

Our Lord's View of the Old Testament

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THE TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT LECTURE FOR 1953

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I. INTRODUCTION

LIMITS OF THE SUBJECT

We shall not attempt in this paper to deal in any general way with our Lord's *use* of the Old Testament, because the Gospels contain a vast amount of material, which could not possibly be handled in a single lecture. We shall consider His *use* of the Old Testament only in so far as it throws light upon His fundamental *view* of the Scriptures. And we shall not attempt to deal with the limits of the canon acknowledged by our Lord. We shall content ourselves with seeing how He viewed the Old Testament Scriptures that He used, without attempting to discover whether His canon of Scripture coincided precisely with our Old Testament. Nor shall we tackle the question of the authority to be given to our Lord's view of Scripture once that view has been discovered. The problems of Kenosis are of supreme importance, but they come outside our subject and we shall not attempt to grapple with them. We shall be concerned solely with the question of what, as a plain matter of history, He believed and taught.

THE PROBLEM OF OBJECTIVITY

Before embarking upon the subject it seems necessary to say something about the writer's personal standpoint, and the vexed problem of historical objectivity. I shall try to the utmost of my powers to deal with this subject objectively; but I fully realize that this is a matter of the utmost difficulty for anyone who professes to be a Christian. However scrupulously he may try to isolate his study from all extraneous considerations, the Christian knows perfectly well that his conclusions are likely to carry with them far-reaching implications. If, for instance, he finds that the traditional Christian view is right, and that our Lord taught that the Scriptures were of divine authorship, he will then be faced with the grave choice either of accepting the Old Testament *in toto* as true and authoritative, or else of rejecting His authority as a wholly dependable teacher. The clarification of the one issue will lead to the sharper definition of another. He will be forced to ask himself *in what sense* he attributes authority to the One in whom he believes. If, on the other hand, he should find that Christ taught some view other

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than that traditionally ascribed to Him, it will still have the profoundest bearing upon his thought and life. For there lies a whole world of theological difference between a view of Scripture that requires divine authorship and all views that require something less. There lies a whole world of devotional difference between the attitude of entire submission to the teaching

of Scripture and an attitude of critical judgment. No Christian can be unaffected by these tremendous considerations, and I myself make no claim to be immune. I freely acknowledge that my whole life is bound up in the answers to which these studies may lead; indeed, I believe that the very future of the Christian Church is bound up in the answers to which its teachers ultimately come on these questions. I do not believe that any Christian who understands the issues involved can be wholly objective. He is bound every now and again to glance up furtively from his studies to see where his conclusions are leading him, and when he sees some fearful precipice ahead, he is bound most earnestly to seek to evade the danger — if he honestly can. Bishop Gore is typical of many who have confessed to the struggle of mind and conscience that has been involved in the consideration of this matter. He said: ‘I have very often in my own conscience reviewed this matter of our Lord’s language about the Old Testament, and have sought honestly to ask myself whether He forces me into a corner.’¹ Our only hope of approximating to objectivity is by bringing our own prejudices and vested interests out into the open and facing them as honestly as we can. Then, at least, we know where to be on our guard and when to be ready to make compensation. We shall then, of course, be in danger of over-compensation; but at least this is less likely to be harmful than concealed and unconscious prejudice, hidden beneath an arrogant and self-deceiving label of ‘scientific objectivity’.

In preparing this paper, I have been conscious of threats to truly objective thinking from two different directions. On the one hand, as far as fundamental doctrine is concerned, I realize that for a good many years I have based my life and thought upon the belief that our Lord was a wholly dependable Teacher and that He had taught us to believe in the truth and authority of the Scriptures. To surrender this belief would involve a vast upheaval, and I might well be subconsciously unwilling to face evidence that would involve such a result. In view of this great

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vested interest, I have tried earnestly to look for flaws in my previous reasoning and scrupulously to avoid saying more than the evidence demands. On the other hand, in the matter of biblical interpretation I have been conscious of a different danger. I have little love for interpretations just because they are either literal or merely traditional. Furthermore, I, like Bishop Gore, have a constitutional dislike of being driven into a corner. When, therefore, it comes to a consideration of such a matter as the interpretation of the book of Jonah, I find a strong pull in the anti-traditional direction. Not only do I instinctively recoil from any conclusion that would inseparably tie up the truth of the Christian faith with an acceptance of the book of Jonah as history, but I also realize that much of the Bible is non-literal in form: it abounds in poetry and parable and symbol. When, therefore, I find learned scholars earnestly arguing that Jonah was never intended to be regarded as history, my inclination is to believe them. And when I come to the study of our Lord’s teaching on the matter, I find myself anxious to see His concurrence in this view. Here is a threat to objectivity, and a danger to be guarded against. It may be that our Lord’s teaching will give encouragement to a non-historical interpretation, but it may point precisely in the opposite direction. Wishful thinking is no guide. Wishful thinking must submit to the logic of sheer evidence.

¹ *The Doctrine of the Infallible Book*, S.C.M., 1924, p.27.

METHOD OF STUDY

Now as to procedure. At the risk of appearing somewhat naïve, I am going to extract evidence from all the Gospels and from all parts of the Gospels without discrimination. I fully recognize that to some people certain parts of the Gospels will have less value as historical evidence than others. I personally believe that the Gospel-writers were guided by the Holy Spirit to write as they did and that they have given us reliable historical records throughout, but no such exalted view of the historical worth of the Gospel records is in the least essential to our argument. Provided that we avoid an almost total scepticism with regard to the Gospels (which seems scarcely consistent for a Christian and scarcely reasonable even for an unbeliever), we can at this stage of the argument allow a great variety of critical conclusions. What one critic will allow and another refuse seems usually to be heavily influenced either by subjective considerations or by the exigencies of some hypothesis for which there is no semblance of demonstrative evidence. To embark upon a critical discus-

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sion of each passage would be likely to prove as inconclusive as it was laborious. All we ask is that the student should accept the truth of the Gospel picture in general outline. If he wishes he can then make his own subtractions according to the best of his critical judgment, but we make so bold as to think that, using fair methods, such subtractions will not affect the final result until the Gospel picture of Christ has been disfigured beyond recognition. And even then the result will not be contrary to our conclusions, it will merely be uncertain through lack of evidence.

When we turn to the teaching of our Lord as recorded in the Gospels, we have a wealth of relevant material coming from all four Gospels and from all the four major strata — Mark, Q, special Matthew, special Luke — of the synoptic Gospels. We are not confined simply to two or three key statements, but we have a host of quotations and allusions thrown up spontaneously from a great variety of situations, and these are often the more telling for revealing His basic assumptions rather than His specific teachings. We can hear Christ preaching to the multitude and instructing disciples, refuting opponents and answering enquirers; we can hear Him in His private conflict with the tempter at the beginning of the ministry and in His final instructions prior to the ascension. As we proceed it will, I believe, become clear that, throughout the whole range of the material, His attitude is consistent and unchanging. We shall examine in turn His attitude to the truth of the history, to the authority of the teaching and to the inspiration of the writing. As the evidence is assembled, it will, I believe, lead us to a firm and objective historical conclusion. We shall see that to Christ the Old Testament was true, authoritative, inspired. To Him the God of the Old Testament was the living God and the teaching of the Old Testament was the teaching of the living God. To Him,² what Scripture said, God said.

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II. THE TRUTH OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

Let us examine then, first of all, His attitude to the historical narratives of the Old Testament. He consistently treats them as straightforward records of facts. We have references to: Abel

² Here I echo a phrase of B. B. Warfield (*Revelation and Inspiration*, O.U.P. New York. 1927. p. 92).

(Lk. xi. 51), Noah (Mt. xxiv. 37-39; Lk. xvii. 26, 27), Abraham (Jn. viii. 56), the institution of circumcision (Jn. vii. 22; cf. Gn. xvii. 10-12; Lv. xii. 3), Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt. x. 15, xi. 23, 24; Lk. x. 12), Lot (Lk. xvii. 28-32), Isaac and Jacob (Mt. viii. 11; Lk. xiii. 28), the manna (Jn. vi. 31, 49, 58), the wilderness serpent (Jn. iii. 14), David eating the shewbread (Mt. xii. 3, 4; Mk. ii. 25, 26; Lk. vi. 3, 4) and as a Psalm-writer (Mt. xxii. 43; Mk. xii. 36; Lk. xx. 42), Solomon (Mt. vi. 29, xii. 42; Lk. xi. 31, xii. 27), Elijah (Lk. iv. 25, 26), Elisha (Lk. iv. 27), Jonah (Mt. xii. 39-41; Lk. xi. 29, 30, 32), Zachariah (Lk. xi. 51). This last passage brings out His sense of the unity of history and His grasp of its wide sweep. His eye surveys the whole course of history from 'the foundation of the world' to 'this generation'. There are repeated references to Moses as the giver of the law (Mt. viii. 4, xix. 8; Mk. i. 44, vii. 10, x. 5, xii. 26; Lk. v. 14, xx. 37; Jn. v. 46, vii. 19); the sufferings of the prophets are also mentioned frequently (Mt. v. 12, xiii. 57, xxi. 34-36, xxiii. 29-37; Mk. vi. 4 (cf. Lk. iv. 24; Jn. iv. 44), xii. 2-5; Lk. vi. 23, xi. 47-51, xiii. 34, xx. 10-12); and there is a reference to the popularity of the false prophets (Lk. vi. 26). He sets the stamp of His approval on passages in Gn. i and ii (Mt. xix. 4, 5; Mk. x. 6-8.)

Although these quotations are taken by our Lord more or less at random from different parts of the Old Testament and some periods of the history are covered more fully than others, it is evident that He was familiar with most of our Old Testament and that He treated it all equally as history. Curiously enough, the narratives that proved least acceptable to what was known a generation or two ago as 'the modern mind' are the very ones that He seemed most fond of choosing for His illustrations.

THE POSSIBILITY OF NON-LITERAL INTERPRETATION

It is of course arguable that our Lord's use of the Old Testament stories does not of necessity imply that He regarded them all as unimpeachable history. It is perfectly possible to use avowed legends and allegories to illustrate spiritual truth. The stories of Ulysses and the Sirens or Christian and Doubting Castle may

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quite properly be used as illustrations of spiritual truth without implying a belief in their historicity. None the less, despite this theoretical possibility, a review of the way in which our Lord in practice used these narratives, seems decisively to forbid such a conclusion. In some of the passages quoted, while there is no evidence to suggest that our Lord understood them in any but a literal way, a literal meaning is not essential to the force of the passage. The references to the ordinance of monogamy 'from the beginning of creation', for instance, do not seem to necessitate a literal interpretation of chapters one and two of Genesis for their validity (Mk. x. 2ff., cf. Mt. xix. 3ff.). Seldom can a non-literal meaning be applied without some loss of vividness and effectiveness, but there would be no essential loss in meaning if the injunction 'offer ... the things which Moses commanded' (Mk. i. 44; cf. Mt. viii. 4; Lk. v. 14) were to be read 'offer the things which the law of Moses commands'; or if for 'Moses said, Honour thy father...' (Mk. vii. 10) we were to read 'The law of Moses says, Honour thy father...' The reference to 'Solomon in all his glory' would be as graphic of a legendary figure as of a historical one.

Moses for the hardness of their hearts allowing divorce is perhaps a borderline case (Mt. xix. 8; Mk. x. 5). As it stands it vividly recalls the rebellious Israelites of the wilderness

wanderings. It still makes good sense if the permission is referred simply to the law without reference to the person of the law-giver, but the saying loses some of its force, and one cannot help feeling that the words are badly chosen if the impersonal law is thus gratuitously personalized. Similarly with the solemn words of Lk. xiii. 28 (cf. Mt. viii. 11): 'There shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and yourselves cast forth without'. It would make good sense to substitute for 'Abraham... Isaac... Jacob, and... the prophets' the simple expression 'the righteous'. But though our Lord could have spoken in that way, He did not in fact do so, and there can be little reasonable doubt that He intended His hearers literally to understand that they would see the three patriarchs in heaven. As a mere picture of salvation, the value of the reference to the wilderness serpent (Jn. iii. 14) would be unimpaired even if its historical basis were destroyed, but nevertheless something is lost if the close historical parallelism is undermined. Concrete saving acts of God were wrought upon the perishing in the wilderness church through the uplifting of the brazen serpent,

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and concrete saving acts of God will be wrought upon the perishing in the New Testament age through the uplifted Son of Man. The type was a picture, but it was not a mere picture. It was a real participation in God's salvation through faith, and to evaporate the type into a mere legend is certainly to weaken it. There is nothing to suggest that our Lord had any such thought.

There are certain cases where it might conceivably be felt that the *ad hominem* element in the context justifies us in not pressing the historical argument too far. For instance, our Lord's reference to the fathers who 'did eat the manna in the wilderness, and they died' (Jn. vi. 49) was provoked by the multitude's own request for a sign, like the sign of the wilderness manna. It is conceivable that our Lord might have taken up this request and turned the historical reference to His own purposes — pointing out the difference between the temporary effects of the manna and the eternal effects of the living bread from heaven — even if He had not Himself believed it to be true. It is conceivable, but there is no evidence for it, and it is difficult to avoid a feeling that it would have been neither necessary, nor quite honest, to have argued thus from a false premise.

Again the passage concerning circumcision and the sabbath (Jn. vii. 19-24) appears to have an *ad hominem* element. Our Lord is not concerned to draw lessons from history, but rather to provoke particular people to honest thought about a pressing problem of ethics. He is showing the dishonesty of Jewish objections to His sabbath-day healing by pointing out their own inconsistencies with regard to sabbath observances. There is no reason to think that our Lord did not believe both that the law had been given by Moses and that circumcision also was of divine origin, but, since the passage is not primarily concerned with history, but with ethics, we are not justified in placing great weight on the value of this passage as a witness to our Lord's belief in the historicity of the Pentateuch.

The reference to David eating the shewbread (Mt. xii. 3; Mk. ii. 25; Lk. vi. 3) would make perfectly good sense as an *ad hominem* argument, provided that the Pharisees believed in the divine authority both of the sabbath-command of the Torah and of the historical record of the 'former prophets'. The passage would make perfectly good sense even if our Lord had not shared their beliefs. But again there is no reason at all to think that our Lord regarded the

narrative as anything but straightforward history. The chief interest of the passage lies in the fact that our Lord had sufficient confidence in the book of Samuel to use

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it as an authoritative interpreter of the Mosaic Law, and that, since they do not seem to have challenged His interpretation, His opponents believed the same.

The reference to David as the author of Ps. cx comes in a passage which is by no means easy to interpret (see Mt. xxii. 41ff., Mk. xii. 35ff., Lk. xx. 41ff.). But this much at least is clear. The passage absolutely depends upon the Davidic authorship of the Psalm for its sense. It would not make sense to say: 'How say the scribes that the Christ is the Son of David? The psalmist said in the Holy Spirit, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I put thine enemies under thy feet. The psalmist himself calleth him Lord; and whence then is he his son?' Now surely Jesus was not wishing to deny the dictum of the scribes that the Christ was son of David. But if He accepts both the Davidic sonship and the lordship of the Messiah, and then proceeds to base His argument upon a premise that He knows to be false, the saying is reduced to a trivial conundrum designed purely for the public humiliation of His opponents. However we interpret this passage, we cannot be justified in reducing it to triviality. Our Lord is speaking on the very eve of His condemnation as a false Christ, and He is engaged upon serious teaching as to what Messiahship means.

PASSAGES REQUIRING TO BE TAKEN AS HISTORY

So far we have examined the passages that might individually seem patient of a non-historical interpretation. Confessedly the search for such non-historical interpretations carries less and less conviction as the investigation is prolonged. It is one thing to say that it is possible. It is quite another thing to say that it is probable. As the matter is pursued there is a growing sense that these interpretations are artificial and unsupported by evidence. The impression gains in strength that our Lord understood the Bible stories in a natural way and that His teaching should be taken quite straightforwardly. This impression is strongly reinforced when we come to a further collection of passages where the historical truth of the saying seems to be essential to its validity.

While I strongly deprecate the placing of great weight upon a single passage, it is difficult to deny that the words of T. T. Perowne on Mt. xii. 41 are applicable to a number of passages made use of in the Gospels. Our Lord says, 'The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall

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condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here.' Perowne comments:

'Is it possible to understand a reference like this on the non-historic theory of the book of Jonah? The future Judge is speaking words of solemn warning to those who shall hereafter stand convicted at His bar. Intensely real He would make the scene in anticipation to them, as it was real, as if then present, to Himself. And yet we are to suppose Him to say that imaginary persons who at the imaginary preaching of an imaginary prophet repented

in imagination, shall rise up in that day and condemn the actual impenitence of those His actual hearers.’³

It may not be impossible to take this as midrash or allegory, yet I find it most difficult to avoid the conclusion that this and several other passages are deprived of their force if their historical basis is removed, and in all honesty I can ‘see no hint that our Lord intended Himself to be taken anything but literally. This conclusion is reinforced by the immediate juxtaposition in this passage (Mt. xii. 42) of the visit of the Queen of the South as a strictly parallel illustration. To regard the book of Jonah as intentional parable, or allegory, or historical fiction may be plausible enough; but we have not yet got that far with the book of Kings!

‘As were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man’ (Mt. xxiv. 37) is very similar. The context is most solemn. Our Lord has introduced his statement with the tremendous assertion, ‘Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away’. Then, drawing a vivid picture of the everyday life of those who lived in the days before the flood, He says: ‘so shall be the coming of the Son of man.’ It is quite true that a popular preacher may play upon the emotions of his hearers by painting a graphic and moving picture of scenes which are vowedly fictitious, and, if he should round off such an account with a dramatic, ‘And the same will happen to you!’, it might indeed seem very powerful. But really it is just colourful verbiage unless it is throwing light upon some other statement that carries with it some intrinsic authority. Our Lord is quite clearly not using a colourful illustration to make His own *ipse dixit* more effective. He is appealing to the dreadful acts of God recorded in Holy Scripture, which both He and His hearers know to be of divine authority, as a warning of what will

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happen. When recalling the judgment upon the cities of the plain, our Lord did not say, ‘Remember the story about Lot’s wife,’ He said, ‘Remember Lot’s wife’ (Lk. xvii. 32), i.e., ‘remember what happened to her.’ To Capernaum He uttered a warning based on the same terrible act of judgment. ‘If the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained until this day. Howbeit I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee’ (Mt. xi. 23, 24). Again, with encouragements and warnings about more immediate coming events, historical happenings of the past are used as a foundation for future expectations. Looking over the whole sweep of biblical history from the first book of the Hebrew canon to the last. He says, ‘that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zachariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary: yea, I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation’ (Lk. xi. 50f.). The issue of Old Testament history was to find its fearful consummation in the events of A.D. 70. And it was the divine aid given to the persecuted prophets in earlier times that was to be the stay of persecuted disciples. ‘Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you’ (Mt. v. 12).

When our Lord said, ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day... Before Abraham was, I am’ (Jn. viii. 56ff.), they took up stones to cast at Him. But if Abraham and the messianic promise were not historical, these sayings were in fact meaningless. At Nazareth ‘they were

³ *Obadiah and Jonah*, Cambridge Bible for Schools, 1894, p. 51.

all filled with wrath... and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong' (Lk. iv. 28, 29). But His remarks about the commission of Elijah to Sidon and of Elisha to Syria (Lk. iv. 25-27) had no validity unless these things really happened.

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III. THE AUTHORITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES

Now we must examine our Lord's use of the Old Testament as the court of appeal in matters of controversy. Alike with Pharisee and Sadducee He does not call in question their appeal to Scripture; rather He rebukes them for their failure to study it sufficiently profoundly. Even the seemingly wasteful expenditure of time and effort by the Pharisees on detailed legal formulation that resulted from their study of the Torah He commends rather than condemns. 'These ought ye to have done,' He says. Their mistake was not that they applied the law too rigorously, but that they left undone the weightier matters of the law (Mt. xxiii. 23). Matthew gives two most remarkable instances of this teaching — so remarkable that it is unlikely that the sayings were invented, particularly after Gentiles had gained full recognition in the Church. The first is the passage which precedes the 'It was said to them of old time... but I say unto you...' section of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished. *Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.* For I say unto you, that except your righteousness, shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven' (Mt. v. 17-20). Jesus taught His disciples the need for obedience to the law, first and foremost in spirit, but also in letter.

The second passage is even more remarkable: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe: but do not ye after their works' (Mt. xxiii. 2, 3). To Jesus scribal lore was valuable if linked with spiritual understanding: 'every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old' (Mt. xiii. 52). There is no hint of a belittling of Old Testament teaching. Rightly understood that teaching was the 'Word' and 'Commandment' of God. Wilful spiritual

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obtuseness and the displacement of Scripture by 'tradition' (mere 'precepts of men') were the twin evils which made that Word of none effect (Mt. xv. 1-9; Mk. vii. 1-13). Compare Jn. v. 39-47, where the Jews who did not believe, who would not come to Jesus for life, who had not the love of God in them, are shown to have searched the Scriptures in vain. They had set their hope on Moses, but Moses himself proved to be their accuser. They did not really in their hearts believe him — hence their unbelief towards Jesus. 'For,' He said, 'he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?' (46, 47). Faith, love and a right attitude of will are the key to an understanding of Moses and of Christ.

The Sadducees escape no more lightly. Their supposed rationality is met by the fierce and scathing denunciation, 'Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God' (Mt. xxii. 29; cf. Mk. xii. 24). Jesus had not been content with the knowledge of the letter of Scripture shown by the Pharisees and had been concerned that there should be genuine spiritual understanding. But in speaking to the Sadducees He makes it plain that such understanding does not come by a study of Scripture enlightened only by human reason; it comes through a knowledge of the Scriptures which has been illumined by the power of God. He concludes His answer to the problem of the future state of the much-married lady by a further appeal to the Bible: 'Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham...?' (Mt. xxii. 31, 32; cf. Mk. xii. 26; Lk. xx. 37).

THE RIGHT USE OF REASON

Jesus condemns neither minuteness of study nor the exercise of reason. His condemnation comes when the wickedness of men so perverts their reason or their methods of study that they become blind to the inner principles of the divine revelation. He Himself knew how to stimulate the exercise of reason and repeatedly He encouraged His hearers to go beneath the externals of Scripture language and think out its underlying principles. This comes out clearly in His exposition of 'Thou shalt not kill' and 'Thou shalt not commit adultery'. It is also most powerfully displayed in His two quotations of Hosea's 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice' (Ho. vi. 6; Mt. ix. 13, xii. 7). In two quite different contexts, neither of which has any direct reference to sacrifice (one relating to His practice of consorting with tax-collectors and

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the other to sabbath-observance) He rebukes the Pharisees for failure to grasp the implications of Hosea's words. He demands more thought, not less: but it must be thought conducted in a humble and teachable spirit directed by God Himself. This need for divine instruction is brought out in Jn. vi. 45, where He refers to the Old Testament itself as already looking forward to such a God-given spiritual illumination. Quoting Is. liv. 13 He says, 'It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God'. He requires that study and thought be applied to the records objectively given, but this study must be conducted under the subjective influence of Him who gave them.

A GUIDE TO ETHICS

We see the same conclusion arising out of His use of the Old Testament as a guide in matters of ethics. The Old Testament provides objective moral standards which demand the obedience of our inmost hearts. The answer to the young man who enquired how to gain eternal life is given in the form of a series of quotations from the Ten Commandments, together with the injunction from Leviticus, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mt. xix. 18, 19; cf. Mk. x. 19; Lk. xviii. 20).

When the lawyer asked the question, 'Which is the great commandment in the law?', He replied with two quotations from the Pentateuch: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' To

Him these two quotations sum up the teaching of the Old Testament. 'On these two commandments,' He says, 'hangeth the whole law, and the prophets' (Mt. xxii. 37-40; cf. Mk. xii. 29-31).

Note carefully that to our Lord these two commandments sum up, not the New Testament, but the Old. It is astonishing how many people think that these two commandments are the heart of the New Testament, forgetting that they stand in the law of Moses, dating back centuries before the time of Christ. According to our Lord they are the heart of the Old Testament. Or, to be more precise, they are the heart of the Old Testament law. There is no higher law than the Old Testament law as here expressed, and never can be. The New Testament does not reveal a higher *law*: it reveals the gospel. The demands of God's law had proved far beyond the reach of sinful men and it had brought only condemnation. The gospel was good news of salvation to

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the helpless and the condemned. It is extraordinary what a hold this utterly unbiblical notion of the contrariety of the two Testaments has obtained. We have had so much false teaching for so many years that even intelligent people often really believe that the two Testaments represent two irreconcilably opposed points of view; the Old Testament God being a God of wrath and the New Testament God a God of love. Such a view would have been repudiated by our Lord and by every New Testament writer with horror. To them the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are the same; in both He is a God of wrath and of love. The great difference between the Old and New Testament is that in the former the gospel (though by no means invisible) is veiled, whereas in the latter it is clearly revealed.

Thus, 'On these two (Old Testament) commandments,' He says, 'hangeth the whole law, and the prophets.'

In passing, it is perhaps worthwhile to point out that here, as also in Mt. vii. 12 in His description of the Golden Rule ('This is the law and the prophets '), He sets His seal upon the sacred writings considered as a unitary whole. Also the summary itself brings home forcibly the fact that within the Old Testament all its elements are not equally fundamental. Laws are a necessity of social life, but cases often arise where the law gives no specific ruling. He makes it clear that in such cases guidance is to be found, not in a multiplication of casuistical rules, but by appealing from the less fundamental principle to the more fundamental. In other words, He is simply saying once again that the mind of God is to be found by a spiritually-minded approach to the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the court of appeal, but their study must be prompted by a love for God and man.

ACCOMMODATION TO THE BELIEFS OF HIS HEARERS?

The use of Scripture as a court of appeal in controversy is undoubted, but it again suggests the possibility that Jesus is simply taking His contemporaries on their own ground without committing Himself to the correctness of their premises. In other words, that again we have *ad hominem* arguments, aimed more at discrediting His opponents than laying foundations on which to build eternal truth. Indeed may we not go even further, and suggest that (since His aim was the positive one of leading His contemporaries forward from their valuable, though

imperfect, Old Testament conceptions of the character of God) He deliberately refrained from unsettling them by questioning their con-

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ception of the inspiration of their Scriptures, allowing the gentler processes of passing time gradually to bring home to them the imperfect character of what they had hitherto revered?

Plausible though this is, it seems impossible to accept it as being Christ's real view. In other respects He does not show Himself unduly sensitive about undermining current beliefs. He is not slow to denounce Pharisaic traditionalism; He is not slow to repudiate nationalist conceptions of messiahship; He is prepared to face the cross for defying current misconceptions; He is prepared to play a part which He must have realized would accentuate the exclusiveness of the Jewish leaders and so precipitate, at least in some degree, His country's fatal clash with Rome. Surely He would have been prepared to explain clearly the mingling of divine truth and human error in the Bible, if such He had known to exist. As I study the Gospel narratives I become more and more convinced that the notion that our Lord was fully aware that the view of Holy Scripture current in His day was erroneous, and that He deliberately accommodated His teaching to the beliefs of His hearers, will not square with the facts. His use of the Old Testament seems altogether too insistent and positive and extreme. What He actually says is, 'The scripture cannot be broken' (Jn. x. 35); 'One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law' (Mt. v. 18); 'It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one tittle of the law to fall' (Lk. xvi. 17). There is a tremendous moral earnestness when He says to the Pharisees, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men... Full well do ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition... making void the word of God' (Mk. vii. 6-13). It is no mere debating point that makes Him say to the Sadducees, 'Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures' (Mt. xxii. 29). When speaking of the irretrievable separation in the after-world, He puts into the mouth of Abraham these words, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them... If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead' (Lk. xvi. 29-31). As we have already seen, when He quotes instances of the fearful judgments of God, He does so to bring home the seriousness of contemporary issues.

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THE TEMPTATION

The suggestion that His use of the Old Testament is of an *ad hominem* nature breaks down most obviously in the account of the temptation. There He introduces each of His three answers by the all-powerful formula, 'It is written' (Mt. iv. 4ff.; Lk. iv. 4ff.). Are we asked to believe that the *homo* here concerned would be content to submit to rebuttal by an argument based on a false premise! Whether the devil is regarded as personal or impersonal, it is equally clear that Jesus understood 'It is written' to be equivalent to 'God says'. There is a grand and solid objectivity about the perfect tense γέγραπται 'it stands written', 'here is the permanent, unchangeable witness of the Eternal God, committed to writing for our instruction'. Such it appears to have been to Jesus' inmost soul, quite apart from the convenience of the standpoint to Him in controversy. In the hour of utmost crisis and at the moment of death words of Scripture come to His lips: 'My God, my God, why hast thou

forsaken me?’ (Ps. xxii. 1; Mt. xxvii. 46; Mk. xv. 34), ‘Into thy hands I commend my spirit’ (Ps. xxxi. 5; Lk. xxiii. 46).

POST-RESURRECTION TEACHING

Any lingering doubts that we might have as to the fundamental importance of the Old Testament to Jesus are dispelled by a consideration of His post-resurrection teaching. Between His resurrection and ascension Jesus transcended human limitations very much more obviously than before, and then, if at any time during His earthly ministry, we must believe that He had access to the mind of God. During the post-resurrection period He gave His final instructions to the leaders of the embryo Church and emphasized again to their rapidly developing understanding the fundamentals on which the Church was to be built. It would appear from Luke’s account that the main burden of this teaching was an exposition of the Old Testament. Tracing through ‘all the scriptures’, ‘beginning from Moses and all the prophets’, He showed from each of the three collections of sacred writings—the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms — how they were fulfilled in Him (Lk. xxiv. 25-47). At first it seems tantalizing that Luke should speak of these expositions only in general terms, when a detailed account of our Lord’s teaching would have proved so interesting to us; but is it not probable that Luke has preserved the main ingredients of His teaching — not in the Gospel, but

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in Acts? In the earliest years of the Church its members were almost all Jews and its message was being presented almost entirely to Jews, with the result that their chief preoccupation was to demonstrate that the Old Testament found its true fulfilment in Jesus. It can scarcely be doubted that the main outline of their apologetic would be derived from what they had learnt from their risen Master. (On this point see the helpful treatment in C. H. Dodd’s recent book *According to the Scriptures*, Nisbet 1952, pp. 109f.) Thus the general apostolic use of Scripture, and particularly the records of the early chapters of Acts, must be regarded as important witnesses to our Lord’s own teaching. Could we pursue this matter in detail, it would be evident that in general the teaching of the New Testament writers underlines and reinforces the teaching of Christ.

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IV. THE INSPIRATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT WRITINGS

Thus far we have seen how our Lord believed and taught the truth of the Old Testament history, and we have seen how solemnly and earnestly He used the Scriptures as the final, divine authority in matters of faith and conduct. Now we go a stage further to see how He regarded the very writings themselves as being inspired. To Him, Moses, the prophets, David and the other Scripture-writers were truly inspired men with a message given by the Spirit of God, but there is no trace of the modern idea that the men were inspired but not the writings. Rather, if anything, might one infer the reverse. The Old Testament makes no attempt to gloss over the sins and errors of its saints. The greatest of them, like Moses and David, are convicted of grievous sin, and our Lord would have had no desire to whitewash their characters. But their *writings* come in a different category.

Their writings are authoritative. This, however, is not by reason of the authority of the human author, but because God is regarded as the ultimate author. The authors are real authors there is no idea of a mechanical dictation — yet none the less it was God's Spirit who was speaking through them, and it is the divine authorship which gives them their importance. Our Lord can preface a quotation of Scripture by 'Moses said' (Mk. vii. 10), 'well did Isaiah prophesy' (Mk. vii. 6; cf. Mt. xiii. 14), 'David himself said in the Holy Spirit' (Mk. xii. 36); He can refer to the abomination of desolation, 'which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet' (Mt. xxiv. 15, R.V. mg.). But, as is clear from the context, the injunctions 'Honour thy father and thy mother' and 'He that speaketh evil of father or mother, let him die the death', do not derive their authority from the fact that Moses uttered them, but because they are commandments of God. Without the original 'God spake these words' or 'The Lord said unto Moses', the expression 'Moses said' would have had no force. The words of Isaiah and Daniel likewise gain their authority because they are prophets, the essence of prophecy being that the prophet speaks God's words, or (more vividly) God speaks *through* the prophet. David (who, incidentally, is actually called a 'prophet' in the very first Christian address delivered after the ascension — Acts ii. 30) is expressly said by our Lord to have spoken 'in the Holy Spirit'.

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FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY

Our Lord's references to the necessity for the fulfilment of the prophecies of Scripture are numerous. Here we touch upon a difficult subject which leads to some knotty exegetical problems. But these exegetical problems serve only to throw into stronger relief the implied God-giveness of the whole body of prophetic writings which by divine necessity must be fulfilled. The fact that the correspondence between prophecy and fulfilment is by no means obvious on the surface makes the conviction that these ancient writings contain the foreshadowing of present events the more remarkable. Our Lord not only sees the fulfilment of prophecy in events that have already taken place, but He is possessed of a sense of divine predestination in the events that lie ahead. These things must assuredly come to pass in order that the Scriptures may be fulfilled. Here are the more important references to His teaching about the fulfilment of prophecy:

'Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears' (Lk. iv. 21). 'This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face... '(Mt. xi. 10; cf. Lk. vii. 27). 'Elijah indeed cometh first, and restoreth all things: and how is it written of the Son of man, that he should suffer many things and be set at nought? But I say unto you, that Elijah is come, and they have also done unto him whatsoever they listed, even as it is written of him' (Mk. ix. 12, 13). 'Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written by the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man. For he shall be delivered up unto the Gentiles... and they shall scourge and kill him: and the third day he shall rise again' (Lk. xviii. 31-33). 'These are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled' (Lk. xxi. 22). 'The Son of man goeth, even as it is written of him ...' (Mt. xxvi. 24; Mk. xiv. 21). 'I say unto you, that this which is written must be fulfilled in me, And he was reckoned with transgressors: for that which concerneth me hath fulfilment' (so R.V. translates τέλος in Lk. xxii. 37). 'All ye shall be offended in me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd...' (Mt. xxvi. 31; cf. Mk. xiv. 27). 'Or thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and he shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? ... all this is come to pass, that the scriptures of

the prophets might be fulfilled' (Mt. xxvi. 53-56; cf. Mk. xiv. 49). 'O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!

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Behoved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself' (Lk. xxiv. 25-27). 'These are my words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, how that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their mind, that they might understand the scriptures; and he said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem' (Lk. xxiv. 44-47). 'The scriptures... bear witness of me;... if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?' (Jn. v. 39-47). 'I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth my bread lifted up his heel against me' (Jn. xiii. 18). 'That the word may be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause' (Jn. xv. 25). 'Not one of them perished, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled' (in. xvii. 12).

Our Lord's acceptance of the divine character of the prophetic Scriptures is clear and full and emphatic.

'SCRIPTURE' AND VERBAL INSPIRATION

Though in any balanced statement of the doctrine of biblical inspiration it is most important to remember how our Lord acknowledged the real authorship of the human writers, yet it is also important to note carefully that His references to human authorship are quite secondary. Often He is content to speak simply of 'scripture', God being the implied author. Here are some of the references: 'Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears...' (Lk. iv. 21). 'Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected...' (Mt. xxi. 42; cf. Mk. xii. 10; Lk. xx. 17). 'How then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?' (Mt. xxvi. 54). 'The scriptures bear witness of me' (Jn. v. 39). 'He that believeth on me, as the scripture bath said...' (Jn. vii. 38).

'The Scriptures' collectively set forth, and each individual 'Scripture' sets forth, the teaching of God. Similarly, for Him to say (as He does in so many other places) 'Have ye not read...?' is equivalent to 'Do you not know that God has said...?'

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(cf. Mt. xii. 3, xix. 4, xxi. 16, xxii. 31; Mk. ii. 25, xii. 10, 26; Lk. vi. 3). The same force is to be given to the word *γέγραπται*, 'It is written', already mentioned in connection with the temptation, but used often at other times (Mt. xi. 10, xxi. 13, xxvi. 24, 31; Mk. ix. 12, 13, xi. 17, xiv. 21, 27; Lk. vii. 27, xix. 46). The inspiration implied by these phrases is not applied only to oracular prophetic utterances but to all parts of Scripture without discrimination — to history, to laws, to psalms, to prophecies.

This witness of our Lord to the inspiration of the writings demands specially careful attention, because, wittingly or unwittingly, it is continually being contradicted by Christian writers. It often takes the form of a repudiation of the whole notion of verbal inspiration as obviously outmoded, or even of a denial that in a formal sense there is any difference between the inspiration of the Bible and other great literature. A doctrine of verbal inspiration plainly needs careful statement, but that some sort of verbal inspiration is taught by Christ is clear, seeing that it is to the writings rather than to the writers that He ascribes authority. Writings are made up of words, therefore there must be some form of word-inspiration. Scripture is Scripture to Christ because it has as its primary author God — in a way which other writing has not.

INTERCHANGEABILITY OF 'SCRIPTURE' AND 'GOD'

One further point of extreme interest gives a final illustration of this notion of the divine character of Scripture. It arises from the remarkable interchangeability of the terms 'God' and 'scripture' in certain New Testament passages. We find cases where 'scripture' is used when one would expect 'God', and 'God' is used when one would expect 'scripture'. Rom. ix. 17 reads, 'The scripture saith unto Pharaoh, For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might shew in thee my power'. This means simply, 'In the scripture narrative, God says to Pharaoh', but 'scripture' has been personalized and allowed to replace 'God'. Similarly in Gal. iii. 8 it says, 'The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham'. An instance of the reverse process, where an Old Testament sentence which in its context is not a statement by God, is referred directly to God as its author, is to be found in Mt. xix. 4, 5, where our Lord says, 'He which made them... said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother'. The quotation is from Gn. ii. 24, which in

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the context is not a statement attributed to God but is simply a comment introduced into the course of the narrative by the writer of Genesis. The natural use would be, 'Scripture said, For this cause...', but the actual use is, 'He which made them (i.e. God) said...' So truly is God regarded as the author of scriptural statements that in certain contexts 'God' and 'scripture' have become interchangeable. Thus to our Lord the Old Testament is true as to its history, it is of divine authority, and its very writings are inspired by God Himself.

ALLUSIONS TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

We have now covered the ground sufficiently to give a clear idea of our Lord's view of Scripture, but the citation of a number of outstanding references cannot of itself convey the full weight of the evidence, for there must be added the many allusions which slip out in the course of His teaching. It would take too long to examine these one by one since the total number of references is very large, and the further evidence is not required to prove a case already adequately established, but it is perhaps worthwhile just to mention a few of the more interesting references.

There are three peculiar to Mark. 'He putteth forth the sickle, because the harvest is come' (Mk. iv. 29) recalls Joel iii. 13; 'having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not?' (Mk.

viii. 18) is from Je. v. 21; and ‘their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched’ (Mk. ix. 48) is from Is. lxvi. 24. In the Sermon on the Mount there are a number of Old Testament echoes. The phrase ‘the pure in heart’, and the sentence ‘the meek shall inherit the earth’ are not original to Jesus, but come from the Old Testament (Ps. lxxiii. 1, xxxvii. 11). ‘Depart from me, ye that work iniquity’ (Mt. vii. 23; cf. Lk. xiii. 27) is Ps. vi. 8. ‘Children shall rise up against parents...’ (Mt. x. 21, 35; Mk. xiii. 12; cf. Lk. xii. 53) is Mi. vii. 6. In Mt. xviii. 15-20 we have one of our Lord’s very rare items of ecclesiastical legislation. The sentence ‘that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established’ comes from Dt. xix. 15. The parable of the wicked husbandmen (Mt. xxi. 33-41; Mk. xii. 1-9; Lk. xx. 9-16) recalls Is. v. The Mount of Olives discourse (Mt. xxiv; Mk. xiii; Lk. xxi) is full of Old Testament language. Lk. xix. 44, ‘(they) shall dash thee to the ground, and thy children within thee’ echoes that fiercest of imprecatory psalms, Ps. cxxxvii.

The total impression that these and many other allusions in the Gospels give is that the mind of Christ is saturated with the

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Old Testament and that, as He speaks, there flows out perfectly naturally a complete range of uses varying from direct verbal quotation to an unconscious utilization of scraps of Old Testament phraseology. There is no trace of an artificial quotation of Scripture as a matter of pious habit, but His mind is so steeped in both the words and principles of Scripture that quotation and allusion spring to His lips naturally and appositely in all sorts of different circumstances.

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V. OBJECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

But is there not another side to this question? Did not our Lord at times qualify or even abrogate some of the Old Testament’s teaching? Did He not on various occasions treat the Scriptures in a much freer way than this summary would suggest — in a way that revealed a quietly critical element in His approach to them? I know of four examples of our Lord’s teaching that have been used to illustrate the thesis that He criticized, and so by implication repudiated, parts of the Old Testament. Of these one is of primary importance; the other three are quite secondary in comparison and we shall deal with them first.

THE SABBATH

Our Lord said, ‘The Son of man is lord even of the sabbath’ (Mk. ii. 28; cf. Mt. xii. 8; Lk. vi. 5). This hardly seems to merit comment, because it so obviously cannot seriously be used to illustrate a lower view of the Old Testament. The Pharisees had objected to the rubbing of the ears of corn. Quite the reverse of appealing away from Scripture, our Lord answers them by an appeal to Bible history, reminding them of what David did. He repudiates the petty traditions of the elders in favour of a sane and spiritually minded attention to the Old Testament. The passage is indeed significant, not for its lowered view of Scripture, but for the height of our Lord’s claims implied in it. It was God who gave the sabbath law, and Jesus claimed to possess God’s authority to define the limitations of that law.

SACRIFICE

Our Lord's twofold citation of Ho. vi. 6 (see p. 16 above): 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice', has been used as an example of His critical approach to the Old Testament in setting aside most important elements of Jewish ceremonial. I very much doubt whether Hosea's own words or our Lord's quotation of them contained or conveyed to those who heard any idea of a literal abrogation of sacrifice. Certainly the Gospel contexts suggest nothing of the kind, and such thoughts do not appear to have been seriously entertained by the apostles till some years after the ascension. At least they did not take their Master seriously or literally enough to abandon the sacrificial worship in Jerusa-

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lem. The biblical writers are by no means as literal as we normally are, and yet we should not misunderstand an impassioned clergyman who said: 'I want your spiritual devotion, not your money.' We should not expect to see church collections suddenly disappear! But be that as it may. Even if we take it entirely literally, it has still proved nothing at all. No Christian, not even the Seventh Day Adventist, believes that the Mosaic sacrificial system is now binding, yet the whole Christian Church for many centuries held the view that the Mosaic injunctions were truly given by God — but that many of them were temporary, until such time as they had been fulfilled in Christ. For the Son of God to abrogate a law of God is by no means to deny that it was first enacted by God.

'MAKING MEATS CLEAN'

Then there is the passage from Mk. vii. 18, 19: 'Perceive ye not, that whatsoever from without goeth into the man, it cannot defile him; because it goeth not into his heart, but into his belly, and goeth out into the draught? This he said, making all meats clean.' This has been used similarly as showing our Lord's abrogation of the distinction between clean and unclean animals. The passage is not without difficulties of text and exegesis, but let the current interpretation be willingly accepted — it too has no bearing on the question of the divine authorship of the Pentateuchal regulations. If the apostle Peter, after his vision of the great sheet let down from heaven (Acts x. 9-16), looked back and (quite rightly) saw in this saying an implicit, earlier abrogation of the distinction between clean and unclean foods, it involves no denial of the divine origin of the law that is now repealed.

'BUT I SAY UNTO YOU...'

Now let us consider the famous section of the Sermon on the Mount in which our Lord's sayings are contrasted with what was said to them of old time (Mt. v. 17-48). Christ used the language of loftiest authority, 'It was said... but I say...' This passage is often construed by superficial readers as being a repudiation of the 'barbarous' ethic of the Old Testament and a replacement of it by a new and contrasted Christian ethic. It is suggested that Christ was declaring the teaching of the Old Testament to be fundamentally wrong and was putting a new and true doctrine in its place. If this were a correct interpretation it would be remarkable enough as a claim to authority as a

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teacher, but in fact it is quite mistaken. He made, if possible, an even higher claim. He deliberately set the Old Testament on the highest pinnacle of authority and then proceeded to set Himself above it. He introduced the passage with the words:

‘Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.’

What our Lord did was not to negative any of the Old Testament commands but to show their full scope and to strip off current misinterpretations of them. Our Lord evidently did not Himself make it clear to His disciples that He intended the abrogation of Levitical sacrifices and all the paraphernalia of temple worship. It was left to St. Paul to bring into clear light the implications of His teaching and (even more important than His teaching) of His death and resurrection. It is certainly not to the Sermon on the Mount that we are to look for an abrogation of the Old Testament. Our Lord did not say ‘The Old Testament says, Thou shalt do no murder. I say, Thou mayest commit murder.’ What He did teach is that God does not restrict the commandment to the mere letter of the law, but that He disapproves of the hating spirit which leads to murder, and of lustful intentions which in God’s sight are equivalent to adultery.

DIVORCE

As His teaching on divorce (Mt. v. 31, 32; cf. xix. 3ff.; Mk. x. 2ff.; Lk. xvi. 18) is often regarded as an instance of our Lord giving to an Old Testament passage something less than divine authority, it may be worth while making a short digression to clear up a common confusion. The command of Moses in Dt. xxiv. 1 to write a bill of divorcement is one of the ‘statutes and judgments’ which ‘the LORD thy God commandeth thee to do’ (xxvi. 16). There is no good ground for thinking that either our Lord Himself or His questioner, in referring this command (or permission) to Moses, meant thereby to deny that it came from God.

There are two possible interpretations of our Lord’s teaching on this matter, and neither of them denies the divine origin of

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the Mosaic command. Either, the permission for divorce was a law for the spiritually immature Israel and the revocation was a new law for the spiritually more mature Church — that is, there were two different laws for two different sets of circumstances, and both were given by God. Or, the permission for divorce was a *law* — a law of Israel’s statute-book, designed to meet the practical needs of a very imperfect people; whereas the teaching concerning the indissolubility of marriage was an *ideal* — an ideal for mankind in general and for Christians in particular. This distinction between laws and ideals is a very simple one, yet it is very fundamental, and is often overlooked. No wise law-giver — least of all the all-wise

Law-Giver — would frame a law on the principle that hate is equivalent to murder, or lust to adultery. Law can deal only with overt acts, not with secret thoughts. A wise ideal and a wise law, though emanating from the same person, must of necessity be very different. The ideal will in a sense be far higher ‘than the law. It is this confusion between ideal and law or, in other words, between moral law and civil law, which leads the superficial reader to regard the Sermon on the Mount as a repudiation of the Old Testament when, in fact, it is explicitly stated to be a fulfilment of the law and prophets.

‘EYE FOR AN EYE’

Even His repudiation of the ‘eye for an eye’ principle, which comes from the Old Testament, cannot fairly be said to be a repudiation of what in its context the Old Testament taught. In Ex. xxi. 24, Lv. xxiv. 20 and Dt. xix. 21 we have laws given for the administration of public justice. The practice of private revenge and family feud was to be replaced by strictly fair and impartial public administration of justice. In our Lord’s day this excellent, if stern, principle of judicial retribution was being utilized as an excuse for the very thing that it was instituted to abolish, namely personal revenge. Our Lord gives no hint that He wishes to see the magistrate relaxing his important social function of witnessing to the majesty of the Law and to the sanctity of justice, but He does discourage His disciples from appealing to justice when it is for the merely selfish purpose of gaining their own rights.

‘HATE THINE ENEMY’

His final contrast again repudiates a misinterpretation of the Old Testament. The Old Testament had given the command, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour’. This had been misinterpreted as in-

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volving the corollary, ‘Thou shalt hate thine enemy.’ But of course in making this addition, which is not a quotation from the Old Testament, the popular teaching was giving it a meaning which is not implied in the context. Lv. xix. 18 was a command originally intended to embrace every member of the Israelite community, and the rest of the verse makes it clear that an Israelite was not to seek for vengeance or harbour grudges against any of his compatriots. ‘Love thy neighbour’ in the Levitical rule already implied ‘Love your enemies’, so that our Lord’s command is simply an extension to all mankind of instructions first given to a limited community.

CUMULATIVE EVIDENCE

It has been said with truth that the attempt to evade the evidence for our Lord’s teaching as to the God-givenness of Scripture is as futile as a mathematician’s attempt to prove that it is possible to dodge an avalanche.⁴ He may satisfy himself that the trajectory of each boulder is calculable and that an agile man could step out of the way of any one of them. So, taken one at a time, a perverse ingenuity may satisfy itself that it can find ways of disposing of many of

⁴ B. B. Warfield. *Op. cit.*, pp. 65f.

our Lord's statements about the Old Testament. But these statements do not come one at a time, they form a great avalanche of items of cumulative evidence which cannot in honesty be evaded.

There are many who profess that they would be perfectly willing to accept our Lord's teaching about the Bible, if only they could know for certain what that teaching was. But the accumulated errors of translation, of oral tradition, and of scribal transmission, leave them — they say — quite uncertain as to what He did teach. Taking refuge behind this belief, they do not grapple seriously with the Gospel evidence, and they feel free to build their theology with a view of Scripture different from that which ordinary historical investigation shows to have been taught by Christ. But such an attitude conceals a dishonesty, which, though unconscious, is very real. For only the most extreme radical sceptic has any justification for professing not to know what Jesus taught. The evidence is clear: To Christ the Old Testament was true, authoritative, inspired. To Him the God of the Old Testament was the living God and the teaching of the Old Testament was the teaching of the living God. To Him, what Scripture said, God said.

This lecture was delivered in Cambridge on July 8th, 1953 at a meeting convened by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research and was published by The Tyndale Press in the same year. It is reproduced here by kind permission of Mrs Christine Wenham.

Prepared for the web in February 2005 by Robert I. Bradshaw

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