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THE BIBLE: ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND AUTHORITY

by HERBERT H. FARMER

From the earliest period of its history the Christian church has regarded the Scriptures as being in some sense the special revelation of God, and therefore as being in some sense the final standard or norm of Christian truth. The Old Testament seems to have been accepted from the beginning as an authoritative revelation of God, and it was not very long before the writings which came ultimately to form the New Testament were also in circulation, carrying a similar, though not precisely assessed, authority. No consistent or unanimous answer has, however, been given by the church to the question in what sense exactly the Scriptures are the revelation of God and the standard of truth. This article is intended to be a contribution to the answering of this question as it confronts the Christian believer today. It is written from the angle of Christian faith and experience as these are shared and known within the fellowship of the Christian church: that is to say, it accepts as a datum the uniquely normative status which the church has always assigned to the Bible, and it endeavors to explore its meaning and bearings in relation to the Christian faith taken as a whole. In other words, the question of the Bible is here considered as a theological question; the answering of it involves raising the question as to what the Christian faith essentially is, for only on that basis can we determine the essential significance and authority of the Bible.

It is, of course, possible to approach the Bible from other angles, in relation to other interests and beliefs. The books of the Bible are so various, and cover alike in their origin and content so vast a period of time, that they provide invaluable material for the historian, the archaeologist, the anthropologist, and many others. Each of these, in using the biblical material, in effect asks and answers the question of the significance and authority of the Bible for his particular study. Such different approaches may provide important material for the Christian theologian inquiring into the significance and authority of the Bible for the Christian faith; indeed, there is no reason why the Christian theologian himself should not on occasion study the Bible, not as a theologian, but as a historian, an archaeologist, or an anthropologist. The question whether in pursuing such studies he should seek to divest himself of his Christian convictions and presuppositions we need not explore. The point is that however much the various ways of studying the Bible may interact, the special interest of the Christian theologian as such, and the one which governs this article, remains quite distinct: we raise the question of the significance and authority of the Bible as part of the wider theological

question of the essence of the Christian faith which the church is commissioned to proclaim to the world.

This being the line of approach, we are immediately confronted with a difficulty. As has been said, we can determine in what sense exactly the Bible has the pre-eminent normative status in the church's life, which has always been given to it, only on the basis of our general understanding of the Christian faith. But, it may be said, if the Bible has such a status, how can we reach a general understanding of the essence of the Christian faith prior to and independently of our understanding of that status? We appear to be involved in a circle. If the Bible is the final standard, then we can know nothing for certain concerning the essentials of the Christian faith apart from it; yet if we know nothing for certain about the essentials apart from the Bible, how can we know for certain this particular "essential," namely, that the Bible is such a standard, and how can we know the right way to use it as such a standard? It is obviously no way out of the difficulty to quote the Bible itself as an authoritative witness to its own supreme normative status, for apart from the fact that it makes no claim to such a status, it is clear that even if it did, to concede the claim on the ground of its own *ipse dixit* would be to beg the whole question. (The statement made in II Tim. 3:16 cannot be taken as such a claim, for it gives no indication as to what exactly is meant by the words "inspired by God," or what writings are to be regarded as so inspired. Furthermore, the verse does not do more than declare that inspired scripture is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"—a statement which nobody would wish to question, whatever his views on the Bible might be. To declare that certain writings are profitable, and to declare them to be in some sense a final standard or norm, are two very different things.)

The difficulty, however, is more apparent than real, and arises out of a failure to distinguish between two types of standard or norm. There are what may be called extrinsic or static norms, and there are what may be called intrinsic or organic norms. An example of the former is the measuring rod or yardstick, which exists independently of the objects it measures: it is brought to the objects, or they are brought to it, and the transaction being concluded, the two continue to exist independently. An example of the latter is the indwelling normative principle which informs a living organism, so that it grows to and is preserved in its distinctive maturity amidst the changes and challenges of its environment. An organism has within it something which can only be thought of as a kind of "spirit of the whole," which keeps all the various biochemical processes in a specific unity or balance with one another. Such a normative principle obviously has no existence apart from the organism, and the organism has no existence apart from it: the organic processes, and the normative principle which informs them and binds them into a unity, though distinguishable in thought, constitute a single, indivisible reality. A better example, for our purpose, of an intrinsic norm (better because it takes us into the realm of the personal) is that impalpable and indefinable, but very real, something which we think of as the spirit of a nation or an institution. Such a statement as "It is un-American, or un-English, to do so-and-so" (despite the deplorable misuse to which it is sometimes put) rests on the recognition of a normative factor within the national life which is really "there," impossible though it be to give it either precise definition or exact location. It is an immanent or intrinsic norm, dwelling within and informing a people in a characteristic way, and having no existence whatever apart from them. This is not to say that there are no explicit formulations of the norm to which appeal can be made when occasion demands. The laws of a people, the constitutional practice (written or unwritten) which directs the form and process of its government, its recorded history, its highest and most distinctive cultural products, especially its literature—all these are in large degree permanently and publicly accessible, just as the yardstick is. Nevertheless the norm, even in its written expression, never becomes—like the yardstick—extrinsic to the things it informs and measures, for nobody can understand it, still less rightly interpret and use it, who does not share in the spirit of the people, the *esprit de corps,* which it not only expresses but also creates and fosters.

The normative relation of the Bible to the faith and life of the church is clearly of the intrinsic kind. It is, we must insist, not the less a true norm for being intrinsic; indeed, it is not the less a final norm, in the sense that no question of faith or conduct can be deemed to be rightly determined which is not thought out with the Bible, as it were, being present throughout the discussion and taking a dominant and authoritative part in it. Nevertheless, what the Bible says can be rightly interpreted only by those who livingly share in the distinctively Christian life within the fellowship of the church; for this life, though it could not arise or be preserved without the Bible, always includes far more than is or ever could be contained in or expressed through a written record. These are matters which will be more fully explored in the course of this article; it is enough at the moment to

insist that if we think of the Bible as exercising an intrinsically normative function within the life of the church, the difficulty about circular reasoning disappears. If it is true that we cannot rightly apprehend the essentials of the Christian faith and life without using the Bible as an authoritative source and norm, it is equally true that we cannot apprehend the Bible as such a source and norm, still less rightly use it, apart from a living participation in the church's faith and life. This is not to argue in a circle, because the Bible, in its function as norm, and the church's faith and life are organically one, and form a single, indivisible whole.

This suggests the plan we may follow in seeking to grasp and expound the significance and authority of the Bible. We shall start from the thought just indicated, that the Christian faith and life as manifested within and sustained by the fellowship of the church constitute an organic whole which, in spite of its many variant developments in the course of the centuries and its many aberrations from its own ideal, has persisted in a recognizably distinct form throughout—a whole in which we ourselves now share, and within which the Bible has an immanently normative place and function. The task of the Christian will then be so to expound faith that (*a*) it is seen to be in harmony with the actual content of the Bible itself, for clearly if what is set forth as "normal" Christianity (in the sense of being "regular or usual or not deviating from the common type") is not in harmony with what is acknowledged to be "normative" (in the sense of setting up a standard), then the unity of the organism of Christian faith and life is seriously broken; (*b*) the normative function of the Bible within the whole is fully preserved and explained; and (*c*) the way in which that normative function is to be exercised is made clear.

The plan will be to speak first of the essence of the Christian faith, and then to develop this in relation to points (*a*), (*b*), and (*c*) in turn.

I. Normal or Essential Christianity

The necessity of starting from the thought of the Christian faith and life within the church as an organic whole might suggest that nothing less than an exposition of the whole content of the faith is required if we are to understand the significance and authority of the Bible within it. Fortunately that is not so. Just because we are dealing with an organic whole, and are particularly interested in the normative factors within it, all that is required is a grasp of that central and controlling truth which imparts and preserves to the whole its specifically Christian character, distinguishing it once and for all from other religious "wholes," no matter what partial identities or similarities there may otherwise be.

There can hardly be division of opinion as to what this central and controlling "essence" of Christian faith and life is. It is belief in the Incarnation—the conviction that God himself came, and comes, into human history in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God himself in action within history "for us men and for our salvation," in a way that is unique, final, adequate, and indispensable. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12); "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16); "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (II Cor. 5:19). There have, of course, been great differences among Christians as to the precise significance and implications of this central affirmation of the Incarnation, the grounds for making it, the way in which the divine action it describes is wrought out in men's lives; and some have interpreted it in ways that have seemed to others to be destructive of its distinctively Christian meaning. But it hardly can be questioned that unless a man is prepared to make the affirmation in some sense or other, then, no matter how much he may in fact owe to Christian teaching, or may accept and exemplify Christian moral values, any claim he may make to be a specifically Christian believer, with a specifically Christian gospel to preach, is, to say the least, extremely dubious. This is not a merely personal view; on the contrary, it is hardly more than a report of evident historical truth. However much and rightly we may dislike heresy hunting, and whatever difficulty may arise in border line cases, the fact remains that the belief in the Incarnation has been the central, distinctive, all-controlling belief of the Christian movement all down the ages; it is the heart and center of what may be called "historic" Christianity, meaning by that simply Christianity as a movement having a distinctive character and being identifiable as such, in spite of all its variant and even conflicting forms, throughout the centuries.

The statement of the dogma of the Incarnation just made—that God himself came, and comes, into human history in the person of Jesus Christ—does not, however, suffice without further explication to bring out the distinctive essence of the Christian faith as this is determinative of the significance and authority of the Bible within it. To do this we must concentrate on two things in the statement—the word "into" and the phrase "came, and comes." We shall take each in turn.

A. God's Action "into" History.—There are two ways in which the word "into" might be

interpreted. These may be made plain by a somewhat fantastic illustration. Suppose that I am dropped from an airplane into the midst of a savage people, with the commission to transform their life into something very much higher, and suppose that I am given power to effect whatsoever I will. I am, as it were, a savior come down "for these men and for their salvation." How shall I go to work? I can do either of two things.

In the first place, I can, if I choose, put into operation at once the higher civilized life which I represent. Using the unlimited resources at my disposal, I can break up the tribal organization of these people, pour scorn on their traditions, prohibit their low moral codes, annihilate their primitive culture—in one gigantic upheaval and revolution pound everything to pieces and then force the pieces into the mold of my own plans and ideals. Suppose that, impossible though it is, I succeed in doing this. Is it not clear that while in one sense I have acted *into* their history, in another sense I have not acted into *their* history at all? For what I have done is to negate and annihilate *their* history and put something radically discontinuous and new in its place. To make what may seem a fine distinction—though it is really an important one and exactly expresses the point—my coming as their savior has been *into* their history, but not *in and through* it: it has been, as it were, down the vertical, but not along the horizontal. In a similar way, a bomb which drops from the sky and destroys my house, while in one sense it is an event in the history of the house, in another sense it is not, for it is in fact the end of the history of the house. There is "before" but no "after"; indeed, strictly speaking, there is no "before," for nothing in its previous history had anything to do with the coming of the bomb. That dropped from the skies, a bolt from the blue.

The alternative line of action has already been indicated by contrast. Instead of annihilating the tribe's whole manner of life, I may take the trouble to "get inside" it, to make myself one with it, to work from within it, to re-create it on the basis of whatsoever there is of good in it, whatsoever is usable in relation to the higher mode of life to which I am commissioned to lift it. The effect of this will be that the new mode of life, though new, will still have the impress of the tribe's own distinctive history and character upon it. It will be saving action not merely *into* their history, but also *in and through* it. There will be continuity between the new life and the old—the pattern will, so to speak, run on, the fabric will come off the loom in one piece; it will still be *their* history. And yet at the same time there will be radical discontinuity, for my dropping from the airplane, and all that I bring with me, will not have been anything that their previous history could have produced by itself. If I had not dropped from above, their history would have continued indefinitely on its former degraded level. There is continuity, yet also discontinuity.

To return now to the fundamental Christian affirmation of the Incarnation. The Christian faith, when it has been true to itself, has always maintained that God's saving action in Christ was along the line of the second alternative in our fantastic parallel. It was action *into* history in that Christ's coming was something radically new, an irruption "vertically" from above, something which, without God's deliberate intention thus personally to come among men, could not have happened, something utterly beyond the resources of human history to bring forth. On the other hand, it was also action *in and through* history—along the "horizontal": there was real continuity with what had gone before in the ordinary web and texture of human affairs, and with what came afterward. The Incarnation was real history, yet not merely history: there was real continuity, yet also radical discontinuity.

The phrase "when it has been true to itself," which was used at the beginning of the last paragraph, may sound somewhat question begging. But if we allow Christianity to define itself by its own dominant historical manifestations, there can be no question that the insistence on both the "into" and the "in and through" aspects of the Incarnation—the repudiation on the one hand of any tendency to assert discontinuity at the expense of continuity, and on the other hand of any tendency to assert continuity at the expense of discontinuity—has characterized the main tradition of the faith. And this is the more clear when we realize that this main tradition has had continually to assert itself against the two opposed tendencies just referred to, both in their obvious and more subtle forms—just as in the compass the holding power of the magnetic north is most clearly evidenced by the oscillations of the needle on either side of it. Thus the distinction usually drawn between the Antiochian and the Alexandrian schools of christological thought in the early centuries obviously represents in a broad way the two sides of the antithesis. The Antiochian school tended to lay the major emphasis on the humanity of Jesus—that is, on his continuity with history. The extreme wing of this school was adoptionism, with its teaching that Jesus was merely an unusually good man in whom the divine Spirit was able to dwell in greater degree than in other men, though not in a way that was essentially different—which

comes as near to denying discontinuity as is compatible with making any plausible claim to a distinctively Christian gospel of the Incarnation. The Alexandrian school tended to lay the major emphasis on the divinity of Jesus, that is, on his discontinuity with history. On the extreme wing of this school was Docetism, with its assertion that the human side of Jesus was mere "seeming," a phantasm of humanity—which comes as near denying continuity as is compatible with making any plausible claim to a distinctively Christian gospel of the Incarnation. In the end the problem defined itself (as the Formula of Chalcedon indicates) as the problem of asserting both the continuity and the discontinuity—the genuine humanity rooted in history and the genuinely divine irruption "into" history—without impairing the unity of the Savior's person. In our own day it is possible to discern the same tension between continuity and discontinuity. Labels can be very unjust to individual thinkers, but broadly speaking, the reaction of the movement associated with the name of Karl Barth, against what is vaguely called liberal Protestantism, as represented, say, by Ernst Troeltsch or Adolf von Harnack, is, especially in the realm of Christology, the vigorous reassertion of discontinuity against a too exclusive emphasis on continuity; of the "into" or "vertical" against a falsifying preoccupation with the "in and through" or "horizontal" (see below, p. 11).

B. God's Continuing Action in Christ.—It was said above that God came, and comes, into human history in the person of Jesus Christ. The phrase "and comes" is important.

The Christian faith affirms that God's saving action "into" and "in and through" history in Jesus Christ did not come to an end with the death of Jesus on Calvary. The action still continues. It is still going on through the church, of which Christ is the living head, and in which he is present through the Holy Spirit as the creative and constitutive principle of its being and life. There are deep theological problems involved in this affirmation, into which it is not our business to enter here; but there can be no question that this conviction of the continuing, redeeming presence of Christ in the world is axiomatic in the Christian faith and life. It is only in relation to this belief that the meaning and the centrality of the Resurrection in the Christian gospel can be understood. The essence of the Christian faith concerning the Resurrection, as it is set forth in the New Testament, is not that Christ survived death according to some general capacity for survival inherent in the human soul as such, but rather that God raised him up; that is to say, the Resurrection was part of God's mighty act of redemption to save mankind and establish his kingdom. Furthermore, it is part of the same act of redemption that Christ thus raised up has not passed into the "beyond," out of touch with men except as an inspiring memory. On the contrary, he has been raised to "God's right hand," and this means that he is now accessible, as a living, active presence mediated through the Holy Spirit, to all who give themselves to him in discipleship and faith.

We may put it like this: the Resurrection and the Ascension constitute the link between two periods in the continuous "biography" of the Redeemer—the period in which he dwelt among men in the flesh, subject to the limitations of time and space, and of which the culmination was his crucifixion and burial, and the period in which in some mysterious way he transcends those limits and becomes the unseen and living Lord and Savior of all who hear his call and seek to obey it in penitence and trust and in mutual love. It would be misleading, if natural, to say that the first period was the earthly period while the second is the heavenly, for in both the sphere of his saving work, of God's saving action in him, is human life and human history. From this point of view it is legitimate to say that the Christian church as the fellowship created and sustained in history by Christ through the Holy Spirit is the extension of the Incarnation. In this sense the church is part of the historical biography of Christ.

In the light of this understanding of the essential Christian faith we can now take up the question of the significance and authority of the Bible within the total organism of the church's life. Each of the three points *(a)*, *(b)*, and *(c)*, set forth above, will be considered in turn:

II. The Essence of the Faith Harmonious with the Content and Structure of the Bible

It was said that our task must be so to understand the Christian faith that we can see it to be deeply grounded in and harmonious with the content of the Bible, for otherwise typical Christianity would not be in accord with its own acknowledged norm, and the unity of the organism of Christian faith and life would be seriously disrupted.

If then we concentrate on the central truth of the Incarnation, and in particular on its dual aspect of continuity-discontinuity, we find that this is in fact very deeply grounded in the whole structure and content of the Bible. Indeed, the Bible might be said to be built up throughout, in a way that is quite without parallel, on the continuity-discontinuity theme, the theme beginning with ancient Israel and reaching its consummation (at the same time disclosing its

deep, underlying meaning) in the divine saving action in Christ. This may be expounded under three heads.

A. Continuity-Discontinuity in the Old Testament.—The picture of the people of Israel with which the Old Testament presents us through the wide variety of its contents—historical narratives, legal and liturgical codes, poetry, hymns, proverbs and maxims, utterances of great prophetic souls speaking in the name of God—is obviously the picture of a people whose life is continuous with the life of mankind generally. This is true in the first place in respect of the ordinary human nature of the persons concerned. To enter into the world of ancient Israel as it is disclosed to us in the pages of the Old Testament is to enter the same world of human actions and motives, loves and hates, passions and sins, hopes and fears, as we ourselves know: the people and the situations which confront them are recognizably "everyman" and the situation of "everyman." This is one reason why the Old Testament can still come alive for —and speak to—the perceptive and receptive mind today; and one reason also why it can always be read, if anyone chooses, simply as great literature. In the second place, it is true in respect of the forces which play upon Israel as a nation and determine the course of its history. To understand the history of Israel it is as necessary to take note of the economic, social, political, international forces which were operating in the ancient world as it would be to understand the history of any other people of that time: we must know something of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Rome, of Sennacherib, Cyrus, Darius, and Alexander. The history of Israel thus takes its place in and is continuous with what may be called the wider secular history of mankind, and can be studied by the methods of ordinary historical inquiry.

On the other hand, the picture is equally, and indeed much more, the picture of a people whose life is profoundly discontinuous with the life of the rest of mankind. This profound discontinuity comes to expression in the quite distinctive religious idea and experience of "the covenant." Covenant signifies a relationship of a personal and ethical kind which God, who has all peoples and all history in his grasp, has entered into with Israel, and with Israel alone, in order to fulfill his purpose in the world. God himself has taken the initiative in setting up this relationship, which, because it is set up with Israel only, puts that people, in respect of the forces which determine its history, in a position of radical discontinuity with the rest of the world. It is a people apart, the chosen people, marked out by God for signal honor and responsibility. By great acts of deliverance and disciplinary judgment, and through the mouths of prophets and teachers whom he inspires to interpret those acts, God calls and continually recalls the people of Israel into obedience to and trust in himself, promising them, as they respond to the call, his blessing and guidance so that they may in turn be a blessing and a guide to men. This strange, deep notion of the covenant relationship thus focuses in itself four elements which taken together form the heart and kernel of Old Testament religion: the apprehension of the one God as (*a*) personal, (*b*) actively working out a purpose in history, (*c*) taking the initiative in making himself known to men, so that they can in some measure co-operate with and understand his activity in history, and (*d*) calling a particular community into a unique relationship with himself so that it may be his agent in the world.

B. Continuity-Discontinuity Between the Old and New Testaments.—There is a second and even more deep-going continuity-discontinuity which the Bible exhibits to us: it comes into being, as it were, within the first. The covenant community of Israel, which God called out from and so made discontinuous with the rest of mankind, is set before us as failing to respond fully to that call. In varying ways and degrees, with recurrent backslidings after partial and temporary recoveries, it goes counter to the divine purpose, so that if it serves the divine purpose at all it does so very imperfectly, and then not so much as a willing agent as an unwilling, and even unwitting, instrument. Nevertheless, the divine purpose of saving the world through the elect people of Israel, being divine, cannot really be frustrated. By a new initiative in the coming of Christ, God brings into being in the midst and out of the midst of the old covenant people a *new* covenant people, a new Israel, to be what the old Israel had been called, but had failed, to be (except in the prayers and hopes of a remnant of elect souls) : namely, the servant and medium of his redeeming purpose toward mankind—to be "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people," that they might "declare the wonderful deeds of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:9; cf. also Exod. 19:5-6). This new divine initiative and its decisive significance are emphasized in the sharpest possible way by the break in the Bible between the Old and New Testaments. "Testament" means "covenant," so that the Old Testament should in strictness be called the scriptures of (that is, the writings and records concerning) the old covenant, and the New Testament should be called the scriptures of (that is, the writings and records concerning) the new covenant.

Here, it may be repeated, is a new and even more deep-going continuity-discontinuity. Let us develop each side of the antithesis in turn.

First, the continuity: That the word "testament" or "covenant" is used of both main sections of the Bible indicates the continuity of the one with the other. It indicates that the story runs on, that the Bible throughout is concerned with essentially the same community —the covenant community, constituted as such by the redeeming purpose of God, conscious of itself as set apart in the midst of mankind, though otherwise continuous with it. This gives the Bible, despite the multiplicity and variety of its contents, and above all, despite the break between the Old and New Testaments, a singular and indiscerptible unity. The New Testament writings do indeed set forth the church as the distinctively *new* Israel of God, the people of the *new* covenant, but if the main emphasis is on the word "new," that is because the unbroken continuity with what has gone before, which is implicit in the words "Israel" and "covenant," is not felt to need any emphasis. Unostentatiously and without discussion, the writers assume themselves heir to the "commonwealth of Israel" and "the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:12).[1] The church, the new Israel, is not a substitute for the old covenant community, brought in, as it were, from elsewhere; rather it springs from the loins of the old community. It is its true heir; it carries, so to speak, its heredity; it is the evidence not of its having ceased to be, but of its unbroken and unbreakable persistence. It is all this because the divine purpose and call which laid hold of Israel in the beginning, and constituted it the covenant people for the salvation of mankind, still grasps it, only now under the form of the church.[2] In what then does this "newness" consist?

This brings us to the second point, the discontinuity: the "newness" of the new covenant community, according to the New Testament, is radical and manifests itself in the following main ways:

(*a*) It manifests itself in *the way in which the covenant community is established and maintained in its relationship to God.* As the New Testament writers look back on the previous history of the covenant people, they see a dense shadow lying across it—the shadow of men's sinful disobedience to God and consequent alienation from him. They see, of course, other things as well: as we have said, they assume themselves heirs to the hopes and promises of what they recognize to be a unique and glorious past, a past which has prepared the way for the coming of the Savior. But the unsolved problem of sin stands out in somber relief, for it is because of sin that the covenant people has failed to be the effective servant of the divine purpose in the world. In the new covenant relationship this problem is solved, the shadow removed, not indeed by the members of the new community being made sinless, but by their being put *as sinners* into an entirely new relationship to God in respect of their sin. This is brought about by God's new action in Christ. God reconciles sinful men to himself, makes them "at one" with himself through Christ, and supremely through his death at Calvary; and the new covenant community consists of men and women who are thus reconciled to him. But this is not all. The New Testament faith, as has already been said, is that Christ is the risen, living, and ever-present Lord of the new covenant community; as such he is, through the Holy Spirit, ever operative in the hearts and lives of its members. The new community lives and moves and has its being in Christ, its divine Savior and Lord, in a way that the old covenant community never lived and moved and had its being in the prophets through whom the divine word came to it. The word of God, formerly uttered by a person, has now become the living, saving person himself. (See p. 29 on the use of the phrase "the word of God" and on its application to Christ.) This is indeed a new sort of covenant, constituting a new covenant people. There is still a further point: while the new relationship to God is a community relationship, it is also a relationship of an intensely individual and personal kind between each member and God through the Savior. Repentance, forgiveness, faith, growth in Christian character, all these spring out of the living encounter with God in Christ within the innermost places of each man's heart; nevertheless—it must be reiterated at once—even as individual transactions with God they become possible only because the word of the gospel meets the believer through the new covenant community and calls him to and establishes him in its fellowship. The New Testament is at one and the same time the most individualistic and the most community-conscious book in the world, which is some evidence perhaps of the richness and adequacy of the truth it contains. (Most of this theme is contained in two key passages of scripture: Jer. 31:31-34, where the new covenant relationship is promised and its nature defined; I Cor. 11:25—see also Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20—where the establishment of the

[1] It is important to note that among the promises was the promise of a *new* covenant with Israel, so that the very newness of the church constituted a significant element in its unity and continuity with what had gone before. See Jer. 31:31-32.

[2] See C. H. Dodd, *The Bible Today* (Cambridge: University Press, 1946), ch. i.

new covenant is associated through the Last Supper with the death of Christ and the forgiveness of sins.)

(*b*) The newness manifests itself in *the scope of the covenant community.* It is no longer a community whose membership is defined in any sense whatever in terms of race or nation; it is now defined in terms only of a man's—that is, any man's—relationship to God through Christ. It is, therefore, in principle a universal society in which every social and national boundary or cleavage is broken through. It is perhaps difficult for those reared in the Christian tradition to realize how radically new this universalism was. There are, to be sure, a number of striking utterances in the Old Testament concerning the universal mission of Israel: she is called to be the agent of the divine purpose in history toward all mankind, and through her the nations of the earth will be brought to the true knowledge and worship of the Most High.[3] But the Old Testament never succeeded in universalizing the notion of the covenant community itself. That remained essentially bound up with Jewish national feeling, with the inevitable result—since national feeling, especially under the stress of national misfortune, is one of the most powerful to which men are subject —that the universalistic elements in the prophetic teaching were almost completely overridden.[4] That the church of the New Testament broke away from this narrow nationalism, while at the same time defining itself in covenant terms and exulting in its continuity with the people of the old covenant, is a most remarkable thing, and is explicable only as the result of the impact of the transcendent personality of Jesus Christ.

(*c*) The newness manifests itself in *the finality of the covenant community.* Throughout the New Testament the conviction rules that the church is something final, conclusive, in the working out of God's purpose in the world through the covenant community. The old covenant was succeeded by the new covenant in Christ, but the latter cannot be succeeded by one still newer, and so itself in course of time become old—it is "once for all." A full explication of the finality of Christianity, such as would exclude the many possible misinterpretations of it, is beyond the scope of this article; it is sufficient to point out three things:

First, finality is necessarily involved in the New Testament view of the person and work of Christ. The categories applied to him cannot be used of one concerning whom the possibility can be even theoretically entertained that he might be superseded.

Second, the finality is not a completed finality. This has the sound of self-contradiction, but it does no more than express the conviction which runs throughout the New Testament, that God's action in history through Christ is not yet a completed action. It has assuredly begun in what is a radically new initiative, but the consummation of it in the fully realized kingdom of God is yet to be, "according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:9-10).

Third, the finality lies in the fact that the new covenant fulfills the old covenant. It is important in this context to give the notion of fulfillment its proper meaning. It might be taken to mean simply that under the old covenant the Jews developed certain religious longings and aspirations which were never fully satisfied, but which under the new covenant were fully satisfied. Or it might be taken to mean that in course of time certain religious and theological problems or tensions emerged in the old covenant period which were not then resolved, but which were later resolved by the coming of Christ. Both these thoughts are valid and important aspects of the full notion of fulfillment as applied to the work of Christ (see p. 27). But they do not express the distinctive New Testament idea of Christ as fulfillment which is here in mind. It might be said that taken by themselves they are too anthropocentric. The primary emphasis of the New Testament is much more theocentric: that is to say, the emphasis is not so much on Christ as meeting the unsatisfied aspirations, or resolving the outstanding problems, of religious men, as on Christ fulfilling God's purpose. He is God's fulfillment before he is man's. God had planned and intended from the beginning to come in Christ; his dealings with the old covenant people from the call of Abraham onward were in pursuit of that plan and intention; the plan and intention were fulfilled when "in the fullness of time" he did in fact come in Christ. In all his dealings with the covenant people God, so to say, had Christ in mind. Christ came and died and rose again "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). "He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times"

[3] The relevant passages may be found conveniently brought together in H. H. Rowley, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: The Carey Press, 1945).

[4] See C. R. North, *The Old Testament Interpretation of History* (London: The Epworth Press, 1946), p. 178: "The Jews were unable to shake themselves entirely free from the principle of nationalism in religion. Even Jeremiah, for all his New Covenant oracle, did not succeed in doing that. He conceived of the future kingdom of God as somehow bound up with the restoration of His own people."

(I Pet. 1:20). In other words, there comes to expression in the New Testament idea of Christ as fulfillment the characteristic biblical thought of God as purposively active in history, and above all in the history of the covenant people. It is this that lies behind the frequent application by the New Testament writers to Christ's advent and life and death of such phrases as "according to the scriptures" or "spoken of by the prophets" or "according to the promises." There is no hint in such phrases, it is superfluous to say, of a fatalistic or mechanical necessity. Nor is there any suggestion that the Old Testament writings thus referred to resulted from some occult gift of clairvoyance in those who wrote them. The controlling thought in such phrases is, once again, the thought of God actively at work in history, and more particularly of his making his mind and purpose known, in some way and in some degree, to prophetic souls. This making known is indeed part of the working out of his purpose, for the work and witness of the prophets are part and parcel of the historic process itself. The interpretation of events that they proclaim in the name of God is itself a creative event. The phrase "in some way and in some degree" has been used because the New Testament writers offer no information as to how or to what extent the divine purpose was made known; this is because their emphasis is primarily on the fact of the divine activity in the history of the covenant people and in the witness of the prophets, preparing the way for Christ, and only secondarily on the human agents whom he chose to speak to and to use "at sundry times and in divers manners" (Heb. 1:1).

C. Continuity-Discontinuity in the Person of Christ.—What, then, is the source and ground of this radical newness in the covenant relationship which constitutes the church the new Israel of God? The answer which the New Testament gives to this question is implicit in what has just been said: the newness derives from the radical, the incommensurable, newness of Jesus Christ. The New Testament unequivocally teaches that—to repeat the words used at the beginning of this article—God himself came, and comes, in Jesus Christ in a saving self-giving and self-disclosure which are unique, final, adequate, and indispensable. The point, however, which should be emphasized here is that there is in the New Testament the clearest testimony to both the continuity and the discontinuity, both the "in and through" aspect and the "into" aspect, of the person of Christ. It is here that the continuity-discontinuity theme of the Bible reaches its profoundest depth, and at the same time its central point —that which holds together and gives a unitary meaning to the whole biblical history.

On the one hand, Jesus Christ is emphatically and unreservedly set forth as a fully human and historic individual. He is a Jew, his whole being and life rooted in, fashioned, and conditioned by the history and tradition, the distinctive religious, moral, cultural character of the Jewish people, including in this, above all, its consciousness of being called of God to a special place in his purpose. And even as the life of the Jewish community was conditioned by the wider secular events and circumstances of the time, particularly those connected with the imperial activities of Rome, so also was his life. Much of his teaching can only be fully comprehended when it is taken in the context of the Roman occupying power and of the relation of the Jews to it; his death is brought about by the co-operation of the Jewish and Roman authorities. There is a wealth of meaning in the fact that Luke dates the beginning of the active ministry of Jesus with the words "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests" (Luke 3:1-2).

On the other hand, with equal emphasis Jesus Christ is set forth as being not merely historic and human: his person and work cannot be comprehended in their essential nature simply in terms of the history of the old covenant people and of the interplay of this with the wider history of mankind. He is not even set forth as the last and greatest of the great prophets with whom had been so closely bound up, in the past, God's dealings with Israel. On the contrary, he is presented throughout as one who, by virtue of his unique and mysterious office as the Messiah, is the redeeming God himself in action to set up his kingdom, in a way for which there is, and in the nature of the case can be, no parallel. In accordance with this he is made the object of religious devotion, of utter faith and obedience, such as the writers would normally direct only to God himself.

It is hardly necessary to say that the New Testament makes no attempt to work out this paradoxical faith concerning the Jewish and human "continuity" and the divine "discontinuity" of Christ into a theoretical doctrine of his person; the deep, underlying theological problems are not raised, for example, how this religious devotion to Christ and a strict monotheism are to be reconciled. There is little in the New Testament to suggest the christological doctrines which were later wrought out in the

discussions of the Greek fathers and are enshrined in the Nicene and Chalcedonian formulas. Indeed, it is perhaps a trifle misleading to describe the New Testament belief concerning Christ as a doctrine of the Incarnation, unless the word "Incarnation" is carefully interpreted to mean that Christ in his divine-earthly life was veritably a man in the wholeness of a man's being as an embodied and historic person—which was the sense in which the word was used at the beginning of this article and the sense which the phrase "became flesh" bears in the first chapter of the Fourth Gospel (John 1:13). Apart from such careful use, the word "Incarnation" is perhaps a little apt, for etymological reasons, to suggest the underlying dualism of Greek thought, with its readiness to think of the Incarnation as the ingress of a divine principle into a mortal envelope of flesh essentially alien to it. Nothing could be farther from the thought of the New Testament than that. We could keep much nearer to the New Testament thought if we had an abstract noun in English corresponding to the Greek word ἐνανθρώπησις, or if we could coin a word and speak of the divine "inhumanization" or even "inhistorization," rather than of the Incarnation.

The purpose of the first main section of this article should be now evident: to show that the central Christian affirmation of the Incarnation, with its insistence that the divine action in Christ is both "in and through" and "into" history, both continuous and discontinuous with history, is intimately and indissolubly bound up with the whole distinctive content and structure of the Bible. Normal or typical Christianity is thus seen to be profoundly and organically one with what it has always asserted to be in some sense its standard and norm. By the same argument, the assertion made at the beginning, that the normative relation of the Bible to the faith and life of the church is of the intrinsic or organic kind, is illustrated and reaffirmed. The faith and life of the church as centered in God's unique action in Christ can in fact no more be torn apart from the Bible and remain their distinctive selves than a plant can be torn from the soil and remain a living plant.

The close connection between the central and distinctive Christian affirmation concerning Christ and the view taken of the Scriptures can be illustrated from the early history of the church. Thus it is significant that Marcion, who had strongly Docetist leanings (i.e., emphasized the "into" aspect of the divine action in Christ at the expense of the "in and through" aspect, the divine at the expense of the human), also rejected the Old Testament. On the other hand, the adoptionists (those who emphasized the "in and through" aspect at the expense of the "into," the human at the expense of the divine) find their first representatives among the Ebionites, who had no awareness of the essential newness of the Christian revelation which ultimately found expression in the idea and the compilation of a New Testament. The mission of Jesus was held to be merely to purify and revive the old revelation. Thus Paul of Samosata was acutely characterized by some of the fathers as "neo-Jewish" and "Ebionitic."

Before proceeding, it may be worth while, in order to avoid misunderstanding, to emphasize that in setting forth the biblical conception of the church as the new Israel, the new covenant people, we have inevitably thought of the church in terms of its ideal as this is defined by God's intention and purpose toward it and toward mankind through Christ. That is to say, we have inevitably thought in terms of the true church, which does not necessarily coincide exactly with this or that institution in history which has in fact called itself a church or the church. There are difficult problems here with which every Christian thinker is familiar, but the line of thought which has been pursued is not really affected by them. We must believe that somewhere within the empirical and institutional churches the true church of God is always in being; and the thesis of this article is that its essential and distinctive nature, purpose, and message, and particularly the relation of these to its own acknowledged norm in the Bible, can be rightly comprehended only on the basis of what has already been said above, and along the lines of thought which we now go on to pursue.

III. The Normative Function of the Bible Within the Church

This central section of the inquiry can be begun with the statement made in connection with the phrase "and comes," namely, that the creative and constitutive principle of the church is the living Christ himself, who in all things rules and directs its faith and life through the Holy Spirit (see p. 7).

This statement clearly involves that Christ is the final and absolute authority for the faith and life of the church, and therefore for the faith and life of every individual member. To say this does not in any way depart from the truth that God is the sole absolute authority for men, but rather expresses it in its specifically Christian form; for, as we have seen, it is precisely the distinctive Christian affirmation that Christ is the personal self-manifestation of God to men. But we have also accepted as the datum of this inquiry that the Bible is in some sense the supreme standard and norm. Obviously our

task is to relate these two statements, which, in their apparent assertion of two finalities, seem at first sight to be contrary. As a matter of fact, as will be seen, it is only by relating them to one another that we can rightly understand in what sense the Bible is the supreme standard and norm, and on what its authority rests. But before going on to this, it is necessary to insist on the importance of being once and for all clear that whatever place may be assigned to the Bible as standard and norm, the truth that Christ, the living Christ speaking through the Holy Spirit, is the supreme authority must not be qualified in any way whatsoever. Only by holding firmly to this truth can the essential and unique quality of the Christian faith and life be preserved. It is a faith and life centered in the person of Christ, apprehended as God himself personally and livingly encountering us and dealing with us. It is not centered in a book, as in Islam; or in a code of behavior, as in Confucianism; or in a system of philosophical or theological truth, as in Vedantic Hinduism; or in a rigidly authoritarian institution such as the Christian church in its Roman form has in large measure become. It is, of course, unhappily true that Christianity has often been set forth in a way that moves far too much in the direction of one or other of these possibilities. Thus it has been presented in a way to give the impression that it is essentially a religion of a book (as when unquestioning acceptance of the inerrancy of the Bible has been made *de fide*);[5] or that it is merely a matter of living according to the ethical teaching of the New Testament, particularly of the Sermon on the Mount, other distinctive New Testament beliefs being relatively unimportant (as in some of the shallower forms of what is called liberal modernism); or that it is a matter of accepting an elaborate scheme of doctrines (as in certain forms of "scholastic" Protestantism); or, in the way already indicated, of submitting to an authoritarian *institution* (as in Roman Catholicism). One may venture to think, however, that the distinctive Christian relationship of personal trust in and obedience to the living Christ has usually lain within these faulty presentations and aberrations, and given them, in spite of themselves, a characteristically Christian vitality and power.

Let us turn now to the problem of the relation of the authority of the Bible to the authority of Christ. The position to be put forth is that we can only understand and justify the supremely normative status of the Bible within the church's life, while at the same time not qualifying in any way Christ's supreme authority, by doing two things. First, we must show that the biblical writings are indispensable to the present, living relationship of Christ to the church—the new covenant community—and its members: in other words, we must show that the normative relation of the Bible to the church is an essential part of the normative relation of the living Christ to it. The special problem here is to see how printed documents from the past can enter into a present, living, personal relationship, particularly in view of the fact that Christ himself left no written records. Second, we must show why nothing else but the Bible thus indispensably participates in the authority of the living Christ. The special problem here is to see why later writings, some of them on the highest level of inspiration, which have been produced as part of the ongoing life of the church throughout the ages, should not enter as indispensably into the living authority of Christ as those which are in the New Testament. The Roman Church maintains that they do, at least in so far as they help to form that ecclesiastical tradition which it expressly puts on a level with scripture as constituting, with the latter, the normative factors governing the authoritative and final pronouncements of the Papacy.[6] If we reject this view, as the Protestant church has always rightly done, we must be clear why we do so, why we give only the biblical writings so unique a place. The two points will be discussed in turn.

A. The Bible as Essential to the Normative Relationship of the Living Christ to the Church. —We can understand the way in which the Bible, as a collection of documents and records from the past, enters indispensably into the present lordship of the living Christ only in the light of our general understanding of why a historic incarnation was necessary at all to God's saving work for men. In other words, the question is fundamentally a theological one, involving our whole doctrine of salvation, which in turn involves the doctrine of God, of man, of sin—in short, of the whole organism of Christian truth. The close connection between our view of the Bible and our view of salvation can be seen by reflecting that to assert the necessity for a historic incarnation is not the same thing as to assert the necessity for trustworthy records

[5] Cf. William Chillingworth's famous dictum, "The Bible alone is the religion of Protestants."

[6] See the decree concerning the canonical Scriptures in "The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent" in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1877), II, 79. In practice, as has often been remarked, the Roman Church sets tradition above scripture as the authoritative source of truth, for scripture is acknowledged to require interpretation and exposition, whereas the teaching of the church concerning their interpretation and exposition is infallible and irreformable (that is, never to be examined in the light of Scripture itself). See "Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council," 1870, *ibid.*, II, 271.

concerning it. One might hold a doctrine of salvation which established or presupposed the necessity for a historic incarnation, but which made superfluous a trustworthy record of the events associated with it: all that would be required on such a view would be credible witness of the bare fact that such incarnation had taken place. There have been doctrines of Christ's saving work of this type. Thus the view which finds expression in the writings of some of the Greek fathers, that the essence of Christ's saving work was that he introduced the divine, incorruptible life into the corrupt and perishing body of humanity, and that our benefiting from that work takes place through participation in the sacraments, while obviously asserting the necessity of the Incarnation, leaves no indispensable place for a collection of records like the Bible. Similarly, certain types of substitutionary views of Christ's saving work (particularly when the view is elaborated into a scheme of soteriological doctrine which every man must believe in order to be saved) do not seem indispensably to involve the sort of records we have in the Bible. The clearest example is once again afforded by the Roman Church, which makes the saving process rest essentially on a man's committing himself to the whole hierarchical and dogmatic system of the church in an act of *fides implicita,* or, as Luther dubbed it, "blind faith." In accordance with this, the Roman Church has not only never given the biblical records an indispensable place in its understanding of the work of Christ, but has also on the whole discouraged its lay members from acquiring knowledge of them.

If, however, we so understand God's saving work through Christ that *it requires as an indispensable element in it the encounter, continually re-enacted, with the concrete individuality of the historic Savior,* then we can see at once why the biblical documents become an indispensable factor in Christ's living relationship to the church. For without the Bible such encounter could not take place. It is obviously not possible fully to elaborate in this article such an account of the saving work of Christ; all that is possible, and indeed all that is necessary for our purpose, is to summarize what has been set forth elsewhere.[7]

The main point is what may be called the "radical personalism" of the Christian message, a personalism which is itself in profoundest harmony with the biblical revelation. According to this radical personalism, the essential nature of man consists in the fact that God has made him a finite person in order that he may enjoy personal fellowship with God and with other finite persons. It is this purpose of God which has brought the process of what we call "history" into being, for history is but another name for the sphere in which finite persons can live freely as persons, the sphere, that is to say, in which their decisions and deeds can have real significance either as co-operative with or as opposed to God's purpose for them and through them. Sin, on account of which God's saving action in Christ is made necessary, has to do with this profound relationship to God which lies at the root of man's whole distinctive nature as a personal being. By the word "sin" we indicate the fact that men have rejected and do reject God's claim upon them for their obedience and trust, and the claim of their fellows upon them for their love, this latter claim being itself part of God's claim. Men are able to make this rejection because in such a personal world there is real freedom; without such freedom to reject claims it would not be a personal world. Because sin has thus to do with the ultimate core and basis of man's distinctively personal life, its effects upon the personality are disastrous and inevitable. The worst and most disabling effect is blindness. Men become increasingly unable to see the truth concerning themselves, to discern the true meaning and direction of their life, and of history generally; they become increasingly unable to know what God's will for them and claim upon them are, and indeed to know that there is a personal God at all, still less one who may be joyfully obeyed and trusted. This is the worst and most disabling effect of sin because it is precisely the prerogative of a *personal* being to walk in freedom according to the light of truth within his own soul. It follows from this that only as the blindness is being continuously healed, only as a man is brought again and again to the light and kept in the light, can the evil of his sin-corrupted existence even begin to be set right. And by the same argument a man cannot cure his own blindness, for to cure it he would first require the capacity to see the truth about God and about himself which his blindness now denies him. If God does not act in a way that is effectively revealing, effectively healing of his blindness, there is no hope.

All this indicates the conditions which the divine saving action in relation to sin, if it was to be effective, had to fulfill. It had to be action which lays bare to men the real nature of the personal—that is, the historical—world, in such a way that their blindness is overcome. Yet this must not be in a way that coerces and overrides their minds, for if it did that it would be false to the real nature of the personal world, and so far from unveiling it, would obscure it. It must be effective, yet not overriding—not over-

[7] Herbert H. Farmer, *God and Men* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1947), chs. iii-iv.

riding, precisely in order to be a truly effective way of dealing with men as persons.

It is difficult, to say the least, to see how a saving disclosure of the truth of the kind just indicated could take any form other than that which Christianity affirms it did in fact take in Christ, the form, that is, of a full and concrete embodiment in a human personal life, lived in the midst of, and confronting men in the midst of, those very events and relationships which constitute their historical existence as persons. Only thus could it deal with the corruption and darkness which sin causes, and only thus could it remain true to the personal world by continuously evoking in men a new inward perception and response. In particular, it was most necessary that it should thus confront us in the midst of and in closest relationship with human existence as corrupted and darkened and embittered by sin, for it is in the midst of human existence as thus corrupted and darkened and embittered that the saved man has to live the new life into which he is called, and for which he is empowered by God. Certainly the mere announcement of general truths or doctrines concerning the nature of God and his purpose for men, or concerning sin, could not effect these things, even if uttered with power and eloquence by some prophetic personality.

To suppose that it could—to suppose that it could be anything more than a merely ameliorative factor—would be to show a very inadequate grasp both of the nature of personality and of the effects of sin upon it. General truths cannot get right inside men, so to speak, and continue to get right inside them, in their sinful state and situation—challenging the will, stirring the deep springs of feeling, breaking up the obstinate resistances of pride and self-justification; general truths cannot pierce the hard crusts of egotism, with its fears and hates and insincerities, and when the crust re-forms, pierce it again, letting in the light and again letting in the light, bringing men again and again to a true and deep penitence, making credible a divine pardon which will neither indulge nor yet be turned aside by their sinfulness. Only truth in unclouded personal embodiment and action, encountering and challenging men in the actual historical situations which are the real stuff of their personal existence, can work real redemption.

It is hardly necessary to point out that what has just been said is not offered as a full statement of the doctrine of our redemption by Christ. It is meant only to set forth a basic general principle which must underlie all our understanding of Christ's saving and sanctifying work, and which is especially relevant to the problem under discussion. The point is that if this general principle is valid, it makes clear why an encounter, continually renewed, with the concrete individuality of the historic Christ is an indispensable factor in his present relationship to the church and to its individual members. Furthermore, it makes clear why a historical record is indispensable also, for without a historical record such an encounter could not take place.

We may reach the same truth from a different angle. We have spoken of the risen and living Christ directing the faith and life of the church and of its members through the Holy Spirit. The significance of this statement, however, both theologically and for the Christian life, depends on the content we give to the term Christ: it depends on whether we can give it a content which differentiates it significantly from the meaning which we attach to the term Holy Spirit. If we mean by the living Christ merely the Spirit of God conceived as working for the realization of certain values vaguely called Christian, or even more vaguely called spiritual, then the proposition that Christ rules through the Holy Spirit becomes the meaningless tautology that the Spirit rules through the Spirit. Futhermore, it becomes all too easy, as experience shows, for the religious life to run out into a sentimental nebulosity, lacking all positive direction and drive, or else, if it achieves positive direction, to do so by becoming an unchecked individualism for whose merely private "hunches" the authority of the Spirit's leading is claimed. But if we mean by Christ as risen and living the same Christ as he who meets us in the pages of the Gospels, with all the sharp personal characterization and definition of concrete historic existence, then to say that Christ rules through the Holy Spirit is to say something highly significant. For on the one hand, the Spirit takes on the character of Christ, and so ceases to be merely a vague divine principle dimly conceived as indwelling human nature and lending sanction to any strong impulsion from the subconscious regions of the personality; and on the other hand, the rule of Christ becomes a truly personal rule operating through the quickened insight of the believer in relation to his personal situation, and not through a merely slavish imitation of or legalistic obedience to the deeds and words of Christ as recorded in the Gospels. The Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us, and the fruits of the Spirit are the virtues of Christ. But this means that there has to be a Christ—a historic Christ—for the Spirit to show us; and that in turn means that there has to be a historical record.

The argument so far might seem only to demonstrate the indispensability of the Gospels

to Christ's saving and ruling presence in the church. But in view of all that has been maintained throughout this article concerning the divine action in Christ, it is clear that the gospel records of the life of the Redeemer could not possibly suffice by themselves to present us with the whole content and full import of that action. To suppose that they could would be to fail to give proper weight to that "in and through" or "continuity" aspect of the divine action which is essential to a truly historic incarnation and revelation. It would also be to display ignorance of the gospel records themselves, for it does not require much study of the Gospels to see that they cannot be understood apart from what went before in the history of the old covenant people, as set before us in the Old Testament, and apart from what came after in the coming into existence of the new covenant community, as set before us in the documents of the New Testament other than the Gospels. Once we grant the necessity of the gospel records to God's dealings with us through Christ, we grant in principle the necessity of more than just those records; we grant the necessity of a whole Bible. At the moment I say no more than "a" whole Bible, for the question of the limits of the canon of scripture is yet to be discussed. But, with that reservation, Luther's dictum stands, "the Bible is the manger in which Christ is laid."

There is, however, a latent assumption in the position which has been laid down which raises serious difficulties, and which therefore we must examine with some care. The assumption is that the Gospels are in fact such records that when we read them we can be sure that we are encountering the actual historic person of whom they claim to give an account. There was a time when this was not felt to be an assumption, for most Christians accepted without any question the doctrine of the inerrancy of the scripture writings. It was believed that God had so operated on the minds of the sacred writers that they did not write down anything which was not strictly accurate in every particular. Whatever was set down in the Gospels actually happened as therein set down. This is no longer a tenable view. It is untenable for two reasons.

The first has to do, once again, with the central Christian assertion of the Incarnation. A completely inerrant record could have been produced only if God had suspended the normal processes of memory and composition in the minds of the writers, and used the latter not as co-operating human persons, but as passive instruments like a pen. But to suppose that such a diminution of the full humanity of the evangelists was necessary to the working out of God's saving purpose in Christ is to deny the full historic humanity of the Savior himself: it is to deny the "in and through" aspect of God's action, and so is a partial denial of the Incarnation. For to assert the full humanity of Christ is to assert the full humanity of all the conditions affecting human life under which and in the midst of which he lived and died, under which he effected, and effects, his saving work. Among such conditions must be included the normal mental processes, both of those who kept company with him and whose memory made the writing of the Gospels possible, and of those who actually wrote the Gospels. This is not to deny that God gave these men guidance and inspiration in their work; it is merely to assert that the guidance and inspiration were given without impairing their full humanity as persons, and without setting up supernatural infallibilities in the midst of mankind—a truth far more honoring to the wisdom and patience of God than a statement like that of the Lutheran theologian Quenstedt to the effect that

> there is in Canonical Scripture no untruth, no falsity, no error, not even in the smallest particular, either in deed or word; but all and everything contained in it is of the highest possible truth, whether it be a matter of Dogma, Morals, History, Chronology, Topography, or Nomenclature. And no ignorance, no lack of thought, no forgetfulness, nor lapse of memory, either can or ought to be attributed to the amanuenses of the Holy Spirit in their recording of the sacred text.[8]

The second reason has to do with the evidence afforded by the Gospels themselves, and calls for fuller treatment. Scholarly research into the Gospels has convincingly shown that they cannot be accepted in detail as they stand. The evidence is clear that they contain inaccuracies, inconsistencies, interpolations, omissions, overstatements, and so forth—in short, precisely the sort of thing that normal mental processes produce. Moreover, it has become clear that the Gospels were written from the angle of an overmastering religious faith in Christ as the Savior sent from God; indeed, they were intended to convey that faith, and they were not composed as biographies in the modern sense. This immediately raises the question whether we must not allow for the possibility that this faith has colored and distorted the historical facts which the Gospels purport to describe. Where facts and interpretations of facts by religious faith are so inextricably bound up together,

[8] Quoted by H. F. D. Sparks, *The Old Testament in the Christian Church* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1944), p. 18.

how can we have any assurance concerning the facts?

Before taking up these two sources of doubt, it will be worth while to digress for a moment to insist that the work of critical scholarship on the Gospels to which reference has just been made has no necessary connection with a certain view which has been characteristic of some schools of liberal thought. This is the view which rejects forthwith some elements in the Gospels (particularly the miraculous elements) on the basis of the alleged inescapable requirements of sound philosophy and sound science. It is not necessary to discuss these alleged inescapable requirements here; it is enough to state that not many competent authorities in this sphere of philosophical and theological thought would now find them anything like so inescapable as they have been asserted by some to be. Rather, it has come to be recognized that the rejection of the miraculous elements in the Gospels on this particular basis was a much too hasty surrender of the biblical and Christian outlook to what has proved to be in large measure merely a prevailing fashion of thought.[9] Nevertheless, to admit, as we must, the *general* possibility and the historical actuality of the "mighty works" of Jesus does not commit us to the acceptance of every *particular* in the gospel account of them. There may be other reasons—as in some cases there certainly are—for rejection, or at least hesitation; reasons which arise out of that close and reverent study of the documents themselves which is demanded from us by the Christian faith in God's saving action "in and through" history. For as T. W. Manson has well said, this faith means "that history takes on a new significance, that the outstanding events in which the voice of God has been heard, or his hand discerned, must be studied with the same passion for accuracy that the scientist gives to a chemical analysis" [10]—though, it may be well to add, not by the same methods or on the same presuppositions. In biblical study we are now in a "postliberal" period, but we can never pass into a "postcritical" one, for the obligation to use every resource of scholarship upon our documents in order to know, so far as we are able, what really did happen, springs, it must be repeated, from the nature of the gospel itself as a gospel of God's action in history.[11]

Let us return now to the two causes of doubt above mentioned concerning the capacity of the Gospels to confront us with the historic person of Jesus.

1. The Trustworthiness of the Gospel Records.—With regard to the first cause of doubt it can be said that the fact that critical scholarship lays bare in the Gospels as they stand a number of inconsistencies, inaccuracies, and so forth, is not able by itself to support the conclusion suggested, namely, that we cannot arrive at assured knowledge of the historical facts. It does not do more than define the task with which reverent critical scholarship is confronted, a hard enough task, to be sure, and one which requires the full and responsible use of all the resources available, but not a task which is foredoomed to failure. On the contrary, if we share the Christian faith about Christ, we are entitled to believe that since it is a task which God has laid upon us through the inevitable developments of scholarship, it is destined to succeed. There is no reason to think that the Holy Spirit does not take the things of Christ and show them to scholars as much as to other believers.[12] In any case, the question of success or failure must not be prejudged: it must be decided by the outcome of the enterprise itself. At this point, however, we are met by the allegation made by some that the outcome is already clear enough, that so soon as we surrender belief in the absolute trustworthiness of the gospel records, and begin to try, by methods of critical research, to establish what "really happened," we find ourselves lost in a quagmire of conflicting suggestions and theories. Every critical scholar, it is said, creates his own picture of Jesus and of the events of his life, selecting his material according to his own fancy, accepting this, rejecting that, explaining away something else, as his own sense of "what must have happened" may dictate. The real Jesus vanishes behind a cloud of conflicting theories and suppositions. The answer to this allegation is simply that it is not true, or in so far as it is true, it is true with the crucial qualification that it is so in the main only of those pictures of Jesus set forth by unbelieving and frequently not very well-equipped critics. Those who for one reason or another desire to retain the old view of the literal inerrancy and absolute trustworthiness of the records are always inclined to exaggerate the extent to which the modern critical study of the Gospels undertaken by Christian scholars has issued only in the multiplication of perplexities. In some ways the exact reverse is true. A fuller, more concrete, more consistent, and historically more credible

[9] See below, p. 26. For a general discussion of miracles in relation to science, see Herbert H. Farmer, *The World and God* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1935).

[10] "The Failure of Liberalism to Interpret the Bible as the Word of God," in *The Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. C. W. Dugmore (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1944), p. 104.

[11] See Dodd, *The Bible Today*, p. 26.

[12] See below, p. 18, about the value for the Christian life of the questions raised by modern research into the Gospels.

portrait of Jesus than has been possible hitherto is now available to us, mainly as the result of the researches of modern scholars. To be sure, there is always a certain fluidity in the picture: it changes as this or that line of inquiry is pursued, this or that hypothesis is put forward, discussed, tested, modified, partially rejected, partially accepted and incorporated in the picture which is being formed; nevertheless, it remains substantially and recognizably the picture of the same transcendent Person. The process might be compared to the changes which pass over a landscape as the clouds float across the sky; the light falls first here, then there, partially obscuring, partially revealing, yet always disclosing the same landscape and its loveliness. In the oft-quoted words of Browning:

> That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
> Or decomposes but to recompose,
> Become my universe that feels and knows.[13]

It may indeed be maintained, as it was years ago by Wilhelm Herrmann, that in so far as historical research raises questions as to what exactly happened in the earthly life of Jesus Christ, it does a real service to the Christian faith. It serves to shake the Christian again and again out of what Herrmann calls "the lazy acquiescence of the natural man," and to guard him against being arrested in some supposedly final resting place in his knowledge of God through Christ. Herrmann writes:

> Historical work on the New Testament . . . destroys certain false props of faith, and that is a great gain. The Christian who imagines that the reliability of the records as historical documents gives certainty to his faith, is duly startled from his false repose by the work of the historian, which ought to make it clear to such a man that the possession of Christianity cannot be obtained so cheaply as he thinks.[14]

Furthermore, the fact that historical research is always raising questions about Jesus Christ continually compels the church and the individual believer to explore afresh the significance of Jesus Christ, continually compels us to ask ourselves whether we are really grasping "what He was, what He stood for, what He said, did and suffered," whether we are really entering into the riches which are offered us in him. A good example of this kind of service is the way in which many at the beginning of the twentieth century, who were inclined to settle down too easily in the liberal view of Jesus as a supreme teacher and exemplar of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man and as such taking his place in the continuous upward "progress" of mankind to better things, were shaken out of that position by the work of scholars such as Johannes Weiss, Albert Schweitzer, and Alfred Loisy, who compelled attention to the dominant place of eschatological belief in the Gospels and in the New Testament generally. In view of all this, it is wrong to regard the tension between Christian faith and historical research as a burden of which, if it were possible, we would rather be relieved. On the contrary, one may think rather that it is of the good providence of God that the Gospels have come down to us in their present form, requiring ever-renewed study and exploration.

2. The Gospels as Faith Documents.—The second source of difficulty proves on examination to be of no greater weight, though it looks at first sight very formidable. The suggestion is that it is impossible for us to encounter the historic Jesus when we read the Gospels, because we have in them an account written from the angle of faith in him: that is to say, we are presented (so it is alleged) not with the facts as such, but with a religious interpretation of them, an interpretation which may well lead in places to distortion and misrepresentation.

In reply to this allegation it is necessary to consider whether there does not lurk behind it an untenable theory of knowledge. The error is to suppose that if we are really to get to know a reality of any sort, then we must somehow get to know it "in and for itself" as bare fact, that is, out of relation to the impression it makes upon us or upon anybody else. Thus—to take an example from another sphere—it is supposed, on this view, that when I look at a rose, the color, fragrance, and beauty of it are merely impressions in my mind which the rose causes, but which are not aspects of its essential being. The impressions are a sort of curtain behind which the real rose—the "rose in itself"—remains hidden. In so far as the real rose is pictured at all, it is pictured as merely a source of energy which, radiating from it, causes vibratory impulses to run up the nerves to the brain cells, where they are transformed into sensory

[13] "Epilogue: Dramatis Personae"; cf. C. H. Dodd, *History and the Gospel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), ch. iii. Having discussed the various groups of material, as reconstructed by form criticism, which have gone to the making of the Gospels, Dodd concludes: "They do set Jesus before us as a clear-cut Figure in word and action. And although the points of view differ, we cannot avoid the impression that it is the same picture that we are seeing from them all" (p. 92). Again: "In the fourth decade of the first century the Christian Church grew up around a central tradition, which, however it is expressed—in preaching, in story, in teaching and in liturgical practice—yields a coherent picture of Jesus Christ, what He was, what He stood for, what He said, did and suffered" (p. 110).

[14] *The Communion of the Christian with God*, tr. J. Sandys Stanton (2nd ed.; London: Williams & Norgate, 1906), pp. 76-77.

and aesthetic impressions. The latter, however, are "no more like the real rose than the knock on the door is like the postman." It is out of place here to discuss this phenomenalist theory of knowledge: its deficiencies have often enough been discussed by the philosophers. It is sufficient to make the obvious point which this theory involves, that we cannot really know any object at all, for obviously we cannot know an object unless it makes some impact upon us; yet on this view, directly it makes such an impact, it goes into hiding, so to speak, behind it. It is much more satisfactory to suppose (as we do normally suppose) that it *is* the real rose which is given to us in its color, shape, scent, and beauty. It is part of the reality of the object we call a rose that it is in a world along with conscious minds which are in rapport with their world through a nervous system, and that when it encounters such minds it offers itself, as it were, to them as color, shape, scent, and beauty. It does not hide behind these, but rather completes itself in them, discloses its reality and significance through them.

Now a similar and equally unsatisfactory theory of knowledge may lie behind the notion we are considering, namely, that since we have in the Gospels a report and interpretation of Jesus and of the events of his life, written down by those who had a profound religious faith concerning him, therefore the real, historic facts are inaccessible to us. We are asked, in effect, to suppose that there was a Jesus "in and for himself" independently of the relations he entered into with other people and the impact he made upon them, and that this, and this alone, was the "real" Jesus. But the truth is that there are no persons "in and for themselves." To be a person in history is to be in relation with other persons, to act and react with them in a continuous interplay of reciprocal meanings, valuations, and interpretations. And the "reality" of a person can in greater or less degree be truly known through these relationships: he discloses himself, gives himself to others, through thus meeting with them. If he cannot be so known, then he cannot be known as a person at all. By the same argument, there are in history no such things as bare facts or events, for history is the sphere of persons in relationship with one another, and events, in so far as they are factors in history, and not merely in impersonal nature, are all events having meaning to, and interpreted by, persons. There is therefore no reason to think that because in the Gospels we are presented with an account of Jesus as he entered into the religious faith of men and women with whom he had the closest personal relationships, that we cannot encounter his historical reality through that account. If we do so suppose, it can only be on grounds which make it impossible to know the world of history at all, either in the past or in the present; and the labors of historians, in so far as they go beyond the merely external cataloguing of dates, become a perpetual chasing of what can never be attained.

It may be said, however, that even if all this is granted, the interpretation of Jesus that lies behind and within the Gospels and the New Testament generally may, for all we know, be false and distortingly imposed upon the facts, so that while it cannot be denied that we *may* know the real Jesus through them, nevertheless we can never be sure that we *do*. The answer to this is to point out that it has never been maintained by the Christian faith that it is possible to know with growingly unassailable conviction the reality of Jesus as he is apprehended by that faith merely by reading and studying the Gospels and the New Testament in a completely detached way, if indeed that is ever possible. It is part of the faith that a transcendent factor is involved, namely, the risen Christ working through the Holy Spirit in the Christian community. All we have been concerned to show is that if it is true, as we have maintained it to be, that it is an essential part of Christ's work for us that we should encounter and continually re-encounter him in his historic self-manifestation, then the difficulty which some feel that we cannot so encounter him because of the nature of the records is not a reasonable one, for it rests on very questionable epistemological presuppositions. It is clear, indeed, that if the Christian faith is valid and Christ does in fact have the transcendent significance claimed for him, then only an account written from the angle of that faith could convey a historically trustworthy impression of him. Furthermore, this impression will not be nullified by the fact that doubtfully accurate statements enter here and there into the account—the total impact of the man Jesus Christ, as he evokes and sustains faith in himself, will still remain unimpaired. On the other hand, even if the Christian faith were false, it would still not follow that because the Gospels are written from the angle of such a mistaken belief, they therefore cannot convey to us a good deal of the real historic quality of Christ's personality and life. For this at least we know for certain, that Jesus Christ was the historic person who evoked that faith. Nothing can alter that remarkable fact and all that has flowed from it; and no study of Jesus Christ which claims to be historically grounded, but which does not earnestly seek to do justice to that fact, is worth consideration. In that fact more than in any other the real Jesus is disclosed. It is at

this point that many studies of Jesus Christ made by skeptical minds fail, and must be judged unscientific. They seek to appraise the story of Jesus without giving due weight to the faith he evoked and to the Christian movement which sprang from him. It may be stated as a definite principle for the study of the Gospels that those reconstructions of the life of Jesus Christ, which, if true, would leave the Christian movement and its faith, as it were, in mid-air, must be false.

This leads to a word on the question of how written records from the past, or rather the reading and exposition of them, can be taken up into, and share in, Christ's present living and ruling relationship to the church.

3. How Written Records Enter into Christ's Living Relationship to the Church.—It might be considered sufficient answer to the question to say, as has already been implied, that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring this about; but to say that and nothing more carries perhaps too much the suggestion of a merely incomprehensible and miraculous tour de force. We get a little light on the matter by looking at it from the angle of the whole Christian faith concerning Christ, even though in the last analysis the way of the Spirit's working must remain a mystery. To look at it from this angle has the further advantage of enabling us to see once again how the significance and authority of the Bible are inseparably bound up with the whole organism of Christian faith and experience, and cannot rightly be understood apart from it.

If the Christian faith concerning Christ is true, then he stands in his historical and human self-manifestation, despite the ever-lengthening interval between that manifestation and those who come after him, in a peculiarly deep relationship of contemporaneousness to all men. This is true in three ways:

In the first place, if the Christian faith concerning him is valid, then the Christ who encounters us in the pages of the New Testament, while he has the concrete individuality of historic personality, is the true universal of human nature. We implicitly recognize this in the way in which we believe it to be possible and desirable for any man to be Christlike without losing his distinctive individuality. This means that Christ is profoundly and uniquely related to the inner being of every man in every age. He is the realization in concrete, historical reality of that norm which God made constitutive of human nature when he created man, and which, though it is frustrated and perverted by sin, can never be entirely destroyed.

In the second place, if the Christian faith concerning him is valid, the Christ who meets us in the pages of the New Testament, being the Incarnation of the very nature and purpose of the personal God, is profoundly and uniquely related to the outward environment of all men, particularly the environment of personal relationships which constitutes what we call history. The ultimate reality with which men have to deal in their present situations and tasks is a personal order, deriving its essential nature and meaning from a personal divine will whose character and direction are manifested fully in the person of Christ. Christ is, as it were, a clear and focused, a "concreted," revelation of that of which the historical existence of men—life as they have every day to live it and meet it—is a clouded and distorted one.

These first two points might be expressed together by saying that Christ is every man's contemporary because the whole of reality, particularly in its relation to the world of persons —both in its inward and its outward manifestations—is Christ-grained, Christ-patterned (John 1:1-18; Col. 1:15-19).

In the third place, if the Christian faith concerning him is valid, Christ is men's contemporary, not merely because he is the expression in concrete individuality of the "essence" of man and of the personal order, but also because he is a living, personal purpose and presence who, through the Holy Spirit, is seeking actively and personally now to encounter men and claim them.

All these aspects of what has been called the contemporaneousness of Christ, which are implicit in the Christian faith concerning him, shed at least a little light on the way in which the Gospels and the New Testament cease to be "dead" and "dated" documents from the past, and become part of the present saving ministry of the Redeemer. It is not a question of leaping over a gap of almost two thousand years out of Britain or the United States of today into first-century Palestine, and sitting at the feet of one who, however impressive, is alien to us. That would be the situation if Jesus were an ordinary man with no unique significance. But it is the Christian faith and experience that he is not an ordinary man: rather, there is incarnate in him the divine will and purpose which lie behind and are at work in every human life and all history.

We may give other expression to the same truth—the truth that Christ's relationship to the Christian man is at one and the same time that of a historical figure in the past depicted in the Gospels and that of a contemporaneous reality deeply related to his inward being and his outward environment—by insisting, as Christianity has always insisted, that Christ's saving work and presence are mediated through the

Christian fellowship, through the new covenant community. The Christian fellowship is a community which is as fully contemporaneous with the believer as are the living men and women who constitute its membership and meet him in day-to-day "I-thou" relationships; but at the same time it is deeply and consciously rooted in and continuous with a past which runs back through the centuries to the historical Christ himself. And both these aspects are inseparably involved in its function as mediating Christ. When I participate in the life of the church, I encounter Christ actively disclosing himself to me now in and through an order of living personal relationships which, despite its faults and failings—nay, in some measure because of its faults and failings, or rather, because of the opportunity for distinctively Christian forbearance and forgiveness which these afford—manifestly bears the mark of his mind and spirit. Christ looks at me, as it were, through the eyes of contemporary men and women in whom he dwells. But I also encounter the historic Christ of long ago; for the church's long past, which goes right back to the first disciples whom he gathered around him in Palestine, and without the explicit consciousness of which it would not be what it is, now becomes my past, my memory, my history.[15] This is why the study and exposition of the Scriptures, particularly the New Testament, within the worshiping fellowship of the church, is something so very different from the study of them by one whose interest is merely in historical or antiquarian research. Such study and exposition are integrally one with the life of the fellowship itself: they illumine and are reciprocally illumined by the whole organism of redeemed personal relationships which the New Testament calls the body of Christ. Perhaps the supreme illustration of these truths is the sacrament of the Last Supper. In the symbolism of this solemn and central rite the church deliberately goes back through the centuries to the Redeemer's earthly life; it obeys his direct injunction spoken by his human lips so many hundreds of years ago; it re-enacts his words and deeds as recorded in the Scriptures, which are read at the rite itself. Nevertheless, it is the faith and experience of the church that the rite is never a mere recalling of the past; it is not mere commemoration. In and through it there is a present communion with the risen and living Lord.

B. Limits of the Canon.—We now turn to the second of the two questions which arise in connection with the understanding of the normative place of the Bible within the church, namely, why the writings which are essential to the present efficacy of Christ's saving and ruling office in the church should be limited to the present contents of the Bible. This is to raise —from the theological angle—the question of the limits of the canon.[16]

So far as the Old Testament is concerned, the question is not a difficult one in principle, nor an important one in practice. In principle, it would be impossible to deny a place in the Old Testament to any writing which was manifestly important as participating in and witnessing to, and so enabling us more fully to grasp, the divine activity in the history of the old covenant people preparing and leading up to the coming of Christ. In practice, the question has no importance because the advent of Christ itself put a final limit to the old covenant history considered as preparatory to that advent. There cannot, therefore, be any more candidates for canonicity, except in the extremely remote contingency of a new manuscript belonging to the Old Testament period being discovered. Though this is an eventuality so improbable as to be hardly worth considering, nevertheless it is clear that if it did happen, the church would have to consider the claim of the writing in question to be included in the canon. The only question which might be considered to remain open is that of the Apocrypha, or rather, of those books in the Apocrypha which help to bridge the gap between the two Testaments, and therefore to give knowledge of the history of the old covenant people immediately prior to the Incarnation itself (e.g., I and II Maccabees). In principle, there is no reason why the churches which now exclude the Apocrypha from the Bible should not at any time reconsider the matter from this angle; but there does not appear to be any reason why they should do so, for the books are in any case available to Christian scholars and thinkers, and none of them is so strong a candidate (though some might well be thought stronger candidates than, say, the Song of Songs or Esther) as to make it worth while to open up what would probably prove a thorny and divisive question.

The question of the limits of the canon is not so easily disposed of in relation to the New Testament. The church as the new covenant community is still going on, so that there is not, as there is in the case of the Old Testament, an inevitable chronological limit to the writings which might be considered to be candidates for canonicity. Why, then, should not later writings

[15] Cf. Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, tr. George Reavey (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), p. 16.

[16] See also articles "The Canon of the Old Testament" (pp. 32-45); "The Canon of the New Testament" (pp. 63-71).

than those at present comprising the New Testament, some of them on a very high level of inspiration, which have been produced as part of the ongoing life of the church throughout the ages, enter as indispensably into the present living relationship of Christ to his people?

To answer this question we must go back once again to the central Christian affirmation of the Incarnation. We must again insist that the divine saving action in Christ was "in and through" as well as "into" history. This "in-and-through-ness" implies that we must include in the scope of that action more than the human person of Christ. We must include in some measure the other human persons and events in immediate relation to which his life, death, and resurrection were wrought out and the new revelation made. If we do not thus widen the scope of the divine action, we must suppose either that it was a matter of chance whether the revelation in Christ would prove effective as a revelation, or that its effectiveness was independent of genuine historical conditions—in other words, that there was no real historic Incarnation at all.

The question is: In what measure must we include the human persons and events in relation to which the life of the Redeemer was wrought out? This raises some formidable problems, as, for example, in what sense must we include the betrayal by Judas and the rejection by the Jerusalem authorities in the divine plan to enter history and save mankind through Christ. Such questions run out into some of the oldest and most intractable problems of philosophical theology, but fortunately there is no need to consider them here. Our interest is simply in God's bringing into existence the new covenant community of saved men and women which should be both the first fruits and the agent of God's saving purpose toward mankind in Christ. Clearly, if this was to be accomplished, it was necessary that the divine action should include the provision of men who would not only keep company with Christ in the actual unfolding of his historic life, death, and resurrection, but also discern the transcendent meaning of these events, and be sent forth to bear witness to it. The calling of such men, and the continual quickening of their minds and hearts to fulfill the calling, we can think of only as the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. As Christ himself said, when Peter confessed that he was the Christ, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). But whatever the mystery of the divine working, the indispensability of these men is obvious. Only in their response does the divine intention and act of revelation complete itself. Had there been no such men,

> the story of Jesus would not have become a revelation to humanity; it would not have become the Word of God. It would have echoed and re-echoed, like a sound which passes unheard in a primeval forest. It would have been like a bridge which had been begun from one side of a river, but which never reached the other side.[17]

So the first apostles come into view as essentially and indispensably involved in the process of a historic incarnation and revelation.

The word "apostle" in New Testament usage is nowhere exactly defined, but it seems clear that in essence it signifies precisely those who were called to play this crucial part in the totality of the divine action in Christ. Perhaps the best description of their function is given in the words: "That which . . . we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life. . . . That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (I John 1:1, 3; cf. I Cor. 9:1, "Am I not an apostle? . . . have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?") There is, however, an important element to be added to this description, the element indicated by the word apostle itself. It is an essential part of the content of the divine revelation, and of its apprehension by those whose eyes saw and whose hands handled the Word of life, that these last should be sent, and be conscious of themselves as sent, to declare it to the world. In the sending of the apostles, and through the sending of the apostles, the purpose of God as manifested in Christ is set forth as a redemptive purpose which is impelled by its essential nature to go out to all mankind. "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). Obvious as this may appear to be, it is of the greatest importance for a right doctrine of redemption and of the church. Christian thought has been too much dominated by what someone has called "the ark" view of salvation, the view, that is, that being saved consists in being rescued from something, whereas it consists just as much in being sent to do something; the "being-sent-to-do" is essentially part of the "being-rescued-from." "Apostolicity" or "being-sent-ness" lies therefore at the very heart of the Christian revelation, springing as it does from what one may perhaps venture to call the "apostolic" activity of God—God in his saving purpose *sends* the Son, and the Son *sends* those who respond to his revelation and call.

The first apostles, then, stand in a distinctive

[17] Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, tr. O. Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), p. 122. My thought at this point is indebted to Brunner.

position within the divine saving revelation in Christ, and in the bringing into existence of the new covenant community. They participate in the historic actuality of the Incarnation, and it is an essential element in the participation that they are sent into the world to bear witness to it. The bearing witness had to be in the first instance oral—the preaching of the gospel—but it is evident that if any of the apostolic circle gave any sort of expression to the message in writing, or was the immediate source or inspiration of such writing, the writing in question would have a special significance and status. It would itself be part of, an immediate deposit of, the great originative historic event itself, and no writing subsequently produced by others could possibly have the same significance and status.

That it was not long before written documents (especially compilations of the incidents and sayings of the Master's life) appeared and were being circulated within the new community is easily understandable; there is no need to try to analyze the process here. And it is as easily understandable that in due course, when the young community moved out into the Greek world, when the many currents of thought in that world began to play upon it, and when at the same time Christian writings—some of them of secondary and doubtful value—began to multiply and gain currency, the need was felt to establish a select body or canon of writings which should express and preserve once and for all, in as pure a form as possible, the story of the originative events of the Savior's life and death and resurrection, and the apostolic testimony concerning them. Such a collection of writings would inevitably be thought of as the completion of the Old Testament canon which was already in use, and would act both as a continuous source and a corrective standard of the church's teaching and life. But the process in its broad outline—much of its detail is obscure—is not only easy to understand; it must be judged to be wholly right and justified. The necessity for authoritative writings of some sort is implicit in the idea of a historic revelation and redemption; without such writings the historic events, along with their crucial significance for men, would have been lost in alien systems of thought, or in embroidered legends, or in theosophical and mystical speculations, if indeed the knowledge of them had not faded away altogether into oblivion, their memory and influence gradually dissipated and dissolved into the unregenerate life of mankind.

Furthermore, it was right instinct which led the church in course of time to formulate the principle that from among the writings which the general mind of the community had already, by the unconscious selection of use, declared to be valuable and worth preserving, only those should be finally admitted to the canon which were apostolic in origin, for as we have seen, the apostles do stand apart: they are within the circle of the divine revelation in Christ, within the process of the Incarnation itself, and any testimony of theirs shares in the same distinctive status. The criterion of apostolicity, however, having been thus justifiably laid down, the task of applying it correctly was no easy one, and the question still remains whether in point of fact it was so applied. This is a large question, involving matters of New Testament scholarship and research into which it is not necessary to enter. But the judgment seems warranted that if we do not identify apostolic origin with direct apostolic authorship, and if we frankly allow for legitimate doubt in respect of some of the writings included in our New Testament (e.g., II Peter, James, Jude, Revelation), the church on the whole decided well. Broadly speaking, the New Testament *is* an apostolic book and therefore shares in the unique status of the apostolic circle in relation to the Incarnation. And in the New Testament we do find ourselves confronting the historic person of the Redeemer in his unique creative and re-creative impact upon men, bringing into existence the new covenant community and sending and empowering it to bear witness to him throughout the world, in a way in which we do not confront him in other early writings of the church, even the most beautiful and helpful. While it is obviously impossible to maintain that the New Testament would not have played a part in the life of the Christian community and in the lives of its individual members if it had included some writings which it does not now include, or had excluded some it now contains, it is beyond question that the New Testament, taken as a whole, has been and is indispensable to God's giving to every new generation the riches which are in Christ. On the principles here laid down, the exact boundaries of the New Testament canon may be held to be debatable, yet the distinctiveness and indispensability of what lies centrally and solidly within those boundaries remain quite clear and undeniable. In a similar way, although the precise limits of the sun when it rides the heavens at noon cannot be discerned with our eyes, there is no doubt in what part of the heaven it is, or that it gives light and warmth and healing to mankind.

The absence of boundaries which we can exactly define and justify might perhaps be looked upon as bearing witness once more to the thoroughgoing historical reality of the revelation which lies at the center of the Christian

faith. It bears witness once more to the "in and through" aspect of it. The same witness is borne by the nature of the writings comprised within the New Testament. None of them, of course, was written for the purpose of finding a place in an authoritative canon defined in accordance with a prior idea as to what such a canon should be and should provide. They were written simply to meet the actual situations which confronted the new faith as it went out into the world in the persons of those who committed themselves to it. As such they are rooted in the historic process itself, even as is the Incarnation with which they are integrally bound up.

IV. The Nature of the Authority of the Bible

This article has maintained that there is only one final and absolute authority for the faith and life of the church, and therefore for the faith and life of the individual members within it: namely, the living Christ speaking through the Holy Spirit. It has sought to show that the reason why the New Testament participates indispensably in the authority of the living Christ is that the faith and witness of the apostolic circle are part of the original act of divine revelation "into" and "in and through" history. If we desire to hear God's word to us in Christ and to be kept from straying again into the darkness from which he came to deliver us, we must always begin with the New Testament and to it we must ever return, for that is but to begin with Christ and to return to him. This commits us to the study of the Old Testament as well, for the coming of Christ, and the bringing into existence of the new covenant community through him, are continuous with the life and history of the old covenant community and cannot be fully comprehended apart from them.

The question to which we now address ourselves is how, in view of all that has been said, the Scriptures are to be used so that their normative function may be rightly exercised.

A. The Authority of the Bible Not Different from That of Christ.—The first thing that has to be said is that the authority of the Bible, being bound up with the authority of the living Christ himself, cannot be a different sort of authority from his. If, then, we ask what sort of authority Christ seeks to exercise over men, the primary appeal must be to the New Testament. This is in accordance with the principles already laid down. In any case, to ascribe to the biblical writings, and particularly to the New Testament, a kind of authority which it is not even hinted that Christ ever claimed for himself, or wanted to claim, would be to put a contrariety at the very sources of our faith.

When we examine the Gospels, we find that at no point did Christ attempt to exercise an external, overriding authority, to whose pronouncements men are required to submit without investigation or criticism, and altogether apart from any inward endorsement and response within their own minds. On the contrary, we meet the exact reverse—a steadfast refusal to do so, and even a deliberate avoidance of any relationship which might perhaps wear that coercive appearance. This characteristic of Christ's life and teaching is so manifest throughout the Gospels that illustration is hardly necessary. It is indeed so characteristic of him, and at the same time so contrary to the natural instincts of men, that it constitutes one of the evidences of the truth of the record. One may refer only to his refusal to provide a sign from heaven, when asked so to do; to his refusal to answer the question on what authority he did "these things," on the ground that his questioners were not sincere; to such sayings as "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," and "Why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?" In John Oman's words:

> The great demonstration of the Christ is just that He never sets Himself, as the absolute external authority of the perfect truth, in opposition to the imperfect authority of the finite and sinful spirit within, but that He has only one appeal, which is to the likeness of God and the teaching of God within. Jesus speaks indeed with authority. He is not as the Scribes. They had authorities, but no authority. They had nothing to speak from direct, and nothing to appeal to direct. Jesus, on the other hand, speaks from man tc man the truth He has seen and to which his hearers cannot be blind, unless they close their eyes. . . . His "I say unto you" did not end inquiry, but begin it. Hear something, it said, which the humble heart will recognise as true, and which the experience of obedience will confirm. And surely herein is the weightiest proof of the perfect truth. It does not dominate and silence the inward voices, but awakes them and makes them its chief witness.[18]

The rest of the New Testament is in harmony with this. In the Acts the apostles are plainly set before us as men of authority in the infant church, yet their authority is not of the magisterial kind working by dictation and coercion, but rather of a kind which works by persuasion through love, as can be seen in the proceedings of the so-called Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15. The same note appears in the epistles of Paul, wherein the writer, though ready to speak with great force and conviction, nevertheless seeks to persuade his readers by argument and exposition, appealing to them to "judge

[18] *Vision and Authority* (new and rev. ed.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928; New York: Harper & Bros., 1929), pp. 107, 112. Used by permission.

for yourselves what I say" (I Cor. 10:15), and commending the truth "to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (II Cor. 4:2).

It follows that it is a most grave disloyalty to Christ, and to the Scripture which he uses to speak to men, to turn the latter into an overriding authority of the extrinsic, "yardstick" sort, whether by ascribing to it a miraculous infallibility whose statements none may question or investigate, or by forcing it—usually by strained exegesis—to stand sponsor for a system of doctrine the acceptance of which is demanded as essential to salvation (as in some types of Protestant orthodoxy), or by using it as a kind of *sortes Vergilianae* or means of divination (as in certain kinds of foolish, intense piety we all know).

By the same argument, we are brought to see what is the right use of the Scripture, and what is true loyalty to it. We betake ourselves to the Scripture as part of our betaking ourselves to the feet of Christ, in the humble faith that in him, and therefore in the Scripture through which he chooses to encounter us, is the final truth for our lives; yet well knowing that only as this truth becomes veritably our truth, the truth which compels our allegiance through our own sincerest thought in relation to our own contemporary world, is Christ's purpose—and therefore the Scripture's purpose—fulfilled in us.

There are, however, two possible objections to this position which must be faced.

First, it is sometimes urged that thus to understand the authority of Scripture is in effect to destroy it altogether; for, it is said, if we accept in the Scripture only what compels our own assent, we are exposed to the danger of an unchecked individualism by which each takes or leaves what his own judgment may dictate. The answer to this is to insist once again on the double truth that Scripture is a norm which is intrinsic to the life of the whole Christian community, and that its normative function is inseparable from the ever-present ministry of the living Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is to the insight of the individual that Christ speaks, but to picture the individual Christian to whom Christ thus speaks as an isolated and self-contained unit shut up within the circle of his own mental processes is to deny in effect the two truths just stated. The Christian man who is being brought by Christ into the new life of reconciliation with God is by that fact incorporated in the new covenant community, and it is only as such that he can properly understand and use the Scriptures. This is itself a continuous and effective check upon eccentric individualism. But in addition, the Christian man, along with the community of which he is part, is under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit. To fear an uncontrolled and destructive individualism is therefore to express an ultimate unbelief in the effectiveness of God's revelation in Christ and in his power to authenticate that revelation to any who seek to open their minds to it. (The truths contained in this paragraph are implicit in Eph. 4:11-16.)

In this connection it is perhaps not without significance that it was during the era when Protestantism generally assumed the literal inerrancy of Scripture, and used it in an externally authoritarian way, that it broke up into a multitude of sects; whereas it has been in more recent times, since biblical scholarship released us from this bondage and gave us the true freedom of the Scripture, that the process has shown a marked tendency to be reversed. The various churches have begun to draw together, and have increasingly discovered a fundamental unity of belief. *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc* is no doubt a precarious argument, but these facts certainly suggest that the view that an authoritarian use of Scripture is necessary to preserve us from a divisive individualism is not borne out by experience.

Second, it may be said that thus to throw the Christian believer back upon his own inward sense of truth is to fail to take account of his actual situation as a weak and sinful man, who, because of his weakness and sinfulness, needs an authoritative guidance and direction transcending his own powers. To adapt some words written elsewhere, the cry for firm and trustworthy direction as to what a man should do and believe springs from the reality of the human situation. Sin is always with us, and sin obscures God. Terrible things happen, and the soul begins to doubt the truth of its highest vision. Testing situations arise when a man is called to stake even his life, and then he begins to waver and to ask for some other assurance than his own inward conviction that the sacrifice he is called upon to make is really worth while. It is these facts of man's spiritual immaturity and spasmodic and erratic growth into the truth, his muddled insights, his shadowed and chaotic life, his sinful failures and disloyalties—everything in his nature which clouds and obscures vision—which evoke the cry for an authority which shall tell him once and for all what he must believe, what he must do, and what he may hope for.[19] If the Scriptures do not answer this cry and meet this need, of what essential value are they to him? But how can they do so if he is thrown back in the end on his own feeble understanding of them?

[19] See Herbert H. Farmer, *The Servant of the Word* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), pp. 83-84.

The answer to this can only be to reaffirm what has already been said, namely, that in Christ God has in fact given the truth in such a form that it is able to reach men even in the darkness and weakness of their sinfulness, without, however, overriding their minds in an impersonally authoritarian way. In this work of Christ, as we have seen, the Scriptures play an instrumental and indispensable part in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. This is fundamentally a matter of faith; but it is also in sufficient measure a matter of proved experience. And this further should be added: The clamor for an authoritarian direction which shall dispel all our doubts and perplexities, exempt us from ever making mistakes, and therefore from learning from them humility and patience and charity for others, relieve us of any necessity to make up our own minds, or to venture on decisions of faith which take us out, like Abraham, into the unknown—such clamor may itself be a manifestation of our unregenerate state, of that anxiety and unbelief which lie somewhere at the heart of sin. Indeed, we may assert that it is such a manifestation, for certainly there is no evidence, either in Scripture or in experience, that that sort of direction is in fact provided for us. Nevertheless, there is always a true succor for our need, even if it is at times not so much the succor of clear vision as of faith renewed, faith in the overshadowing and pardoning love of God from which nothing can separate us, not even our sin, still less our perplexities, immaturities, and mistakes.

B. Some Principles of Discrimination and Interpretation.—When once we have set to one side the infallibility of the Scriptures, and have fully admitted that the Christian believer or theologian in his use of them must be guided in the last resort by his own conviction of truth, we admit in principle the right to set to one side some of the biblical content. But on the other hand, if the Bible is the record of the divine revelation in history, and as such part of the revelation, there must be within it that from which the Christian is not at liberty to depart without gravely imperiling, if not destroying, the notion of an objective historical revelation available in an accessible and relevant form. It is the task of theology, and that which gives its work vitality and value in every new generation, to keep these two things—the critical discrimination of the content of the Bible, and the faith that there is within that content that which is objectively and finally given—in continuous tension with one another.[20] Though this is a tension which can never be completely overcome, some broad principles may be laid down in relation to it on the basis of the general position set forth in this article.

(*a*) It is perhaps hardly necessary to say at this time of day that the Christian is free to reject beliefs concerning the facts of the natural order which find expression in the Bible, but which are contrary to the established and tested findings of competent scientific research. To suppose that we must accept every biblical belief about the facts of nature would be to ignore both the historic character of the Christian revelation and the distinctive content of it: the historic character of it requires, as has been said so often already, that it should be "in and through" human life, that is, at the level of general knowledge and culture obtaining at the time it is made; the content of the revelation, on the other hand, being Christ the redeemer and reconciler, is plainly unaffected by the question whether a man is, say, a medieval Christian believing, with the biblical writers, that the earth is flat, or a modern Christian believing, contrary to the biblical writers, that it is round. No doubt we have always to be on our guard against accepting too easily and uncritically the views of scientists on this or that matter. It is especially necessary to discriminate between experimentally established facts and those theoretical interpretations of facts which at best are never more than probable hypotheses, and which in many cases fall outside the scope of strict science and become essentially philosophical in character. But the obligation to be thus cautious in the interest of truth is a general one and rests upon all men, not merely on the Christian believer, though no doubt the Christian believer has an added incentive to watchfulness because of his concern that the essential truth of the biblical revelation shall not be set to one side by speculations falsely claiming the authority of science. However difficult it may be in some cases to determine the boundary between fully accredited fact, probable hypothesis, and philosophical speculation, particularly when, as is sometimes the case, they are intertwined with one another, the general principle that has been laid down is clear and indubitable, namely, that scriptural views on such matters as natural science is competent to investigate and determine cannot be regarded, on a right view of the Scriptures, as binding.

(*b*) The distinction must be made, whenever appropriate, between the content of the biblical revelation and the symbols through which it is expressed. The latter may belong, like views on the facts of nature, to the culture and thought forms of the time, and we are free, if we will, to set them to one side and find other symbols and forms of expression. It is another of the

[20] Cf. p. 18 regarding the value of the questions raised by the historical criticism of the Bible.

great services of the historical approach to the Bible that it often enables us to recover, in a way that was not possible before, the meaning which a particular form of expression had to those who used it and to those to whom it was addressed. This gives us a firmer grasp of the meaning intended (guarding us against reading into it our own meanings), and at the same time it releases us from bondage to the symbol itself. A notable example of this is the understanding we now have of the symbolism of the book of Jonah, an understanding through which the full force of its teaching has been recovered, releasing us once and for all from the preposterous notion that acceptance of the fish episode as historic fact is somehow part of a sound Christian faith. Another illustration is the understanding we now have of the metaphorical element in such key words of Paul's thought as "justification" (a symbol from the law courts), "adoption" (a symbol from contemporary social custom), and "redemption" (a symbol from the institution of slavery).[21]

(c) That the revelation set forth in the Bible is a developing revelation is implicit in the idea of the New Testament as the fulfillment of the Old and is plainly evident from the content of Scripture itself. This means that we have not merely the right but the duty to discriminate within the scripture records between different levels in the apprehension of God's nature and purpose and to reject the lower levels once and for all in favor of the higher. For only by so doing can we once again be loyal to the notion of a revelation which God has given through the medium of historical events, and to the faith that Christ himself is the final source and norm of all truth in this sphere.[22]

At the same time it must be recognized that it is not always easy to make such a discrimination between lower and higher levels. Difficulty arises for two reasons.

The first is that though we may rightly speak of development in the apprehension of God set forth in the biblical history, nevertheless the development is not a straight linear advance, such as it has sometimes been represented to be by thinkers too much dominated by the uncritical nineteenth-century notion of an inevitable and always mounting progress in human affairs. In the biblical history we do not see depicted the "evolution of religion," but the wrestling of the living God with real human persons, who have wills of their own and are liable to all the perversities of mind and heart which characterize human persons. The earlier is therefore not necessarily on a lower level than the later: there is retrogression as well as progression; and the task of discrimination can never be simply a matter of establishing, if we can, a chronological sequence. Something of direct religious insight and evaluation has also to come into play, enabling us to differentiate between what is essentially sound and of permanent value, even though relatively undeveloped, and what is essentially unsound, even though otherwise on a much higher cultural level. The Bible itself justifies us in making such a differentiation and helps us to make it, for it is an essential part of the witness of the prophetic minds, whose message it preserves, to recall their contemporaries from their perpetual wanderings into error and darkness to, as it were, the highway of God's unfolding disclosure of himself to them through the working out of his purpose in their history. It is indeed part of the value of the Bible to us that it thus mediates the purpose of God to us through a record of men's continual disloyalties to and departures from it, for the same tendencies to stray into error are always present within the human soul. And it is also part of its value that though what we have called the highway of God's revelation of truth is indicated, there is always need for our own insight and discrimination to be brought into play if we are to discern it and find in it a directive for our own life.

The second reason has to do with the ambiguity in the meaning of the term "fulfillment," to which reference was made earlier (see p. 10). When we say that the New Testament fulfills the Old we may mean that it provides answers to certain fundamental religious questions which the Old Testament leaves unanswered or answers unsatisfactorily. Clearly such fulfillment supersedes the Old Testament so far as the *answers* to these questions are concerned, though the Old Testament record in relation to such questions may still have great value in making clear what they are and how they arise, and in warning against those partial or false solutions which the New Testament once and for all sets to one side. C. H. Dodd, in a chapter headed "The New Testament as the Fulfillment of the Old," lists five such fundamental questions.[23]

On the other hand, we may think of the New Testament as fulfilling the Old in such a way that what is fulfilled is not completely set to one side, but, on the contrary, is validated and

[21] Cf. Adolf Deissmann, *Paul*, tr. William E. Wilson (2nd ed.; New York: George H. Doran, 1926), pp. 167 ff.

[22] Christ's "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, . . . but I say unto you" is a clear recognition of different levels in the divine revelation to and through the covenant people. That history must be a development process in order to be a true meeting place between God and men as persons, I have sought to show in my book *The World and God*, p. 300.

[23] *The Authority of the Bible* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1929), pp. 205-23.

its true significance and value preserved and made plain. Moreover, that which is thus fulfilled may in a measure reciprocally illumine and illustrate that which fulfills it. An example will help to make this clear. In Hosea's loyal and tender relationship with his erring wife, and in the new discernment of God's nature and purpose which came to him through that tragic experience, we can see, as we look back on it from the standpoint of the New Testament revelation, both a true likeness to Christ and at least a partial discernment of the truth which was fully disclosed in him. And because of this continuity of truth between the two, because the incomplete and the partial, so far from being abrogated, is taken up and reaffirmed in that which fulfills it, we can even use the story of Hosea (as many a preacher must have done) to illustrate, and by illustrating to illumine, the truth which is in Christ. In a similar way, the faith of Abraham, the sympathetic and pitiful imagination of David, the deep concern of the Mosaic law for the weak and needy, the penitence of the psalmist, the "servant passages" of Isaiah, and much else in the Old Testament, can be understood in a new way in the light of Christ; and they may even help us to apprehend and appropriate that light more fully.

It is along these lines that we can find room in our use of the Old Testament for something that might be called a "typology," but it is obviously a very different typology from that which can be amply illustrated from the history of scriptural interpretation—namely, that which fancifully and ingeniously reads into almost anything in the Old Testament oblique Christian references and meanings, without any regard to what a sound exegesis would show to be the real meaning and intention of the text. The hold which typological and allegorical methods of interpretation (seldom clearly distinguished from one another) have had on the minds of students of Scripture all down the history of the church can be sympathetically regarded as an endeavor to assert the continuity of the Old and New Testaments and the divine unity of Scripture. But it too often rested on what we now see to be (i) an inevitably inadequate exegetical equipment; (ii) a defective sense of the meaning of a historical revelation, which made it seem necessary to find an equal place in the divine revelation for everything in the Old Testament (even for the voluptuous love lyric called the Song of Songs—usually interpreted as an allegory of the relation of Christ to the church); and (iii) a failure to realize that if there is continuity between the Old and New Testaments, there is also a radical discontinuity between them.

(*d*) It is important in discriminating the biblical material to be sure that we are not doing so on the basis of theological or philosophical presuppositions and principles which have been adopted on grounds extraneous to the biblical revelation, which have never been thoroughly scrutinized in the light of that revelation, and which may in fact be contrary to it. Thus—to give some examples—whatever we may make of the difficult question of the miracle stories in the Bible, we must seek to be sure that the position we adopt in regard to it is not based on a general philosophical position which not only starts elsewhere than in the fundamental biblical view of God as personally active in the world he has made, but must also, if logically wrought out, gravely impugn that view. Or again, whatever we may make of the eschatological elements in the New Testament, we must seek to be sure that we are not bringing to the interpretation of them a view of history which owes much more to current notions of evolution and progress than to serious wrestling with the distinctively biblical view of the relation of time and eternity. Or again, we must take care that the very somber view which is taken throughout the Bible of man's status as a sinner before God is not unconsciously toned down and reinterpreted, if not almost completely explained away, on the basis of an optimistic, semipantheistic humanism which, if it is true, really takes the heart out of the distinctive biblical message of man's redemption.

The problem of rightly relating to one another the special interests and problems of philosophy and a theology which is seeking to be true to the Bible is a difficult one, and affords another of those tensions which keep theological work alive. It is not possible to avoid the use of philosophical categories (such as time, eternity, cause, purpose, personality) in building up a systematic theology; moreover, the general cosmological framework into which the Christian theologian, and even preacher, inevitably seeks to fit his Christian convictions is bound to contain elements of which the Bible knows nothing, on which it sheds little direct light, and to which in some measure a philosophical evaluation must be applied if they are to be rightly assessed (as the facts of biological evolution). Nevertheless, the general principle, however difficult to apply, remains clear, namely, that we must be continually interrogating ourselves to see whether we are allowing the Bible in its basic affirmations to be determinative of our thinking, or whether we are making some other view the criterion to which (perhaps unconsciously) we compel all else, including the Bible itself, to submit. The point may be put another way by saying that the principles by which we discriminate the biblical material

must be supplied by the Bible itself, or at least be in fundamental harmony with it, and not be taken over uncritically from elsewhere.[24]

(*e*) A special word may perhaps be said concerning the application to the Gospels and to the New Testament epistles of the principles which we have discussed. The view herein set forth certainly implies that we are not under obligation to accept without question every belief and teaching which is ascribed to Christ, or finds place in the epistles, as though a quotation from these were sufficient to settle every problem, or at least to supply the quite indisputable premise of every argument. Many, however, will feel a particular shrinking from claiming the right to exercise such a discriminatory judgment on the New Testament; it seems like tampering with the very springs of Christian truth. This feeling must certainly be honored to the extent of insisting most strongly that the work of discrimination within the New Testament requires always the greatest care and humility of spirit, and a constant readiness to review one's judgment, lest aught of the new and challenging truth be lost. But if the feeling is allowed to issue in a total prohibition against setting to one side anything in the New Testament, we are in effect back in that wrong view of the authority of Scripture which in fact involves a far greater disloyalty to it than the possible errors against which such a view is alleged to give protection.

The duty and the right to discriminate (always, it may perhaps be well to say again, from within the fellowship of the church and under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit) are perhaps not so difficult to affirm in relation to the epistles as in relation to the Gospels, for the writers of the epistles, great as they were and commandingly unique as is their function in the economy of God's revelation in Christ, were in their degree sinful and fallible men. They were seeking to appropriate and express, in relation to their own historical situations and under a divine guidance which certainly did not confer either infallibility or sinless perfection, the riches given in Christ; and it is obvious that what they say does not provide us with a perfectly harmonious system of thought and belief, though there is, of course, a deep underlying unity. In the Gospels, however, we believe ourselves to encounter the perfect One, the incarnate Son of God. Therefore, if we feel led to question beliefs and teachings ascribed to him, it can never be in such a way as even distantly to hint or imply that we know better than he concerning the deep things of God. It can only be for one or both of two reasons: (i) because we see that the belief in question is not integrally part of the saving truth Christ came to disclose, but is rather part of the mental furniture of any first-century Jew, and so enters indispensably into his historic humanity, or (ii) because we have good reason to think that Christ's teaching has been inadequately or inaccurately reported. An example of (i) might be found in the belief held in demons and demon possession, which Christ apparently shared. Some Christians today reject this belief, and whether we agree with them in this or not, it must be conceded that they are within their rights so to do, provided only that they are prepared to maintain the position that belief in demon possession is not integral to "saving truth," and that the holding of this belief was part of Christ's historic humanity as a first-century Jew. An example of (ii) might be found in some aspects of Christ's reported eschatological teaching. There is evidence to suggest that contemporary apocalyptic ideas and schemes of thought have entered more or less distortingly into the reports given us in the Gospels. The so-called Little Apocalypse of Mark 13, for example, has a symmetry which makes it more than a little dubious whether it can be accepted as it stands and in its entirety as an authentic utterance of Christ.

C. The Bible as the Word of God.—It may well be asked, in view of all that has been said, in what sense, if any, we can properly speak of the Bible as the Word of God. When the Scriptures were regarded as literally inerrant, the writers being passive instruments in God's hands, there was a clear and definite sense in which the Scriptures could be called the Word of God. God wrote the Scriptures, and they were therefore his written Word. But when this view is rejected, and we regard it as both a right and a duty to exercise a discriminatory judgment on the Scriptures, the time-honored phrase, the Word of God, if we continue to use it, obviously calls for fresh exposition and definition. The need becomes the more evident when inquiry reveals that both in the Bible itself and in theological usage the phrase, the Word of God, has had a number of variant though not unrelated meanings.

In the New Testament the concept of the "word" (used *simpliciter*, or in variant phrases such as "Word of God" or "word of the Cross" or "word of the Gospel," etc.) seems to bear the following main meanings: (*a*) the content of the gospel message, as disclosed to mankind by God through Christ, and as witnessed to in the preaching of the apostles—see Mark 4:14-20; Acts 16:6; Rev. 1:2; Acts 15:7; I Cor. 1:18; Phil. 2:16; (*b*) the total truth for life, conduct, and

[24] See Herbert H. Farmer, "Some Reflections on Professor Wieman's New Book," *Journal of Religion*, XXVII (1947), 114.

belief, which is implicit in the gospel proclamation, and which must be accepted if the full riches of the gospel are to be enjoyed—see Col. 1:5; Tit. 1:9; I Pet. 2:8; 3:1; Jas. 1:22; II Cor. 4:2; (*c*) God's active power as manifested in the creation and preservation of the world—see II Pet. 3:5; Heb. 1:3; (*d*) God's activity in salvation, both within the hearts and minds of believers and in the church—see Heb. 4:12; 6:5; Jas. 1:18; Eph. 5:26; Col. 3:16; and finally (*e*)—the distinctively Johannine thought—the expression of God's eternal being in an eternally outgoing activity of creative reason, which creates the world, gives life and understanding to men, and finally becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ—see John 1:1-4, 14; I John 1:1; Rev. 19:13.

It is not difficult to see what is the dominant and unifying thought of all these usages: the Word of God signifies the revealing activity of the living and personal God in creation and toward men, particularly as this is manifest and operative in the gospel—"gospel" being here used as an all-inclusive term to signify (*a*) the content of the gospel, namely, that God himself came in a supreme, saving act of self-giving and self-disclosure in Christ, (*b*) the declaration of the gospel through the preaching and teaching of its primary witnesses, and (*c*) the making of the gospel effective in the hearts and lives of those who believe. To this wealth of meaning—all of it centering in the thought of the revealing activity of God toward men—the symbol of the Word is singularly appropriate; it would be difficult to think of one more compendiously adequate. For the spoken word springs from, is sustained by, and directly expresses the personality of the speaker in his purposeful activity, as nothing else does—his reasoned thought, his desire to unveil his mind, his intention to challenge and draw a response from the mind and will of another person. And speech can be most deeply penetrative in its effects on those who hear it. No doubt the symbol of the Word becomes somewhat strained when it is applied, as in the Johannine literature, to the divine Redeemer himself, for "word" normally signifies the expression and act of personality, not the personality itself. The strain is evidenced by the fact that this usage stands rather apart in the New Testament, and by the fact that many people find the conception of Christ as "the Word of God" (particularly as expounded in John 1) somewhat mystifying. But when once the meaning is grasped, the sense of strain in calling Christ himself the Word is lost in the appropriateness of the symbol along the lines just indicated. Moreover, to call Christ himself the Word of God has this advantage: that it emphasizes the point already insisted on so much, that the supreme source and norm of Christian truth are not words written down and preserved between the covers of a book (important as these are, for the reasons which have been given), but Christ who is the living Word.

It was much later in the history of Christian thought that the tendency arose to equate the Scriptures with the Word of God. The tendency was especially manifest in Protestant circles after the Reformation, though it should be noted that in these circles the phrase the "Word of God" was also used in the New Testament sense indicated above, as a study of the various confessions shows. It is noteworthy that Calvin never identified Scripture with the Word of God. It is broadly true to say that in the Protestant tradition the New Testament usage of the phrase is preserved alongside the increasingly dominant usage of it to indicate the Scriptures as such, the two usages not being very clearly related to one another.

It follows from this brief inquiry that it would not be in the least contrary to Scripture itself but rather in harmony with it, nor would it be contrary to anything essential in the Christian faith, if we ceased altogether to speak of the Scriptures as the Word of God, and if we reserved the phrase, as the New Testament does, for God's great saving act of revelation in Christ and for the gospel message proclaiming it to mankind.

However, the course of thought which has been pursued in this article may perhaps be taken to afford sufficient ground for adhering to what has become the Protestant tradition of speaking of the Bible as the Word of God, though it at the same time defines the sense in which we may do so. For we have maintained that the Scriptures do enter indispensably into that revealing and saving activity of God in the incarnate Redeemer and in the gospel message concerning him, which is what the symbol of the Word of God properly denotes. God, as it were, continually takes the written word of the Bible up into his own living Word, so that it becomes vitally one, though not identical, with it. To speak of the Scriptures as the Word of God, for all the misrepresentation and misuse to which such a usage is admittedly exposed, does at least forbid us to minimize or overlook this vital union and its necessity. Nor, it must be emphasized again, is this indispensable union of the Scriptures with the saving Word of God in Christ and in the gospel message impaired in the least by the fact that we must use our own best knowledge and judgment to interpret them. On the contrary, our freedom to do this is used by God, in his patience and wisdom, to turn the *littera scripta* into a living

encounter with us as persons, whom he must save as persons, if we are to be saved at all.

D. The Bible as the Authoritative Basis of Preaching.—The proclamation of the gospel through preaching has from the beginning been recognized to be an indispensable factor in God's saving activity toward men in Christ. This necessity of preaching arises primarily out of the nature of the gospel itself as a message concerning God's coming into the world in a historic event, a historic Incarnation. An event can become known only by being borne witness to, by being proclaimed, by the story being told. Nobody can come to the knowledge of an event by his own reflection, by excogitation. And if the significance of the event is that in it God comes to encounter men as persons in the challenge and the succor of redeeming love, then another reason for preaching can be seen: namely, that preaching is in a superlative degree the deliberate challenge of one person to another, the encounter of one person with another. God takes the human personal encounter involved in bearing witness to the Event up into his own personal encounter with men through the Event. Here also he makes the human word vitally one, though not identical, with the divine Word. Once again the appropriateness of the symbol "Word" to indicate the total divine activity in Christ toward men becomes apparent.[25]

It follows from this that preaching in its essential idea is not necessarily required to be based upon scriptural texts or passages. All that is required is that it should be, in whatever form is appropriate to the occasion, a bearing witness to, a setting forth of, the Word of the gospel, the Word which is Christ. However, this requirement, when taken along with all that has been said concerning the part played by Scripture in mediating the Word of God, does make the deliberate yoking of the preacher's message to the content of the Scripture indispensable to the effective prosecution of his task, whether or not in fact he starts from, or indeed makes any explicit reference to, a scripture text or passage. The long tradition of the church that preaching shall as a rule be "from the Scriptures" is therefore justified. But, of course, by the same argument it must be genuinely "from the Scriptures." The danger earlier referred to is always present, that even when the preacher does "take a text," he fails really to submit his mind to it, but rather reads into it contemporary conceptions and beliefs, using the scripture words merely as a perch on which his own ideas, like a lot of twittering birds, may alight and preen themselves.

The basing of preaching on Scripture imparts to it a weight and authority which the preacher in himself could not hope to command. This authority, it must be insisted once more, is not of the external, overriding kind; always it makes itself felt through the *testimonium spiritus sancti internum* working through the quickened insight of the hearer. But it is nevertheless a real authority. It derives from the inherent and proved power of the Scriptures to disturb the heart of a man with a renewed sense of sinfulness and need, to challenge him with a sense of the seriousness of the issues which are at stake in human existence, to solemnize him with a sense of the living God coming to him in the majestic person of the Redeemer. It derives too from the fact that Scripture comes to the hearer as an inseparable part of the total life and witness of the Christian church, and so carries with it the authority of the church's agelong experience and testimony. By taking his stand upon the Bible and preaching thence, the preacher utters the prayer, and expresses the faith, that the thin, shallow trickle of his own words will be taken up into the living Word of him, concerning whom it was said that his voice was "as the sound of many waters."

[25] For a further exposition of this see Farmer, *The Servant of the Word.*

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