

THE CONCEPT OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

THE never-failing supernatural vitality of the Church manifests itself strikingly, from time to time, in movements that seem to spring up unheralded yet generally, and mark the Catholicism of a particular period as having special interests and tendencies. Such a movement, at the present day, is the so-called biblical revival. Among Catholics of various languages and cultures, both clerical and lay, there has developed, especially since World War II, a keen interest in Holy Scripture, and an evident desire for closer contact and greater familiarity with the written Word of God. This revival was well launched before the War in European countries, and it is now spreading to the Catholics of the English-speaking world.

Such a movement, encouraged and guided but not imposed by the Holy See, spontaneous and wide-spread, is certain evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit; and it is equally a blessing, that the means are at hand to satisfy this appetite. The Church's scholars and exegetes have today a vastly increased understanding and mastery of the proper meaning, in details, of the sacred text, and are capable of providing the understanding sought by our contemporaries, answering the questions they ask, and so breaking for them this holy bread.

But what is sought is not merely erudition. In the spirit of faith, Catholics look for substantial spiritual nourishment in the Bible. The liturgical revival has already given them an understanding of the contemporary, actual, validity of the mysteries of the Faith. The doctrine of the mystical Body has helped them to integrate those mysteries into the substance of their daily lives, not leaving them on the level of merely intellectual assent. Now in seeking deeper understanding and a still more fruitful contact with the Christian mystery, they are driven to look for them in the book that contains the deposit of God's revelation, where faith tells them that God is, so to speak, waiting to speak to them.

Thus it is not cultural formation that is sought, nor merely apologetic defence of the Bible's truth; it is theology—for theology is nothing but *fides quaerens intellectum*, and that is precisely what

the biblical revival of our day consists in. It is doctrine that is sought, the message contained in this mysterious and fascinating book, the revelation, in short, as it is expressed in the inspired words, preserved and presented and interpreted to us by the Church. Hence there is a duty incumbent upon the Church's corps of interpreters, theologians and exegetes, to provide the theological interpretation and guidance with which Christians, both clerical and lay, can read and appreciate for themselves the sacred text, with all that it comports of unction and enlightenment and consolation. That is, the Catholic scholar's work on the Bible is not complete until it issues in a biblical theology.

First we must clear the ground by defining biblical theology, and establishing its right to be considered an integral part of the queen of the sciences. It may be provisionally defined as "The doctrine of God contained in Scripture, analyzed and systematized in biblical categories." The phrase "in Scripture" distinguishes its material from those of other branches of positive theology, patristic, symbolic, liturgical; the phrase about biblical categories distinguishes it from speculative theology, which must make use of some natural system of philosophy as scaffolding for its constructions.

Our faith tells us that God has spoken to men, has revealed Himself and His works, and that this revelation is contained in the deposit entrusted, for authoritative communication and interpretation, to His Church. A large part, if not actually all, of that revelation has been not merely entrusted to oral preservation and tradition; it has been set down in writing, in such a way that God Himself has done the writing, through the instrumentality of men. The object of our faith, then, that to which we give assent, is manifested both in the preaching of the Church and, in detail, in these written records which testify to the historical progress and stages in which the revelation took place.

I say "manifested"; because ultimately the believer gives his assent not to formulas but to facts. *Actus credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabile sed ad rem.*¹ That is why there may be different equally orthodox ways of enunciating the Church's belief, and why the Church has had, and still has, different systems of theology; different,

¹ St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 1, art. 2, ad 2um.

that is, in terminology and in use of philosophical concepts, but all of them truthful though inadequate presentations of the inexhaustible deposit committed to her care. In the New Testament, for example, St. Paul and St. John have erected two magnificent structures of theology, which are complementary but certainly different. The theology of St. Augustine is not that of Pseudo-Dionysius, and St. Gregory of Nazianzen has his system, quite distinct from that of St. Thomas Aquinas. Some have even claimed to perceive a difference between the theology of St. Thomas and that of some later Thomists. Not all of these are of equal value; they are more or less complete, more or less adequate to the divine mystery which they reproduce analogously in human concepts and terms. It is for the Church to pass judgment on them. But of those which she approves, each has its own contribution to make to the understanding of the deposit.

When God speaks, man must listen, and he must respond. The written word is not a dead letter, it is a challenge, a summons to answer, and the response made possible by grace is an affirmation, an assent which is not purely intellectual but vital, a self-commitment involving man's whole being. In what concerns man's higher faculties, the revelation appeals especially to knowledge and love. An object is proposed to both these faculties, and our assent if genuine will involve the effort to know it and to love it ever better.

That is why theology in the broadest sense—theologizing, let us call it—is essential to the vitality of the individual Christian's life, and to that of the whole Church. Faith seeks to understand, to grasp and penetrate and let itself be seized by the reality revealed. If the Church ever ceased to theologize it would be a sign that she had lost interest in her very *raison d'être*. This is her business, to know and love God; and her theology is an ever-advancing movement toward the divine self-knowledge, of which revelation is a partial and necessarily imperfect communication.

Like the individual Christian, the Church *thinks* her faith with the powers of the human intellect illumined by grace—*ratio fide illustrata*. Human language, logic, science, philosophy, are the tools with which she examines, analyzes, compares and combines the data of the revelation. And since this natural equipment varies in character and perfection from age to age, so her theology varies and de-

velops, quarrying now in this section, now in that, returning at times perhaps to veins that had seemed to be worked out, but in the long run neglecting no corner of the field, and producing age after age new treasures from the truly inexhaustible wealth of her patrimony.

Through the working of the divine plan for man's salvation, the written deposit of revelation was produced by Semitic instruments; but the Church's exploitation of it has been mainly with Greek tools. Broadly speaking, Neo-Platonism was the philosophy which served to develop theology for the first twelve centuries; but in the thirteenth, as we all know, Aristotelianism made its irruption, and in the hands of the Church's greatest genius achieved a fructification of theology unexampled till then, and never matched since.

The Thomistic theology then represents a high point, and the Church has officially made it her own—until a better one comes along. Even if that should happen, St. Thomas' theology would never be discarded, nor any of it lost; theology is a progress in understanding the faith, and the gains made by it are permanent acquisitions. But there is always the urge to further advance; and in the 20th century we cannot hope to advance further along the precise path followed by St. Thomas. The official Thomistic revival is now 75 years old; ² it has produced wonderful results, in getting us away from Cartesianism and Nominalism, in getting us back to the heights reached by St. Thomas. But looking at it broadly, one can hardly say that, in theology, it has gone forward; that is, it has not produced a system, or a development of St. Thomas' system, worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with his achievement.

And the reason—apart from the accidental one that no comparable genius has appeared in the Church—is that we do not spontaneously think like St. Thomas. We can learn his thought-patterns, just as we learn his Latin; but neither can ever be our mother-tongue, as natural to us as it was to him. The greatest theologian of the 19th century, probably, was Matthias Scheeben; and it

² The Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII *Aeterni Patris* is dated August 4, 1879. The revival of course was primarily a return to Thomistic philosophy; but whereas in the Middle Ages this had shown itself so effective a stimulus to theology, in modern times it has yielded little inspiration toward development. Theological progress is at present stimulated rather by positive studies in liturgy, patristics,—and Scripture.

is significant that the fertilizing element for his thought was especially the theology of the Greek Fathers, mostly unknown to St. Thomas.

On a humbler level, this is something very evident in the modern Biblical movement, as has been keenly pointed out by Grail.³ The laity are often ill at ease, puzzled, even repelled by dogmatic theology, as it is offered to them in manuals and textbooks—even when these are available to them in the vernacular. Such works are full of terms and argumentations, meaningful and indispensable in scholastic philosophy, but extremely elusive and hard to penetrate for minds formed according to the positivist, scientific, quantitative techniques of modern Western culture. Anyone who has tried to explain transubstantiation to an adult convert will know what I mean—especially if that convert be an engineer, a scientist, a mathematician, or the like. The Real Presence, the Bread of Life, the Eucharistic Sacrifice, are doctrines as consoling, as nourishing to his soul, as they were to the converts instructed by St. Paul. But substance and accidents are notions beyond his comprehension, or at least they sharply conflict with the mental image he has formed of physical reality. He will end probably by accepting them on faith, too; but then they remain sterile elements in his belief, not fruitful and enlivening as are the dogmas of the Church.

Whereas with the Bible he feels himself at home. The greatest immediate appeal is in the Gospels, but he quickly comes to appreciate the rest of the New Testament, and the Old as well. The bugbear of Bible/science conflict being easily disposed of, and some notion of literary forms acquired, he revels in the realism, the concreteness, the immediacy of the Bible message. It appeals to his sense of history and development (which he calls evolution). He *expects* to find that God worked gradually, and that many things in the early stages of revelation were rudimentary and imperfect. It appeals to his interest in the individual person or fact, the verifiable prophecy, even the patent miracle. Above all, it gives him the contact with a personal and loving God, a responsible, freely willing, individual Being—Who in dogmatic theology tends only too easily to dissolve in a cloud of “attributes.”

³ A. Grail, “Renouveau biblique et doctrine,” *Lumière et vie* 1 (1951), 17-32.

I stress that example as something from my own experience; but the experience could be generalized. It was this desire for adaptation, revitalization, or whatever you prefer to call it, that lay behind the ill-fated effort at a "new theology" of ten years ago, which sought impatiently to re-state the Church's dogmatic teachings in terms of various contemporary philosophies. That was doomed to failure, because such work cannot be done artificially and to order. Theology is an organic growth, and the faith which seeks understanding must always remain master of its tools, and take time out when necessary to remodel the tools themselves. No existentialist philosophy of modern times could serve as handmaid of theology, without a long process of purification and adjustment. But *Humani Generis*, in condemning a movement that would have involved Catholic dogma in a hopeless relativism, also recognized the constant need there is for theology to keep in touch with, or return to, its sources, and significantly indicated the "inexhaustible treasures" that still await exploitation in patrology and in Scripture.⁴ In view of the tremendous possibilities opened up by the modern renovation, almost transformation, of biblical studies, it does seem that one hope of a revitalized theology lies here.

It is very much to be hoped, too, that with all the growth of our specializations, the unfortunate separation between dogmatic theology and exegesis will not widen but tend to close. Down to quite recent times it was taken for granted that every exegete was a theologian, and every theologian was an exegete. It is only the enormously increased sum of positive knowledge that has split these into two separate vocations in the Church—I would say, with harm to both of them. It is still required that a specialist in Scripture studies first obtain the Licentiate in theology; the exegete cannot but regard it as unfortunate that a specialist in dogmatic theology is not obliged to get his Licentiate in Scripture. Anyway, if the breach is to be healed, the responsibility falls first upon the exegete, who can and should proceed beyond mere exegesis, to build up a connected theology of his materials.

⁴ *AAS* 42 (1950), 568: "Uterque doctrinae divinitus revelatae fons tot tantosque continet thesauros veritatis, ut numquam reapse exhauriatur. Quapropter sacrorum fontium studio sacrae disciplinae semper iuvenescunt..."

We speak then of the biblical theologian, and of biblical theology as that division of positive theology for which the materials are supplied by exegesis which is both scientific and guided by faith. But the very name of "biblical" theology is somehow strange; it seems to be tautological. Any Christian of the Patristic period, of the Middle Ages, of the first millennium and a half of the Church's history, would probably have inquired, "What other kind of theology is there?" Certainly, St. Thomas would have been amazed at the suggestion that his *Summa* was somehow not biblical. As is plain in the very first *Quaestio*, to him *sacra doctrina*, *sacra scriptura*, and *theologia* were all—at least from his particular pedagogical point of view—one and the same thing. He aimed simply at systematizing and synthesizing, in easily intelligible form, the sum of revelation contained in the Word of God. And his magnificent accomplishment rests on a minute familiarity with the sacred text—in the Vulgate translation, naturally, and according to the exegetical science of his time.

Just as St. Thomas was able to surpass his predecessors by the superiority of the philosophy at his disposal, so we can . . . I hesitate to say, surpass St. Thomas, because genius counts for something too; but at least, we can provide much that he had no possibility of discovering, that in fact would not have been intelligible to his contemporaries. What we have is a vastly increased understanding and command of all the sciences auxiliary to exegesis: cultural and political history of the ancient Near East, linguistics, literary forms, comparative religion, Semitic psychology, etc. Thus we can penetrate much deeper into the human elements of the inspired books, and the mentality and intentions of the human authors. But by the same token—the hagiographers being God's instruments—we penetrate further the divine meaning, with all its wealth of implications and virtualities. And we cannot fail to notice at the same time, how the later scholasticism, lacking St. Thomas' meticulous attention to the text, tended to desiccate the infinite vitality of the deposit, over-intellectualizing and so verging constantly toward that Nominalism which is (not only in the 14th century!) the besetting temptation of scholastic theology.

Our advance, in other words, is possible mainly in the field of positive theology, though no doubt this will have its repercussions too, at some future date, in speculative theology. The question

whether positive—and consequently biblical—theology properly belongs, in the strictest sense, to the sacred science, need not be dwelt on here. If it was denied for a time, by many of the theologians of half a century ago, that was because of the crippling influence of historicism, which applied a too narrow notion of scientific detachment to an activity which is entirely proper and essential to the *fides quaerens intellectum*. After the studies of Muñiz and Spicq,⁵ to name but two, there will be few to question now that one function of theology is the examining, stating, and defending of the datum of the faith; that is, a positive analysis of scripture and tradition. The same science of theology is to be considered speculative when it exercises another function, namely, uses a system of philosophy to develop that faith and draw theological conclusions. We may take it then that biblical theology is real theology, not a subordinate science that theology uses (as is, for example, exegesis); it is the science which studies divine revelation as it is recorded in the inspired Word of God, and combines it into an intelligible body of doctrine according to the concepts and patterns of the inspired writers.

Since the divine wisdom communicated the revelation progressively and by degrees—"at sundry times and in divers manners"—the Bible contains it in scattered and partial form, in many bits and pieces, yet so arranged that there is a steady development and clarification. (And this of course has continued, *intensive* though not *extensive*, since the closing of the Canon, in the Church's ever deeper penetration of the meaning of the deposit.) But now that the whole deposit has been given, it is possible, and it is even necessary for us, to put together these bits and pieces, fitting them into their proper places according to the pattern in the divine Mind, and so doing our best to acquire a total grasp of God's revelation to us, analogous to that knowledge which God has of His own plan.

At this point it is necessary to say something of the work done in this field by non-Catholic scholars, which on the technical level

⁵ F. P. Muñiz, "De diversis muneribus S. Theologiae secundum doctrinam D. Thomae," *Angelicum* 24 (1947), 93-123; C. Spicq, "L'avènement de la théologie biblique," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 34 (1951), 561-574. See also F.-M. Braun, "La théologie biblique. Qu'entendre par là?," *Revue thomiste* 53 (1953), 221-253.

has blazed the trail for Catholic theologians. This vigorous renewed interest in biblical theology—among Anglicans and Lutherans especially—has various causes. One may be, that they feel the lack of an authoritative and well-defined dogmatic theology, and are attempting to supply it in this way. But there is far more to it than that. There is here a sharp reaction against the triumphant rationalism of the higher critics of the last century, who insisted on treating the Bible, the Old Testament especially, as exactly on a par with any other ancient literature, and regarding the beliefs, practices, and aspirations of the Israelites as so many documents of cultural and religious history—interesting in their own right, but quite without any transcendental importance or relevance for the men of the 19th century. The texts were thus made the object of strictly scientific, impersonal study, and instead of Old Testament theology they produced histories of Old Testament religion, or, more consistently, histories of the religion of Israel. Correspondingly, for the New Testament, there were histories of the beliefs and development of the primitive Church, and the like. As late as 1927, Hermann Gunkel was explaining that the day of biblical theology was over, and that the only possible scientific treatment of the contents of the Old Testament was the historical and literary one.⁶

But even at that time the reaction had already begun. Karl Barth was loudly demanding whether Scripture was the Word of God, or not? and answering that question in the affirmative, set out to renew the theological treatment which God's Word must necessarily evoke in those who believe.⁷ Rudolph Kittel, about the same time, called for a treatment of the Old Testament which would do justice to its claim to present divine revelation.⁸ In the last 30 years an immense amount of discussion has taken place in Protestant circles, first in Germany, then in Great Britain, France, and other countries, concerning the justification of biblical theology—how reconcile the prior

⁶ Cf. his article in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, I (2nd ed. 1927), s.v. "Biblische Theologie und biblische Religionsgeschichte."

⁷ See the preface to the first edition of *Der Römerbrief*, 1918; also *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*, 1925.

⁸ R. Kittel, "Die Zukunft der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 39 (1921), 84-99.

affirmation of faith with the necessary submissiveness to the evidence that one studies?—and its techniques—what authority belongs to the text? what criterion to use for subordinating doctrines one to another? what relationship has the Old Testament to the New? A large number of articles and monographs, and some complete theologies, of Old and New Testaments respectively, have been produced.⁹ One may say that biblical theology has won, or regained, an acknowledged place as the crown and ultimate object of biblical studies—in spite of the vehement objections of a few scholars such as Enslin and Pfeiffer, who wish to remain faithful to the 19th century ideal of scholarly objectivity, as they conceive it, and protest bitterly against the mingling of faith with scholarship.¹⁰

The chief gain among the Christian exegetes has been the general acknowledgment not merely of the legitimacy but of the necessity of faith, in anyone who approaches the Bible with the hope of receiving what it has to offer. They recognize now that coldly scientific—in the sense of rationalistic—objectivity is quite incapable of even perceiving, let alone exploiting, the religious values of Scripture. There must be first the commitment, the recognition by faith of the divine origin and authority of the book; then the believer can properly and profitably apply all the most conscientious techniques of the subordinate sciences, without in the least infringing their due autonomy or being

⁹ The bibliography of the subject is already considerable, and cannot even be sketched here. Some helpful indications for further study may be found in the following: R. V. Schoder, "The Rebirth of Scriptural Theology," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 117 (1947), 81-101; N. W. Porteous, "Old Testament Theology," in *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (ed. H. H. Rowley, 1951), 311-345; C. Gamble, "The Literature of Biblical Theology: a Bibliographical Study," *Interpretation* 7 (1953), 466-480; H. F. Hahn, *Old Testament in Modern Research* (1954), ch. VII (pp. 226-249), "The Theological Approach to the Old Testament." The outstanding Old Testament theology so far is W. Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 3 vols. 1933-1939; on the New Testament may be mentioned E. Stauffer, *Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 1941. Perhaps the most important work of all, in spite of its defects, is the great *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, launched by the late G. Kittel, now edited by G. Friedrich, which has reached its sixth volume and the letter *pi*.

¹⁰ M. S. Enslin, "The Future of Biblical Studies," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65 (1946), 1-12; R. H. Pfeiffer, "Facts and Faith in Biblical History," *ib.* 70 (1951), 1-14.

disloyal to the scientific ideal. As Porteous puts it bluntly, "for the Biblical theologian neutrality would be unscientific."¹¹

The chief problem that still remains unsolved for them—and I would say it is insoluble, as long as they do not recognize the living authority of the Church—is that of authority: what guarantees the Bible's claim on our acceptance, and, in the last analysis, what guarantees a given interpretation of it? What criterion is to be used for distinguishing the less perfect from the more perfect? What about "demythologizing"? It is perfectly true that eternal truths must be disengaged and drawn clear of their presentation in terms of a particular language, culture, psychology, etc. But it is no good immediately re-involving them, as Bultmann does, in the pseudo-scientific mythology of the 20th century. The criterion for their "pure" statement must be the living spirit of faith, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and that means, ultimately, the authority of the Church.

On the Catholic side, biblical theology on any large scale has been slower in making its appearance, partly because there was not the same gap to be filled nor errors to be corrected, but mainly because Catholic biblical scholars are still occupied in assimilating and "baptizing" the literary and historical achievements of the last generation of "higher critics." Still, the first large-scale works have appeared in recent years, and there is an increasing number of theological monographs on particular sections of the sacred books.

The new possibilities of this science rest ultimately on the tremendous increase in our factual knowledge of the civilizations and cultures in which the Bible was produced. We have no time now to do more than refer to this new equipment, which was magisterially outlined twelve years ago in *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. But it has made possible a great refinement of techniques of investigation. For example, in the linguistic field: half a dozen ancient languages, unknown a century ago, are of immense help in the understanding of Hebrew, while the papyri and new Aramaic sources shed new light on New Testament Greek. Some—not all, but some—of the modern vernacular translations are admirable in their accuracy, and even those who have forgotten their Hebrew are no longer obliged to peruse the text

¹¹ N. W. Porteous, "Semantics and Old Testament Theology," *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 8 (1950), 14.

as through a glass darkly, in the Vulgate. The new understanding of literary conventions and stylistic usage has proved a great many hoary *cruces* to be pseudo-problems, raised only by false principles of interpretation. I will mention one example: the symbolic and qualitative use of numbers, a favorite and frequent device in both Testaments. The mathematical literalism of the Western mind has made many difficulties for itself over this usage.

Then, there is the modern appreciation of development and change in history—the historical process. In both Testaments, we now recognize “the evolution of dogma,” and do not try to put all affirmations in the Bible on one high level of doctrinal perfection. They must be read in context.

This is a point of considerable importance, for if the growth of revelation be neglected, the Bible appears as a bundle of contradictions. The Hegelian triad of thesis, antithesis, synthesis, may serve as a convenient scheme for exposing this dialectic, one of the characteristic Semitic procedures of which the divine Condescension made use, to communicate with men in human speech. In the concrete, it means that revelation in the Old Testament progressed by a series of statements, each of which stressed one particular aspect of the truth, regardless of other aspects. The Hebrews themselves felt none of the difficulty that we tend to feel in following this process. No Israelite sage or prophet was ever deterred from speaking his mind by the fact that some predecessor had said exactly the opposite. Examples are numerous: the necessity of ritual sacrifice vs. the uselessness of ritual sacrifice; God’s wrath would utterly destroy sinners, God’s love would reform and justify them; God’s alliance was with the community, it was with each individual; God hated the Gentiles, God loved the Gentiles; the virtuous are rewarded with earthly prosperity, the virtuous suffer more than the wicked. And so on. Even in the same book, the institution of kingship may be presented as offensive to God and as willed by God. The Semitic speaker or writer is conscious of one thing at a time, and he affirms it with all the vehemence of his remarkably fiery temperament.

This is one of the distinguishing marks of the Semitic mentality, so different from that of the Greeks, which we have now learned to comprehend much better, thanks to literary and psychological

studies.¹² The Semitic mind has very little capacity for metaphysics or for abstraction, and little taste for colorless, rigorously exact statement. It prefers combination to distinction, operates with symbols where we should prefer well-defined concepts, is intuitive rather than rational; it is, in short, the mind of a poet rather than that of a philosopher. To take a metaphor from painting, it is impressionist rather than representational. It instructs and convinces, not by syllogistic argument but by a series of emphatic statements, impelling the mind of the hearer to build up a mental image corresponding to the speaker's. It expresses one idea at a time, with all possible emphasis, without regard for inferences which a more reflective mind might be inclined to draw from the expression. The Semite can, and often does, quite happily affirm something, *without* intending to deny its opposite.

Another characteristic concept of the Old Testament, which is difficult to accommodate to Greek philosophy, is its special anthropology. The soul/body dichotomy, of such importance in Western thinking from Plato on, is quite alien to Semitic ideas. They know only Man, who thinks (with his heart), eats, drinks, loves, begets, is born, dies, is strong or weak, truthful or false, etc. In all his material, animal functions he is *basar*, flesh. In his affective, volitive activity he is *nepshesh*, usually translated "soul," though "person" might be nearer the mark. And the source of all his activity, that which distinguishes a living man from a corpse (best compared to the electric current that makes a wire "live") is *ruah*, the "spirit." When God infuses it the embryo comes to life: when He withdraws it the man dies. There is probably no more frequent misapplication of texts than that which rests on the translation of *nepshesh* as *anima*, soul.

Though it hardly seems to belong to our subject, it may not be out of place here to say a word on the "Scripture proof," as it is ap-

¹² In this field the fundamental and most influential work has been J. Peder-
sen's *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, I-II 1926, III-IV 1940. Cf. also A. R. Johnson,
The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel, 1949; C. Tres-
montant, *Essai sur la pensée hébraïque*, 1953; id., *Etudes de métaphysique
biblique*, 1955; T. Boman, *Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem griech-
ischen*, 2nd ed., 1954; G. Dix, *Jew and Greek*, 1953; and a breezy but informed
sketch by G. P. Minogue, "Multifariam, multisque modis . . .," *Homiletic and
Pastoral Review* 55 (1955), 736-739.

plied in textbooks of dogmatic theology. It would be easy, but rather unprofitable, to draw up a list of horrible examples, in which the casual and perhaps rather inappropriate use of a particular Latin word in the 4th century Vulgate is made to bear the weight of an elaborate philosophical argument according to the meaning the word acquired in the late Middle Ages.¹³ But it is better to be constructive; so let me suggest that nowadays a dogmatic theologian has an obligation to re-examine the "traditional" Scripture proofs, checking them by some up-to-date translation and commentary (such as the *Bible de Jérusalem*), and seeing whether in their original context the words can support the interpretation which his dogmatic thesis requires. He may thus get some salutary shocks; and in any case he will receive some rather stimulating insights into what divine revelation, at a given stage, really revealed.

Above all, one must deplore the technique which seeks in Scripture for brief isolated phrases, suitable to serve as major or minor of a scholastic syllogism; and it is here the exegete must feel most keenly, not only that the sacred text is being given less than its due respect, but that it is being distorted. The very idea of "proof" is a distortion; what Scripture offers is evidence (in the forensic sense), testimony given by living witnesses in their own words, and one feels again the slide toward Nominalism when testimony to a fact is volatilized into proof of a proposition.¹⁴ Regardless of strain on

¹³ A discussion of selected "proofs" will be found in E. F. Siegman, "The Use of Sacred Scripture in Textbooks of Dogmatic Theology," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 11 (1949), 151-164; the author draws largely on the work of Ceuppens, *Theologia Biblica*, 1938-39. A more fundamental treatment of the use of Scripture in dogmatic theology is J. Levie, "Les limites de la preuve d'Écriture Sainte," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 71 (1949), 1009-1029; cf., by the same author, "Exégèse critique et interprétation théologique," *Recherches de science religieuse* 39 (1951); = *Mélanges Jules Lebreton* I, 237-252.

¹⁴ As this remark was shrewdly criticized, and only feebly defended, in the discussion that followed the reading of this paper (see below), it may be well to emphasize that it was not intended as a denial in principle of the *validity* of proof from Scripture. But there is question of methods of approach, two ways of using the sacred text, and I am arguing for the priority, in time and importance, of one over the other. Briefly: there is a *res*, the Christian mystery, the Fact of God and His salvation, to which man is invited (and impelled by grace) to react, by faith and works. The Church presents that *res* by means of

pupils' memories, one would like to see a little more strain on their understandings, to help them to realize that each of the sacred writers has his own personal message which he is intent on proclaiming: a message that deserves to be heard as a whole, and which as a whole takes its proper place in the sum total of God's gracious proclamation to mankind.

Often, at the beginning of a treatise, or before a group of theses, in a dogmatic textbook, there is included a history of the development of a particular dogma in Christian tradition, and the controversies that led to its clarification and definition. But how often does one see a summary of its development in the inspired text itself, its successive forms in various Old Testament books, its transformation and flowering, perhaps by stages, in the New? Yet this is, for the most part, the deposit which the dogma sums up and crystallizes in the language of the Church.

While we are thus speaking in practical terms, it may be helpful to say a word about the so-far-existing biblical theologies, of Old or New Testament, which have been published by Catholics in recent years. They are, it is to be hoped, the fore-runners of many others.

two sets of *signa*, not mutually exclusive: Scripture, and Christian doctrine, of which the scientifically elaborated form is dogmatic theology. (The liturgy might be considered a third such *signum*.) Insofar as they are distinct, the former is testimony of living experience, which tends to stir emotions and will, as well as enlightening the mind. The latter is intended to appeal, directly, only to the intellect. When Scripture is, in practice, treated mainly or primarily as material auxiliary to the scientific statement of doctrine, you lose, or at least you neglect, the motivating force which is proper to it: the unction, the actuality, the contact with the mind and heart of a witness—and, through them, with the authority of the divine Author, Who writes *these* words for me to read or hear. Naturally, the same Authority guarantees the affirmations of theology (those that are *De Fide*)—but it does not *make* them; and the text that is adduced in support of the affirmation is functioning only on the rational, logical level, while its affective, imperative values are in this context necessarily disregarded. In short, Scripture should first be evaluated and expounded for its own sake and in its own terms, and only secondarily be made to function as an element in dogmatic theology. Cf. some remarks of Bonsirven on the use of Scripture texts by the Apostles, in *Exégèse rabbinique et exégèse paulinienne* (1939), pp. 275, 300. Biblical theology, incidentally, should combine the advantages of both presentations: the immediate, personal appeal of the sacred text, and the clarity and comprehensiveness of a theological system.

If we fail to find any of them fully satisfactory, that is in no way a blame to their authors, who on the contrary deserve all credit as valiant pioneers.

Ceuppens' *Theologia Biblica* is mentioned here by reason of its title, though it is not really a biblical theology at all in the sense we have been speaking of. It follows the order of the *Summa* of St. Thomas, and consists of a careful exegesis of the texts that are usually adduced in proof of many of the theses into which modern theological writers have skeletonized St. Thomas' work. As such, the book is decidedly useful, and it is a handy reference work for seeing what a reliable exegete has to say about the real meaning of a given text. But it is only an anthology of texts, and makes no pretense at covering completely even a single book or a single doctrine.

Heinisch' *Theologie des Alten Testaments*¹⁵ is a much more ambitious work, which aims at completeness. But again, the order of treatment is non-Biblical, starting with God's metaphysical attributes; there is hardly any recognition of the immense development in doctrine, between the oldest and latest parts of the Old Testament; there is very little penetration into, or analysis of, the doctrines. Problems of reconciling contradictions, of finding syntheses, are passed over lightly or quite ignored. The work contains a nearly exhaustive accumulation of references on doctrinal questions; in effect, it is a collection of materials for Old Testament theology, presented however in some confusion.

Van Imschoot¹⁶ marks a great advance over Heinisch in his analyses; he is aware of development, of the multiplicity of points of view represented, and he gives careful attention to Hebrew psychology and its consequences for interpretation. But—judging by his first volume, all that has so far appeared—we must say that he still has not been sufficiently original; he has allowed the too-familiar outline of dogmatic theology to suggest his order of treatment, and has not made the effort to uncover a genetic order inherent in the nature of the material itself.

On this point of thematic arrangement and order, one may usefully contrast the work of Walther Eichrodt, cited above. He selects as

¹⁵ Published 1940; English translation by W. Heidt, 1950.

¹⁶ P. van Imschoot, *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament: I, Dieu*, 1954.

the key concept in the Old Testament the fact of alliance, the covenant, the supernatural relationship graciously established between God and man. On this theme he constructs the theology: the fact of the covenant, its essence and terms, the God of the covenant, its instruments, its recipients, its finality, etc. He has produced a work of extraordinary depth and richness, lacking only a sufficient development of Messianism; the prophetic values of the Old Testament witness are too little stressed. The latter, on the other hand, are brought very much to the fore in Procksch's work;¹⁷ but in other ways this has not the balance and completeness of Eichrodt's.

Meinertz' New Testament theology¹⁸ is the most successful such work so far, largely because of his division of the material—a division that comes strictly from the data of the text, theologically considered. He treats first of the message delivered by our Lord Himself, as recorded in the Gospels, including the Gospel of St. John; in second place, he goes on to the results produced by that message and its working in the faith of the primitive Church, as described in Acts; thirdly, he studies the Apostolic letters which show us theological reflection already at work on the message—and with these he couples another treatment of the Fourth Gospel, which is theology as well as history. Fourthly, the prophetic book of the New Testament is studied, the Apocalypse. There are still some gaps in Meinertz' work, but it does mark a great step forward.

The year after Meinertz' publication, there appeared another New Testament theology by a Catholic, P. Bonsirven.¹⁹ Here the author carefully defines at the start what he understands by biblical theology, and one can say that his book excellently realizes his program. But his theory does not allow for a complete intra-biblical synthesis. That is, he analyzes the doctrine of each section of the New Testament, according to the headings and divisions proper to a later-developed dogmatic theology. Inevitably, this blurs and somewhat obscures the originality and specific inner structure of the thought of the various inspired writers.

¹⁷ O. Procksch, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1949-50.

¹⁸ M. Meinertz, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 2 vols., 1950. Cf. the review by R. Rosmann, in *Gloria Dei* 7 (1952), 119-122; also, ib. 65-75, an article by V. Warnach, "Gedanken zur neutestamentlichen Theologie."

¹⁹ J. Bonsirven, *Théologie du Nouveau Testament*, 1951.

The ideal biblical theology then lies still in the future; but it is already possible to describe the form it will take and the techniques necessary in producing it. There are two stages in the work: first there must be an exact determination of the data, namely the theological truths expressed in each particular inspired book; secondly, the testimonies thus determined and collected must be arranged in their right doctrinal relationships, and co-ordinated into a complete system according to the patterns that are implicit in them. Even the first stage requires much skill and training (to say nothing about talent); its author must not only be a theologian, thoroughly familiar with the Church's doctrine, so as to keep the *analogia fidei* and tradition as guiding principles of interpretation; he must also be an expert scientific exegete, at home in all the complicated auxiliary sciences—languages, history, literary criticism, psychology—which make up the equipment of the biblical scholar. He must be both textual critic and commentator, and in the latter capacity he must treat his subject theologically. As *Divino Afflante* admonished, he must not think his work is done when he has discussed his text from every literary, cultural, and historical point of view. He has to uncover and synthesize that for which it exists—the witness it bears to some particular stage of God's saving activity toward men. In short, he must present the theology of the particular section of the Bible he is dealing with.

When—in the not too distant future, let us hope—we have an abundance of Catholic commentaries which are both scientific and theological, on all the parts of Scripture, the way will be clear for the second stage, which offers new and even harder problems. The main one is the question of arrangement: what order to follow, and what central theme to make the backbone of the synthesis? Something is required, analogous to the Neo-Platonist idea of outgoing and return, from God and to God, which St. Thomas applied so brilliantly in the *Summa*. All we can say is that it must be something suggested by the history of revelation itself, not by any scheme of philosophy. We spoke already of Eichrodt's use of the Covenant theme, the most successful so far, though restricted to the Old Testament. Others that have been suggested are: the Person of Christ, in all His manifold activity; the Holiness of God; the idea of Election; the Kingdom of

God.²⁰ Whatever it is, it must be something that allows for the development and sequence of revelation, the history of God's care for mankind: the gradual preparation of the Old Testament, the decisive saving judgment that is the Incarnation, the eschatology prophetic of the last times in which the Church lives her militant life.

But positive theology is not the whole of the sacred science; as we saw, it represents only one of its functions. The faith that seeks understanding is driven on to ask questions, to compare, to speculate. And this is where biblical theology rejoins dogmatic theology, as the latter has been developed up to the present in the Church. When the former has advanced nearer to its perfection, it will offer to the speculative theologian a rich harvest in the way of fuller understanding of the deposit, an immense accretion of the materials on which speculative theology can build. When that will come and in what precise form must be left to the Providence of God, Who will surely raise up in His Church thinkers as gifted and as wise as the Doctors who have served her so well in the past. In the meantime, the humbler task of biblical theology is accessible, at least in its details, to every exegete who is willing to be a theologian and to every theologian who remembers that he is by rights an exegete. At the present day, they can find no nobler intellectual task, in the service of the Church.

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DIGEST OF THE DISCUSSION

Father Cyril Vollert, S.J. To what extent and in what respect is Prat's *Théologie de S. Paul* short of the ideal biblical theology as exposed?

Father MacKenzie. Prat's work still stands as one of the finest efforts at a biblical theology, an effort still valid and valuable though there has been some progress in background knowledge which should influence and be incorporated into future efforts. Probably the greatest deficiency in the work lies in the fact that Prat does not look upon

²⁰ This last is favored by B. Hessler, "De theologiae biblicae Veteris Testamenti problemate," *Antonianum* 25 (1950), 407-424. He discusses, *ib.* 419ss, some of the other themes mentioned.

biblical theology as theology. There are other minor defects, e.g. in the treatment of the "parousia," a defect imposed by the time of writing and the limitations of the research materials at his disposal.

Father Eugene Gallagher, S.J. Is it possible to make an objective analysis and a coherent synthesis of Old Testament theology, given the antinomies which you have indicated?

Father MacKenzie. It is possible, given that biblical theology is theology guided by faith and following the authoritative interpretation of the church. It is possible therefore for a Catholic theologian. It would be extremely difficult if not impossible to construct a biblical theology of sacrifice without the doctrinal guidance of the magisterium.

Father Walter Burghardt, S.J. Would you say that we must modify our concept of biblical inspiration, especially the concept of author, in the light of progress of scriptural science?

Father MacKenzie. There is work to be done in the clarification of details of those concepts, but the fundamental idea of inspiration as taught by *Providentissimus* is valid and not to be altered basically. However there are precisions to be made in the application of the idea, especially as regards translation. The attempt to apply the charism of "author" even to the Septuagint seems to me to be a retrograde step. I would say there is still much to be done with regard to the proportion and mode of the charism of author and with regard to the problem of glosses.

Father George Glanzman, S.J. With reference to Father Burghardt's question, would you say it is necessary to revise the idea of "God as Author," especially that idea as developed by Cardinal Franzelin in the last century? Can we and should we desert the idea that everything in Scripture is an absolute? May we validly distinguish between what is revealed and what is inspired?

Father MacKenzie. I haven't given much thought to the question as framed. As a matter of fact, Franzelin's idea is being abandoned. The identification of inspiration and revelation was never doctrine of the church and does lead to a rather rabid literalism.

Father George Glanzman, S.J. But the handbooks are full of the confusion of inspiration and revelation and this tends to confuse theologians.

Father B. J. Murray, S.J. Is St. Paul's epistle to the Romans an elaboration of biblical theology and is St. Paul's notion of justice a valid central theme of such a biblical theology, perhaps one of many possible?

Father MacKenzie. Romans is certainly one of the greatest developments of biblical theology, but it is not a complete biblical theology. It does not incorporate and synthesize many other points of St. Paul's theology as found in the other epistles. Justification sounds like a very promising theme for a biblical theology but the validity of such a theme cannot be determined *a priori*. The value and aptitude of a theme can be determined fully only by its successful application and development.

Father B. J. Murray, S.J. All the themes you suggested seemed to center around or to be connected with this theme of justification.

Father MacKenzie. Yes, the theme of justification is a very promising one.

Father Edmond D. Benard. I would be grateful for some explanation of your statement—I hope I quote correctly—that the testimony of scripture is not proof but evidence.

Father MacKenzie. The distinction refers to different approaches and psychologies of the inspired writer (and student of biblical theology) and of the scientific, systematic, speculative theologian. The inspired writer is present to what he knows, what Christ did, etc. Psychologically there is a great difference between such testimony, giving of evidence, and the process of proof and ratiocination which is at one remove from reality. The difference might be exemplified by contrasting the study of a thesis proving the divinity of Christ with the reading of the prologue of St. John.

Father Edmond D. Benard. I'm not sure that I grasp the meaning of your original distinction between evidence and proof. How are we to use Sacred Scripture in proving, e. g., that Christ is God, a thesis of systematic theology, if Scripture does not offer proof of the truth to be held?

Father MacKenzie. It wasn't my intention to deny that Scripture may be adduced as proof of a thesis. I was looking at the matter psychologically. A process of ratiocination is necessary to arrive at the construction of a scientific theology and Scripture may be used

in such a process; but such use, though legitimate and necessary, does seem to me to strike at the reality and impact of Scripture. It tends to obscure its vital nature as evidence given by a witness and to make it part of a reasoning process somewhat removed from the "realness" of the given testimony.

Father Edmond D. Benard. In our teaching of fundamental theology, I think we would admit that the ideal would be to read the Gospels and to explain each crux in its context, textual and historical.

Father MacKenzie. Well, why not let the student share that inductive process?

Father Edmond D. Benard. I admit it would be ideal, but it's just not possible in practice, given the limitations of time imposed by a crowded curriculum.

Father James Griffin, S.J. What Father Benard calls an impracticable ideal is actually being done in religion courses in colleges and universities, e. g., in Father Fernan's course at LeMoyne.

Father Gerard Owens, C.S.S.R. Relative to Father Benard's difficulty, our proof, i. e., the proof of the dogmatic theologian, is from authority, the authority being revelation. Now with regard to a thesis such as the sacerdotal power to forgive sins, in what sense is the classic text not a proof that Christ communicated this power to the apostles, etc.?

Father MacKenzie. I'm afraid your question stumps me, Father. The biblical theologian could still make a contribution by providing background knowledge as to just what it means to forgive sins, what that phrase would mean for the inspired writer and for Christ's listeners.

Father Gerard Owens C.S.S.R. But what would be lacking to the probative value of such a text?

Father MacKenzie. Certainly Scripture is probative. But I would deplore the tendency to take the texts out of context; I think it impoverishes the sacred text. I had no intention of stating or maintaining that Scripture was not validly used by dogmatic theologians in their construction of a scientific theology. I think the questions have shown me that I haven't thought out that point well enough to make my meaning clear.

Father K. F. Dougherty, S.A. With regard to the phrase "evi-

dence not proof," would you mean that the inspired writers were giving evidence or testimony and were not concerned with proving a thesis, but that for us that evidence may be adduced and does constitute proof?

Father MacKenzie. I think that would be a sound view.

Father Girouard, O.M.I. What is the place of biblical theology in theology as a whole? Does it constitute the base? the crown? Might it someday take the place of the present systematic theology?

Father MacKenzie. While there will always be a place for positive theology, it can never be speculatively systematic or take the place of speculative theology. The latter takes its materials from many sciences and biblical theology is waiting to make a contribution of great importance. Biblical theology will always be a major part of positive theology, but only that.

Father Mark Dorenkemper. Is biblical theology a total theology, including the whole of revelation?

Father MacKenzie. I don't think so. There is much of Mariology which would not find adequate place and expression in a strictly biblical theology. Hence I would say that biblical theology is not a total theology.

Father J. P. O'Connell. In a series of religious instruction books, textbooks published in England, the fourth volume by Fathers Dyson and Jones is entitled "The Kingdom" or something like that. The books are on a popular level, but the fourth volume particularly seemed to me to be very valuable. I'd be grateful for your opinion of it.

Father MacKenzie. The title is, I believe, "The Kingdom of Promise" and I think it very good. It aims at giving a unified presentation of the doctrine of the kingdom of God and is a very sound effort in the field of biblical theology.

Father J. P. O'Connell. Priests of my acquaintance have read it and found that it greatly illuminated what they had learned in their Sacred Scripture course.

Father Eugene Gallagher, S.J. For the seminary, ecclesiastical directives prescribe the scholastic method. But in our colleges we have been free to experiment. We have tried to hang dogma on the hooks of history, with emphasis on a historical-psychological ap-

proach. To try to teach transubstantiation in scholastic terms seems to result in the weakening of faith in the Real Presence. I have found the use of analogies drawn from some of the old energy theories very useful in handling this difficult doctrine.

Father E. R. Callahan, S.J. If you were teaching the dogmatic treatise on penance, for example, where you are very dependent on the magisterium, having given the dogmatic proof from Trent, how would you modify or enlarge your treatment of the Scripture proof?

Father MacKenzie. I'd place my teaching of Sacred Scripture first. The dogmatic proof from the magisterium is clear and solid. As a prelude to such doctrine and proof from the documents of the church, I'd give the whole biblical theology of penance, forgiveness of sins, from Scripture.

Father Edmond D. Benard. With regard to this development of doctrine in the Old Testament, in the New Testament and after the close of public revelation, what distinctions would you place between the development of doctrine in the Bible and the development of doctrine in the church?

Father MacKenzie. There is of course a very sharp and strict distinction to be made. In Scripture, the progress in doctrine is often by way of contradiction and reconciliation, e. g., in the promise of reward for observance of the Law. The progress is slow and often proceeds from a sharp contradiction to an eventual synthesis of only apparent contradictions. The progress of doctrine in the church however is not by way of such contradiction but rather by way of progressive clarification and refinement.

Father James A. Brennan, C.M. I would be grateful for your opinion on the problem of implicit and explicit revelation.

Father MacKenzie. I deliberately omitted all mention of that problem in my paper, because it's a very thorny one, quite confused, and I didn't think it necessary to go into it in discussing the general nature of biblical theology. I'd rather not express myself on it now.

Father James Griffin, S.J. How can we best handle the exegetes who make the Bible so esoteric and mysterious that apparently anyone without a doctorate in Scripture should be afraid to derive any meaning from any text?

Father MacKenzie. Any valid position is subject to exaggeration

which is unwarranted. However, the caution of the good exegete generally arises from the scrupulousness of the scientist who doesn't want to go beyond his data. I suppose I can only counsel patience. When good exegetes do agree on some point, then the dogmatic theologian will know that he has firm ground on which to build. And of course there is already expansive ground abundantly tested on which you can build. I think that when the exegetes' work is done, it will be seen that there has been no impoverishment of dogmatic proof.

Father G. W. Shea. What are the respective roles of the professor of dogmatic theology and of the professor of Sacred Scripture in a seminary? I take it that the Scripture professor is the biblical theologian?

Father MacKenzie. I wish he were in actual practice the biblical theologian. I don't think that Scripture professors give enough time to biblical theology, being generally hypnotized by textual difficulties. I think that a definitive solution will be found only *ambulando*; but I do think that a Scripture professor is failing to do his full and most effective job if he fails to emphasize biblical theology.

Father John J. Fernan, S.J. It seems to me quite impossible for a seminarian or student of theology to derive and evaluate a proof from Scripture unless he knows the various books of Scripture in their historical setting, and the main ideas or themes of those books. Otherwise he cannot understand the individual texts. It seems to me that such a course on the general character of the books of the Bible should precede a course in dogma.

Father MacKenzie. I would agree that such a course would be most beneficial, but according to the dogmatic theologians it is not always practicable to give it. Still it seems to me that the professor of dogma could give the context and background necessary for the enrichment and the comprehension of his Scriptural texts, if he had recourse to a solid and select bibliography.

Father Eugene Burke, C.S.P. I'd like to say a word in defense of the system of theological instruction which has developed in the last hundred years, the thesis system. The thesis method has a justification outside of and independently of mere pedagogical techniques and advantages, a justification in the very nature of the theological

discipline and its sources. The magisterium is the great and immediate source of our theological knowledge. Hence you are teaching properly when you are stating, explaining and proving the propositions of the magisterium. As for the scriptural data, are you going to expose that as a sort of introductory background and then repeat it a second time in giving the actual proofs?

Father MacKenzie. It seems to me that if a background analysis of the Scriptural data were given once, that would be sufficient. Whether it were given before or after the data of the magisterium, does not seem to me to be very important.

Father B. Farrell, C.P. It seems to me that the thesis form is indispensable for the teaching of dogmatic theology. In a seminary course we can frequently do no more than give a clear statement of the teaching of the church. And the textbooks are not bad in giving the sources in which a doctrine is scripturally founded. With regard to the *an sit* the scriptural proofs and expositions are generally sound. Errors or defects, if there be any, will generally regard the *quid sit* or the *quomodo sit*, the theological conclusions of different schools.

Father MacKenzie. I think that observation is perfectly justified with regard to most major points of established dogmatic truth. But I wouldn't say it's so with regard to all. What of the standard handling of the Scriptural proofs for the existence of Purgatory? And there are other such points.

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