But until we have grappled seriously with the background of the Scriptures, how much confidence can we have that we really have grasped the message that the writers intended? And without such confidence, how can we pertinently apply that message to our own times and circumstances?

Conclusions

We have seen that God in his providence used not just one language, culture or historical period as the vehicle for divine revelation, but several. From this, we may conclude that no one language, culture or period was a fit vehicle for the totality of that revelation. Conversely, we may expect that no language, culture or period is totally unable to receive and understand at least those parts of the divine revelation that it needs most. The command to take the Gospel to all nations carries with it the implication that they will all be able to understand when the message is delivered in an appropriate way. Despite the difficulties, the message is within the grasp of anyone who is willing to study the Scriptures diligently and sincerely. There are, and will continue to be, problems and difficulties in communicating a message given originally in a particular time, place, culture and language to the people of a different time, place, culture and language. But if God could originally communicate across the chasm between heaven and earth, he will surely help us to communicate across the fissures between one earthly group and another. In so far as all peoples share a basic humanity, all can grasp the essential message of God's love and grace when it is presented in a linguistic and cultural form that is relevant to them. The proof of this lies in the worldwide growth and rooting of the church, and the 'incarnation' of the Gospel message in such a diversity of cultures.

With respect to our own culture and language, we may draw some further conclusions. Just as no one language, culture or period

received the totality of the divine revelation in the first place, so no one language, culture or period really understands the totality of that revelation. This may be very hard for us to accept. We come from a group that has had access to the whole Bible in its own language for centuries. We belong to a culture that has been permeated by biblical values for generations. We live in a time when knowledge about the Bible is readily available to anyone who wants to acquire it. But nevertheless we remain bound by the linguistic categories and the unquestioned values of our culture and generation. For example, most of us probably take for granted that a freely elected representative government is the best form of government, and one towards which all peoples ought to be striving. Yet in a wider perspective, this is a form of government which has appeared only in the last couple of centuries, and only among limited groups of people. It may yet come to be looked back on as a temporary and localized aberration from 'normal' forms of social organization. Most Christian people, both past and present, have lived out their lives under very different forms of government, and many have not seen, and do not see, the 'advantages' of our type of government which are so obvious to us.

A tiger born in a zoo not only does not know what it is like to roam through the forest, but does not even know that forests exist. In the same way, cultural and historical blinkers blind every one of us to some aspect of God's message — and we never even realize it. The more we can begin to realize it, however, the more we shall be stimulated to learn of other cultures, and their experience of Christ. To understand the message of the Bible in the context in which it was given, we need to study its cultures. To apply that message relevantly to our own situations, we need to develop a certain detachment from our own language, culture and period. And to keep us humble, we need to realize that Christians from other cultures always have something to teach us about the extent of the biblical message and its application to the human situation. It is after all only 'with all the saints' that we 'may have power to comprehend' the full scope of the biblical message of 'the love of Christ' (Eph. 3:18-19). But even then, we can only confess that it 'surpasses knowledge'. Exploring 'the fullness of God' will be our occupation for eternity.

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The author wishes to acknowledge the help and stimulus received from discussions with several friends and colleagues on an earlier draft of this paper.

Book Reviews

The Bible in Perspective
Bible Society. 82pp. (Paperback.)

These four Oliver Beguin lectures examine the authority and relevance of the Bible today. The contributors exhibit a piquant contrast in approach. R. G. Bratcher was the translator of the New Testament in *Today's English Version*. His 'Scripture and Authority' is tentative, avoiding the clear assurance of the other contributors on revelation and inspiration. John Stott, in 'Scripture and Culture' states clearly that Scripture is God-breathed and emphasizes the implications. He packs a tremendous amount into his closely reasoned lecture, commenting helpfully on the harmonization of Scripture, on the need for hermeneutics, and on the challenge of cross-cultural communication. He sums up thus: God spoke (inspiration), we listen and understand (interpretation), and then we communicate to others.

'Scripture and Society' is a splendid draught of vintage Muggeridge. He 'has a go' at Wells, commends the *Authorised Version* at the expense of some of the recent translations, arraigns our credulity, deplores the surrender of our laws, liberties and religious faith — no mean achievement in fourteen pages.

Blaiklock's contribution, 'Scripture and Truth', is just as individual. He reviews the Bible with an historian's eye, noting the mighty movement of God's revelation to man from the Creation to Christ and on to the Consummation. These contributions give a splendid balance to the two more technical studies, the whole presenting fairly *The Bible in Perspective*.

É. W. Crabb

The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with special reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein

Anthony C. Thiselton. Paternoster Press. 484pp. £15.

Evangelicals have always taken their stand on the supernatural character of Scripture supernaturally interpreted. For them, the starting point of all true theology is the revelation of God in Scripture as communicated by the Holy Spirit and understood Christologically. Their emphasis has been on the illumination which the repentant sinner experiences when he is made a new creature in Christ Jesus. When human need is brought into close proximity to the Word of God through the Holy Spirit, then a spark flashes between the two points, and a work of grace springs into life in the human heart.

Dr. Thiselton takes all of this for granted — perhaps too much in view of the unfortunate use of the word ‘negative’ on p.85. Instead, he concentrates on the human act of reading, understanding, and interpreting the Bible through which this miracle takes place.

I am full of admiration for the skill and confidence with which the author of this brilliant thesis has entered into dialogue on equal terms with those whose presuppositions are often very different from his own. Those readers who fondly imagine that Paternoster is only in business to render warm-hearted reassurance to eager, if cautious, evangelicals, will get a shock when handling this impressive tome. It is a scholarly debate in technical language on the philosophical problems of biblical interpretation.

That is not to suggest it is dull. Quite the reverse. For those who have been initiated into the language of existential or analytical philosophy, it is a masterly and vigorous survey of contemporary thought forms. And so widely does it range, that it is almost half-way through before Thiselton can get down to the real business of explicating Bultmann’s ‘Hermeneutical Concerns’.

Here is no superficial refutation of ‘demythologization’ in which so many scholars have indulged. Instead we are treated to a definitive analysis of the roots from which Bultmann’s view of Scripture grew. It fails to show how Bultmannism at one stage developed into the death-of-God theology. But it lucidly exposes the philosophical inadequacies which account for Bultmann’s inevitable imbalance, and it pays tribute to the valuable advances which he and his mentors made possible, especially in understanding such Pauline concepts as ‘body’ and ‘flesh’.

If nineteenth century theology was dominated by Hegel’s doctrine of inevitable progress, so that ‘evolution’ became the key concept in one area of knowledge after another, the twentieth century, so sadly

disillusioned with the liberal's dream of utopia, has opted for an existential view of life and an analytical way of doing philosophy. Now mere 'theory' is at a discount, and life is learnt through living (p.144f.). And in course of time, even science has undergone radical change, so that modern physics, for instance, challenges any static view of reality. In Thiselton's comprehensive survey of the present landscape we are shown how this has affected the world of New Testament scholarship. No longer can we stand at a distance from the biblical text and opt for an 'objective' method of interpreting it, for all that we are and have experienced contribute to our understanding of the Bible, and we cannot be 'detached' observers of the scene.

The two 'horizons' refer to the world-view of the biblical writers and our own very different presuppositions. And if we are to understand the Scriptures aright, albeit in a somewhat tentative and growing fashion, we must take full account of both perspectives. That means to say that the distance between New Testament times and our own must be frankly acknowledged, even though the two horizons must be ultimately 'fused'. But how does this 'fusion' take place without doing violence either to the text or our own integrity? At this point I would have welcomed a greater emphasis on 'obedience' as a vital key to understanding (John 7:17). But Thiselton maintains throughout that there must be, in the words of T. F. Torrance, 'a repentant readiness to rethink all preconceptions and presuppositions' (p.316). Though why the New Testament should possess this authoritative role is not sufficiently explored.

He shows, contra Bultmann, that faith is grounded in objective reality, that the word preached must have *substance* if faith is to be valid, and that Bultmann's historical scepticism is far too exaggerated. He rightly protests against the kind of word-magic which some of Bultmann's disciples practise when they over-stress the numinous power of potent words (pp.215; 233; 248; 274). And he includes a valuable section on the parables of Jesus which I found particularly suggestive (pp.342-352). His critique of Nineham is really quite devastating (pp.53-63). But it is a pity he gives such short shrift to the 'purist' view of Scripture which some maintain (pp.8f.). And it is disquieting that he should make no reference to the centrality of the Atonement in his discussion of 'justification' on pp.415-422, even though it was clearly pivotal for Paul (Rom. 3:24-26; 2 Cor. 5:21). Indeed I am prompted to ask how and why, on Thiselton's view, God can declare a man to be righteous *now* on the basis of what is to happen *later*.

This is a magnificently produced volume using good quality paper, and is splendidly laid out. I noted remarkably few mis-spellings, though 'incapsulated' (p.243), 'intropection' (p.236), 'Chrisitan'

(p.265), and (with apologies to all Americans) 'humor' (p.295) rather jarred.

John Wood

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'The Interpreted Word: Reflections on Contextual Hermeneutics'

C. Rene Padilla

Themelios, Vol. 7. September 1981. No. 1 pp.18-23.

The writer, a well-known western trained theologian working in third-world situations, properly draws our attention to the ways in which our interpretation of Scripture is strongly shaped by the different social forces, patterns and outlook of our particular culture i.e. the combination of lifestyle, attitudes and values, our thought patterns and learning processes which lead us to impose a conditioned 'hermeneutic' on our understanding and proclamation of the Word.

He argues strongly for the 'contextual' approach to hermeneutics, for him as important as our normative 'intuitive' and 'scientific' processes which fail to recognize adequately the effect of the ancient world in shaping the original text and 'today's world in conditioning the way contemporary readers are likely to "hear" and understand the text.' It is now clear to many that the Gospel has been confused with 'culture-Christianity' and that this process has created vast problems in the worldwide church. We have, for instance, extracted a biblical message for hearers on the 'mission field' (perhaps in the U.K.?) who cannot appreciate the overtones of Greek philosophy and European-American heritage blessings as a message of hope for themselves, touching their lives only at a tangent.

Padilla moves inexorably to the currently favourite topic of the contextualization of the Gospel 'which demands the contextualization of the church, which is God's hermeneutical community for the manifestation of Christ's presence among the nations of the earth'. True enough and many interpreters and theologians have a lot to answer for. Nevertheless, the 'deposit of truth' in Scripture is to be guarded and proclaimed for all time and in all places; let our 'kerygmatic' ministry be culture-free and take care that our 'didache' is for the twentieth century!

John Boyes

New Testament Interpretation

I. H. Marshall, Editor

Paternoster. (1979, revised edition.) 412pp. £7.80. (Paperback.)

Seventeen scholars have co-operated with Prof. Marshall in the pro-

duction of this guide to the modern study of the New Testament, which is in many respects an essential follow-up to our present consideration of the Bible, especially as the extensive bibliography provides further reading on each main chapter, with a *Which*-like suggestion of a 'best read'. A mere description of its comprehensive contents will indicate best its value.

Prof. F. F. Bruce gives a history of New Testament study over the ages, valuable in its own right, even more so as opening minds to further reading. G. N. Stanton considers 'Presuppositions in New Testament Criticism' and suggests some safeguards, not least that the interpreter let the text itself speak to and through him. In an immensely stimulating paper, A. C. Thiselton treats of Semantics, reviewing the theories of Barr and de Saussure. He includes cautions against, on the one hand, the tendency to import etymology into the significance of words and, on the other, translation on the basis of 'transformational grammar' which has so much influenced the *Good News Bible*. D. Guthrie's paper on 'Questions of Introduction' is too brief to be helpful, though his own book on the subject is among the best available.

The Religious Background is handled by J. W. Drane — again rather briefly. The Editor himself surveys Historical Criticism with reference almost entirely to the Gospels and with a suitable section on 'The Implications of Inspiration', which often gets overlooked in the fray. In view of current interest, it is appropriate that one passage be quoted:

Some scholars are prepared to allow that a Bible which is infallible in its doctrinal statements may nevertheless contain inaccurate historical statements in matters that do not affect its doctrinal affirmations . . . Others would disagree and claim that, even if no solution is *known* at present, nevertheless a solution *exists* and will one day become known . . . In practice they are not so very different, for where the former group of scholars admit *real* error, the latter group must admit *apparent* error. What is important is that scholars of both persuasions are equally committed to the search for truth — God's truth — and are both required to be humble and cautious in their statements regarding the phenomena of the N.T.

D. Wenham, in treating Source Criticism, is mainly concerned with the Synoptic Gospels. On Form Criticism, S. H. Travis, as well as giving a short account of the procedure, advances some challenges to it. Perhaps the least satisfying from the conservative standpoint is D. R. Catchpole's paper on Tradition History. Not only are the problems of harmonizing John 20 with Mark 16 exaggerated, but also the alleged activities of the 'post-Easter community' in tampering with or inventing Dominical statements leave one reader decidedly uneasy. Elsewhere, Prof. Marshall suggests as to the latter question: 'These

possibilities must be frankly admitted, even if we may suspect that the amount of such activity was slight' (*I believe in the Historical Jesus*, p.211). This is more satisfying. Even so, Catchpole does set out some well taken objections to the critics' criteria. Redaction criticism, which as a separate discipline has come on to the scene surprisingly late in the day, is presented by S. S. Smalley, again with cautions about its use.

E. E. Ellis on 'How the New Testament uses the Old' is most illuminating, if rather briefer than we might have hoped. We can think of a number of preachers to whom we would like to recommend R. P. Martin's study of 'Approaches to Exegesis.' The consideration of genre is exceedingly valuable. R. T. France gives two examples of exegesis in practice (Matt. 8:5-13 and 1 Pet. 3:18-22) which are followed up later by J. Goldingay with suggestions for expounding the same passages. The ideas are stimulating, though men who have to deliver about 150 expositions annually may be wondering where the time to do this sort of study is to come from! J. D. G. Dunn ably deals with Demythologizing and duly insists that the Easter faith makes Christianity a mystery religion unless it is backed by a historical resurrection. In a second paper, A. C. Thiselton discusses The New Hermeneutic. He warns of subjectivity as a real danger in this approach and contends for the existence of objectively true and false interpretations of biblical passages. The late R. Nixon, under the 'Authority of the New Testament', stresses the need to hear the Word of God to understand this authority. Some readers will wonder whether, with R. C. Chapman, it is not valid to talk of 'The Self-proving Authority of Holy Scripture.' John Goldingay's paper, already mentioned, concludes with useful guidance on methods of expounding the New Testament.

Hopefully, the foregoing will display the wide scope and great profit of this volume, enhanced as it is by excellent indices. Theological students will instantly rise to it, but the ordinary minister of the Word (or aspirant thereto) would be well advised to cogitate on its teaching — perhaps along with C. J. Hemer's comment. 'There is a place for a healthy irreverence towards the confident solemnity of the expert.' Since textual criticism is not treated in this volume, it may be useful to remark that Bruce M. Metzger's *Textual Commentary on the Greek Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1971) forms an indispensable handbook thereon.

John Polkinghorne

Let the Bible Speak

John F. Balchin

Inter-Varsity Press. 96pp. £1.25. (Paperback.)

This little book may be regarded as a kind of simplified edition of *New Testament Interpretation*, as it covers much the same ground from a similar standpoint. The successive chapters handle the history of biblical interpretation; the Bible as a human book, with consideration of human authors, languages, literary genres; the Bible as divinely inspired; and questions of interpretation and response. While there is neither index nor bibliography, the table of contents is very full and footnotes make frequent suggestions for further reading.

Two issues of concern to us may be mentioned. It is insisted that the biblical writers, for all their differences of situation and emphasis, present a single message. As to inerrancy, a comparatively full discussion (pp.58-65) is given. Many of the alleged problems arise from asking the wrong questions, so that the answer basically is to 'think biblically'. A final text of Scripture cannot be secured nor can an infallible interpretation be agreed. Literary style and genre must be allowed for, as also archaic scientific language. Alleged historical discrepancies can often be resolved by reconciliation, though some attempts at this are ludicrous. One suspects that the 'limited inerrancy' described as follows on p.59 would be the author's choice, though this is not explicitly stated: 'As far as the great truths which are central to salvation are concerned, the Bible, they say, is infallible. But because the Bible authors were conditioned by their own contemporary world views, they wrote things which we now know are not true.' It is also pointed out that many evangelicals insist that the Bible is without error both in what it teaches and also in whatever it touches.

This is an excellent introductory book, hiding immense erudition under a racy readable style.

John Polkinghorne

C. The Use of the Bible

The Public Image of the Bible

CHARLES G. MARTIN

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The Social Background

It is only eighteen years since CBRF produced Journal No. 2. Then H. L. Ellison and W. S. Galyer wrote of the Gospel for the 'man in the street'. Since then the 'man' has almost doubled his real income; the street is wider to cope with three times as many cars and the forest of aerials now provide colour TV instead of black-and-white. We are still in political and economic muddle but more affluently so. The childhood recollections of Sunday School are fainter. The U.K., apart from the occasional Royal wedding, is more solidly secular than ever. The *Honest to God* firework spluttered for a few years. *The Myth of God Incarnate* fourteen years later was hardly a damp squib. Religion is not news.

Yet the Bible is still a best seller. House groups burgeon. In the last five years my daughter has seen far more of her contemporaries becoming Christians than ever I did between 15 and 20 years old. The British Humanist Association, newly-formed in 1963, boasted a thousand names in Oxford, but now is shrivelled. Evangelicals have made steady progress in the Anglican Church — so much so that whereas in 1963 the majority of stalwarts in para-church organizations like Scripture Union had come through Brethren assemblies, now they are probably outnumbered by those who have come through CYFA and other establishment channels.

Against such a background, how shall I write of the public image of the Bible? Which public? Which Bible?

Which Public?

As Mr. Ellison said in 1963, evangelical Christianity has only rarely been of interest to the mass of the people of Britain. Most of the con-

verts of evangelical revivals were middle class. In 1963 he saw a slide to intellectualism. Eighteen years later it is painfully clear that we have two publics. We are reaping the dread harvest of the 1944 Education Act. Not that the Act was other than a high ideal, but it was, inevitably, applied by fallible, sometimes selfish, often blinkered, people. The General Certificate of Education — designed for the 20% with a particular reasoning ability — became a thing to be grasped at. The Newsom Report *Half our Future* fell quietly to the ground. The Robbins report, expanding University education, was more than fulfilled. Compulsory secondary education for all, 'appropriate to age, aptitude and ability' became a scramble to get as many children as possible through examination hoops and leave the rest in uncertificated limbo. The recent struggles to achieve truly comprehensive education may possibly bring healing, but it will take at least a generation. By our educational folly we have given status, power, privilege, greater income and job opportunity, and immensely greater self-esteem to those who can pass exams. The average Brethren assembly probably has more examination successes per member today than when Mr. Ellison wrote in 1963, and certainly vastly more than the average of the area in which the Hall stands. (There are exceptions, in one of which it is my privilege to worship.)

So we have two 'publics' — the 'educated' who tackle anything with the easy confidence that it can be understood, analyzed and weighed: and the other 60% of the nation who regard analysis as either mystery or waste of time, but who learn by watching and doing.

This division into two publics has been more than ever evident in the church. We are a literate lot, so it is likely that we sell our message best to the literate. So some of the great successes of post-war years have been among the 'educated'. Scripture Union work in schools (Inter-School Christian Fellowship) had phenomenal success, under God, in bringing hundreds of grammar school Sixth formers to intelligent Christian faith, passing them on to the immensely successful Inter-Varsity Fellowship whose University and College Christian Unions have trained thousands of highly intelligent, highly committed young Christians, many from completely non-Christian or anti-Christian backgrounds. In the late sixties and early seventies Michael Eastman launched his urgent appeal for 'all schools' with the target 'a Christian teacher and a Christian group in *every* school' and with special emphasis on the secondary modern schools. In the late seventies the Frontier Youth Trust and others blazed a trail for 'frontier situations' where Christians tried to communicate across the educational and cultural divide, to bring Jesus meaningfully to those who had fallen behind in the educational paper-chase.

The very difficulty of describing these two publics shows how little the problem is understood. I use 'educated' and 'uneducated' in quotation marks simply to put labels on them. It is not a matter of being 'good with brains' or 'good with hands' — many people are very good with both. Many a civil servant or teacher could have been a very competent mechanic or plumber if he had escaped the eddy that sucked him into university. Many a lawyer could be the gold-dust of engineering, a highly-trained toolmaker, if he had taken an apprenticeship at 16 instead of the expected route for A-stream pupils, into the sixth form. Nor is it a matter of moral quality or sober judgment of life. The 'educated' are as selfish, fraudulent, lecherous, kind, good or caring in their own well-expressed ways as are the 'uneducated' in their more open and blunter ways. It has been suggested there is a difference between the 'educated' emphasis upon individuality, personal decision and choice, and the 'uneducated' tendency to group solidarity and greater dependence upon peer-group in thought and action. There is truth in this (especially among the young) but peer-group pressures are still strong for the 'educated' and individual freedom is often freedom only to follow an accepted path. The main difference that seems to stand out (at least to me, immersed in the 16-19 educational scene, looking out on the world into which adolescents must go) is one of mental stance, confidence and expectation. The 'educated' *expect* to analyze things, to read about them, to listen to various points of view, to make judgments. They expect to fit individual things into a wider framework of society, which they expect to make sense according to broad principles. Insofar as they are optimists, it is an optimism of man's ability to solve his problems rationally, through technical expertise and efficient structures. The 'uneducated' have no such aspiration to understand the world at large. They have a healthy scepticism about government, local or central, and concentrate their energy on family and personal enjoyment. There is a 5% lower, underprivileged fringe (as there is a 5% super-affluent fringe of the 'educated') but in the main they feed well, clothe their children well, decorate and furnish their houses well and take their share of holidays abroad, and spend their Sundays servicing the car.

Views of the Bible

How do these two publics view the Bible? The 'educated' are fallen into the pit which they dug. C. S. Lewis said years ago that if you learn to 'see through' everything, you soon lose the value of sight. If you can see through the house wall, through the people inside,

through the back wall and the hedge beyond, there is nothing to 'see'. So the 'educated' have questioned and read and thought about every claim to authority or value. The learned language of university filtered slowly but surely to sixth form. Pupils learned from their gurus that science is fact, all else opinion. The values that held societies and nations together for centuries are dissolved into their cultural, social or political components. The philosophy of empiricism (knowledge comes only through sense experience) colours all thought, with its narrow view of 'proof'. Neither God nor any other absolute can be proved scientifically. So their world closes around them in a sad reductionism. All values, personal experience, love, duty, awe or hope can be reduced to their psychological or sociological account. The beauty of the sunset is in danger of being reduced to a catalogue of wavelengths. A very few of the 'educated' followed (and even fewer still follow) the logical positivists in saying that God-talk is meaningless (A. J. Ayer said that DOG is more meaningful than GOD) though this star has fallen since its heyday in universities post war. Tolerance has become the supreme virtue — provided always it be tolerance of enlightened twentieth century patterns and not exclusive or intolerant claims. Views are held with civility. Christians may follow their unenlightened ways provided they do not force them on others, or claim an absolute truth value for them.

The successor to Logical Positivism in academic philosophy in Britain was existentialism with its emphasis upon 'authentic existence' and personal decision. Along with this went a deep pessimism, anguish and dread about people bound by convention or leading purposeless lives. The hippie drug scene of the sixties represented one attempt to break out, the theatre of the absurd was another. Many of the 'educated' have absorbed this atmosphere — at university in long and anguished discussion about the meaning of life, purposelessness and discontent with society, but a few years later (because one cannot live in anguish — the 'educated' are also human) a joining in the rat-race but with a little more despair and sense of futility than their less anguished peers. For a few this has been, by God's grace (through people like Francis Schaeffer and places like L'Abri) the gateway to authentic existence in Jesus. For most it has deepened the despair of ever finding a firm basis for living. So eat, drink, be merry and read the Sunday papers.

How does the Bible fare in all this? The 'educated' public starts with a faint haze of half-remembered Bible stories, fogged in many cases by liberal teachers' attempts to explain and interpret anything miraculous in the life of Jesus. Michael Green (*The Truth of God Incarnate*, Hodder 1977) notes the presuppositions of scholarly historical critic-

ism and these have filtered through to those of the 'educated' who ever read or think about the Bible. The first presupposition is that miracles don't happen, either at Lourdes or Galilee, so those bits of the Bible must reflect an outdated, unscientific world-view. Secondly, the world is a closed system with its own laws, so genuine revelation — any message from 'outside' — is impossible. Jesus may have been a good teacher, a man for others, a free man, but no more so than Gandhi or the Buddha. So if the Bible is read, it is read with automatic mental translation into the thought forms of the late 20th century. In fact, it is not often read. Only fragments are remembered and trotted out in discussion — like Paul being anti-women, Jesus being anti-war, the Old Testament God being vengeful and Genesis teaching a 144 hours creation which is scientifically impossible. The general approach is that the Bible is no longer relevant to life, but a proper specialist study if you like that sort of thing. A very few of the 'educated' will have heard of the New Theology, form criticism, and demythologization, and even fewer have any real knowledge of these approaches to the Bible, but most will know that there has been a bit of upheaval in the church about it all and that 'even the clergy don't take it literally any more'.

How does the other public view the Bible? For a start it is, of course, a book — not a newspaper or magazine, or even a pulp novel such as you might possibly read of an evening or on holiday. It is thought of as hard-backed, long and academic. Then it is very definitely a 'religious' book. It is not necessary to any skill or useful knowledge like the car manual, or guide to home decorating or whippet-breeding. All the instinctive suspicion of the culture against book learning and 'them' can be focused on the Bible. You don't need books to tell you how to live. If polite, you regard book learning as 'for them with more brains than I've got', if impolite you dismiss it as a lot of words. The Bible is for religious people, particularly parsons who 'aren't concerned with us' and aren't all that brilliant at living, either judging from newspaper scandals. The presuppositions of the 'educated' surround everyone via the media. TV, papers, magazines, all carry the message: 'science is fact, all else is opinion'. No moral absolute; make your own mind up; respect other people if they keep themselves to themselves. The religious programmes on TV show wide diversity. The only thing that sticks is that religious people ought to care, but often don't (even the Salvation Army is debunked). The Gallup pollsters are told 85% believe in God but you don't need to go to church or read a Bible for that.

The main thrust that comes across for 'educated' and 'uneducated', bookish and non-bookish, is that the Bible is a tremendous irrelevance. It does not hit life at all. There is no reason why anyone except an en-

thusiast should ever read it. If pressed, there are ill-digested gobbets of empiricism and rationalism to show it's not very reliable anyway.

Which Bible?

Even in 1963 translations abounded. The NIV has now joined the team. To the general public, the Bible is still AV. That is what they are most likely to hear at the occasional funeral or wedding, or the ceremonial occasion on TV. Certainly the TV caricature parson will use AV language. The 'educated' write to each other in the *Times* about how bad it is to alter the AV or 1662 prayerbook, but in fact most of the 'educated' find the AV hard to read. The Elizabethan English is beautiful rather than informative. Like Shakespeare, you read it for beauty and the occasional quote but only expect it to *mean* anything if you are making it a special study. Recent versions have helped readability but not the motivational barrier. There is no expectation that the Bible will make sense in today's world. Many pick it up with a faint *déjà vu* feeling, the old faint memories. Those who come to it fresh find it hard to start. Start at the beginning and you immediately get the 'unscientific' hang-up. Start the New Testament and you face a page of names. If you are serious enough to get a reading guide you must be strongly motivated indeed, and may make more progress.

To the 'uneducated' the Bible is an even less likely starter. Again it is met only in AV or the occasional TV caricature, and AV is not only incomprehensible but also faintly comic. New versions help (there is not the same snobbish veneration of 'beautiful language') but even so there is little expectation that it will make sense.

So, beyond any educational distinction, there rises a monumental disregard of the Bible. It is utterly irrelevant to the life style of most citizens. Our post-Christian society is learning to live without God-talk, however much it may secretly draw on God's common grace through his people and through the human constitution. A whole vocabulary is dying. The things the Bible talks about — God, glory, sin, justification, righteousness, eternity — are fading from English language. In their place the media give a new jargon, the specialist terms of social, political and economic descriptions of man in society. Caring and community are seen as (vital) functions of family and state in which the church may possibly still be a factor along with Rotary, Help the Aged and the RSPCA.

The Bible says?

All this puts in dark and sharp colours the question: 'How do you use

the Bible today? Is it still the sword of the Spirit? Is it still the incorruptible seed? Should we wield it and sow it? If so, how?

There can be no question that the Bible is the church's charter. It contains all things necessary to faith and conduct. Churchmen who try to cut it down or out in favour of more modern bases for the Christian profession know not what they do. In maturity, every Christian must have a faith in Christ that stands not in the wisdom of men but in the Word of God. How will he get that faith if he starts from the 'public' mentioned above?

The sword is still wielded, the seed still sown in very direct ways. The Gideons distribute New Testaments (now mercifully NIV) to school children, nurses, police and hotels, and have a steady stream of exciting testimony to keep them going and keep all God's people praising him for the power of his Word. Texts outside churches and on railway stations bear silent witness — I have not heard of any direct reaction but always rejoice at a stab for God among the theatre notices on the Underground. But these are broadcast seed, bows at a venture, God's Word in God's hand, here a little, there a little, prospering whereto he sent it. What of the church's steady ministry, the individual witness of individual believers? Do they start with 'The Bible says . . .?' If you get your friend as far as a Billy Graham rally he will expect to see a Bible waved. If you get him to church even, he will expect it to be read. But if you talk person-to-person what has the Bible got to do with it?

I suggest that we must witness to Jesus and then *lead on* to the Bible to give content and historical basis to the outline we draw from our own experience. Our aim is to introduce friends, neighbours, colleagues to Jesus and his people. Whatever flimsy bridge we build, eventually we hope that bridge will carry some of our experience of the love of Jesus, his forgiveness, his reliability, his voice to us in his word. At some stage we pray that bridge will link our friends to other Christians, a house-group perhaps, a family service. There they may see for themselves a group of people finding that the Bible does make sense, does support hope and purpose in daily life, does build a Christian world-view. Thus we give in our own words and experience the substance of the Bible message and then lead on to the Bible we get it from. To start with 'the Bible says . . .' is, I suggest, off-putting and makes bridge building more difficult.

Years ago, perhaps, the Bible enjoyed some authority, some public standing and veneration so we could start there and lead people from the familiar words to the living Jesus. The Bible today is not a ready-made launching pad for the Gospel. It is still the historical base and essential study for the committed, but we work back to it, not from it.

What has this to say to the use of the Bible in church? First and foremost, all use of the Bible in church must be *understandable*. This may well mean abandoning the AV, but in whatever version, it must be well and clearly read. Exposition must be honest and clear. The hanging of sermons on a few texts damages the standing of the Bible. Sermons must show how the text is relevant, show it can be understood by the honest straightforward reader. The homegroup scores heavily because the reading can be slow, painstaking, open to question, involving whole people and not just their intellects. Like Jesus, the group leader can give people truth 'as they are able to bear it'. If they thus increase their expectation that the Bible can speak to them, they will go to church better prepared to listen to exposition.

So the third public, Christian believers, grows. The change in motivation and comprehension is dramatic. 'I'm catching up fast,' said a student, 'I've got to 2 Kings already!' 'Of course, I read the Bible much more now,' said a retired gentleman recently converted. 'It makes more sense, too,' he added artlessly.

Bible Study: Methods and Means

JOHN W. BAIGENT

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Nearly twenty years ago, when he was editorial secretary of the Scripture Union, Morgan Derham wrote: 'Bible Study is one of the most frequently praised and most consistently neglected activities in the Christian community today.'¹ Limited impressions suggest that even in this do-it-yourself age it still remains necessary to plead with Christians to do Bible study for themselves. The purpose of this paper is to suggest ways and means by which some Christians may be encouraged to get started on Bible study and others who already engage in it may be stimulated to extend and deepen their involvement.

But first it seems desirable to ask some basic questions: What is Bible study? Why should a Christian study the Bible?

The Nature and Purpose of Bible Study

What is Bible study?

It will be helpful if we try to make some distinctions here, whilst recognizing that absolute distinctions are neither possible nor desirable and that in practice the various activities mentioned overlap and coincide.

Bible study is not the same as Bible reading. Obviously you cannot study the Bible without reading it; but you can read it without studying it. Bible reading is an essential part of the Christian's life-style but it is not Bible study. Let me illustrate the difference. When I read a novel (say D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*) I read it basically for enjoyment. I read it as quickly as possible so as to be swept along by the action of the story. If I come across a word that I don't know, I don't bother to look it up in a dictionary (I probably haven't got one with me!); if I read a statement that I don't immediately understand, I don't let it hold me up; I just keep going, satisfied with understanding

the general sense. But one of my sons has been studying English literature at school. When he is given a novel like this, first he reads it through a few times to get the gist of it; then he studies it. He looks up the words that he doesn't know; he wrestles with the statements that he doesn't immediately understand. He finds out about the author and tries to discover his purpose in writing. He notices his style, his use of metaphors, his allusions, and so on. He studies the characters within the novel. He may even read other books about the novel or the author. There is the same sort of difference between Bible reading and Bible study.

Bible study is not the same as meditation on the Bible. Meditation is fixing on one verse or phrase of Scripture and thinking about it: chewing it over in your mind; considering its possible implications and ramifications; seeing how it applies to your life; allowing it to make an impression on your heart and to produce a response towards God. All this is vital to healthy Christian living, but it is not Bible study.

Bible study is not the same as reading books about the Bible. Bible study may well involve referring to various books, but they should be regarded as *aids* to Bible study. Reading books about the Bible — whether commentaries, introductions, expositions, or daily explanatory notes (e.g. those produced by Scripture Union) — can contribute greatly to an understanding of the Bible, but it is not Bible study *per se* and such writings should never be allowed to become a substitute for personal Bible study.

Bible study is not the same as listening to Bible addresses. Jim Packer claims that the NT pattern is that public preaching of God's Word provides the main meals of the Christian — the chief means of grace — whereas personal Bible reading and study are like supplementary snacks — not intended to be the complete diet.² We may agree that it is essential that Christians should hear the Bible expounded by those whom God has gifted to minister it to the church: personal Bible study is no substitute for such ministry. But the converse is also true: listening to Bible teaching is no substitute for personal Bible study.

What then is Bible study? Briefly, it is the *personal* investigation of the meaning of the Bible. It is an *individual* grappling with the biblical text in order to understand it better.

Why should a Christian study the Bible?

Why not just read the Bible, meditate on it, listen to Bible addresses or read published explanations of it? A few reasons may be suggested.

To make it one's own. Educationalists tell us (and experience confirms) that we remember very little of what we hear in a talk and not

much more of what we read. But if we discover something for ourselves we are much more likely to remember it. The whole point of Bible study is for the individual to engage with the text in such a way as to come to a personal appropriation of it.

To make sure one understands the Bible. It is very easy to read the Bible and not really to understand it. It is dangerously easy to misinterpret or misapply a statement of Scripture by taking it out of its context and failing to understand its function within the total purpose of the particular book of the Bible. Bible study aims to attain to a correct understanding of the meaning of the text and thus helps to ensure that the devotional use of the Bible and the attempt to live by the Bible are placed on a firm footing.

To check up on the preacher. The writer of Acts pronounces the people of Berea 'more noble' than those of Thessalonica 'for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true' (Acts 17:11). And that was (apparently) *before* they became Christians! No Christian teacher or preacher is infallible. What he says (or writes) must be tested by reference to the biblical revelation. No belief should be held and no practice adopted which the individual Christian is not fully convinced is scriptural. But in order to be able to judge in these matters the Christian must have come to grips with the Bible for himself and mastered its contents.

To be able to teach others. Quite clearly, the preacher, the Bible class leader and the Sunday School teacher need to study the Bible. And it is the call to communicate the message of the Bible to others which constitutes the main motivation for Bible study for many Christians. Nevertheless, all Christians should eventually be in a position where they can open up the Bible and show to any inquirer its basic teaching.

The reasons outlined here may not add up to an inescapable argument for Bible study on the part of every Christian. Obviously, for considerable periods of history Christians have had little or no opportunity or ability to engage in Bible study. It cannot, therefore, be insisted that it is an *essential* feature of the Christian life. But in modern times, when standards of general education are much higher and aids to Bible study abound, it is quite reasonable to expect all Christians to do some Bible study, if only of a simple nature. When we consider the amount of study that people are prepared to put not only into preparation for a career but also into mastering some interest or hobby, it is not unfair to call on them to put the same sort of effort into mastering the Bible.

Methods of Bible Study

There are a number of different ways by which the Christian may be involved in Bible study. He or she³ may choose to study various parts of Scripture simply according to interest or inclination; on the other hand, the demands of a teaching syllabus may dictate the areas of study. Such study may take place once a week or even more infrequently. Some, however, will follow a scheme of Bible study such as *Search the Scriptures* (IVP) which covers the whole Bible in three years and provides questions on each day's passage (requiring at least half an hour per day). Others will make use of the wide range of correspondence courses provided by agencies like the Emmaus Bible School, the Fishers Fellowship, or the Navigators and by Bible colleges such as the London Bible College or the Bible Training Institute, Glasgow.

For many Christians, who might find it hard to study on their own, the Bible study group provides an excellent way to get started.⁴ Under an experienced leader, members of such a group can be introduced to the methods and principles of Bible study and can benefit from the stimulation of a shared activity. (For further details, see the books listed below.) A church-based or area-based Bible school, such as those run for many years by George Harpur in Glasgow and other parts,⁵ is an excellent way to introduce people to the joys and benefits to be derived from serious and systematic study of the Bible.

The simplest method

Bible study begins at the point when the reader asks himself questions about what he has read. Thus it is the Scripture Union method, which provides a list of questions to ask oneself after reading the set passage (not the reading of the explanatory notes), that transforms Bible reading into Bible study. (It also encourages meditation.) The sort of questions suggested are as follows:

What does this passage teach me about God — the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit?

What does this passage teach me about the Christian life? Is there a command to obey, a promise to claim, a warning to heed? Is there an example to follow or an error to avoid?

What is the main lesson of the passage?

When the reader has thus grappled with the biblical text for himself, he may well read the published explanatory notes in order to confirm, correct or supplement his own findings.

More detailed study

Once a person has begun to ask generalized questions like those above,

he is likely to realize that the details in the passage prompt further questions as to their meaning and significance which demand a more thorough form of Bible study.

In his book *Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty* (Pickering & Inglis, 1950), Merrill C. Tenney outlines ten methods of Bible study. They are as follows:

(1) The *synthetic* method: which surveys a biblical book as a whole; (2) the *critical* method: which investigates questions of authorship, destination, etc.; (3) the *biographical* method: which discovers what can be known of the author and of the characters mentioned; (4) the *historical* method: which explores the political, cultural, historical and religious background of the book; (5) the *theological* method: which studies the main arguments and teaching of the book; (6) the *rhetorical* method: which looks at the author's ways of expressing his message; (7) the *topical* method: which traces the main and incidental subjects mentioned in the book; (8) the *analytical* method: which analyses the book section by section, attempting to formulate an outline of the whole book; (9) the *comparative* method: which compares the teaching of the book with that of other parts of Scripture; (10) the *devotional* method: 'by which the truths ascertained through the various means already described are integrated and applied to the needs of the individual' (p.207).

An alternative and simpler classification of methods of Bible study distinguishes two main approaches: the analytical and the synthetic.⁶

The analytical approach

This approach can be used on a verse, a chapter or a complete book of the Bible. Here we will consider its application to the study of a book of the Bible, since this should be seen as the normal scope of consecutive Bible study and as a reminder that there are real dangers in taking a verse or even a chapter out of its context. (Although it is recognized that different books of the Bible may need somewhat different methods, lack of space forbids more than a generalized treatment.)

The first stage is to look at the book as a whole. It should be read through a number of times, preferably in various versions. The following questions should be kept in mind and rough notes made (including the appropriate reference) as answers to them are discovered during reading. (Each question could well be placed at the top of a piece of paper.)

What type (genre) of literature is this? (How does it compare with other books of the Bible?)

What can I discover about the author and his purposes in writing?

What can I discover about the identity, situation and needs of the addressees?

What are the main themes of the book?

Then an attempt should be made to produce an outline or analysis of the structure of the book, giving an overall title (according to its apparent theme) and dividing it into sections and subsections each with a heading or description (according to its contents).

At this point a Bible dictionary, an Introduction (e.g. those by Harrison and Guthrie) or the introductory section of the appropriate commentary could well be consulted to confirm, correct or supplement the personal discoveries and conclusions. A fuller, revised and more permanent set of notes could now be made.

The second stage involves working through the biblical text one paragraph at a time (according to the divisions in your Bible or your own analysis), keeping in mind the literary genre, the overall structure, the purpose, and the flow of the narrative or argument. First, an attempt should be made to paraphrase (in writing) the contents or argument of the paragraph and to relate its function to the overall purpose of the book. Then, the paragraph should be worked through sentence by sentence and even phrase by phrase. (Verses will not always be the most sensible units of study.) Two main questions face the Bible student at this point: What does it say? What does it mean?

To answer the first question necessitates the use of a number of versions of the Bible. The student is advised to use one version as his normal 'working' Bible: this is particularly important for the purpose of memorizing verses and passages as well as for developing a general familiarity with the biblical text. Either the *Revised Standard Version* (which is used as the basis of many modern commentaries and Bible study schemes) or the *New International Version* would seem to be the most suitable. A more literal translation such as the *Revised Version* or the *New American Standard Bible* is extremely valuable (despite the somewhat archaic English of the former) for a close study of the text by those who do not read Hebrew or Greek. *The Interlinear Greek/English New Testament* (Bagster) will bring the non-linguist even closer to the original text (and may encourage him to begin learning NT Greek). Almost any modern English version will convey the sense of the original text and make the sort of impact on us that it had on its first readers. For the whole Bible there are *The New English Bible*, *The Jerusalem Bible* and *Good News for Modern Man: Today's English Version*; for the NT only there are translations by various individuals such as J. B. Phillips and William Barclay. Remember that whilst all translations include some measure of interpretation, some of these

modern versions contain a considerable amount of paraphrasing. The *Living Bible* is a particularly free and personal paraphrase which is hardly suitable for careful study.

At this point, note should be taken of whether the translations largely agree in substance on the meaning of a sentence or phrase, or whether there are considerable differences which point to problems in determining or understanding the original text. In such instances it may not be possible to come to a final conclusion (there are times when we have to deal with probabilities and even possibilities) and care must be taken to resist the temptation to adopt the translation that simply appeals most.

To answer the second question (What does it mean?) involves considering each statement in relation to the author's purpose and the situation of the addressees (as far as these are known or may be surmised). At this point, if it is an NT book, use should be made of the marginal references (included in most Bibles): not to find parallel statements in other NT books, but to discover possible allusions to OT passages which may lie behind the NT writer's expressions and which will help us to understand them better. Use should also be made of a Bible dictionary for help with historical, geographical, cultural and religious references as well as with difficult words.

Finally, having worked through a paragraph on one's own, a number of commentaries should be consulted for confirmation, correction or supplementation of one's findings. On the one hand commentaries should not be disdained — the experts have been gifted by God for the benefit of the church — and on the other hand they should not be treated as infallible. That is why it is best to use more than one commentary — where they agree there is clearly a high degree of probability, where they differ there is clearly room for differences of opinion — and above all to read them critically with one's own impressions of the text kept in mind.

Having worked through a paragraph or section in detail to determine its original meaning, the student can move on to three other questions: What does it teach? How does it compare with what other parts of the Bible teach? How does it apply to Christians today? To answer these questions requires an understanding of the principles of biblical interpretation (see Part B), a good knowledge of the Bible as a whole (though marginal references and various reference books will help here), a grasp of the nature and purpose of the Bible (see Part A) and above all reliance upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The synthetic approach

This approach usually treats the Bible as a whole. It traces a topic or

theme right through the Bible: What does the Bible say about the Holy Spirit? What does the Bible teach about marriage? It can also be applied to smaller sections of the Bible such as a single book, the Gospels or the epistles of Paul: What do we learn about evangelism from Acts? What do the synoptic Gospels say about the kingdom of God? What did Paul teach about sin?

Since this approach has a number of pitfalls for the unwary, it is probably best not to undertake it until a fair amount of work has been done in analytical study.⁷ One of the main dangers is that of taking statements (often called 'references' or 'verses') from various parts of the Bible regardless of their specific meaning and purpose in the original context and treating them as absolute and normative. Each statement must first be studied in its context before it is placed into any kind of synthesis. When dealing with the Bible as a whole, it is usually best to begin by organizing the statements (together with their references) under biblical books or writers before attempting to divide them into categories or put them under headings.

If a single book is being studied, the book can be read right through and references to the appropriate topic can be culled and noted. If the Bible as a whole is being studied, it will be necessary to make use of a concordance. The pitfall here is that of thinking that topics are strictly linked with particular words. In the case of some topics (e.g. baptism) the study of the occurrences of a single word (in its various verbal and noun forms) will give a fair coverage of the biblical teaching. Word studies on key biblical terms such as holiness, grace, righteousness, redemption, can be very helpful, providing it is remembered that a study of such words does not exhaust the biblical teaching on a particular topic and providing an analytical concordance is used which distinguishes the various Hebrew and Greek words in the original (see the section on concordances below).

For a thorough study of a biblical doctrine recourse will probably need to be made to a Bible dictionary or even to a handbook on systematic theology (e.g. T. C. Hammond's *In Understanding Be Men* (IVP) or L. Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* (Banner of Truth)). In the first instance, however, these should be used to ascertain the relevant biblical references; classification and interpretation should be ignored. Only when the student has done his own work on the biblical references — seeking to organize them into categories (or aspects) under headings and to summarize their teaching — should he consult the dictionaries and manuals for confirmation, correction and supplementation of his findings.

The value of writing

The writing of notes has already been mentioned, but its importance needs to be stressed. Harold St. John tells how he once visited a young university student who proudly showed him his scientific note books. After examining these proofs of the student's industry with pleasure Mr. St. John said, 'And now show me your Bible study books.' The poor student replied with embarrassment, 'I haven't any, and, indeed, I don't treat the Bible in that way, I should not know how.'⁸

Bible study should surely be treated at least as seriously as any secular study; and if Francis Bacon was right when he stated that 'Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man',⁹ the Bible student should take the trouble to make extensive notes. Rough notes should be made at all times and some kind of final writing-up should be done in a presentable form.

Wide margin and interleaved Bibles are expensive and of limited use: they can be useful for recording alternative translations, adding biblical references and even noting references to passages in other books; but the amount of space provided is too small for preserving all one's findings in Bible study and the notes made at a particular time take on a fixed form which may inhibit further thought. The practice of underlining and marking one's Bible has similar drawbacks and also results in a biblical text which is harder to read; but it may be helpful if it is confined to a study Bible and not applied to a copy used for general reading.

Keeping the aim in view

It is essential that the Bible student should constantly bear in mind the purpose of his study. Bible study is not the same as the study of secular literature, although many of the methods will be identical. Christian Bible study should never be purely academic. The final aim is not Bible knowledge but the knowledge of God: not only to know about God intellectually but to know him as a person, experientially, and to discover his will for one's life. That is why Bible study must be preceded by prayer ('Lord, speak to me'), followed by prayer ('Thank you, Lord, for teaching me . . . Help me to put it into practice'), and all the time carried out in the consciousness that the Bible is God's Word.

Finally, a reminder: Bible study, like all study, is hard work and requires consistent, disciplined application; but it is also a most satisfying and enjoyable occupation.

'I delight in your decrees;
I will not neglect your word.' (Ps. 119:16)

Aids to Bible Study

The following annotated list is only a selection of the many aids available for all levels of Bible study. It is largely confined to conservative and evangelical works (most of which should still be in print, but some would need to be borrowed from libraries or friends), although there are, of course, other books which the discerning reader would find very helpful.

Bibles

In addition to the various translations available (some of which are mentioned above), there are a number of study Bibles which are of varying degrees of helpfulness, but which should never be used as the sole source of reference. Based on the AV/KJV are *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford), *The Thompson Chain Reference Bible* (Eyre and Spottiswoode/Kirkbride) and *The Companion Bible* (Bagster/Zondervan). Both Scripture Union and Eyre & Spottiswoode publish RSV study Bibles; *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (OUP) is a non-conservative work also based on the RSV. *The Open Bible* (Nelson) is an edition of the NASB.

The Bible student is well advised to have at least one copy of the Apocrypha (available either separately or incorporated in a Bible and in AV, RV, RSV, JB, NEB, or GNB translations) for study of the inter-testamental period and as a background to understanding much NT thought. A copy of *The Septuagint Version of the Greek Old Testament* (Bagster), which has an English translation, would also be a worthwhile acquisition, since it was the Bible of the early church and is extensively quoted in the NT. A *Synopsis* (in which the first three Gospels are arranged in parallel columns) is invaluable for any close study of the Gospels. English editions are published by Nelson (ed. B. H. Throckmorton) and by Black (ed. H. F. D. Sparks), and a Greek/English edition by the United Bible Societies (ed. K. Aland).

Concordances

Most concordances are based on the AV/KJV. *A Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha* (Warne) by Alexander Cruden is the simplest: it enables one to find the reference to any text provided one knows at least one of the key words. A popular edition of *Strong's Concordance* (Pickering & Inglis) fulfils the same function. Smaller concordances (including those bound into study Bibles) are of more limited use because of their incompleteness.

The following are better for word study because they indicate the

original Hebrew or Greek words and yet require no knowledge of these languages: Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Lutterworth); James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Abingdon/Baker/MacDonald). *The Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldean Concordance of the Old Testament* (Bagster) and *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament* (Bagster) are very useful for those who have some acquaintance with the Hebrew and Greek alphabets.

Some concordances on modern versions are also available: *The Complete Concordance to the RSV* (Nelson); C. Morrison, *An Analytical Concordance to the RSV of the New Testament* (SCM); E. W. Goodrich and J. R. Kohlenberger, *The NIV Complete Concordance* (Zondervan); *The New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Hofman). *The Modern Concordance to the New Testament* (DLT) is intended for use with various versions of the Bible.

Dictionaries and other reference works

The Bible student should have an up-to-date Bible dictionary. Older ones should be used with caution: many of the historical, archaeological and linguistic details will be obsolete or even inaccurate. Probably the best at present is *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (IVP) in three volumes. The revised *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Paternoster) in four volumes will shortly be available in Britain. The major non-conservative work is *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Abingdon/SPCK) in five volumes.

For the beginner the best buy is the *Lion Handbook to the Bible* (Lion) which combines the functions of a dictionary and a commentary. *The Lion Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Lion) forms a convenient supplement. Also useful are H. Sundemo, *Dictionary of Bible Times* (SU) and *Marshall's Bible Handbook* (MMS).

W. E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of NT Words* (Oliphants) is still useful; but the best treatment of NT words and concepts is *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Paternoster) in three volumes. The OT equivalent to Vine is M. F. Unger (ed.), *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Nelson); a larger work in two volumes is *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Moody).

A Bible atlas (which usually contains much more than maps), such as *The Oxford Bible Atlas* (OUP), can be helpful but is less necessary if one has a Bible dictionary or even an edition of the Bible with maps.

More advanced students will find the following helpful: R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (IVP); D. Guthrie, *New Testa-*

ment Introduction (IVP) and *New Testament Theology* (IVP); G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Lutterworth).

Commentaries

The Bible student should begin by acquiring a one-volume Bible commentary such as *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (IVP) or *A Bible Commentary for Today* (Pickering & Inglis). The standard non-conservative work is *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (Nelson).

Later, he can begin to collect commentaries on individual books of the Bible. The main current conservative series are the *Tyndale Commentaries* (IVP); the fuller *New International Commentaries* (Hodder & Stoughton/Eerdmans); *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Pickering & Inglis) which will cover the whole Bible in twelve volumes; and *William Hendriksen's NT Commentaries* (Banner of Truth). *The Bible Speaks Today* (IVP) is a simpler but a very helpful series of expositions of some biblical books. *The New Century Bible* (Eerdmans/Oliphants/MMS) has some volumes (NT) by conservative writers.

Non-conservative commentaries, if used with an awareness of their presuppositions, will often be found helpful. Volumes on various biblical books may be found in the following series: *Anchor Bible* (Doubleday); *Black's NT Commentaries*; *Cambridge Bible Commentaries*; *New Clarendon Bible* (OUP); *Old Testament Library* (SCM); *Torch Bible Commentaries* (SCM); *SCM Pelican NT Commentaries*; William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible* (St. Andrew Press) is more popular.

Older commentaries are of varying degrees of usefulness and accuracy. Some may be picked up in second-hand shops; some are reprinted by publishers like Banner of Truth Trust. Older one-volume commentaries still in print include *Matthew Henry's Commentary* (MMS); Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Zondervan); F. B. Meyer, *Bible Commentary* (Kingsway).

Bible Study

Studying God's Word (IVP), edited by John Job, is an excellent description of various methods of Bible study. H.-R. Weber, *Experiments with Bible Study* (WCC) is a valuable work from a different background.

Schemes of Bible study include *Search the Scriptures* (IVP), edited by A. M. Stibbs, and various booklets of questions (published by SU, IVP, Kingsway, etc.) intended for group study but also useful for individual study. Books like F. Foulkes, *Pocket Guide to the NT* (IVP) and J. G. Machen, *The New Testament* (Banner of Truth) contain questions and suggestions for further study. Bible reading notes (e.g. those published by SU and by Crusade for World Revival) often include

questions for study. I. H. Marshall, *Christian Beliefs* (IVP) and R. Bewes and R. Hicks, *The Pocket Handbook of Christian Truth* (SU) can also be used as the basis for Bible study.

Group Bible study is dealt with in Derek Copley, *Home Bible Studies and How to Run Them* (Paternoster); M. Kunz and C. Schell, *How to Start a Neighborhood Bible Study* (Neighborhood Bible Studies); and Mary Garvin, *Bible Study Can Be Exciting* (SU). Walter Wink, *Transforming Bible Study* (SCM) introduces a new kind of Bible study which incorporates the insights of psychotherapy.

The serious Bible student will need to read books on biblical interpretation, such as Alan Stibbs, *Understanding God's Word* (IVP); and for the more advanced there are B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Baker) and I. H. Marshall (ed.), *New Testament Interpretation* (Paternoster).

The novice will require introductions to the Bible, such as John Stott, *Understanding the Bible* (SU); John Balchin, *Let The Bible Speak* (IVP); H. Mears, *What the Bible is All About* (Gospel Light); S. Baxter, *Explore the Book* (Zondervan); R. Brown, *Let's Read the Old Testament* (Victory Press).

Biblical languages

None of the works listed above requires a knowledge of OT Hebrew or NT Greek, but even a superficial acquaintance with these languages (e.g. ability to read the alphabets) will open the door to a further range of helpful literature. Apart from correspondence courses (e.g. London Bible College; Wolsey Hall) and evening classes (available in some areas), the following books make it possible for someone to learn the basics of these languages: R. K. Harrison, *Teach Yourself Hebrew* (EUP); T. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (DLT); J. F. A. Sawyer, *Modern Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (Oriel Press); W. S. LaSor, *Handbook of Biblical Hebrew* (Eerdmans); D. F. Hudson, *Teach Yourself New Testament Greek* (EUP); J. W. Wenham, *Elements of NT Greek* (CUP); M. Whittaker, *NT Greek Grammar: An Introduction* (SCM).

NOTES

1. A. Morgan Derham, *A Christian's Guide to Bible Study* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1963), p.8.
2. J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1965), p.91.
3. The last thing I want to do is to suggest that only males are expected to engage in Bible study! For convenience, however, 'he' will stand for the Christian, whether male or female.

4. It is recognized, of course, that house groups perform other valuable functions which make them important for all Christians, whether or not they engage in individual Bible study. See John Mallison, *Building Small Groups* (SU).
5. See 'An adventure in teaching Bible-study' by George Harpur in *The Witness*, June 1962.
6. A. M. Derham, *op. cit.*, p.37ff.
7. *Ibid.*, p.50.
8. Harold St. John, 'The Joys of Bible Study', *The Bible Student* XXXI, (1960).
9. Francis Bacon, *Essays*, 50, 'Of Studies'.

The Christian Use of the Bible

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The Christian use of the Bible depends on a truly Christian attitude towards the Bible. That, in turn, arises from a proper conviction regarding its nature. Let there be a belief that it is God's Word written, that it is the authoritative divine self-revelation, complete and final, and there exists the essential basis and spur for a right use of Scripture.

But this alone is not enough. The individual, the family and the church must be assured that this book is more than all that. There must be an assurance that it lives with the life of him whose word it is. This is not to claim magical properties for the Bible as we shall have cause to emphasize presently. Rather, it is to accept its own claim to be 'living' (Acts 7:38; 1 Pet. 1:23), and not only living but 'active' (Heb. 4:12), dynamic and potent yet.

Further, it is needful that the Christian has a clear view of God's purpose in first giving and still speaking through his Word. That purpose may be summarized as conveying the knowledge of God, creating a response of faith and providing a directive for life.

The knowledge of God stems from the divine self-disclosure made in Scripture. That knowledge centres in a personal relationship. It would be false, however, to divorce that aspect of knowledge from that which consists in the apprehension of truth. The two are inseparable. Thus the psalmist links a meditation upon God's statutes with the seeking of him with the whole heart (Ps. 119:2,10). There is no loftier ambition than to grow in the knowledge of God. The fact that this may be realized chiefly, if not exclusively, 'through a proper use of the Bible should provide the needed motivation for its serious consideration.

Further, it is the basis and source of faith. 'Faith comes . . . through the word of Christ' (Rom. 10:17). So we learn that Timothy comes to 'faith in Christ' and is made 'wise for salvation' because 'from infancy' he has 'known the holy Scriptures' (2 Tim. 3:15). Nor is such faith to be restricted to saving faith. The record in Hebrews 11 indicates that

the word of promise and of command proved ever the ground and energizer of faith. This is a further reason why we should read and meditate upon the Word.

But Scripture is also given as the guide and regulator of life. It 'is useful' Paul goes on to say, 'for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work'. It would be difficult to state the practical value of the Bible more succinctly or comprehensively. This verdict of the apostle's is corroborated by many of the Bible's writers. For instance, the psalmist in Ps. 119 refers to it as a prophylactic against sin and a strength in the time of temptation (vv.9,11), as a source of comfort in sorrow (v.28), as the secret of spiritual renewal (vv.37,50,107,149, 154,156), and as the spring of prayer and praise (vv.169-172). The one who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates upon it day and night is likened to 'a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers' (Ps. 1:23).

Personal Reading

The biblical testimony to the importance of a daily, meditative reading of Scripture and a careful compliance with its demands, as well as to the blessing which attaches to such practice, is overwhelming. Add to this the corroborative evidence provided by the lives of men and women of God through the centuries, as well as that which arises from personal experience and who can doubt the vital nature of a regular, systematic use of the Bible?

As far as the individual Christian is concerned, this (and it is surely needless to say it) should be on a daily basis. As already noted, the psalmist recommends a 'day and night' meditation upon God's law. To look at the matter ideally, the optimum benefit will be derived from using the Bible in a threefold way. There should be an *extensive* reading of Scripture. This will ensure that the whole book will be covered within a reasonable period of time. This should be coupled with a *meditative* reading of Scripture. By this is meant a thoughtful, prayerful consideration of a relatively short section of the Word. But, in addition, time should be made for a regular if less frequent *in-depth study* which aims at mastering a particular letter or book or some important biblical truth. Where this ideal is considered unrealistic it is customary for the devotional use of the Bible to survive, but a good case can be made out for pursuing all three.

The benefit of reading the Bible through in the space of one, two or

three years is the acquiring of an overall view of the book. In addition, there is gradually gained a sufficient acquaintance with the text for one passage to shed light on another, the Holy Spirit bringing to remembrance that which has previously been read. It also prevents imbalance in the understanding of biblical truth.

Clearly, it is a comparatively simple thing to devise a personal scheme for a rapid reading of this sort. There are, however, a number of published 'plans', one of the best known being that drawn up by Robert Murray McCheyne. This requires a daily reading of four chapters and results in the OT being covered once and the NT and Psalms twice in the year. This may sound demanding, but if it is recognized that what is proposed is a straightforward reading which resists the temptation to stop and ask questions, it is not as formidable as it might at first sight appear. The dividends it pays renders it infinitely worthwhile.

In addition to this, or possibly as part of it, there should be what is commonly referred to as a devotional reading of the Bible. This is imperative if the child of God is to grow and progress to spiritual maturity. It involves a listening to the voice of God speaking through the Word. Here again a measure of discipline is essential. There is no greater aid to discipline than habit. It is sensible therefore to decide upon a suitable time to devote to such reading and meditation, and if in addition to a set time there is chosen place so much the better. Much has been said and written on the value of 'the morning watch' that it hardly needs to be repeated here. If God is the God we believe him to be, if he means to us what we claim he does, if we are assured that the Bible is that through which he continues to speak to us today, if we are conscious of our frailty and need, then we will wish to begin the day in his company and over his Word. It may well be that in this spiritual exercise the reading will be but brief. Even so it is advisable to follow some sort of programme so that the Word comes at us from a variety of angles. Some find it helpful to use one or other of the numerous Bible-reading notes which are available. Such can prove a support for those who otherwise tend to lapse from a regular quiet time. The main lessons are drawn, challenging questions are frequently posed, and a 'devotional' application is made. Others would prefer to seek these in the passage themselves, unaided.

Perhaps the greatest danger arises where the subjective desire to have 'a word from the Lord' overrides the objective truth of the Scripture concerned. It is essential to let God be God and to be prepared to accept what he wants to say to us through the particular passage which is set for the day. In this respect, his Word rather than our circumstance needs to be paramount. The immediate, straightforward, in-

context meaning of the passage is likely to yield what we most need to hear and what God himself wishes to say to us. A claimed 'word' from him which is unrelated to the above factors should be viewed with the gravest suspicion. It is more likely to have arisen from self than from the Spirit.

Our most pressing need is to hear and obey what God has to say to us relative to life and conduct in general. There is a tendency for Christians to concentrate too much on what is commonly termed the particular will of God. We may be assured that God is well able to direct his children into that, and will most certainly do so as they are eager both to know and do that will. A confidence in him regarding this has the effect of freeing the Christian from the need and desire to be perpetually on the look-out for some special message in Scripture affording 'guidance'. This latter practice is a bad habit and contains inherent dangers. The great corrective is to rejoice in the promises God brings to us, and to respond to the demands he makes upon us through his Word.

It is obvious that all such reading of Scripture will be prefaced, saturated and followed by prayer. To preface it with prayer is to express our desire that God should address us directly. It is also to acknowledge that apart from the enabling of his Spirit we are incapable of hearing, understanding and responding to the Word. To saturate our reading with prayer is to allow Scripture to become a two-way communication. As for following it with prayer, the Bible may well provide that stimulus to prayer which we so often need. Its statements will engender praise, its promises the prayer of faith, and its commands our earnest supplications.

In his autobiography (p.152) George Muller testifies to the value of this practice. 'I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord'. He describes how he did this 'early in the morning'. 'The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord's blessing upon His precious Word, was to begin to meditate on the Word of God, searching as it were into every verse to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word, nor for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon, but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication'. He proceeds to add that he found in this practice the answer to

‘wandering of mind’ in prayer.

Whilst it must be recognized that we all differ in capacity, opportunity and spiritual gifts, there is a case to be made out why every Christian should attempt (in addition to the exercises already outlined) a certain level of personal Bible-study. This will hardly be engaged in daily, but it is not beyond the ability of the majority to set aside some time on a regular basis for this purpose. Aids, such as concordances and commentaries, are readily available and the benefit gained from such study far outweighs the time and effort required. It is frequently a help to gear such study to the programme being followed in the local church or house-group. For those who wish to fit themselves for the service of God, serious consideration should be given to the possibility of following one of the numerous correspondence courses which are on offer.

Unfortunately, and surprisingly, the point still needs to be made that it is wholly wrong to see any contrariety between a complete reliance upon the Holy Spirit and the exercise of the intelligence with which we have been endowed. We may rightly take comfort from the fact that an understanding of divine things is not dependent on a high IQ rating. At the same time God is not honoured by mental laziness. He refuses to bestow his treasures on the indolent. Yet, being creatures of extremes, we must beware lest we rest content with an intellectual understanding of Scripture, all the while ignoring its true intent. It must issue in a response of worship, prayer, increased faith, and careful obedience.

Balance is also needed in the use of, but not subservience to, the scholar. It is right that we should weigh and benefit from the insights into the meaning of Scripture which result from the labours of those who are academically equipped and spiritually enlightened. Let us recognize this as given by God for the benefit of his people, and as opportunity affords avail ourselves of it. At the same time the notion that such aid is indispensable to a proper understanding of Scripture is both false and inhibiting. God is sovereign and is not hampered where there happens to be an absence of scholarly help. Nor, where it does exist, is he confined to it.

In Family Life

Those who share these convictions regarding the Bible will inevitably determine to give it a prominent place in their family-life. The practice of having a ‘family-altar’, which was fairly common a generation or so

ago, seems largely to have lapsed. A number of reasons may be adduced for this, some more valid than others.

The matter of more immediate concern, however, is the recovery of a recognition of the importance of the Bible in family-life. This principle was established early in Israel's history. Of his commandments God said: 'Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up' (Deut. 6:7). The NT speaks similarly (Eph. 6:4). If a *daily* reading of the Bible as a family is regarded as impracticable then at least let Scripture be referred to constantly, and the whole gamut of ordinary affairs be consciously regulated by its standards. This seems to be the emphasis of the verses referred to above. However busy and complex family-life may be there seems little excuse for not making time for sharing together in prayer and Bible-reading on a regular *weekly* basis — whether on a Saturday or a Sunday. Children will recognize the regard in which their parents hold the Scriptures and its message will be brought home to them and their parents together.

Obviously the style of family Bible-reading will be determined by the age-range and composition of the family. Where there are young children it is obvious that both the reading and the comments on it, as well as the prayer, will be brief. Priority should be given to the interests of the children, and they should grow up with the awareness that today's counterpart of the dead sparrow (? hamster) is of prime concern to their heavenly Father, as well as such mundane (or exciting) matters as clothes and holidays, as the case may be. In this respect, the day in which we live brings great advantages. Never has there been a greater variety of versions (several of which are set at the level of a child's understanding) nor have there been so many Bible-reading notes as are available today.

The great objective for Christian parents should be not only the conversion of their children (it is doubtful whether 'salvation' in 2 Tim. 3:15 should be limited to this), but the establishing in them while still young, of a biblical mind. If this can be achieved then it will affect their attitudes to science and art, money and sex, indeed to life in all its aspects. And right attitudes beget right actions. A mind informed and directed by God through his Word is one of the noblest objectives which Christians may have for their children. It will be the product not merely of instruction but of example. The whole family must respond to the exhortation, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.' Where this is the case then whatever is done 'whether in word or deed', will be done 'in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him' (Col. 3:16,17).

The Bible in the Church

G. J. POLKINGHORNE

A special paper on this theme was commissioned but could not be completed because of illness. Our picture would be incomplete, however, without a brief consideration of the matter.

It is the claim of Christian Brethren that we base our entire practice on the Bible and nothing else. Thus Henry Soltau stated in 1863 with regard to the movement that

In no other instance has the Word of God (free from all tradition) been taken as the guide of those who have sought a revival in the church of God.

This doubtless is the governing principle still. But how far does our practice square with it? We will not consider here whether our traditions have grown to a place of competition with Scripture, so as virtually to nullify it (cf. Mark 7:8). Rather our focus is, how far does Scripture and its exposition receive attention in our regular church gatherings? We have developed a system wherein we have a Sunday morning service devoted to the Lord's Supper, with a brief appendix of ministry of the Word, usually quite unco-ordinated. The Sunday evening service is directed to challenging the outsider from a fairly narrow range of passages. At a mid-week meeting, some attempt is made to teach the Bible, sometimes on a systematic scheme, though only a small proportion of the membership attends. This brief and over-simplified summary will serve to highlight a conviction that few of our church members receive anything like an adequate diet of biblical teaching in the assembly. Moreover, we tend to be guided by a totally unbiblical concept of the leading of the Spirit, when in fact Paul lays it down quite clearly that the elders have a responsibility to feed the flock (see Acts 20:27f.).

Paul further states that we should 'attend to the public reading of Scripture' (1 Tim. 4:14) *inter alia*. Cranmer took this seriously in his first lectionary (1549) and provided for the Old Testament to be read in public services once a year and the New Testament thrice. Do we approach this ideal?

As to the coverage of the full scope of truth, *CBRF Journal No. 20* has some useful suggestions, not least a syllabus of teaching for two years. Surely this should be done more widely?

Elders should ensure that over a reasonable period, every major doctrine is taught and every book of the Bible expounded. Our current tendency to invite a minister to take a month's meetings results in the shorter books, with four or five chapters, receiving some attention, but the longer ones being ignored. How long since is it that Isaiah, say, was expounded in your church?

Recently, it was reported that Dr. R. T. Kendall delivered twenty-seven addresses on the book of Jude in Westminster Chapel, London. Have we men of comparable ability among us — and do we give them similar opportunity? The answer to both questions is probably negative. Why have we not the men? Because they have gone elsewhere? We are prone to boast that most of the best ministers of the Word have their roots in the Brethren, whereas we ought to enquire why they left. And the answer may turn out to be that they saw no opening for their gifts among us. We should be considering this brain drain and how it may be halted. And we should see to it that regular in-depth exposition of the Word is done in our meetings.

However high a view we take of the authority and inspiration of Scripture, it has no practical significance unless our preaching is firmly based on the entire Bible. Let us see to it that this is done.

Interpreting the Bible

JOHN GOLDINGAY

The Rev. J. E. Goldingay, B.A., is Lecturer in Old Testament at St. John's College, Nottingham. The following is the outline of a paper originally given at the C.B.R.F. Seminar in June 1980.

Four key features of the way we go about this task:

1. Reverently

- (a) The Bible is God's book:
by his providence (books such as Kings, Luke)
by his initiative (books such as Isaiah, Revelation)
- (b) It is therefore wholly true, because he is true (Jn. 17:17)
- (c) But each individual theological statement has to be seen in the context of the whole of biblical truth and of its place in the biblical story (e.g. God's justice and his love).
Each individual behavioural demand has to be seen in the context of the whole of biblical theology and ethics and of its place in the biblical story (cp. Jesus's discussion of divorce, Mk. 10).
Each individual 'historical' narrative has to be understood in the light of the kind of narrative it is (e.g. Genesis 1; differences between the Gospels).
- (d) (Hence part of the problem of the stress on inerrancy is that it tends to imply that the whole Bible is a blow-by-blow chronological narrative, when actually its narrative is more like a portrait than a photograph; and, of course, much of the Bible is not narrative at all, so that the concept is an inappropriate one. It's not that the Bible has any 'mistakes' — it's that this is the wrong question.)
- (e) It is the fact that it is a collection of God's words that gives us confidence it will speak today, and obliges us to be committed to believe and do all that we find in it.

2. Historically

- (a) Because God spoke through men who lived in history, the only way to understand his statements is to understand them on the lips of the men who uttered them and in the ears of those to whom they were spoken. (The problem with much prophetic interpretation lies in ignoring this point.)
- (b) (The NT doesn't *always* interpret the OT historically, but it encourages us to do so by picturing God himself speaking historically.)
- (c) In understanding the Bible, however, we are building on the fact that we are one with the biblical writers in many ways (we share in their humanity, their experience of God, their indwelling with the Holy Spirit, and so on).
- (d) At the same time, the fact that we feel one with them can also make us mishear what they are saying, and we need all possible aids to true hearing.
- (e) Thus understanding the Bible involves a paradoxical combination of being objective, distancing ourselves from it (to try to lessen the extent to which we mishear it and enable us really to hear what God was saying back then) with appropriating it for ourselves by making our response to God as we hear him speaking in some long-past context — speaking not just then but to me too. The Holy Spirit is involved in the whole of this process.

3. Relevantly

- (a) Many passages of Scripture are of clear meaning and timeless significance, and can be applied directly to today. But *precisely* how they apply we have to 'work out', 'guess', or seek the Spirit's leading on. We need to understand the world, ourselves, and our congregation as well as Scripture, to be able to do this. A preacher has to be a man of two worlds. (J. D. Smart)
- (b) Different biblical books address different situations and have different emphases according as they see people needing challenge or encouragement, the building up of faith, hope or obedience, and so on. We need to be able to understand where our congregation is so as to be able to apply the right biblical emphasis to them, to move them on from where they are now to the next place of God's leading.

- (c) A brief consideration of books such as Deuteronomy or 1 Chronicles reveals that many chapters are of no direct application today. Here we have to seek to see what principles may be inferred from these chapters and then see how those principles apply today.
- (d) Biblical narratives (e.g. stories in Genesis or the Gospels) can be relevant in one of two ways. Sometimes their once-for-all historicity is what we note. (Jesus rose from the dead: that fact is part of the basis of my faith in him.) Sometimes they can be examples of how God always acts (God's raising Jesus is paralleled by his giving me new life). We can thus link our story to God's story. But note that in preaching we too easily fall into 'moralizing — turning stories into examples of how *we* ought to act (or ought not to act) — which often wasn't their purpose (e.g. stories about Abraham).
- (e) The Bible itself remains the check on what we think is the Spirit's teaching on how it applies today.

4. Imaginatively

Our aim in preaching is to enable the inspired Word of God to get home today to the people of God by the help of the Spirit of God. This involves him breathing new life into:

- (a) the direct teaching of the Bible (e.g. prophets, letters). Classical expository preaching is at its best here, following the writer's argument and letting the sermon's structure reflect it. Note the need of bringing biblical symbols back to life (e.g. kingdom, redemption, fatherhood).
- (b) the narratives in the Bible (Genesis to Esther, Matthew to Acts), which teach indirectly. We usually turn them into direct teaching, losing their particular value. We need to retell stories, incorporating new insight, comment, and application as the original writer did (in the way Chronicles does this to Kings, and Matthew to Mark) — not making the story the mere lead into a list of 'lessons'. Help people to get into the story, identifying with situations and characters as if hearing it for the first time. Value of drama.
- (c) the imaginary stories in the Bible (parables). The parables worked by starting in people's familiar world and taking people on to something totally revolutionary; a parable is a story with a kick in the tale. Our problem is that the familiar world is now strange and the revolutionary punchline is old hat. We have to bring old parables to life and tell new ones.

For New Readers

The work of the CHRISTIAN BROTHERS RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP began in 1963 when a number of interested brethren established a study group activity which concerned itself with the life and customs of the assemblies of Christian Brethren with which they were associated.

These activities immediately began to draw widespread support and interest both within and outside of the Brethren movement in the United Kingdom and overseas. Associate links with similar bodies in New Zealand and Australia and with correspondents in many parts of the world were made. By means of its JOURNAL and OCCASIONAL PAPERS — now some 35 in number and shortly to be published under a new title, the CHRISTIAN BROTHERS REVIEW with an even wider perspective of interests — the C.B.R.F. has become recognized as a forward-looking and progressive association of brethren and sisters engaged in promoting, on a continuing basis, the growth and development of our churches' principles and practices. During recent years, it has become a reference point for many enquiries about the Christian Brethren Movement from outside bodies, the media and research workers.

The C.B.R.F. has also organized many well supported conferences, seminars and workshops in London and in other regions. Some of the more recent issues examined have included:

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|---|--------|
| 'Marriage, Divorce and the Church' | (1977) |
| 'Leadership in the Churches' | (1978) |
| 'Women in the Church — the Silent Majority' | (1979) |
| 'The Caring Church' | (1979) |
| 'What is Truth' — the Application of the Scriptures for Today' | (1980) |
| 'Mission in the 80's' | (1980) |
| 'Agree to Differ?' | (1981) |

Most of these papers presented are subsequently published with fur-

ther material in the CHRISTIAN BRETHERN REVIEW. Tape recordings of these Seminars are available for purchase (see p.).

In 1977, a Trust body was set up to develop the work of the Fellowship and adopted wide constitutional aims to 'advance the Christian faith' by study and publication of its findings especially as they affect those known as the Christian Brethren. In pursuit of these aims, the C.B.R.F. undertakes a number of study projects of contemporary interest to our churches. Examples are: training and development programmes for younger leaders, students and others, for future responsibilities; church management processes for elders; church growth developments (continuing work on *The Brethren Today — a Factual Survey* by Brown & Mills 1980: C.B.R.F.); mission and evangelism for today and others. The Fellowship is developing an information and resource agency for churches regarding workers, para-church bodies, missionary candidates and other personnel questions. It can also provide counselling services and consultancy aid to churches and over-sights.

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Seminar Programme for 1982

Advance notice of Seminar dates and subjects in 1982 is given *for your diary*:

- (i) *'Small is Beautiful'*
an examination of the experiences and contributions of house groups in the local assemblies.
Saturday, 1 May 1982

- (ii) *'Healing Ministries in the Church'*
a study of the biblical teaching and contemporary experiences in the healing and restoration of the whole person and of reconciliation ministry in the body life of the local church.
Saturday, 23 October 1982

Both Seminars will take place at the London Bible College (Green Lane, Northwood, Middlesex — nearest underground is Northwood on the Metropolitan line) from 10.00-17.30 hours. These are participative events and your contributions in the form of case studies or comment will be welcomed beforehand; please send material to Dr. John Boyes, 13 The Meads, Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Herts HP4 3QX.

Tape Recordings

Most of the main papers given at the recent series of Seminars held at the London Bible College by C.B.R.F. are now available on cassette tapes as listed:

| | | | Tape No. |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 'Marriage, Divorce and the Church' <i>22 October 1977</i> | David Field & Myra Chave-Jones | £2.00 (C90) | (0) |
| | Dr. John Miller & Ronald Aldrich | £2.00 | (00) |
| 'Women in the Church— the Silent Majority' <i>9 June 1979</i> | Mary Evans | £1.50 (C60) | (1) |
| | Prof. F. F. Bruce & Mary Skinner | £2.00 | (2) |
| 'The Caring Church' <i>20 October 1979</i> | Rev. Gilbert Kirby & Roger Forster | £2.00 | (3) |
| 'What is Truth?— the Bible for Today' <i>7 June 1980</i> | Prof. F. F. Bruce & | £1.50 | (4) |
| | Rev. John Goldingay | £1.50 | (5) |
| 'Mission in the 80's' <i>1 November 1980</i> | Brian Mills & Robert Scott-Cook | £2.00 | (6) |
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