The A.S. Peake Memorial Lecture

'In the Bible it is God who speaks': Peake and Bonhoeffer on reading Scripture

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There is a touching moment in Leslie S. Peake's memoir of his father. Narrating his earliest memory of the biblical scholar the son recalls that his father 'had a horror of cruelty in any of its forms, and especially the cruelty that kept birds in cages'. As the venerable scholar convalesced after an operation his young son entertained him by singing a verse – possibly A.S. Peake's own composition – that ran:

> It's only a bird in a gilded cage,
> A beautiful sight to see,
> You'd think she was happy and free from care,
> She's not, though she seems to be.[2]

It is a whimsy, I concede; but I sense in this childish rhyme an intimation of Peake's attitude to the Bible. For Peake, the Bible resembled a bird locked in a gilded cage waiting for the compassionate biblical scholar to open the door to its message. With wanton cruelty the passage of time and generations of theologians had locked away the meaning of the Bible; his vocation was to release it so that the history of God's revelation could be heard again. Peake believed that biblical criticism, with its scientific tools of textual reconstruction and historical enquiry, could reconstruct a generally accepted account of the meaning of biblical texts and convey it to a lay readership. Only by this means, Peake thought, could the Bible be saved for a generation squeezed between sceptical modern critics who would discard Scripture and traditionalists intent on the irrational assertion of the Bible's verbal inspiration and historical, scientific and theological inerrancy.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer belonged to a different generation. In 1929, the year in which Peake died, Bonhoeffer was 23 and already embarked on a promising academic career. Two years earlier he had defended his doctoral thesis. In August 1929, as Peake went under the knife in the operation from which he never recovered, Bonhoeffer was writing the Habilitation thesis on the doctrine of revelation that would qualify him as

a university lecturer.[3] For Bonhoeffer, biblical criticism was *not* the key that released the meaning of Scripture. The knowledge that Christian faith is about is like other kinds of knowledge in many respects, his thesis argued, but in other respects is best regarded as a distinct kind of knowing. Historians and theologians, he thought, traded in different kinds of knowledge. If biblical critics were not the Bible's jailors, they were certainly not its liberators. As a student in the University of Berlin, Bonhoeffer had been trained skilfully to wield the tools of scientific biblical criticism. In 1928 his examiners judged his Old Testament exegesis 'good' and his New Testament exegesis 'sufficient'.[4] But Bonhoeffer had come to believe that the tools of biblical criticism were incapable of penetrating the surface of Scripture. What he aimed at in Bible reading was a post-critical approach that achieved a reading that moves beyond critical methods in order to attend humbly to the word of God speaking in the Bible. In 1936 Bonhoeffer wrote explaining his approach and his dissatisfaction with biblical criticism to his agnostic brother-in-law, Rüdiger Schleicher:

> First, I want to confess quite simply that I believe the Bible alone is the answer to all our questions, and that we only need to ask persistently and with some humility in order to receive the answer from it. One cannot simply read the Bible the way one reads other books. One must be prepared to really question it. Only then will it open itself up. Only when we await the final answer from the Bible will it be given to us. That is because in the Bible God speaks to us. And we cannot simply reach our own conclusions about God; rather we must ask him. He will only answer us if we are seeking after him. Naturally, one may also read the Bible like any other book – from the perspective of textual criticism, for instance. There is nothing to be said against that. But that will only reveal the surface of the Bible, not what is within it [tr. Amended].[5]

Bonhoeffer knew how this would sound to his sceptical brother-in-law, and concedes in his letter that he is prepared to live with the possibility of sacrificing his intellect with respect – and only with respect – to God.[6] Reading the Bible, Bonhoeffer appears to say, is not a question of technical skill: if that were true the meanest contemporary scholar would be a better reader of the Bible than the greatest saints and scholars of the pre-modern Church. Bible reading is a matter of attentiveness and faith. The word of God in the Bible does not lie buried under the alien cultures and foreign languages of the biblical writers, awaiting the biblical scholar to sweep away the centuries of dust: it is a

gift God is free daily to give – or withhold – to each faithful reader in her unique situation.

Contrasting Peake and Bonhoeffer in this way involves a certain violence towards the evidence: as an exegete Peake was more guided than he knew by what Henry Rack terms his 'liberal evangelical faith';[7] and as a theologian Bonhoeffer retained more of his biblical critical training than he was prepared to acknowledge.[8] But there is enough truth in this contrast to make it worth reflecting upon. For Bonhoeffer, Peake's generation represented an approach to Bible reading that had signally failed to articulate God's word to the world: a generation of biblical scholars and dogmatic theologians had failed the men in the trenches and was now repeating their theological and political error in their response to Nazism. In men like Peake, Bonhoeffer thought he saw a generation that had called the Bible before the bench of human reason, thereby taming God's word by making it subject to scholarly interpretation. As Bonhoeffer argued in his christology lectures of 1933, it is not the job of the human *logos* to make sense of the *Logos* of God; it is the job of God's *Logos* to make sense of us.

The contrast I have sketched above appears to impale us on the horns of a dilemma: is biblical criticism the key to the Bible or a toolkit capable of merely scratching its surface? Must we chose either historical criticism or what Bonhoeffer calls 'theological interpretation'? I want to suggest that this choice is artificial and unhelpful. That is, though there are indeed substantive differences between Peake and Bonhoeffer it may not be necessary to choose between them. Though they differ fundamentally in their respective *construals*[9] of the way God is revealed through Scripture, I want to suggest that contemporary debates within and between the guilds of biblical scholarship and systematic theology are, uneasily and untidily, feeling towards ways of reading the Bible that have taken both Peake and Bonhoeffer's perspectives into account. I want to add that in one key respect – the relation of Christianity to Judaism – contemporary scholarship has moved beyond both men, making them seem oddly antique in their biblical exegesis. My hope is that by rehearsing some issues raised by the two men's uses of the Bible I may contribute modestly to that ongoing conversation.

A.S. Peake and the nature of Scripture

John T. Wilkinson commented that Peake wrote 'some twenty books of solid scholarship, a large number of important monographs [and] a colossal quantity of articles and book reviews';[10] this is perhaps too generous an assessment. Many of the volumes of 'solid scholarship' to

which Wilkinson refers are, by today's scholarly standards, not classifiable as instances of constructive scholarship but attempts, as Peake puts it in the commentary that bears his name, 'designed to put before the reader in a simple form, without technicalities, the generally accepted results of Biblical Criticism, Interpretation, History and Theology'.[11] With some exceptions, Peake's main contribution lay in mediating critical scholarship to lay readers. This is no bad thing and it helps give some sense of what made him tick: Peake was foremost a polemicist. If Bonhoeffer's biblical hermeneutic is a reaction against Peake's generation, Peake's hermeneutic is no less reactionary. He was driven by his conviction that traditionalists, not least those in evangelical traditions such as his own Primitive Methodist Church, had wrongly dismissed the contribution of critical scholarship to Bible reading. In his 1897 book, *A Guide to Biblical Study*,[12] his 1913 book *The Bible: Its origin, its significance and its abiding worth*,[13] and again in his 1922 book on *The Nature of Scripture*,[14] Peake states and restates a strikingly coherent[15] case concerning the nature of critical biblical scholarship and the nature, value and message of the Bible that such scholarship makes available.

One immediate impression one gains from these books is Peake's view of scriptural authority, or rather his lack of one. Until the Second Vatican Council and the publication in 1965 of *Dei Verbum* on 'The Dogmatic Constitution of Divine Revelation',[16] which declared that Scripture and tradition are twin forms of the one Revelation to which the Church is subject, one could have been forgiven for thinking that in western Christianity there were essentially two ways to understand the authority of the Bible. Either (as the Church of Rome was supposed to believe) Scripture is authoritative because the Church declares it so; or (as the Reformers taught) Scripture alone is authoritative for the Church, and is so because it is intrinsically inspired – literally 'in-breathed' – by God. Peake subscribed to neither position. For a man so interested in church unity he was signally uninterested in the Church. Like von Harnack, for Peake the Christian religion was primarily a question of personal salvation in which the Church plays little role except as a fellowship of believers in which the individual might hear God's word preached. Certainly Peake displays little sense of the Church's potential role as a community in which an individual's interpretation of biblical texts may be tried and tested. More surprisingly for a Protestant he rejects expressly any notion that the Bible is authoritative because it is inspired. For Peake, critical biblical scholarship has emancipated us from 'a mechanical view of inspiration' that held that 'from the first page to

the last the Bible was written under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit'.[17] Quoting 2 Timothy 3.16 (though interestingly omitting the biblical reference) Peake rejects the view that all Scripture, because inspired by God, is 'profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness'. This view, he argues, has become progressively less credible and 'the facts are so clearly against it that only a preconceived theory could have made men blind for so long'.[18] His reason for this conclusion is simple: to any unprejudiced reader, contended Peake, it is clear that the Bible 'is not throughout on the same level, whether of historical accuracy, or moral insight, or theological correctness'.[19] In Peake's opinion, the Bible is a record of God's progressive revelation; it is not that revelation itself. Revelation, in other words, is an historical process. What the Bible gives us is a record of human experience of revelation in which it is not the biblical writers who are inspired, but the people of Israel to which they belonged. Intelligent readers will take the Bible as a whole rather than fixating on particular texts.

Traditional accounts of the authority of Scripture were not the only ancient doctrines and practices of the Church that Peake distanced himself from: he also rejected two ways of reading the Bible with ecclesial pedigrees reaching back to the New Testament. Firstly, Peake regarded the allegorical interpretation of biblical texts as little more than a form of primitive superstition that is simply disallowed for modern readers: in this he was and is not unusual. But more significantly, he also rejected as entirely without value or propriety christological interpretations of the Old Testament, that is readings of Old Testament texts in which the person of Christ is 'read back' into the text.[20]

The issue which best displays Peake's view of Scripture is his understanding of the relation between the Old and the New Testament. In Peake's earliest commentary, on *The Epistle to the Hebrews*,[21] Peake associates himself with what he takes to be the message of that letter: 'Christianity [he writes] is that heavenly original of which Judaism is the flickering and insubstantial shadow.'[22] The Old Testament represented for Peake, unwittingly echoing Hegel, a 'lower stage of religion'[23] that has been superseded by Christianity.[24] For Peake, the primitive religion of the Old Testament is a problem to be overcome by Christian apologetics; he is unembarrassed by the resemblance between his view of the Old Testament and that of the Gnostic heretic Marcion. The Old Testament cannot serve as a basis for personal or social ethics. The vital aspect of Old Testament texts is not the message its authors convey, but,

taken as a whole, its record of a deepening experience of God. Only by recognizing its limitations may a modern reader love it.

For Peake, the Bible must be read with the same critical faculties as any other book. Biblical texts, he thought, have a single meaning that can accurately be recovered by biblical scholars, a meaning on which scholars could achieve a high degree of consensus. Biblical scholars, thought Peake, had achieved permanent agreement on certain textual and historical conclusions, for example, about the sources that make up the Pentateuch. He was certain of the achievements of biblical scholarship and sure that they must be accepted by any rational individual who objectively surveyed the evidence.

Bonhoeffer and the theological interpretation of Scripture

Dietrich Bonhoeffer disagreed with very nearly every single point detailed in my summary of Peake's view of the nature and value of the Bible. For Bonhoeffer, the Bible can be read as one reads any other book, but that will only scratch its surface. He viewed the Old Testament as a book of Christ and routinely engaged in christological readings of Old Testament texts. He believed the Bible – even the Old Testament – could serve as a guide for Christian social and personal ethics. He suspected that dismissals of the authority of Scripture were simply pretexts for disobedience to the divine command. For Bonhoeffer, for example, a reader of the Sermon on the Mount simply has to face up to the possibility that Jesus means exactly what he says and calls the Christian to simple obedience to his command. Thus, when Jesus tells the Rich Young Ruler to sell his possessions and give to the poor, Bonhoeffer suspects that interpretations which suggest Jesus does not *really* intend that a reader of this story should also sell his possessions for the poor may be evasions of the true cost of discipleship. For him, the archetype of the typical modern reader of the Bible is the cunning serpent, who, with his 'pious question'[25] 'did God really say...?' asks the ultimately godless question of the critic.

Perhaps the only item on which Bonhoeffer would have agreed with Peake is that the Bible matters. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a profoundly biblical theologian. Of the five books he published during his lifetime three 'are meditative interpretations of the Bible from an ethical-pastoral perspective'.[26] Bonhoeffer wrote numerous works of biblical exegesis including texts on the Ten Commandments, the Psalms, on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, on the temptation narratives and on the Lord's Prayer. A hundred or so of his biblically oriented sermons are extant and from prison he wrote to Eberhard Bethge that he was reading the Bible

'above all'.[27] Almost his last earthly act was to reflect on two biblical texts for fellow prisoners on Low Sunday, 1945.

Yet even as an undergraduate student, Bonhoeffer's approach to the Bible was beginning to create tension between him and his theological teachers and peers. In 1925, when he was still in his teens, Bonhoeffer received the lowest mark he achieved for any paper in dogmatic theology for his essay on the question 'Can one distinguish between a historical and a pneumatological interpretation of Scripture, and how does dogmatics relate to this question?'[28] Already the precocious student had begun to raise questions about the historical critical method that were as troubling to his own Professor as they would have been to Peake had he received the essay to mark. 'Regarding the form of the Bible' Bonhoeffer writes:

> with this approach [i.e. historical criticism] the concept of the canon disintegrates and becomes meaningless. Textual and literary criticism are applied to the Bible. The sources are distinguished, and the methods of the history of religions and form criticism fragment the larger and even the remaining short textual units into little pieces. After this total disintegration of the texts, historical criticism leaves the field of battle. Debris and fragments are left behind. Its work is apparently finished.[29]

'None of us,' Bonhoeffer concedes late in the essay, 'can return to a pre-critical time' and he accepts that even the 'spiritual' interpreter has to use historical critical methods since, first and foremost, a reader of the Bible is faced with written texts that are the words of real human beings. But, he concludes in an early echo of Karl Barth, while for the historical critic Scripture is merely an historical source: for the spiritual interpreter 'scripture is a witness'.[30]

Bonhoeffer worried Berlin's theological professors. He had fallen under the spell of dialectical theology and in particular of Karl Barth, whose commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans had shaken the foundations of the early twentieth-century consensus on how the Bible should be read.

Bonhoeffer's view of the Bible was being shaped not only by new approaches to exegesis that rejected the liberal theological presuppositions of historical critics such as A.S. Peake, but by his theological discovery of the *sanctorum communio*, the holy community of the Church, as the primary context in which the Christian reads the Bible. The Bible for Bonhoeffer is above all the *Church's* book, and

when Christians read it they read it with the eyes of faith. From the early thirties there were also increasingly *political* reasons why Bonhoeffer was reading the Bible. The impact on biblical studies of anti-Semitism was beginning to be felt[31] and there was a serious possibility, under pressure from the pro-Nazi German Christians who were gaining influence in both Church and academy, that study of the Old Testament might be excluded from the curricula of both seminary and university. In this heady atmosphere Bonhoeffer made the decision in the winter semester of 1932-33 to lecture on the first three chapters of the book of Genesis. The decision was doubly bold. Dogmatic theology, then as now, did not by and large undertake theology by engaging with biblical texts; Bonhoeffer risked rejection by theologians for reading the Bible, and by biblical scholars for intruding into areas where he could claim no expertise. His choice was bold, too, because by January 1933, before his lectures had reached their conclusion, Adolf Hitler had been appointed Reich Chancellor, changing for good the political geography of Germany and Europe.

Bonhoeffer's approach to the interpretation of the Bible had altered very little since his formational essay on spiritual interpretation. In a brief introduction to the published version of the lectures Bonhoeffer attempts to express the tension that, in his view, characterizes the relationship between the Church and the world: 'The church of Christ witnesses to the end of all things. It lives from the end, it thinks from the end, it proclaims its message from the end'.[32] How is it possible for the Church, which exists in time like every other institution; or the Christian, who lives like every other individual in the middle of time and history, to speak authoritatively of the beginning of the universe and of the end point of time to which the world is travelling? This human impossibility is made possible on the basis of the witness of Scripture, which knows Christ as the beginning and the end. The Church can do this because it is founded on the witness of Scripture. There is no other Church than the church of Holy Scripture. In this Church, 'the story of creation must be read in a way that begins with Christ and only then moves toward him as its goal'. The term Bonhoeffer now uses to describe this thoroughly christological hermeneutic method is 'theological exposition', and Bonhoeffer insists, against Peake, that it takes 'the Bible as the book of the church and interprets it as such'.[33] His subsequent remarks are worth quoting in full:

> Its method is a continual returning from text (as determined [here again is Bonhoeffer's concession] by all the methods of philological and historical research) to this presupposition. This

> is the objectivity in the method of theological exposition. And on this objectivity alone does it base its claim to have the nature of a science.[34]

Bonhoeffer's view of the Bible, his approach to reading it, and his critique of the limitations of the historical critical method raise no less difficult questions than Peake's approach. The most significant of these difficulties concerns a tension between Bonhoeffer's comment to Rüdiger Schleicher that the reason he found himself turning more and more to the Bible in the context of the Church struggle was because in all other texts he feared meeting merely an echo of his own interpretation. What was distinctive about Bonhoeffer's experience of reading the Bible relative to other texts was its *otherness*, the alien qualities of its culture, languages and theology. Yet, properly undertaken, it is precisely the otherness of the biblical text that historical criticism helps to establish. This results in some very pressing questions about the quality of some of Bonhoeffer's exegesis.

There is much more to be said about Bonhoeffer's view of the Bible, not least on his understanding of the relation of the Old and the New Testaments.[35] But in order to achieve a more tangible grasp of the practical exegetical consequences of Peake and Bonhoeffer's biblical hermeneutic it is helpful briefly to compare and contrast their respective readings of the same text. One obvious comparison is between the editor's own commentary on the book of Genesis in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* and Bonhoeffer's interpretation of the first three chapters of that book in *Creation and Fall*; only 13 years elapsed between the publication of Peake's commentary and that of Bonhoeffer.

Peake on Genesis

Peake begins his commentary, predictably enough, with the question of sources. Rejecting what he terms 'persistent assertions to the contrary'.[36] Peake asserts that the 'there is no room for reasonable doubt' that the book of Genesis is comprised for the most part of three documentary sources and goes on to emphasize that the text is characterized by 'internal inconsistencies' and 'intrinsic incredibilities'.[37] Singling out the creation narrative he takes pains to iterate that 'the narrative of creation cannot be reconciled with our present knowledge except by special pleading which verges on dishonesty'.[38] Peake is clear that the proper approach to the text is one of 'dispassionate enquiry' that distinguishes history and myth, though he adds that myth, like poetry, may often be an effective means to convey religious truth. This insight is the basis for his reading of the first 11 chapters of the book, in which

what was once naked myth has been, as he puts it, 'purified' by the religious genius of the Israelites. On this basis Peake is able to write that 'it is not the explicit formulation of principles and beliefs, nor even these distilled from the narrative' that is precious, 'it is the narratives themselves as they stand which yield us most for edification, guidance and inspiration'.[39] The texts are neither science or history, Peake is saying, but their capacity to instruct remains intact. One way in which to understand how the texts arrived at their present form, Peake continues, is to see that '[m]any of the stories are aetiological, that is, that they supply an answer to the question: What gave rise to such customs, instincts, conditions, names, such as those with which we are familiar?'.[40]

This is one way that Peake, to select an example, treats the story of the woman's interaction with the serpent in Genesis 3 and its consequences. The story, Peake explains, accounted for the Hebrews for the pangs of childbirth: God's everlasting punishment for the woman's disobedience. In the body of his commentary, however, Peake by and large contents himself with re-narrating the biblical story. Like Bonhoeffer, as it happens, Peake asserts that it is mistaken to associate the serpent with the devil; the text is quite explicit in making the serpent simply one amongst the creatures made by God. But Peake distinguishes himself from the approach Bonhoeffer would later take in stating that 'there is no Messianic reference' in the text, thereby ruling out the link that Bonhoeffer will make between the text of Genesis 3 and the apostle Paul's understanding of Christ as the new Adam who in his person reconciles fallen Adam with God.

Bonhoeffer on Genesis

In contrast with Peake, Bonhoeffer sets out not from the question of the sources of the book of Genesis, but from a theological discussion of how Christians may speak of the beginning of time. No one 'can speak of the beginning but the one who was in the beginning'. Because of this, 'God alone tells us that God is in the beginning; God testifies of God by no other means than through his word, which, as the word of a book, the words of a pious human being, is wholly a word that comes from the middle and not from the beginning'.[41] The beginning described in Genesis 1 is not to be thought of in temporal terms; but as something unique, a limit beyond which human beings cannot go. The character of this beginning, Bonhoeffer asserts, can only be known in the resurrection, which is, like God's creation, a creating out of nothing.

It is clear to Bonhoeffer that the first chapters of the book of Genesis contain more than one narrative of creation. But while this fact cannot be ignored, Bonhoeffer is not anxious about it. If the first creation narrative is for Bonhoeffer about humankind for God, thought out from above; then the second is about God for humankind, thought out from below. The two narratives therefore complement rather than contradict one another. The anthropomorphisms of the Yahwist account of the creation of Adam (in Genesis 1–2.4a) are, Bonhoeffer acknowledges, insupportably childlike. However, he asserts that 'in being distinguished as the word of God it [the story] is quite simply the *source* of knowledge about the origin of humankind'.[42] It expresses the physical nearness of the Creator to the creature, but also God's omnipotence. 'Who can speak of these things,' he asks, 'except in pictures? Pictures after all are not lies; rather they indicate things and enable the underlying meaning to shine through'.[43]

In the time available to me it is possible to give but one example of the theological interpretation Bonhoeffer engages in the lectures. In the centre of Eden stand two trees: the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life. Bonhoeffer mentions historical critical treatments of the trees, but only to dismiss them by reiterating that 'our concern is the text as it presents itself to the church today'. On this basis Bonhoeffer titles his treatment of the serpent's discussion of the trees with Eve 'the pious question'. The serpent is not, for Bonhoeffer, an incarnation of the devil, but one of God's creatures who becomes an instrument of evil. By spelling this out Bonhoeffer sidesteps the question of how evil came into the world, justifying the evasion on the basis that the biblical narrative of the Fall does not address the question either. The serpent is subtle: to begin with he does not dispute God's word. His question, 'Did God really say?' is apparently innocent. Bonhoeffer describes his exchange with Eve as the first religious conversation and the first theological debate. But the question opens up a brave new world of possibilities unsuspected by Eve in her innocence. 'The decisive point,' Bonhoeffer explains,

> is that through this question the idea is suggested to the human being of going behind the word of God and now providing it with a human basis – a human understanding of the essential nature of God. Should the word contradict this understanding, then the human being has clearly misheard.[44]

So what, Bonhoeffer continues, 'is the real evil in this question?':

> It is not that a question as such is asked. It is that this question already contains the wrong answer. It is that with this question the basic attitude of the creature toward the Creator comes under attack. It requires humankind to sit in judgement on God's word instead of simply listening to it and doing it. And this is achieved by proposing that, on the basis of an idea, a principle, or some prior knowledge about God, humankind should now pass judgement on the concrete word of God.[45]

When Eve still resists temptation, the serpent takes a more aggressive line, suggesting to Eve that God's prohibition of the tree's fruit is intended to prevent Eve and Adam becoming *sicut deus*, like God: eat of the fruit, lies the serpent, and you too can be like God. Eating the fruit removes a limit, as the serpent suggested it would, and makes Eve and Adam *sicut deus*, at the centre, but alone. Is it going too far to speculate that this *sicut deus*, this placing of oneself at the centre instead of God, is the position in which Bonhoeffer suspected the historical critic had placed himself and his discipline?

Evaluation and conclusions

It is, of course, clear that reading Peake and Bonhoeffer on Genesis is not to compare like with like: a critical commentary facilitating biblical study and a lecture in dogmatics by a private lecturer free to choose his topic and the way he handles it would result in different treatments even if the authors were in substantial agreement. Yet, even when we have taken this into account, the distance between them is great. So who is right? Which side of the fence do I want to choose? At the beginning of my lecture I suggested that putting the question in this way is artificial. Both Peake and Bonhoeffer, for different reasons, address questions of the nature of the Bible and the function of historical criticism in a polemical mood: both men, that is, are keen to present the questions as though every reader of the Bible must choose between historical critical and theological modes of reading. But is this really the case? I want in this concluding section to identify several avenues of enquiry along which, with more time, I would want to journey further with the issues raised by comparing Peake and Bonhoeffer.

Let us make the most obvious point first: historical criticism is not what it was. The historical criticism that Peake is writing about, the historical criticism that Bonhoeffer is writing about, and historical criticism as it is practised today by Old and New Testament scholars, though they are clearly variant forms of the same practice, are not identical. Bonhoeffer's view of historical criticism is skewed by the fact

that the variant form with which he was in contact was German historical criticism. German forms of biblical scholarship were particularly fixated on textual and redaction criticism. Confronted with biblical scholarship that occupied itself almost entirely with textual and redaction criticism, it is easy to see why Bonhoeffer might feel frustrated at the lack of theological interest in biblical criticism.

Contemporary biblical scholarship resembles no more the view Peake had of it. Peake was impressively confident in the achievements of biblical scholarship. Surveying his discipline Peake displays pride in the rational consensus on key issues, such as the construction of the Pentateuch, on which he and his peers were agreed. Today, it seems to me as an outsider, Old and New Testament scholarship is more controverted and less coherent. Some biblical scholars do share many of Peake's assumptions; but increasingly many do not. Peake, for example, believed both that biblical scholars generally agreed about the sources that make up the book of Genesis, agreed about when it was constructed, and that these kinds of conclusions represented considerable scholarly achievements that help modern readers to make better sense of the texts. Today, few if any of these assumptions are universally shared within biblical scholarship. Some biblical scholars assert that redaction criticism has proved a bit of a blind alley, a way of heated disagreements that ultimately boil down to simple matters of opinion. Some biblical scholars are now suggesting that scholarship should set questions of source criticism aside and deal only with the text in its final received form. Peake was confident that the text had a meaning, that the meaning of the text was what the original writer meant it to mean, and that the biblical critic was in a position to recover that meaning. Once again, while some biblical scholars continue to hold this view, others, drawing, for example, on post-war developments in philosophical hermeneutics, believe the idea that texts have a single definitive meaning to be a chimera that will always elude the critic's grasp.

Neither Peake nor Bonhoeffer could have foreseen the impact on biblical scholarship that liberationist and feminist theory have had, for example, in raising political questions about whose interests are served in the construction and interpretation of biblical texts. The more recent growth in social scientific interpretations of biblical texts[46] is raising no less interesting and promising questions about the role and nature of biblical criticism. While some biblical critics still conceptualize their discipline as a science separate from theology and defend, as Peake did, the ideal of the biblical critic as a dispassionately objective scientist in the classic rationalist Enlightenment mould, a growing number are

accepting that this ideal can no longer be maintained. A smaller number have begun to argue not only that theological presuppositions creep up on biblical scholarship unawares, but are embracing the idea of an openly theological approach to biblical scholarship in ways that acknowledge complex interactions between the written text, the Church and the world.[47]

But perhaps more than liberation, feminist or social scientific influences on biblical scholarship, the Holocaust is proving to have an impact on biblical scholarship that neither Peake nor Bonhoeffer could have predicted. Peake subscribed to the view that the Old Testament must be regarded as a partial and imperfect introduction to the fullness of revelation in Christ. Like Hegel he regarded Judaism as a primitive religion that achieves its perfect form in Protestant Christianity. Bonhoeffer has variously been hailed as part of the problem of Jewish Christian relations and as a model for good conduct in Christian relations to the Jews. The truth lies somewhere in between. Recent developments in biblical scholarship that arise directly and indirectly from the challenges raised by the Holocaust for Jewish Christian relations make Bonhoeffer's biblical exegesis look its age.

One consequence of the Holocaust for biblical scholarship has been the recent development of Jewish biblical scholarship alongside Christian biblical scholarship. Dialogue between Christian and Jewish readers of biblical texts is taking place more and more and, while this need not disallow christological readings of the Old Testament such as those Bonhoeffer routinely deployed, it is putting them in a different light. Similarly, the so-called new readings of Paul, which have called into question assumptions about the apostle's supercessionist theology shaped by centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, have radically altered New Testament scholarship in ways that make the later sections of Bonhoeffer's book *Discipleship* seem oddly dated.

It is certainly true that Bonhoeffer raises for us several still unresolved questions about biblical criticism. Some forms of scholarly enquiry into the Bible may not raise very many theological questions; but it seems entirely reasonable to me for theologians to feel frustration with biblical scholarship if, for example, it undertakes *textual* enquiry into the relationship between the books of Judges and Kings without interest in questions of their *theological* relationship. Peake approached the Bible as a historian and made historical critical questions primary in his reading of biblical texts. Bonhoeffer approached the Bible as a theologian and made theological questions dominant in his reading of biblical texts. To

my mind, historical approaches and theological approaches to reading the Bible may legitimately be distinguished. Peake came dangerously close to making historical critical readings of the Bible the only legitimate way of reading biblical texts. Bonhoeffer came dangerously close to making theological interpretation the only legitimate or, perhaps more accurately, the only legitimately *Christian* way of reading the Bible. Somewhere between these reactionary extremes lies a much less tidy, and potentially much richer – richer that is for the Church – *modus vivendi* for biblical scholars and theologians, in which their respective methods of reading engage in a dialogue that permits far greater interpenetration of insight between the disciplines than either Peake or Bonhoeffer envisaged. Bonhoeffer thought a fence stood tall between historical critical and theological interpretation of the Bible and insisted that readers choose which side to sit on. I agree that the fence is there: but I also think that it is in the mutual interest of biblical criticism and theology that it should never be so tall as to prevent these neighbouring communities of Bible readers from talking across it.

NOTES

1. Stephen Plant, Wesley House, Cambridge.
2. L.S.Peake, *Arthur Samuel Peake: A memoir*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1930, p. 291.
3. Bonhoeffer's Habilitation thesis, *Akt und Sein*, was accepted by Berlin University in 1930.
4. *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, DBWE vol. 9., Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2003, pp. 183-84.
5. *Meditating on the Word*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Cowley Publications, Cambridge MA, 1986, pp. 43-44. German text in *Illegale Theologen-ausbildung Finkenwalde 1935-1937*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, DBW 14, Chr.Kaiser Vlg., 1996, pp. 144-45.
6. *Meditating on the Word* p. 46.
7. Henry Rack, 'A.S. Peake memorial lecture: A.S. Peake – Liberal evangelical', *Epworth Review*, 31/3, July 2004, pp. 48-53.
8. See, e.g., Georg Huntemann, who argues that 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer participates, first of all, in the schizophrenia of modern theology which on the one hand analyses the Bible critically, but then nevertheless allows the critically analysed text to stand as God's word' p. 112, *Der Andere Bonhoeffer: Die Herausforderung des Modernismus*, Wuppertal, R.Brockhaus Vlg., 1989, my tr.
9. I refer here to David Kelsey's *Uses of Scripture in recent Theology*, SCM, London, 1975.
10. John T. Wilkinson, *Arthur Samuel Peake*, Epworth, London, 1971, p. 85. For a select bibliography of Peake's writings see: J.T.Wilkinson, *Arthur Samuel Peake 1865-1929* ed., Epworth, London, pp. 161-67.
11. T.C. & E.C. Jack, *Peake's Comentary on the Bible*, Ed. A.S.Peake, London, 1920, p. xi.
12. A.S. Peake, *A Guide to Biblical Study* Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1897.
13. *The Bible: Its origin, its significance and its abiding worth*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1913.
14. *The Nature of Scripture*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1922.

15. Wilkinson, *Arthur Samuel Peake*, detects some development in Peake's understanding and use of the Bible in the period spanned by these books (c.f., chapter 5 'The Interpreter of the Bible', pp. 84-123), and is surely right to do so; but the very great *consistency* of Peake's fundamental views on the Bible throughout his career is nonetheless striking.
16. W.M.Abbott S.J., ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, Chapman, London, 1966, pp.107-132.
17. *The Nature of Scripture*, p. 200.
18. *The Nature of Scripture*, p. 201.
19. *The Nature of Scripture*, pp. 201-2.
20. For a good example of a christological interpretation of an Old Testament text, see Charles Wesley's identification, in the hymn 'Come, O thou Traveller unknown' (*Hymns and Psalms* 434), of Christ with the stranger encountered by Jacob at Peniel in Genesis 32.
21. Published in *The Century Bible*, 1902.
22. John T. Wilkinson, *Arthur Samuel Peake*, p. 110.
23. *The Nature of Scripture*, op.cit., p. 140.
24. *The Nature of Scripture*, p. 178.
25. John W. De Gruchy, ed., *Creation and Fall*, D. Bonhoeffer, DBWE vol.3, eng.ed, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997, pp. 103-110.
26. See Gerhard Krause's entry on Bonhoeffer in the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol 7, p. 57ff.
27. D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and papers from Prison*, SCM, London, 1971, p. 26.
28. *The Young Bonhoeffor*, DBWE 9, pp. 285-300.
29. *The Young Bonhoeffor*, p. 286.
30. *The Young Bonhoeffor*, p. 296.
31. For a full account of this see Stephen Plant, 'How theologians decide: German theologians on the eve of Nazi rule', in Forward, Plant & White eds., *A Great Commission*, Peter Lang, 2000, pp. 147-165.
32. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works volume 3, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, p. 21.
33. *Creation and Fall*, p. 22.
34. *Creation and Fall*, p. 23.
35. See e.g. Martin Kuske's splendid monograph, *The Old Testament as a book of Christ*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1976.
36. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p. 133.
37. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p.132.
38. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p.132.
39. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p. 134.
40. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, p.134.
41. *Creation and Fall*, p. 30.
42. *Creation and Fall*, pp. 75-6.
43. *Creation and Fall*, p. 81.
44. *Creation and Fall*, p. 106.
45. *Creation and Fall*, pp. 107-8.
46. For an introduction to this approach see D.G. Horrell, ed., *Social Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1999.
47. E.g. Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective*, T & T Clark, 1994.