A Historical and Semantic Analysis of Methods of Biblical Interpretation as They Relate to Views of Inspiration

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A HISTORICAL AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS
OF METHODS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AS THEY RELATE
TO VIEWS OF INSPIRATION

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A HISTORICAL AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS
OF METHODS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION AS THEY RELATE
TO VIEWS OF INSPIRATION

A Dissertation
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the Faculty of the
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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Theology

by
MILDERED BANDS WYNKOOP
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE RELATION OF INTERPRETATION TO THE RELEVANCY OF THE BIBLE FOR TODAY</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem of Interpretation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. AN EXAMINATION OF THE MAJOR POINTS OF VIEW REGARDING INSPIRATION AND PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Christian Palestinian Jewish Interpretation</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philo and the Alexandrian Jews</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Patristic Period</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medieval and Scholastic Periods</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Reformation View of Scriptures</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confessional Period</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Confessional Statements of Faith</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE ROLE OF MODERNISM IN THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernism and Catholicism</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernism and Protestantism</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernism in Revolt</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernism and Today's Theology</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. AN EXAMINATION OF INTERPRETATION</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Relation of Words to Interpretation</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation and a Divine-Human Book</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANALYTICAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
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INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to understand the historical and contemporary Christian views of Scripture, particularly in regard to the relation of theories of inspiration to the various methods of interpretation which have been and are employed by the Church. Though the question is never directly asked, the whole research has centered about the tacit question, what do we mean when we say that the Bible is the Word of God? The theology of inspiration is not under consideration but only an analysis of the various expressions regarding it. In this sense it is a semantic approach. The study is directed toward the goal of uncovering principles of interpretation which are historically, philosophically and semantically sound, which do justice to the uniqueness of the Bible and which will demonstrate the relevance of the Bible to the needs of today.

The study is justified, in the writer's opinion, for a number of reasons. (1) There are several views of inspiration and consequent variations of emphasis and procedure in interpretive methods extant in the Christian church. This results in a failure to find a common ground for "conversation" on matters that should be of mutual concern. This divergence of opinion long ago raised questions in the writer's mind,
questions which have assumed demanding proportions which made a personal decision imperative. (2) No published works, to the writer's knowledge, exist which attempt to resolve the confusion by means of a sympathetic understanding of the terms and concepts which have been and are used and around which the differences of opinion revolve. A very great deal has been written from a theological, and philosophic but always dogmatic point of view. It seems to be the proper way to attempt unity of spirit, at least, to uncover and analyze the various pre-suppositions of each position so that an objective judgment can be made. (3) If the conservatism with which the writer identifies herself does not re-examine its position, constructively, its enemies will do so destructively with too great a loss to theological conservatism of intellectual prestige and spiritual leadership. (4) It is hoped, moreover, that relevant semantic principles may be suggested which will provide tools for a further exploration into theological formulations. At least it should be a "point of departure" toward this worthy goal. (5) To summarize the main concern it may be said that one desire is paramount in the author's mind, namely, to work toward a unity of spirit and faith among Christians.

The study, it is hoped, is reasonably objective and unbiased. Pure objectivity, however, is not only impossible but undesirable. The author approaches the subject matter as a Christian with all the personal and moral commitments involved in a living Christian faith and is aware of the deep assumptions that this commitment brings to the study.
Objectivity, then, will mean a freedom from a priori conclusions, of a creedal and dogmatic nature which would prejudice the study and result in a merely circular argument which defends rather than explores the question.

The fact of the problem is assumed in view of the variety of opinions held by equally qualified Christian scholars. Inspiration is not considered here to be a problem but the relationship between theories of inspiration and the understanding of the Bible as we have it, gives rise to legitimate problems in the field of interpretation. Does the Bible need to be interpreted? If not, why are there so many different understandings of its doctrines? If it does, what are the proper hermeneutical rules and how are they determined? Should the Bible be handled as any other literary work or are there special rules for interpretation which apply uniquely to it? How do we know this? What is interpretation? What are the pre-suppositions involved in the act of interpretation? What are we doing when we interpret? How is interpretation related to revelation? Who interprets revelation? Is it an authorised person, a certain church, a council or synod, or is it the individual reader? If interpretation is to be authoritative, in what is that authority grounded and what is the objective sign of the proper interpreter? What is authoritative, the Word of God or the interpretation? What is the relationship between interpretation and authority? Wherein does the authority of the Bible
consist? Does it, and can it reside in the Book as a book? Is authority intrinsic or vested so far as the Bible is concerned? We believe that all these are proper questions. There are others. Most Christian scholarship recognises the human element in Scripture and the fact of progressive revelation and the Bible's thoroughly "historical" involvement. These things obviously must be reflected in the rules of interpretation. How does it do so, and to what extent? What does historical mean, and how is it related to inspiration, particularly when interpretation is based on this characteristic as a modifying element? The Bible is called supernatural, divine, holy, spiritual. It has human elements in its production and history. It has a physical structure. What is the distinction between all these terms? How do each relate to interpretation? There are also, very urgent and practical problems. What is the Bible for? This is a crucial question, because the answer to it must be one of the major criteria for interpretation. Is it relevant for today? Can it speak to individual and collective needs and if so how can this be realised? Only a handful of scholars are able to read the original Biblical languages with any degree of real understanding. The rest of the world have the Bible in some translation. Some pagan cultures have no verbal equivalent for such words and ideas as "God" and "love." Do those who must read the Bible in imperfect translations have the word of God or not? If they do not, how does God speak to men, any
man, today? If the translation can be considered the word of God what is it that is the vehicle of that word? These "diagnostic" questions lie behind every inquiry of this study.

There are three kinds of questions asked above, practical questions, philosophical and semantic questions. It is impossible to disentangle these aspects completely but it is necessary to distinguish them and in so doing bring to the solution a greater measure of clarity than is often the case. The central question is very simple; what do the terms we use mean to us? But as simple as this may appear on the surface it is actually the source of all the questions which have been posed, and many more. Meaning is more involved than dictionary definitions and philological analysis though it includes these. There is a personal element about the question as it is stated that is vitally important since it makes the difference between the possibility and impossibility of "conversation." If we had asked: what do these terms mean? the discussion would have remained abstract and formal and would not pass beyond the point that justifies this study. The personal approach opens up new areas of thinking and asks for a more thoughtful response than many are accustomed to give. We, as Christians, justify our views of inspiration and interpretation and related terms, on a sense of continuity with the central stream of Christian consciousness running through at least two thousand years of history. We believe we have a right to our assurance. But when
we are pressed for an answer as to what we mean by the terms which we use, if we maintain continuity with the past Christian traditions we are driven to inquire whether our understanding of the terms is the same as that of the other Christian epochs. This is necessary to justify our right to stand in "apostolic succession." We do not take for granted that the meaning has not undergone modification through the centuries. We ask whether or not it has changed.

This study, then, in order to come to a practical answer to the problem of interpretation must explore two apparently unrelated fields, history and the philosophy of meaning. What have Christians of all ages believed about the inspiration of the Bible and how did they relate that belief to interpretation? The answer to these questions will establish a historical perspective against which to evaluate contemporary views. The second emphasis is that of meaning, or an analysis of the expression of the various views and a critical consideration of them in the light of the possibilities and limitations of language. Interpretation as a science of meaning must ask about words and how they are able to bear significance from one mind to another. The philosophy of interpretation is not a dogmatic discipline but is a necessary one as a preliminary preparation to hermeneutics, and particularly to Biblical exegesis.

Of necessity, then, this study cannot result in a dogmatic conclusion, though there has come great personal assurance to the
writer as a result of it. She expects and welcomes criticism and debate. In no other way can finite minds arrive at any measure of certainty so far as our interpretation of God's word is concerned. Criticism and revision is the way to an educated and useful mind.
The study is offered much in the spirit of Charles G. Finney, who, in launching his *Systematic Theology* into troubled theological seas, said,

I do not preserve my views to be published after I am dead, to spare myself the mortification of seeing them severely criticized, and overturned if false; but on the contrary I desire to subject them to the fullest criticism, that whatever is wrong in them may be thoroughly sifted out.¹

The following chapter will further acquaint the reader with the nature of the problem under discussion and the next chapter proceed to examine the major points of view, held through the centuries by the Christian church, regarding inspiration and its methods of Biblical interpretation. This will not be an exhaustive inquiry but an attempt at a fairly representative and accurate one. The significance of the Reformation period requires a more detailed analysis, as does also, the peculiar shifting of emphasis in the post-Reformation epoch. A section will be devoted to the role of Modernism in the history of interpretation as it challenged the Catholic church and then Protestantism and then was caught on the horns of a self-created dilemma.

The resultant reversal to a sort of Orthodoxy which has issued in a new demand for a Biblical theology (in contrast to Old or New Testament theologies), will be traced. All of this prepares us to examine our own views of inspiration and asks that we justify our methods of interpretation in the light of a clear understanding of our position and in terms which are meaningful to us and to others, and in a full awareness of our historical heritage on the matter. But this chapter is more than analytic. It is also a germinal approach to a constructive statement by the writer. This personal aspect is both implicit and explicit. It is implicit in the very choice of subject matter and the criteria of judgment throughout the study. It will be spelled out more fully as a conclusion, in a manner which seems to be justified historically, philosophically and semantically.
CHAPTER II

THE RELATION OF INTERPRETATION TO THE RELEVANCY
OF THE BIBLE FOR TODAY
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Modern man is faced with a perplexing array of varying Christian doctrines. To the extent that each doctrine is Christian, it is based on the authoritative Christian book, the Bible. No Christian group can be charged with insincerity, deceit or ignorance and yet the extremely vital differences stand as barriers to the unity of fellowship which would seem to be desirable and probably extremely necessary today. The differences of opinion on doctrinal issues, as great as they may be, are of less concern than the fact of the barriers to a united Christian voice which ought to be raised against the anti-Christian forces in the world and which ought also to be winsomely speaking of Christ, the Saviour of men. We are told that the world, in its confusion, is asking for that guiding voice and is ready to listen to it.

There can be no doubt that the church today has to carry a great responsibility in public life. . . . Men outside the Church are searching for some authoritative guidance in social and political matters. . . . Do the churches possess any answers to their concrete questions? . . . Until the churches can speak with something more like a united voice, men will not listen very seriously to what they say.¹

¹Alan Richardson and Wolfgang Schweitzer (eds.), Biblical Authority for Today. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954, p. 9. This book is the first major tangible result of the desire of the World Council of Churches to provide an ecumenical answer to the question, what is the legitimate source of our common testimony to the world?
There are major differences which make the possibility of that united voice difficult, if not impossible. The most serious difference of opinion is in connection with a doctrine of the Church. That barrier separates the East from the West, Romanism from Protestantism and the hierarchically centered denominations from the congregationally directed churches. Even within congregationalism, the differences of opinion in regard to the nature of the church, raises barriers, sufficient to restrict communion fellowship between them. Another perplexing difficulty is the matter of orthodoxy. One can scarcely call himself an orthodox Christian unless he names which orthodoxy he means. Fundamentalism, in its widest sense, specifies which of all the views held by the church are the basic and essential ones. The Greek Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic communion, the Lutheran and the Reformed bodies, the Baptist churches and the Methodist denomination, the Anglican and Episcopal Churches and the Congregationalists, to name a few of the more widely known groups, together with a host of smaller though equally active and equally self-conscious churches and/or sects, each represents a fundamentalism, or an orthodoxy. The difference of opinion as to what an essential may be, is wide indeed.

It is manifested particularly in various views of soteriology, which is to be expected in the face of the broader ecclesiastical divisions, but which also break into many unexpected factions. Men are saved by grace channeled through the church, or by personal
experience of the grace of God, without regard for the church. Sal-
ervation is by an objective ritual act, or by a subjective attitude
only. It is of sovereign grace, forensic in nature and unrepeateable
(impacting an indelible character on the soul), or it is moralistic
in nature and contingent upon the faithfulness of the believer. It
is a social regeneration, mainly, or it is an individual rebirth
demanding no social responsibility. In some cases correct belief
as evidenced by an intellectual acceptance of rigidly defined propo-
sitions are necessary to salvation, in other cases, a rigidly defined
code of conduct is the test, or a spectacular psychological experience
may be the requirement entailing little or nothing in the way of
intellectual commitments. There are, of course, many modifications
and degrees between these extremes.

Of far less basic doctrinal importance (in the opinion of the
writer), but of more divisive consequences are such matters, among
others, as patterns of dress and adornment, food restrictions,
Sabbatarianism and details of eschatological teaching. It is not
suggested that any of these things is unimportant, nor is it supposed
that Christians will or can or ought to surrender that facet of truth
which is most precious and meaningful to them. The most (or the least),
that can be expected is that each Christian come to appreciate the
context of his brother's faith and the mutual humanness out of which
springs individual understandings of the Word which is common to all
of Christendom. Differences of opinion are not to be deplored, for out of the sharing of such differences have come most of the richest intellectual and spiritual insights in the world, but only that is to be deplored which lifts a human opinion to the status of revelation. It is a psychological problem, Ramm tells us. "So many Christians fail to differentiate interpretation from inspiration," he says, "one must realize that revelation is not interpretation, and conversely, interpretation is not revelation. Revelation is the communication of divine truth; interpretation is the effort to understand it."¹

Underlying all the differences of opinion that fragment the Christian witness is a varying attitude toward the Bible. That the Bible is inspired of God is almost an unanimous opinion. In what that inspiration consists is not so uniformly understood. It is to be expected, therefore, that interpretation procedures will vary in accordance with that which is considered to be a proper view of inspiration. That the Bible is authoritative for the Church and the Christian is scarcely ever a matter for debate, particularly among the more Biblicistic groups, but the ground of that authority and the extent of it occasions honest and earnest polemic. If one were

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to characterize the most universal view of inspiration by the title
given to the Christian Book, the "Word of God" would undoubtedly
describe it. The "Bible" or "Scripture" would be a sort of generic
or family name, a definitive term, but the "Word of God" is specific
and particular and testifies to a faith in its divine origin and
the obligation of men to it as to God himself. Interpretation sustains
a definite relationship to these terms or at least to the concept back
of them so that whatever is involved in them is reflected in the doc-
trines which emerge from it. This study is an inquiry into the meaning
these terms and concepts had and have for Christians.

The fact of a contemporary difference of opinion about the
Bible is accepted as a given. We live in the midst of such tensions.
We do not need to prove that they exist, nor do we condemn them. But
we desire to know whether these differences of opinion regarding the
Bible, at least within conservatism, are local in time and religious
culture or whether they have roots in history which may justify them.

The Problem of Interpretation

Interpretation stands between the inspired word and its appli-
cation to personal needs. We are aware that this statement could be
challenged at least on two counts. If one says that the Bible requires
no interpretation, the burden of proof that it does, rests upon us.
This matter shall be examined. Should another say that the Bible has
no relevance for today's world we would have to admit that such a
claim is perfectly reasonable and requires defense if it is maintained. This will be attempted later. But for the moment, we will assume that interpretation is needed and possible and that by means of it the Bible becomes a contemporary book speaking afresh to the modern man in his dilemma. This assumption is made on the strength of the almost universal faith of Christians in this possibility. Whenever we say that the Bible is authoritative, we must also say how it is so, and in doing that we interpret it and admit its relevancy.

But how can interpretation provide an authoritative message? The Catholics have an answer. What did the church do during the early years before there was a written record of any kind; and what did it do for the next about fifteen hundred years when there were but a few handwritten copies of the Bible or a few fixed-type prints, each of which would have cost, had they been procurable, far more than a man could possibly earn in an entire lifetime? The answer is simple. The Church interpreted the Bible message just as Christ intended that it should. He never asked men to read or write but he did ask them to believe the preaching which he authorised.

Believing that the Catholic Church is the living voice of Christ, Catholics accept it as the Supreme authority for determining with infallible assurance what is the Word of God. . . . They believe that the Church alone has been qualified by Christ to teach men what must be believed and what must be done according to God's revelation.¹

¹ But Can It Be Found in the Bible? (St. Louis, Mo.: Supreme Council, Knights of Columbus, Religious Information Bureau, no. 12), p. 7.
If the Bible is inspired, the Catholic argues, and was produced by the Church under the Holy Spirit's guidance, interpretation is only possible through the same media. In the pamphlet quoted above, the anonymous author quotes Adolph Harnack's conclusion, with full approval:

An inspired document is not only untranslatable without the same Divine assistance that created it, but it is also uninterpretable. Catholicism is, therefore absolutely right in its claim that the power of interpreting Holy Scripture lies only in the Church, which alone has the promise to be led by the Holy Spirit into all truth. Inspiration and a sacred court of interpretation necessarily hang together.\(^1\)

Scripture is kept contemporary to every age by way of this authoritative and living voice. "From the Scripture, he who is assailed and oppressed by adversity and misfortune will draw comfort and superhuman strength to suffer and to endure with patience."\(^2\)

"Among the reasons for which the Holy Scripture is so worthy of commendation . . . the chief of all is this, the innumerable benefits of which it is the source, . . ."\(^3\) There is no static interpretation recognized by the Catholic Church. Either the Pope or the General Council as living representatives of Christ — yes, as Christ himself, keeps ever new and dynamic the message

\(1\)Ibid., p. 14, (quoting Harnack: Bible Reading in the Early Church, p. 9).

\(2\)Ibid., p. 16, (quoting Pope Pius XII).

\(3\)Ibid., p. 47, (quoting Pope Pius XIII).
of Scripture and Tradition. Charles Finney recognized the logic of this when he said that if authoritative interpretation were necessary he would prefer the voice of a living Pope than that of a dead Council (meaning the Westminster Assembly) which had fixed meaning in the tomb of some past era.

Wolfgang Schweitzer has analyzed the ecumenical Protestant mind very well in his article, "Biblical Theology and Ethics Today." The critical and historical interpretation of the past century has not proved adequate. It must advance to a theological interpretation of Scripture. Scripture must be "put at the service of the Christian proclamation." While exegetical theology recalls us to Scripture, it does not lead into the past, but shows "in what sense the Bible contains a message that is valid today.""}

However, without rules, everyone will hear the Gospel differently. We must ask, then, "What are the methods of interpretation that are best fitted to the whole of the Biblical message?" It is necessary to know the message as a whole before individual texts can be interpreted. Interpretation and rules for interpretation

1Finney, Systematic Theology, p. iii.

2Biblical Authority Today, pp. 129-154. Schweitzer is the Secretary in the Study Department of the World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland.

3Ibid., p. 131.
must mutually enrich and correct each other.\textsuperscript{1}

If some understanding of Scripture is necessary to its interpretation a clue must be found to its meaning. The historico-literary school could not find, by its analytic methods the role that Jesus played in the emergence of the Christian faith. The religion of Jesus was said to have been the climax of religious evolution, but this forced every subsequent teaching and event into a retrogression which is out of harmony with the direction of evolution. Albert Schweitzer revolutionised liberal thought by showing that Jesus and the eschatological message were inseparable. This eventually led to the form-critical method of Biblical research, which asked: What led the New Testament authors to compose their writings? The written Gospels developed out of preaching (the \textit{kerygma}), and the preaching arose out of the confessional formulas. What occasioned the baptismal formulas? Significantly, all of them are Christo-logical. Christ is the living unity of the documents and the faith behind them. There is no separation between event and meaning as it was once thought there might be. The demand, now, is to locate theology, or the faith of the community in events and in the person of Jesus. The events may be denied, but the Biblical

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., p. 131.
faith in them cannot be. And thus, Christ becomes the clue to the interpretation of the New Testament.  

The Old Testament now is considered to contribute the idea of Covenant, as its central fact, rather than that it teaches monotheism, in a unique way, or presents a new and superior law. It is the charter of the New Covenant and is to be interpreted in that light. If we read the Old Testament as Jesus read it, the difference between the Old and the New "withers away," and we see the Old Testament witnessing to him. If there is an objection to this the question is asked "whether a Christian theologian can even for a moment work as if Christ were not yet born?" The question is more penetrating yet; "What meaning has Jesus for us if he had not applied the Old Testament to himself and so fulfilled it?" In this respect the Old Testament cannot be understood apart from the idea of Gesamthgeschichte. It was preparation. The theological unity of the whole of Scripture lies in this concept of preparation-fulfillment, centered about the Christ.  

Now, what about rules for interpretation? We must, first of all determine what connection is in the Bible between the Word of God and the word of man. Freedom of critical research, once thought to

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1 Ibid., pp. 131-134.

2 Ibid., pp. 135-137.
endanger the authority of the Bible, is now welcomed almost everywhere, as actually reinforcing it. The deeper question is regarding the freedom and authority of Scripture as ever against human interpretations.

This sovereignty of the Word of God cannot be defended where the theologian, before he even opens the Bible, is already committed to an obligatory doctrine of the Church about the truth of the Word of God, whether it be the resolutions of Councils, Papal encyclicals or Protestant confessional documents. The question is whether we open the Scriptures without expecting that the will of God, perhaps in a new and unprecedented way, will be revealed to us in his word. Who is Lord in the Church?¹

The Catholic, as we have seen, simply identifies Christ and the Church, and so the authority of the Church coincides with the authority of Christ and the Word. It is true that this provides a freedom of adjustment to changing situations and cultures but it is not the freedom which permits a genuine listening to the Gospel. Actually, the loss of distinction between the Lord and his Church, succeeds in putting the word of man in place of the Word of God, and it is this substitution which Protestantism rejects.²

Schweitzer feels that the extreme fundamentalists err in a similar way. Their maxims of verbal inspiration determines rules for exposition. The historical methods of interpretation is inconsistent with this view because the original historical circumstance and the human writer, according to the fundamentalist’s theory, is neutral

¹Ibid., p. 139.
²Ibid., p. 140.
so far as the purpose of God is concerned. One does not analyse the words of men to find the message of God. As much as they feel they tie themselves purely to the Word of God, in truth it becomes the word of man that bears the authority because the interpretation of a text, once made in a certain way, is tenaciously maintained as itself the very word of God.

As the fundamentalist declines to take the Bible as a human word seriously it has little or no importance for him that the Bible proclamation should be transferred into the thought of the present day. Accordingly there is here fundamentally no interpretation but at most only a systematising and harmonising of Biblical affirmations.1

Interpretation, to the liberal, is a proclamation of the human word. The Bible is a record of evolutionary religious development culminating in the admirable Jesus of history. He is an example for us to emulate in principle, but his teachings are not to be taken seriously as maxims for the ethics of any other age. Liberalism has nothing to contribute to the problem of interpretation because it cannot find a real place for the relevancy of the Bible for today in its evolutionary world-view.

Existentialist philosophy offers a solution in the teachings of Rudolph Bultmann, by eliminating the unacceptable Mythos in which the New Testament Kerygma is buried, and stressing the genuine decision which gives meaning to the Cross and the Resurrection and

1Ibid., p. 142.
a new understanding of the self and new power for living. The ques-
tion in this view is whether the myth which Bultmann desplores is not
the very heart of the New Testament Kerygma.

The Christological solution of dialectical theology is a far
cry from the fundamentalist’s idea. It is not a desire to hold to
a revelation transmitted in the past, but to find a fresh revelation
today. In the Bible God speaks ever new to those in despair. The
Word of God is not the letter of Scripture, but the literal fact of
God's act of speaking to us. The Bible, as a book, is a human word.
Literary and historical criticism is a legitimate part of interpre-
tation. Whenever we hear God speak in the human word, the message
is no longer something out of the past but an event in the present.
When we hear the Word we accept the message of Jesus Christ. Christ
and His mercy is the word of God. The influence of this theology is
wider than the limits of the dialectical school. It has won many
away from the thought of fulfillment as the end of religion, to the
realisation that it is obedience to God Himself. It has made the
modern world aware of the divine and human aspects of Scripture and
the resultant tension is in contrast to both extreme fundamentalism
and liberalism neither of which can know this tension since one
affirms the pure word of God and the other the simple word of man.¹

¹ibid., p. 147-149.
The lack of the historical sense of God's revelation as a succession of events, vitiates a large measure of true interpretation in this system.

Schweitzer believes that the general trend in theology today is its "struggle for the recognition of the liberty and sovereignty of the Word of God against historicism." Those who have been influenced by Kierkegaard should be the first to break the ban on historicism and determine "the meaning of the historical for the fundamentals of theology." The Scriptural understanding of history has been clarified in large measure by Oscar Cullmann, in his book, Christ and Time, but the full implication of it for interpretation has not yet been developed.¹

The modern theologian knows that Biblical ethics apart from the Gospel of forgiveness, has no relevancy for the present day. The ecumenical Study Conferences in London (1946), in Bossey (1947), and in Wadham College, London (1949) were unanimously agreed "that every Biblical interpretation has to set out from Jesus Christ."²

It is now, no doubt, obvious why interpretation is the bridge between an inspired word and the man of today. The Catholics have thrown the Church over the otherwise fixed gulf and in so doing hold open the door to the new revelation. But at the same time the

¹Ibid., pp. 149-150.
²Ibid., p. 151.
Bible as the Word of God is never heard by the common man. Only the Church speaks. Extreme fundamentalism and liberalism, each in its own way, has isolated the Bible from serious consideration for today's world. Both are rationalistic and approach the Bible with a priori pre-suppositions, one, that fulfillment is for a future age, the other that its day is past. Each "interprets" historically, and both lose thereby the ability to relate the Bible to today. Fundamentalists have fixed interpretation in past creeds and dogma, the liberals have lost the power to interpret because of their evolutionary theories. The unhistorical Christ of the dialectical theology and its beyond history eschatology leaves doctrine and ethics hanging in midair with no Biblical support. None of these major religious disciplines, then, has found a way to bridge the gulf between the Word of God and the need of man. If the Bible is not a human word, intrinsically, it is no more authoritative for us than a passage from Shakespeare or Homer. If it is the supernatural, pure Word of God, it is untranslatable and must have an authorised and inspired interpreter who is then some human voice only, not that of God directly.

The key problem is in a theory of inspiration which makes interpretation possible. The relevancy of the Bible depends upon a theory of inspiration which permits and authorises interpretation. The matter of inspiration in this connection will be examined later in the study. Just now, we must note the testimony of responsible
people to the strange power of the Bible and some of the suggestions which have been made as to how to come to grips with it. In spite of the difficulties with which rationalistic approaches to the Bible have faced us, the message and vitality of the word of God comes through to all kinds and conditions of men. One of the most striking expressions is found in the author’s Preface to Letters to Young Churches:

The present translator who has studied these letters for several years is struck by . . . their surprising vitality. Without holding fundamentalist views of “inspiration,” he is continually struck by the living quality of the material on which he is working. Some will, no doubt, consider it merely superstitious reverence for “Holy Writ,” yet again and again the writer felt rather like an electrician rewiring an ancient house without being able to “turn off the mains.” He feels that this fact is worth recording.¹

Dean Farrar, whose writings have been utilised in this study, though tending toward the liberal view, extols Scripture in majestic language throughout his works.

A Book less sacred would have been discredited by the dangerous uses to which it has been presented; but no aberrations of interpreters have suffered to weaken, much less abrogate the essential revelation which has exercised from the first, and will, to the last syllable of recorded time continue to exercise unique power over the hearts and consciences of men.²


Even more rhetorically but none the less truly, he says again,

Men may still continue to misunderstand and to misrepresent it; to turn it into a grim idol or a mechanical fetish; to betray it with the kiss of false devotion, and to thrust it between the soul and the God whom it was designed to reveal; ... but ... and herein consists its divine authority — it shall always guide the souls of the humble to the straight gate ... .

Howard Eustis, after retelling the story of Sir Edwin Landser's painting which was characterised by a glowing color in his painted fire, but which in time lost its living quality because he had used a "fugitive pigment," makes the application by way of contrast:

Human words fade but the Bible, although made of the stuff of common life, nevertheless is pervaded by a spirit whose flame is as deathless as the needs of men.\(^1\)

Scripture has two sides, he says, one, the literary form, to be approached as literature, but it has another side which men look for "in moments of deepest need," when they do not think of it in literary categories, but when "he turns to Scripture for what it can do to lift him out of his earth-bound experience into the pure light of God."\(^2\) This vital principle is not its code but its motive its power to "require the response of the whole man."\(^3\)

\(^1\) Ibid., p. 303.


\(^3\) Ibid., p. 208.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 220.
These, of many who could be quoted, would be considered as representing the more "liberal wing" of Christianity, but the point in mind is precisely made in-so-far as this may be true. Liberal Christianity was largely a revolt against the sterile Biblicism of the nineteenth Century which had robbed the Bible of the spiritual power which it had exercised over the lives of men. However, liberalism, as such, went too far in rejecting the objective integrity of the written Scriptures and making "experience" the norm of truth.

As a deep reaction to consciousness theology Karl Barth, who had discovered the strange new world of the Bible, proposed uncompromisingly a theology of the Word of God which put God's revelation of Himself entirely in His own initiative and took it out of the manipulating hands of sinful man. That this view suffers by virtue of being (1) an extreme reaction and hence over stated, and (2) by resting on a metaphysics (or anti-metaphysics) un congenial to the historic Christian faith does not discount the fact that it has served to shatter the comfortable optimism of old liberalism and has forced this age to a new and more vital appraisal of Scripture and the Word of God. There is a new demand for a Bible-centered theology, which betrays neither the grammatical and historical methods of interpretation, nor the spiritual vitality which constitutes its authority. Alan Richardson, the English Church canon, puts it squarely before us; we do not, he says, anymore merely want
to know about God, we want to know Him.

To say that the Bible contains the highest idea about God which men can attain does not satisfy us, we do not want ideas about God, we want God. . . . Can the Bible give us that?1

In a significant editorial in *Interpretation*, the matter is made very clear as the author presents the controlling conviction of that journal — the reason for its existence. "Protestant vitality today must be rooted in a renewed discovery of the relevance of the Bible to the intellectual and spiritual quest of our time." "Only a truly biblical theology can produce an ecumenical theology." The reason for the faith in a Biblical theology is that "biblical categories are dynamic, not static." The Bible has fresh relevance for every age. The wineskins of the post-reformation theology cracks, but the wine of Biblical truth fits every age — even this one.2

In the publication noted above containing the results of some of the preliminary studies preparatory to the "Evanston Meeting" of the World Council of Churches, the matter of Biblical authority for today's social and political activities received attention. Men outside the Church are seeking authoritative guidance and are asking


the Church for an answer, especially an **agreed** answer, for, "until the Churches can speak with something more like a united voice, men will not listen very seriously to what they say."¹ The Church has always been drawn nearer together as it went to its Bible so

To look for guidance in the Word of God is, it seems to us, especially urgent in a time like ours . . . Thus we hope that our common approach to the Bible will not only bring us nearer to each other, but will also enable us to make a common witness to our faith . . .²

All these men, and many more, ask for that approach to the Bible which will not only do it justice as a literary work, but that will also speak to our contemporary need, personally and collectively. Men like H. H. Bowley in England, and Floyd Filson in America, say quite frankly that the evolutionary hypothesis which once separated the Bible from us as a serious book, has been quite abandoned. Something is in the Bible which is "charged" with divine power.

There is a growing recognition that only a biblical religion, founded on and nourished by the Bible, can suffice for this or any other day.³

It is of first importance that our historical sense should not be vitiated by pre-conceived ideas, that we should not approach the evidence with an evolutionary or deterministic theory.⁴

¹**Biblical Authority for Today**, p. 7.

²Ibid., p. 7.


⁴Ibid., p. 9.
Rowley says that Biblical interpretation is more than an intellectual pursuit. Men are asking for commentaries more profoundly theological. "We need a more dynamic view of the Bible." But even the theological interpretation is not quite sufficient.

For the Bible is more than a theological book. It is a religious book, and religion is more than theology. Its study should do more than develop right views about God, man and duty, it should nurture right relations to God.¹

Interestingly enough, this same demand is recognised by the Reformed theologian, Louis Berkhof. He will be asked to speak for his segment of the Christian church.

Many writers on Hermeneutics are of the opinion that the grammatical and historical interpretation meet all the requirements for the proper interpretation of the Bible.²

But there is a third element needed. He said Kuyper emphasised the necessity for recognising the mystical factor, Bavinck, Klausen and Landerer, insisted on the theological factor and that he, himself, followed Callier and Sikkel in adding a Scriptural interpretation. Whatever each of these men meant by these terms, it remains true that in the "third element" which was needed, is a recognition of a lack in the simple literal interpretation suggested by the historico-grammatical method.

¹Ibid., p. 16.
It is this researcher's belief that the "third element" sought by all these Bible scholars is related to a theory of inspiration.

Berkhof defends the right use of the mystical interpretation, because Scripture itself suggests its propriety, particularly in some of the Messianic passages. There is a symbolical relationship between different spheres of life, as for instance, marriage being a mystery pointing to Christ's relation to the Church, and there is a typical relationship suggested in similar historical events which the book of Hebrews shows. Of particular significance in Berkhof's stress on the implied sense of Scripture, beyond the literal content of any verbal composition, He says, "The Bible as the Word of God contains a fulness and wealth of thought that is unfathomable." Even in human compositions we distinguish between the expressed and implied meaning. In "writings of a superior order" language leaps over the strict dictionary definition.

Great minds contain a wealth of knowledge, and whatever they communicate of it is related to and suggestive of that vast store, so that it becomes quite possible to read between the lines. And if this is true of the literary production of men, it applies much more to the infallible Word of God.

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1 Ibid., p. 141.
2 Ibid., p. 157.
3 Ibid., p. 158.
Most specifically Berkof says, in italicized type, "Not only the express statements of Scripture, but its implications as well, must be regarded as the Word of God." Any theory of inspiration which exalts the word unduly, or ends in the literal word of the text, will result in a theory of interpretation that is unsatisfactory, which does not do justice to the Bible as a religious book, nor does it confront men with the living God in daily existence. The very purpose of the Bible as men of all ages have conceived it, and as experience proves it to be, demands a theory of inspiration which adequately preserves that purpose. According to the testimony of the Christian thinkers quoted, and according to the tenor of a mass of similar sentiments from no less representative theologians, the contemporary Christian need is a view of Scripture which will give spiritual authority in the realm of personal and social experience, one that will give a Living, Working God, to living, sinful men.

Dr. A. B. Michelson senses this when he said

Those who believe in verbal inspiration must not stress words to such an extent that people will think that words are ends in themselves . . . Words have but one purpose and that is to convey thought . . . Words without thoughts are nonsense syllables . . . This is why I often use the term "conceptual-verbal" in regard to inspiration.

This does not eliminate, in Dr. Michelson's mind the need for the

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1 Ibid., p. 159.

correct word, but it seems to indicate the recognition of the need
for looking beyond the word, to the thought which required the word,
and to the spiritual dynamic which characterizes Christian religion.

A Christian professor in a conservative theological seminary adds
an urgent word. There is "no subject more vital to our Christian faith,"
he says than the inspiration of Scripture. Without that inspiration
"the whole superstructure of Christian faith must inevitably collapse."
In facing the problem of the verbal differences in the Synoptics, as
a New Testament scholar, he concludes that since the Bible is both
human and divine, we need to acknowledge both freely. He says,

The point that seems to me all important is that the
inspiration was not at the point of a pen, . . . Rather,
it was in the minds and hearts of the writers. They thought
the thoughts of God after Him and recorded them as best they
could in their own words . . . This does not rule out the
possibility that the Holy Spirit did, when the communication
of divine truth required it, . . . guide the writer to use
the proper form of the word employed.\(^1\)

H. H. Rowley, the British Baptist conservative Old Testament
scholar quoted above, gives an instructive and significant analysis
of the status of Biblical theology today. In 1944, he said in a
preface to one of his books,

What I have tried to show in this little book is that
the Bible is relevant to our modern world, which so largely

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\(^1\)Ralph Earle, "Verbal Differences in Parallel Passages in
the Synoptics," \textit{The Asbury Seminarian} (Spring-Summer, 1954),
p. 28.
ignores it, and that modern scholarship is not inimical to the spiritual understanding and use of the Bible . . . . It is not merely relevant to our age, but urgently relevant, and that the pressing need of the hour is for men and nations to receive the divine revelation mediated through the Bible, and culminating in the unveiling of God in Jesus Christ, and to base all their life on that revelation.\(^1\)

Rowley feels that not all the Biblical scholars in the critical schools were enemies of the Christian faith. Today's studies seek to accept the best of that study and transcend it to seek the abiding significance of the Bible for this generation.\(^2\) It recognises all the human processes that went into the book, yet knows it is not merely a human document. It understands that there was progress in revelation, but does not reduce revelation to discovery.\(^3\)

The new attitude is completely frank. Where problems exist it acknowledges them. Archeological light is welcomed, but it sees real peril in trying to establish Biblical trustworthiness by means of it.

That the Bible has a far greater measure of historical trustworthiness than any other literature of comparable antiquity can be established without difficulty, but it is quite impossible to establish the historical inerrancy of the Bible.\(^4\)

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\(^2\) Ibid., p. 15.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 17.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 18.
This does not discredit the message of the Bible. The new attitude gives full recognition of the religious quality of the Bible and its desire [is] not alone to recover ancient situations, cultures and beliefs, but to find behind and through them the One unchanging God, revealing Himself in all the Scripture. . . . This ancient Book is God's word to us, relevant to the modern world and to our hearts.1

Rowley's article on "The Relevance of Biblical Interpretation," stands as the first article in the first issue of Interpretation (1957), and in it he rings a clear note for the authority of the Bible for today and its basis in the fact of certain events. But those facts must be interpreted. And "biblical interpretation is more than an intellectual pursuit," he warns us, it is spiritual as well, and out of the material given us we must determine what is God's enduring word for us.

If this seems to be a compromising view from a conservative, note what one of the leading spokesmen for the Fundamentalist movement had to say in answer to the question, "Is the Bible the word of God or does it contain the word of God?"

If by the former is meant that God spoke every word in the Bible, and hence every word is true, the answer must be no; but if it be meant that God caused every word in the Bible, true or false, to be recorded, the answer is yes.2

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1 Ibid., pp. 19-20.

As conservative a scholar as Dr. Merrill C. Tenney, asks that conservative critics "face squarely" several issues. Among them are two pertinent questions.

What is the relation of the Synoptic problem — and the Johannine problem as well — to the doctrine of inspiration? (And) Can a theory be propounded that will meet the conditions necessary to give a correct evaluation of the literary and spiritual qualities of these writings (italics are mine)?

In the author's opinion, Tenney has failed to come to grips with his own question but however that may be, the fact remains that this discussion is another significant segment in a growing body of literature from every quarter of the Christian Church, asking that a theory of inspiration be formulated which will provide an authoritative basis for the spiritual message which is widely felt to be the core of the Word of God, written.

Dr. Seeberg's comment suggests obliquely the relation of Biblical translations to the whole matter.

Everywhere in our day we are confronted by the great task of preserving Christianity to the modern mind. This can be accomplished only if the modern world can be brought to the consciousness that even at the present day the deepest wants, needs, and problems which move man find their answer in the Gospel, and that the Gospel need fear no progress of science and culture. But for this purpose no pains must be spared in translating the thoughts of the Christian revelation into the speech and modes of thought of our time.


Unless the Bible is directly applicable to individual, contemporary need, translations are a foolish waste of time and money. The presupposition back of a translation, or back of a sermon in which the preacher "explains" the Hebrew or Greek, or back of a course in English Bible, or even one in the original languages, is that the Bible is relevant.

This chapter has suggested that the differences in Biblical interpretation are due in large measure to how inspiration is regarded. The problem of interpretation is the problem of inspiration on the one hand and the problem of the Bible's applicability on the other. If one believes that the Bible is relevant for today, a theory of inspiration which is congenial to interpretation as a working reality, is demanded. If one holds to the interpretability of the Bible, it is necessary to come to a satisfactory decision as to who may interpret, and whether the interpretation or the Bible itself is authoritative. If the Bible is special revelation and inspired by God, its interpretation is thereby taken out of the class of human writings. Another dimension of interpretation will have to cope with that aspect of the Bible which makes it special revelation. The next chapter will examine the attempts of Christianity in history to find a solution to these problems.
CHAPTER III

AN EXAMINATION OF THE MAJOR POINTS OF VIEW REGARDING

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A history of the movement of Scriptural interpretation through the long centuries as it is related to the respective contemporary theories of inspiration, displays an interesting pattern against which to evaluate present-day theological methods. It reveals a consistent relationship between these two aspects of Christian thought and practice. It justifies the term problem as it is used in the title of this study. The problem is not whether or not the Scriptures are inspired, but in regard to almost every other possible question concerning the explanation of inspiration and of its nature, purpose and object and how inspiration may affect interpretation. The historical review gives, also, a perspective against which to view contemporary thinking in respect to ecumenical Christian emphases. It is invaluable to those who desire to avoid the transitory, the novel and the provincial in doctrines of Scripture. It locates doctrinal family relationships, even though the ecclesiastical lines may have been broken or tangled.

It would be impossible to present a fully detailed historical survey in a study of this nature. The key figures in each epoch
must represent their own situation. The Patristic period, the middle
and Scholastic period, the Reformation proper and the post-Reformation
or Confessional period and relevant modern trends will be briefly
surveyed. It is hoped that what has been intended as a characteri-
sation of each will not become merely a caricature, a danger which
always accompanies the brief "proof-text" biography. The attempt to
minimize this danger has been made by means of comparing the interpre-
tations of scholars of widely varying personal points-of-view and
staying within the general area of agreement. In some cases, notably
with Luther and Calvin, this area has been too limited for value and
a personal judgment was required. This judgment is based on an
inductive study of the writings of these men, rather than upon a
deduction from an a priori approach to them. In this area of research,
therefore, there has been great dependence upon studies already done
in the field of the history of interpretation. There are several
excellent works from which two publications have been selected. Dean
Farrar’s classic work, The History of Interpretation, will be used for
its arrangement and much illustrative material.¹ L. Berkhof² would
not, perhaps share Dean Farrar’s view on inspiration so it was thought

¹Farrar, History of Interpretation, pp. 48-50.
²Berkhof, Principles of Biblical Interpretation.
that these two works would serve to stand together. Their agreement in the analysis of early Christian thinking is significant. This full agreement has not been sought in every case. Other sources have also been consulted and used on occasion.

The Pre-Christians Palestinian Jewish Interpretation

Interpretation of Scripture probably did not begin before the days of Ezra. The prophets took a very free view of the law of Moses. In fact, Moses' name is mentioned but three times in all the Prophets (Isa. 63:12; Jer. 15:1; Mal. 3:14), and only in the last passage is the law of Moses mentioned, and neither Sinai or High Priest is named at all. And there is only a trace of reference to the Levitical system. Actually the prophets register a "magnificent protest" against the spirit of legalism. Ezra instituted an era of legal strictness never known before — the restoration of the Law, which undoubtedly saved the Jews as a nation from extinction. It taught the people how to maintain religion and separation under hostile foreign rule and permanently ended the practice of idolatry. But the scribes, following Ezra, made of the Book, Tradition and Ritual new idols most difficult to identify and uproot. They held every word of the Five Books of Moses to have been supernaturally communicated and every tittle of Levitical formalism as of infinite importance. The Law, became an object of worship, more sacred than any other Scripture.
Outward conformity to it was salvation, "torturing scrupulousness" became a substitute for glad obedience and Messianism was "debased into a materialized fable."¹

Probably the crudest form of Bibliolotry developed during this period. Every letter was considered holy, and unusual case endings religiously significant. Hidden meanings were sought by every possible device, acrostically, cabalistically, allegorically, mystically and otherwise. The confused picture came to a semblance of order when Hillel proposed seven rules by which oral tradition could be deduced from the Written Law. These seven rules of interpretation became the hermeneutical foundation of the Talmud, which so completely overshadowed the Hebrew Bible that it may be regarded as the sacred book of the orthodox Jews.²

**Philo and the Alexandrian Jews**

Many Jews were for economic reasons attracted to the splendid city of Alexandria where consequently a fusion of Greek philosophy

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²Ibid., pp. 18-19. (1) Rule of "light and heavy" or "from the less to the greater; (2) rule of "equivalence" infers a relationship from identical expression; (3) "extension from the special to the general," permitted special Sabbath rules to apply to any festival; (4) two passages could be explained by a third one; (5) inference from general to special cases; (6) explanation from the analogy of other passages; (7) the application of inferences which were self-evident.
and Jewish religion took place. It was here the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek and the Septuagint version became the "Apostle to the Gentiles," and influenced exegesis for centuries. Fables regarding its origin resulted in attributing to it supernatural inspiration. Strangely enough, New Testament writers quoted from it, though it contains many mistranslations.

The peculiar Alexandrian type of allegorical interpretation arose, we are told by Farrar, by the necessity of harmonizing Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. This need is a universal one and occurs again and again. Whenever men try to apply the Bible to daily life, a like need arises.

Now the only possible method for making ancient documents of felt authority express throughout their whole extent the thoughts of advancing ages is the method of finding in them a mystic sense which lies below the surface — in one word, the method of allegory.1

The method was already in use. Homer was made contemporarily respectable by the allegorical method. Philo, then, simply accepted it from the Greeks and systematized it. He professed to respect the literal sense, but actually thought it was a concession to weakness. Symbolic exegesis was to him, far richer. He was a good man and so sincere that he thought himself to be inspired, but his allegorizing was completely absurd. Philo held most rigid views of inspiration.

1Ibid., p. 134.
It is "the holy word," the "sacred oracles," supernaturally significant in its minutest parts. He insisted that Scripture should be only interpreted in the light of that which is worthy of God. Whatever dropped below that had to be allegorised, as was also, any contradiction in Scripture or where Scripture itself allegorises. To him, also, allegory was called for when Scriptural expressions were doubled, when superfluous words were used, when a play of words were possible or when tense or number was unusual. But when this has been said it must be added that with all his erroneous interpretive methods, says Farrar, those who read his works are impressed with

his high morality, his dignity and loftiness of soul, his wide learning, his burning enthusiasm, his obvious sincerity, his innocent gladness, his deep piety. Undoubtedly, like the great philosophers in whose inspiration he believed, he too, had "knocked at the door of truth," and ardently longed for the furtherance of truth.2

The Patristic Period

The Patristic period will be classified according to catechetical schools, Alexandrian and Antiochian, the Literal or Realistic "school" and the Western type of interpretation.

1 Ibid., pp. 22-23. These rules were "still more futile when they are only applied as Philo applied them, to a translation abounding in errors . . . The repetition, "Abraham, Abraham," does not imply that Abraham will also live in the life to come; nor does "Let him die the death" mean "Let him die in the next world as well as in this."

2 Ibid., p. 152.
The Alexandrian school was strongly influenced by Philo's allegorical principles and will be represented by the two most famous teachers, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, his pupil, both of whom "regarded the Bible as inspired, in the strictest sense."¹

Clement (d. 215) came to the position of head of the Alexandrian school, well qualified by extensive learning and deep Christian convictions. Philosophy, he felt, was a teacher leading men to Christ and his whole work was motivated by this belief. Among his contributions to Christian thought was his interpretation of Scripture, the principles of which, as given in the Stromata, suggest the profound respect he had for it.

Clement believed in the divine origin of Greek philosophy and openly taught that Scripture must be allegorically understood. He did not deny the literal sense of Scripture but felt that the hidden senses of Scripture were only for the perfect Christians "who are marked out by election for the true Gnosis" (Strom. I, 7, et al). He thought of some New Testament stories as legends. The story of Salome is from "the Gospel to the Egyptians" (Strom. III, 63).² He often attributed quotations to the wrong authors, and some were not to be found in the Scriptures. To him the Apocrypha was inspired and the

²Yarrer, History of Interpretation, p. 184.
Septuagint miraculously inspired and he called Plato "all but an evangelical prophet" (Strom. I, 10). Examples of his exegesis include the idea of "clean beasts as implying the orthodox who are steadfast and meditative, since rumination stands for thought and a divided hoof implies stability. He allegorises the Decalogue and treats New Testament miracles as parables. In the feeding of the 5000 the barley loaves indicate the "preparation of the Jews for divine knowledge because barley ripens earlier than wheat, and the fishes the preparation of the Gentiles by Greek philosophy, because philosophy was born amid waves of heathendom, and given to those who lie on the ground."¹

He used the four-fold approach: (1) the superficial instruction to "the plain people"; (2) a higher form of instruction to those who had studied philosophy, "cutting through" Greek dogmas and "opening up" Hebrew Scripture; (3) an overcoming of the heretics who are brought by force to the truth; (4) and the highest, or gnostic teaching which is capable of looking into things themselves.²

As unsatisfactory as this approach may be to a twentieth century student, the fact remains that Clement's method of interpretation was

¹Tbid., p. 186.

to him the only satisfactory way to plumb the depths of the treasures of divine Scriptures.

Origen, Clement's pupil (c. 185-254), who succeeded him as head of the school, is considered the greatest scholar of the ancient church. His chief work was in textual criticism and the interpretation of Scripture. Students were drawn to him for his scholarship and pedagogical ability and he used all his gifts primarily to lead pagan youth to Christ. Jerome and Gregory give remarkable descriptions of him, emphasizing his skill in the classroom and his passion to open the Scriptures to young eager minds. His work of fundamental importance was the compilation of the Hexapla, an enormous work in which six Old Testament versions and texts were placed in parallel columns. He labored diligently to produce a pure text and applied his wide learning to the task. In interpretation, he distinguished a three-fold sense corresponding to body, soul and spirit, which suggested the literal, moral and spiritual senses. In the latter he was led into uncontrolled allegory, but it seemed to be prompted by a deep desire to come to the truth of God's Word which human language is unable to convey.¹

It is this motive rather than the errors of his allegory that might well be remembered. He believed "in its strongest form, the theory of verbal inspiration,"² that "every clause of the Bible was

¹Ibid., pp. 87-94.
²Farrar, History of Interpretation, p. 190.
infallible, supernatural and divinely dictated,¹ and yet, if taken
literally, he thought the Bible could not be so regarded. The
anthropomorphisms, the immoral Old Testament scenes, the absurd
prohibitions regarding food, and the contradictions in the Synoptics,
provided him an argument for the need for an allegorical interpreta-
tion. A literal sense was for the weak, the allegorical, for the
mature mind. He produced a forceful exegesis and attempted to
systematize his own false conclusions, but at the same time his
influence did much to "build up the fabric of Biblical interpretation"
and "it must not be forgotten that he was the father of grammatical
as well as allegoric exegesis,"² and was the first systematic and
thorough textual critic.³ Bishop Lightfoot says of him, that he was
a deep thinker, an accurate grammarian, a most laborious worker, and
a most earnest Christian.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 196.
²Ibid., p. 189.
⁴Origen, while living, was the victim of "episcopal jealousy and
party intrigue" and his memory darkened by "ignorant malice" but "there
is no man to whom the Church of Christ owes a more awful debt of repara-
tion than to this incomparable saint." By his Tetrápola and Hexápola he
became the founder of textual criticism. Through some strange twist of
fate it has been "his errors which were canonised," not his worthy con-
tributions. He shared the views of Scripture prevalent in his day.
The Septuagint was inspired. There were mysteries in soliciisms and
errors. The Apocryphal books were inspired and authoritative. Not one
 iota of Scripture (Apocrypha included) is "empty." "God," he says,
"gave the command Thou shalt not appear before me empty, and therefore
He cannot speak anything which is empty" (Philokolos, fragment).
Farrar, History of Interpretation, p. 187.
The errors of exegesis which Origan tended to establish for more than a thousand years had their root in the assumption that the Bible is throughout homogeneous and in every particular supernaturally perfect.\(^1\) Many details, of course, by their literal sense were "derogatory to God's greatness" and had to be handled accordingly. What profit could there be, he asks, in reading about Noah's drunkenness or about Judah and Tamar? Some of the precepts were unworthy and unjust, such as, that an uncircumcised child should be cut off from his tribe (Gen. 17:44). Ought not the parents to be punished rather? His allegorical method gave him, from the story of Rebecca coming daily to the wall, the truth that we must come daily to the walls of Scripture to meet Christ.\(^2\)

The Antiochian school was noted for its repudiation of the Alexandrian allegorical methods, and its anachronous use of the grammatico-historical method of interpretation was never widely nor successfully used again until the Reformation. Two men represent it, Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), and John, called Chrysostom (d. 407). Theodore, "held rather liberal views respecting the Bible,"\(^3\) and was keenly aware of the human aspects in it. He insisted on an interpre-

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 191.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 199.

\(^3\)Berkhof, Principles of Biblical Interpretation, p. 21.
that gave full value to the grammatical and linguistic rules, unity of sense, sequence of thought, and related concerns.\footnote{Farrar, History of Interpretation, p. 210.} Although he was a brilliant exegete, Theodore was not a Hebrew scholar, nor did he avail himself of the Peshito version which would have aided him greatly. He relied on the full inspiration of the Septuagint. He treated all Scripture as equal in value with no conception of progressive revelation, though he did refuse to see the Trinity in Gen. 1, or the three spies of Exodus. He could explain away bothersome passages and resorted to arbitrary reading changes. (In Ephesians 3:15 he used \textit{epartpm} instead of \textit{parpia}). But he paid close attention to particles, moods and prepositions and carefully addressed himself to hermeneutics.\footnote{One of the greatest contributions was his grasp of the difference which separated Jewish and Alexandrian theories of inspiration. The unique Jewish concept of inspiration was in its ethical character, or the enlargement and enablement of the individual consciousness. The Alexandrian pathological inspiration came by way of trance or a depression of individual consciousness. The former, purified in Christianity, takes the Old Dispensation literally but sees in it a shadow of the future, suggesting the use of typology (which Theodore rejected), and the latter became a pretext for the unbridled use of allegory in which writers could be made to mean something other than they said. Ibid., p. 217.}

Both he and Chrysostom roundly rejected the allegorical interpretations of their day and Theodore, at least "paid a terrible penalty for having been born in an age too soon. His aberrations from traditional dogma brought him into suspicion."

\footnote{Ibid., p. 219.}
John of Chrysostom, who, though less learned and original than Theodore, had more definiteness, clearer insight, and more practical and spiritual wisdom, and "stands unsurpassed among the ancient exegetes." There are fewer errors and vagaries in his writings than in any other one of the Fathers. Though he, too, held to a high view of inspiration, he also frankly acknowledged the human element in Scripture. He adopted a sober mystic sense but is known best by his usage of and appreciation for the special words and contextual meanings. He held Scripture to be perfectly perspicuous, the only aid needed, being a willing heart, wise guidance of men and the help of the Holy Spirit of God.¹

It is interesting to note, in this regard, that this school in spite of its more correct exegetical principles was not able to influence the doctrinal decisions of the Councils. Orthodoxy stemmed from the more spiritual interpretation of the Greek theology of the Alexandrian school.²

The Literal or Realistic school, which from this time on became formative for the Western Church, is best represented by Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome and St. Augustine. Its unique contribution was its elevation of Tradition to an authority equal to Scripture. In practice

¹Ibid., pp. 221, 223.

Tradition always overshadows Scripture, when it is admitted to an equal status, under the guise of being its protector and interpreter.

Tertullian always spoke of Scripture as being uttered by God and dictated by the Holy Ghost (Apol. 18) and saw no degrees of inspiration but placed all Scripture on the same level (De Pudic. 17). He supposed they contained the total body of all truth and that they contained no contradictory elements. He held as infallibly inspired their cosmology, chronology, anthropology, and history (De Anima. 1, 2). He claimed equal authority also for the Book of Enoch, and "the Sibyl who lies not" (De Idol. 15). He mixed up quotations, quoted them inaccurately and used some not found in Scripture, as proof texts. He knew no Hebrew and relied on the "inspiration" of the Seventy (Apol. 18). He held that Ezra reproduced the whole Scriptures by immediate inspiration. He protested against literalism yet took literally "the hand of God," and other anthropomorphisms. He blames the gnostics for their abuse of allegory yet employed it when it suited him. He finds a symbol of the Twelve Apostles in the twelve wells of Elim, in the twelve gems on the high priest's breast and in the twelve stones taken from Jordan (c. Marc IV, 13). In arguing with heretics, he said contemptuously, it is useless to use Scripture. The appeal must always be made to tradition. Ironically, the "father of Latin Orthodoxy," in maintaining the right of private judgment and freedom of faith and conscience, became a champion of schism and died.
a heretic. Cyprian followed closely in Tertullian's steps. Though he, too, held to a very high theory of inspiration his "exegesis is vitiated by the fatal fault of unreality." He proved the unity of the Church from (1) the Passover commandment, "In one house shall it be eaten." from (2) "My dove, my undefiled one," and from (3) the command of the spies to Rahab to collect all her family into her house. Noah's drunkenness was a sign of the Passion. He insisted that everything he done as Christ did it, yet demanded that Holy Communion be celebrated in the morning. He said everything in the Old Testament about priests applied to Christian presbyters. Tradition, to him, was subservient to Scripture until he needed it to defend some a priori opinion.

Jerome was one of the intellectual giants of Christian history. Farrar tells us that his personal character was less lofty than most of the Church Fathers. "... he was an excessively faulty saint..." but his exceptional scholarship rendered to the study of Scripture, services equal only to Origen. He learned Hebrew from an unpointed text, by his own efforts mainly, but with the infrequent and surreptitious midnight visits of a friendly Jew. It was risky for both Semite and Aryan to be found together for the Jew was held in deepest contempt. Such diligence underlay every area of Jerome's learning and his translation of the Scriptures into the Latin (Vulgate), as faulty as it may be, represents a new high mark in the rising tide of Biblical and critical scholarship. It was another

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2Ibid., pp. 180-181.
major step in the spread of the sacred Scriptures in the vernacular. Jerome distinguished sharply between canonical and all other writings, and was alert to the superior value of the literal and historical sense of the Bible, but as with the other exegetes of his age, he too fell into the allegorical method when some passage baffled him.¹

It is impossible to say what his view of inspiration may have been. Sometimes he speaks as if every word in Scripture was "so mysterious and supernatural that even their contradictory statements were equally true"² and again criticises them with perfect freedom. He says that the Galatians being foolish, Paul accommodates himself to their infirmities, and made himself foolish. In another place he

¹Jerome's valuable contribution, including a well-developed literal and historic sense was somewhat offset by his overhaste, second handedness, vehement prejudice, and changeableness (p. 225). He spent only three days in translating Solomon, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs (p. 226). He hastily read the Fathers and then dictated as fast as he could, hoping the reader would attribute his hasty quotations to humility (p. 227). In his controversial literature he throws all exagetical caution to the winds, particularly in regard to his prejudices against marriage. As an example, he said of married Peter, he "washed off the filth of marriage in the blood of martyrdom," and sometimes "by the impudent fable that Peter left his wife with his nets and his fishing boat." (p. 228). But, most serious was his lack of exegetical decision. He is as unsure about how to characterise other writers as he is about his own Vulgate renderings (p. 229), and his commentaries are full of contradictory statements. "He was himself, so conscious of these inconsistencies that he quotes the verse "When they persecute you in one city, that is in one book of Scripture, let us fly to other cities, i.e., to other volumes." (Comm. in Matt. I, 23), Ibid., p. 229.

²Ibid., p. 230.
speaks of Paul as unable to express profound thoughts in an alien tongue (in Gal. 5:12). In many places he disparages allegory, but then, "treats every detail, almost every syllable, of the Levitic law as full of mystic meanings." Scripture narratives are too shocking to be matters of sacred history. Jerome, then becomes another link in the long chain of Christian scholars who stood baffled before the mighty Word of God.

St. Augustine, said to be the most influential single man in all Christian history subsequent to Apostolic days, followed in the tradition of Jerome. Unfortunately, Augustine was not the scholar that Jerome was, but he excelled in systematising the truths of Scripture. He was extravagant in his claim for a verbally inspired and inerrant Bible, as is indicated by such statements as the following in which his writings abound: Scriptures "were written by the Holy Ghost" (De Doctr. Christ. III, 37), and sacred writers were "pens of the Holy Ghost" (Confessions, VII, 21).

His interpretive ideals were high. Allegory, he thought, ought always to be based, if used at all, on the strictly historic sense. He recognised the fact of progressive revelation. A literal sense was the best sense. But in practice, Augustine indulged in some of the

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1 Ibid., p. 231.
2 Ibid., p. 232.
3 Ibid., p. 233.
most extreme allegorical interpretation. It is interesting to note that in spite of his ideal he accepted as a norm the rules of Tichonious which were less justifiable than Philo's or Hillel's and refers to them with marked praise since they enable us, he said, to understand the hidden meanings of Scripture.

He also agreed with Philo in his attempt to defend the character of God by allegorising passages which seem unworthy of Him should they be taken literally. And, of particular interest is the fact that as an exegete he was a true servant of the Church. He laid down the rule that "the Bible must be interpreted with reference to Church Orthodoxy."*

Since Augustine is identified in Christian thinking as the Father of Orthodoxy it comes as somewhat of a surprise to note the details of Augustine's allegorical interpretation and remember that it was the Septuagint which he regarded as inspired Scriptures.

Hab. 3:2 ("Thou shalt revive thy work in the midst of the years"), is in the Septuagint, translated, "And thou shalt be recognised in

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1The rules of Tichonious: (1) "about the Lord and his mystic body," namely the Church. Some Old Testament passages refer to Christ, the next clause may be the Church, etc., (2) "about the Lord's bi-part body," or about true and false Christians. Thus in Cant. I, 5, "I am black but comely," the first epithet refers to false Christians: the second to true Christians. (3) "About the Promises and the Law," is theological. (4) "About Genus and Species," or whole and part. All nations mentioned in Scripture are types of Churches, either good or bad, part or whole, depending on the weight of the exegete. (5) This rule permits a sort of cabalism of numbers. (6) "About the devil and his body," teaches us how to apply some passages of Scripture to the devil and some to evil men. Ibid., p. 25.

2Ibid., p. 236.
the midst of two animals." Origen sees in this passage, the Son and Spirit; Tertullian saw Moses and Elias and Augustine holds it to be the ox and ass in the manger, and his view has exercised a deep influence over the pictures of the Nativity in Christian Art.

St. Augustine, being ignorant of Hebrew, and finding in the Septuagint his nearest approach to the original, had an exaggerated opinion of the sacredness of the Greek version (De Doct. Christ. II, 15). He seems to have doubted whether even the errors were not of divine origin.¹

He said sacred writers were "pens of the Holy Ghost" (Conf. 7, 21), yet recognised the human element in Scripture and explained the Synoptic variations on purely human principles (Inspiratus a Deo sed tamen homo, in Joann, tract. 1, 1). 'Leaven' might be 'truth' or 'wickedness,' and a 'lion' could stand either for 'the Devil' or for 'Christ.' In the Fall story, the fig leaves were hypocrisy, the coats of skins, morality, and the four rivers of Eden, the four cardinal virtues. Surprisingly, the drunkenness of Noah is "a figure of the death and passion of Christ" (Hom. in Gen. 13:3), and

"The sun which knoweth his going down" (Ps. 104), is Christ aware of his own death, and, could anyone be as senseless (ita destitut), he says, to imagine "the prophet" (Psaumist) would have meant actual sleep in "I laid me down, and slept, and rose up again," and not the Death and Resurrection of Christ (Enarr. in Ps. 103)?²

So deep has been, and is the hold of Augustine on Christian thought, not only in Protestantism but in the Catholic faith as well.

¹Ibid., p. 126.
²Ibid., p. 238.
that no other single man could be called so truly ecumenical. His opinions have become almost identified with divine revelation, and much of his thought anticipated modern psychology and philosophy.

But for the subject at hand it is an incredible thing to note that his Biblicism and his emphasis on the authority of the Church, mutually contradictory emphases, as well as all the doctrines which he taught, were born and nourished in the perspective of Scripture which this review presents.

The whole epoch is the allegorical period of Biblical interpretation. The few traces of a more sound method of exegesis, were either ignored by the Church as in the case of Theodore of Mopsuestia, or ignored in practice by the person proposing it. Nearly every scholar knew to do better than be practiced. We are compelled to reckon with the fact that out of this period came the Council decisions regarding the nature of Christ upon which the Christian Church stands today. Out of it, too, came the orthodox view of anthropology which was formative for Protestantism, and the realistic doctrine of the church which is Catholicism. In spite of their questionable handling of Scripture, they had insights which were permanent for the Church. Their view of the inspiration of Scripture equals that of present-day Fundamentalists, yet it was the Septuagint which was so regarded (even as some Fundamentalists regard the authorized version). They believed in what would now be called verbal inspiration, yet they
treated the divine words with bewildering freedom. They altered them, misquoted them, combined widely different passages to prove a point and allegorised to the point of absurdity. We are left with the question: Why did allegorising satisfy highly intelligent and deeply religious men? What consistency may be found in their interpretive methods and their expressed views of Scripture? This is a question which must be kept in mind and answered when more evidence has been gathered.

**Medieval and Scholastic Periods**

The middle ages have not been called Dark without some reason. Particularly in the realm of Scriptural interpretation do we become aware of the eclipse of Biblical scholarship. Whatever may be the full reason for this, at least we may safely assume that the ascendancy of the authority of the Church did not aid in encouraging thought in this direction. The elevation of Church authority to equal Scriptural authority resulted in the servile status of Scripture to Church doctrine. Papal authority assumed the place of God over the Book, state, reason and private conscience. There were, in spite of, or perhaps in consequence of this, very definite rules of interpretation prevailing. These rules were rigid, in that they were set by the church but they were also flexible enough to prove any number of things. The point is that, by them, all truth was or could be known. Hugo of
St. Victor simply expressed the frank belief of the church when he said: first learn what you are to believe, and then go to Scripture to find it there. "Dogmatics were made the key to interpretation."  

The flexibility of Scripture was in its "multiple sense."

Hugo of St. Victor said:

The word involves the sound, the form the meaning. The sound is addressed to the enemy, the form of the word to the afflicted people; and the meaning of the word to the... choir of the elect.  

The religious, or semi-religious literature of the Middle-English period demonstrates indirectly the usage of Scripture. In a study of Piers Plowman, the systematic exegetical procedure was discovered by the authors, inductively. They say that medieval students were taught to read on three levels. The first was in terms of grammar, structure, syntax. The second step was to determine the meaning of what had been read, and the third, the theme, or doctrinal content. The last is the important thing, for in it lay the higher meaning, or sentence. This sentence was not so much the moral, as the "dominant unifying principle." "The relative importance of matter and sentence is indicated by Chaucer's Nun's Priest, who compares the matter of his tale to the chaff, its sentence to the fruit."  

References:

1Ibid., p. 258.
2Ibid., p. 252.
exegesis was carried through on these same three levels, with a very sharp distinction made between sense and sentence. The sentence was elaborated by means of the three levels, tropological, allegorical and anagogical. The tropological meaning applied to the individual, the allegorical applied the Old Testament to the Church, the anagogical is concerned with heavenly mysteries, or is the sentence of Scripture. The commentaries of the Fathers always had this mystical meaning in mind and to find this is the goal of Peter Lombard's work called by the name Sentences.¹ The medieval student did not confine himself to any single interpretation but acquainted himself with any number, so that it was not, to Peter Lombard, a contradiction to find different sentences in the Fathers regarding any one passage of Scripture, but the evidence of richness or multiplicity of meaning in this the highest realm of spiritual exercise. The Glosses gave multiple meanings to individual words. "For example . . . dormitio (sleep) is given seven meanings: the quietness of contemplation, spiritual torpor, death, sickness, blindness, falling into sin, sexual embrace."²

The ultimate Sentence of the Bible was perfect caritas, the love of God and of one's neighbor, and this was said to be the end of all Biblical study.³ Since this is so, passages in the Bible not

¹Ibid., p. 4.
²Ibid., p. 5.
³Ibid., p. 11.
literally active in this pursuit must be figuratively interpreted. In this way, the sentences were the symbolic message of Scripture, the real meaning of it in distinction from the literal words in the book. Christ himself, in a mystical way, as well as Peter, the head of the Church, are involved in this sentence and accounts for the name of the poem *Piers Plowman*, or the mystical impression on the human will toward the City of God. It is no mystery, in view of this understanding, that Abelard’s *Sic et Non*, was not well received. He was, by the spirit of his work, not only attacking Tradition, and poor exegesis, but the mystical meaning or the Sentence philosophy. In this his rationalism is most clearly defined. He could only have compiled it in the spirit of mockery and the Church accepted it as the mockery he had intended; but it became another wedge to separate the hold that Tradition had on Scripture.

Scholasticism was born of the efforts of free inquiry to penetrate the dogmatism of the Church. The new era began with Anselm (1033-1109) who tried to lift the truths of faith to scientific certainty, "I believe in order to know." Peter Abelard, did a great deal to break down the authority of tradition. But as is so often the case when Scripture has become intertwined with tradition or some other concern, when the support is taken away there is a loss of faith in the

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1 Ibid., p. 12.
Bible as well. Abelard began to criticize Scripture as well as Tradition. His own restless speculative spirit drove him beyond the bounds of good judgment. But his maxim, "By doubting we arrive at truth," did more than any other one thing to challenge the whole structure of tradition. Peter Lombard retreated into the dogmatic method as we have shown, but his Sentences with Thomas' Summa, became the textbook of scholasticism.

In exegesis we see the Schoolmen at their worst. Scholasticism treats the letter of Scripture, even in its plainest histories, as an enigma which veils the latest afterthoughts of theology.

Thomas Aquinas, the most important figure in the Scholastic era, in that he synchronized the major forces of the age into one impressive whole, uniting Aristolean philosophy, Augustinian theology and Latin ecclesiology, did not add anything to the doctrine of Scripture. He held a high view of Scripture, says Seeberg, believing that God imparted definite items of knowledge to the sacred writers, by way of transient impressions. But Thomas used the four-fold sense of interpretation essentially as described above, historical, tropological, allegorical and analogical. Bonaventure (d. 1274) accepted the super-

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1 Farrar, History of Interpretation, p. 261.
2 Ibid., pp. 266-267.
natural infallibility of every word of Scripture but made his commentaries profoundly unscriptural. From

God saw the light . . . (he said) If truth is not, it is true that truth is not; something therefore is true, it is true that there is truth; therefore if truth is not, there is truth. For truth prevails above all things.1

Nicholas Lyra (d. 1340) disturbed the slumbers of Scholastic interpretation by a rediscovery of the Hebrew grammar and a study of other languages. He distinguished five methods of Biblical commentary, the last of which he accepted; the Verbal; which centers on individual words, the Subjective, the Allegoric, the Kabbalistic, and the Literal, which confined itself to the actual meaning of the writers. Farrar thinks that Nicholas did more than any other writer to break down the tyranny of tradition and overcame the centuries-old bad methods of interpretation.2 "After the death of Nicholas of Lyra there was no important addition to the study of Scripture till the dawn of the Reformation."3

As the allegorical period produced principles of interpretation, so the Scholastic period produced principles in keeping with its general attitude toward Scripture and the purpose of it as they understood it. The purpose, if we may judge from the use made of Scripture,

1Farrar, History of Interpretation, p. 272.
2Ibid., p. 277.
3Ibid., p. 278.
was largely to justify Church doctrine and practice. In order to make the application, rules of interpretation which would produce the needed support were devised. The multiple meaning device was admirably suited to this demand. Though this is undoubtedly true to fact, it is the conviction of the author that a more subtle and spiritual motive was also behind it. There is every evidence that the centuries-old impulse to relate sacred Scriptures to common daily need was at work at least in the early stages of this approach to Scripture. The reason for this hypothesis is very simple. Institutions and patterns of human activity and thinking never descend ready made into life. Always they spring out of the "grass roots," out of some need or impulse or reaction. When it is time to defend that pattern of behavior or the institution which develops from it, the tendency is to codify the original impulse into a controlling method of preserving the status quo. Originally, Scripture served the spiritual needs of men, and the "three" and four fold" senses of interpretation were attempts to give system to that usage.

It must be observed, also, that in spite of the defective principles of interpretation of this period, the doctrine of the Atonement was in the process of examination and formulation, and in the hands of Anselm and Abelard, took forms so permanent as to compel the Church today to reckon with them.
The Reformation View of Scripture

The Reformation was in the truest sense a rediscovery of the Bible. Its initial spiritual and intellectual "shock," in the person and preaching of Luther was the effect of the Living Word of God, stripped of its enervating and choking traditional interpretations, shining out in its unique power over the consciences of men. The work of Luther was preceded by a growing interest in the Bible as literature. Actually, the preamble to the Reformation, in the form of such scholarship, was the hidden but vital roots of the spectacular afterglow. The curious thing is that this scholarship was born in the spirit of the Renaissance which was not in itself a religious awakening but rather the awakening of the human spirit from its long sleep under the spell of a materially strong but spiritually decadent Church.

Lorenza Valla (d. 1465), is said to have been the chief link between the Renaissance and the Reformation. He was not a deeply religious man but in the course of his studies came upon the wonder of the Bible and was convinced that it should be read and interpreted literally, grammatically and with a full understanding of the original languages just as the newly recovered classics were being read. This impressed Erasmus profoundly. Jaque Le Ferre, a few years later, with Valla in mind, translated, for the first time, the entire Bible into the French language (published in 1523). Reuchlin (b. 1455), a
layman, dominated by the same spirit, "devoted himself to the study of language with the express object in view of elucidating the Scriptures.\(^1\) He spent all he earned by teaching, in acquiring greater knowledge of Hebrew, and once paid ten gold pieces to a Jew for the explanation of a single phrase. He was so eager to find the literal sense of Scripture that the cost to him in time and money was not considered. Hebrew was a "lost tongue" to the Church at the time. Priests had denounced it as an accursed language so that when Reuchlin lectured on Hebrew at Heidelberg University, he had to do so secretly to escape their fury. The controversies between him and the Church theologians were exceedingly bitter and serve to point up the fact that the struggle with the Papacy was a struggle of "knowledge against ignorance, of light against darkness."\(^2\)

Erasmus of Rotterdam, though not considered a hero of the Reformation, gave invaluable tools to the Reformers. His *edits princeps* of the New Testament (1516) was the cause of the conversion of Bilney the English martyr. It was used by Tyndale and Coverdale as well as by Luther. He desired "to see Christ honored in all languages, to hear the Psalms sung by the labourer at the plough, and the Gospel read to poor women as they sat spinning at the wheel."\(^3\) It pained

\(^1\)Farrar, F. W., *History of Interpretation*, p. 315.

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 315-316.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 317.
him to listen to ignorant worshippers rattling off the memorised Latin prayers and Scripture passages, without the slightest idea of what the words meant. Of all the things that may be said about Erasmus, pro and con, his devotion to the great ideal of recovering the Bible from the corrupt Vulgate and publishing it in the original languages, and the personal cost of achieving it, deserves to be remembered in his favor. It is significant to the final work of the Reformation and is an important point in this study.

Martin Luther was in large measure the fruit of previous Biblical scholarship. In the Bible he found Christ. He was amazed to know that the word "penance" in Jerome's "holy" Latin version, with all the corrupt theological system implicated with it, was rather "repentance," and men could by-pass the Church hierarchy and come directly to forgiveness from Christ's hand. Luther's contribution to the Church is very great but we will restrict the discussion to an answer to the question "What was Luther's view of Scripture?" There are two approaches to this question and they are mutually exclusive. One depends upon Luther's actual writings — an inductive approach. The other looks back on Luther through later Creedal formulations to find in him a view of Scripture consistent with that formulation. In the opinion of the writer, the former approach is the only consistent one. We must rely upon the opinion of dependable Luther students and historians for most of the analysis.
Luther was well trained in Scholasticism and the *Sentences*. He knew Peter Lombard's *Sentences* almost by heart and interpreted Scripture in the "four-fold sense." His interest in Hebrew and Greek opened to him the richness of the unadorned Bible and was the key to the principles of interpretation, which became formative to him and to the Reformation. They are, (1) the supreme and final authority of Scripture itself, apart from ecclesiastical authority. He would not even argue this point since it was theoretically admitted by the Catholic Church. In this relation, he was led to reject even the authority of councils which, he discovered gave contradictory decisions. He scorned the popular *glosses*, or word analyses, multiplying meaning on meaning. Scripture (2) is *sufficient*, needing no Father to supplement contradictory meanings. The literal sense (3), was to him the only proper sense. He finally rejected the four-fold interpretations. Even Erasmus had not forsaken this method, in the interest of the "fecundity" of Scripture. Errors, said Luther, arise from neglecting the simple meaning, for each passage has but one simple, true sense of its own. (4) Of course, it follows that Luther rejected allegory. In his commentary on Genesis III, such remarks are made, "Origen's allegories are not worth so much dirt," and, "Allegories are . . . the scum of Holy Scripture," and "Allegory is a sort of beautiful harlot, who proves herself especially seductive to idle men." Luther maintained (5) the
perspicuity of Scripture, saying that "the Holy Ghost is the all-simplest writer that is in heaven or earth." The difference of opinion among exegetes he attributed to "malice or pravity." This and (6) the strong assertion of the right of private judgment, and the conviction that every right-minded man would come to a uniform understanding of Scripture was the profoundest conviction of the Reformers. When unity of Christians failed to materialise it gave great distress of mind and eventually led, doubtlessly, to the New Confessional dogmatism. But, to Luther, the Holy Spirit given to all Christians, gave them a higher function than merely to register the decrees of a sacerdotal class.¹

The excesses of private opinion and the fact that all the Reformation controversialists appealed to Scripture and claimed the right to interpret it in their own way, prompted Luther to lay out rules for interpretation. The first three raise no question: (1) the need for grammatical knowledge, the (2) need for knowledge of the historical occasion and conditions, and (3) contextual acquaintance. The last three gave rise to subsequent errors. (4) The need for faith and spiritual illumination did not take into consideration the inability of piety alone to give infallible interpretation. No individual can, unaided, know the conditions of centuries of history through which the Bible was written. If the first three rules are

¹Ibid., pp. 327-329.
valid this one is not independently valid. The fifth rule is found throughout Reformation literature, "the analogy of faith" which simply indicates that Scripture interprets Scripture. In the first place it misapplies Paul's use of this term (Rom. 12:6), and in the second place it is exegetically meaningless outside of the rule that Scripture must not be distorted out of its general or particular context. The last rule, so meaningful to Luther, (5) that Christ is to be everywhere found in Scripture, can be and was by others made to mean that Christ could be found revealed clearly everywhere from Genesis to Revelation.¹

This last criterion, Luther used radically. By means of it, he concluded that some books were not and could not be made to be, canonical. On this basis, some books were above others in value. St. Paul's epistles were more gospel than the Gospels and Romans and I Peter were the "right kernel and marrow of all books." His critical insight decided that the Books of Chronicles were inferior to the Books of Kings (which he regarded as only "a Jewish Calendar"), and he noted the improper chronology of Jeremiah. One of Paul's proofs in Galatians was, to him, too weak; and Jude's epistle was unnecessary. The Epistle of James was "a right strawy epistle and one which flatly (stracks) contradicted St. Paul." And of the book of Revelation he

¹Ibid., pp. 332-334.
said that "his spirit could not accommodate itself to the book, and that it was sufficient reason for the small esteem in which he held it, that Christ was neither taught in it nor recognized." He put it in the same class as Eadres as uninspired. To him, it did not matter whether Moses wrote the Pentateuch or not, for Moses was for the Jews, not the Christians. In his Commentary on Genesis 38, Luther apologizes for the Holy Spirit for recording sexual immoralities.

It is needless to say, that in the face of this kind of criticism of Scripture at the hand of Luther, regardless of what he may have said relative to the value of the Bible he did not mean what later came to be called verbal inspiration. Even statements like the following must be understood against a wider context of meaning than is often afforded by Luther.

The Bible is God's Word, written and, as it were, spelled and presented in letters, just as Christ, as the eternal Word, is presented in human nature, (and) one letter, even a single tittle of Scripture means more to us than heaven and earth. Therefore we cannot permit even the most minute change.3

1Ibid., p. 336.
2Ibid., p. 337.
William Young quotes from Luther's letter to Carlstadt, to illustrate his regard for an objective, authoritative and verbally inerrant Bible:

Therefore this is our basis, where the Holy Scriptures establish something that must be believed, there we must not evade the natural meaning of the words nor wrest them from the conviction in which they stand unless an express and clear article of faith compels us to arrange or interpret the statement otherwise. If we acted differently, what would become of the Bible?1

No statement could better illustrate Luther's view of Scripture than this. He believed in an objective Scripture but he also held Scripture to an *a priori* test, the "article of faith," which we know from other passages to be Christ, the Living Word.

Luther's insistence upon the grammatical and historical sense, and his own recognition of and freedom in criticising the human elements in Scripture, makes it impossible to hold that he held the modern theory of verbal inspiration. Luther's theory of inspiration did not end in the words of the text but in the Living Lord who stood as the criterion of the validity of the written record. Interpretation was not a mechanical and arbitrary thing, but was very personal and very much dependent upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit. From this position he never wavered in spite of the excesses perpetrated

in the name of Scriptural interpretation. If it be said that such a view of hermeneutics and such a view of inspiration is indefinite and lacking in the finished characteristics which the later Protestantism gave it, Luther, we believe, would not object. His Lord could not be confined in human principles of interpretation. There was always an open door toward the spiritual life. So far as inspiration is concerned we may say, Luther believed in an inspired book but inspiration, in his mind, was not equated with inerrancy. "Christ, and Christ alone, was to him without error — was alone the essential Word of God." (Werke, XXII, 652)\(^1\) This gives to the Bible a living dynamic quality, a fresh and vital communication to every age and to every individual. He said in his introduction to the book of James,

> All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach Christ and deal with him. That is the true test by which to judge all books when we see whether they deal with Christ or not, since all the Scriptures show us Christ.\(^2\)

The most consistent and undoubtedly the greatest exegete and theologian of the Reformation was John Calvin. Some say he was the greatest that ever lived. Certainly, he was more logical and systematic, deliberate and consistent than any interpreter before him.

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\(^2\)Quoted by Lehmann, *Theology Today*, p. 337.
Calvin's great systematic work, "The Institutes of the Christian Religion," provides a more sure basis of analysis of his doctrines than anything Luther left. In the Institutes, Calvin's mind lies exposed and his method of interpretation clearly demonstrated. In fact it is precisely this point that Calvin would have us note.

The design of the Institutes was

. . . to prepare and qualify students of theology for the reading of the divine word, . . . for I think I have given such a comprehensive summary and orderly arrangement of all branches of religion that, with proper attention, no person will find any difficulty in determining what ought to be the principle objects of research in the Scriptures and to what end he ought to refer to anything it contains, . . . If I should publish any exposition of the Scripture, I shall therefore have no need to introduce long discussions respecting doctrines . . . This will relieve the pins reader from great trouble and tediousness, provided he came previously furnished with the necessary information.1

Calvin's principles of Interpretation are suggested in the Dedication to King Francis. In defending his doctrine against those who charged him with "nefariously corrupting" the Word of God, he pleaded Paul's "fixed and invariable standard by which all interpretation of Scripture ought to be tried," namely, the "analogy of faith" (Romans 12:6). The rule known by this name, and first proposed as a principle of interpretation in the Reformation, is otherwise worded, Scripture interprets Scripture, and is a misapplication of

Paul's meaning in the passage. In the same dedication he explains his opposition to the Fathers — "I mean the writers of the earlier or purer ages" — . They contradict each other, were inconsistent with themselves and "ignorant of many things." He uses them, however, far more than Luther did. In this explanation Calvin parts company with the multiple sense interpretation in favor of the one, clear meaning of Scripture.¹

In the Institutes we find further principles of interpretation. He said that the writer's intention is to be held inviolate. This principle is often reiterated. In a dedicatory letter to one of Calvin's Commentaries, quoted by Bernard Ramm but unidentified, Calvin said that the test of the validity of an interpretation was the faithfulness of the commentator to the writer's mind. "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."²

The rule of piety requires that an indulgence in an unprofitable degree of speculation leads the reader away from the simplicity of faith.³ We should not speak of or desire to know anything "beyond the information given us in the Divine word . . .

¹Ibid., pp. 28-29.


³Calvin, Institutes, (I, 1b, iii, iv).
as soon as the Lord closes his sacred mouth. . . we should give up our desire of learning.¹

Inference, however, is proper and important. Calvin demonstrates David's use of inference, and makes some inferences of his own from the Psalm 107, in Book I, 5, viii.

One of the most widely used principles in Calvin's works is the synecdoche, that figure of speech which suggests the whole by a part. By it interpretation may exceed the expression. But the application must be held in check by the "end for which it was given" or the writer's intention. By way of example of this type of figure, Calvin, in Book II, 6, viii, demonstrates its proper use. He says that commands and prohibitions always imply more than the words express. The rule is (1) to examine the subject under discussion; (2) to determine to what ultimate end the command was given and (3) to draw an argument from the command to its opposite. A positive command implies a prohibition and a prohibition implies a positive performance relative to it. This rule Calvin applies to the Decalogue and to the Sermon on the Mount and makes of these two passages highly practical rules of life.

Figurative interpretation is proper, also, when the text permits. This type of interpretation is crucial to Calvin's Old Testa-

¹Ibid., III, 21 iii.
ment exegesis.

Whenever the prophets mention the blessedness of the faithful, scarcely any vestiges of which are discernible in the present life, he should recur to this distinction; that in order to the better elucidation of the Divine goodness, the prophets represented it to the people in a figurative manner; but that they gave such a representation of it as would withdraw the mind from the earth and time, and the elements of this world, all which must ere long perish, and would necessarily exit to a contemplation of the felicity of the future spiritual world.

The Old Testament was not limited to earthly things but to spiritual things (note elaboration in II, 10, xxi-xxii). In other words, Old Testament figures pointed to and culminated in the spiritual blessings of the New Testament. They were not material but spiritual. The children of the promise, from the beginning of the world . . . belong to the New Testament, and that, in hope, not of carnal, terrestrial and temporal things, but of spiritual, celestial and eternal blessings.

New Testament interpretation centers around the word "meaning" and shows Calvin's feeling for Scripture at its best. In the Sacramental controversy he answers his opponents who accuse him of not being enough of a literalist. They said he did not give due credit

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1Tbid., II, 10, xx.
2Tbid., II, 11, x.
3Tbid., IV.
to the words of Christ. His answer is that, though they have held
the words inviolate, he has been more reverential to the meaning.

... Our diligence in inquiring into Christ's true
meaning is a sufficient proof of our high regard to his
authority ... Nothing prevents us from believing
Christ when he speaks, and immediately acquiescing in
every word he utters. The only question is, whether it
be criminal to inquire into his genuine meaning.

Calvin said that these "good doctors" prohibit "even the least
departure from the literal signification." They have the word, he
admits, and quote the letter of Scripture, but they would "banish
from the Church the gift of interpretation which elucidates the word."

In the light of Calvin's key principles of interpretation, and
the Protestant principle, Scripture sola, the Institutes, which were
the Reformation text-book, are of unusual interest to this study.

Calvin, in the General Syllabus, lays out the plan of the whole
work. It follows the development of the Apostles' Creed, since every-
one is familiar with that. As the Creed consists of four parts, that
concerning (1) the Father, (2) the Son, (3) the Holy Spirit, and (4)
the Church, so his books will follow this order and conform to the
subject matter suggested by it.

It became obvious, as the Institutes are opened, that the

1Ibid., IV, 17, xxii.
2Ibid., IV, 17, xxv.
doctrines taught have not been Biblically but philosophically grounded. Even the structure and arrangement of material demonstrate this fact. The entire first book is a treatise on natural theology and is as rational an approach as that of the Schoolmen to theology.

Catholics still call Calvin a Scholastic. Not only does the plan of the Institutes as a whole follow this method, but each argument for the doctrines he develops, is first rationally developed before it is Scripturally grounded. He appeals to common sense and logic and every device of philosophy. Only then does he appeal to Scripture to defend the doctrine he has built. The Scriptural defense is in the typical Scholastic style — that of the appeal to the proof-text. Calvin did not, as a rule, come to his doctrines by way of true exegesis, nor does he support his contentions in the Institutes by way of exposition, in the modern sense. Rather, he first lays out the doctrine as an uncontestable truth, which it would be unthinkable to question. After this rational presentation, he denounces all opposers of it. Then he builds his Scriptural defense, seldom, if ever, using passages of greater length than three or four verses, and the context is not always carefully consulted.

The philosophical presentation is supported by scores of quotations from the classics, some of them pagan works and writers such as Cicero, Valerius Maximus, the Aenoid, Plutarch, Plato, Seneca, Xenophon, Socrates, and many more. Calvin was an exceedingly well-
read scholar and saw in non-Christian literature truths which contributed to a natural knowledge of God.

Calvin had no doctrine of inspiration, as such. He is not discriminating in the use of the term, confusing it with revelation and illumination, and others. In other words, fine definitions in this field were a subsequent development in theology. They would have been inconsistent in Calvin's system. He does, however, give every evidence in the spirit of his writings and by word that he held Scriptures to be God's Word, which he also recognised to be mediated to us by human hands, "Being illuminated by Him (the Spirit) we now believe the divine original of the Scripture . . . that we have received it from God's mouth by the ministry of men . . . "¹

He calls Scripture "the pure word of God,"² and suggests a verbal dictation by contrasting the "neat, elegant and even splendid" diction of the prophets, with the "rude and homely style" of others by saying that "by such examples the Holy Spirit hath been pleased to show, that he was not deficient in eloquence."³ In defending the written Scriptures against those who "deride the dead and killing letter," he says, "He is the author of the Scriptures: he cannot be

¹ Calvin, Institutes, I, 7, v.
² Ibid., IV. 17, xxvi.
³ Ibid., I, 8, ii.
mutable and inconsistent with himself. He must therefore perpetually
remain such as he has there discovered himself to be." In his
Commentary on I Peter 1:19, he says that holy men of God "were
moved — not that they were bereft of mind . . . but because they
cared not to announce anything of their own, and obediently followed
the Spirit as their guide . . ." Men of humble position and crude
speech were
taught by the Spirit, who, though before despised as
some of the meanest of the people, suddenly began to
discourse in such a magnificent way on the mysteries
of heaven.2

Note the emphasis on the incomprehensibility of the revelation
as a test of its divine nature. We may be aware that many things in
the Bible were "blind" to him, as the interesting quote below suggests.
The very "low and mean" style of the three Evangelists proves the
fact that they wrote of "heavenly mysteries which are above human
capacities."3

Similar is the method of Paul and Peter, in whose
writings, though the greater part be blind (italics mine),
yet their heavenly majesty attracts universal attention
. . . One circumstance raises their doctrine sufficiently
all unlettered men, — had learned nothing in any human
school which they could communicate to others, . . . Let
[anyone] deny that the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles,

1Ibid., I, 9, ii.
2Ibid., I, 8, xi.
3Loc. cit.
or let them dispute the credibility of the history; yet the fact itself loudly proclaims that they were taught by the Spirit.\(^1\)

The efficient cause of the inspiration was the Holy Spirit, but Calvin is not clear as to which of the two persons involved in the revelatory act, the Spirit or the human agent, leaves his personality characteristics on the record. After having shown that the crude style of the unlearned evangelists was stamped on the Gospel record, he says of the "splendid and elegant Scriptures"

> The Holy Spirit hath been pleased to show, that he was not deficient in eloquence, though elsewhere he hath used a rude and homely style.\(^2\)

The divinely inspired message and record is not the word of God until the confirmatory experience is paired with it. That the Scriptures have a divine origin, Calvin is certain. "God is the author of the Scriptures"\(^3\) but only those illuminated by the Spirit have this persuasion.

> Being illuminated by him, we now believe the divine original of the Scriptures, not from our own judgment or that of others, but . . . that we have received it from God's own mouth by the ministry of men.\(^4\)

\(^1\)Ibid., I, 6, xi.
\(^2\)Ibid., I, 8, 1.
\(^3\)Ibid., I, 9, 11.
\(^4\)Ibid., I, 8, iv.
It is necessary, therefore that the same Spirit

who spoke by the mouths of the prophets, should penetrate
into our hearts, to convince us that they faithfully de-

livered the oracles which were divinely entrusted to

them.1

In another place this dual assurance is taught.

Whether God revealed himself to the patriarchs by or-
acles and visions, or suggested, by the means of the

ministry of men, what should be handed down by tradition
to their posterity, it is beyond a doubt that their minds
were impressed with a firm assurance of the doctrine, so
they were persuaded and convinced that the information
they received came from God. For God always secured to
his word an undoubted credit, superior to all human

opinion.2

This study should prepare our minds for the further fact that

Calvin, as well as the other reformers, made no claim for inerrancy
or infallibility of Scripture. The nearest he comes to it is to
say that the people were "certain that God had spoken without the
least fallacy or ambiguity,"3 that this certainty "required no
reasons" and was produced by an assurance from heaven. "I speak of
nothing" he says, "but what every believer experiences in his heart."

Though "the apostles were certain and authentic emamences of
the Holy Spirit and therefore their writings are to be received as

1Ibid., I, 7, iv.
2Ibid., I, 6, ii.
3Ibid., I, 7, v.
the oracles of God," yet Old Testament writers did not have any
great measure of personal illumination even in their inspired
writings. We could assume a blind, mechanical recording on their
part, did not Calvin become explicit in the matter. Granting that
the prophets were "distinguished by such energy of the Spirit" as
to be sufficient to illuminate the whole world, yet

they were under the necessity of submitting to the
same tuition as the rest of the people, they are con­
sidered as sustaining the character of children as well
as others, . . . None of them possessed knowledge so
clear as not to partake more or less of the obscurity
of the age.  

This is but one of the passages, of which there are many, that tell
us that the Old Testament sheds but a feeble light, not perfectly
delineated, and not capable of maintaining its glow in the presence

In following Calvin through his arguments one soon discovers
that he is not a slave of grammar or words. He freely rejects as
superfluous and misleading, the Greek particle _ _ (therefore), in
Matthew 7:12, with the consequent change in meaning. One often
finds superfluous particles, he explains. He calls the Romanists
"syllable-hunters" in their unbending literalism. The following is

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1Ibid., IV, 8, ix.
2Ibid., II, 11, vi.
3Ibid., IV, 17.
Calvin's reaction to the literalist who misses, according to him, the obvious meaning of the Sermon on the Mount, and the teaching about recovering personal belongings, in particular:

"We ought not to quibble about words, as if a good man were not permitted to recover what is his own when God gives him the lawful means (Matt. Comm)."

His defense of litigation and swearing in the face of Jesus' teaching is a masterpiece of casuistry.

Calvin believed that the Biblical writers adjusted their writings to the level of the ordinary man's understanding (a point of view somewhat out of keeping with what we have already noted regarding the incomprehensibility of the revelation). He attributes this manipulation to the human writer, not to the Holy Spirit.

Moses, he says, "accommodated himself to the ignorance of the common people," and "Moses, speaking in the popular manner," adjusted his message to them.¹ This accommodation of Scripture to the capacity of human credulity is made more explicit in a passage in which he speaks of the angels.

"It is certain that spirits have no form; and yet Scripture, on account of the slender capacity of our minds, . . . represents angels to us as having wings, to prevent our doubting that they will always attend . . . us."²

¹Ibid., I, 14, iii.
²Ibid., I, 14, viii.
The authority then of Scripture will have to fall into the general pattern already discovered. There will be found the same qualification of its absolute authority as we have found in the other passages.

It is proper to introduce some remarks on the authority of Scripture . . . For when it is admitted to be a declaration of the word of God, no man can be so deplorable presumptuous . . . as to dare to derogate from the credit due the speaker . . . It obtains the same complete credit and authority with believers, when they are satisfied of its divine origin, as if they heard the very words pronounced by God himself.\(^1\)

The names Calvin uses for Scripture indicate somewhat of his view of them. Simply Scripture is conspicuously one of his most frequent terms. Sometimes it is the Doctrine of Heaven, the Doctrine of God, or a few times, the Bible. The most striking synonym is the Word of God or God's Word. It is striking because of the use he makes of it, a usage which seems to point to Calvin's philosophy of the Word.

There are two discussions in which the use of this term makes for ambiguity if we assume it to refer simply to the written word. The first occasion is in relation to the written word, and gives rise to the observation that Calvin clearly subordinated the objective written word to the objective, metaphysical Word of God or Christ. In his Christological argument we find these words --

\[^1\text{Ibid.}, \ I, \ 7, \ 1.\]
When the Scriptures speak of the Word of God, it certainly were very absurd to imagine it to be only a transient and momentary sound, emitted into the air, and coming forth from God himself; of which nature were the oracles, given to the Fathers, and all the prophecies. It is rather to be understood of the Eternal Wisdom residing in God, whence the oracles, and all the prophecies, proceeded.

The ancient prophets, no less than the Apostles spoke by the Spirit of Christ. If the Spirit that inspired the Prophets was the Spirit of the Word, he concludes that the Word was God. He adds;

Captious and loquacious men would readily evade this argument, by saying, that the Word imparts an order or command; but the Apostles are better interpreters, who declare, that the worlds were created by the Son, and that he "upholds all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:2,3).

To Calvin, then, the Word of God is, apparently a broader term than Scripture, and when used in certain connections indicates a more authoritative and absolute Word than the mere written Word. When used this way the Word is not a command, or an order, or a preposition, but the Logos back of all revelation.

Another variant in usage occurs in connection with Calvin’s discussion of the Church, which is, to him, distinguished by this criterion, "the pure preaching of God's word, and the legitimate administration of the sacraments." It is difficult, in the treatises

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1 Ibid., I, 13, vii.
2 Ibid., Dedication, p. 31.
on Christology, and Ecclesiology and the Sacraments, to clearly
distinguish between the (1) Preached word, the (2) "Visible word"
(Augustine's phrase for the Sacraments which Calvin borrows), and
the (3) Living Word or Christ. In a Sacrament, he says, "God
manifests himself to us ... more expressly than he does by his
words." This would put the sacraments at least on a par with the
Bible. He goes on, "I affirm that Christ is the matter, or sub-
stance of all the Sacraments." "The office of the Sacraments is
precisely the same as that of the Word of God: which is to offer
and present Christ to us ... but they confer no advantage or
profit without being received by faith." In this instance, the
Sacraments, the Bible and the Person of Christ are strangely equated.
There is no wide difference between the sacraments of the Old and the
New Law, as though one prefigured and the other communicated the
grace of God. Paul speaks of "the fathers in the time
of Moses who did "all eat the same spiritual meat"
(I Cor. 10:3) with us, and explains that meat to be
Christ. Who will dare call that an empty sign, which
exhibited to the Jews the real communion of Christ."
In this passage we not only see a typical Calvin interpretation of Scripture, but to the point under discussion, we detect Calvin's philosophy of the Word of God. He had a "low" view of the written word, in comparison to the modern view in some conservative circles. The active Living Word subordinates the written word. The "visible" word is more effective than the written word to illuminate the believer. It is the Living Word which is the end of revelation. It is questionable whether Calvin would have described his doctrine of Scripture in the terms that the Calvinists later came to accept as orthodox. This judgment is made in spite of the estimate of some who call Calvin a literalist and a grammarian.

The purpose of Scripture, to Calvin, was not to focus attention on itself, but was to reveal Christ. It was not an end in itself, but a vehicle through which the Spirit worked.

The latter therefore is dead, and the Law of the Lord slays the readers of it, where it is separated from the grace of Christ, and only sounds in the ears, without affecting the heart. But, if it be efficaciously impressed on our hearts by the Spirit, — if it exhibits Christ, — it is the word of life.

"If it exhibit Christ," and the "office of the Word of God . . . is to present Christ to us," are statements that cannot be disregarded in our understanding of Calvin. The promise of blessing is not

1Ibid., i, 9, iii.
"carnal," but "spiritual," not "temporal," but eternal." If Calvin was a Biblicist, he most surely was not a Worshipper of the word but only of the Word.

We conclude that Calvin with Luther held a view of Scripture which not only affirmed the sacredness of the Book and its authority but which based these qualities in the divine Author and Interpreter, rather than in the book itself. His very free handling of Scripture and his emphasis upon the humanity of the individual authors as well as their participation in the errors and ignorance of their times, justifies this conclusion. His exegetical principles which refused to conform to a strictly literal sense, and his emphasis upon attention to the historical conditioning of a passage, cannot be harmonised with the unimaginative literalism with which he is often charged. His major concern, that Christ be exhibited in Scripture, and that the Holy Spirit alone could make the Word of God meaningful to an individual, was not a concern with the words as words but with a spiritual message beyond the laws of exegesis. It seems safe to conclude by the study of the foregoing section on the Sacraments, that Calvin's view of the Word of God did not absolutely equate it with written Scripture; but whether this conclusion is correct or not, it is the author's opinion that his attestations of infallibility and authority referred to the Divine Source of written Scripture, not simply to the concreted object called the Bible. Christ, the
Word of God, is the perfect subject. From Him came the word, to Him the word points. He, alone is perfect and infallible.

The observation which was made in relation to the basic Christian doctrines having been formulated in ages when allegorical and "four-fold" methods of interpretation were the vogue, applies again with Luther and Calvin, and particularly the latter, who are "Fathers" of Protestant doctrine. Calvin, especially, is the model for contemporary exegesis. Yet, under scrutiny, both he and Luther prove to have held a view of Scripture uncongenial to the more Biblicistic followers of both. Neither Luther, nor Calvin held to verbal inerrancy, yet their doctrines became the basis for Protestant orthodoxy. We do not conclude that either Luther or Calvin was inconsistent, necessarily, or seriously, as Farrar, and others today, claim. The only way to throw them into inconsistency is to force a modern view of verbal inspiration into their words. To do so takes the strength out of their usage of Scripture. To Luther and Calvin, the authority of Scripture was not secured by inerrancy and infallibility, two qualities only belonging to Persons, nor was it imposed from without.

It is the authority of the Spirit of God by whose activity the record both came into being and is freely accepted by all who read and heed what it says. This is the unique contribution of Luther and Calvin . . . It never happened before. It has been largely neglected or repudiated since. The time has come for its rediscovery.¹

¹Lehmann, Theology Today, p. 331.
Confessional Period

After the mental and spiritual liberation of the Reformation, the freedom from Scholastic bondage, the liberation of truth, the unlocking of Scripture to the commonest man, the elevation of the common man to a spiritual priesthood and unrestricted entrance into the presence of God, there came a strange surrender of all these freedoms and a return to a bondage equal to the old, except in name. The old Scholasticism was replaced by a new Scholasticism, as rigid as the old; and liberty was imprisoned behind great doctrinal systems. The most unpleasant note of all was the bitterness with which each man defended his own orthodoxy and denounced those whose views differed. It was the age of the authority of Creeds, Symbols and Confessions, a new authority to the world of religion. Here-to-fore the ancient decisions of the ecumenical councils were felt to be sufficient in that they faithfully expressed Scriptural teaching. Scripture stood in judgment over the Creeds. Now, for the first time in 1500 years, the Creeds defined Scripture. It is this aspect of the Confessional period which will call for examination and analysis. Only that part of each major creed which expresses a definite view of Scripture will be noted. Philip Schaff's volume on Creeds is

The Reformation impulse was registered in both the religious factions created by it. Both Roman Catholic and Protestant groups experienced reformation. Each group sharpened its doctrinal demarcations by council decree and Confessional standards. The decrees of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), by rigidly defining Catholicism for all time, ended any hope for ecumenical Christianity on any other basis than it provided. We are interested in the Catholic view of Scripture as defined by that document and as interpreted by later popes. The statement is as follows:

The Holy, Ecumenical, and General Synod of Trent... having ever before its eyes the removal of error and the preservation of the truth of the Gospel in the Church — that Gospel which, promised beforehand through the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures, our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, first promulgated with His own mouth and then ordered to be preached to every creature by His Apostles, as being the fountain of all saving truth and moral instruction; seeing, moreover, that this truth and instruction is contained in written Books and in unwritten traditions which were received by the Apostles from the very mouth of Christ, or were delivered — as it were by hand — by the Apostles themselves at the dictation of the Holy Spirit; this same Synod, following the example of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with equal devotion and reverence all the books of both the Old and the New Testaments, since the one God is the Author of both, as also the aforesaid traditions, whether pertaining to faith or to morals, as delivered by the very mouth of Christ or dictated by the Holy Spirit, and preserved in the Catholic Church by the unailing succession.²

Regarding the translation to be used and the rules of interpretation to be followed, the Council is extremely explicit.

Moreover, the same sacred and holy Synod, — considering that no small utility may accrue to the Church of God, if it be made known which out of all the Latin editions, now in circulation, of the sacred books, is to be held as authentic, — ordains and declares, that the said old and vulgate edition, which, by the lengthened usage of so many years, has been approved of in the Church, be, in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions, held as authentic; and that no one is to dare, or presume to reject it under any pretext whatever.

Furthermore, in order to restrain petulant spirits, It decrees, that no one, relying on his own skill, shall, — in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, — wresting the sacred Scripture to his own senses, presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, — whose it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures, — hath held and doth hold; or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers; even though such interpretations were never (intended) to be at any time published. Contraveners shall be made known by their Ordinaries, and be punished with the penalties by law established.1

It would be difficult to conceive of a theory of inspiration more in harmony with what is called verbal. The following quotation from papal writings makes this clear.

All the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical, are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Ghost; and so far is it from being possible that any error can co-exist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. This is the ancient and unchanging faith of the Church, solemnly defined in the Councils of Florence and of Trent, and finally confirmed and more expressly formulated by the Council of the Vatican.2

1Ibid., pp. 19-20.
Lutheranism is defined by means of Catechisms and Creeds, and significantly none of them undertake to make a definitive statement regarding the inspiration of Scripture. The Book of Concord (1580) including the three ecumenical creeds (Apostle's, Nicene and Anthanasian), the Augsburg Confession (1530), the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Schmalkald Articles, Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, and the Formula of Concord, constitute the authoritative statement of the majority of Lutherans. The Augsburg Confession, however, (written by Melanchthon) is generally accepted as the doctrinal standard.

Luther, in his writings, emphasised the objective, authoritative Word against those who rejected all authority outside of the subjective leading of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, so far as the written symbols are concerned, there is no specific definition of a view of inspiration. The Creeds appeal to Scripture for the defense of doctrine but do not specify a formulated doctrine of Scripture.

Reformed theology begins to elaborate a doctrine of Scripture. The Reformed branch of the Reformation, in distinction from the Lutheran branch, arose at Marburg (1529) when Luther refused to accept the Zwinglian view of the Sacraments. This isolated South and Swiss Protestants, who found leadership under Zwingli and Calvin.

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The particular emphases were predestination and the authority of the Bible as a norm of faith and practice. There are over thirty Reformed confessions from Zwingli's Sixty-Seven Articles to the Westminster Confession (and a few subsequent confessions of lesser importance). Of this great number, two are selected for a brief analysis: the Belgic Confession because it is authoritative for the Christian Reformed Church, and others today, and the Westminster Confession, because it is the "culmination and end of creative reformed Protestant thought,"¹ and because it is authoritative for many Presbyterians, some Congregationalists and a few smaller groups.

The Belgic Confession (1561) composed by Guido de Bres who soon after died a martyr, was received in the Netherlands. It is now the Confession of Faith of the Christian Reformed Church. There is obvious reference in it to Calvin's French Confession. It became the basis for the confession passed by the Synod of Dort in 1618-19. The purpose of Scripture, it states, is that men should be without excuse before God and that in it God makes Himself known to us, "as far as is necessary for us to know," to His glory and our salvation. Article III says this Word of God came not by the will of men but men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and were afterwards commanded to commit His revealed word to writing and "He Himself wrote

with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures." Article IV adds to former lists of canonical books, the statement that against these books "nothing can be alleged." Paul is named as author of the book of Hebrews. The authority of Scripture comes, "not so much because the Church approves them" but because of the inward witness in our hearts, and the fact that they carry the evidence in themselves. "For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being justified."

Since it is forbidden to add or subtract we are to conclude that "the doctrine" is most perfect and complete in all respects. It becomes the "infallible rule."

This Creed elaborates on the method of inspiration and the extent of authority. Although inspiration has not yet appeared as a term, that which later will be identified as inspiration in later creeds, is now said to include (1) being "moved by the Holy Spirit," (2) speaking, and (3) later commanded to write the revealed word. There is an apparent discrepancy in the 3rd article in that, these humanly written records and the two tables written by God's own finger, are not distinguished from each other in the, "Therefore we call these writings holy and divine Scriptures," and the assumption is that either we have such supernatural objects now as God's writings or that both God's writings and men's writings are equally supernatural. This lack of
clarity results from the attempt to equate God's part and the human element in Scripture. The authority of Scripture extends to the limit of men's need of salvation. In this creed we find the first reference to infallibility, but this infallibility is limited to that which proves right doctrine. Perfection of Scripture is also mentioned, but not a verbal perfection. The evidence upon which Scripture is based, is, curiously, not only the "inward witness" and Scriptures "self-evidence" but the cause of being able to see both of these, namely, 'their prophecies are being fulfilled.' The lack of elaboration leaves much to be desired in the understanding of this section of the statement.

The English Thirty Nine Articles, Schaff tells us, show evidence of a Calvinistic heritage. But their theology, a later writer says, is that of the Augsburg Confession. Certainly the English Presbyterians, later, found no fault with the doctrinal soundness of the Articles. But, of interest to us, is the utterly simple statement regarding Scripture

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be approved there-by, is not to be required of any man . . .

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Standing between the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Westminster Confession and the chief source of the latter are the Irish Articles of Faith (1615) thought to have been written by Archbishop James Ussher and representing Reformed doctrine in Ireland. Relating to the Scriptures it is less specific than the Belgic Confession but a little more so than the English Confession. The "ground of our religion" and "the rule of faith and all saving truth," it says "is the Word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures." This limits the claims made for Scripture to the area of "saving truth." Article II says that since the Scriptures have been "given by inspiration of God" they are in that regard to be "of most certain credit and highest authority." No more is said here, than that Scripture is dependably adequate for the purpose of its existence. There is no thought, apparently, of equating the Word of God with every word of Scripture or what is later called verbal inspiration.

The Westminster Confession (1647) was formulated by a body of English non-conformists who, though they had no quarrel with the Church of England on the basis of doctrine, did desire to break with the English Church government and ritual. The "Presbyteries" were organized in defiance of the "Episcopies," and gradually the Puritans (Pure Protestants) came to a definite self-consciousness. They

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desired union with sympathetic sister groups in Scotland and Ireland, not on the basis of a national creed, but so far as a Catechism and church government was concerned. Warfield gives us the spirit of the Westminster Assembly

All the topics . . . are treated with notable fulness with the avowed object, not merely of setting forth the doctrine of the churches with such clearness and in such detail as to make it plain to all that they hold to the Reformed faith in its entirety, but also to meet and exclude the whole mob of errors which vexed the time.  

The form and order of the Irish Articles were used as a basis and the content revised and expanded. Scriptural proof texts were added by April, 1647. After the three bodies individually had ratified the whole it became the Confession of faith of the Presbyterian Churches in the British dependencies and America and later some Baptists. Dr. Schaff thinks that the chapter, "Of the Holy Scriptures," is "the best counterpart of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the rule of faith," and Warfield agrees, that "such a statement of a fundamental doctrine is a precious heritage, worthy not only to be cherished but to be understood."

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2 Ibid., p. 61.

3 Schaff, Creeds, p. 767.

4 Warfield, Westminster Assembly, p. 155.
Because of the length of the chapter, we shall accept Warfield's analysis of it, in brief. "Holy Scripture or the Word of God written . . . is given by inspiration of God." Inspiration is the defining term, not itself defined and is contrasted with human writings. All books in all their parts are asserted to be inspired. This "makes these books divine and not human writings." God is their author; they are "immediately inspired by God," so they are the "very Word of God," of "infallible truth and divine authority . . . the very word of God" in all their parts and elements alike.¹

Because it is God's book it is "authoritative in and of itself."² Against "the Socinians and Arminians who desired to confine the authority of Scripture to its literal asseverations," the Westminster Confession adds also what "by good and necessary consequences may be deduced from Scripture."³

The original autographs, only, are the inspired Bible, and alone are authoritative as a final appeal in defense of doctrine, though providential care assures their full authority for the transmission of saving doctrine.⁴ But the sharp distinction drawn between

¹Ibid., p. 204.
³Ibid., p. 226.
⁴Ibid., p. 237.
"inspired originals and the uninspired translations" must not blind men to the possibility and reality of the conveyance in translation of that Word of God which lies in the sense of Scripture, and not in the letter, same as in a vessel for its safe conduct.

Scripture has but one sense. It is its own interpreter, parallel passages alone will give infallible guidance. The basis for this statement is in the assumption that God is the sole author, who as Truth itself, needs no other one to interpret him.

The Holy Spirit, who speaks in every part of Scripture, is the Supreme Judge in all controversies of religion. This does not distinguish between Scripture and the Holy Spirit, but says "whenever and wherever Scripture speaks that is the Holy Ghost speaking." The words of Scripture are not dead words but are instinct with life.

The Westminster Confession contains the most explicit statement regarding Scripture, in particular, of any creed, with the exception of the Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675), which defined verbal inspiration in its most extreme form. We note that the

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1 Ibid., pp. 240-241
2 Ibid., p. 255.
3 Textual literalism in the sense of the infallibility of the Biblical words was never held in the Church before the seventeenth century. It achieved extreme and solitary formulation in the Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675), the last doctrinal confession of the
Westminster Confession itself extended its authority over a limited segment of the Christian church. Its purpose was not to be ecumenical, or to express opinion held universally, in time or area. It was, rather, highly definitive of Reformation theology and excluded all that which was considered as error in the light of its own insights. It sought to codify the truth of the Reformation, as Calvinists saw it. Regarding Scripture, it is more explicit than any previous written expression. The Bible is not a human book, but a divine book. Consequently, it is the very Word of God, equally in all and every part of the specified books. It carries its authority in itself. So extreme is this expression that a fissure is forced upon between what is described and what men possess. No previous view of Scripture had forced this unnatural division between the human and divine in the Bible. It may well be the source of all the conflict between science and the Bible, since. The solution was to affirm inspiration only of the autographs, and to say that doctrinal authority lies only in these autographs and that translations are not so inspired or authoritative. But problems immediately arise. We

Reformed Church of Switzerland, which declared even the vowel points of the Hebrew alphabet to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. This confession never extended its authority beyond Switzerland and was as remote as could be from the mind of the Reformers." Lehmann, Theology Today, Vol. III, Oct., 1946, p. 342.
do not possess these autographs, therefore decisions regarding doctrine cannot be made. Since only the autographs can be equated with the Word of God, then it is only proper to say that the Word of God is not to be equated with what we now possess as our Scriptures, and we would be forced to say that Scriptures contain the Word of God and to maintain a distinction between them, which is precisely what the Confession does not want to say. But this position is inevitable on the basis of what the Confession admits when it says that since we have only the "uninspired translations," the Word of God lies, now, "in the sense of Scripture, not in the letter." And to say this, is to make affirmations of verbal inspiration illogical, and erroneous.

The Confession is quite inconsistent in calling the guidance which our Scriptures give, in our "regular language," infallible, in view of the above analysis, and to equate Scripture with the Holy Spirit, is unfortunate, in that it either imprisons Him within an uninspired document or robs us of any contact with Him in the absence of the autographs. In any case, it is questionable whether it is proper to either regard even the autographs as so supernatural as to be the actual person and voice of the Holy Spirit, or to fail to discriminate between the natural and supernatural in Scripture. It is dangerous to materialize God or to deify objects. Lack of this discrimination does one or the other.

There are a few observations to be made regarding the Creeds
as a whole. In every case, they originated as local statements, even personal in nature. Some achieved national authority over specific groups within the nation. The Westminster received the approval in two nations of the Presbyterian and later Baptist and Congregational groups. In no case do the Creeds represent an ecumenical status. They do not look backward to historical tradition, or outward toward unity of the Church, or forward to wider agreement or understanding.

The Reformed Confessions tend to regard Scripture as "perspicuous," and to be interpreted in terms of its own statements. If a passage is obscure, another passage somewhere will give a sure light upon it. In this way Scripture interprets itself. It does not need an "outside" source of interpretation. This point is important to an understanding of the Fundamentalist Controversy in America as well as the wider conflict with Modernism everywhere. As the Confession stands, it means that there is no place for textual criticism, and more important, for historical criticism. At this point, the real issue emerges. The curious thing is that this view of Scripture should be coupled with a method of interpretation called grammatico-historical. By historical is meant, simply that, the text is to be understood in its contemporary situation. (There is another meaning to historical which will be considered later). The intention of the author is to be studiously sought. Now, a moment's consideration will reveal a fundamental discrepancy between this and what is meant
by verbal inspiration. If the precise word which God intended is in the text, and the word is strictly unambiguous, if the meaning is in the word and not in the thought back of the word, then the historical connotation and conditioning is not only superfluous but distracting. This weakness in the Creedal statement will account for its subsequent history. In reading the Creeds of this period, one misses the Reformers' note, emphasising the Living Word. The person of Christ, as a living Reality, could not be confined in human words, we would conclude, but this failure adds up to a spiritual barrenness which becomes somewhat oppressive. Inspiration ends in the word, according to Warfield, and we do not even have that inspired word.

There is a sense in which the Creeds isolate the individual from the Word of God. This is made obvious by the fact that (1) they are external pressures brought to bear upon the conscience regarding Scripture; they are what "one must believe" to salvation. (2) They are statements about the Word of God, not statements out of the Word of God; and (3) they were first compiled and then later defended with proof texts from Scripture, rather than being expositions of the Word of God. Is not this a new Scholasticism, another seal on the Word of God, an elevation of a new authority over the Word of God? Can it be said that by means of these creeds, man can put his ear to the Word and hear it speak directly to him as the Reformation faith declared?
Perhaps the most serious result was the imprisonment of the Living Word under bonds of human manipulation. History has shown us that when Scripture was least regarded as a human book, it was most imprisoned by human reason. When it is regarded too much as a supernatural thing, it is least available to human need. This has been demonstrated by the Palestinian Jewish attitude toward Scripture which required the Talmud to interpret it and by the Catholic view which requires a pope to explain it.

**Non-Confessional Statements of Faith**

Throughout history, there have always been and continue now to be the smaller groups that challenge the majority and contest the points of orthodoxy which do not truly express the best in universal Christian thought. Since Orthodoxy seldom engages in self-criticism, it must submit to the scrutiny of these brave souls, of which in earlier times, martyrs were made. By means of such thinking a better balance is maintained in the whole Church or to use another figure, the growing edge is kept alive by means of which fresh life is generated and released into the whole structure. In some respects the independent groups which will be reviewed in this section, came to independency in respect of the open Bible in contrast to the Book closed by the Creeds.

James Arminius (1560-1609) became the source of a type of
theological emphasis somewhat at variance with Reformation views. His position on free will, contrasted that of the more extreme Calvinistic symbols, though it was completely evangelical in comparison with Pelagius, with whom he has been erroneously compared. His views were developed, however, in various directions, from the most liberal moderism to a mellowing of extreme Calvinistic positions so that Kuiper could say, "Almost all of American Fundamentalism is Arminian, and Arminianism is a compromise with autosoterism."

Because of his wide influence and the importance of his views on Scripture which relate to this influence we will include him in this analysis. His writings are largely in the form of correspondence and tracts, admirably systematised theologically, now, by Dr. Bern Warren into a Compendium. Under the title, "The rule of religion, the Word of God, and Scriptures in particular," he says,

By the "ingrafted word," God has prescribed religion to man, by an inward persuasion, a universal disclosure to the mind and by writing or sealing a remuneration of his heart. This inward manifestation is the foundation of all external revelation.

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3Ibid., p. 75.
God communicates this external word to man, "first orally, then in writing, so that we now have the infallible Word of God, in no other place than in the Scripture." ¹ The cause of the books is God, he says, in His Son, through the Holy Spirit. The instrumental causes are holy men "actuated and inspired" by the Holy Spirit. Inspiration may be the "words inspired into them, dictated to them, or administered by them under the divine direction."²

There is a tacit rebuke to the spirit of Creedalism if we understand Arminius correctly. To him the Book does not have "authority in itself," nor can a Creed give it authority but only the "veracity and power of the Author," alone, gives authority to the writing.

But whosoever they be that receive it as if delivered by God, that approve of it, publish, preach, interpret and explain it . . . add not a tittle of authority to the sayings or writings . . . and things Divine neither need confirmation, nor indeed can receive it from those which are human. The whole employment of approving . . . is only an attestation by which the church declares . . . these writings . . . as divine.³

It is the witness of the Spirit which imparts assurance regarding Scripture, but it is, nevertheless, subject to objective examination.

¹Ibid., p. 76.
²Ibid., p. 76.
³Ibid., p. 78.
"Try the spirits," cautions Arminius. Perfection of Scripture, was to him, a relative perfection. It is not the perfection of the next life, not an "absolute quality, equally dispensed through the whole body of Scripture and each of its parts," but a perfection in relation to the particular purpose of God in bringing salvation to the church.¹ Divine revelation is internal, Inspiration is the external record. There can be no new revelation, because Christ is the fulness of revelation and no revelation can exceed Christ. Interpretation is to be in accord with the grammatical sense and a re-discovery of the intention of the author in "either a proper or figurative signification."

The important emphasis of Arminius' theory of Scripture is in his recognition of the human aspect of Scripture. The cause is God, but men are instruments. The book is subject to examination. Its perfection is not that which sets it apart from human life but is relative to its purpose, that of bringing salvation to the church. He recognises an accuracy of word in Scripture but inspiration does not culminate in that word, else he would not have stressed "a re-discovery of the intention" of the witness. Interpretation that seeks to recover the thought of the human writer is not speaking of an inspiration which terminates in words.

¹Ibid., p. 87.
Methodism is in the Reformation tradition so far as its Articles of Religion are concerned. John Wesley was himself an Anglican whose Thirty-Nine Articles were born in a Calvinistic atmosphere. Wesley revised and abridged them in the spirit of Arminianism, but in regard to Scripture he was a son of Luther. Wesley shared with Luther ideas as to the inspiration of the Bible. He believed with Luther that "the Word is applied pro me, to make us wise unto salvation" (II Tim. 3:15). No other guide will open the Word but He Himself who gave it.¹ Reading is primarily listening, because the word is a "tale" rather than a script and "experience" in an echo, not the rival, of the Word, confirming, not replacing the one supreme authority.²

Wesley felt the same freedom as the Reformers to correct and clarify what was considered faulty in Scripture. In interpreting Matthew 1:1, he explains the genealogies as themselves defective public records, the correction of which would have caused serious question in the minds of those who know of them.³

Yet he was a man "of one book," a Biblicist, but one who constantly asked questions of human experience in order, better to


²Ibid., p. 30.

understand the "one book." Did sin remain in believers? he asked himself, and kept carefully the case histories of hundreds of converts before he gave an answer. This was one challenge to the stereotyped dogma of the Creeds.

The Baptist Confession of 1689 is the most generally accepted by the Regular or Calvinistic Baptists of England and the American Baptists in the South. It respects the Westminster statement on Scripture.¹

But the Northern and Western Baptists find the New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833) congenial to them. It is simple and worthy of quoting in full for its point particular of interest to this study.

We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried.²

In the New Hampshire Confession there is a reversal from the spirit of Creedalism back to the spirit of the Reformers. It expresses a faith in the Word more in keeping with that of the whole Christian Church. We note, particularly, (1) that men were the

¹Schaff, Creeds, p. 738.
²Ibid., p. 742.
recipients of divine inspiration, not their writings as the Westminster Confession states; (2) that there is a human element recognised, men wrote; (3) that God was the cause of what was written. Absolutely unique among Confessions is (4) the reference to the Bible as the true center of Christian union, and (5) the fact that the Bible stands as the judge over us and all our creeds and opinions. There is no emphasis on the individual words but on the message of the Bible which is un mixed with error.

The survey would not be complete were it not at least to mention the Society of Friends and Barclay's Apology which is still regarded by orthodox Friends. They hold Scripture to be a secondary rule of faith, subordinate to the Spirit who gives it its authority. Experience looms very large as a source of divine knowledge but experience must conform to and confirm Scripture. In this system the ministry of the Spirit assumes a very important place.

In this chapter the historic Christian faith in Scripture and the corresponding methods of interpretation have been traced and stated. An analysis of the material will be held over and included in the next chapter which brings the theories up to date. It is sufficient to note that throughout Christian history, the Church has believed that the Bible was given to speak to the hearts of men. Whatever the theory of inspiration may have been, methods of interpretation have invariably attempted to relate the inspired word to the contemporary situation.
CHAPTER IV

THE ROLE OF MODERNISM IN THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION
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INTERPRETATION

We are engaged in asking what the Christian Church has meant by inspiration, interpretation and relevancy in so far as the Scriptures are concerned. Only by understanding this are we able to ascertain our own continuity with it. We have discovered that there is a tendency among those who hold a "high" view of inspiration to interpose authoritative interpreters between men and God's word. 

The Reformation was primarily a casting off of the false authority of the Catholic Church to interpret Scripture. We enter now another period of struggle in regard to Scripture. In this period there is a great "shaking of the foundations." How the Church met and responded to the challenge will tell us important things about its views of inspiration and will explain something about its methods of interpretation. The agent of the challenge is Modernism.

Modernism, in broad terms, is anything new in practice or thinking. More specifically it refers to a spirit contrasted with that of the reactionary. It seeks to express the old in contemporary terms, or to introduce new points of view to correct the old. There have always been moderists in the Church, as for instance
Thomas Aquinas, who "modernised" medieval theology by means of Aristotle. But the Modernism of which we speak is a particularised example of the general. It has earned a capital letter. It arose in the Enlightenment, grew with the scientific spirit and aligned itself with a type of Biblical criticism destructive of the authority and supernatural aspects of the Bible. It used such acceptable terms as "faith," "revelation," "conscience," "truth" in a sense entirely different from the traditional meaning. "Truth" is relative to a changing situation, not an absolute. "Revelation" is not a supernatural invasion of the human, but an indefinable inner experience, individualistic and authoritative for no one. The Bible is, therefore, unnecessary as an objective standard of religion or morality, and actually detrimental to human progress if it is considered as an authority. The Christ of history is not the Christ of faith. The Christ of history was only a man. The Christ of faith is a figment of the hero-worshipping mind which added fantasy to imagination, as evolution altered men's thought processes. Science is more dependable than religion and the two must not be confused. Since the truths (?) of religion are not available to the scientific methodology, they are to be discarded as the useless child's play of a growing race. The hypothesis of an evolutionary origin and developmentalistic "process," informed Biblical scholarship, and consequently, robbed the Scriptures of the authority which the Creeds had posited in them. Sin was
discounted, and the atonement was discarded as a relic of unchristian religions. God was "in" every man and progress toward the heights was inevitable. Such was Modernism in the nineteenth century, though perhaps no one person held all that was involved in it.

Modernism came into violent conflict with three major religious forces. The first was with the Catholic Church on the basis of authority. The second was with the Reformed Churches on the basis of orthodoxy, and the third, with a reaction within its own ranks on the basis of Revelation. All three saw it as a struggle in the area of a doctrine of Scripture.

Modernism and Catholicism

Modernism challenged all authority political and religious, in France and all of Europe. It was aligned with democracy as against autocracy in any form. Since Catholicism was hand in glove with the secular government, it was obliged to fight democracy indiscriminately with religious freedom. The move for separation of church and state was a move against papal authority. Pope Pius IX, in 1864, issued a Papal Bull condemning 80 propositions of theologically or philosophically false propositions. Near the turn of the century, Abbe Loisy, a professor in the Catholic Institute in Paris began teaching Modernistic principles, particularly in regard to Biblical criticism, for which he was condemned and excommunicated. It would have been dis-
astrous for the authority of the Church to discover that it was not securely moored to Scripture. Rev. A. L. Lilly was forced out of the Church for the same reason as was Paul Sabatier who wrote and lectured with great effect in favor of the new modernism. He said

... at the bottom of Modernism there is ... an effort to arrive at an idea of the Church which shall be closer to life and truer to practice ... . Jesus was a modernist, He was a rebel, revolutionary.¹

The emphasis of the Modernistic movement was toward a "vital immanence" of God in the hearts and consciences of men against Rome's external and ecclesiastical authority. The position had been given strong expression by a French Catholic philosopher, Lucien Laberthonnieres. Then July 28, 1906, Pope Pius issued a scathing Encyclical, Pieni l Anim, in which Modernism was denounced and the right of seminary novitiates to read newspapers or attend public meetings where democratic principles were apt to be mentioned was denied. This was followed in 1907 by the Lamentabili Sane Exitu, issued by the "Holy and Universal Inquisition," which enumerates and anathematizes the sixty-five errors of Modernism. It was circulated to stimulate exegetical work among Catholic Scholars to offset the false scriptural interpretations of Loisy and other Modernists.²

The Catholic Church had met Modernism and in its own way had conquered. The method of coercion of conscience is quite foreign to Protestantism.

In connection with the rise and rejection of Modernism a positive emphasis was initiated in the form of Neo-Thomism. The task of the New Scholastics is to relate Catholic theology to the modern world strictly within the terms of St. Thomas. It is a difficult task to bring modern physics into the Aristotelian-metaphysical fold. And Biblical scholarship, thriving elsewhere, has finally compelled the Catholic church to acknowledge the glaring errors of the Vulgate. Recently, her own scholars have begun to produce new versions of the Bible, from corrected manuscripts, but the church retains the exclusive right of infallible interpretation.

Modernism and Protestantism

Modernism came into great conflict with Protestantism in America about the same time that it challenged Catholicism in the old world, but with very different results. That which is known as the Fundamentalist controversy is strictly an American phenomenon, though a Biblicism of a milder type and known as fundamentalism was gathering strength on the continent.

The occasion for controversy was rooted in a typically American development of Puritanism, — Calvinism. It is extremely
doubtful that America was ever as religiously oriented as is sometimes imagined. American freedom was congenial to all sorts of intellectual freedoms, but Stewart Cole is probably right when he described the bias of community life in which the "personal test of Christianity was two-fold — right belief and proper conduct."¹

To observe the Christian Church in this type of situation is to recognize a regulative agent of the first magnitude ... Its ideals were as fixed as those of its milieu: either an individual accepted salvation and became a Christian, or he willfully neglected divine forgiveness and was informed of the suffering he would experience in the next world; either he sought and shared the fellowship of saints or he divorced himself from the church and endured the role of the religiously disclaimed.²

Whether the irreligious man took his excommunication seriously or not, certainly the church was serious in its attitude toward lack of conformity in religion and morals.

The church control of the community was gradually weakened by industrialization. Factories called for "hands." Men congregated in large and larger cities. Material goods replaced spiritual values. New ideals of success arose displacing the older religious norms. Industrial developments were the result of scientific advance. Science was king. It "debunked" fears of the universe.

²Ibid., p. 11.
It took the place of religion. Biblical studies were conducted in the atmosphere of the newly discovered "king." Scientism arose and ruled. Darwin upset religious faith, as did the findings of geology. The earth was older than the 4004 years Bishop Ussher had calculated. Under the shock of the new discoveries, a shock we can scarcely appreciate today, there arose two responses in the Churches. Perhaps the greater portion of them blindly rejected science and appealed, in a sort of frantic fear, to the authority of Biblical literalism as a position of safety in a world shaken by doubt. A few ministers, who were forced to brave a hostile religious world, accepted all too naively, the untried implications of the scientific approach and attempted to read new content into the old terminology and so save the values of religion. Both sides allowed themselves to be forced into extreme positions, the former into an unnatural reactionary mood, the latter into a sensitive, defensive attitude that went farther in its feeling for freedom than later good judgment could justify. Here was the birthplace of modern religious conservatism and liberalism in America, dated somewhere between 1850 and 1875. Liberalism expressed its religious impulse in improving the lot of the downtrodden. It saw in the church a way to "bring in the Kingdom," by means of a social gospel and read the Bible in that light. It certainly was a corrective to the apathetic spirit of traditionalism in the churches. Furniss suggests the possibility that the apathy
was encouraged by big business which did not want an investigation into its methods.¹ This is not proved but may suggest a reason for some of the stout resistance to better working conditions and social improvement. In a word, liberalism leaned heavily toward the "this-worldly" concerns, was heartily optimistic about its ability to lift humanity to Godlikeness and ever improving conditions, rejected the Biblical teachings it could not interpret in the light of this philosophy and joined its hand in matrimony to Science, not yet out of its swaddling clothes.

Conservatism, on the other hand, stressed the "other-worldly" values, encouraged people to bravely endure the injustice and temptation and evils of life and to look for deliverance in the next life. It was wrong to try to improve the social conditions in the world because such an effort defied God's word that said that the world would wax worse and worse; and because happy, comfortable people conclude that they do not need redemption in Christ. The author recalls hearing Boy Scout activities roundly condemned because the boy who learns to live a good moral life in his own strength would feel too self-righteous to require conversion. Conservatism was overly pessimistic. The "other-worldly" emphasis climaxed in such a stress on the immanent second-coming of Christ that in some quarters church building programs were curtailed and schools for

ministerial training had to fight for an existence. The tendency was to reject completely secular scientific investigations as antithetical to Biblical scientific teaching. Bernard Ramm found two traditions in Bible and science both stemming from the developments of the nineteenth century. There is the ignoble tradition which has taken a most unwholesome attitude toward science... There has been and is a noble tradition in Bible and science... [in which] learned evangelical Christians have been patient, genuine and kind and have taken great care to learn the facts of science and Scripture.¹

Ramm found that "narrow evangelical Biblicism" and "Plymouth Brethren theology" had buried the noble tradition and science had repudiated both.

There were two directions of activity; the conservatives became highly evangelistic and discredited education relying on Sunday Schools and Bible conferences to indoctrinate converts; the liberals depended upon education to make Christians. The result was an ever deepening cleft running through Christendom.²

The tension in the church colleges and universities and seminaries was great. Whereas in 1875 a geology professor was dismissed for teaching that the human race descended from preadamic stock, and in 1885 progressive views opened Andover Seminary to criticism, most, if not all the church-controlled schools, including Union Theological Seminary and the University of Chicago, had


²Coles, History of Fundamentalism, pp. 38-40.
won their fight for theological freedom by about 1925.\(^1\) A very few schools remained conservative, among them Wheaton College.

The conservatives, now, were forced to build new schools and the era of Bible colleges arose in which the tenets of orthodoxy, in methodology and content were stressed. Many periodicals were started. J. H. Brooks edited *The Truth* and A. J. Gordon, *The Watchword*, both adventist in character. *The Christian Herald* (M. Bantes, editor), dedicated to the old faith. *Jesus is Coming* (by "W. E. R."), and fifty thousand copies of *Pre-Millennial Essays* (1878) were widely circulated. This is but a sample of the periodic type of literature. Able writers soon appeared, to defend the orthodox position. James Orr, with great philosophical skill, wrote voluminously. Augustus Strong of Rochester Seminary, set forth the reasonableness of the Christian faith in a three volume *Systematic Theology*. Robert Dick Wilson of Princeton, brilliantly defended the authenticity of the Old Testament documents. E. I. Mullins of Louisville defended the supernatural in religious thinking, and J. Gresham Machen, also of Princeton, attacked liberalism with scholarly force.\(^2\) There were many writers of less ability.

As American youth developed a taste for scholarship it went to Germany to study and came back to teach and preach the social

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gospel and the higher criticism of the Bible, which it learned there. Orthodoxy fought both issues particularly. Biblical criticism had reduced the supernatural element of Scripture to superstitions and the theory of evolution supported a reasonable gospel instead of a miraculous one. This of course cast question on the Virgin Birth, the resurrection, and a literal Second Coming of Christ.  

Out of this tension developed the Fundamentalist movement. In 1902 George McCready Price wrote voluminously, rejecting evolution and proclaiming the Second Coming of Christ. Philip Mauro, a lawyer, joined the attack on Darwinism. William Riley, a Baptist preacher, in 1909 attacked higher criticism. In 1902, these men and others, and the Bible League of America joined forces, so that there was a body of orthodox believers voicing a strong protest to modernism. In 1910, the Stewart brothers in Los Angeles financed the publication and free distribution of ten or twelve booklets called, The Fundamentals, as a sort of manifesto of orthodoxy.  

These booklets contained articles by leading orthodox preachers, teachers, laymen, archeologists, Biblical scholars and evangelists, representatives from England, Germany, Scotland,  

1Ibid., p. 50.  
Ireland and Canada as well as America, outlining the essentials of the faith. They centered around the five points of controversy as they came to a head at that time, namely, the Infallibility of the Bible, Christ's Virgin Birth, his Substitutionary Atonement, the Resurrection and Second Coming. Within two or three years over three million copies had been distributed and their influence served to give a sense of solidarity to the rather unorganised forces of orthodoxy, and undoubtedly gave the name, Fundamentalism to the movement, which now came into violent and unhappy conflict with Modernism. The story of that controversy is not the point of interest here, but some analysis of the view of Scripture which Fundamentalism held will engage our attention.

It is instructive to note at this point, that the title, Fundamentalism, was accepted by several religious groups but with varying connotations. An important evangelicalism was active in Great Britain during the years which spanned the time of the American controversy. In England and Scotland a revival of conservativism, without the reactionary emphasis known in America was revitalising the churches. It came to expression in the Keswick Conferences which stressed the Victorious Life emphasis rather than creedalism, primarily. G. Campbell Morgan, also, though a Fundamentalist in the British manner, was active among the American groups for a time. He taught in the Los Angeles Bible
Institute during the time of debate. But his idea of the fundamentals and his spirit was quite different from that exhibited by much of American Fundamentalism. There is a spiritual quality to his teaching quite missing from some other conservative authors. Taking the historic facts and fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith for granted, he presses on to stress the spiritual nature of man and the importance of a right relationship to God. That, he says, is the meaning of the Bible, the reason of Calvary, the value of Pentecost. In one of the rare occasions when Morgan spoke roughly he stressed the importance of personal rightness: "A man who speaks about being right with God, yet who has no consciousness or care about being right with others, is a liar." Another minister and writer, who considered himself fundamental was F. B. Meyer whose message breathes the same spiritual quality. Other names could be mentioned, such as A. H. Carter, Christobel Pankhurst and A. C. Dixon. About this time, in Germany, there were conservative men speaking of the fundamentals, but knowing nothing of the American spirit.


2. Ibid., p. 19.

But even in the United States, Fundamentalism was a term that described a number of points of view. In fact, it was as difficult then as it is now to "locate" the meaning of it. Never was the Northern Baptist Convention drawn into the doctrinal coercion which fundamentalism sought so desperately to impose. It steadfastly maintained a freedom from control and considered the statement of the New Hampshire Confession sufficient to cover its faith. Though it considered itself fundamentalistic it refused to accept the notion that pre-millennialism was a tenet of that persuasion. "Fundamentalism is not; said Goodchild, "a pre-millenarian movement."

He continued, "There are as many views about the return of our Lord among fundamentalists as will be found among other bodies of Christian people."

Even in regard to inspiration there were differences of opinions. Dr. Maxwell, in a keynote address, before a Conference on Christian Fundamentals, (February, 1922) said that it was not for a literal interpretation of Scripture that they contended: "Our contention is for the fact of inspiration and not a theory about it."

E. Y. Mullins, in a midst of the controversy, and very much a fundamentalist, sounded out a warning to his fellows.

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The controversy has degenerated into an attack from one side on one or two positions... such as a premillennialism, which lend themselves easily to caricature and ridicule. From the other side the attack has taken the form of attempts to secure legislative action to prevent the teaching of evolution in the public schools. Nothing could be more ill-advised than for Americans to attempt to employ legislative coercion in the realm of scientific opinion.¹

The spiritual vitality in some quarters of American Fundamentalism is to be noted. Mullins said,

No religion or theology can long hold sway unless it is big enough to grasp life as a whole, or to state the same truth in another way, unless it is religious enough to serve the ends of religion.²

George Truett, represented fundamentalism and yet a deep spiritual eagerness characterized his ministry. His noon day talks at the Chicago Baptist Convention in 1927, drew the largest audiences of any of the sessions and he was forced by popular ministerial demand to set apart the early mornings for prayer and counsel with them. This seemed to be the end of the bitter fundamentalist fight in the Baptist groups.³ In the writer’s recollection, the Church of the Nazarene, among other “Holiness bodies,” while considering itself fundamental, was always careful to distinguish that term from fundamentalistic. It was characterized by a deep revivalistic

²Ibid., p. 77.
passion similar to the spiritual fervor of the groups in Great Britain.

By way of analysis it may be noted that Fundamentalism as described above, was forced into existence by tremendous pressures built up in many areas of American life, all of them focusing in some measure upon traditional Christianity. Some answer had to be given and Fundamentalism was the handiest answer at the moment. Basically, it was one metaphysical system pitted against another, supernaturalism against naturalism. Neither side had taken stock, maturely, of its assets and liabilities and so the clash was emotional in great measure rather than intellectual. The Modernists assumed an evolutionary hypothesis before they opened the Bible. The Fundamentalists assumed an infallible Bible before they had opened the Book. Both sides took "ignoble" positions, and held them with an extreme, defiant and often bitter spirit. Modernism held science to be its authority. Fundamentalism made the Bible its authority, for everything. Both claimed for its authority, infallibility. Science could not be wrong, and the Bible could not be wrong. Science had no place for the supernatural and the Bible was wholly supernatural. In this way the split widened and hardened. It is asserted by Cole and Furniss and innumerable writers everywhere that it was a split on the basis of literacy versus illiteracy. It is our opinion that this is an emotional judgment and one that
cannot wholly stand up under scrutiny, but the fact remains, as Ramm reminds us, that Fundamentalism’s blanket rejection of science, was "ignoble." Science was rejected before it was understood. Modernism, too, soon found its blanket rejection of the supernatural ill-advised. Both sides erred.

But in the throes of the conflict, and in the absence of an adequate middle ground, the Church was forced to a loyalty on one side or the other. The split went down through denominations and aligned Churches against each other. Extreme fundamentalism was derisive in spirit, highly definitive in its doctrine, and unimaginatively uncompromising. (From this point on, Fundamentalism will refer to the extreme views which were held). Now the significant thing about Fundamentalistic faith is that it has no historic roots. This does not mean that the individual doctrinal tenets had not been held by the Church, but it does mean that the peculiar emphasis as exhibited by the Five Points has no counterpart anywhere in Christian history. There is certainly no Biblical basis for lifting up these five items as a preaching norm, as a rule of faith or as a test of orthodoxy, and there is no precedent in any creed upon which they rest. The very grouping is unfortunate as it caricatures Christian faith by a distortion of emphasis. There is no word about a relatedness of Christian doctrine to vital life concerns, or any practical issues. It is highly abstract in nature. It lifts
peripheral truths to centrality. Relating to the one item with which this study is concerned, a doctrine of Scripture, we note that the stress on the word, — the literal letter, against science and Biblical criticism, had never been known before. Its nearest counterpart is the statement in the Westminster Confession, but which we have already found referred finally to the thought back of the word, not the word itself. Certainly, neither Luther or Calvin held to this rigid view and only the decree of the Council of Trent equals it. Is it the American penchant for mechanising everything it touches, including thought, that prompted the unnaturally sharp definitions of the Fundamentalists movement? Our language encourages a thinking in absolutistic categories unknown to European languages. It is difficult to be subtle in English. We are very quick, also, to "label" everything and we are prone to throw the label over a person or thing too quickly, without a full examination of all aspects of the case. This lack of true tolerance throws us into racial, religious and political strata, classified only on the basis of some superficial consideration and the Indian social caste system is scarcely any more sovereign than ours. Because of the provincial and unhistorical nature of the Fundamentalist theory of Biblical inspiration, born in a heated controversy, we conclude that it does not represent the best in Christian expression. The basis for this conclusion is further fortified by the fact which a
study of the history of Fundamentalism will show, that each particu-
lar denomination treasured sets of "distinctives," as the essentials,
which were peculiar to each and did not represent a unanimous con-
viction even of conservative Christianity.

The occasion of conflict in each communion was the
question of the priority of the historic distinctives
that had given individuality to that particular doc-
trine . . . . In every denomination orthodox men
considered that their church's distinctives were the
essentials of supernaturally-prescribed Christianity.¹

The closest agreement came in their estimate of the Bible, but "even
so, Baptist and Disciple traditionalists took a different position
from that of Methodists or Episcopalians,"² and all of them different
from English evangelicals. It would be indiscreet to hold any one
group totally right and the others totally wrong. Cole, in the same
connection cites the disintegration of the seventeen "fellowships"
which were active all or part of the time between 1910 and 1930 and
gives as a possible cause the "unyielding individualism of its
leaders,"³ an admission made by William B. Riley.⁴ We may inject a
modern note, by referring to the "mushroom" growth of undenomina-

¹Cole, History of Fundamentalism, p. 322.
²Ibid., p. 323.
³Ibid., p. 325.
⁴Cole, loc. cit.
tabernacles, centered about a strong personality, which began in the midst of the controversy, and in connection with it, and is only now declining in vigor. All of them played up some points of Fundamentalism, were divisive in spirit and lacked historical continuity, ecclesiastically and doctrinally.

It may be further noted as we look into the Five Points of Fundamentalism that one central emphasis ties them together, supernaturalism, or more particularly the fact of miracle. It was this emphasis, undoubtedly, that lay back of the choice of the points. Science and religion clashed at the level of miracle. But if we look a little more closely we will discover that the issue of miracles lay against an even more basic presupposition. It was the static metaphysics of Aristotle, coupled with Newton's "laws of nature," against a more dynamic view of reality. Every tenent of Fundamentalism stressed miracle defined in terms of Aristotelian metaphysics and Newtonian physics. Science denied miracle on that very basis. In terms of the lowest common denominator, the actual controversy was over a philosophical definition of miracle. Fundamentalists said, our cause is lost if science can disprove miracles. Science did disprove many "miracles" by a new definition of nature but the cause of Christianity was not thereby lost.

The question here cannot be an evaluation of modern science or philosophy or the validity of any one definition of miracle.
Most Christians and many non-Christians believe in the possibility of miracles, but it is disconcerting to try to find an agreeable definition of it. Hume's disproof of miracle was on the basis of one of the definitions of nature and epistemology. He showed that Newton's "laws" of nature were a figment of the imagination. No one has ever been able to demonstrate a necessary causal relationship, he said, therefore that which appears to be a violation of it (or miracle), is simply the unaccustomed context of the event. This, philosophically, destroyed science as well as religion. Kant "rescued" science and morality from such skepticism by transferring the "law" from nature to mind. Each in its own way is a rationalistic system, metaphysically, and seems to have no basis in Biblical thinking. It is significant that the New Testament term for what is translated "miracle" in the English, is some form of the word "power" and the response to the exercise of it is astonishment and wonder. "Breaking" a law of nature is never the implicit idea of miracle in the New Testament. Rather the wonder was regarded as a mastery of the forces of nature by God — a sovereignty over physical and spiritual things — and this is a very different matter. Ramm reminds us that the Biblical view of nature was singularly free of any untenable philosophical views of nature through which it passed during the long years of its building. It knew nothing of a law of nature but only the will of God.
Providence is just as much the work of God as creation. Nature is the arena of God's activity and the subject of his will.¹ The real issue between modernism and conservatism ought never to be fought in the area of some view of nature but in the realm of a conception of God in relation to his world. Significantly, also, is the fact that the virgin birth and the resurrection of Christ are not in the New Testament regarded as "wonders" but simply as basic facts of empirical history. These events do not validate Christ but are validated by him. By this, it is not meant that the virgin birth and the resurrection are considered unimportant, untrue or unverifiable. On the contrary, if one considers himself to be a Bible believer, he cannot escape the acceptance of these facts as Biblical truths. But it may be observed that the New Testament did not attempt to prove the deity of Christ by way of these facts but rather having come into vital relationship with the risen Lord these facts became meaningful and inevitable to the believer. Paul had all the evidence available for the resurrection of Christ but he was only convinced of the fact in connection with the meeting with the Living Christ on the way to Damascus. If Paul, in the midst of the living witnesses to the resurrection, was not convinced by them of its truth or of its testimony to the deity of Christ, but needed a personal meeting

with the Lord himself, it is not surprising that two thousand years later the same pattern of proof should be the norm. But this will be more fully examined in the last chapter.

Christians, through the centuries, and today, have held varying philosophical theories regarding the nature of reality. A theological judgment cannot be authoritative on that basis. But in the writer’s opinion it was the elevation of this one point as the central issue of Christianity throwing all central issues out of focus which put Christianity in a ridiculous light. Fundamentalism naively fused its belief in miracles to a philosophical position and a view of physics. When Christian youth met the new physics, the whole philosophical structure, which had been religiously associated with the Christian faith, collapsed and took Christianity with it. All too many a Fundamentalist youth apostacised at the eye piece of a microscope. His neatly packaged arguments for the Christian fundamentals were never even opened, science began on another level, and the twain never met.

In anticipation of a discussion in the last chapter of the difference between the natural and supernatural in the Bible, three preliminary words are ventured here. The first is in relation to the supernatural, as such, the second is in regard to miracles, and the third to inerrancy. In the writer’s opinion it was not the stress on the reality of the supernatural which confused the issues in the
Controversy, but an immature view of the whole philosophy of the supernatural. The issue arose something like this. Science denies the miraculous and with it the supernatural. Christianity is supernatural and its faith is proved by the miraculous. Its Bible is supernatural, and therefore must be perfect and infallible. To admit any measure of fallibility and humanity in the Bible would deny its miraculous and supernatural character with the consequent capitulation to naturalism. Its authority would therefore be nullified and the Christian religion would fall apart. Science and Biblical criticism attacked that supernatural perfection, therefore Fundamentalism rejected science and Biblical criticism. The error, in the writer's opinion was in equating authority and inerrancy. The issue is not inerrancy but authority. To confuse the two matters is to imperil the essential Christian truth. On the basis of seventeen or eighteen hundred years of Christian history in which the authority of the Scriptures was never equated with verbal inerrancy, the suggestion is made that to pre-suppose inerrancy on the basis of the Scriptures' supernatural character is unnecessary to its authority, and actually is misleading since the Book is both human and divine. Its authority must rest on a more firm foundation as will be shown in a later chapter.

Miracle, as such, is not the major subject under discussion, but it may make for clarity to suggest that the issue of miracles
should be subservient to the fact of revelation — God’s self revelation. Such revelation is a miracle. Miracle as it is commonly defined is not per se revelation. Miracle is not the first line of defense, but God’s self-disclosure is. Regardless of the philosophical or physical pre-supposition, revelation is the point at issue in the Christian system. God speaks and God acts, and His speaking and acting originates from His own initiative and not out of the milieu of the cause effect relationships of the natural system.

But a point of great importance is that when revelation becomes revelation it enters the natural and accommodates itself to it, else the natural could not comprehend it, or transmit or communicate it.

Inerrancy, then, is an abstract deduction from the presupposition that the supernatural revelation must display its supernatural character to give evidence (1) of its nature and (2) to its authority. Since its physical properties are words, words must be the object of its perfection and infallibility. There is nothing else to be perfect but the words, as said the Fundamentalists. But can supernatural perfection be either contained in human words or recognized as perfect by imperfect men?

The danger in thus positing inerrancy and authority in the literal and human word of Scripture is at least two-fold. The first
danger is that an examination of the Bible will reveal defects which thereby casts question on its physical inerrancy and consequently on its divine authority. Warfield saw this and arbitrarily placed perfection back on the autographs which are unavailable to us. This is a retreat to philosophical abstraction and quite unconvincing outside of the area of cold logic or blind credulity. We have no word of revelation in regard to the autographs hence no basis for faith regarding them. The second danger arises out of the first. Authority is posited in a material object. The end of revelation, according to the extreme Fundamentalists, rests in an inerrant word. Inspiration climaxes in a book. "Inspiration is of books, not men — not the writers but the writings," wrote one of the authors in The Fundamentals.1

Another author writing in the series quotes the decision of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1893.

The Bible as we now have it in the various translations and revisions when freed from all errors and mistakes of translations, copyists and printers, is the very Word of God, and consequently, wholly without error.2

This focuses attention on the medium of revelation, not on the One

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who is revealed. There is a two-fold danger here. The first danger is sacramentalism in which an object becomes a carrier of grace. The Roman Catholic Church early saw that the efficacy of its sacraments would have to be divorced from the persons of its priests and so by-passed the moral character of men, (or the "inspiration" of ministers) and placed it more securely, so they thought, in the physical object. Bread, oil, wine, water, words (the formal aspect of making an object a sacrament), all became holy. Now, those objects after becoming sacraments, are supernatural. They are in and of themselves, grace. Protestantism stands in imminent danger of repeating this error in conceiving of words as the culmination of revelation. The second danger arises right here, in that, where words are sacred, legalism inevitably results. Fundamentalism has become legalistic in many quarters. Legalism is always harsh, self-righteous and unteachable, the very characteristics that Jesus and Paul exposed in the highly religious Jews who kept every facet of the law. From this legalism the Living Lord has been lost from His Word. The Lordship of Christ is either minimised or denied or arbitrarily put into another and future dispensation. Actually, the contact between men and a living Christ is severed. Dr. A. W. Toser, a Chicago minister (Alliance), speaking in Moody Church, in the writer's hearing, on an October night, 1954, as a guest speaker for a Mid-America Keswick Conference, expressed this
sentiment in almost these words. "There is no Savior-hood outside of the Lordship of Christ. We cannot just throw a Scripture at God and claim Christian status, we must accept His full Lordship over our lives. This truth the Fundamentalists have lost." Its loss separates them from the concerns of men and the desperate needs of the contemporary world. It isolates Christ from the human situation. Exegesis, to relate this situation to interpretation, becomes coldly formal, unspiritual, theoretical and unrelated to life. This fact has given rise to a new cry for Biblical theology but the cry comes principally from non-Fundamentalist circles as we shall see.

As early as 1924, E. Y. Mullins, in analyzing the controversy saw that the "chief danger in the situation has been the confusing of issues." Mullins, Christianity at the Crossroads, p. V. This he seeks to clarify. Christians believe in the inspiration and sufficiency and finality of the Scriptures for religious purposes. But the chief issue is not the doctrine of the inspiration or authority of the Bible. The central question is whether there was anything supernatural in the character and career of Jesus Christ? Ibid., p. 29. The climax of Mullin's book is in the stress on the living Christ of Christian experience. He quotes with approval Luther's answer to the question, "What is the Word of God to be believed? The Gospel of God concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was incarnate and crucified, and who is risen again and glorified by the Holy Ghost the Sanctifier" (De Litertate Christiana). Ibid., p. 236.

Carl Henry believes that Fundamentalism must "experience a rebirth of apostolic passion." Henry, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism. (Preface) He thinks that marginal issues
Catholicism won a "decision" in its bout with Modernism. Decisions are not always convincing or victorious. It is an open question as to whether Papal Bulls settle issues or simply drive them under cover to fester and ultimately weaken the organism from within. Did Fundamentalism lose or win in its controversy with Modernism? Certainly Fundamentalism was thrown, quite intact, out from the center of religious and theological concerns of the world, to the periphery of the real issues, where it is now forgotten by everyone but those in it. Can it be compared to the conservative, orthodox, correct Antiochian school in ancient days—a school which simply was brushed to the sidelines to die, by the less correct, less orthodox, actually modernistic Alexandrian school which kept contact with the vital issues of the day? The comparison have been put in the place of centrality and that we have needlessly invited criticism and even ridicule, by a tendency... to parade secondary and even obscure aspects of our position as necessary frontal phases of our view (Preface). Fundamentalist preachers are almost silent about social evils (p. 18). Fundamentalism has "failed to" develop the grand social implications of its message (p. 28). In revolting against the Social Gospel it also revolted against the Christian social imperative (p. 32). This unwillingness to join hands with other agencies for the lifting of human ills has caused the Fundamentalist to be dropped from the program, and yet the ministry in which he engages is often made possible by the work of the Federal Council which he rejects (p. 37). The hesitancy to preach the Kingdom now message, he believes, is to fail to follow Jesus' example. It is the relevance of the redemptive message today, that we need so desperately (Chap. IV). The problem is not finding another vital message "but rather of giving the redemptive word a proper temporal focus" (p. 65).
is not altogether without point.

For decades fundamentalism has proved itself impotent to change the theological and ecclesiastical scene. Its lack of influence has relegated it to the peripheral and subsidiary movements of Protestantism. Wherever fundamentalism and modernism came into test in a theological struggle, fundamentalism lost every major battle in the historical field. It has demonstrated little power to crack the social situation challenging the church today. The motivating loyalty to fundamentalism on the part of many Christians lies in its orthodoxy, its faithfulness to the Word of God. However, the judgment of history on fundamentalism is that it has failed.¹

There are several reasons for the Fundamentalists' failure to win real victories. One of them is mentioned (among others) in Ramm's new book. The deficiency, he says,

was that of an improper spirit. Too frequently orthodoxy fought the critic with sarcasm or vilification or denunciation. This too often involved a similar treatment of the facts of science. Such a strategy was futile.²

To the particular point of interest in this study is the opinion of this writer that one of the most important failures lay in the Fundamentalists' dependency upon abstract argument. The most beautiful logical system stands impotent before living facts. The Fundamentalist is able to conjure up syllogisms and formulas and self-evident principles and logicalities and manipulation of evidence to resolve any Biblical discrepancy anyone can produce, or for any doctrine he desires


to present. But it is hard to remember all the devious turns in the system if it is not reviewed very often and it is distressing to note the lack of attention to these details, in the face of the common man wanting an answer, within the time allotment of his attention span. The Bible itself, reduced its arguments to facts one could see and feel and experience. When all the verities of Christian truth are highly complex rationalizations and remote abstractions which make no practical difference to daily life, they cannot stand up before the demonstrations of science or the needs of men. Christianity is primarily a life, not logic. Jesus was a man, not an idea. Redemption is a very practical matter, with dynamic life implications. It is the Lordship of Christ, not merely a philosophy to be accepted.

Modernism in Revolt

Modernism was met by a third major foe. This antagonist was one of its own carefully nourished children who turned on its parent in an hour of disillusionment. Catholicism met and dispatched Modernism in France. Fundamentalism met and permitted itself to be pushed off the center of the stage by Modernism in America. Neo-Orthodoxy met and "chastised" Modernism, first in Switzerland in the person of Karl Barth, and then everywhere where Modernism had gained a foothold in religion. Catholicism had fought off Modernism's
threat to its authority. Fundamentalism had sought to protect its orthodoxy against Modernism's academic freedom. Barth challenged Modernism on the point of God's Revelation to man. Modernism has lost its ground for special revelation in its identification of the divine and human and in a consequent morass of relativism.

"The only absolute that remained was that of John Dewey's 'Absolutely no Absolute.' It was this extremity of historical relativism . . . that proved Neo-Orthodoxy's opportunity."¹

Modernism's conception of God's immanence and the inevitability of progress, man's natural goodness, gradual perfectibility, and its view of the Bible as the word of man, was challenged by a return to the classic Protestant doctrines of God's transcendence, man's sin and justification by faith, and a return to the Bible as the Word of God. Barth's Epistle to the Romans, became a manifesto of the new movement, in its early days. Neo-Orthodoxy, as Barth called it, spread, first through Emil Brunner to the United States who parted theological company with Barth, and then in various forms in the United States and Europe. Each leader prefers his own title for his position. Each takes a distinctive theological stand. Only the analysis of the most common attitudes toward the Bible among them can be attempted here and the title most in keeping with

that general attitude, Neo-Supernaturalism, will be used.

Neo-Supernaturalism on the surface seems to "cut across the modern mood somewhat in the spirit of the Biblical tradition." It rejects the Kantian agnosticism regarding the superphenomenal. It defies Modernism's immanent God. It singles out the Schleiermachian "consciousness theology" for particular attack. It says God speaks to man, for man cannot by searching discover God. Man is a sinner and stands under the awful judgment of God. But God is not available to man because He belongs to a qualitatively different order than does man. He is Wholly Other. He breaks obliquely into man's world, like a flash of lightening, demanding moral and spiritual decision. It is not an "experience," as the modernist understood in his world of eternal continuity, it was an "existential" event, completely discontinuous with an orderly world. Revelation, in this view, is restored to Protestant status, in that (1) a wholesome separation is established between God and man, and (2) the occasion for a special contact is made necessary and (3) the initiative of a personal, holy God in making the self-disclosure, is demanded. The Bible is properly termed the Word of God because in the entire Bible, not simply in parts of it, does revelation occur. Revelation takes place in the very words of Scripture. There is a dynamic charge of

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God's special revelation in connection with the Bible. All of this is in direct opposition to Modernism's view of the Bible. But before we examine the result in Modernistic thinking it will be well to compare the view with the more orthodox view of Scripture.

The name of the movement, Neo-Supernaturalism, suggests the point of departure. This school of thought is supernaturalistic but conceived in a way uncongenial to traditional Christianity. If Luther and Calvin seemed to have held it as the Neo-Supernaturalists say, the impression probably has resulted from their reaction to Catholic and mystical familiarity with God (each in its own way) which was repulsive to both Reformers. The idea, according to Barth, came from Søren Kierkegaard's conception of the "qualitative difference between time and eternity." In a crude way the difference between parallel lines and crossed lines would illustrate what he means. God and the supernatural are so different that it is really useless to try to speak of one in the language of the other. Man's world is historical to him, or related to his level of existence. God's world is "beyond history," not temporally but "eschatologically," on another level of existence, or a promise. The two existences are in no way related or relatable. But God can and has and does cut across man's world in judgment. Man knows this has occurred but he cannot grasp the

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occasion to hold it and examine it. It does not become a part of his equipment. This "revelation" is fresh and new, never static or second-hand. Anything which accommodates itself to the natural order ceases to be revelation. It may be a record of revelation but it reveals nothing to anyone. Revelation is never finished, never propositional, never even actually experienced. Man, in reality, never "knows" God for God is never object, but always subject, he is rather, "known by" God and in that situation comes into existence, God crowds in on man, wholly on His own terms.¹

With this as a background it is obvious that Neo-Supernaturalism considers orthodoxy wrong when it equates Scripture with the Word of God, and absolutizes the words and sentences as themselves God's revelation, finished and accessible to all men. Divine things must be experienced directly. But experience in any mystical sense is also rejected as "holy psychological datum," not valid as revelation. There is no Subjective criterion in mysticism by which to identify God from demons. Barth's encounter with the Word of God is activistic,² not on man's part but on God's part. Revelation is God acting.


This view is counter to the Reformer's view in that they took the Bible, as a direct revelation in history, completely for granted. To Barth, a historical event as a basis of faith is a contradiction in terms. If the "incarnation" could be historically proved, revelation and faith would cease to exist.

Barth's doctrine of the Word of God, then, is not a doctrine of Scripture, as such, for the activism of God speaking, is both a continuing and therefore an incomplete process, and also that which is incapable of being identified with any phenomenal object. The emphasis is on the speaking God, primarily, and not on the One who has spoken. We confront the Word of God in preaching and the sacraments in so far as there are repetitions of the Divine Promise. On the ground of the Word which God has spoken, directions is given in His Church . . . to the Word which He . . . will speak.¹

The Word is found also in Scripture, the written Word, which is not revelation itself, but a "concrete form of the Churches' memory of God's past revelation."

In the event of Revelation it becomes the word of God. The Bible cannot be abstracted from the activity of God, by Whose power it becomes ever again His Word. He is not bound to His word, but His word is bound to him.²

¹Ibid., p. 60.
²Ibid., p. 61.
Scripture is one of the tokens of revelation. Tokens are symbols or legends of the miraculous, such as the Virgin Birth and the Empty Tomb. Scripture reports these important legends. The Old Testament as anticipation and the New Testament as recollections form the Holy Scriptures. Holy Scripture as such is not the revelation. And yet Holy Scripture is the revelation, if and in so far as Jesus Christ speaks to us through the witness of His prophets and apostles. True, there has never been a single person who for his part could honestly say that he has heard Jesus Christ speak equally clearly in every part and parcel of the Scriptures . . . There are large portions of Holy Scripture in which they have not yet heard the voice of Jesus Christ . . . But only in Scripture, as far as we know, can Jesus Christ speak to us again.¹

Barth also seeks, behind Scripture for, "the Revealed Word" or God's Son who is identical with the Word. This Word is a personal and private event, a "spiritual speech," directed to individuals, but it cannot be spoken of, for it is a secret revealed only in terms of the actual event of God speaking. The Word of God, identified as it is with Jesus Christ, makes us contemporaries with all Christians of all ages. It is the "eternal movement in the present." The Word is "God-with-us."²

It is also a Deed — a decision. God forces a crisis upon man but it is God's decision and always good. The Word, as hidden,

¹Karl Barth, Chapter II, in Revelation, ed. by John Baillie and Hugh Martin, pp. 67-68.
²McConnachie, The Barthian Theology, p. 65.
seems to mean that revelation, taking place as it must in the cosmos which is the realm of sin and opposition to God, is distorted by the cosmos. We can see only one side of a thing, never enough to systematize it. Scripture is then, but a witness to revelation, never revelation itself. It is a human word, written by one who had experienced revelation, but being human, it is always much less than perfect. Revelation is always known but the receptical is never so. God never changes, but men do. Because men change, what they have written is dated. The Scriptures are not without error, but the Revelation of which they speak, is without error. Inerrancy can only be spoken of the "Word became Flesh."

Jesus Christ is supremely the Word of God translated into our human flesh and speech and if we are to speak of plenary inspiration it can only be of Him.¹

Revelation is never impersonal — just the expression of truths or ideas, but the confrontation of a "thou" addressed to an "I." "The Word of God does not lie in the Bible in any static form,"² but becomes God's word to us so far as God allows it to become. The Bible "finds" us (not we, it), and ever and anon, becomes to us, the Word of God, constituting a "permanent occasion of crisis."

Revelation includes the gift to receive it. "In other words,  

¹Ibid., p. 106.  
²Ibid., p. 117.
revelation is revelation only when by the Spirit it gets through to men. Scripture then, is not revelation but the "permanent possibility of revelation."¹

Barthianism, as just described, is a strange mixture of truth and error. This reviewer appreciates the emphasis on the majesty of God and His "otherness" in comparison to man. Man is not a part of divinity in the sense of metaphysical continuity so that he need stand in no awe before his Maker. The emphasis on Revelation in contrast to discovery is proper and central to Christianity. In the writer's opinion, the rejection of an autonomous, independent status for Scripture, is right. The Word of God as a Living, personal encounter between man and God, not simply a static object has a measure of truth in it which has been quite rejected since Reformation days. Verbally, at least, the place given to the Word as Christ, a personal Word is superb. But, Barth is not an evangelical in the proper sense of that term. Semantically speaking, and that is the chief concern of this study, Barth does not mean by evangelical words what evangelicals mean. Barthians and Evangelicals cannot "converse" intelligibly for the reason that each comes to these terms with a different context of reference. The issue is again metaphysical, or in a conception of the nature of

reality. This time the key word is **revelation** and not actually **miracle** because, in Barth's world there is no place for a real miracle. There is no place for miracle because the natural world cannot accommodate the "stuff" of the supernatural. Revelation cuts through the natural and leaves no trail. It cannot accommodate itself to the natural. It cannot add to nature. Barth maintains the "one-way" passage, the monergistic direction of revelation, but puts it beyond the comprehension of man, besides. Man is aware that he has been experienced by God and so has encountered the revelation event, but the knowledge of that event is not his, for he was the object not the subject of the event. The object cannot be the subject, else God would take on the "untranscendent" status of being the object of knowledge, and so would cease to be God. Therefore man cannot carry away with him any permanent souvenir of the occasion. He may tell what natural, historical surroundings he was in when the event occurred, but this could never be revelation either to him or to others. Revelation is a divine act, rooted in the very on-going being of God. One wonders if even an awareness does not leave some knowledge.

This radical bifurcation of the supernatural from the natural raises questions. They are simple questions. What does supernatural, in Barth's sense, mean? Is it a real existence or is it an idea only? If it is real, what evidence do we have, revelational or
experiential to substantiate the claims that are made? It cannot be known by revelation because no supernatural revelation can result in human knowledge, therefore, to say it is by revelation is a contradiction in terms. It may, on the other hand, be an event but it is not experiencable, according to Barth's teaching, and if it were, "subjective psychological datum" has no criterion for determining the source of the stimulus and if it did it would only describe the sensations, not the source. We cannot verify the claim by experience, then, even if we did experience revelation. Revelation must then, be an idea. But if the supernatural is so qualitatively other, no idea of it can be formulated. In fact, how is it to be spoken of at all? We are driven to the conclusion that if man cannot carry anything away with him of the revelation event since he is merely the object of it, he cannot even speak of it without "nonsense" and meaninglessness and the Bible as a record of it would be impossible.

The Bible then cannot be revelation as it is a purely human book, subject to all the errors of men's understanding of the revelational events they went through. It is a record of men's understanding, not of God's disclosure. Interpretation, in Barth's system would include a grammatical approach, not a historical grasp, because history, as such obscures any revelation. In this view the Bible as a human book is utterly divorced from the Bible as a divine revelation. It is possible to regard it exactly like the Modernists
regard it, and that is precisely what is done. The only difference
is that Barthians make the Bible the meeting place between God and
man. It is the rendezvous, the occasion place, and that alone.
Actually, neo-supernaturalism has neither seriously challenged
Modernism's Bible or Modernism's metaphysics. Its Book is just as
inert as Modernism's human book and it cannot defend its transcen-
dent God because it has no epistemological equipment to know
whether there be such a God or no, by way of revelation or experience.

Semantically, Barthian terminology is confusing to a tradition-
alist in theology or philosophy. Revelation which ordinarily means
disclosure, in Barthianism seems essentially not to refer to an
addition to human knowledge but only to God's activity. Revelation
does not add anything to nature except Christ's person. The affir-
mation of God, as personal and holy and "Other" cannot be made on
theoretical or empirical grounds. The Word of God is not a written
or spoken language, but is God acting. God acting is simply one
side of a two faceted event. When God acts man is saved. God does
not act in a vacuum or in vain. Decision, therefore, is not a
human reaction but God's initiative. We scarcely grasp the meanings
of old familiar terms in the new setting.

This severe criticism does not mean to imply that Barth's
rediscovery of the "new world of the Bible was negligible. Actually,
it was one of the most revolutionary and far-reaching impulses in the
history of the Bible. But may we say that it was the inconsistency of the movement that made it alive? The Bible was read and the contents noted, and in the light of it, man's sinful status was revealed, as well as his need for redemption. The streams of theological thought flowing from Barthianism have taken the Bible seriously, a trend of events that has "antiquated Modernism," an ironical situation.

Reinhold Niebuhr's attitude toward the Bible expresses very well the major Neo-Supernaturalistic usage of it. He said it was to be taken "seriously but not literally." 1 The Bible as symbol is not the worst method of interpretation which history has disclosed to us. The worst, possibly, was the unrestrained allegorical fantasy. Symbolic interpretation has Scriptural precedent, as much of the Book of Daniel and Revelation clearly shows (as well as many other passages). Symbolism has the advantage of expressing truths in picture language, more vividly and meaningfully than in prosaic words. But with all the advantage of symbolic interpretation it is a recognized fact that Christianity is a historic religion and it is the lack of the historic sense that vitiates neo-supernaturalism as a theology, whatever may be said for it as a philosophy.

Taking Brunner's juggling of the words Reason and Revelation

1Reinhold Niebuhr, Nature and Destiny of Man (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).
and adding a point or two to it we can characterise these schools of thought succinctly. Catholicism and Reformation theology speak of Reason and Revelation. Philosophy precedes Revelation. Modernism speaks of Reason, alone. Revelation is a misnomer. Barth speaks of Revelation. There is no philosophy in connection with theology. Brunner speaks of Revelation and Reason. "We do not begin our inquiry with reason and then work up to revelation, but, as a believing Church, we begin our inquiry with revelation and then work outwards to reason."1 Brunner, then, champions revelation before reason, upholds the validity of general revelation against Barth's destroyed image of God and contends for the cruciality of the incarnation for Theism.

The failure of liberalism was rooted in the fact that it was predisposed against a God who intervenes in the world or in history.2 The Bible was not taken seriously. Neo-Supernaturalism put God back into the affairs of men. God, now, is conceived as a God who judges and redeems the world.

**Modernism and Today's Theology**

Modernism has been traced through its attack on Catholic Church authority, and through its attack by Fundamentalism and into

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2 T. W. Manson, "The Failure of Liberalism to Interpret the Bible as the Word of God," The Interpretation of the Bible (London: S.P.C.K., 1946), p. 95.
its enervating civil war, out of which developed a new interest in the Scriptures and a Biblical theology. We have spoken of Modernism (1) as having been driven under cover by the Catholics, (2) as having driven the Fundamentalist spirit to the sidelines and (3) as having itself been antiquated by Neo-Supernaturalism. But Modernism, as an attitude, does not die. In one respect Modernism has served and does now serve Christianity very well, and that is in its perennial passion to bring the Bible into the vernacular. Always, this urgency to break with obsolete, "sacred" languages, has been met with stout resistance in the Church. Jerome was a modernist for putting the Greek text into Latin. Erasmus was a modernist for recovering the Greek text. Any tampering with the Vulgate has been rejected as a modernistic impulse by the Catholics, at least until recently. It took many years before the King James translation became an authorized version in practice, though the King has authorized its usage. The Revised Standard Version is yet regarded as the work of modernists in some quarters in spite of the fact that its very wide sales indicate that it is now read by a great audience. But it may be said that the result in each of these cases and numbers of others which might be mentioned was some sort of a "revival" of the religious impulse. Today, there is a resurgence of the right kind of Modernism. It is expressed recently as a need to bring "faith into relationship with realities and Reality," which can demonstrate
that "Christianity is relevant to [our] situation and can be spoken in language with which [we] are familiar."\(^1\) So far as a Bible-centered interest is concerned, religious modernism could be classified as (1) the liberal, whose head is "bloody but unbowed," as (2) the "chastened" liberal, as (3) the conservative who accepts, within reason the findings of modern Biblical scholarship, "some would see a theological interpretation of the Bible, not created independently of modern scientific research, but resting firmly on it,"\(^2\) and (4) the ultra-conservative, who does not feel that it is necessary to adjust the Bible to the new day. It is that emphasis, among these groups, common to all that must interest us, namely the return to a Biblical theology. Brunner characterizes the new school of thought as one which wishes to be free from an "orthodox-confessional theory" or from the "orthodox traditional view of Scripture and free to return to a "Biblical understanding of revelation." This tendency, says Brunner, has approval "for the first time in the history of theology [in that] revelation, in its whole historical reality, became the object of theological reflection."\(^3\) This school of


\(^3\) Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 11.
thought, no longer identifies revelation with infallible verbal expressions, but goes back of the words, to the facts and meanings. There has arisen a new theology of revelation.\textsuperscript{1} Carl Henry describes the same mood of thought. He says that the mid-twentieth century theology, in every quarter has a common interest in revelation, even the renewed insistence on special revelation. But the center of controversy is over the content of revelation.\textsuperscript{2}

There are a number of ideas of revelation. Revelation is thought of as "propositional," or words only. It is conceived as communication, or as thought as well as words. It is decision or God acting. It is law to obey, or it may be the divine impulse to love. It may have been applicable only to the contemporary situation or as prophetic of a future situation. It may be related to material or to spiritual things. But in any case there is a deep conviction that the Bible must speak today to our need, and theologies that fail to relate God to life and to life's problems will be "shunted to a siding" and put out of service as all useless theories have always been. The most forceful and convicting plea from conservative circles to come from the press in recent years, to the author's knowledge, is Bernard Ramm's book, \textit{The Christian View of}  

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., p. 12.  
\textsuperscript{2}Henry, \textit{The Protestant Dilemma}, p. 43.
Science and Scripture, in which he points out fearlessly the failure of an older Fundamentalism which failed to come to grips with facts, and disqualified itself for today's respect. He pleads for a revival not only of religion but of scholarship.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

OF THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION
We are now prepared to suggest an answer to the question; what did our Christian forefathers mean by the terms they used in relation to a doctrine of Scripture? In the first place, throughout history the Scriptures have had a place of centrality for the Church. They have been considered authoritative. Throughout the various theories of inspiration and methods of interpretation there has run the deep consciousness that Scripture was the very life of the Church. Interpretation has always been the bond between the sacred documents and its ongoing life. This observation includes the fact that the Bible was always, up until modern times, at least, considered to be uniquely inspired by God. There have been a number of theories of inspiration, but back of them all the profound conviction that Scripture was God's word to men in an absolutely unique sense. This conviction has dominated every method of interpretation. The Palestinian and Alexandrian Jews, Philo, Origen, Augustine, the Schoolmen, Luther, Calvin, the post-Reformation Protestants and Catholics, and most of Christendom down to the present day, including the Liberal, the Neo-Orthodox, Calvinists, Wesleyans, Lutherans, Arminians, Fundamentalists, Conservatives, Evangelicals, Neo-Evangelicals, among others, and a host of unclassifiable theological "mavericks,"
all stand with bowed head and humbled heart before the Word of God.

Some of these have attempted to formulate a doctrine of inspiration which would define orthodoxy or which would merely describe the faith which men had in the Word. Others, among most of the groups, preferred to declare a faith in the fact of divine inspiration, but prefer not to become too specific about the manner of inspiration. Relatively few Christians have dogmatized about inspiration, and practically no scholars have done so. Practically all Christian writers have used terms to refer to inspiration which sound to us like some form of mechanical dictation. Language has been extravagant at this point. The Bible was the Word of God in the most literal sense; its doctrines were true and without error and the book was of the highest authority. But when this has been said we are faced with the paradoxical fact that in no case, up until the post-Reformation time was verbal inerrancy associated with the individual words of Scripture (except during the pre-Christian era when the Jews worshipped the very letters of the Law). We make this judgment on the strength of the testimony left us of the actual usage the Fathers made of the Scripture. As we have seen, they felt free to criticize, misquote, alter, eliminate words, verses, books, and to interpret in a way that did violence to any idea of a verbally sacred book. Augustine was unable to become a Christian until he discovered the allegorical method of interpreting the Old
Testament. To him a literal sense was unworthy of God. Neither Luther nor Calvin felt tied to a verbal accuracy but applied personal criteria to the Bible to determine the truthfulness and inspiration of the book. Neither believed that the book of Revelation was inspired. Even the Creeds almost unanimously affirmed the perfection and authority of Scripture to be in its doctrines, and not specifically in its individual words. This is in no way, yet, a judgment as to whether divine authority can be maintained apart from a divinely inferrant text, but is only an observation that, on the basis of historical evidence, the two ideas were not equated through history.

The second observation is in respect of interpretation. On the one hand, interpretation, in relating Scripture to life has been the modernistic emphasis. It has seldom been self-consciously modernistic, but by its very exercise has certainly been so. Even in epochs when inspiration was thought to be the most pure word of God, even to the point of Bibliolatry, where the physical book itself was sacred, interpretation reached its arms about God and man in an effort to bring them together -- a real modernistic impulse. But on the other hand, always, possibly without exception, interpretive methods have interposed themselves between God and man. Interpretation has been both a bridge and a barrier. We will venture the dogmatic statement that the Bible, in the Church, with the exception of one short period, that of the Reformation proper, has never spoken
directly to man. Men have never been able to lay their ears against the Book to listen to its message with the blessing of the Church. If controlling principles for allegorising have not intervened, tradition and dogma have determined the interpretation. When tradition was cast off, Church Creeds took its place and became dogmatic philosophical presuppositions. Wolfgang Schweitzer's challenge, "Who is Lord of the Bible?" strikes a painful sore in the Christian conscience. Harnack was right when he said that a divine revelation required a divinely authorized interpreter. Of course, by this he meant that since no human agency could provide that kind of interpretation we are not to assume the divine revelation. But the fact remains that, in the history of the Church, the practical consequence of a "high" theory of inspiration has always been a sacerdotal interpretation standing between man and the word. This was true in relation to the Jewish law which demanded the ministration of the scribes to apply the precepts of the Law to the daily life. It is demonstrated again in the decrees of the Council of Trent which ascribed such absolute perfection to the Scriptures as to demand the divine interpretation of the Church as Christ's own voice. It should be noted that this decree is the first example in Christian history of an affirmation of mechanical perfection of the Bible which in this case was the Latin Vulgate, notorious for its unreliable textual structure. Rather than an asset to the Christian conscience it became a liability because it separated men from the personal contact with the Word.
Significantly enough, this decree followed closely on the basis of the invention of printing which was providing a way for the common man to own and read for himself the sacred book. The few Confessions that specified mechanical perfection of the Bible, also tend to authorize interpretation and to confuse it with the inerrancy of the text. This was especially noticeable during the Fundamentalist controversy.

The third observation is in relation to the methods of interpretation against corresponding theories of inspiration. The more supernatural the Bible is considered to be, and the less it is related to human authorship, the more the allegorical methods of interpretation become the acceptable approach to it. And this is logically proper. Communication with such a Book accommodates itself to a sort of gnostic philosophy. The deepest understanding must, of necessity, be mystical and inexpressible. And, we may say, to the extent that the Book is considered supernatural, allegory is proper, if adequately controlled. We cannot ignore the Scriptural warrant for it.

It is commonly understood that basically, the soundest method of interpretation begins with a respect for the grammatical and historical implications of literature. But it is well to note that this method logically demands a reduction in the "height" of the view of inspiration for it reduces the revelation to the categories
of human literature. It raises the question as to whether "special revelation," supernaturally perfect, can be understood in the same manner that natural revelation is received and understood. If the revelation in Scripture can yield its secret to imperfect men by way of the common laws of literary interpretation, alone, it must itself have partaken of the limitations of the natural and human. Grammatical interpretation is consistent with a "higher" view of inspiration than the historical method of interpretation. Grammatical precision shows a greater respect for the literal word of Scripture than the historical sensitivity can possibly show. The Church has scarcely ever been completely devoid of the grammatical exegete. But literary exegesis did not rest on the historical sense. Historical interpretation has undergone changes through the centuries. The Antiochian meaning of historical was a corrective to the non-historical Alexandrian method. It simply meant that the biblical revelation had historical reality rather than losing itself in a shadowy world of symbols.¹ In other words, the literal meaning which all could comprehend was

distinguished from the secret meanings to the initiate, only. Later, *historical* came to mean, as in the Reformation, that Scripture was originally spoken in a historical situation — that real people had spoken and written in connection with real events. There was some true regard, theoretically at least, especially in Calvin, for the fact of progressive revelation and the accommodation of revelation to the comprehension of the people. Historical interpretation in the nineteenth century came to mean that the Bible was to be read entirely in the light of its contemporary cultural milieu. But, common to all interpretations, beyond the Antiochean conception of historical, is the explicit understanding that the literal word has been environmentally conditioned and that the true meaning of it cannot be determined apart from some measure of vicarious participation in that condition. Wherever this method of interpretation is used, a less rigid view of inspiration than the supernatural perfection of words, is assumed. To unite the idea of verbal inerrancy and an interpretation which respects the historical situation is a logical contradiction and has never been able to maintain itself for long.

The fourth observation arises out of these three. Terms like verbal inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility are not encountered before the Confessional period, as they are now used. Historians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries use these terms in describing the views of the Fathers back as far as Origen and beyond. But in
reviewing the literature on the history of interpretation two divergent judgments are made which can be confusing to a student. One will say, as Farrar does, of Origen and Clement, "both regarded the Bible as verbally inspired," and another will say, "the Church never held a view of verbal inerrancy." To anticipate the discussion on Semantics in the next chapter, we may say here, that great care must be exercised as we read the works of historians as well as of the original works of the Fathers that our own personal or cultural connotations of the words are not read back into the works of an earlier day. Farrar's judgment as well as that of the other writers, is an interpretation and must be understood to be such. It results in a fallacious understanding to project the associations which make up the meaning of a term, into another context of associations. The term verbal inspiration acquiring a particular flavor of emotional and historical and religious and controversial characteristics, did not mean to Farrar in 1886, all that it means to us, and to project the accumulation of one to two thousand years of usage into New Testament words is obviously to misrepresent and distort the concept we wish to clarify. It is not difficult to come to a fair understanding of the views of the Church regarding inspiration. The study, thus far, in comparing expressed affirmations of inspiration with the handling of Scripture in practice, has uncovered the fact that no one held a theory of verbal inerrancy comparable to the
twentieth century American view as expressed in the Fundamentalist controversy. Of all the Creedal families, only the Catholic and Calvinistic branch spelled out the theory in any germinal way. Even the Westminster Confession is less explicit than the early twentieth century exposition of it. It strongly affirms Biblical authority and completeness and its source in God but not its verbal inerrancy except by implication. Therefore, when terms are used by Origen and Augustine and Calvin, which apart from a historical understanding, sound like the terms we use to describe inspiration, we are in error not to remember the startling freedom with which all these men handled the Word of God. Were they inconsistent? If only one or two had done this, we might say, yes, but when every Father did the same thing we must conclude that we project a false inconsistency upon them by forcing them into the pattern of our logic.

A history of the theories of inspiration illustrates the erroneous judgments that may be made by failing to note the context of the use of the terms used. Did the Church always believe in an inerrant text? A good case can be made for the affirmative answer if no thought is given to meaning. The case receives a setback when it is remembered that in the early Christian centuries it was the very imperfect Greek Septuagint translation which was thought to be verbally inspired. During the Reformation it was the translations which were thought to carry the pure word of God, and which
were the objective authority. When Biblical criticism uncovered the presence of an impure text the Church, in order to retain confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture was forced to retreat to the abstract idea of an inerrant autograph as the authority for its doctrine. Autographs, as important to inerrancy and authority, had never entered the doctrinal concept of the Church in all its history until the Calvinistic confessions were forced to resort to them in the face of science. It would be untrue to fact, then, to say that the Church has always held to the theory of verbal dictation (in any of its forms), if we impose the extreme Fundamentalistic content of meaning on the terms that have been used in other centuries and conditions. Verbal inspiration meant one thing to Augustine (if he used the term), another to Calvin, and an entirely different thing to the modern church. This in no way reflects on the propriety of the use of the term nor its theological truth, but does suggest that it is not as simple a term to understand as is so often assumed.

A final observation is made. No method of interpretation has been able to do full justice to the spiritual and religious quality of the Bible. Luther and Calvin came the closest to a satisfactory system of exegesis in trying to make Scripture terminate, not in its word but in Christ, the Living Word of God. Such "indefinite," somewhat subjective considerations, the explicit laws of which cannot be pinned down to the point of a regulatory rule, is
the danger and the challenge with which we, in our day, are left. It is a task which only the brave may dare, and only the spiritual exegete may succeed in accomplishing and yet, a task each individual Christian must assume if he would hear the voice of his Lord.

Robert Grant says it nicely,

To our mind the correct understanding of exegesis and its task is that set forth at the Reformation by Luther and more recently by Wilhelm Dilthey. He calls the highest type of interpretation "divination," and argues that it "has always an element of genius, i.e., it reaches a high degree of perfection only through inner affinity and sympathy."¹

This is not a recession to ancient untenable excesses, but it comes close to an understanding of the intangible wealth of the Bible that the more logical methods completely miss.

The suggestion has been made in this study that the interpretive devices used by Christian thinkers through the centuries have been prompted, consciously or otherwise, by a desire to do justice to the strange spiritual dynamic in Scripture which defies description. The Greek and Roman fathers thought they could do it justice best by allegorising. Even Luther and Calvin whose ideas for interpretation were so high, in practice resorted to other methods in an attempt to do justice to it. It is the conviction of the writer that these methods of interpretation were not to be explained entirely by saying that these men were children of their age — that

¹Grant, The Bible in the Church, p. 4.
we cannot expect as much from them as may be demanded of us. There is a real measure of truth in all of this, but it must not be forgotten that they were not men of childish intellect or shoddy scholarship. The fact remains, as has been pointed out, that the basic doctrinal insights permanently relevant to the Christian church were born and developed in these very centuries. The highest Christological formulas came out of the "fanciful" Alexandrian atmosphere. Soteriological theories informing Christian doctrine today were developed in the "arid" rationalism of the Scholastic period and it may not be untrue to fact to say that the modern period using the better interpretive methods has neither improved on the older doctrines nor has it been significantly more active in developing Biblical doctrines, acceptable to the majority of Christian people. A number of deductions could be made at this point, but only one is important to this study and it will now be expressed as the hypothesis which seems to do justice to that which we know. The concern of the Church has always been to do justice to the spiritual dynamic of Scripture by means of some type of interpretation. No formal method yet devised has been able to capture that dynamic. As men were true to the insights given by a diligent study of the Scriptures, eternal truth has broken through, regardless of what method of interpretation was habitually used by the men concerned. This does not justify inferior hermeneutical practice in any age, nor
does it account for good doctrine on that basis, much less give
this age liberty to be careless in this most important area of
theological work, but it does point up the fact that there is a
"more" to Scripture than any theory of inspiration and method of
interpretation has yet been able to pin down into a rational system.

If the Bible is to be a living force in human life some way will
have to be provided to bridge the very deep gulf between an ancient
book and modern men. In other words, the Bible's authority is at
stake. By what right do we (for we do) press the message of the Bible
on others and accept its authority for ourselves? Grammatical and
historical categories of interpretation, as proper as they are, are
impotent to answer this question or to suggest the way out. Great
preaching has always leaped over the boundaries of formal hermeneutics.
Why has the reading of Scripture always produced a conviction for sin
and pointed to a Redeemer? How is it that a book, its youngest author
at least two thousand years removed from us, prompt the righting of
personal and social wrongs? No other book does this. It is clearly
not a book that imposes any former pattern of culture or government
upon us, though it is couched in the terms of its contemporary situa-
tions. In other words, in what does its authority over us consist?
These observations and questions point up the urgent need for a
philosophy of interpretation which can give an answer and defend it
before the thoughtful mind. Interpretation does stand between inspira-
tion and a contemporarily relevant book either as a barrier or as a
bridge.
CHAPTER VI

AN EXAMINATION OF INTERPRETATION
The study thus far has shown that various theories of inspiration of Scripture have been held throughout the centuries and that methods of interpretation have been informed by them and by the perennial and universal awareness of the relevancy of Scripture to each era of time and every individual person. This relevancy has been reflected in interpretation. Interpretation, then, must justify its right to make the ancient book intimately applicable to the modern world, and to account for the manner in which it has done so and does now do so. This inquiry must, as we see, go behind the usual approach to the science of hermeneutics and ask a prior question (suggested in the first chapter); what do we pre-suppose when we interpret, and what are we doing when we interpret the Bible?

The first concern to be clarified is whether or not the Bible is to be interpreted as any other book. We believe the answer is quite simple. Inasmuch as no other literature is considered by Christians to be binding on the conscience of all men and applicable to all men, we conclude that it cannot be interpreted as any other book. There is an extra-literary quality in it which puts it in a class by itself. Of course, this conclusion does not mean that the Bible is not to be handled as intelligent literature. Even the most
common good judgment rebels against a violation of the laws of grammar and history. It is first of all literature. But the Bible is more than literature. It is a book of religion. But it is more than just a religious book. It is the final Christian authority, the book by which (as the New Hampshire Confession says), the world is united under judgment and the book by which all men shall be judged. With these observations before us we realise that there is a philosophical problem in relation to Biblical exegesis that must be stated whether it can be fully handled or not. It is this; granting for the moment a truth that will later be examined more fully, that the Bible is in some way a supernatural book — a special revelation — we are confronted by the problem of justifying the use of natural categories of interpretation to unlock its message. On the face of it, this study assumes the need for a category of interpretation beyond that which is normal for purely human literature, and it bases this assumption on the fact that every Christian epoch has come to its religious and theological insights amidst methods of interpretation beyond that which is now considered to be proper for literary analysis.

What do we assume when we interpret any literature? We assume the existence of a hidden meaning within a milieu of words which is capable of coming to a new focus in human minds — the same focus in any intelligent human mind. Aside from the very common problem of definitions and translations, neither of which is as simple as
we often imagine, interpretation assumes the necessity and possibility of transposing intelligent communication from one medium to another, from static symbols to living concepts. Some profound function of mind stands between the two, somewhat as an electrical transformer might step up voltage from the lifeless symbol to the stimulating meaning. We assume, moreover, that thought can be reduced to words and that these words can "seal in" the dynamic of that thought, and be preserved through years, or centuries perhaps, through language and cultural changes, and that under the right conditions the original dynamic can be released in the act of interpretation. Words and grammatical structure become the reservoir of the dynamic. The meaning is locked in, until an intelligent mind turns the key and applies that miracle of alchemy which resurrects life. And, strangely, the written words are not communication, or significance until the mind does act in this way. Words are not self-defining.

What do we assume when we interpret the Bible? We assume everything that has been said above but much more. We assume that divine truth is packed in human words. The Holy Spirit did not choose to disclose his truth in a supernatural language but in the vernacular of the day in which he spoke. We assume that the message in those words is authoritative for every individual man. In the case of literature in general, as described in the previous paragraph,
all that was required of the mind was understanding; in this case a
thorough personal adjustment, morally and socially is required. What
do rules of interpretation have to do with this imperious demand?
If the Bible is simply literature, it is not real revelation, for as
literature only, it can tell no more than something about God and
his ways. As revelation, interpretation must include the ability to
involve the reader in personal relationship to Truth.

All of this has pointed up the areas of investigation with
which we must now be concerned. (1) Interpretation cannot be meaning­ful unless we understand the medium of interpretation — words. What
is the strength and weakness of words to convey ideas? (2) Interpre­
tation cannot be intelligent for the Christian unless he is aware of
the peculiar and unique areas of meaning which he seeks to integrate.
What does inspiration mean? What about the Bible is supernatural,
spiritual, human, natural? All of these areas are involved. What
is the relationship of one to the other? What does each mean?
(3) Interpretation which relates the supernatural to the natural
man must have access to another category of operation beyond the
grammatical and historical. What is it and how can it be made available?

The Relation of Words to Interpretation

The regulatory question by which all the discussions in this
study are guided has been introduced; what do the theological terms
that we use mean to us? More specifically, we will ask; what do the terms we use in relation to Biblical exegesis and inspiration mean to us? If the question were simply; what do the terms mean? a good dictionary and theology would be sufficient. A study of word origins and changes in usage would add considerable richness to the study. But we are pressing the question back to the personal response of the theologian and the minister. What is the peculiar coloration which words, or propositions have for the religious speaker and his listener? There is a context of implications and emotional responses coming out of a definite cultural background or group feeling or personal disposition, which cannot be dismissed in this connection. Almost all communication takes place in an aura of personal relationships, friendly, controversial, propagandistic, instructive, hostile, or any one or more other moods which gives a decided character to words beyond the ability or purpose of any dictionary to capture.

What is the significance of the speaking power that we possess? How does it operate to achieve the understanding which we are apt to take so for granted? Much misunderstanding is attributed to perversity or stupidity or to prejudice. Is this always true? An answer may help to solve deep breaches in the Christian church. These questions relate to our theological language and to our interpretation of Scripture, the two interests of this study. This pre-dictionary analysis in connection with Biblical interpretation
is somewhat humorously introduced by an overstated effect by a recent writer in this field, though it is a sentiment occasionally heard.

I take the Bible just as it is written, says many a Christian. Others may continue to twist its meaning by their interpretations. I refuse to do anything of the sort. God’s book means exactly what it says.  

But is the problem as simple as this? It will be profitable to pause for a little session with words, (1) as words, and (2) as vehicles of thought. We first ask: what is a word? No volitional human activity is so common and so taken for granted as that of using words. Men awaken in the morning thinking and speaking words and fall asleep with words slipping out of the mind and off the tongue. Probably nothing explicitly and implicitly marks the "great gulf" between the human and the non-human quite so decisively as the power to formulate and use words. Words are not simply explosions of compressed air, or accidental, perhaps incidental sounds issuing from the animal larynx under stress of pain or emotional urgency, but are carefully differentiated and classified vocal signals serving the highly complex function of purposeful and intelligent communication and seem to be required to give order to thought itself. The range of possible qualities and tones of sound

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is limited and subject to precise formulation, but this range is sufficient to constitute an almost limitless complex of recognizable variations sufficient to support an unbelievably varied and intricate, yet meaningful constituent out of which may proceed material for communication ranging from brief, impulsive, simple, objective messages to the most elaborate, involved, technical, exact and abstract philosophical treatises.

This paper takes a number of strange things completely for granted. It assumes, first of all, that these typed black marks on this white paper represent the words which the writer has learned to associate with certain ideas and that these same ideas will be suggested, in turn, to the mind of the reader, without loss of meaning. An intangible purpose or intention, we believe, carries through from one mind to another via the medium provided by these black symbols. The assumption made is no less profound for its being the common one that it is. This simple statement represents the core concern of much of philosophy, ancient and modern, and every facet of it would be subject to challenge and debate. It points up the significance of the human in contrast to the non-human and whatever it is that makes any difference between the two. We do not write letters to leopards or books for baboons.

There is an assumption also regarding words, qua words. This writer makes the naive assumption that the limited number of
words used in this paper will be understood to produce the proper meaning in each particular context. In one context a word may have one significance, in another context, another significance. In other words, words do not have one meaning only, but any number of meanings, but only one meaning at a time, so that it is possible by wise usage to produce such precision of expression as to carry the single, fairly unambiguous meaning intended in each case. A set of ten words can be manipulated to carry several completely different, even contradictory meanings. Take, for instance, the word paper, already used in two senses in this discussion. It is used to designate the "stuff" these words are written on. It also is used to designate the entire contents of this composition, and would be a proper term if the paper were not written on paper but on a piece of tin sheeting. To carry the illustration further: we speak of the business firm carrying its own paper, and we instruct the boy to throw the paper on the porch when it rains and deplore the "scrap of paper" attitude among nations. To tear paper and to read a paper lie in different levels of activity. Strangely, there is no unresolved ambiguity in all these "papers."

Among the many other unspecified assumptions is one that has been intruding itself into the first two — that of meaning. Whatever meaning means, and this is by no means the simple thing it is often taken to mean, the practical assumption of the writer of this
study is the similar practical assumption of every writer, whether
he produces a simple treatise or the most sophisticated discussion
on any subject — namely, that the intention of the writer will be
carried through symbols to the mind of the qualified reader. The
emphasis, here, is on the intention aspect of meaning. This chapter,
which is intended to be a report on one aspect of philosophy as it
relates to religious problems, will not be understood to be a young
dictionary or a love story. Whether it be well-written or not,
whether proper grammatical formulations (according to contemporary
English standards) are employed or not, whether the author has a
full understanding of all aspects of the subject or not, this paper
will be understood as the report it is intended to be. All this
is assumed.

But these assumptions regarding the function, and tools and
intention of the communication act, go by no means unchallenged.
Though these simple elements are granted in practice, they have
become with others equally simple, the matrix out of which is coming
the most important controversial conversations in contemporary
thought. Out of these conversations arise questions which challenge
all traditional thinking, philosophical, scientific, religious. The
critical concern with words is as old as philosophy itself. Seman-
tics as a study of word origins is not new. But Semantics in the
contemporary sense is as new and important as Einstein and nuclear
physics. It involves the possibility of a different approach to philosophy than that commonly made, and its new definition of philosophy respectfully requests the traditional definition to take inventory of its ancient concepts. It asks us to re-evaluate and defend a theological position which we have long taken for granted and which we ought to have no fears about opening up for investigation. Bernard Ramm quotes H. E. Fosdick with approval, "A religion that is afraid of the facts is doomed."^1

The central concern toward which all other interests point, directly or indirectly, in this study, is the relation of the Word of God to problems of interpretation — or the symbol-to-meaning relation — or the relation between words and their meanings. Can the Word be contained in a word? Of course, the question immediately arises as to whether or not words are symbols of something or are that something itself. Is meaning intrinsically in the objective word or does an interpretive function of a mind operate somewhere between the written word and the meaning? Is meaning in the objective word or in the interpreting mind? Is there a necessary relationship between correct grammar and logical formulation, and the structure of reality? All these related questions lie behind this quest for clarity.

There seems to be no good reason for hesitancy in assuming that words are symbols. The word "dog" is not a dog but a verbal symbol for one. The very acknowledgment of the need for interpretation of the Bible is testimony to the symbolic nature of words. In the absence of the thing spoken of, words call the mind's attention to the object, so that communication may proceed about it. But words must come under some discipline. In the first place, words as symbols must refer to something which both speaker and listener (or reader) agree upon. This "referent" as the modern semanticists call it, must be either an object or an idea and it must be known whether the referent is the one or the other, if meaningful communication is experienced. Men have less trouble with misunderstanding when a concrete object is the subject under discussion, than when ideas are the subject. Besides the lack of uniformity in each mind about the idea, there arises the problem of imagining the idea to be a "real." It may be, but not necessarily so. Kant illustrates this by the example of the one hundred dollar bill which a man may imagine to be in his pocket. If it isn't there, no idea of it will produce one. If ideas cannot be pinned down to some reality (in this case the bill), the human mind is subject to illusion and deception.

Words, as symbols, moreover, are incapable of containing all the meaning which resides in the object for which it stands. Words
are invariably abstractions in that they point up a limited number of qualities resident in the object and leave the other qualities unnamed or inferred. This is a necessary and dangerous procedure. It is necessary because it points up the particular aspect of a subject for attention rather than letting the mind grope for the thing relevant to the conversation. It is dangerous in that the mind is apt to attribute one characteristic only to the entire object as being the whole truth about it. A "bad" boy is undoubtedly not bad in every respect, but bad in only the way under discussion. This danger is more than "merely verbal." Another danger to understanding is in objectifying the abstraction so that "goodness," "honesty," "truth," etc., seem to be entities, not qualities in something. Definitions of abstract words are difficult to pin down. Almost inevitably, some concrete example must accompany the elucidation.

Now, this understanding of the difference between a concrete fact and the abstract term is only one necessary distinction in words. While language as the dictionary definitions view it, is very thin, — capable merely of "pointing" at a thing and leaving the deepest essence of it untouched — there is another quality to the communicative process akin to abstraction, but with the very opposite effect, and this quality is vagueness. Abstraction is the simple-valued term for a complex-valued object. Vagueness refers to
the accumulation of many implications — the richness of value — accomplished by suggestion, association, tone of voice, insinuation. A term is vague in inverse proportion to its abstractness. An absolutely complete description of an object would have no abstraction but would be "totally vague." As the process of abstraction increases and fewer things are said about the object, vagueness decreases and the need for inference mounts in order to preserve meaning. Written language uses abstractions. Spoken language can make better use of vague language with the wealth of implication personality is able to project. Jonathan Edward's famous sermon, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God," makes rather dull reading. This is a particularly important point to Biblical interpretation. Of all the occasions in the Old Testament where the "Word of God" is referred to, in no case, probably, does it speak of a written word, but always the spoken word. Jesus' spoken words had to be reduced to written form. This reduction invariably is at the expense of the rich overtones of meaning, supplied by the mood of the audience, the personal response to the word as each one steps out of an individual background, the physical surroundings that suggest much more than the actual word is able to record, the emphasis of Jesus' voice, the expression of his hands and face and the whole manifold of the occasion. If we understand what was said and meant, there will have to be a means of recapturing, in some degree, those
overtones of meaning, beyond the physical word on the page.

While abstraction is the basis of communicating in an orderly way, vagueness is the basis of significance in communication. Neither one is a means to precision, yet the two kinds of words are necessary to communication, because one is the vehicle of order and the other is the vehicle of meaning. By means of abstract words certain qualities of the total manifold of the object or idea in question have been isolated and this directs attention to the particular thought in mind. Vague words enrich communication without a great deal of distracting verbiage. Order and meaning come out of this process. The analogy of a musical tone is apt. A pure tone, or one free from any overtones and a bit of vibratto, can scarcely be called music. It is as it deviates from the "pure" according to the laws of sound that it becomes musically meaningful. It would look "fuzzy" around the edges if it could be seen. It calls on near-by tones to cushion it and throws out a filigreed structure of sympathetic harmony to cling to. The more related overtones the more beautiful the tone. Mechanical recordings invariably lose much of this wealth.¹ It is a similar area of vagueness and abstraction around and about a word which calls for the action of the interpretive

¹There is a far wider color range in the spectrum than the human eye can see and more tones in the scale than the human ear can hear. Analogously, there is more meaning overtones to speech than the written word can contain.
function of the mind. The richness, which no absolute and precise word can capture, but which reaches the mind by way of inference, is the intellectual comprehension which takes place between minds in written or spoken communication. The more precise the language, i.e., the narrower the range of reference or, the more concrete the referent, the less intellectually significant it is. The more vague it is, i.e., the more that can be packed into it by way of unspoken inference, the richer is its communicative value. C. T. Lewis said pertinently,

We must express meaning by the use of words, but if meaning altogether should end in words, then words altogether would express nothing. The language system as a whole would have no interpretation and there would be no such fact as the meaning of language.¹

This points up the idea of words as symbols, and to the extent that they are symbols, they must be interpreted. The Christian church has never held words to be self-defining. The strong emphasis upon interpretation has always been made and is now made by all Christians of which we are aware. Certainly, it is true that the assumption of absolutely unambiguous words of Scripture has been unthinkingly made. It is this carelessness that has given rise to unjustified criticism from the pen of modern semanticists. Certain fundamentalistic literature has seemed to affirm that verbal inspiration by-passed the need for interpretation but in practice, the most rigid "mechanicist"

speaks of the proper method of interpretation, and by that acknowledges the symbolic nature of words and the need of an intermediary human mind to arrive at meaning. Interpretation is an intellectual process, not a mechanical one. Christian philosophy has never entertained a mechanistic view of the human mind and this case is no exception. Interpretation is the act of catching the "overtones" of words which bear the speakers unspeakable meaning. It begins as early in life as a child may be when he begins to associate the sound of words with a parent's tone of voice or attitude (the look in the face may say more to him than the fullest connotation of the word). Even the family dog responds more to the tone of voice than the word he hears. All of us have watched dogs suffer under ridicule be it ever so soft spoken. It reaches into the most highly intellectualised discourses where understanding depends entirely on the ability of the hearer to distinguish the finest nuances of the words of high-order abstraction. The finest humor is carried in this delicate way and if a person is unable to catch the fragile overtones (which, by the way, are not evanescent but very real and are uniformly understood by those who do understand them), he will never be able to know them for there is no other language which can make it more clear.

Communication takes place less truly in any of these realms by the means of words than by the means of inference. This does not discredit the demand for the accurate word but it does put them into
proper relationship to the communication process.

Perhaps it would be instructive to recall an obvious but
seldom noted fact. There is a low level communication, i.e., a
transference of apparently single-valued concepts which seems to
be free from all ambiguity and capable of but one signification.
It is low-level, also, because the referents are not ideas but
physical objects. "Your dog is under the table," seems to be a
factual enough statement. The referents are material objects, high­
ly particularised. But the ambiguity of this simple statement can
be glaringly demonstrated by emphasising each word in it: Your dog;
Your dog; It is under that table; under that table, and so forth.
By adding a mood, such as that of ridicule, condescension, humor,
anger, boredom, fear, haste or any number of other communicable
variations and the significance of vagueness, is obvious. It is
said that William Jennings Bryan by pronouncing the word Mesopotamia
could move an audience near to hysteria. But such concrete state­
ments and words as the illustration above is not yet the stuff of
philosophy or theology. If it should be imagined that religion is
free from ambiguous words — that it needs no involved interpreta­
tion, let us step up to the Reformation affirmation which even
Luther felt by-passed philosophy, "The just shall live by faith."
It is on an entirely different level than our first example. In
this case every key word is an abstraction. Its religious message
Bay be easily understood, by means other than mere words, but it cannot be said of these words that they are so precise as to admit of no need of interpretation or that the dictionary definition and a grammatical analysis can yield the peculiar significance that sent the Reformation thundering through history. Very simple, concrete information and instruction is fairly easily made secure in words (within the context of one's cultural milieu) but we submit that anything relating to intellectual and spiritual understanding cannot be so secure.

A common misunderstanding regarding this has been made by Berkhof. Ironically, in his excellent book on Interpretation he defends a point of view that would make interpretation unnecessary, and himself an untruthful man.

It is a settled principle among men that a man of undoubted veracity will habitually express himself in unequivocal language . . . If a really truthful man would not consciously resort to the use of ambiguous language, then certainly God, who is absolute truth, cannot have given us a revelation that is calculated to mislead.¹

Berkhof has made four assumptions which will not hold up under investigation. (1) On the one hand he assumes that the use of ambiguous words is a sign of deceitfulness. (2) He has made an unfavorable judgment concerning ambiguous words without classifying

¹Berkhof, Principles of Biblical Interpretation, p. 57.
ambiguous and non-ambiguous words to see what makes them one or the other. (3) He has assumed that ambiguity is a quality of words not a quality of usage, and (4) he has assumed that infinite thought can be reduced to human words — that God could fully put himself into language which we would fully understand. Berkhof has then used words capable of being understood in more than one sense, such as, revelation, absolute truth, God, settled principle, men (indefinite), therefore he makes himself an untruthful man. The trouble lies simply in a lack of understanding of the nature of ambiguous words and the use of them in communication. We do not charge good men or God with the use of ambiguous words to "mislead," but we do insist that ambiguous words must be used in conversation above the level of concrete experience, and that the ambiguity lies not in the word but in the speaker's intention.

This shifts the emphasis from words to the thought behind them, which is the heart of communication. The most mechanical of all disciplines is symbolic logic. No Biblical "mechanist" ever conceived a more rigorous absolute, so far as words are concerned, than the symbols used in symbolic logic. It is an "absolute" language. It is supposed that those symbols are so impersonal and so unambiguous that no possible deviation of meaning could possibly occur. But it breaks down at the psychological point between symbol and meaning.
The situation is as follows: In an attempt to secure absolute rigor the language by which the propositions or reasoning is expressed is completely mechanised. To apply the mechanised language for any practically useful purpose it must be invested with some interpretative meaning. If this interpretation were itself mechanised a still other interpretation of the mechanised interpretation would be required. We are thus always left with a language which cannot be formalised or mechanised, namely the "language" in which the interpretation is effected.

We arrive at the conclusion that no mechanised logic . . . can dispense with the "non-mechanised logic" . . . that is required for the interpretation of the symbol.  

In other words, no symbol is self-defining. This amounts to saying that there are no "depersonalised" propositions. Somebody meant something. This truth is most clearly understood in relation to the Bible as a religious book bearing a spiritual message. The unique message of the Bible is the religious message, according to the historical usage of it. The immaterial nature of spiritual things cannot be precisely contained in the natural or material medium. Inasmuch as the human mind transcends the natural world, so must the spiritual word transcend the material word. This is not mysticism or intuitionism or fantasy but the common daily experience of human beings, in communicating to each other, richer messages than mere words can convey. It is the proper use of the vague or abstract word with the almost unconscious employment of inference. The exceedingly dull mind lives in a wooden world, with practically no alternatives in thought or action. Life is surely more simple for

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him. It is a black and white world with no greys or colors. Possibly the measure of intelligence is the ability to catch the "overtones" of all speech and being. That it is not simply a subjectivism is demonstrated by the fact that two or more equally intelligent persons respond similarly to the excitement. "Wooden" interpretations of the Bible must always fail to open its treasures to the human mind and will demand, by way of reaction, interpretations, less than proper. This thought will be developed more completely in the chapter relating to distinctions between spiritual and supernatural.

In the absence of controlled guidance to the reactions to "wooden" interpretations, theology has tried a number of untenable interpretative devices as we have seen. A recently coined term, suggests another and possibly more tenable solution to the problem. That term is "myth." It is called, "recently coined," for the reason that a new theological content has been given the word most nearly congenial to the ideas which it was desired to express. It must be noted that the choice of the term "myth" may be unfortunate for the reason that, in the public mind, myth stands for a false belief, popularly held or an explanation of some occurrence which is disproved by scientific investigation. In so far as this connotation is carried over into the theological usage, we are not prepared to follow it, but there is a proper literary usage which is sanctioned by a long and impressive history including Plato who used myth as
a literary device to state a truth. It is not radically different from the parable which serves the same purpose.

No dictionary definition of myth will suffice. The "feeling tone" behind it must be sensed and the situation which called forth the need for this kind of interpretation. As the atomic scientist opened the doors more widely to the structure of reality, the new conceptions of nature seemed for a time to outdate the Bible. How could the religious message of the Bible be preserved — a message that was said to depend on a certain view of nature, and which now seemed insecure before the new science? The real message of the Bible cannot be destroyed by the discoveries of science. To repudiate either would be as foolish now as in Copernicus' or Newton's day. A link must be found which distinguished between but did not sever religion from science.

The link between science and "reality" was expressed by the term myth, which takes its meaning from the symbol of semantical usage. Myth is the device used by theology to protect its own religious structure from demolition by the forces of scientific investigation. It was hoped that this concept would be able to isolate the values of religion and make them forceful and respectable in a world of science.

It enables the theologian to speak in traditional language without committing himself to Aristotelian metaphysics. To some,
myth is a dramatic form in which a culture casts its spiritual insights, particularly in regard to the redemptive process. There are recurring patterns of expression running through all literature which testifies to an imbedded primal revelation. Myth as a literary device expresses in symbolic terms the truths of life which are too profound to be contained in any objective language. Nicholas Berdyaev thinks of myth as the symbolic expression by which the spiritual reality gives meaning to the natural world. Myth is a reality greater than concept. Berdyaev thinks of myth as the link between the spiritual and the natural in contrast to Bultmann who equates myth with the spiritual and who desires to eliminate both.\(^1\) and Bevan who thinks of myth as the barrier between the two worlds — an imaginative construct which hinders understanding.\(^2\)

Myth is the concrete recital of events and original phenomena of the spiritual life symbolised in the natural world, which has engraved itself on the language, memory, and creative energy of the people.\(^3\)

Anderson explains that by the use of myth Biblical writers reached "forward and backward into the endless time of God" to show His


A myth may be defined as a kind of parable or word-picture which uses the language of time and space pictorially to give expression to history's "fourth dimension." Myth as the idea of God acting in history saves us from a non-historical and abstract impersonal conception of God, such as "the ideal realising capacity of the universe," "the principle of concretion," (and others). The intellectual abstractions are completely alien to the Bible.

As such it becomes a "form" of expression, a "pattern" in the structure of language. Just as words are symbols and must be interpreted, so myths are another form of symbol which require interpretation. Just as words, as ends in themselves, are meaningless, so myths are misleading if they are made ends in themselves. It may not be amiss to compare Jesus' parables and his use of common "sayings" with this understanding of myth. He used "true to life" stories (not true to fact, so far as we know) to carry "truth" to hearers. Some of the most violent reactions occurred when Jesus withheld the "moral" and let the implications of the story or saying "sink in."

Whether or not we are willing to concede the validity of the "myth" concept is beside the point, here. This much seems to be justified — that the myth concept is another and more telling attempt in the hands of Christian theologians to find a way to de…

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This section began with questions about words as words, and as vehicles of communication. After a survey of some of the things that must be taken into account regarding words in the communicative process, in common speech and theological discussions, we must now summarise these aspects of meaning which will help better to guide us into meaningful conversations about problems of interpretation. Out of the foregoing study the following principles seem relevant.

1. Words are symbols and as symbols must symbolise something. Meaning is only possible as this is so. It is impossible for a word to refer to itself. It must then refer to something other than itself. To refer to something other than itself is to function as a symbol.

2. Symbols must have referents, if they are to be meaningful. There seems to be no good reason for rejecting metaphysics and "absolutes" as referring merely to non-empirical notions and therefore meaningless. It seems inconsistent to reject "absolutes," absolutely and to discredit metaphysics by metaphysical statements. We would therefore extend the possible range of referents into the realm of the spiritual and even supernatural but fence this realm in by the revelation of God as He has revealed Himself in Christ (which becomes sufficiently concrete), and by the universal moral and spiritual renovation experienced by those who have conformed to the Biblical
"way of salvation." This is the common property of Christians and
need no more to be surrendered than the Positivist's assurance that
he is right. In other words, some metaphysical assumptions and
judgments seem to be necessary to human thinking and intelligent
conversation will utilise them properly. But when this is said, it
should be admitted that religious and even Christian expression is
not free from Semantic guilt. The whole contemporary emphasis on
the reality, "beyond history," of spiritual entities which cannot
be demonstrated experientially or historically, is subject to justi­
fiable criticism in spite of the measure of truth and spiritual
insight which is implied. Certainly, much of Christian rationalism
in Catholic and Fundamentalistic circles could be included in this
indictment. No figment of the imagination, however logical, or
deduction from "self-evident" principles, however reasonable, is
adequate to serve as a referent to meaningful conversation, particu­
larly in which orthodoxy is the subject under discussion. It is well
to recall that the Bible is not a book of abstract, philosophical
propositions, but a revelation of the most ultimate truths in the
language of experience and concrete event. The Incarnation is the
event which saves religion and theology from meaningless abstraction.

3. Words, as symbols, do not have single and unalterable
meanings. This is proved in two ways. (1) Inasmuch as communication
demands the use of universals or abstractions, it follows that exact
communication is not made possible by this type of word. An illustration is provided by the very familiar term "Our Father." "Father" is an abstraction relative to the experience of the hearer. If this statement is challenged, let these questions be answered exactly, to the satisfaction of all. Did Jesus mean a relationship or attitude by "Father?" If relationship, is it generic or spiritual? If spiritual, is it literal or figurative? In any case, what is a spiritual relationship, either literal or figurative? If Jesus meant by Father, an attitude, which attitude did He mean? If it is love, how did it differ from any Old Testament manifestation of God's nature. And what is love? None of the questions, we believe are trifling. To some, fatherhood means indulgence, and to others, austerity and fear. Words are not absolute in meaning, but relative to the reader's experience. (2) Words are as flexible as life. Not only will three to four hundred years or two or three thousand years demonstrate complete reversals and change in meaning but this change can be observed within a lifetime. How many mergers of denominations would

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Thomas Jefferson's remark to John Adams is a case in point. "I can never join Calvin in addressing his God. He was indeed an atheist, which I can never be; or rather his religion was daemonism. If ever man worshipped a false God, he did. The being described in his five points, is not the God whom you and I acknowledge and adore, the creator and benevolent governor of the world; but a daemon of malignant spirit. It would be more pardonable to believe in no God at all, than to blaspheme him by the atrocious attributes of Calvin," Walter G. Mueller and Laurence Sears, The Development of American Philosophy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1940), p. 79.
be possible if the word "Bishop" had only preserved its original meaning, (— whatever that was)?

Even the Biblical concept of Freedom is lost on the majority of us, in our modern political world. The change in meaning can be noted within the scope of New Testament writings; μάτης meant simply witness in secular Greek and carried through with that meaning up to Acts 22:20. From then on until it became single-valued again as martyr in Rev. 2:13, etc., the change can be traced through various passages, some of which are not clearly one or the other. Tillich well states the practical aspects of the problem involved in preaching.

Whenever the language of the Christian gospel is taken seriously . . . great difficulties arise. It is certain that the original religious . . . cannot be supplanted. There are religious or archetypal words (Urwarte) of mankind. But these original . . . words have been robbed of their original power by an objective thinking, and the scientific conception of the world . . . A situation is hopeless and meaningless in which the speaker means the original word, and the listener hears the objective word.

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J. G. Riddell shows the importance of this writer on the level of theological scholarship.

The question of words arises... in theological thought and specialized scholarship. The theologian... has responsibility for stating his views in language which his fellow theologians can fully understand. Careful definitions and precise use of technical terms is an essential precaution, especially in the case of words like revelation, incarnation, or atonement, which are capable of a wide variety of meaning. There is eventually a danger of reducing argument to mere logomachy, or of concealing an important issue by an unorthodox or even casual use of words.1

4. A meaningful situation includes, (1) a person with intention, (2) a symbol of that intention and (3) a recipient who interprets the symbol in a way to understand the original intention.

There are no independent meaningful propositions. Somebody meant something. Meaning is personal. Words were not given independently of usage. Language is related to a human occasion and receives meaning there. Unless someone is responsible for the words and gives them significance by his intention, words are but scratches.

5. Meaning is an interpretive process. When we read Scripture we do interpret as we read, if meaning comes through. The Reformers, we are told, desired to put the Scriptures beyond interpretation, but they did not and could not succeed. Both Luther and Calvin,

by common consent, are known as interpreters of note. By our
failure to recognise the involved process of interpretation that
we engage in, we are in danger of making our own interpretation
infallible and all other heretical.

6. Interpretation is an intellectual, not a mechanical
process. The power of catching proper inference is as important
as the use of the correct word and accounts for the richness of
communication beyond the meaning of individual words.

7. Since words are symbols and demand interpretation by
finite minds and in view of the relative and human nature of words,
it follows that absolute knowledge cannot be contained in them
fully. This limitation is recognized by the Reformed writers, in
this admission:

Granted that human language is an imperfect vehicle
of truth yet it is an extremely valuable and altogether
usable vehicle.\(^1\)

Here the limited nature of language is recognized. It is hard to
reconcile this with the affirmations of verbal inspiration and
infallibility which the same author claims for Scripture.

8. Interpretation is more than mechanics and more than an
intellectual process. It includes a spiritual dimension. Communi-

\(^1\)R. B. Kniper, The Infallible Word, "Scriptural Preaching."
(Philadelphia: The Presbyterian Guardian Preaching Cooperation,
cation is possible and is constantly experienced. Speaker and hearer do make the same connections between symbol and referents. Some way God’s message “leaps through” the words which are both the bearer of and the barrier to the spiritual element of Scripture. The full explanation of how this is so may finally escape us but the two thousand years of Christian history tell us it is so.

Such is the simplicity and complexity of a word. To use the term verbal inspiration, then, is to implicate ourselves in the responsibility of knowing what is involved in the use of that term, as well as its history.

By way of clarity we must recall the theological meaning of the term. By verbal inspiration, in modern times, is meant, that God either dictated or superintended by divine inspiration the choice of every word in the 66 books of the Bible, that every part of every book is absolutely inerrant and authoritative and is to be called the very Word of God. This perfection, however, is not extended to any work beyond the original autograph none of which are in evidence today. We are interested in the descriptive word verbal because it is the words of Scripture that are emphasised. Let us put this word to the test of meaning.

1. The words of Scripture are symbols in that they do not refer to themselves but to something other than themselves. They stand as symbols between God’s mind and our minds.
2. As symbols, words of Scriptures must refer to something. They have meaning only in—as—much as they do refer to something.

3. The meaning of the words of Scripture is absolutely dependent upon a proper method of interpretation and personal attitude of mind.

4. Interpretation is an intellectual, and spiritual, not a mechanical process and the less concrete and materialistic the referent, the more vague are the words used to refer to it. Vague words demand intelligent skill in interpreting — a skill possessed by the average human being. The overtones of meaning must be sensed but never guessed at.

5. Meaning is always personal. Words of Scripture have no significance apart from the intention of the author. Somebody meant something. Therefore the intention of the author is the essence of meaning. In and behind the words of Scripture is the intention of God. His thought is prior to words and is the concern of prime importance.¹

¹Augustus Hopkins Strong, Systematic Theology (Rochester: Press of E. R. Andrews, 1886), p. 103. "Inspiration did not always, or even generally, involve a direct communication to the Scripture writers of the words they wrote. Thought is possible without words, and in the order of nature precedes words. The Scripture writers appear to have been so influenced by the Holy Spirit that they perceived and felt the new truth they were to publish, as discoveries of their own minds, and were left to the action of their own minds in the expression of these truths."
6. The words of Scripture, partaking as they do of the changing nature of human language are not automatically, absolutely and eternally fixed in meaning. (This does not refer to the meaning itself. Meaning may be fixed). (1) Words change in meaning, particularly as the periods of spiritual energy drives writers to attempt to express new insights in the common tongue. The New Testament is full of words molded for their new role. (2) Words connote one thing to one person and other things to others. (For instance, the Reformed theologians take serious issue with the "Arminian" Fundamentalists, over the meaning of the "grace of God").

7. The finite words of Scripture cannot, as the imperfect medium that they are known to be, fully bear absolute truth and knowledge. That knowledge must "get through" in a more than corporeal way.

8. Communication from God to man, by means of the words of Scripture is possible and is daily experienced. This is the mystery and wonder of inspiration.

What is the immediate conclusion? Whether the Bible contains

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1Kniper, "Scriptural Preaching" The Infallible Word, p. 233. "Salvation by grace and the Sovereignty of God in salvation are interchangeable terms," and by the latter he means God's pre-creation choice of certain sinners to salvation and Christ's atonement for them alone. This is an excellent example of the common Christian language which is not understood the same by the various branches of the Church.
the precise words of God’s ordering, and only those words, is not the central issue. Equally good Christians take varying points of view on this matter. But let us assume that such is the case. The problem now is, does verbal inerrancy “mean” anything? To “mean” something, it must refer to a “real,” and it must make a significant difference to belief and, in the practical results of that belief, temporal or eternal.

Does verbal inerrancy refer to a “real”? No, say the most ardent advocates of this view. There is no inerrant Scripture, now. Only the autographs are inspired and therefore inerrant. The “original Scriptures and they alone, are the inspired Bible.”¹ No copy or translation or version can claim verbal inspiration in the absolute sense that we have presented. But nothing is actually known about these autographs. We have no direct testimony of any one regarding them. Everything affirmed about them is a deduction from a presupposition. No one knows whether they were inerrant or not, nor would anyone be qualified to judge their inerrancy should they be found. The autographs are not of concern, beyond curiosity, to us or to our age. We are not responsible for them, or to them. “There is no translation absolutely without error (and therefore inspired), nor could there be, considering the infirmities of human copyists, unless God

were pleased to perform a perpetual miracle.¹ But God's failure to perform this miracle is assurance that it is not needed. It would have been a little thing for God to have done this. Are we not justified in concluding that verbal inspiration, so far as the specific definition, inerrancy, is concerned, is a meaningless proposition, since it refers to nothing but an idea? By the same token, the lack of existence of the autographs, at least in so far as we are concerned, makes the description of them of no importance to belief or action, temporal or eternal.² Verbal, then is a symbol describing another symbol and not a "real," it is a semantic problem and assertion, not an ontological one. It is simply a "matter of words." It would be useless to submit the subsequent translations of the Scripture to this analysis for the reason that none are without scribal errors and textual insertions and transpositions of some kind and verbal perfection is not claimed for them.

Finally, if we take the Bible as we have it now, and look at it, perplexities appear that are not easy to adjust to the idea of


²William Burt Pope, A Compendium of Christian Theology (New York: Phillips and Hunt, n.d.), Vol. I, p. 171. "The fact that the autographs have disappeared proves that the Holy Ghost has allowed nothing vital to depend on such a distinction."
inerrancy. However the use of the Old Testament in the New may be justified, the simple fact remains that if we are looking for the verbally perfect text Paul's free use of the Old Testament, to isolate one example, leaves us unsure whether to use his wording, when we read the Old Testament, and call the Old Testament wrong, or the Hebrew Bible when we read Paul, and call him wrong. If one is inerrant, the other must be wrong, even if "the Holy Spirit has a right to quote Himself as He desires." They cannot both be right under the theory of verbal inspiration. Actually this discrepancy becomes one of the most significant clues to Biblical interpretation as we shall see.

Are we to end then in scepticism? Let us see. First, are we justified historically in holding to verbal inspiration? It may be granted that though this term was not used exactly in this form from the beginning of Christian history we are not entirely remiss in naming the Fathers views by the term. We must not, however, project twentieth century meaning into second and fourth and twelfth and sixteenth century concepts. Whatever the early theologians meant, and this includes Luther and Calvin, they did not mean that every part of all books were equally and inerrantly inspired. "They were not, as we have seen, textual literalists in the sense in which Protestant orthodoxy was." ¹ They, as we have seen, corrected,

misquoted and passed judgment upon, rejected and criticised, books and writers, even to Paul's use of illustrations. This passed beyond the legitimate pursuit of correcting scribal errors, into the realm of correcting basic inaccuracies, on personal judgment.

And yet, to all of these men, the Word of God was absolute authority in matters of faith and practice. From its teachings there was no appeal. Apparently the authority of Scripture has not always been thought to depend upon the twentieth century interpretation of verbal inspiration.

With this assurance, tentatively before us, we are prepared to restate another historical affirmation. Scripture is given by inspiration of God. This is the profoundest belief of Christendom. It is always and everywhere assumed to be the basis of the authority of Scripture.

How does this relate to our conclusions about the concept, verbal? The conclusion was this, that inspiration, using words — however correct the words might be, did not end in words. Had it ended in words the whole structure of divine revelation would have tottered with the vagaries of finite words. It would have been subject to the constant fluctuation of language and the relativity of men's experience. Revelation is more absolute than that. It uses words, but transcends words. Words, as ends in themselves, can obscure the Living Word. Words are not to be interpreted mechanically,
meaningfully. They mean something real — they bear authority. Authority is always personal, not verbal. It is the Spirit, as the Author, who guarantees the authority of Scripture. Men, need no longer fence it in with creeds.

There is historical, experiential and semantic justification for affirming the Scriptures as given by inspiration of God. They are cast in as permanent a medium, words, as finite men need. They are sensibly arranged words, expressing the intelligent ideas of persons, and they must be respected grammatically. As literature, the Bible is as deathless as humanity. But the words are also in a religious context expressing, as religion, a spiritual message which must be applied religiously and comprehended spiritually. It is this quality that needs a category of interpretation to come to grips with it.¹

The study, thus far, has left open the whole matter of "spiritual" in relation to interpretation. Every investigation has come face to face with the inadequacy of human categories to cope with the most essential aspects of Scripture. But the solution,

¹H. H. Rowley, The Relevance of the Bible, p. 16.

Even if we establish with certainty the exact text of the Old and New Testaments, and had perfect philological knowledge of every word and form they contained, we should still need other equipment before we could understand the message of God to men embodied in the Bible.
"spiritual interpretation," is obviously another "weasel" word. It sounds religious, it covers all the moot points nicely, at least everything we do not understand can be cast into the "spiritual bin," but it, too, is an ambiguous word. It can mean everything — or nothing. The following section will be an attempt to find out what it means.

Interpretation and a Divine-Human Book

The preceding section utilised the term, verbal, to launch the investigation into the nature and usage of words, their power and limitation. The very expression "verbal inspiration" unites in itself two vitally important aspects of Scripture to which this study of words points. The Bible is both human and divine. At least that aspect of words, treated in the last section, would be the human in Scripture. By consent of the unanimous testimony of two thousand years of Church history, we are face to face with the fact of the divine in Scripture. We have the Bible because of the inspiration of God. But when this is said, we become immediately aware of very great difficulties — perhaps the greatest difficulties. We are quite aware of the fact that the method of inspiration will always remain a mystery. This lies at the point where God contacts man. There is no human ability competent to reach beyond itself and man's own awareness to watch God in action. Purely psychological
Inspiration is impossible to analyze and explain; how much less possible it is to account for the entrance of a supernatural event into the natural sphere. But there are questions which we may and must face if we would speak meaningfully about the Bible. We must say something about inspiration so far as we experience its effects. Inspiration is a term that calls forth from us a clear semantic distinction between human and natural, supernatural and spiritual. To confuse these terms or to permit them to become more or less meaningful than they should be results in distortions of thinking fatal to theological "conversation."

What constitutes inspiration? Dean Farrar distinguishes four "well-marked theories," which have been widely held in the Christian Church, without challenge: (1) Organic, mechanical or dictation theories; (2) the Dynamic theory which stresses the divine energy without regarding human co-operation; (3) the theory of Illumination which permits degrees of Inspiration; and (4) General, or psychological theories of inspiration, stemming from Schleiermacher.¹ Some hold inspiration to be wholly supernatural and outside the natural realm entirely, resulting in a wholly supernatural book, without any of the limitations of the natural order. Others think of inspiration as the activity of the divine in each man working out through every

human consciousness with the result that the Bible is a purely human record of that "experience." Some say books are inspired, others that only men can be inspired. Some say only the "autographs" are inspired, others say, simply, the Bible is inspired. Some equate inspiration, objectivity, inerrancy and authority.

To some, inspiration is the energy of God, to others the resultant ecstasy in men. It may be God's initiative or God's "inbreathing," God's absolute sovereign working to produce a perfect record or His superintendence of men's understanding as they read the record.

Inspiration is not a simple unequivocal word. The reason is not hard to find for it is not a "concrete" word but a "concept" word. It has only an "idea" as a referent. When we define it, we are defining a word or idea, only, not a "real." We cannot, up to this point, say of this or that, "it is inspired," for we have not come to any agreeable decision, yet, about what inspiration may be, or what or whom may be the recipient of inspiration, or whether the recipient, receives inspiration passively or is himself actively inspired. In order to make an intelligent decision on these matters we will examine the possibility of coming to an agreement. A number of relevant matters will be considered.

There are three questions which must be lifted up for examination and which then will be criteria to determine the proper use of the term inspiration. (1) The first is an inquiry into the importance
of the theory of inspiration. (2) An excursus into the area of Bibliolatry will help to define lines of demarcation. (3) The third inquiry will attempt to determine what in Scripture is divine and what may be human with the necessary definitions to the explication of this important decision.

Historically, inspiration and canonicity have been quite closely related. Their relation lies in authority. Inspiration and authority are inherent qualities in the sacred writings, not imposed on them by human fiat but recognised by the Church consciousness, a subjective evaluation and acceptance. Canonicity and authority emphasise the objective aspect. Even divinely inspired authority must be specific if it is to be authoritative. Against the undue license of the gnostics in projecting their spurious writings as authority, the Church more or less officially set up a norm of canonical writings which would serve also to define inspiration so far as the Apostolic writings were concerned. The existence of the Church depended upon an authority to which it could appeal, against heresy from within and against attacks from without.

While there was a universal acceptance of the authority of Scripture nothing needed to be said about the physical aspects of it, in early days. It was divinely God's Word and that was enough. Not until after the Reformation proper was it considered important to say anything specific about the words of Scripture. Luther
pressed its authority. Calvin did the same. Why did the Confession-
al period, for the first time in history begin to speak of verbal
inerrancy in connection with authority? The Creeds were forced upon
the many divergent Protestant groups, by the civic governments, as
a sort of defense of their theological positions and as a charter
for their existence. The differences of opinion which separated
Protestant groups, all of which accepted the Bible as authority,
had to be justified. Words of Scripture became important because
doctrines "hung on prepositions." Since divergent doctrines depend-
ed upon the fine analysis of words and tenses, the authority must
be verbally inerrant. (Thus, by slow process the main emphasis
shifted through two centuries from divine inspiration alone, to
objective authority, then to verbal inerrancy in order to protect
doctrine.) Inerrancy received its most explicit formulation in the
Fundamentalistic controversy. It was coupled, now, not only with
authority and authority's authority — inspiration, but with the
source of inspiration or the supernatural God. It was a precarious
pyramid because it was invented. The inerrancy and divine choice
of every word of Scripture was made to support the entire structure
of revelation up to God Himself. It was guarded jealously and
blindly because if it could be shaken the whole structure of
Christian faith would collapse. If the Bible were not supernatur-
ally perfect it would reflect on a God who is the source of all
truth. If God could not be depended upon in this respect there would be no authority. God's character was falsely equated with the nature of a physical book and the interpretation the Church put upon it. To preserve God, men had to make unguarded supernatural claims for the Book. Of course, Biblical criticism was stoutly resisted. It began to show up the non-supernatural aspects of the Bible. In its hey-day scholarship rejected even the divine in Scripture, but today the pendulum has swung back near center. Even through the withering blasts of destructive criticism, the Bible was not destroyed and the Church stood remarkably firm. Many human opinions melted into thin air but the solid verities of the faith shine out more clearly than ever. In other words, divine inspiration and authority have not been dimmed or destroyed by a recognition of the human elements of the Bible. (Our attention is again centered on God as the source of authority rather than on a physical book which must receive its authority from Him, not possess it in independence.) This leads us into a discussion of the divine and human nature of the Bible.

But before we are ready for that an excursus into an examination of Biblicialatry will serve the purpose of helping us to think more clearly. Though Biblicialatry represents an extreme view admitted by no one, and falsely charged against some, it has value as a semantic pole lying opposite to the totally naturalistic view of the
Bible. As such, it serves to anchor at its highest point a scale of values measuring the esteem in which the Bible is held as a sacred book. (High and low are not moral estimates of the scale of values, for each end of it would be very low from that standpoint).

Bibliolatry has two forms. On the one hand it describes a crude, materialistic worship of the corporeal mass constituting Scripture. Palestinian Jews came to regard the rolls of the Law in this manner. So intrinsically sacred were they considered that copies, worn to the point of uselessness, were carefully and reverently buried in consecrated spots. Thanks to this practice, manuscripts were preserved from which our Hebrew texts are taken. This material idea of sacredness was at first quite unknown to Christian communities, but as sacramentalism developed in the Church, a magical view of the Gospels, in particular, followed. Christ's actual presence was guaranteed when the Gospels, the Host and a likeness of Christ was on the altar. Augustine tells of how the Gospel of John was placed on the bodies of sick people. Traces of this type of Bibliolatry are in evidence in modern life. Wherever the Bible is felt to be desecrated when covered by any other book or publication, an idolatrous motive prevails, however, religious may be the person doing it. And the most superstitious modern practice was the wooden or steel covered Testament sold or
given to service men to wear over their hearts, in battle. And the publicity given to the occasion when a bullet was deflected in this way, was pagan. Another type of Bibliolatry is more subtle and difficult to identify. It would indicate a putting of the word or some objective natural feature of the Bible in the place of primary importance, rather than God Himself. As will be seen at once, this judgment is necessarily a subjective one, for the point where a feeling of reverence to God for His gift becomes reverence for the gift itself is not clearly defined or definable in terms of human legal formulations. To the point that the following statements describe certain fundamentalistic attitudes, they become indictments. These characterizations are not quoted here, however, to indict any group, but to describe what Bibliolatry could be and may be in some cases. Preiss describes some Reformation views of the Bible as

\[\ldots\] a paper pope, a word of God which man can carry in his pocket and of which he is in reality the master.\footnote{Theo. Preiss, "The Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit," trans. by D. G. Muler, \textit{Interpretation}, VII, (July, 1953), p. 262.}

Another modern writer says:

\[\ldots\]
Fundamentalism is really a form of bibliolatry, that is, it is a faith in the Bible itself, rather than faith in the God who speaks his word through the Bible.¹

A far more sympathetic voice, evangelically speaking, points up with equal force the characteristic which he feels is typical of bibliolatry. Any thing, no matter how good, which sets itself up "in a false independency" and "obstructs the revelation of the Living Word," becomes in so doing a "pretender to the throne" and thus an idol. The Church set itself up in place of its Lord and became an end in itself. Protestantism revolted against the tyranny of this false pretender. In a few years the post reformation movement set up the Bible in the place of the Church. The Reformers had fought to keep the Word and Faith in balance, but unconsciously men began to "substitute the written Word for Christ the Living Word," and by so doing forced it into a false position.

Man's knowledge became formal rather than spiritual. As a consequence Christ became to them merely a historical figure, not a living Reality, and men sought more for a knowledge of God's will than for God himself.²

A Christian rationalism that sets its criterion of truth up as a

¹Anderson, Rediscovering the Bible, p. 17.

test of Biblical truth could also be a pretender to the throne. Such an attitude, at least, would contrast that expressed humbly in the New Hampshire confession as it acknowledges the Bible to be the judge of men, not men as its judge.

Biblicolatry would give the Bible equal status with God. It would worship a created thing as though it were supernatural and uncreated. Again we are confronted with the more crucial problem, namely, how is the Bible supernatural and how is it human? Our attitude toward it depends upon an answer to this question.

The question now, about what may be identified as human and what divine in the Bible is complicated by some philosophical considerations which cannot be by-passed. There are four words used in Christian circles which need very clear distinctions if not full definitions. Since this study is less concerned with definition than meaning, in the measure that the latter can be accomplished, the purpose will be served. These four words are, human, natural, spiritual and supernatural.

Before attacking these distinctions, a description of the type of general problem we have before us will be helpful. It was suggested earlier that the problem bears a strong resemblance to the Incarnation problem. Was Jesus human or divine? Obviously, the answer must be, both. But which is most important? Not quite so obviously the answer is, they are of equal importance.
We must have both. The parallel runs through the problem of Scripture. Both Christ and Scripture are implicated in the self-disclosure of God. Both are a revelation of God. Both are, in some manner from God. Both are in the natural world. It would not be surprising to find the two areas of thought coinciding in some respects — in some very important respects. The Chalcedonian formula specified that Christ's two natures were to be clearly distinguished, while his person was not to be divided in our thinking. This is not an easy specification to put into practice in Christology, nor will it be easy to keep the divine and human elements in Scripture in proper balance. To say that Christ was as truly man as he was truly God does not, by metaphysical necessity, involve Him in human sin and it is just as true to say that the Bible in partaking of the natural aspects of the world, is not, per se, involved in error and deceit. But each one, in ways peculiar to its existence, is subject to the limitations of that created existence. In the sense that Christ partook of human nature, he did not enjoy the prerogatives of deity, and in the sense that the Bible partakes of the natural order it is not supernatural. This no more denies the spiritual character of the Bible than it denies the deity of Christ, but simply recognizes the dual nature of both. The particular difference in these two cases, and a difference that must come up for examination, is that one is revelation in a natural medium and the other in a human medium.
One is inert in itself, the other has life in Himself. In this respect the parallel ceases to exist, and one medium of revelation assumes an ascendancy over the other for reasons which we hope to show.

Now, the demand is upon us to distinguish the four terms which we have used so freely. The broadest distinction runs down through natural and supernatural. Without desiring to become involved in the realist - idealist - existentialist debate concerning the nature of reality, it may be simply stated that whatever the nature of reality may be, the line between the uncreated God and that which is created is the line between the supernatural and the natural. However it may be explained philosophically, Christian metaphysics does demand that point of distinction. Nature is not God and God is not nature in some very real sense. God is the ground of being, but being is not God. Whether this dualism must be metaphysical or not, at any rate it is an epistemological distinction which is the important point, to this discussion. So far as we can see, this does not commit us to either a static or dynamic view of reality, necessarily, nor does it define reality as substance, mind or energy. Biblical truths do commit us to a transcendent God as well as to an immanent God. The point at which God is not nature is the point between the two realms. The two are not spatially separated so that the universe is in "stories" as
Bultmann interprets supernaturalism, but is inextricably fused, to use a crude symbol. But the verbal difference at least, between the two is an unbridgeable gulf. There is only one consideration in this, of importance to this study that will be true for any philosophy congenial to the Christian faith and the one which informs our conception of Biblical philosophy. God, as possessing prerogatives of deity, self-existent, without limitation and the source of other-than-Himself is in this sense, supernatural. As will be seen, we are not defining supernatural and natural which is the task of the philosopher and theologian, but distinguishing between them in our thinking. We are not describing the "real" but clarifying the symbols. Now, if the right term has been chosen to indicate God, supernatural is a characteristic true only of God. No created thing whether person or object can participate in the uniqueness of God. The natural, always other-than-God, does not, and cannot partake of that uniqueness. The other-than-God has boundaries, God has none. Nature, or the created order, or, the other-than-God, enjoys freedom but within this limitation. It has its perfections. But its freedom and perfections are relative to its own possibility, never absolute. The descriptive term, absolute, is only applicable to God as supernatural.

Knowledge of God runs strictly on a "one-way grid." Nature (in the broad sense), can explore every aspect of itself but cannot
break out of nature into supernature, either by means of the test-
tube or by logic or mystical experience, without itself becoming
supernatural, which is impossible. Nature, shot through by super-
nature, cannot detect it because nature is bounded and supernature
is not. If there is communication between the two realms God must
initiate the communication. And if nature can comprehend the
communication it will be because that which is communicated has
partaken of the limitations which makes knowledge possible in
nature. It is obvious that no material thing, or no human thing,
or no created thing ought to be called supernatural. In terms of
this broad distinction, miracle in its truest sense, and we believe
in the Biblical sense, is not the unusual things that occur to
physical objects. The "laws of nature" may be by-passed or short-
circuited but such abilities are vested, also, in men to a very
great measure. Man does not yet know the full extent of his power
over the natural world. Man was made to have dominion over the
earth, not the earth over him, either physically or morally. Let
us carefully affirm that Jesus' "miracles" could conceivably be
duplicated by modern man without disproving Jesus' uniqueness. The
one miracle which is the miracle, — the place where human reason
reeks is Jesus Himself. Here and here only, does final Revelation
occur because only in this one spot has the supernatural broken
into the natural. It could not be accomplished through logic, through
any abstract comprehension, through propositions of truth, but only through Christ. Only through Christ can men see God.

God being personal, cannot adequately reveal Himself save through personality, and can only reveal Himself perfectly in perfect personality. That is why the Incarnation was necessary for a full revelation of God.¹

But when this has been said we are faced with the same problem that confronted us when we noted the limitations of the ability of the words of Scripture, alone, to bring spiritual meaning. Even in Jesus' own presence and under his instruction he remained to his disciples but a man. Just as the Old Testament was materialistically interpreted by the Jews and a literal kingdom looked for, as the disciples' understanding of Jesus was materialistic and unspiritual in spite of their intimate and prolonged contact with him.

If we accept the Synoptic account of Peter's confession as the chronologically correct one, we become aware of the fact that Jesus' presence and teaching was unable to accomplish much more than the written Scriptures had been able to do. The disciples interpreted the physical Jesus and his words by the natural categories of understanding. Peter's insight, Jesus said, was not arrived at by induction and observation alone. Jesus said it was

¹Rowley, Relevance of the Bible, p. 25.
given by the Father. In spite of this momentary grasp of truth and the transfiguration experience and everything that Jesus had said and done in his presence, the crucifixion caused a total eclipse of spiritual understanding. The futility of trying to bridge the gulf between God and man by means of sensible objects and teaching has never been more graphically demonstrated. These observations do not intend to convey the idea that these things were unimportant or dispensable. On the contrary, they were an integral part of revelation, but not complete as revelation. If meaning were to break through, something else is demanded. We say, it is "spiritual vision" that is needed, but what is spiritual vision and how does it relate to our problem?

We have used the term "nature" in an apparently ambiguous way up to this point. If there is ambiguity it is in the broad scope which it has been made to describe. We have thought of everything which is not God as nature. If nature is too closely limited the phenomenologists with their scepticism and the positivists with their assurance will rob us of immaterial realities and mind will become simply one function of matter. If nature only includes matter and mind we are left where Kant left us, with an agnosticism in regard to the supra-sensible and immaterial. But if nature, by definition, can include everything which is not God, the scope of man's knowledge can be extended into the noumenal, or the "backside" of the
sensibly observed world. The noumenal is not the supernatural and
the two ought never to be equated. It may be the immaterial, or
even the spiritual realm of existence, but it is still a part of
creation. Knowledge need not end with the phenomenal world. In
fact, it does not so end. All real understanding transcends it.

Intellectual comprehension, meaning the human faculty of under-
standing as contrasted with what we believe to be sub-human faculties,
does not take place in the realm of sense data, but beyond it. The
writer believes that this realm is a spiritual one — an immaterial
Real realm. The spiritual is not a superimposed dimension, but an
integral part of nature, therefore subject to human awareness. We
noted previously that in the act of understanding the mind reaches
for and grasps by implication the real meaning of a speaker. These
overtones of meaning are not unreal but the most real. All real
comprehension takes place, here, all unity of understanding, all
meeting of minds. It may be metaphysically real, at least in so
far as it is a part of the created world, but beyond this we need
not venture here. It is a dimension which cannot be measured but
only utilised. It is a dimension of depth which must be sensed
rather than described. It is a world of meaning. A "carnal" man
tries to tie his world together by means of material experiences and
objects. A "spiritual" man lives in the same world, he experiences
the same sense data, but is able to grasp the true unifying struc-
ture because of an awareness opened toward the dimension of depth. This is not, apparently, subjective solipsism, for there is demonstrated a remarkable unanimity of comprehension in this realm. In fact, it is a measurable quality in terms of intelligence, behavior, and human accord. There is evidence to support the theory that there is far greater discord among those who seek values in the physical realm than those whose values are intellectual and spiritual. Physical interests are chaotic because decentralized. Paul's distinction between the carnal and spiritual man in his first Corinthian letter would illustrate this, though perhaps not exhaust his meaning. The carnal Christians were divided bitterly in their loyalties to human leaders. Paul's spiritual Christian having come under the centralizing Lordship of Christ, by the Holy Spirit (I. Cor. 12:3) finds unity in the body of Christ — a unity in harmony with all the diversity relative to human personality.

So far as the interpretation of revelation is concerned Jesus' explanation for the need of his departure is the most important clue we have. "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come to you" (John 16:7). He then characterizes the Holy Spirit as the spirit of Truth whose function it is to lead into all truth, to bear witness of him, to glorify him. Paul never knew the physical Lord, but he did know the real Lordship of Christ by means of spiritual experience.
To be specific, then, the final revelation of Scripture and of Christ as the ultimate self-disclosure of God, is mediated in the spiritual realm. Natural categories of interpretation can tell us about Christ, and we must have that information, but to know Him, or to capture the intention of the Divine Mind, a spiritual category of interpretation is absolutely imperative. As necessary as the Spirit was to the completed ministry of Jesus' earthly work, and as necessary as His illumination was to the understanding of the Old Testament to save both of these things from a materialistic conception, so much more is the Spirit's ministry needed in our day to lead us into truth. This ministry is a perpetual one, a continuing revelatory concern of the Author, insuring the authoritative meaning of the Word. It preserves the Word of God as the Bible goes through translation to translation, from century to century. It is the one way that the Bible can be considered relevant for today and for individuals. The Bible is not interpreted fully as God's word apart from this spiritual dimension. Spiritual in this sense is very far removed from unreality. It is not "an explaining away" something that we do not want to deny outright. Spiritual is the deepest realm of understanding, the area where God's revelation of himself is most real and effective. In this view the real Word of God is not restricted to the original autographs or to the Hebrew
and Greek texts, but extends by divine superintendence from the original inspiration down through every human form of the Scriptures to English versions, Russian translations and Braille Bibles and hence to the individual person.
ANALYTICAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION
This study has undertaken for a practical purpose, namely, to find a basis for mutual Christian fellowship by means of a method of Biblical interpretation which would show the relevancy of the Bible for today, as well as to attempt to solve personal questions regarding a doctrine of Scripture. It was necessary to show the relationship through Christian history that existed between methods of interpretation and theories of inspiration, including those of the present. The method was analytical in its historical investigation and semantically critical throughout, i.e., the question informing every aspect of the study, was; what did the Church mean by the terms it used? By way of summary we shall review the cumulative conclusions of the study and by an analysis of these come to some conclusions.

The Scriptures have almost always been considered as given by a unique inspiration of God. There have been a number of theories of inspiration, each of which have been held without challenge. There have been two basic approaches to the interpretation of Scripture, the grammatical and the historical. Interpretive methods have proceeded from either one or the other of these, or from some combination of the two. The goal of all interpretation has apparently always been to relate God's word to man's world. In this it has sought to systematize a spiritual category of interpretation.
It would be possible to show by an uncritical assembly of the terms used throughout history that the Church has always held to a theory of verbal inspiration. It has always spoken of a Supernatural Book, of its writers as "Pens of the Holy Ghost," and its contents as the "Pure Word of God." There are three observations, however, from the study of history, which compel us to modify the definition of that term from time to time through history.

The New Testament writers, on many occasions, quoted from the Septuagint version, as though it and the Hebrew were on a par so far as value was concerned. The Patristic Fathers and nearly all the later writers, including Origen and Augustine, considered the Septuagint as the divinely inspired Old Testament. From Jerome to the Reformation it was the Latin Vulgate which was spoken of as inspired, and it continued to be so in the Catholic Church. From the Reformation on, translations were considered to be as much inspired as the original texts provided they were translated from the Hebrew and Greek. Under the earliest light of textual criticism, both Protestant and Catholic theologians began to claim verbal inspiration for the autographs only. The Helveticus Concensus II, authorised only in parts of Switzerland, claimed inspiration even for the Hebrew pointing. The Westminster Confession affirmed inspiration for the original languages but did not specify the autographs, while a Catholic scholar, Richard Simon, distinguished sharply between
"inerrant autographs" and "errant copies," as early as the seventeenth century. It is not unimportant to note, also, that certain English translations were considered as inerrantly inspired for a while.

The second observation is that in spite of the very striking expressions which the Church Fathers have made regarding the inspired Scriptures, they have handled them with a freedom which is amazing to us. They felt free to criticize, reword, misquote, adversely judge and eliminate passages and even books from the canon on subjective judgment alone. Every Christian teacher of note did this, including Augustine, Luther and Calvin, all of whom left doctrines to the Church which are considered, today, as normative for it.

The third observation relates to the interpretation which the Fathers found satisfactory to themselves as scholarly men and devoted Christians. Allegorical interpretation in its several phases was demanded by them, in part, to preserve the high regard they held for Scripture as the Word of God, from the "unworthy" results which they felt a literal interpretation would yield. Augustine could not become a Christian, we are told, until he had found the allegorical interpretation for the Old Testament.

The "multiple meanings" developed in the medieval period and utilised throughout the scholastic era was an attempt to systematize

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the "fecundity" of Scripture, i.e., its amazing depth and spiritual richness. The Catholic Church, by its official decrees in the Council of Trent, assumed the responsibility for keeping Biblical interpretation flexible and useful to the Church rather than let it remain static and lifeless, by a sacerdotal office of authoritative interpretation inserted between the Word and the common man. Luther particularly, and Calvin, in a somewhat lesser way, made the revelation of Christ the interpretive norm. Both demanded a literal and literary interpretation of Scripture, but added a further category of exegesis which would relate the reader to Christ spiritually.

The Creeds, emphasizing doctrinal distinctions tended to require an authorized interpretation of the Bible. This was true of both the Catholic and Protestant churches. Differences based on Biblical interpretation can only be kept clear by authoritative interpretation. It was not until the Fundamentalist controversy that literal verbal inspiration in the sense that God was held responsible for each and every word and tense formation in the entire Bible, was made the basis for a proper interpretation. Literal, in this sense, was an exaggerated reverence for the minutest grammatical and verbal occurrence. It is significant that Barth, the Father of Neo-Orthodoxy, should be willing to admit A. Schlatter's
charge against him that he held to the theory of verbal inspiration. ¹

The relationship of interpretation methods to theories of inspiration form a more or less definite pattern. A very "high" theory of inspiration finds the grammatical approach to interpretation apart from the historical, the most suitable. The pre-Christian Palestinian Jews who regarded the very "radicals" of the Law manuscripts as sacred, formulated rules for allegorical interpretation from the words and tenses of the text. The Talmud, constructed from these rules stood between the Law and the people. This was true of the Alexandrian allegorical method also. The Antiochian school, which first proposed the historical method of exegesis as a system, held a "lower" view of inspiration, i.e., it had more regard for the human element in the Bible. The teachings of this school were discredited as being less "spiritual." The Tridentine decree fixed the individual words of the Vulgate as the sacred text, and rejected historical interpretation, in the sense of any environmental conditioning of the composition of the Bible. Any kind of Biblical criticism was forbidden. It was necessary to substitute a perpetually fluid Tradition in the place of a genuine historical sense to keep the Bible related to human life.

The Reformation came close to maintaining a balance between

¹ Barth, Epistle to the Romans, preface to the second edition, 1921, p. 18.
the grammatical and historical by holding to a Book as both divine and human which had to be interpreted in harmony with that fact. Liberalism turned "historical" to "historicism" and denied the divine origin of the words entirely. Fundamentalism, by way of reaction, overemphasized the divine at the expense of the historical conditioning of the words, though it always held a serious view of history. It is here that Barth's willingness to be called a verbal inspirationist becomes significant, though his view is carried to a greater extreme than any phase of traditional orthodoxy. Inspiration does not mean to him, that the Bible is revelation. He seems to mean that the words of the text are to be studied as human literature for the purpose of catching a meaning that no past or present cultural conditioning could modify. We read the Bible for what it means to us, now, without any concern for what was meant by the human authors in a past day. (The Bible, then, is an occasion, only, not a source of the Word of God.) There is no room here for historical interpretation. Actually, there is no room for any true interpretation beyond the personal response of the reader, relative to his own condition.

A survey of the positions that the Church has held regarding a doctrine of Scripture all subsumed under similar verbal descriptions, suggest the need for care in our use of the terms. Historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have described the views
of those as far back as Origen in the terms that we use today. Care
must be exercised that all the modern connotations are not read back
into the words of those Christian thinkers whom we have quoted and
analyzed. Statements like that of Farrar, regarding Origen and Clement
that "both regarded the Bible as the verbally inspired Word of God," are personal and modern interpretations and must be understood as
such in the effort to reconstruct the early opinions. To use the
same terms as the ancients to describe our views of Scripture does
not mean that our connotations should be imposed backward upon the
early expressions, and by that device permit us to say that our views
coincide with theirs. To do so is to distort the facts of history.

The lack of uniformity in regard to the meanings that various
theories of inspiration have had for other ages as evidenced by
their methods of interpretations, suggested a study of the problems
of interpretation, qua interpretation. Beyond the well known tasks
of the interpreter, lie the less recognized but equally important
ones relating to the nature of words, qua words. Since words are
symbols, the writer or speaker must be certain that his reader or
hearer thinks of the same object or idea which he had in mind as
the thing for which the symbol stood. Further, words are not only
symbols, but they are also abstractions, able only to point to a
limited number of the features of an object. In this way, they
localize the mind's attention to a desired point, but they also run
the danger of suggesting to the recipient (hearer or reader), that the object is entirely described by the abstracted characteristic. The whole is falsely equated with a part. Words also carry a richness of meaning beyond their definitions by way of implication, and deep understanding is measured by the ability of a human mind to capture these overtones of signification. Interpretation, then, is an intellectual process. A mind stands between symbols and meaning. The Bible, as literature, must yield its message to the reader in the same way that any literature gives up its treasures.

But the Bible is not only literature, it is a religious book, a revelation from God to man. Its relevance is in its role as "special revelation." The problem of interpretation is to transcend the human aspect of the book and to grasp the religious, or spiritual, message which is its unique possession. The Bible is both divine and human as Christ is God-man. Each one in its own way partakes of the divine, yet is available to the empirical world. It is necessary to understand and to appreciate the Bible in its divine and in its human aspects and to inform interpretation by this attitude and comprehension. Jesus gives us the most authoritative clue to spiritual interpretation. He interpreted the Old Testament spiritually, in obvious distinction from the rabbi's method, not as though it were an optional choice but as the only valid one. The whole Old Testament was his text; it all spoke of him and his ministry. He dared
to draw all the strands together out of it and draw them to himself, and make himself the spiritual fulfillment — the real fulfillment. Jesus made the difference between spiritual and unspiritual interpretation very plain and pointed when he said, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness of me; yet you refuse to come to me that you might have life" (John 5:39-40, R.S.V). In this we see that all inspiration finally centers in Christ. He is the goal of inspiration and revelation. It is worth noting, also, that the use of the Septuagint in the mouth of our Lord, confirms us in our conclusion that inspiration is not to be confined to the autographs only, nor does it end in words, but it is assured to all of us in the form of the Bible that we possess.

Now, if the lines of demarcation, historically and semantically, have been drawn correctly, the answer to the initial question of the study as to the divine and human elements in Scripture and how these relate to interpretation may be indicated. Perhaps the most obvious conclusion is that as the two natures of Christ are difficult to distinguish in his person, so also is the distinction difficult to make in relation to the Bible. It is necessary to know the meanings of the terms we use but when the purpose of clarity has been served, we are still confronted by the mystery of God's ways, and are, in fact, more humbly aware of the mystery. The Bible is the result of an inspiration from God. We are speechless before this awareness.
Scarcely anything more can be said. In this respect the Bible is of a supernatural origin. It is not of the human. God acted, not to explain to men secrets of the universe which they could discover for themselves, not simply to gratify a curiosity about Himself, not even to provide a system of laws to be obeyed, but primarily to make a Saviour available to sinful men. Everything meaningful to that end is included in revelation.

We conclude that merely knowing about Christ would not have been enough, else the Old Testament would have been enough, or at least the Old Testament and the Gospels. But the historical Christ, living, teaching, dying and rising from the dead, as essential as all this is to the total revelation of the Saviour, was not enough. All of this without the interpretive ministry of the Holy Spirit, by which the living Person and Lordship of Christ is revealed, is not the finished revelation. If the living Person of Christ is the fullness and goal of revelation, the initial inspiration is not completed until individual men make this acquaintance. The Holy Spirit acted in history. He interpreted the spiritual significance of history to "holy" men, who later wrote what they knew. Christ, the fullness of revelation entered history and the same acting Holy Spirit led the disciples into truth about Christ, and continues to interpret the spiritual significance of sacred history and the person of Christ. At no point in all that we know about revelation can any aspect of
it be separate from or independent of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. If the fullness of God's revelation be Christ, there can be no further revelation, for he includes all revelation. We must look back, in chronological time to his physical existence, but this is not an enervating reactionary view, for in the spiritual dimension He is always living and always Lord, and, to borrow the modern expression, He is our contemporary. In all of these respects the Bible is from God. It is divine. It is, of the supernatural.

But it is not possible, nor desirable to isolate these divine aspects from the human and natural realms, except in definition, any more than the God-man could be metaphysically dissected. God could only make knowledge available to man as the content of his disclosure came under the terms of human existence. It is curiously interesting to note the utter reliance of God upon man's capacities and consciousness. On the two occasions when deity wrote on physical objects the result was speedily destroyed. The tables of stone were dropped and broken on Mt. Sinai and Jesus' words, written in the dust, were trampled under feet. God used men because he was giving "special" revelation and not anymore simply general revelation, for which nature was adequate. The Scriptures were not dropped from heaven written on golden plates (which would then have been natural, by the way), nor were they produced "in a vacuum" but came out of the stuff of human living. The Bible is the history of real people in
in the life and death struggle which was the Sitz im Leben of a past day. It is historical in the richest sense. The Bible is not written in a supernatural language, or even in a stilted, formal, precise language, but in the most human, usually rather rough, sometimes grammatically imperfect language, rich in idiom and seldom, if ever philosophically abstract or rigidly logical.

The Scriptures partake of the human and natural limitations also in the sense that they represent a progressive revelation which was accommodated to the capacity of men to receive it. If a mechanically perfect record had been the goal, better ways than through imperfect men would most surely have been used. No theory of mechanical dictation, by whatever name it may be called, can stand the test of either practical or philosophical examination. There is no evidence whatever that the Greek mystical theory of a depression of human consciousness is the Christian or Hebrew one. It is rather an unworthy notion. God has always used the highest capacity of men in the event of revelation. God used men because He had made them capable of grasping spiritual truth. Inspiration — the impulse, and revelation — the content of God's disclosure, was a spiritual experience. It had to be reduced to human speech and then reduced again to a written language.

It is of special interest to note that Scripture came by way of "holy" men. Contact with God is an ennobling experience, taxing
human consciousness to its extremest limits and lifting man to his highest moral stature.

God acting sovereignly in history through a race, electing, excluding until the One Man — Christ, had come and lived and died in the ineradicable, empirical fact. A record of that must be kept for the benefit of all men. But the record, of itself meant very little. Holy men, under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit, caught the significance of these events and taught and preached what they know. The combination of these two aspects of revelation were still not enough, for in spite of them, all but Anna and Simeon were completely unprepared for the kind of Messiah that came and their awareness was Spirit given. No one expected a Saviour from sin instead of a saviour from Roman bondage. In spite of Jesus' life and teaching when he died, his disciples, utterly disillusioned, said, "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 2:19:21). They were still materialists. If a perfect record could have been effective as revelation, surely the Old Testament and Jesus' own teaching would have produced a radiant church. But it took something more, and the "something more" is the thing that saves the human record from being merely human. It is our opinion that the humanness of the record with any of the limitations typical of humanness with which it may be endowed, is for the express purpose of preventing men from giving undue reverence to the medium of revelation and
aborting the ultimate purpose which is to bring men in touch with Christ himself. No iota of authority is lost through its humanness.

All of this must be reflected in interpretation. If inspiration occurred in the spiritual realm, where meaning and significance are grasped, interpretation that does not take this spiritual dimension into account fails dismally to even approximate the message of the Bible. Allegorical interpretation was essentially spiritual. The Sentences were attempts at finding the spiritual content of Scripture. Luther and Calvin were spiritual interpreters. The Confessional period divorced spiritual exegesis from theology and lost the life from Scripture and religion. It talked about Christ but lost him from experience. More currently, myth is the device used, beyond the strictly proper use of that term, to make the Bible live today. It is a modern world groping for the Life that was lost in the period of Protestant rationalism.

Spiritual reality must be recovered in our interpretive methods. This does not mean that there is any excuse for returning to the abuses of any system of hermeneutics. The laws of rational thought and language require that we respect every demand of rational usage as well as every understanding of the not-so-rational, such as the idiom and the figure of speech and the grasping of implications and the indescribable inflections of speech and thought, but when this has been accomplished the task is still not done. There is the
spiritual significance yet to be found and this is the ultimate significance for it brings us into living contact with Christ who is the goal of revelation. This is not venturing into the unreal world, unless Christ be merely an idea, but is the most real, yet does not deny full value to the physical world in which we live. It is here that men find unity in Christ, and fellowship beyond the personal differences that will always divide us while we are in the flesh, and which are only to be deplored as they break fellowship in Christ. If rules for this spiritual interpretation should be required, none could be given. It is precisely in the place where rules are constructed that distortion occurs. The law of the spiritual is the law of life. It cannot be reduced to mechanics. It is a life lived with an awareness toward Christ, demanding but one thing — a personal submission to the leading of the Spirit and the Lordship of Christ.

If it be said that this is too personal, too subjective, one must answer that it is the same Christ that has always been found by everyone and in all times, everywhere. It cannot be another, because the objective record witnesses to Him alone. The individual is not free to find a new path to Him. The remarkable unanimity of understanding regarding this contact with Christ throughout two thousand years of history is testimony to the dependability of the spiritual objectivity of the Spirit of God and the Living Lord. Augustine's Lord is the Lord we know and his adoration is as modern as that of
the twentieth century Christian. If it be thought that this quality of interpretation is too intangible, let it be said that for the lack of it, the Bible as a book of religion, which it must surely be first of all, is taken from men most decisively. Authoritative interpretation, whether it be Catholic or Protestant, fixes a great gulf between the Word and the men to whom it would speak, and whether it is recognized or not, those who administer the authority become priests standing between God and men. Only by means of this quality of understanding, administered by the Holy Spirit, can the Bible ever speak to men and to this age.
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VITA
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