

# Inspiration and Inerrancy—Some Preliminary Thoughts

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## I.

Future church historians will show how the three great movements that have shaped the inner life of Christendom in the twentieth century are interrelated: the Ecumenical, the Liturgical and what has been called the Bible Movement. What we observe today is the fact that the ecumenical as well as the liturgical endeavors of our age have led to a new search for the nature and authority of Holy Scripture as the Word of God. To ask for the reality of the Church means to ask for the objective reality of the Word of God by which it lives. Thus all Christendom seems to be returning to the great issues of the first decade of this century when Rome's fight against the Modernist *Movement* reached its climax in 1907, and when in 1909 with the appearance of "The Fundamentals" in America the great controversy between "Fundamentalism" and "Modernism" began in Western Protestantism. What would the modernists whom Pius X excommunicated have to say about the sweeping revolution in which Rome since Pius XII is accepting almost the entire results of the historical investigation of the Bible?<sup>1</sup> And what would the Protestant modernists of the same period who interpreted the Bible as a collection of historical documents of the greatest of all religions think of their successors who have begun to realize that the historical approach to the Bible is neither sufficient nor the only one? The theology of Karl Barth in Europe, "Neo-orthodoxy" in America and the new "Biblical Theology" in England are remarkable attempts to rediscover the divine side of the Bible which remains inaccessible to any merely historical research. Thus all churches of Christendom are confronted with the same great problems. If we mention some of them here our aim is not to present a solution, but to clarify questions which can find an answer only through the thorough and patient work of decades and in the co-operation of historians, exegetes and dogmaticians of the various churches.

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## II.

*The Bible is the written Word of God.* For 1700 years this has been the conviction of all Christians. It is still today the dogma, the public doctrine, of all Catholic churches and of those Protestant churches which still today claim allegiance to their old confessions. Whatever difficulties this dogma may present to men of our time as long as we claim historic continuity with the Church of all ages, our task cannot be to abolish this dogma which is based on the doctrine of Jesus and the apostles. We have rather to interpret it in the light of—not modern theories and hypotheses but—facts established by scientific and historical research. It would be destroyed by any theory meant to limit the statement that the Bible is the Word of God. It is not enough to say that the Bible contains this Word and that some parts of the Scriptures are given by inspiration and others, perhaps a very little portion, not. This has been suggested not only by Protestant theologians but it is even, in principle, the solution suggested by such a great Catholic thinker as John Henry Newman in one of his last publications, an article on Inspiration in “The Nineteenth Century,” 1883. Deeply concerned with the situation of modern man between the claims of science and those of the church, and in view of the fact that the decrees of the Tridentine and the Vatican councils “lay down so emphatically the inspiration of Scripture in respect to ‘faith and morals,’” but “do not say a word directly as to its inspiration in matters of fact,” the Cardinal assumed that there are in Holy Scripture “obiter dicta,” certain incidental statements, e.g., in geographical or historical matters which do not “bear directly upon the revealed truth” and do not come “under the guarantee of inspiration.” This would contradict the dogma that the Bible as such, and not only parts of it, is the word of God. Nor is it possible to make the Bible only indirectly the word of God. That happens if one says the Bible can become to us the word of God. Certainly the Scriptures must become to us the word of God. i.e., we ought to accept it, by the grace of God, as his word which he speaks to us. But it remains God’s Word even if we do not accept it. The scripture which the eunuch of Ethiopia read was the objective word of God even before by the grace of God he was led to it understanding. And even if he had not found the help of Philip, he would have brought the word of God in writing to his homeland. Another attempt to understand Scripture is to regard it as the “record” of God’s revelation in the history of salvation. No one denies that it is such a record, and a most faithful at that. But it is impossible to separate the record from what is recorded. Just as the word of God preached today as the faithful exposition of the Scripture is word of God (“*Verbum Dei praedicatum est verbum Dei*,” as Luther puts it), so the word of God that came to Jeremiah remains the word of God when it is written in a book (Jer 36:1:ff., 28ff.). “For the word of God is living and powerful” (Heb 4:12 cp Jer 1:9f., 17:7, 23:29): this applies to the word of God in its various forms. If we call scripture the word of God, we do not deny that there are also other forms of the word. The Bible itself tells us that before there was a human ear

to hear or a human eye to read there was the “word of God” (Rv 19:13), the *logos* through whom all things are made (Jn 1:3 cp. 1 Cor 8:6), who was from eternity with God and was God and was made flesh in Jesus. As this eternal word is living and powerful, so the oral word of the prophets and apostles, the written word of scripture and the faithful preaching of this word of scripture through the Church are something living and powerful. They share the life and power of him who is the Word. Holy Scripture is never a dead letter.

### III.

How can a book or a series of books, written by men, be word of God? The first theologians who were confronted with this question were the scribes of the synagogue who collected and interpreted the Old Testament. It has often been overlooked that they in answering this question distinguished between the Torah on the one hand and the prophets and the scriptures on the other. While the latter were regarded as given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the divine character of the Torah as the primary and principal word of God was explained in a different way. The Torah had been created by God thousands of years before the creation of the world.<sup>2</sup> It existed unlike other Pre-existing creatures (e.g., paradise, hell) not only in the mind of God, but in reality, a real book in heaven written with black fire on white fire. The content of this book was brought down to earth and given to Israel. God Himself has proclaimed the Ten Commandments to the people. With his own finger he has written them on the tables. The rest of the Torah he has given to Moses directly, without the mediation of the Spirit. Either he has taught Moses the words of the Pentateuch as a teacher teaches his disciple. Or he has dictated it, or written it, too, for Moses on the two tables. Angels are sometimes mentioned in this connection by the rabbis, but not in the sense of mediators as in Acts 7:53, Gal 3:19, Heb 2:2, and sometimes in apocryphal books. The rabbis have never forgotten that there was not a prophet like Moses whom Jahveh knew face to face (Dt 34:10). It was the Hellenistic synagogue which understood Moses as a prophet who spoke by inspiration of the Spirit. If Rabbinic theology thus distinguishes between the Torah and the rest of the Old Testament, this does not mean that the eight “prophets” (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve—without the later distinction between “prior” and “later” prophets) and the “scriptures” are not God’s word. In them God speaks through the mediation of the Holy Spirit. The term “spoken from the mouth of God” is applied not only to the words of the Torah (e.g., Sifre Dt 1:6), but also to the prophets (Is 61:6 Pesiq 126 a Billerbeck op. cit. 439–44. Comp. also Mt 4:4 and Dt 18:18).

The distinction between two ways that a book can be the word of God belongs to Rabbinic and not to Christian theology. It is an attempt to explain the divine character of the Torah by applying to it an Oriental idea of a heavenly book which we can trace in several religions up to the Islamic doctrine of the Koran.

The idea is not Biblical. It is, however, related to the Biblical doctrine of the pre-existent word. In Ecclesiasticus 24:31 the Torah is more or less identified with the Chokmah, the preexistent wisdom of God. Since the hypostatized Wisdom (Prv 8 comp. Ecclus 24) was understood by the Church as identical with the logos on account of the obvious parallel between Proverbs 8:22ff. and John 1:1ff., we may find behind the strange Jewish speculation on the pre-existent Torah an anticipation of the New Testament doctrine of the pre-existent, eternal word.

#### IV.

For Jesus, the apostles and the Primitive Church, the differentiation between the Torah and the rest of the Old Testament had lost its meaning. All holy scriptures of the canon, Law, prophets and scriptures (Lk 24:44), constitute now "the Scripture" (he graphe). Though the singular can mean an individual passage or a single book, "scripture" and "scriptures" can be used interchangeably for the entire Bible of the Old Testament (comp. Mt 22:29 with Jn 5:39, 10:35). Whatever differences concerning the understanding of the Scripture may exist between Jesus and the scribes, between the apostles and their Jewish adversaries, between Church and synagogue, on either side the scripture is accepted as the Word of God. There is a strange agreement as to the inspiration of the scriptures. The way that Jesus quotes Psalm 110 as words which David spoke "in the Spirit" (Mt 22:43), or that Peter (Acts 1:16) quotes a "scripture ... which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David" corresponds exactly to the way that the rabbis quote the Old Testament. The two passages of the New Testament which teach expressly inspiration, 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21, could have been written in the synagogue. Here the question arises: What is inspiration? What does the Church mean when it teaches, *The Bible is the word of God because it has been written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit*?

In order to find an answer we must first ask: What is this inspiration not? We must be aware of the fact that words like "inspire," "inspiration" are used in modern English in a very general and indefinite sense. But even when used in a specific and pregnant sense they do not do justice to the facts which the Bible and the Church have in mind when they speak of the "theopneustos" scripture. Inspiration in this sense is the work of the Holy Spirit and consequently something which defies any psychological understanding. Psychology knows such phenomena as the "inspiration" which a poet or an artist experiences when suddenly insights, words, artistic visions are given to him. Nietzsche's description of the "inspiration" in which his Zarathustra was given to him is perhaps the most illuminating testimony of such experience. No one would be tempted to regard this "revelation," as Nietzsche, comparing his experience with those of former ages, calls it, as wrought by the Spirit of God. The same is true of the "inspiration" claimed by prophets, sibyls and religious writers in many religions of the ancient world. The prophets

whom Jeremiah and Ezekiel called false prophets claimed to be true prophets, to have been called by God and to be entrusted with his word. Psychology cannot discover the difference between true and false prophecy, between that which is truly word of God and that which is not, between true prophetic experiences and what Jeremiah called dreams. Therefore, it cannot know what inspiration in the sense of the Bible is, let alone explain it.

The psychological misunderstanding of the inspiration is very old. It begins in the Hellenistic synagogue. To Philon Moses is a prophet, filled with the Spirit of God, full of wisdom and virtue. One must read Philon's *Life of Moses* in order to understand the greatness of the Old Testament as a book of real history. Philon reads his own ideals into the stories of the Pentateuch. It was the "blameless deed" of a virtuous philosopher when Moses killed the Egyptian (*De Vita Mosis* I, 44). This great man becomes what the Greek calls a "*theios aner*" when he is in ecstasy and the divine Spirit speaks through him, the last of these ecstasies taking place immediately before his death when he prophesies his own death and burial (II, 291). In another context<sup>3</sup> we have shown how this psychological misunderstanding of the Biblical inspiration by Hellenistic Judaism has deeply influenced the early church and how even still Augustine tries to apply this idea of prophetic inspiration and of a divine book produced by such inspiration to the Bible. It is one of the great tragedies of the history of the church that the early fathers, and even still Augustine, instead of taking the doctrine de Sacra Scriptura from the Scriptures themselves approached the problem with a preconceived idea of a divine book which must bear all the marks of a book claiming divine origin, a most perfect book without what our human mind would call "error," without contradictions, a book whose divine origin can and must be recognized by any unprejudiced reader. For everybody can see the perfection of the Bible, e.g., if he observes how all prophecies of the Old Testament have been fulfilled in the New. "How is not he to be regarded as God whose prophets have not only given the congruous answer on subjects regarding which they were consulted at the special time, but who also, in the case of subjects respecting which they were not consulted, and which related to the universal race of man and all nations, have announced prophetically so long time before the event those very things of which we now read, and which indeed we now behold?" (*De consensu evang.* I, 19 quoted from Nicene and Postnicene Fathers VI, p. 88). This view of prophetic inspiration which puts the Biblical prophets into one category with the pagan prophets and sibyls is untenable. The inspiration of Isaiah is something quite different from the inspiration of the Sibyl of Cumae whom Augustine regarded as a true prophetess. If this is so, then the psychological explanation of inspiration which Augustine gives and which he has left to future centuries up to our time must be abandoned. All these venerable pictures in which the relationship that exists between the divine and the human author is described and which go back to Augustine and Gregory the Great—head and

hands, author and secretaries, the *amanuenses* even as pens (*calami*), the process of inspiration as "*suggerere*" or "*dictare*" etc.—must be seen as what they are: attempts to understand psychologically what no psychology ever can grasp.

For if inspiration is a work of the Holy Spirit, it is like all works of the Spirit, beyond the sphere of what our reason can understand. A real conversion can be accompanied by deep emotions. These emotions may be studied by a psychologist, but not the conversion itself. The same emotions may be present in an imaginary conversion. The work of the Holy Spirit in human souls may be accompanied with such phenomena as we find them in the Primitive Church, prophecy, glossolaly, miraculous healing and the like. But the same phenomena may accompany experiences which are definitely not caused by the Holy Spirit. Who will explain how faith, hope and charity are created in a human soul? Who will explain the effects of the Word of God, of the sacraments of Christ in the depth of our souls? It is very dangerous, to say the least, to speak of the "experience of the Holy Spirit," or of the guidance of the Spirit, as we so easily do. How often has the spirit who was experienced or whose guidance was acknowledged not the Holy Spirit, but another spirit? If we confess, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we admit that the Holy Spirit is an article of faith, and not an object of observation.

## V.

If we apply this truth to the problem of the Inspiration of Holy Scripture as one of the great works of the Holy Spirit, we may define inspiration as that action of God the Holy Spirit by which he causes chosen men to write his word in the form of human writings. It would not be sufficient to define this action as assistance, as it sometimes has been done. Many books have been written with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. We would claim that for Augustine's "*Confessiones*" and other works of great Christian writers, or for the great creeds of the church or for many confessions of faith, such books and documents, however, remain human writings. The Roman Church which regards the final definitions of doctrine by the pope as infallible exposition of the doctrine entrusted to the Church would nevertheless not ascribe "inspiration" to whom she regards as vicar of Christ and to his decisions. The Vatican Council speaks of "divine assistance." Inspiration is ascribed to the scriptures only, though the work of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the "tradition" may practically come very close to his work in the inspiration of Scripture. The divine inspiration of the Scriptures must be distinguished from the way that in each case the will of the Holy Spirit was carried out. In some cases we hear that the writer received the direct command: Write! (e.g., Ex 17:14; Jer 30:2, 36:2; Rv I: 11), There may have been cases of real dictation, comparable to the phenomenon of "automatic writing" which has been described by psychologists of religion. Just as Biblical prophecy is not bound to any definite psychological experiences (visions, auditions, etc.), so there is no definite form of inspiration. Leviticus

has been written and composed in quite a different way from the way in which the *Miserere* came into existence. John 17 has not been written in the same frame of mind as the epistle of James. A variety of ways of inspiration must be assumed in view of the variety of writings, styles and literary genres found in the Bible. And yet the inspiration itself was in all cases the same. God the Holy Spirit caused his word to be written in form of human writings. In a “variety of operations” the Holy Spirit created the Bible in which the song of Lamech and the Lord’s Prayer, Song of Songs and the epistle to the Romans, the Gospel of St. John and the story of the conquest of Canaan belong together and nothing is superfluous, not even the cloak that Paul left with Carpus at Troas. The Bible is *one* in virtue of the inspiration. Without the belief that God the Holy Spirit has created it we could regard it only as a collection of writings of greater or lesser religious or historical value produced and gathered in the vicissitudes of history. For even the view that the unity of the Bible rests upon the decision of the church that defined the canon is untenable. According to the belief of the Church of all ages, even the Roman Church, the church has not produced, but received the scriptures. She has canonized the books, and only such books, which she firmly believed to have been written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

## VI.

If Holy Scripture can be understood properly only as the work of the Holy Spirit, then *the doctrine of Inspiration is an essential part of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit*. This is borne out by the Nicene Creed where both are connected in the words, “I believe in the Holy Spirit ... who spoke through the prophets.” What this means is shown by the “according to the scriptures” of the preceding sentence. This again must be read in the light of 1 Corinthians 15:3f.<sup>4</sup> If our observation is correct, how could anyone expect from the synagogue a real understanding of the inspiration of the Scriptures? How could anyone understand the Holy Spirit before Christ’s promise of the Paraclete was fulfilled at Pentecost? If we, moreover, remember that only after 300 years, at the synods of Alexandria 362 and Constantinople 381, the divinity of the Holy Spirit was recognized, we can hardly blame the fathers of the first centuries that they were not able to overcome the view of the *pneuma* as a divine power or divine influence enabling and causing men to speak divine words and to write divine scriptures. The full meaning of the fact that the name *Parakletos* is given in the New Testament to Christ as well as to the *Pneuma Hagion*, and that in John 15:26 and 16:7ff. the Spirit is referred to as a person was realized only by the Fathers of the Fourth century. Very rarely, however, they mention the Scriptures among the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> We must not forget that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has never been finished in the Ancient Church. Otherwise the great dissensus between East and West about the *Filioque* could not have happened. It is significant that the history of the liturgy also shows a strange neglect of

the Holy Spirit. "Who with the Father and Son together is worshipped and glorified," says the Nicene Creed, confirming the rule that every dogma appears first in the liturgy. The Holy Ghost is indeed mentioned in the conclusion of the prayers of the church. But the logical conclusion from the Trinitarian dogma that prayers can also be directed to the Third Person of the Trinity has never been drawn in the liturgy. The orations are directed to the Father and the Son, even at Pentecost and in the Roman Mass of the Holy Ghost. This shows the antiquity of the Christian liturgy which still today celebrates Pentecost as a feast of Christ as in the first centuries. The liturgy knows only the invocation of the Holy Spirit in the "*Veni sancte Spiritus...*" out of which the medieval hymns and those of the Reformation churches which are directed to the Holy Spirit have grown. If we must state that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is unfinished in the church, can we then be surprised that the same is true of the inspiration of Scripture? All churches of Christendom feel today this great gap in their doctrines.

## VII.

If Holy Scripture is the work of God, the Holy Spirit, its main task is that ascribed to the Paraclete by Christ: "he will teach you all things and will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26); "he will bear witness to me" (15:26); "he will guide you into all truth ... he will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (16:13f.). Christ is the real content of Holy Scripture. This was not only Luther's understanding of the Bible. It appears already in the Middle Ages, e.g., with Wicliff. Scripture, he points out, can be understood only by him who believes "that Christ is true God and true man because he is the messiah promised to the fathers." Scripture must be understood from those parts which clearly testify to this truth. Then "the entire Scripture and each part of it "teach" that Christ, God and man, is the redeemer of all mankind, the author of the whole salvation and he who gives the last reward."<sup>6</sup>

The Jews could not, and the synagogue today cannot, understand the Old Testament, because they have rejected Jesus as the Messiah. No one can understand the scriptures of the Old Testament, unless he knows Christ and understands what it means that "To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43). As in the great vision of Revelation 5 "the Lamb that was slain" alone is "worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof" (5:9), namely the heavenly book in which the events of the future are written, so the Old Testament is a book sealed with seven seals until the risen Lord opens it to men, until the risen Lord "opens their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures" by showing them how "all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the scriptures concerning me" (Lk 24:44f.). As a stained window is meaningless until it is seen against the light, so the Old Testament becomes clear to him only who sees the light of Christ shining through it.



This connection between the inspiration by the Holy Spirit and Christ as the content of the Scriptures corresponds to the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Apart from the passages on the Paraclete (Jn 14–16), Paul’s utterances have to be taken in account. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to confess Jesus as the Lord (1 Cor 12:3, comp. Mt10:19f.), as also the Holy Spirit enables us to call God our Father (Rom 8:15, see the words in the “*Veni Creator Spiritus*” which express this truth: “*Per te sciamus da Patrem, noscamus atque Filium*”). Christ and the Holy Spirit belong for Paul so closely together that in 2 Corinthians 3:17 he almost seems to identify them: “The Lord is the Spirit.” This is, however, as the immediately following words “The Spirit of the Lord” show, no real identification, but rather the expression of an inseparable connection as the later Church has it expressed in the “*Filioque*.” It could be formulated: “Where Christ is, there is the Holy Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit is, there is Christ.” As in the Gospel Jesus and the Holy Spirit belong together since the Incarnation, so in the entire Bible Christ and the Holy Spirit belong together from the first chapter of Genesis where we read that the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters when God created all things through His eternal Word (Gn 1 read in the light of Jn 1:1ff., 1 Cor 8:6, Heb 1:2), to the last chapter of Revelation where the Spirit and the Church say: “Come, Lord Jesus” (22:17:20). This understanding of Holy Scripture does not mean that we can find in any passage a christological meaning, or that we even should look for it. Only those passages of the Old Testament which are clearly interpreted in this way in the New Testament can be regarded as clear testimonies to Christ. But they are sufficient to convince us that Christ is the content proper of the entire Bible even there where we cannot perceive him with the limitations of our human mind.

### VIII.

This understanding of the inspired Bible as the scriptures in which God, the Holy Spirit, testifies to God, the Son, frees us from many a false understanding of inspiration. Men of the sixteenth and seventeenth century who thought of books and their authors in terms of Humanism were embarrassed by what seems to be the very bad Greek of some of the New Testament writings. A perfect book must be written in a perfect, flawless language. The apologists of all times since Origen’s “*Against Celsus*” have had to defend the Bible against those who found in it moral deficiencies, inaccuracies, contradictions and errors. The church fathers as well as the medieval and modern theologians were confronted with the fact that the story of creation cannot be understood in terms of natural science. The conviction is growing that the time has come when the church has to give up definitely the well-meant attempts to reconcile the first chapter of the Bible with “modern” science. Since theology moves very slowly, “modern” science proves in each case to be the science of yesterday. The church has defended the geocentric view of the world when it long since has become obsolete. It has accepted the heliocentric view when the centre had already moved to the centre of our galaxy and from there to other

galaxies. How detrimental to the Christian faith this has been is now generally recognized. The rapid development of modern physics has led to serious warnings on the part of, Roman theologians as well as such an outstanding leader of conservative Reformed theology as Professor Berkouwer against the repetition of the great mistakes made in the case of Galileo and on other occasions. It may be a heroic act of faith to accept the story of creation as a substitute for a scientific view of the origin of the universe, but to demand that from a Christian means to excommunicate all scientists who in firm belief in their God and Saviour do the work of their calling which is based on the dominion over all the earth given to man by his creator. How many souls have been lost through the failure of the Church to do justice to the facts established by solid research, by experiment and observation? We have shown on another occasion what we could learn in this respect from the fathers of the church.<sup>7</sup> This does not imply any denial of a dogma of the Church. Neither the creation of the world "out of nothing" is abandoned, nor the special creation of man and the fall of the first man as an historic event. What must be admitted by the church is that the Bible in speaking of such things uses a language different from ours. It speaks to men of very ancient times in a way which was even by the church fathers felt to be very old and simple. How could men of such times have understood a story of creation told in the terminology of Aristotle or Augustine, let alone of twentieth century science which probably will be obsolete in another century? This is what Chrysostom has called the "*synkatabasis*" ("*condescensio*") of God. "Behold the condescension of the Divine Scripture, see what words it uses on account of our weakness," he says commenting on Genesis 2:21 (Migne SG 53, col. 121, comp. col. 34f., 135; vol. 59, col. 97f.). In a similar way Jerome and other fathers have solved the problem. If we say that, we do not think that the way of thinking and speaking in those very early times was inferior to ours. It was different, but we would by no means dare to say that our scientific view of the world gives us a deeper insight into the nature of the world. They were very far from our rational thinking. They saw realities which we no longer see, just as primitive people today still observe things which we no longer perceive. What they said about such realities must not be regarded as myths, though it sometimes may remind us of the language of mythology, the reason being that pagan mythology is a deteriorated and paganised echo of such wisdom.

In addition to the "law of condescension" in the Bible we must take in account what we could call the "law of parallels" in Holy Scripture. As we find in the Hebrew language the *parallelismus membrorum* in poetic and prophetic texts, so we find the strange fact that almost every important event is told several times and always with variations. There are two stories of creation. There are all the other parallels in the Pentateuch, due to the different sources. We have two great histories of Israel, one written from the prophetic, the other from the priestly point of view. In the New Testament even four lines run parallel in the Gospels. What does it mean

that we have parables and other sayings of Jesus in the Gospels, even the Lord's Prayer and the eucharistic words in various forms. Two baptismal formulas also appear in the New Testament. This must have a meaning. How easy would it have been for the church to agree on one Gospel or to create an official harmony of the Gospels? Why have all attempts at such a harmony failed? The Church of Syria which used the Diatessaron became heretical and its return to orthodoxy coincided with the return to the four Gospels. The Gospel Harmonies created in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or those to be found in some Catholic Bibles, have proved to be failures. The picture of Jesus which they give is always unrealistic and lifeless, so when, e.g., a twofold cleansing of the temple is assumed or even several healings of the same person. No one has been able to harmonize the apparent "contradiction," regarding the chronology of the Passion and of the events of Easter. But are these real contradictions? If we compare paintings of the crucifixion by four great painters, who would find "contradictions" and "errors" in them? Have not Grunewald and Durer seen more than a photograph could show? The strange idea of the sacred history which underlies the apologetic attempts to harmonize all differences goes back to an age which no longer was able to understand the biblical idea of history. Neither the Jewish rabbis nor the fathers of the church nor their pagan adversaries like Celsus and Porphyrius have been able to think in terms of history. This is to a large degree due to the fact that Greek philosophy had no understanding of history. What we have to learn again is to measure biblical history by its own standards. Instead of asking whether a certain narrative corresponds to our standards, we should ask: Why did the biblical writer tell events and record words just the way he did it? Luke, e.g., was a critical historian who evaluated his sources (1:1ff.). Why has he given, or inserted, in Acts 3, reports on the conversion of Paul which are not in full agreement? He must have been aware of this. Instead of finding fault with his method and accusing him of errors we should rather ask: What was his intention when he wrote these passages? Why did he not regard as intolerable contradictions what later centuries have called that? The great concern of the church in factual historical truth is deeply rooted in the Bible. How carefully are the events in the history of salvation dated (e.g., Is 6:1, Am 1:1, Lk 3:1, 1 Cor 15:1ff.) lest anyone might deny the facts. The words "under Pontius Pilate" belong to the Nicene Creed just as "according to the Scriptures." What, then, is factual historical truth for the holy writers? This is one of the great problems which Biblical theology has to investigate and to answer. It cannot be answered by the statement that "truth" in the Bible has a deeper and more comprehensive meaning than "veritas" with Aquinas (*Summa th. I qu. 16 "De Veritate"*). However, biblical truth cannot be without what we understand by propositional truth, because otherwise the revelation of the Bible would become myth. All creeds of the church from the first creedal statements of the New Testament present facts (see 1 Cor 15:1ff.). Without this factual, dogmatic character Christianity would become a mystery religion. How

and why the holy writers transmit to us one truth in several parallel records and what the variety means, this is one of the foremost problems of biblical hermeneutics. It is a most comprehensive question, for the fact also that the New Testament knows and uses two "Old Testaments," the Hebrew and the Greek, comes under the "law of parallels."

## IX.

Whatever the answer to these questions may be, one thing Christian theology can never admit, namely, the presence of "errors" in the sense of false statements in Holy Scripture. The holy writers may have used, as they actually have, sources, traditions, methods of a pre-scientific historiography, literary forms of the ancient Orient which we do no longer possess. Their language may be figurative, their narratives sometimes bordering on legend and poetry or even using such forms of expression. Yet all this has been written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In a way that is and always will remain inscrutable to human reason these truly human writings are God's Word. The inspiration of Holy Scripture has often been understood as an analogon to the incarnation. It seems that this view is becoming more and more the common possession of Christendom, especially since it has been introduced into Roman Catholic theology and approved by the encyclical of 1943. To the dilemma formulated by Paul Claudel, "either the Bible is a human work ... or else Scripture is a divine work," Steinmann (op. cit. p. 14) has rightly replied: "One might as well say: Either Jesus Christ is man or he is God." We cannot go into this theological problem here. The time may come when the christological decision of Chalcedon will become the pattern of a solution of the doctrine of Holy Scripture and its inspiration. Between the Monophysitism of fundamentalists who failed to understand the human nature of the Bible and the Nestorianism of modern Protestant and Anglican theology which sees the two natures, but fails to find the unity of scripture as a book at the same time fully human and fully divine, we have to go the narrow path between these two errors, But we must never forget that the Chalcedonense has been authoritatively explained in the doctrine of the "*enhypostasia*." The human nature has its "hypostasis" in the divine. So Holy Scripture is first of all and essentially God's Word. The human word in the Bible has no independent meaning. What would the books of Samuel and even the epistle to the Romans mean outside the Bible? God has given us these writings as his word. What is Holy Scripture without its content, Christ? "*Tolle Christum e scripturis, quid amplius invenies?*" as Luther wrote against Erasmus "Take Christ out of the Scriptures, what remains?" As we humbly bow before the mystery of the incarnation of the Eternal Word so we accept in great humility the mystery of Holy Scripture as the written word of God in which the Father through the Holy Ghost testifies to Christ: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The greatness of this revolution may be seen from some volumes of the series "Faith and Fact Books. Catholic Faith in the Scientific Age" (translated from French, London, Burns and Oates): "Biblical Criticism" by Jean Steinmann. "The Religion of Israel" by Albert Gelin, "The Origin of Man" by Nicolas Corte (pseudonym). 1959. The new approach to the Bible was made possible through the encyclicals "Divino afflante Spiritu" (1943) and "Humani Generis" (1950).

<sup>2</sup> For the references see Strack-Billerbeck, Vol. IV. p. 435ff.

<sup>3</sup> "Sacra Scriptura. Observations on Augustine's doctrine of Inspiration" in this Review, Vol. XIV, No. 3, Oct., 1955, pp. 65–80.

<sup>4</sup> This basic creed of the Church would be understood better if its Biblical Pauline background were taken more in account. It has grown out of the binitarian formula of 1 Cor 8:6, the Pauline, Christian version of the basic confession of the O.T., the "Schema" of Dt 6:4. Still the creed of 325 is binitarian like the Great Gloria of the Western liturgy. Pauline is the "one God ... and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things are," as also the "one baptism" (Eph 4:5) and the connection of the Spirit with the Lord (2 Cor 3:17).

<sup>5</sup> Gregory of Nyssa and Didymos seem to be the only theologians who do that, but they do not elaborate on this thought.

<sup>6</sup> "Conclusio autem finalis totius scripturae et cuiuslibet partis suae est, quod Christus, deus et homo, est humani generis ... redemptor. totius salutis autor et ultimus praemiator," De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae III cap. 31 (ed. Buddensieg vol. III, p. 242, 18ff.).

<sup>7</sup> "Hexaemeron: Theology and Science with the Church Fathers," this Review Vol. XVII, No.3, October, 1958.

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