CHAPTER VI

AN EXAMINATION OF INTERPRETATION
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 realize 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) Interpretation 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.1

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

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. Semantics 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."

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 Edwards' 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, highly 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 statements 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 interpretation, 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 in-
vestigation. (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

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 do

---

justice to the spiritual and religious elements in the Bible.

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 utilize 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 justifiable 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, particularly 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.1 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

---

1Thomas 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; 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 (Urworte) 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.  

---


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

The question of words arise . . . in theological thought and specialised 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 logo-mache, or of concealing an important issue by an unorthodox or even casual use of words.

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-

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.

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

---

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"
anything, 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 presupposi-
tion. 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 transla-
tion absolutely without error (and therefore inspired), nor could
there be, considering the infirmities of human copyists, unless God

¹Benjamin B. Warfield, The Westminster Assembly and Its Work
(New York: Oxford University Press, 1931, p. 237.)
were pleased to perform a perpetual miracle. 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

---


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 Schleirmacher. 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
document.) 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 Bibliolatry will serve the purpose of helping us to think more clearly. Though Bibliolatry 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

... a paper pope, a word of God which man can carry in his pocket and of which he is in reality the master.\(^1\)

Another modern writer says:

---

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.

Bibliolatry 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 ascendency 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 supernatural, either by means of the test-tube or by logic or mystical experience, without itself becoming supernatural, which is impossible. Nature, shot through by supernatural, cannot detect it because nature is bounded and supernatural 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 reels 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 understanding 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.