

# *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*

## **A Textbook of Hermeneutics for Conservative Protestants**

by  
Bernard Ramm, B.D., Ph.D.

### CHAPTER II

#### HISTORICAL SCHOOLS

Few studies are so rewarding in granting insight and perspective into problems as historical studies. This is true of the history of hermeneutics.

Terry has well said:

A knowledge of the history of biblical interpretation is of inestimable value to the student of the Holy Scriptures. It serves to guard against errors and exhibits the activity and efforts of the human mind in its search after truth and in relation to noblest themes. It shows what influences have led to the misunderstanding of God's word, and how acute minds, carried away by a misconception of the nature of the Bible, have sought mystic and manifold meanings in its content.<sup>1</sup>

One of the cardinal mistakes in interpretation is provincialism, i.e., believing that the system in which one has been trained is the *only* system. Another mistake is to assume that certain traditional or familiar interpretations are the only adequate interpretations. Certainly hermeneutics ought to be purged of subjectivism and provincialism, and fewer studies are more capable of doing this than historical studies in interpretation.

Rather than trace the long history of interpretation from Ezra until today, the typical schools of interpretation will be presented, and this will preserve much of the historical element.

#### A. ALLEGORICAL SCHOOLS

##### 1. *Greek Allegorism*

Allegorical interpretation believes that beneath the letter (*rhētē*) or the obvious (*phanera*) is the

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1 M. S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (revised edition), p. 31.

real meaning (*hyponoia*) of the passage.<sup>2</sup> Allegory is defined by some as an extended metaphor. There is the literary allegory which is intentionally constructed by the author to tell a message under historical form. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is such a one and such allegories occur in Scripture too.<sup>3</sup> If the writer states that he is writing an allegory and gives us the cue, or if the cue is very obvious (as in an allegorical political satire), the problem of interpretation is not too difficult. But if we presume that the document has a secret meaning (*hyponoia*) and there are no cues concerning the hidden meaning, interpretation is difficult. In fact, the basic problem is to determine if the passage has such a meaning at all. The further problem arises whether the secret meaning was in the mind of the original writer or something found there by the interpreter. If there are no cues, hints, connections, or other associations which indicate that the record is an allegory, and what the allegory intends to teach, we are on very uncertain grounds.

It may seem strange to list as our first school of interpretation the Greek school, but this is necessary to understand the historical origins of allegorical interpretation. The Greeks were not concerned with Sacred Scripture but with their own writings, and in this sense it is improper to classify them within the context of Biblical interpretation. But in that their allegorical method was adopted by both Jew and Christian they deserve this special attention.

The Greeks had two noble traditions. (i) They had a religious heritage in Homer and Hesiod. Homer's influence seemed to increase with the extension of time rather than diminish. The "Bible" of the Greek was the writings of Homer and Hesiod. To question or to doubt them was an irreligious or atheistic act. (ii) They had an astute philosophical (Thales, *et al.*) and historical tradition (Thucydides and Herodotus), which developed principles of logic, criticism, ethics, religion, and science.

The *religious tradition* had many elements which were fanciful, grotesque, absurd, or immoral. The philosophical and historical tradition could not accept much of the religious tradition as it lay in the written documents. Yet, the hold of Homer and Hesiod was so great, popularly and with the thinkers, that Homer and Hesiod could not be declared worthless and forsaken. How was the tension of the two traditions to be resolved? The problem is at once *apologetic* and *hermeneutical*. It is interesting that the religious apology and the allegorical method of hermeneutics have the same historical root. The tension was relieved by *allegorizing* the religious heritage. The stories of the gods, and the writings of the poets, were not to be taken *literally*. Rather underneath is the secret or real meaning (*hyponoia*). Wolfson, Farrar, Geffcken and Smith have demonstrated how widespread this allegorical method became in Greek thought.

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2 H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, I, 115. For Greek allegorical interpretation see: *Wolfson*, *ibid.*, I, 131-133. J. Geffcken, "Allegory," *Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, I, 327-331. F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, pp. 131-136. H. P. Smith, *Essays in Biblical Interpretation*, Chapter III, "The Triumph of Allegory." K. Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority*, p. 59ff.

3 Terry, *op. cit.*, Part Second, Chapter VII.

The important item to notice here is that this Greek tradition of allegorizing spread to Alexandria where there was a great Jewish population and eventually a large Christian population.

## 2. Jewish Allegorism

The Alexandrian Jew faced a problem similar to his fellow Greek. He was a child of Moses instructed in the law and the rest of a divine revelation. But as he mingled with the cosmopolitan population of Alexandria he soon learned of the Greek literature with its philosophical heritage. Some of these Jews were so impressed that they accepted the teachings of Greek philosophy.

The Greek faced the tension of a religious-poetic-myth tradition and a historical-philosophical tradition. The Jew faced the tension of his own national Sacred Scriptures and the Greek philosophical tradition (especially Plato). How could a Jew cling to both? The solution was identical to the Greek's solution to his problem. In fact, the Jew even got it from the Greek for Farrar writes, "The Alexandrian Jews were not, however, driven to invent this allegorical method for themselves. They found it ready to their hands."<sup>4</sup>

Here is one of the strange fates of history. The allegorical method arose to save the reputation of ancient Greek religious poets. This method of interpretation was adopted by the Alexandrian Greeks for the reasons stated above. Then it was bequeathed to the Christian Church. "By a singular concurrence of circumstances," continues Farrar, "the Homeric studies of pagan philosophers suggested first to the Jews and then, through them, to Christians, a method of Scriptural interpretation before unheard of which remained unshaken for more than fifteen hundred years."<sup>5</sup>

The first writer who seems to have written in this Jewish tradition of allegorism was Aristobulus (160 B.C.). His works exist only through fragments and quotations by other writers. Wolfson,<sup>6</sup> a leading Philonian scholar, believes that Philo actually cites from Aristobulus, thus aligning himself with those who believe that the writings (or oral teachings) of Aristobulus antedate Philo. Aristobulus asserted (i) that Greek philosophy borrowed from the Old Testament, especially from the Law of Moses; and (ii) that by employing the allegorical method the teachings of Greek philosophy could be found in Moses and the prophets.

The outstanding Jewish allegorist was Philo (born about 20 B.C.; died about A.D. 54). He was a thoroughly convinced Jew. To him the Scriptures (primarily in the Septuagint version) were superior to Plato and Greek philosophy. He teaches practically a dictation-theory of inspiration

4 Farrar, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 135. Wolfson (*op. cit.*) qualifies this by noting that the rabbis themselves had commenced to do some allegorizing to make ancient laws relevant to contemporary situations. Feldman (*The Parables and Similes of the Rabbis*) has some important material about the use of allegorical interpretation among the rabbis. P. 3ff. Philo was not influenced at this point only by the Greeks but by his own rabbinic traditions.

6 *Op. cit.*, I, 95.

he so emphasizes the passivity of the prophet. Yet, he had a great fondness for Greek philosophy, especially Plato and Pythagoras. By a most elaborate system of allegorizing he was able to reconcile for himself his loyalty to his Hebrew faith and his love for Greek philosophy.

One scholar notes that Philo actually had about twenty rules which indicated that a given Scripture was to be treated allegorically. Most of his rules however, can be classed under general headings.<sup>7</sup> Philo did not think that the literal meaning was useless, but it represented the immature level of understanding. The literal sense was the body of Scripture, and the allegorical sense its soul. Accordingly the literal was for the immature, and the allegorical for the mature. Nor did Philo believe that the allegorical method denied the reality of the historical events.

There were three canons which dictated to the interpreter that a passage of Scripture was to be allegorically interpreted: (i) If a statement says anything unworthy of God; (ii) if a statement is contradictory with some other statement or in any other way presents us with a difficulty; and (iii) if the record itself is allegorical in nature.

However, these three canons spill over into many sub-canons. (i) *Grammatical* peculiarities are hints that underneath the record is a deeper spiritual truth. (ii) *Stylistic* elements of the passage (synonyms, repetition, etc.) indicate that deeper truth is present. (iii) *Manipulation* of punctuation, words, meaning of words, and new combinations of words can be so done as to extract new and deeper truth from the passage. (iv) Whenever *symbols* are present, we are to understand them figuratively not literally. (v) Spiritual truth may be obtained from *etymologies* of names. (vi) Finally, we have the law of *double-application*. Many natural objects signify spiritual things (heaven means the mind; earth means sensation; a field, revolt, etc.).

Actual examples of this method may be found in the literature. Some of this is sound (major canon iii, and sub-canon iv) for there are allegorical and figurative elements in Scripture. But most of it led to the fantastic and the absurd. For example, Abraham's trek to Palestine is *really* the story of a Stoic philosopher who leaves Chaldea (sensual understanding) and stops at Haran, which means "holes," and signifies the emptiness of knowing things by the holes, that is the senses. When he becomes Abraham he becomes a truly enlightened philosopher. To marry Sarah is to marry abstract wisdom.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. *Christian and Patristic Allegorism*

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7 Special attention to Philo's allegorical system is given by Gilbert, *Interpretation of the Bible*, Chapter II. Farrar, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-157. Briggs, *Biblical Study*, p. 305ff. Wolfson, *op. cit.*, p. 115ff. Jean Daniélou (*Origen*) sets forth the data showing how much Origen was influenced by Philo. Pp. 178-191.

8 The validity of allegorical and typological interpretation will be discussed in the chapter on prophecy.

The allegorical system that arose among the pagan Greeks, copied by the Alexandrian Jews, was next adopted by the Christian church and largely dominated exegesis until the Reformation, with such notable exceptions as the Syrian school of Antioch and the Victorines of the Middle Ages.

The early Christian Fathers had as their Bible the Old Testament in Greek translation. This had been the Bible of Christ and the Apostles judging from their citations of the Old Testament in the New. One of the most basic convictions of the early church was that the Old Testament was a Christian document. C. H. Dodd's work, *According to the Scripture*, is an effort to isolate out these *testimonia* of the New Testament wherein Old Testament Scriptures are used to show the Messianic witness of the Old Testament to Christianity. The New Testament itself is replete with Old Testament citations, allusions, and references. The apologetic of Matthew and Hebrews is directly a proof of the fulfilment of the Old in the New. The allegorical method of interpretation sprang from a proper motive, in spite of the fact that it was usually improper in practice.

The proper motive was the firm belief that the Old Testament was a Christian document. This ground the Church can never surrender without retreating to Marcionism in some revived form. The allegorical method was its primary means of making the Old Testament a Christian document.

It must also be kept in mind that although these writers used the allegorical method to excess, they did unconsciously use the literal method. If we underscore everything they interpret literally (even though they might not spend too much time defending the literal sense of Scripture), we discover how much the literal approach was used in actual practice. In some cases the historical (approximating the literal) is actually made part of their hermeneutical system.

Two things may be said for the allegorizing of the Fathers: (i) They were seeking to make the Old Testament a Christian document. With this judgment the Christian Church has universally agreed. (ii) They did emphasize the truths of the Gospel in their fancies. If they had not done this, they would have become sectarian.

The difficulties with the method are many. (i) There was a lack of a genuine historical sense in exegesis. The historical connections of a passage of Scripture were usually completely ignored. (ii) Their method of citing the Old Testament revealed that they had a very infantile understanding of the progress of revelation. They had the basic understanding that a great shift had taken place from the Old to the New Testament. But citing verses in the Old Testament, in themselves frequently very obscure, as if superior to verses in the New, revealed no understanding of the significance of historical and progressive revelation for hermeneutics. (iii) They considered the Old (especially) and the New Testaments filled with parables, enigmas, and riddles. The allegorical method alone sufficed to bring out the meaning of these parables, enigmas, and riddles. (iv) They confused the allegorical with the typical, and thus blurred the distinction between the legitimate and the improper interpretation of the Old Testament. The "allegorical," the "mystical," the "pneumatic," and the "spiritual," are practically synonymous. (v) They believed that Greek philosophy was in the Old Testament and it was the allegorical method which discovered it. (vi) In that the method is highly arbitrary, it eventually fostered dogmatic interpretation of the Scripture. Fullerton's judgment

against the allegorical method at this point is very sharp:

Instead of adopting a scientific principle of exegesis they introduce Church authority under the guise of Tradition as the norm of interpretation. The movement of thought which we have been following now becomes associated with the great dogmatic consolidations of the second and third centuries that led directly to ecclesiastical absolutism.<sup>9</sup>

The curse of the allegorical method is that it obscures the true meaning of the Word of God and had it not kept the Gospel truth central it would have become cultic and heretical. In fact, this is exactly what happened when the gnostics allegorized the New Testament. The Bible treated allegorically becomes putty in the hand of the exegete. Different doctrinal systems could emerge within the framework of allegorical hermeneutics and no way would exist to determine which were the true. This was precisely one of the problems in refuting the gnostics. The orthodox wished to allegorize the Old Testament, but not the New. The gnostics accused them of inconsistency. The only method of breaking an exegetical stalemate created by the use of the allegorical method is to return to the sober, proper and literal interpretation of the Scriptures. The allegorical method puts a premium on the subjective and the doleful result is the obscuration of the Word of God. To cite Fullerton again:

*When the historical sense of a passage is once abandoned there is wanting any sound regulative principle to govern exegesis. . . . The mystical [allegorical] method of exegesis, is an unscientific and arbitrary method, reduces the Bible to obscure enigmas, undermines the authority of all interpretation, and therefore, when taken by itself, failed to meet the apologetic necessities of the time.*<sup>10</sup>

To present a clearer picture of some of the patristic heremeneutical theory we shall briefly study Clement, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine.

(1). *Clement*. Clement of Alexandria found five possible meanings to a passage of Scripture.<sup>11</sup> (i) The *historical* sense of Scripture, i.e., taking a story in the Old Testament as an actual event in history; (ii) the *doctrinal* sense of Scripture, i.e., the obvious moral, religious, and theological teachings of the Bible; (iii) the *prophetic* sense of Scripture including predictive prophecy and typology; (iv) the *philosophical* sense which follows the Stoics with their cosmic and psychological meaning (which sees meanings in natural objects and historical persons); and (v) a *mystical* sense (deeper moral, spiritual and religious truth symbolized by events or persons).

(2). *Origen*. Patristic scholarship is indebted to Jean Daniélou for a thorough study of Origen in his book entitled Origen. Part II of this work is devoted to "Origen and the Bible."

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9 K. Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority*, p. 81. Italics have been omitted.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 75. Italics are his.

11 R. M. Grant, *The Bible in the Church*, p. 64, in which he summarizes the findings of C. Mondésert, *Clément d'Alexandrie*.

Origen is in the Aristobulus-Philo-Pantaenus-Clement tradition. Daniélou shows how deeply Origen's system was marked by Philo. Origen had an apologetic motivation to be sure. He wanted to escape the crudities of lay people who were literalists to the point of taking everything symbolic or metaphorical or poetic literally. He was motivated to show that the New Testament does have its roots in the Old and so reply to the Jews. He wished to eliminate what were absurdities or contradictions in Scripture and make Scripture acceptable to the philosophically minded. His approach can be summed up as follows:<sup>12</sup>

(i). The *literal meaning* of the Scripture is the preliminary level of Scripture. It is the "body," not the "soul" (moral sense) nor the "spirit" (allegorical sense) of the Bible. The literal sense is the meaning of Scripture for the layman. Actually we perhaps should say "letterism" rather than literalism for reasons we pointed out in the previous paragraph.

Further, the literal sense would leave us in Judaism. If we were to take the Old Testament in a strict literal sense we would believe and practice exactly as the Jews. We escape Judaism by spiritualizing the Old Testament.

Again, the literal in Scripture is the sign of the mysteries and images of things divine. It is to provoke us to a deeper and more spiritual study of the Bible. History, for example, is to be taken symbolically. Origen has a Platonic view of history which he reinterprets by means of Christian theology. The symbolization of history does not deny the actual historicity of the story.

(ii). To understand the Bible *we must have grace given to us by Christ*. Christ is the inner principle of Scripture and only those with the Spirit of Christ can understand Scripture.

(iii). The true exegesis is *the spiritual exegesis of the Bible*. "The Bible is one vast allegory, a tremendous sacrament in which every detail is symbolic," writes Daniélou of Origen's fundamental thesis.<sup>13</sup> The Bible is a spiritual book, and its meaning is found only by spiritualizing it. Even the New Testament has elements in it which cannot be taken literally, and so must be spiritualized. In many cases this means nothing more than that a figure of speech has no literal meaning.

Origen's *spiritual* exegesis is a mixture of the typological and the allegorical. Daniélou knows that the allegorical method was greatly abused, and is not in high regard among scholars. He seeks to rescue Origen from the charge of being an allegorist by insisting that he has basically a typological exegesis. That Origen allegorized Daniélou does not deny. That his theory was much better than his practice he strongly affirms. But he does object to classifying Origen as an allegorist, pure and simple, and then condemning him because he is an allegorist. Daniélou believes that Origen has the correct Christian principle of interpretation, but that Origen poorly practiced it, and that subsequent scholarship misrepresents him.

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12 Origen's hermeneutics is treated in *De Principiis*, Book IV.

13 *Origen*, p. 184. Cf. Grant (*op. cit.*, p. 65ff.) for a less sympathetic treatment of Origen.

(iv). Origen believed that *the Old is the preparation for the New*. This implies two further assertions: (a) If the Old is the preparation of the New, the New is in the Old in a concealed manner, and it is the function of the Christian exegete to bring it to the surface. This is *typological exegesis* and is based on the fundamental harmony of the Old and New Testaments. (b) If the New fulfils the Old, the Old is now superseded. There is continuity and divergence in the relationship between the New and the Old. Continuity means that the New is like the Old and therefore the Old is capable of typological interpretation. There is divergence between the New and the Old, and this means the Old is now out of date.

(3). *Jerome*. Jerome was a great Bible scholar in terms of the scholarship of antiquity. He translated the Bible into Latin (*Latin Vulgate*) which required him to become proficient in Greek and Hebrew. He noticed that the Hebrew Bible did not contain the Apocrypha and suggested its secondary nature and that it ought to be put between the Testaments. This suggestion was not carried out until Luther. Jerome placed great emphasis on the historical and the literal.

He insisted that the literal is not contradictory to the allegorical as the extremists in the Alexandrian school asserted. On the other hand he evaded the *letterism* of the Jews. But in practice he was a typical allegorist even to allegorizing the New Testament.

(4). *Augustine*. Augustine developed a handbook of hermeneutics and homiletics called *De Doctrina Christiana*.<sup>14</sup> One very interesting aspect of this treatment is that *Augustine endeavors to develop a theory of signs*. This is missed by practically all the hermeneutical studies, yet in the light of contemporary philosophy it is most important. Here is a Father of the church that in so many words indicates that a theory of signs is basic to any theory of hermeneutics. Or, Biblical hermeneutics is but a special case of semantics (or semiotic). Augustine speaks of natural objects which are percepts but not signs, e.g., a piece of wood or metal. Next he speaks of things which signify other things. A tree may signify forestry service, a shoe a shoemaker, and an anvil the blacksmith guild. Then there are things whose sole function is to signify other things, i.e., words.

He defines a sign as: "A thing which apart from the impression that it presents to the senses, causes of itself some other thing to enter our thoughts."<sup>15</sup> These signs are conventional or natural. Smoke is a natural sign of fire. Conventional signs "are those which living creatures give to one another."<sup>16</sup> From this he proceeds to discuss sounds and speech; God's method of communication to man through speech; and speech incarnate in the written Scripture. This is typical of the genius of Augustine to have put his finger on a critical point in a discussion which

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14 A new translation of this is: *The Fathers of the Church*. Vol. IV: *The Writings of Saint Augustine*. "Christian Instruction" translated by John J. Gavigan. Besides treatments of Augustine in standard histories of hermeneutics cf. David S. Schaff, "St. Augustine as an Exegete," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (first series), VI, vii-xii.

15 *Christian Instruction*, Bk. II, Ch. 1, paragraph 1.

16 *Ibid.*, II, 2, 3.

sometimes took a millennium or more to realize. It is regrettable that: (i) he did not follow through with complete consistency from his theory of signs to hermeneutics; (ii) that others did not catch any glimmer of light in his remarks about signs; and (iii) that historians of hermeneutics for the most part ignore Augustine's treatment of signs.

Augustine was driven to the allegorical interpretation of Scripture by his own spiritual plight. It was the allegorical interpretation of Scripture by Anselm which illuminated much of the Old Testament to him when he was struggling with the crass literalism of the Manicheans. He justified allegorical interpretation by a gross misinterpretation of 2 Cor. 3:6. He made it mean that the *spiritual* or *allegorical* interpretation was the real meaning of the Bible; the *literal* interpretation kills.<sup>17</sup> For this experimental reason Augustine could hardly part with the allegorical method.

Summing up Augustine's hermeneutics we would say his controlling principles were:

(i). A genuine Christian faith was necessary for the understanding of the Scriptures. The inner spirit of the exegete was as important as his technical equipment.

(ii). Although the literal and historical are not the end of Scripture we must hold them in high regard. Not all of the Bible is allegorical by any means, and much of it is both literal and allegorical. Augustine's great theological works indicate that the literal method was employed far more than he admitted on paper.

(iii). Scripture has more than one meaning and therefore the allegorical method is proper. The supreme test to see whether a passage was allegorical was that of love. If the literal made for dissension, then the passage was to be allegorized. Besides this he had seven other somewhat farfetched rules for allegorizing the Scriptures. He did work on this principle that the Bible had a hidden meaning, and so in his allegorical interpretations he was frequently as fanciful as the rest of the Fathers. However, whatever was allegorized was in theory to be built upon the literal and historical meaning of the text.

(iv). There is significance in Biblical numbers. Augustine regarded the entire world of logic and numbers as eternal truths, and therefore numbers played a special role in human knowledge. If this is so then we can get much truth by an allegorical or symbolic interpretation of numbers in Scripture.

(v). The Old Testament is a Christian document because it is a Christological document. In finding Christ in too many places however he obscured the genuine Christology of the Old Testament.

(vi). The task of the expositor is to get the meaning out of the Bible, not to bring a meaning to it. The

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17 This abuse of this Scripture has continued throughout history and to this hour. Orthodoxy uses it to put criticism in its place ("A spiritual understanding of the Bible gives life but an academic, critical and scholarly study of the Bible kills"). Neo-orthodoxy uses it to rout the orthodox ("Existential interpretation gives life; literal interpretation is the wooden, lifeless letter"). Religious modernism also so used it against orthodoxy. Cults use it to justify their fanciful impositions on Scripture. Cf. *Confessions*, VI, 4, 6 for Augustine's statement.

expositor is to express accurately the thoughts of the writer.

(vii). We must consult the *analogy of faith*, the true orthodox creed, when we interpret. If orthodoxy represents Scripture, then no expositor can make Scripture go contrary to orthodoxy. To this must be added *love*. No man understands Scripture if he is not built up in love to God and man. Love and analogy of faith are apparently the two major controlling principles in his hermeneutics. In truth, love may be a form of spiritual intuition necessary for the deeper apprehension of Scripture.

(viii). No verse is to be studied as a unit in itself. The Bible is not a string of verses like a string of beads, but a web of meaning. Therefore we must note *the context* of the verse; what the Bible says on the same subject somewhere else; and what the orthodox creed states.

(ix). If an interpretation is insecure, nothing in the passage can be made a matter of orthodox faith.

(x). We cannot make the Holy Spirit our substitute for the necessary learning to understand Scripture. The able interpreter must know Hebrew; Greek; geography; natural history; music; chronology; numbers; history; dialectics; natural science; and the ancient philosophers.

(xi). The obscure passage must yield to the clear passage. That is, on a given doctrine we should take our primary guidance from those passages which are clear rather [than] from those which are obscure.

(xii). No Scripture is to be interpreted so as to conflict with any other--the harmony of revelation. But to do this we must *distinguish the times*. Augustine's statement ("Distinguish the times [*tempora* not *saeculae*] and you harmonize the Scriptures") means that we must take into account *progressive revelation*. Polygamy conflicts with monogamy only if we fail to note that revelation progresses. If we are aware of the progressive character of revelation we shall not make Scripture conflict. This is very different from the dispensational interpretation put on these words, which is only possible by taking *tempora* as if it meant *saeculae*.

As magnificent an effort as this appears, it is disheartening to realize how far short in so many instances Augustine came. There is hardly a rule he made which he did not frequently violate. What compensated for this was: (i) the actual usage of the literal understanding of Scripture even though such a principle was not fully developed in his hermeneutical theory; and (ii) his great theological genius which could not help but see the theological grandeur of the Scriptures.

#### 4. *Catholic Allegorism*

It would be over-simplification to assert that the only method of exegesis during the Middle Ages was the allegorical. It would not, however, be an exaggeration to assert that the preponderance of exegetical work was allegorical.<sup>18</sup> To clarify terminology we should note

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18 Besides the general histories of hermeneutics listed at the end of this chapter, material for exegesis in the Middle Ages may be found in Beryl Smalley, *The Study of Bible in the Middle Ages* (second

that the scholastics divided the meaning of the Bible into the literal and the spiritual (i.e., the *spirit* is more central to human personality than the body, so the spiritual meaning of the Bible is the more important one) or the mystical (i.e., it is more refined, subtle, less obvious). Under the spiritual or mystical are the three divisions of (i) allegorical or what passes as a combination of typology and allegorism, (ii) tropological or moral interpretation, and (iii) anagogical or how the church *now* anticipates the church glorified, the eschatological sense.

The Catholic Church in imitation of the Fathers has maintained the validity of the allegorical method or the spiritual method of interpretation. We shall not try to survey the history of interpretation during the Middle Ages but will present the Catholic theory which eventually emerged from it.

In studying Catholic pronouncements on hermeneutics it is very clear that the advancement of Biblical studies by Protestants has had its telling influence on the very spirit of the Catholic approach. (i) Catholic scholars admit the extremes that allegorism was carried to by some of the Fathers and some of the Scholastics. There is no stout defense of these exaggerations in Catholic hermeneutical literature except from real patristic sentimentalists. (ii) The importance and primacy of the literal meaning of Scripture is extolled. No longer is the literal declared to be for spiritual infants or to be the mere surface of the Scripture. The position of the Alexandrians at this point especially is repudiated.

(1). Catholic scholars accept the Latin Vulgate as the authentic version for *public lectures, disputations, sermons, and expositions*.<sup>19</sup> This includes the apocryphal books as listed by the Council of Trent (Fourth Session). This puts the Catholic Church in odd position because the Hebrews wrote their Bible in Hebrew and Aramaic and the Apostles in Greek. This is common information to all Biblical scholars. It thus appears rather unusual for a translation to be given authentic status when the document may be had in the original languages. If the entire dogmatic structure of Catholic theology is based on the Latin it could be disconcerting to find it at variance with Greek and Hebrew.

One Catholic scholar states very directly the implied essence of the Catholic position: "The Greek and Hebrew texts are of the greatest value, as means in order to arrive at the genuine sense and full force of many passages in the Latin Vulgate."<sup>20</sup> Another scholar, however, has tried to use the Greek and Hebrew as his more basic sources in translating the Bible, and has been charged with duplicity.<sup>21</sup> This is a surface admission of the authenticity of the Latin but a tacit admission of the priority of the Hebrew and Greek.

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edition, 1952). We shall note later the literalistic Victorines.

19 So decreed by the *Council of Trent*, Session IV. Also repeated in the *Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council*.

20 Humphry (a Jesuit) quoted by Salmon, *Apocrypha*, I, xxix (*Holy Bible Commentary*). Note that this is exactly the opposite of the Protestant position. The Protestant uses the Latin to help him understand the inspired Hebrew and Greek. Humphry says the Greek and Hebrew help in understanding the authentic Latin.

21 Cf. the scholarly review of Knox's (Roman Catholic) translation of the Bible in the *London Times* (Literary Supplement, December 23, 1949, p. 834).

(2). The Catholic interpreter obediently accepts whatever the Catholic Church has *specifically* said about matters of Biblical Introduction, and authorship of the books of the Bible.

(3). The Catholic interpreter accepts all verses which the Church has officially interpreted in the sense in which they have been interpreted. All told not more than twenty such verses have been officially interpreted. Further, in some instances the Church has indicated what meaning a verse cannot have. However, the number is actually much more than this because many of the official documents of the Church involve certain definite interpretations of certain verses. The official definition of the meaning of a verse is not usually made unless the verse has become controversial and the interpretation of it must be made.

(4). The literal and historical interpretation of Scripture is the foundation of the study of the Bible.<sup>22</sup> Maas and Fuller both make a strong point that Catholic exegesis considers itself built on the substantial ground of the literal interpretation and historical interpretation of Scripture. This is not exactly new in their tradition. Aquinas emphasized the importance of the literal and even stated that no doctrine could be erected on spiritual exegesis. But making literal and historical interpretation such virtues is certainly due to the impact of Protestant Biblical scholarship.

(5). The Scriptures do possess a spiritual or mystical meaning which is beyond the literal. Thomas Aquinas taught very clearly that Scripture may have more than one sense because the author of Scripture is God.<sup>23</sup> God was able to inspire men in such a way that they wrote not only literal and historical truth but spiritual and figurative truth. Therefore, Thomas concludes, it is not proper to limit the meaning of Scripture to the literal sense.

This spiritual or mystical interpretation which is an outgrowth of the allegorizing of the early church became codified during the Middle Ages under three rules. (i) A passage may have an *allegorical* meaning. This refers to its future or prophetic meaning and includes allegorical and typological interpretation. In view of the abuses of the allegorical method many contemporary Catholics prefer the word *typological* to *allegorical*. (ii) A passage may have an *anagogical* (eschatological) meaning. It may "lead up" to the Church Triumphant. Thus the Church militant has features about it which anticipate the Church in glory. (iii) A passage may have a *tropological* meaning, i.e., teach a *tropos*, a way of life. This is the moral significance of the

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22 Cf. A. J. Maas, "Exegesis," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*; V, 692-706, and "Hermeneutics," *Ibid.*, VII, 271-276. R. C. Fuller, "The Interpretation of Scripture," *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, pp. 53-60. Maas calls the First Law of hermeneutics to be the grammatical, philological, contextual and historical study of a passage of Scripture.

23 *Summa Theologica*, I, 1, 10, "Whether in Holy Scripture a Word may have Several Senses." Cf. "The author of Holy Scripture is God, in Whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man also can do) but also by things themselves. . . . That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal and presupposes it."

passage.

This spiritual meaning must be built upon the literal and historical meaning. Modern Catholic scholarship is making a serious effort to take the arbitrariness out of spiritual and allegorical exegesis. It is fully aware of the sordid history of fanciful allegorical interpretation. The Protestant scholar too must face the typical and predictive in the Old Testament, and so he likewise has a problem. It is the actual *practice* which reveals a very fundamental cleavage. When the manna in the wilderness, the passover of the exodus, the bread and wine of Melchisedec, and the diet of meal and oil by Elijah are made types of the Eucharist, the Protestant objects. When Newman argues that the change of the Old Testament worship system as demanded by the New does not make a profound alteration from the material to the spiritual, again the Protestant objects.<sup>24</sup> Reading back into the Old Testament the sacramental and clerical system of Catholicism appears as simple *eisegesis* (reading into) and not *exegesis* (reading out of). It was this necessity of making all the Bible *sacramental* and *sacerdotal* which was one of the reasons Newman wrote that "it may be almost laid down as a historical fact, that the mystical [allegorical] interpretation and orthodoxy will stand or fall together."<sup>25</sup>

(6). The Catholic Church is the official interpreter of Scripture. There are several important considerations here. First, the Church is the *custodian* of Scripture. The Bible was not given to the world but deposited in the Church. Hence one of the rights of the Church is to interpret the Scriptures. Another consideration is that the Catholics believe that Christianity is *The Deposit of Faith* deposited in the Catholic Church in an oral and written form. The usual Protestant notion that the Catholics have the Bible to which they add tradition is not quite accurate. There is the Original Tradition, or Revelation, or Deposit of Faith which is transmitted through the centuries in an oral form (tradition), and a written form (Bible). The final consideration is that the written form is obscure and needs an official interpreter. The average man is not competent to interpret the Scripture because it is a task beyond his abilities. For example a Catholic writes that "Every biblical scholar knows perfectly well that there is no book in the world more difficult than the Bible. It is a sheer absurdity to say that ordinary people, with no knowledge of Hebrew or Greek or archaeology or of the writings of the Fathers of the Church, are competent to interpret it."<sup>26</sup>

(i). The Church which bears the true Tradition (oral and written) is thereby the official interpreter of the Scriptures. Only that Church which bears the mark of apostolicity can know the real meaning of the written tradition.

(ii). No passage of Scripture can be interpreted to conflict with the Roman Catholic doctrinal system. "Any meaning [of a passage of Scripture] . . . not in harmony with the fact of inspiration and the spirit

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24 Jaak Seynaeve, *Cardinal Newman's Doctrine of Holy Scripture*, Part II, Newman's Hermeneutics. Pp. 197-396. Cf. pp. 260-261.

25 J. H. Newman, *An Essay on Development of Christian Doctrine*. P. 344.

26 M. Sheehan, *Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine*, I, 149, fn. 13.

of the Church's interpretation *cannot be the true sense of Scripture*," writes a Catholic author.<sup>27</sup> This was also maintained by the Council of Trent (Fourth Session) in which not only the Church's right as interpreter was set forth, but individual interpretation condemned. Sometimes this is called interpretation by *the analogy of faith*.

Councils, commissions, and congregations do not have the virtue of infallibility, but their interpretations of Scripture enjoy a high authority.

(7). The Fathers are to be a guide in interpretation according to three principles:

(i). The interpretation must be solely about *faith and morals*. Statements about natural or scientific matters, or historical matters are not binding.

(ii). The Father must be bearing witness to the Catholic Tradition (the *Quod ubique, quod semper, quod omnibus creditum est* [what has been believed everywhere, always, by everyone] of Vincent, the classical definition of orthodoxy), and not to personal opinion.

(iii). The Fathers must have a unanimous witness to the given interpretation.

However, even when not all three canons may be applied to a given interpretation, nevertheless the opinions of the Fathers are to be held in veneration. This veneration of the Fathers resulted in much medieval exegesis being really studies in patristics and not exegesis in the proper sense.

(8). Obscure and partial teaching of the Scripture is to be explained by the fuller teaching in the unwritten tradition of the Church. The Roman Catholic believes that he has two sources of revelation which mutually interpret each other. Scripture makes clear matters of the unwritten tradition, and unwritten tradition makes clear obscure matters in Scripture.<sup>28</sup> Hence the Catholic scholar does not feel it necessary to find full teaching of all his doctrines in the Bible but allusions are sufficient (e.g., prayers for the dead, veneration for Mary, confession, the supremacy of Peter). The Catholic Church does not intend to limit itself entirely to the word of Scripture. Its source of revelation is the Deposit of Faith in an unwritten and written form. The unwritten tradition may then be used to fill out what is deficient in the written form (Scripture).

(9). The Bible is to be understood in terms of *the principle of development*. No one will deny that there is considerable difference between a modern cathedral and its worship services and the fellowship gatherings of the Christians as recorded in the book of Acts. The Catholic theologian believes that the

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27 A. J. Maas, "Hermeneutics," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, 272. He also wrote: "Since the Church is the official custodian and interpreter of the Bible, her teaching concerning the Sacred Scriptures and their genuine sense must be *the supreme guide* of the commentator." *Ibid.*, V, 698. Italics are ours in both quotes.

28 Cf. "Thus the knowledge of apostolic Tradition can make up for the silence of the ambiguity of the letter of the New Testament and restore the exact sense it wanted to transmit to us." A. Bubarle, "Introduction to Holy Scripture," in A. M. Henry, *Introduction to Theology*, I, 67. "What is contained by way of outline in the written Gospel has light thrown upon it by traditions which are in their own way also bearers of the mystery of Christ." A. Liégé, "The Sources of the Christian Faith," *Ibid.*, I, 12.

doctrines of the New Testament are *seeds* which grow and develop so that what is seen in a modern Catholic cathedral was contained in seed form in the apostolic Church of the book of Acts.

(i). First, this is justified by the principle of implication. We are bound to believe all that is in the Scriptures and that which may be *properly deduced*. The Trinity is not taught in so many words in the New Testament but the Christian Church has believed it to be a *proper deduction*.

(ii). Secondly, this is justified by the principle of *epigenesis*. Seeds do not merely enlarge. New doctrines are not determined solely by construing the necessary implications of Scripture. Seeds grow, develop and change. Yet in a real sense the "truth" of the tree is identical with the "truth" of the seed. This notion of the *epigenetic growth* of seed doctrines into the elaborate doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church was classically elaborated by J. H. Newman in his famous work, *The Development of Christian Doctrine*. The essay is a tacit admission that the present Catholic Church is far removed from the apostolic Church of the New Testament.<sup>29</sup>

(10). The attitude of the Catholic Church toward the Protestants is contained in the Encyclical, *Providentissimus Deus* of Leo XIII.

Though the studies of non-Catholics, used with prudence, may sometimes be of use to the Catholic student, he should, nevertheless, bear well in mind . . . that the sense of Holy Scripture cannot be expected to be found in writers, who being without the true faith, *only gnaw the bark of Sacred Scripture, and never attain its pith* [italics are ours].

## B. LITERAL SCHOOLS

### 1. Jewish Literalism

The literal method of interpreting the Bible is to accept as basic the literal rendering of the sentences unless by virtue of the nature of the sentence or phrase or clause within the sentence this is not possible. For example, figures of speech or fables or allegories do not admit of literal interpretation. The spirit of literal interpretation is that we should be satisfied with the literal meaning of a text unless very substantial reasons can be given for advancing beyond the literal meaning, and when *canons of control* are supplied.

Ezra is considered the first of the Jewish interpreters and the ultimate founder of the Jewish, Palestinian, hyperliteralist school. The Jews in the Babylonian captivity ceased speaking Hebrew and spoke Aramaic. This created the language gap between themselves and their Scriptures. It was the task of Ezra to give the meaning of the Scriptures by paraphrasing the Hebrew into the Aramaic or in other ways expounding the sense of the Scriptures. This is generally admitted to be the first instance of Biblical hermeneutics.<sup>30</sup>

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29 Modern Catholic scholarship has approved rather than disavowed Newman's principle claiming although not in scholastic form it still reflects what has been Catholic teaching. Cf. A. M. Dubarle, *op. cit.*, I, 65. G. H. Joyce, "Revelation," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, XIII, 4. Walter P. Burke, "The Beauty Ever Ancient," *American Essays for the Newman Centennial*, pp. 206-207.

30 See Farrar's fine tribute to Ezra. *Op. cit.*, p. 54. However Davidson (*Old Testament Prophecy*, p.

Far removed from the land of Palestine, the Jews in captivity could no longer practice their accustomed religion (Mosaism) which included the land, their capitol city, and their temple. There could be no Mosaism with no temple, no land about which there were many regulations, and no harvest. Robbed of the national character of their religion the Jews were led to emphasize that which they would take with them, their Scriptures. Out of the captivities came Judaism with its synagogues, rabbis, scribes, lawyers, and traditions.

There is no simple manner by which Jewish exegesis can be *adequately* summed up. It is a complex system contained in a voluminous corpus of literature. Through the course of the centuries many talented rabbis expressed themselves on hermeneutics and various schools emerged (e.g., Karaites and Cabbalists). The Karaites were the literalists and the Cabbalists were the allegorists.

The Palestinian Jews did develop some sound principles of exegesis which reflected a token approach to the literal understanding of the Scriptures. Hillel formulated seven rules, Isamel thirteen, and Eliezar thirty-two. Some of these principles are still part of a valid hermeneutics.

- (i). They insisted that a word must be understood in terms of its sentence, and a sentence in terms of its context.
- (ii). They taught that Scriptures dealing with similar topics should be compared, and that in some instances a third Scripture would relieve the apparent contradiction between two Scriptures.
- (iii). A clear passage is to be given preference over an obscure one if they deal with the same subject matter.
- (iv). Very close attention is to be paid to spelling, grammar, and figures of speech.
- (v). By the use of logic we can determine the application of Scripture to those problems in life Scripture has not specifically treated. In this connection some of the valid forms of the logic of deduction or implication were used by the rabbis. This is still standard procedure in theological hermeneutics.
- (vi). Their insistence that the God of Israel spoke in the tongues of men was their way of asserting that the God of Israel had adapted His revelation to the recipients of it. This implies a measure of accommodation and cultural conditioning of the divine revelation.

It would not be unfair to rabbinic exegesis to assert that it did not develop a profound self-conscious and critical theory of hermeneutics. Nor would it be unfair to state that they wandered far off from the good rules they did construct.

The major weakness of their system was the development of a hyperliteralism or a *letterism*. In the intense devotion to the details of the text, they missed the essential and made mountains out of the accidental. This was based on the belief that *nothing* in Scripture was superfluous and therefore all the

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80) lists the prophets as the first interpreters. He appeals to Isaiah 43:27. However others translate the word as "ambassador." The RSV has "mediators."

grammatical phenomena of the text (pleonasm, ellipsis, etc.) had an import to the interpreter. Further, because the Bible was given of God the interpreter could expect numerous meanings in the text. The combination of these two principles led to the fantastic interpretations of the rabbis. The errors were then compounded by the enormous authority given to tradition.

Eventually this system developed into the system of the Cabbalists wherein *letterism* and *allegorism* form a grotesque alliance. By the use of *notarikon* all sorts of exegetical gymnastics were performed. Each letter of a word was made to stand for another word. By use of *gemetria* they endowed words with numerical values which became grounds for arbitrary and odd associations of verses. Let the modern student who wishes to play with the numbers of the Bible first read what the Jews did with *gemetria* and so learn moderation and restraint. By the use of *termura* they permuted the letters of a word and so extracted new meanings from old words.

Fortunately the Karaites and the Spanish Jews started a more intelligent procedure for the understanding of the Old Testament, and from this new inspiration has come much valuable exegetical literature.<sup>31</sup>

There is one major lesson to be learned from rabbinical exegesis: the evils of *letterism*. In the exaltation of the very letters of the Scripture the true meaning of the Scripture was lost. The incidental is so exaggerated as to obscure the essential.<sup>32</sup> Any exegesis will go astray which bogs itself down in trivialities and *letterism*.

## 2. Syrian School of Antioch

It has been said that the first Protestant school of hermeneutics flourished in the city of Antioch of Syria, and had it not been crushed by the hand of orthodoxy for its supposed heretical connections with the Nestorians, the entire course of Church history might have been different. The Christian community was influenced by the Jewish community and the result was a hermeneutical theory which avoided the *letterism* of the Jews and the *allegorism* of the Alexandrians. It boasted of such names as Lucian, Dorotheus, Diodorus, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Chrysostom. As a school it influenced Jerome and modulated the allegorism of Alexandria in the West. It also had an influence on medieval exegesis, and found itself again in the hermeneutics of the Reformers.

The Syrian school fought Origen in particular as the inventor of the allegorical method, and maintained the primacy of the literal and historical interpretation of the Scripture. It is true that in practice some of the Antiochenes were found dipping into allegorizing, nevertheless in hermeneutical theory they took a

31 Farrar, (*op. cit.*, Lecture II, "Rabbinic Exegesis," and, "Notes to Lecture II," and, "Notes to Lecture V"), should be read for first-hand examples of Jewish exegetical fantasies. But one must bear in mind the judgment of Abrahams that Farrar is not always fair, and that buried amidst this exegesis are some very substantial contributions to exegetical science. Cf. Israel Abrahams, "Rabbinic Aids to Exegesis," *Cambridge Biblical Essays*, pp. 159-192.

32 Gilbert (*op. cit.*, Chapter I) lists five major criticisms of Jewish exegesis but they all boil down to one, *viz.*, the failure to develop an adequate theory of hermeneutics. In process of publication is a commentary which hopes to summarize the Jewish exegetical wisdom of the ages, *viz.*, Kasher, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* (vol. I, 1953).

stout stand for literal and historical exegesis. They asserted that the literal was plain-literal and figurative-literal. A plain-literal sentence is a straightforward prose sentence with no figures of speech in it. "The eye of the Lord is upon thee," would be a figurative-literal sentence. According to the Alexandrians the literal meaning of this sentence would attribute an actual eye to God. But the Syrian school denied this to be the literal meaning of the sentence. The literal meaning is about God's omniscience. In other words literalism is not the same as *letterism*.

Further, they avoided dogmatic exegesis. Dogmatic exegesis, which kept growing in the West due perhaps to so many controversies with the heretics, eventually developed into Roman Catholic authoritarian exegesis. But the Syrians insisted that the meaning of the Bible was its historical and grammatical meaning, and interpretations must so be justified.

The Syrians insisted on the reality of the Old Testament events. They accused the allegorists of doing away with the historicity of much of the Old Testament and leaving a shadowy world of symbols. The literal and historical approach guarantees to the Old Testament history its important reality.

In place of an allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament the Syrians presented a more sane typological approach. According to the allegorists, floating above the obvious historical meaning of the Old Testament events was another more spiritual or theological meaning. But according to the Syrians the historical and the Messianic were blended together like woof and warp. The Messianic did not float above the historical, but was implicit in it. This not only weeded out much of the fanciful Old Testament Christological interpretation of the allegorists, but it rested the subject on a far more satisfactory basis. The relationship of the Old and New Testaments was made typological and not allegorical.

This also enabled the Syrians to defend the unity of the Bible from a better vantage point. They admitted the development of revelation. An allegorist might find something far richer about Jesus Christ and salvation in Genesis than in Luke. But if progressive revelation is correctly understood such a maneuver by an exegete is impossible. Secondly, they admitted that the unity of the Bible was Christological. The bond between the Two Testaments is prophecy (predictive and typological) understood in terms of (i) progressive revelation and (ii) the literal and historical exegesis of Messianic passages.

The result of these principles was some of the finest exegetical literature of ancient times. As Gilbert says, "The commentary of Theodore [of Mopsuestia] on the minor epistles of Paul is the first and almost the last exegetical work produced in the ancient Church which will bear any comparison with modern commentaries."<sup>33</sup> Grant observes that this school had a remarkable influence in the Middle Ages and became the pillar of the Reformation, and finally became the "principal exegetical method of the Christian Church."<sup>34</sup>

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33 *Op. cit.*, p. 135. Commenting on the good hermeneutical taste yet oratorical ability of Chrysostom (the "golden-mouthed," or in our idiom "the silver tongued") M. B. Riddle wrote: "Great pulpit orators do not need to indulge in mystical fancies nor does their power arise from dogmatic warping of the sense of Scripture." "St. Chrysostom as an Exegete," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (first series), X, p. xix.

34 Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

### 3. *The Victorines*

Scholars of the medieval period have established the fact that a strong historical and literal school existed in the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris.<sup>35</sup> Its outstanding men were Hugo of St. Victor, Richard of St. Victor, and Andrew of St. Victor. Just as the Jewish scholarship in Antioch of Syria influenced the Christian scholars there for literalism, so the Jewish scholars of the medieval period influenced the Victorines for literalism. Miss Smalley at several points in her exposition notes the friendly relations and interactions of this school with the Jewish scholars.

The Victorines insisted that liberal arts, history, and geography were basic to exegesis. History and geography especially form the natural background for literal exegesis. Literal exegesis gave rise to doctrine, and doctrine was the natural background for allegorization. A close check is hereby put on allegorization for none is permitted that does not root in doctrine established by the literal sense.

The literal, rather than a preliminary or superficial study, was the basic study of the Bible. The Victorines insisted that the mystical or spiritual sense could not be truly known until the Bible had been literally interpreted. By literalism they did not mean *letterism* but the true and proper meaning of a sentence. This emphasis on the literal carried over into an emphasis on syntax, grammar, and meaning. True interpretation of the Bible was *exegesis*, not *eisegesis*.

### 4. *The Reformers*

The tradition of the Syrian school was reflected among the Victorines and became the essential hermeneutical theory of the Reformers. Although historians admit that the West was ripe for the Reformation due to several forces at work in European culture, nevertheless there was a *hermeneutical Reformation* which preceded the ecclesiastical Reformation.

There were two main factors that prepared the way for the Reformation in terms of hermeneutics. The first of these was the philosophical system of Occam. Occam was a nominalist, and much of the training which Luther had was in the philosophy of Occam. In Occam we find a separation of revelation and human reason. Human reason had as its territory nature, philosophy, and science. Revelation which was received through faith had for its territory salvation and theology. This was a radical separation of two elements that existed on friendlier terms in the philosophy of Aquinas. In Thomism reason not only dealt with philosophy but with natural religion, and natural religion became the mediating link between philosophy and revelation.

The two realms of grace and nature were separated by Occam. Therefore, whatever we know of God we know by divine revelation, not by human reason. The authority for theological dogma rested solely on divine revelation, and therefore upon the Bible. Thus Luther was so trained as to magnify the authority of the Bible as over against philosophy. When called upon to prove his position he appealed to Scripture and reason (logical deductions from Scripture). A traditional Catholic theologian would appeal to Scripture and reason but also to Thomistic philosophy, councils, creeds, and the Fathers.

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35 Cf. Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (revised edition), Chapters III and IV. The older historians of interpretation apparently were ignorant of the existence of this school.

(The traditional interpretation of Luther and Occamism had been challenged by B. Haegglund: "Was Luther a Nominalist?" *Theology*, 59:226-234, June, 1956.)

The second factor was the renewed study of Hebrew and Greek. Beryl Smalley (*The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*) had demonstrated that Hebrew studies were not as completely lacking among the scholastics as scholars formerly thought. It was Reuchlin, a humanist and a lawyer, who translated Kimchi's Hebrew grammar into Latin so that if a man had the time he could decipher some main elements of the Hebrew language.<sup>36</sup> With the Renaissance came a renewed interest in Greek, and Erasmus published the first Greek New Testament in modern times in 1516. The entire Bible in its original languages was now available for study, for a Hebrew Testament had been printed by 1494. Luther learned his Latin for the priesthood and could so handle the Latin Vulgate, and he also learned his Greek and Hebrew. He had a photographic memory and this did him good service in public debate for he could recall the reading of the Greek or Hebrew on a given passage. When he thought he might be shut up in prison, he selected as his two books of consolation a Hebrew and a Greek Testament.

Luther's hermeneutical principles were:<sup>37</sup>

(1). *The psychological principle.* Faith and illumination were the personal and spiritual requisites for an interpreter. The believer should seek the leading of the Spirit and depend on that leading. In his *Table Talk* he writes: "We ought not to criticise, or judge the Scriptures by our mere reason, but diligently, with prayer, meditate thereon, and seek their meaning" (*On God's Word*, IV). In that Scripture was inspired it demanded a spiritual approach by the interpreter for he also wrote: "The Bible should be regarded with wholly different eyes from those with which we view other productions" (*On God's Word*, IX).

(2). *The authority principle.* The Bible is the supreme and final authority in theological matters, and is therefore above all ecclesiastical authority. Its teaching cannot be countermanded nor qualified nor subordinated to ecclesiastical authorities whether of persons or documents.

(3). *The literal principle.* In place of the four-fold system of the scholastics, we are to put the literal principle. The scholastics had developed their hermeneutics into two divisions, the literal and the spiritual. The spiritual had been divided into three divisions (allegorical, anagogical, and tropological). Luther maintained strongly the primacy of the literal interpretation of Scripture. In the *Table Talk* he affirms that "I have grounded my preaching upon the literal word" (*On God's Word*, XI). Farrar cites him as writing: "The literal sense of Scripture alone is the whole essence of faith and of Christian theology."<sup>38</sup> Briggs cites him as saying: "Every word should be allowed to stand in its natural

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36 For the details of Hebrew learning at the time of the Reformation and for Luther's own knowledge of the language see W. H. Koenig, "Luther as a Student of Hebrew," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 24:845-853, Nov., 1953.

37 Besides the standard works on history of interpretation see R. F. Surburg, "The Significance of Luther's Hermeneutics for the Protestant Reformation," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 24:241-261, April, 1953. Farrar (*op. cit.* 326 ff.) gives two different lists of Luther's hermeneutical principles.

38 *Op. cit.*, p. 327.

meaning, and that should not be abandoned unless faith forces us to it."<sup>39</sup>

The literal principle implies three sub-principles:

(i). Luther rejected allegory. He calls allegorical interpretation "dirt," "scum," "obsolete loose rags," and likens allegorizing to a harlot and to a monkey game. Yet this is not the entire story. This was his opinion of allegory as used by the Catholics. He was not adverse to allegory if the content were Christ and not something of the papacy. In fact students of Luther have indicated his inconsistency at this point for Luther himself engages in some typical medieval allegorization. But in principle he broke with it, and in much practice he repudiated it even though he was not entirely free from it.

(ii). Luther accepted the primacy of the original languages. He felt that the original revelation of God could not be truly recovered until it was recovered from the Hebrew and Greek Testaments. His advice to preachers was: "While a preacher may preach Christ with edification though he may be unable to read the Scriptures in the originals, he cannot expound or maintain their teaching against the heretics without this indispensable knowledge." Luther did a great deal to sponsor the revival of Hebrew and Greek studies.

(iii). The historical and grammatical principle. This is inseparable from the literal principle. The interpreter must give attention to *grammar*; to the *times, circumstances, and conditions* of the writer of the Biblical book; and to the *context* of the passage.

(4). *The sufficiency principle*. The devout and competent Christian can understand the true meaning of the Bible and thereby does not need the official guides to interpretation offered by the Roman Catholic Church. The Bible is a *clear* book (the *perspicuity* of Scripture). Catholicism had maintained that the Scriptures were so obscure that only the teaching ministry of the Church could uncover their true meaning. To Luther the *perspicuity* of the Bible was coupled with the *priesthood of believers*, so that the Bible became the property of all Christians.

The competent Christian was *sufficient* to interpret the Bible, and the Bible is *sufficiently* clear in content to yield its meaning to the believer. Further, the Bible was a world of its own and so *Scripture interprets Scripture*. At points where the Bible was obscure the Catholic referred to the unwritten tradition of the Church. But Luther shut the interpreter up within the Bible and made the obscure passage yield to a clear passage. Much of the Catholic exegesis was nothing more than studies in patristics. This Luther rejected:

I ask for Scriptures and Eck offers me the Fathers. I ask for the sun, and he shows me his lanterns. I ask: "Where is your Scripture proof?" and he adduces Ambrose and Cyril . . . With all due respect to the Fathers I prefer the authority of the Scripture.<sup>40</sup>

A corollary at this point is: *the analogy of faith*. The scholastics interpreted by glosses and catena of citations from the Fathers. This was arbitrary and disconnected. Luther insisted on *the organic, theological unity of the Bible*. All of the relevant material on a given subject was to be collected together so that the pattern of divine revelation concerning that subject would be apparent.

39 C. A. Briggs, *History of the Study of Theology*, II, 107.

40 Cited by Farrar, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

(5). *The Christological principle.* The literal interpretation of the Bible was not the end of interpretation. The function of all interpretation is to find Christ. Luther's rule at this point was: "Auch ist das der rechte Prüfstein alle Bücher au tadeln, wenn man siehet ob sie Christum trieben oder nicht."<sup>41</sup> Smith cites Luther as saying: "If you will interpret well and securely, take Christ with you, for he is the man whom everything concerns."<sup>42</sup>

This is Luther's method of making the entire Bible a Christian book. The Fathers did it with their allegorical method. Luther does it with his Christological principle.

This has been one of Luther's most controversial utterances. (i) One group (especially the neo-orthodox) claims that Luther did not hold to a narrow verbal inspiration view of Scripture. Luther felt free to challenge anything in Scripture not Christological. (ii) The strict orthodox Lutheran theologians claim that this is purely a hermeneutical principle, and not a principle of Biblical criticism. They adduce numerous statements of Luther to prove that he held to an infallible, inerrant Bible. Fortunately, the study of hermeneutics does not have to await the outcome of this debate for it is crystal clear that this principle is first of all a hermeneutical maxim of Luther's.

(6). *The Law-Gospel principle.* Luther saw the root heresy of the Galatian churches transposed into a different key in the Catholic Church. The Galatians had been taught to (i) be circumcised--the seal of the Old Testament Covenant and (ii) to believe in Christ--the center of the New Covenant, and they would be saved. The Catholic Church taught that (i) to do religious works, and (ii) believe in Christ would save them. Justification by faith alone not only repudiated the Judaizers of the Gospel, but the Roman Catholic system of salvation.

Luther taught that we must carefully distinguish Law and Gospel in the Bible, and this was one of Luther's principal hermeneutical rules. Any fusion of the Law and Gospel was wrong (Catholics and Reformed who make the Gospel a new law), and any repudiation of the Law was wrong (antinomianism). The Law was God's word about human sin, human imperfection, and whose purpose was to drive us to our knees under a burden of guilt. The Gospel is God's grace and power to save. Hence we must never in interpreting the Scriptures confuse these two different activities of God or teachings of Holy Scripture.

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With reference to Calvin, Fullerton observes that "Calvin may not unfittingly be called the first scientific interpreter in the history of the Christian Church."<sup>43</sup> Is there any other man in the history of the Christian Church who has turned out such a scientific, able, and valuable commentary on almost the entire Scriptures and also made one of the greatest contributions to theology in his *Institutes*? It is true

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41 Farrar, *op. cit.*, p. 333. "This is the correct touchstone to censure (or test) all [biblical] books, if one sees if they urge Christ or not."

42 H. P. Smith, *Essays in Biblical Interpretation*, p. 78.

43 *Prophecy and Authority*, p. 133. Cf. also P. T. Fuhrman, "Calvin, the Expositor of Scripture," *Interpretation*, 6:188-209, April, 1952. For a description of the sheer genius of Calvin see A. M. Hunter, "The Erudition of John Calvin," *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 18:199-208, July, 1946.

that to Luther we owe the honor of having broken through to a new Protestant hermeneutics, but it was Calvin who exemplified it with his touch of genius. Speaking of Calvin's commentaries Wright says: "The more one studies these commentaries, the more astonished he becomes at their scholarship, lucid profundity, and freshness of insight. Although biblical studies have moved a long way since the sixteenth century, there is still little which can be held to be their equal."<sup>44</sup>

(i). Calvin insisted that the *illumination of the Spirit* was the necessary spiritual preparation for the interpreter of God's Word.

(ii). Calvin, with Luther, rejected allegorical interpretation. Calvin called it Satanic because it led men away from the truth of Scripture. He further stated that the inexhaustibility of Scripture *was not in its so-called fertility of meanings*.

(iii). "Scripture interprets Scripture" was a basic conviction of Calvin. This meant many things. It meant *literalism* (as defined in this book) in exegesis with a rejection of the medieval system of the four-fold meaning of Scripture. It meant listening to the Scripture, not reading Scripture to justify a host of dogmatic presuppositions--although scholars are not sure that Calvin escaped doing this himself. Calvin wrote: "It is the first business of an interpreter to let his author say what he does, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say,"<sup>45</sup> and in the dedicatory letter to one of his commentaries he added:

We were both of this mind that the principal point of an interpreter did consist in a lucid brevity. And truly, seeing that this is in a manner his whole charge, namely, to show both the mind of the writer whom he hath taken upon himself to expound, look, by how much he leadeth the readers away from the same, by so much he is wide of the mark . . . Verily the word of God ought to be so revered by us that through a diversity of interpretation it might not be drawn asunder by us, no not so much as a hair's breadth . . . It is an audacity akin to sacrilege to use the Scriptures at our own pleasure and to play with them as with a tennis ball, which many before us have done.<sup>46</sup>

The "Scripture interprets Scripture" principle led Calvin to make a strong emphasis on grammatical exegesis, philology, the necessity of examining the context, and the necessity of comparing Scriptures which treated common subjects.

(iv). Calvin showed a marked independence in exegesis. He not only broke with Catholic exegetical principles, but with any sort of exegesis which was shoddy, superficial, or worthless. He rejected arguments for very orthodox doctrines if the exegesis involved was unworthy.

(v). Finally, Calvin anticipated much of the modern spirit with reference to the interpretation of Messianic prophecy. He showed caution and reserve in these matters, and stated that the exegete ought to investigate the historical settings of all prophetic and Messianic Scriptures.

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44 G. E. Wright, "The Christian Interpreter as Biblical Critic," *Interpretation*, I:133 ff., April, 1947.

45 Quoted by Farrar, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

46 Quoted by Fullerton, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

## 5. Post-Reformation

In general the spirit and the rules of the Reformers became the guiding principles of Protestant orthodox interpretation. To name the scholars who followed in the footsteps of Luther and Calvin would be to name most of the great exegetes from Reformation times until now. Briggs claims that the Puritans worked out the protestant hermeneutics to a fine point<sup>47</sup>

Not all post-Reformation exegesis was of the same high standard as that of Calvin, and that there were extremists no one can doubt although Farrar's judgment on these men is extreme. However, a very significant advance was made by Ernesti, who was a classical scholar. He published his *Institutio Interpretis* in 1761 and in it maintained the thesis that the skills and tools of classical studies were basic to New Testament exegesis. Ernesti stated that grammatical exegesis has priority over dogmatic exegesis, and that literal interpretation was preferred over allegorical exegesis. His principal emphasis was on the necessity of sound philology in exegesis. Of Ernest Briggs writes: "It is the merit of Ernesti in modern times that he so insisted upon grammatical exegesis that he induced exegetes of all classes to begin their work here at the foundation" [grammatical interpretation].<sup>48</sup>

### C. DEVOTIONAL SCHOOLS

The devotional interpretation of Scripture is that method of interpreting Scripture which places emphasis on the edifying aspects of Scripture, and interpreting with the intention of developing the spiritual life.

#### 1. Medieval Mystics

The medieval period produced both scholasticism and mysticism. The mystics read the Scriptures as means of promoting the mystical experience. Such representative men were the Victorines (Hugo but more especially, Richard) and Bernard of Clairvaux. The principle book of the mystics was the *Song of Songs* which they readily interpreted as the love relationship between God and the mystic resulting in spiritual delights told in terms of physical delights.

#### 2. Spener and Francke--Pietism

The post-Reformation period was a period of theological dogmatism. It was a period of heresy hunting and rigid, creedal Protestantism. Farrar's account of it although perhaps extreme is nevertheless depressing.<sup>49</sup> He says it was characterized by a three-fold curse: "The curse of tyrannous

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47 Cf. his discussion of the rules of the Puritans in *Biblical Study*, p. 335 ff.

48 *Op. cit.*, p. 352. However, there are some items in Ernesti's system which are not acceptable to historic Christianity. These principles are stated and challenged in Carson, *Examination of the Principles of Biblical Interpretation*.

49 *Op. cit.*, p. 357 ff.

confessionalism; the curse of exorbitant systems; the curse of contentious bitterness."<sup>50</sup> Speaking of bitterness among theologians, he writes: "*They read the Bible by the unnatural glare of theological hatred.*"<sup>51</sup>

It was in reaction to this situation that *pietism* developed. Pietism was the effort to recover the Bible as spiritual food and nourishment to be read for personal edification. It was a distinct reaction against dogmatic and fanciful exegesis. Spener, who was influenced by Richard Baxter, published his *Pia Desidera* in 1675 and maintained that the Bible was the instrument in God's hands for effecting true spirituality. Spener organized his *Collegia pietatis* wherein believers met together for Bible study, devotions, and prayer.

The second great pietist was A. H. Francke who was much more the scholar, linguist and exegete. Francke organized with Anton and Schade a *Collegium Philobiblicum* for the study of the Scriptures with an emphasis on philology and the practical bearing of Scripture on life. Later he went to the University at Halle which became the center of pietism. Francke insisted that the entire Bible be read through frequently; that commentaries were to be used but with discretion so as not to take the place of the study of Scripture itself; and that only the regenerate could understand the Bible.

Farrar says that Bengel was the "heir and continuator of all that was best in Pietism."<sup>52</sup> Bengel studied under the pietists and was impressed by their spirituality, their wonderful Christian fellowship, their emphasis on grammatical and historical interpretation, and their emphasis on the application of Scripture to spiritual life. Bengel eventually wrote his famous *Gnomon* which is concise, grammatical, penetrating, and which emphasizes the unity of the Scriptural revelation. His work in textual criticism represents one of the great landmarks in the development of New Testament textual criticism.

The influence of pietism was great. It influenced the Moravians and Zinzendorf. Others in the pietistic tradition (or at least emphasizing the devotional, practical, and edifying study of the Bible) are the Puritans, Wesley, Edwards, Matthew Henry, and the Quakers.<sup>53</sup>

### 3. Modern Emphasis

The insights of the pietists have not been lost. It would not be amiss to say that the average Christian reads his Bible in the devotional tradition, i.e., for his own blessing and spiritual food. The devotional material on our book shelves is imposing and the preacher is expected to have a devotional emphasis in every sermon above and beyond whatever doctrinal or exegetical remarks he may have to make.

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50 *Ibid.*, p. 359.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 363. Italics are ours.

52 *Op. cit.*, p. 392. Cf. J. Pelikan, "In Memoriam: Joh. Albrecht Bengel," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 23:785-796, November, 1952. Charles T. Fritsch, "Bengel, Student of Scripture," *Interpretation*, 5:203-215, April, 1951.

53 Cf. Dana's discussion. *Searching the Scriptures*, p. 81 ff. Immer claims that the chief error of the pietists was that "the Scriptures were not so much explained as overwhelmed with pious reflections." Cited by Terry, *op. cit.*, p. 62 fn.

The devotional and practical emphasis in Bible teaching is *absolutely* necessary. The purpose of preaching is more than doctrinal communication or exposition of the meaning of Scripture. It must reach over into life and experience, and this is the function of the devotional teaching of Scripture. The vital, personal, and spiritual *must be present in all the ministries of the Word*.

There are two weaknesses of devotional interpretation:

(i). It falls prey to allegorization especially in the use of the Old Testament. In the effort to find a spiritual truth or application of a passage of Scripture the literal and therefore primary meaning of the passage is obscured. If it is not a case of bald allegorizing it may be excessive typology. Given enough allegorical and typological rope one may prove a variety of contradictory propositions from the Old Testament. One may prove Calvinistic security (the central board in the wall of the Tabernacle) or Arminian probationalism (the failure of faith at Kadesh-Barnea). A Reformed expositor may prove that the soul feeds on Christ while discussing the sacrificial system, and a Catholic prove his doctrine of the mass.

All sorts of distortions have been made of the historical records of the Old Testament (and occasionally the New) in order to derive a spiritual blessing or to make a devotional point.

(ii). Devotional interpretation may be a substitute for the requisite exegetical and doctrinal studies of the Bible. Strong doctrinal sinews and solid exegetical bones are necessary for spiritual health. If the emphasis is completely devotional the requisite doctrinal and expository truth of Scripture are denied God's people.

#### D. LIBERAL INTERPRETATION

As early as Hobbes and Spinoza rationalistic views were held about the Bible. The debate over the Bible in modern times is a debate of rationalism versus authoritarianism. Rationalism in Biblical studies boils down to the fundamental assertion that whatever is not in harmony with *educated* mentality is to be rejected. The critic defines *educated* in a very special way. The authoritarian position asserts that if God has spoken, the human mind must be obedient to the voice of God. That there is a blind or credulous authoritarianism cannot be denied, but it is not true that authoritarianism is anti-intellectual.<sup>54</sup> The rationalistic premise has led to radical criticism of the Scriptures.

This radical treatment of Scriptures reached its full tide in the nineteenth century. Suffice it to say that by the middle of the twentieth century most theological seminaries have accepted the basic theses of radical criticism, and many of its conclusions. The Barthian reaction will be discussed later. In broad perspective the following rules have governed the religious liberals as they approached the study of the Bible.<sup>55</sup>

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54 Protestants accept authority when underwritten by the criteria of truthfulness. Cf. E. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*. P. 71.

55 Generally speaking radical views of the Bible have accompanied liberal views of theology. However, an atheist may hold to radical criticism and reject liberal theology. There are scholars who have accepted radical criticism and maintained orthodox theology, as is evident from W. B. Glover's *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* [in Great

(i). *Religious liberals believe that "modern mentality" is to govern our approach to Scripture.* This "modern mentality" is made up of a complex of presuppositions, e.g., standards of scholarship as practiced in higher education, the validity of the scientific *outlook* as well as *method*, and the ethical standards of educated people. Whatever in the Scriptural account does not measure up to these criteria is rejected. Scholarship claims that all books are to be treated as human documents and by the same methods and the Bible is no exception.<sup>56</sup> Science presumes the regularity of nature so miracles are not accepted. The doctrines of sin, depravity, and hell offend the liberals' moral sensitivities so these doctrines are rejected. This also means a rather free use of the text of the Bible. If a book of the Bible seems "patched" the text may be re-arranged, e.g., as Moffatt does with the Gospel of John in his translation. If the text is obscure the text may be remade, e.g., as is done too frequently in the Old Testament part of the *Revised Standard Version*.<sup>57</sup>

(ii). *Religious liberals redefine inspiration.* All forms of genuine inspiration (verbal, plenary, dynamic) are rejected. If liberalism rejects all transcendental and miraculous activity of God, then it must reject a supernaturalistic doctrine of inspiration and revelation, which it does.<sup>58</sup> In its place it puts Coleridge's principle that the inspiration of the Bible is its power to inspire religious experience. Revelation is redefined as human insight into religious truth, or human discovery of religious truths. Or as Fosdick puts it: "The under side of the process is man's discovery; the upper side is God's revelation."<sup>59</sup>

The canon of criticism is "the spirit of Jesus." Whatever in the Bible is in accord with the "spirit of Jesus" is normative, and whatever is below the ethical and moral level of the "spirit of Jesus" is not binding. Bewer writes quite clearly at this point: "To the Christian the only norm and standard is the spirit of God as revealed in Jesus . . . all those parts of the Old Testament which are contrary to the spirit of Jesus, or which have no direct spiritual meaning to us, are for us without authority."<sup>60</sup>

This means that the doctrinal or theological content of Scripture is not binding. It was Sabatier who argued that religious experience was fundamental and theology was the afterthought of this experience. But the religious experience could not be completely expressed in thought-form so theological expression was but symbolical of the religious experience. With this essential thesis Fosdick agrees, for to him religious experience is the heart of religion and theological forms are temporary. One of the chapters of his book has the title, "Abiding Experiences and Changing Categories." His thesis is expressed in these words: "What is permanent in Christianity is not mental frameworks but abiding experiences that phrase and rephrase themselves in successive generations' ways of thinking and that

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Britain].

56 Cf. E. C. Colwell, *The Study of the Bible*, Chapters III, IV, and V. Also, H. E. Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible*.

57 Cf. Piper's sharp criticism of rationalism in the hermeneutics of religious liberalism. Otto A. Piper, "Principles of New Testament Interpretation," *Theology Today*, 3:202, July, 1946.

58 Fosdick, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 30. This thesis is found widely in the literature of religious liberalism and no clearer expression of it has been given than in A. Sabatier's *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion based on Psychology and History*. See p. 34 ff.

60 Bewer, *Authority of the Old Testament* in T. Kepler's *Contemporary Religious Thought*, p. 127.

grow in assured certainty and richness of content."<sup>61</sup>

(iii) *The supernatural is redefined.* The supernatural may mean: that which is extraordinary, miraculous, oracular, not attainable in knowledge or power by ordinary human nature. Or it may mean: above the material order, or beyond mere natural processes, e.g., prayer, ethics, pure thought, immortality. Historic orthodoxy has accepted supernaturalism in both these meanings. Religious liberalism accept only the latter.

Everything in the Bible which is supernatural in the first sense is rejected. Colwell argues that the *same* methodology must be used in interpreting the Bible as is used in interpreting the classics; no special principle may be appealed to by Christians. If, therefore, we reject all reports of miracles in the classics as violating our scientific good sense, then we must reject miracles in the Scriptures.<sup>62</sup> When the miracle or supernatural is found in Scripture it is treated as folklore or mythology or poetic elaboration.

(iv). *The concept of evolution is applied to the religion of Israel and thereby to its documents.* Fosdick's book, *The Modern Use of the Bible*, is considered a most lucid presentation of the Wellhausenian interpretation of the Old Testament. The primitive and crude, ethically and religiously, is the earlier; and the advanced and elevated, is the later. We can thereby recreate the evolution of the religion of Israel and rearrange our documents accordingly. "We know now that every idea in the Bible started from primitive and childlike origins and, with however many setbacks and delays, grew in scope and height toward the culmination of Christ's Gospel," is Fosdick's point of view.<sup>63</sup>

In the study of the canon this put the prophets *before* the law. The basic Wellhausen position calls for considerable rearrangement of books and materials.<sup>64</sup>

The same procedure has been applied to the New Testament. Harnack's *What is Christianity?* is considered the finest and clearest expression of religious liberalism. Its thesis is that Jesus, a good man in the highest prophetic order, is transmuted by theological speculation and Greek metaphysics into the strange God-man of the creeds. The critic of the New Testament must be an expert archeologist and

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61 Fosdick, *op. cit.*, p. 103. Cf. also his remarks in Kepler, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-20. But is not this thesis itself a *theological proposition*? Therefore, *this* theological proposition is prior to religious experience. Result: his basic position is contradictory.

62 Colwell, *op. cit.*, p. 122 f. Piper's comment is: "Critics who had no experience of the supernatural concluded, for instance, that everything in the Bible which referred to the supernatural was wrong. Sound criticism would have contented itself with saying: 'My judgment as to the truthfulness of these documents has to be suspended because I know nothing of these things.'" *Op. cit.*, p. 201.

63 *Op. cit.*, p. 11. H. P. Smith (*Essays in Biblical Interpretation*) speaking of the application of evolutionary principles to Biblical criticism says that such application is widely accepted because men see evolution in *history* as well as nature. However, a great reversal has taken place in anthropological theory and the evolutionary principle of social cultural no longer dominates anthropological theory. P. 141.

64 However, this entire concept is now under severe criticism. Cf. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, and, *Archeology and the Religion of Israel*. John Bright, "The Prophets Were Protestants," *Interpretation*, I: 153-82, April, 1947.

geologist to uncover the strata of accretions imposed on the true Jesus of history.

However, archeological work, further work in criticism, and the uncovering of much papyri demonstrated that all such stratigraphy was due to fail. In *Formgeschichte* (form or historical criticism) an effort is made to develop a pre-literary theory for accounting for the New Testament. The New Testament was the creation of the Christian community out of its spiritual needs, and so the Gospels are not the life of Christ as much as they are the life of the early church.

(v). *The notion of accommodation has been applied to the Bible.* Much of the theological content of the Bible is weakened or destroyed by asserting that the theological statements are in the transitory and perishable mold of ancient terminology. For example, the only terms in which Paul could describe the death of Christ were from bloody Jewish sacrifices or the blood-baths of Mythraism. Thus Paul's doctrine of the atonement is accommodated to the expressions of his time and these are not binding on us. It is claimed that our Lord in dealing with the Jews had to accommodate his teaching to their condition, especially in matters of Biblical Introduction, e.g., the historicity of Adam and Eve, of Jonah, of the Davidic authorship of the Psalms.<sup>65</sup>

The religious liberal feels it is his assignment to recast the essence of the New Testament doctrine in the language of his contemporaries, and in so doing must strip off the concepts and images of the Old and New Testament cultures.

(vi). *The Bible was interpreted historically--with a vengeance.*<sup>66</sup> The historical interpretation is used in a special leveling and reductionist sense by the religious liberal. He means more than painting the historical backdrop of the various passages of the Bible. It is a method which endeavors to break the uniqueness of the Scriptures. It makes religion a changing, shifting phenomenon so that it is impossible to "canonize" any period of its development or its literature. It believes that there are social conditions which create theological beliefs and the task of the interpreter is not to defend these theological beliefs (as in orthodoxy) but to understand the social conditions which produced them. It stresses the continuity of Biblical religion with surrounding religion, and emphasizes "borrowing," "syncretism," and "purifying."

Further, in so stressing the necessity of finding the meaning of a passage for the original hearers of it, it repudiates the prophetic or predictive element of prophecy. It rejects typology and predictive prophecy as Christian abuses (although in good faith) of the Old Testament.

(vii). *Philosophy has had an influence on religious liberalism.* Immanuel Kant made ethics or moral will the essence of religion. Kant shut himself up almost completely to the *moral* interpretation of Scripture. Whatever was not of this he rejected. This emphasis on the moral element of Scripture with

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65 That our Lord did not accommodate himself in this sense is thoroughly argued by C. J. Ellicott, *Christus Comprobatur*. Horne (*An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, eighth edition) has an able refutation of this type of accommodation, too, that although written more than a hundred years ago is still relevant. Gore's essay in *Lux Mundi* argued that the incarnation involved ignorance and so Christ knew only what a typical Jew would know about matters of Biblical Introduction.

66 Cf. Colwell, (*op. cit.*, Chapter VI), for the results of a religious liberal's use of the historical principle in criticism. Also, H. P. Smith (*op. cit.*), Chapter XIII, "Historical Interpretation."

its tacit rejection of theological interpretation has played a major role in the liberals' use of the Scripture.

Deism made ethics the essence of religion too. In a typically deistic fashion Jefferson went through the Gospels picking out the ethical and moral, and rejecting the theological and so published his *Jefferson Bible*.

Hegelianism has had its influence on Biblical interpretation. According to Hegel progress in the clarification of an idea involves three terms: the thesis, the antithesis, and the synthesis. This Hegelian waltz was applied to the totality of human culture including religion. Hegelian students were not slow in applying it to the Biblical records. Wellhausen applied it to the Old Testament, and Strauss and the Tuebingen school to the New. Thus in the Tuebingen school the strife between Pauline factions and Petrine factions is harmonized by the Lucan approach.

Ethical idealism and idealism with strong ethical and religious elements has had its influence on American religious liberalism. At the headwaters of much of our American religious philosophy were Josiah Royce and Borden Parker Bowne. Bowne's personalism through his students and their students has had a real influence on much of Methodist and liberal theology in America.

#### E. NEO-ORTHODOXY

Karl Barth ushered in a new era in Biblical interpretation when he published his *Römerbrief* at the end of World War I. This was a new approach to the theological interpretation of the book of Romans. This new movement has been called "crisis theology" because it so emphasized God's judgment of man; "Barthianism," because it stems from the original thought of Karl Barth; "neo-orthodoxy" because it dissevers itself from liberalism and seeks to recover the insights of the Reformers; "neo-supernaturalism" because in contradiction to modernism it reënstates the category of the transcendental; "logothicism" because it is a theology of the Word of God; "neo-evangelicalism" because it seeks to recover the Christian gospel in contrast to the social gospel of liberalism; "neo-liberalism" because it is claimed that although differing in many ways from liberalism it has not really broken with it; and "Biblical realism" because it makes a new effort to rediscover the theological interpretation of the Bible.<sup>67</sup>

The movement has been fractured into a series of submovements rendering simple description difficult. We shall try to set forth those hermeneutical principles which would more or less characterize the center of this movement.

(i). *The revelation principle*. This movement makes it very clear that the historic, orthodox position with reference to inspiration, revelation, and Biblical criticism can no longer be maintained.<sup>68</sup> The

67 The literature of neo-orthodoxy has become voluminous. For discussions of hermeneutics which come right to the point see Edwin Lewis, *The Biblical Faith and Christian Freedom* (especially chapter II); B. S. Anderson, *Rediscovering the Bible* (especially chapter I); Brunner, *Dogmatic*, I & II; and Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man*. Barth discusses hermeneutics in *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, pages 513 ff., 546 ff., 810 ff., 515 ff., and 812 ff.

68 This entire story from the neo-orthodox viewpoint is told directly and energetically by Lewis, *op.*

*infallibility* of the Bible is denied. The Bible is not one harmonious whole but a series of conflicting theological systems and ethical maxims. Some parts of the Bible are definitely sub-Christian and perhaps it would not be too strong to say even anti-Christian.<sup>69</sup> The *inerrancy* of the Bible is denied. In matters of science, anthropology, history, and geology, the Bible is flatly contradicted by modern science. The Hebrews had the typical Semitic cosmology and outlook on nature. The traditional notion of *revelation* is denied. Revelation as a communication of that truth not ascertainable by human powers is strongly repudiated. It is dubbed "propositional revelation" and an attack on "propositional revelation" is one of the typical themes of neo-orthodoxy. All historical and orthodox forms of *inspiration* are denied (verbal, conceptual, plenary),<sup>70</sup> and in more than one neo-orthodox treatise the word inspiration never even makes the index. Those who believe in verbal inspiration are guilty of a *mechanical* or *dictational* theory of inspiration and the additional charge of *bibliolatry* is made against them.

Although neo-orthodoxy has challenged some of the theses of radical criticism it has accepted in main the results of the same. Lewis puts it bluntly but he expresses the opinion of the movement when he writes: "The one certain thing about the new Biblicism is that it is not a revamped fundamentalism."<sup>71</sup>

However, no matter how strongly neo-orthodoxy has reacted to the orthodox view of the Bible, it has not capitulated to modernism. It finds its normative use of the Bible in terms of its doctrine of revelation. Very briefly the essence of the doctrine is this: *Only God can speak for God*. Revelation is when, and only when, God speaks. But God's speech is not words (orthodox view) but is *His personal presence*. "The Word of God" is God Himself present to my consciousness. The "objective" form of this speech is Jesus Christ which is God present in mercy, grace, and reconciliation. When God addresses me by Jesus Christ and I respond, then revelation *occurs*. Revelation is thus *both* God speaking to me of grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ *and* my response of faith to this personal address.

The Bible is thus not revelation or the word of God directly, but a *record* and a *witness* to revelation. It is not the word of God directly. It is the word of God in the indirect sense that the Bible contains the normative *witness* of revelation of the past, and the *promise* of revelation in the future. The Bible is a trustworthy yet fallible witness to revelation. Although a man may unmistakably experience revelation, he never gets a *pure* communication. The revelation is always *broken* or *diffracted* through the prism of its medium. Therefore the Bible, a record of revelation, can never be directly the revelation of God nor a pure communication of it.

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*cit.*, chapter III, "The Emancipation of the Word of God."

69 Cf. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

70 Brunner's attack on verbal inspiration will be found throughout his work, *Revelation and Reason*, and also in his *Dogmatics*, I., and, *The Philosophy of Religion*. Barth rejects it in his *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (cf. pp. 126, 156, 309 f.). Niebuhr's attack on "theological literalism" will be found in *The Nature and Destiny of Man (in passim)* and in, *Faith and History*, pp. 33-34. Monsma accuses Barth of breaking with the literal sense of Scripture (Cf. his *Karl Barth's Idea of Revelation*). Hamer accuses Barth of being a spiritualizer (in *The Hibbert Journal*, 48:84, October, 1949). For a sharp criticism of Barth's hermeneutics cf. Behm, *Pneumatische Exegese?*

71 Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

The neo-orthodox interpreter then looks for the Word behind the words. The religious liberal saw no Word behind the words of Scripture, but only a record of remarkable religious experiences. The orthodox identified the human words of the Bible with the Word behind the words.<sup>72</sup> The neo-orthodox thinker proposes to dig through the human, fallible words of the Bible to discover *the original witness to the Word of God*.

(ii). *The Christological principle*. God's Word to man is Jesus Christ. Only that part of the Bible which is witness to the Word of God is binding. This introduces the second fundamental hermeneutical principle of neo-orthodoxy, the Christological principle. Only that which witnesses to Christ is binding, and doctrines are understood only as they are related to Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

As we read the Old Testament we encounter a variety of incidents. Whatever is not in harmony with Jesus Christ the Word of God is not valid witness. Lewis declares that there is nothing in the Old Testament about God that is binding upon Christian men which "cannot be reconciled with what God has disclosed himself to be in the Incarnate Word, and with the requirement of human life and thought and action that is the proper issue and concomitant of this disclosure."<sup>73</sup>

Further, it is argued by Brunner that no doctrine is a Christian doctrine unless it receives a Christological orientation. Such doctrines as creation and sin are not to be directly approached in the Old Testament for only in Christ do we truly know what it means to be a creature (and thereby have the proper grounds for understanding creation in Genesis) and only in Christ do we know what sin is (and thereby understand Genesis 3). The rule for understanding "all Christian articles of faith is the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ."<sup>74</sup>

(iii). *The totality principle*. Barth, Brunner, Lewis, and Niebuhr argue that one cannot prove a doctrine by the citation of a text of Scripture or a few texts of Scripture. The teaching of the Bible is determined by a consideration of the totality of its teaching. Lewis insists that crass literalism does not yield the true meaning of Scripture. The Scriptures are properly interpreted only when we apply the totality principle and Brunner argues that "we are not bound by any Biblical passages taken in isolation, and certainly not by isolated sections of the Old Testament."<sup>75</sup> No doubt the Bible interpreted *in particular* leads to orthodox doctrines. To take the Bible seriously (as neo-orthodoxy intends to do) without taking it with a crass literalism, is to interpret each doctrine from the totality of the Biblical perspective guided by the Christological principle.

(iv). *The mythological principle*. The Bible contains discussions about such topics as the creation of the universe, the creation of man, the innocency of man, the fall of man, and the second coming of

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72 "Criticism has made impossible all those conceptions of the Bible which depend upon the identify of the words of the Bible with God's own 'word.'" Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 11. "The critical movement has issued in our time in the emancipation of the Word of God from identification with the words of men and there will be no return to this bondage." *Ibid.*, p. 44.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 117. These sentiments can be heavily documented from neo-orthodox literature.

74 Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics*, II, 6. Italics are his. Cf. also pp. 8, 52, 53, 90.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 52. This is not really a totality principle, but an ignoration principle, for under the guise of taking all the Scripture says on a subject, they take only that which concurs with their presuppositions and *ignore* the rest.

Christ. The liberal either rejected these teachings forthright, or altered them so as to change their Biblical character. Neo-orthodoxy seeks to interpret these doctrines *seriously* (as liberals failed to do), but not *literally* (as the orthodox do). The *via media* is to interpret them *mythologically*.<sup>76</sup>

The myth is a form of theological communication. It presents a truth about man's religious existence in historical dress. *Creation* is such a myth for it is a truth about religious existence in historical form. Genesis 1 is not meant to tell us actually how God created the universe. Rather it tells us on the one hand of our creaturehood, and on the other of the limits of scientific investigation. Creation really means that eventually science comes to the end of the line in its explanation of the universe and must there surrender to truth of another dimension. The *Second Coming* of Christ is a religious truth in historical form to the intent that man can never find his happiness nor his meaning in purely historical existence. The *Fall* is the myth which informs us that man inevitably corrupts his moral nature. The *Incarnation* and the *cross* are myths telling us that the solution to man's problems of guilt and sin is not to be found in a human dimension but must come from beyond as an act of God's grace.

Neo-orthodox writers make it clear that Biblical myths are radically different from pagan and classical myths. The latter are the productions of human imagination and the elaboration of tradition. The Biblical myths are a serious and meaningful (although imperfect) method of setting forth that which is transcendental about man's religious existence and can best be represented in historical form. Because myths do not actually teach literal history but the conditions of all religious existents, mythological interpretation may sometimes be called *psychological* interpretation as suggested in Kierkegaard's subtitle to *The Concept of Dread* ("A simple psychological deliberation oriented in the direction of the dogmatic problem of original sin").

(v). *The existential principle*. The existential principle of interpretation has its roots in Pascal's method of Bible study and received its initial formulation in Kierkegaard's meditation on "How to Derive True Benediction from Beholding Oneself in the Mirror of the Word."<sup>77</sup> According to Kierkegaard the grammatical, lexical, and historical study of the Bible was necessary but preliminary to the true reading of the Bible. To read the Bible *as God's word* one must read it with his heart in his mouth, on tip-toe, with eager expectancy, in conversation with God. To read the Bible thoughtlessly or carelessly or academically or professionally is not to read the Bible as God's word. As one reads it as a love letter is read, then one reads it as the word of God. The Bible is not God's word to the soul until one reads it as one *ought* to read the word of God. "He who is not alone with God's Word is not reading God's Word," pens Kierkegaard.<sup>78</sup>

Kierkegaard gives the illustration of a boy who stuffs the seat of his pants with napkins to soften the blows of the licking he is expecting. So the scholar stuffs his academic britches with his grammars, lexicons, and commentaries and thus *the Bible as God's word* never reaches his soul.

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76 See Anderson, *op. cit.*, Chapter X; Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, pp. 33-34; Alan Richardson, "Adam," *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*; Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*.

77 *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, p. 39 ff. Cf. Minear and Morimoto, *Kierkegaard and the Bible* for a brief sketch of Kierkegaard's hermeneutics. No doubt pietistic interpretation had existential elements in it.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 55. Regardless of the incipient neo-orthodoxy in this essay it is one of the finest in theological literature in the field of psychological hermeneutics.

This existential approach to the reading of Scripture has been taken up by neo-orthodoxy. The Bible contains a special history (*Heilsgeschichte*), the history of salvation. Some of it is mythological in form, and some is actual history. This history within the Bible is the record that revelation has occurred, and so constitutes a promise that as men read the Scriptures revelation may occur again. This *Heilsgeschichte* is normative for all men and the instrument of occasioning revelation. From the human standpoint revelation may be invited by reading the Bible *existentially*, i.e., as Kierkegaard suggested with eagerness, anticipation, with a spirit of obedience, with a passionate heart.

The existential situation is a profound situation of life. It is an experience involving decisions about the most fundamental issues of life. Brock defines it as follows:

Existenz is an attitude of the individual to himself, which is called forth by such concrete situations as the necessity for choice of profession or a conflict in love, a catastrophic change in social conditions, or the imminence of one's own death. It leads immediately to sublime moments in which a man gathers his whole strength to make a decision which is taken afterwards as binding upon his future life. Furthermore, Existenz never becomes completed, as does life through death. In its different manifestations it is only a beginning which is faithfully followed or faithlessly forgotten. Moreover, Existenz is not real in being known, it is real only in being effectuated, in remembrance of it, and in resolutions for the future which are taken to be absolutely binding.<sup>79</sup>

The Bible is not primarily history, although it contains history. It is not primarily a theological textbook although it contains theology. It is a book about existence, about life at its most comprehensive expression, about God. To understand it at this level one must read it existentially. By this existential reading the Bible may become the word of God to the reader. Speaking of this Grant says:

The deepest interpretation of Scripture is that concerned with 'existential' situations: life and death, love and hate, sin and grace, good and evil, God and the world. These are not matters of ordinary knowledge like the multiplication table or the date of the council of Nicea. There is . . . no special method for the attainment of these deeper insights; the historical method is not replaced but deepened.<sup>80</sup>

It is precisely at this point that the famous continental scholar, Eichrodt, levels one of this major criticisms at Fosdick. Fosdick has read *into* the Old Testament his evolutionary theory of the progress of religious ideas. Had he read the Bible with *existential* insight he would have noted more carefully the mighty redemptive and revelatory acts of God in making Himself known to the people, and the corresponding insight into the meaning of these acts which the prophets and real believers in Israel

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79 Quoted by H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 219, from Brock's *Contemporary German Philosophy*, pp. 83-84.

80 Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

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Grant mentions also the German scholar Oepke,<sup>82</sup> who attacks the liberal's historical-critical method in that it is dead and fruitless, and suggests in its place the super-historical method--the existential method. The scholar reads his Bible with the full apparatus of his learning, yet personally he might be very nominal in his spiritual life. The scholar has an intellectual knowledge of the Bible. In contrast to this is the devout believer who has little of the scholar's critical apparatus yet who derives a rich blessing for his soul from his Bible reading. The latter reads his Bible *existentially* whereas the former reads it historically and critically.

(vi). *The paradoxical principle.*<sup>83</sup> It was Kierkegaard who not only developed the existential principle but also the paradoxical. This full story is too long to tell. The heart of it is this: Hegel, a German philosopher, made much of *divine immanence* and *logical rationality*. He was a pantheist and because of his belief in the pervasiveness of his logic his system has been called *pan-logism*. Kierkegaard challenged these categories with the counter-categories of *divine transcendence* and *logical paradox*.

If man is a limited and sinful creature, and if God is Wholly Other (that is, very different from man), then man cannot have unambiguous knowledge of God. The truth of God must appear to man as dialectical or paradoxical. Any given doctrine must be defined in terms of assertion and counter-assertion. Assertion and counter-assertion appear to man as paradoxical. Exposition of doctrine by means of assertion and counter-assertion is what is meant by the expression *dialectical* theology.

This dialectical procedure and the resultant paradoxes is not wilful indulgence in irrationalism. It is not the contention of the neo-orthodox to assert flat contradictions. Rather, it is the inevitable nature of theological truth, and an uncritical application of the law of contradiction leads to a premature and inaccurate formulation of Christian doctrine.

Examples of these paradoxes are: man is a creature of nature, yet possessing spirit he transcends nature; man must use reason to understand God, yet God is beyond human reason; man is responsible for his sin, yet he inevitably sins; man's historical existence is at the same time destructive and constructive; man must lose his life to save it; God is One yet Three; the cross is foolishness yet wisdom; God is absolute holiness yet unmeasured love.

The truths of man's religious existence can never be precisely or rationally defined, but are tensions

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81 W. Eichrodt, "Fosdick, A Guide to Understanding the Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 65:205 ff., June, 1946. Eichrodt calls Fosdick's book, "The obituary of a whole scholarly approach and investigation." P. 205. Further references on the existential approach are, Brunner, *Dogmatics*, I and II, and, Bernard Ramm, "The Existential Interpretation of Doctrine," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 112:154-163, April, 1955, and July, 256-264. *Op. cit.*, p. 163.

82 *Op. cit.*, p. 163.

83 Cf. Roger Hazelton, "The Nature of Christian Paradox," *Theology Today*, 6:324-335. R. Niebuhr, "Coherence, Incoherence and Christian Faith," *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, pp. 175-203. H. DeWolf, *The Religious Revolt Against Reason*. Tillich, however, makes a distinction between the paradoxical and dialectical (cf. "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Knowledge," *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, p. 39).

between contrarities not capable of complete rational explication yet sufficiently adequate for our religious understanding. Religious reality is too rich in meaning and content to be stated in strict, non-contradictory form.

## F. THE HEILSGESCHICHTLICHE SCHOOL

Amidst the orthodoxy and liberalism of the nineteenth century, von Hofmann of Erlangen endeavored to break through to a fresh Biblical-theological synthesis. He tried to combine the insights of Schleiermacher concerning religious experience as the point of departure for theological thought, the critical study of the Bible, and orthodox Lutheran theology. He attempted to ground religious authority on the tripod of: (i) the experience of regeneration; (ii) the history and fact of the church; and (iii) Scripture.<sup>84</sup>

His principal contribution to hermeneutics is his notion of holy history or salvation-history. For his basic insight he is indebted to Schelling (as Tillich is in our century), for Schelling saw history as the manifestation of the eternal and absolute and not as so many events to be chronicled. Revelation is a higher form of history reaching backward into the past and forward into the future. The supreme content of this superhistorical history, this metaphysics of history, is Jesus Christ.

With this clue from Schelling, von Hofmann said that a historical event had roots in the past, meaning in the present, and portent for the future. In the study of prophecy we must know: (i) the history of Israel, (ii) the immediate historical context of the individual prophecy; and (iii) the fulfilment intended. This is what von Hofmann considered to be the *organic* view of Scripture. All Scripture was bound together in this holy history for every event looked backwards, to the present, and to the future. Preuss says that "it was the first time in the history of Biblical interpretation that an organic view of history was applied to the problems of exegesis in a systematic way."<sup>85</sup>

Christ is the central point of history. God is the active agent; Christ, the focal point. Yet this does not exhaust the content of history, for the present age portends another age, the millennium. Von Hofmann thus takes his place with the Lutheran millenarians of the nineteenth century.

Further, von Hofmann taught that the Holy Spirit not only inspired the Scriptures, but He guides the church. We are never to formalize, dogmatize, or canonize our interpretations of Scripture but ever be sensitive to more teaching from the Holy Spirit. Interpretation is not to be static, but dynamic moving along under the leadership of the Spirit.

Revelation was first historical. It is God's acts in history. But with these events was given a divine interpretation of them. Communication of ideas was necessary to make the event meaningful. Scripture is thus the product of historical event plus inspired interpretation.

Further, the older method of proving a doctrine by piecing together a catena of Scripture from all over

84 Cf. Christian Preus, "The Contemporary Relevance of von Hofmann's Hermeneutical Principles," *Interpretation*, 4:311-321, July, 1950; and J. L. Neve and O. W. Heick, *A History of Christian Thought*, II. 132 ff.

85 Preus, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

the Bible is seriously challenged by Hofmann. He insists that *every* verse or passage be given its historical setting which should in turn give it its true meaning and its weight in proving any doctrine.

The outstanding American representative of this school is Otto Piper.<sup>86</sup> Piper admits indebtedness to von Hofmann and to his Salvation history principle. He claims to be neither neo-orthodox nor liberal nor fundamentalist. One of the major theses of von Hofmann was that inspiration and criticism were not disjunctively related, and this major thesis Piper also accepted. Accordingly he is not appreciated by the liberals who deny any real inspiration nor by the fundamentalists who believe that concessions to criticism are fatal.

The authority of the Bible, according to Piper, is not its claim to verbal inspiration (for this claim is really the claim of the post-Reformation dogmatists) nor is it some higher type of knowledge which it seeks to communicate (for this is the error of gnosticism), but rather "that the Bible confronts us with facts that are more comprehensive and more important than anything else we know."<sup>87</sup> The Bible speaks to us of Jesus Christ and God's offer of forgiveness and salvation through faith. We find that out of our experience with life, this is precisely what our souls need, and upon faith we find ourselves blessed with the blessedness of the gospel. Hence Scriptures are not rationally vindicated, but they are vindicated out of life. The Bible is thus the Word of God (not the words of God as in verbal inspiration) because I *sense* that it is true. God speaks to me out of the Bible. He speaks of sin and forgiveness. The general address of the Bible becomes God's Word to me when I receive it by faith. Piper admits this is subjectivity (i.e., the Bible is the Word of God only to those who respond to it), but this need not alarm us. First, as long as we are willing to relate our experience to other knowledge it is not a solipsistic principle, and secondly, all *important* knowledge is subjective.

In the interpretation of the Bible Piper accepts in principle the critical treatment of the Bible for he pens, "All the attempts to exempt the Bible from the kind of criticism that we apply to other historical documents are just as futile as were the theological protests against the discoveries of paleontology."<sup>88</sup> But to be sure he does not follow this to drastic measures for at times he stoutly resists the efforts of the critics to do away with the supernatural. But he does insist that the interpreter must engage in the preliminary and critical studies of Biblical introduction, canon, and text.

Assuming that the critical study of the Bible has been made, the interpreter is then guided by three major hermeneutical principles (the quest for the life-movement of the given book; the comprehension of its message; and the appropriation of its message).<sup>89</sup>

In the study of the life-movement of a document we perform the following: we attempt to discover the unity of the book; we ascertain the persons to whom the book is communicated and its bearing on the

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86 Cf. Otto Piper, "Principles of New Testament Interpretation," *Theology Today*, 3:192-204, July, 1946. "The Authority of the Bible," *Theology Today*, 6:159-173. "The Theme of the Bible," *Christian Century*, 63:334 f., March 13, 1946. "The Bible as Holy History," *Christian Century*, 63:362 f., March 20, 1946. "Discovering the Bible," *Christian Century*, 63:266 f., Feb. 27, 1946. "How I Study my Bible," *Christian Century*, 63:299 f., March 6, 1946.

87 "The Authority of the Bible," *op. cit.*, p. 163.

88 "How I Study my Bible," *op. cit.*, p. 299.

89 Set forth in "Principles of New Testament Interpretation," *op. cit.*

interpretation of the book; we try to follow the succession of ideas or arguments in the book; we note the literary mold or form or structure of the book; and we must note the basic unity of the entire New Testament in its kerygmatic preaching and witness.

Comprehension of the document, Piper's second step, is (i) locating each idea in the author's total view of life and reality, and (ii) determining "the relationship which exists between the ideas of the documents and the ideas of our own mind."<sup>90</sup> This involves, among other things, the determination of the world view of the New Testament writers. The cogency or believability of this world view lies in "the fact that it is most comprehensive and most consistent taking all kinds of facts and experiences into consideration and that it reaches into depths of meaning not fathomed by any world view."<sup>91</sup> If an interpreter fails to discover this world view and insists on interpreting the New Testament from the so-called modern scientific world view he can only *misinterpret* the New Testament.

The fallacy of allegorical interpretation is that it is reading into Scripture the views already held by exegetes, rather than the discovery of the world view and system of values held by the writers of Scripture. Equally at fault is a narrow literalism, for communication is too complex to be limited to simple, literal interpretation. The *real* literal interpretation is the meaning found "in the original text when its component words are understood in the world view and according to the scale of values of the author."<sup>92</sup>

The final state is appropriation which is our reply to the challenge of the Bible. Appropriation means that we critically study the Scriptures for we should not take seriously a spurious or unauthentic document. After criticism establishes the genuineness and the authenticity of a document we may proceed to its appropriation. The rationalist and liberal are so out of harmony with the supernatural character of the Scriptures that they are not able to truly appreciate them. The post-Reformation orthodox and their modern orthodox and fundamentalist counterparts equally fail to properly appreciate the Bible. The Reformers have showed us the way through the Protestant Circle. Coming to Scriptures out of faith we believe them to be the Word of God, and by properly reading them we in turn discover them to be the Word of God. Only *by* response and *in* response to Scripture do we appreciate it and truly know it as the Word of God.

*Summary:* The various efforts to understand the Bible have now been surveyed. It has not been our purpose to refute each of these methods here suggested, as that in principle is involved in the next chapter. In this following chapter we define and defend what we believe to be the conservative Protestant method of Biblical interpretation for we deem it the only adequate one to unlock the meaning of Sacred Writ. We believe it was the essential method of our Lord, of His Apostles, and all others who have been successful in understanding the pages of God's Holy Word.

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90 *Ibid.*, 197.

91 *Ibid.*, 198.

92 *Ibid.*, 200.

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(W. Schweitzer's *Schrift und Dogma*, a survey of contemporary hermeneutics, came into our hands too late to include it in this chapter.)