

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Canadian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_canadian-journal.php

Historical Theology and Biblical Theology

ALAN RICHARDSON

AT first sight it might seem that the distinction between historical theology and biblical theology is sufficiently obvious. That is to say, when we use these terms in conversation with our colleagues they seem to understand what we mean. Perhaps their general connotation in everyday usage is something like this. Historical theology is simply the application of those disciplines of historical science, which were perfected in the nineteenth century, to the study of biblical and Christian origins and developments. Biblical theology is the interpretation of the insights of the Bible in a coherent and systematic way with a view to shewing the essential meaning and unity of the biblical faith. According to this kind of working definition there need be no clash between these two types of theological enquiry; as in other spheres it must be pointed out that there is no essential conflict between science and religion. The scientist—in this case the historical theologian—must be allowed full freedom to pursue his researches wherever they may lead, and the conclusions to which he is to come must not be prescribed in advance by dogmatists who start from faith rather than from history. The biblical theologian, however, must pay attention to the conclusions which the historical study of the Bible has reached; otherwise he will be in danger of imposing an elaborate allegorism or typology on the historical materials, which bears no more relation to the latter than do the constructions of, say, Valentinus or the British Israelites.

Thus, it is generally conceded that the biblical theologian must take account of the researches of historical investigators and not try to by-pass their conclusions in the interests of his dogmatic system. Indeed, the biblical and dogmatic theologian is nowadays so anxious to create the impression of having started from the unadorned facts, as the historian sees them, that he often succeeds in convincing himself that he has started from those facts and based his conclusions solely upon them. It is not, however, so readily conceded that the man whose interest is in historical theology should or must take up an attitude in the sphere of biblical theology; it is still often assumed that the historical theologian may continue with his researches unaffected by discussions about the nature of revelation or the problem of demythologizing. A kind of peaceful co-existence is still frequently held to be the ideal relationship between historical and biblical theology; it is not inevitable that the one should attack or seek to subjugate the other, and if an iron curtain separates the two spheres of influence, at least it should prevent either side from trespassing too easily on its neighbour's territory.

Of course, we all recognize that this sketch of the two empires of historical and biblical theology is somewhat inaccurate and misleading. At best it

serves merely as a rough-and-ready characterization of what is on the top of our minds when we say that so-and-so is interested in historical theology and so-and-so in biblical theology. There are, it is true, theologians, if such they may be called, who would be bored by a discussion of the problem of demythologizing the Gospel but who would listen eagerly to a paper on the Semitisms in Lk. 1-2 or on the *hapax legomena* in Colossians-Ephesians. And there are also those who would be entirely uninterested in such enquiries unless they were assured that they had some vital bearing upon the doctrine of justification by faith or of the apostolic succession. Historical and biblical theologians, as we use such phrases, are, it is true, recognizable species amongst the theological fauna of this and other ages. Some University faculties or schools of theology can fairly be labelled by the one or the other of these terms, at least for purposes of broad and convenient description. Nevertheless the distinction between historical and biblical theology, when we come to consider it more searchingly, breaks down and is seen to be more apparent than real, and it is doubtful whether the terms have any more validity and utility than labels usually possess. One might label this jar "strawberry jam" and that one "raspberry", and the labels are useful enough for practical purposes; but the analytical chemist knows that a high percentage of the contents of both jars is in fact identical in substance.

Thus, when we begin to analyse the content of historical theology we find that it contains a remarkable percentage of the kind of presuppositions which are found in the writings of so-called biblical theologians—not perhaps the same presuppositions but still the same kind of presuppositions, that is to say, presuppositions which belong to the sphere of philosophy or ideology rather than to that of empirical science. In other words, as we all recognize nowadays, even the most empirically-minded historian works with his mind crammed full of philosophical and ideological assumptions, all the more so if he prides himself on being uninterested in speculative problems and concerned only with historical facts. If we might adapt some words which Professor A. D. Ritchie once wrote about physical scientists,¹ we might say that historians "brush aside a vast number of perplexing problems when they desire to disregard metaphysics and go straight to work" on history. Their conception of history is "already saturated with metaphysics and metaphysics of the most dangerous sort, unconscious metaphysics inherited from our forebears and worked out in extreme youth. Lurking in the background is some theory and some assumption as to the nature of things; the (historian's) escape from metaphysics is largely illusory. He has simply repressed it." What Ritchie calls "unconscious metaphysics" would better be termed ideology, for ideology differs from metaphysics or philosophy precisely in the fact that it is uncriticised and largely or entirely unconscious. The uncritical or unphilosophical person sees everything through the spectacles of his own assumptions, and he is unaware of the spectacles he is wearing; he thinks that he sees things as they are in themselves. As T. E.

Hulme pointed out, "there are certain doctrines which for a particular period seem not doctrines, but inevitable categories of the human mind." People "do not see them, but other things *through* them".²

Now, of course, it must be conceded that there are a number of literary and historical questions in the sphere of theological studies into which the personal beliefs of the investigator do not obtrude themselves at all. For example, it is possible to determine scientifically whether there are Semitisms in St. Luke's Gospel or how many *hapax legomena* there are in the Pastoral Epistles. But it is an error to conclude from this concession that therefore all questions of literary and historical criticism are equally susceptible of impartial or "scientific" treatment. Yet this is the assumption which is constantly made, more often unconsciously than deliberately. Let us take one or two illustrations of the way in which this assumption has pervaded recent theological study.

It has, for instance, been received almost as a dogma of modern biblical scholarship that the Book of Ecclesiastes represents a distinctly Greek type of pessimism and scepticism which is at variance with the Hebraic outlook of the Bible as a whole. The Preacher is accused of being variously a Cynic, an Epicurean, a Stoic, a worldly Sadducee or even a nihilist, and these assertions are copied from one commentary to another. It has been found necessary to invent a Pharisaic interpolator to account for the passages which do not accord with this estimate. But to-day in our changed climate of opinion it is easier to see that all these critical estimates and conclusions are based on the fact that the insights of the Preacher contradict the assumptions of theological liberal optimism. It is not Ecclesiastes but the liberal critics, with their sanguine confidence in human reason to understand all mysteries and all knowledge, who are the purveyors of non-biblical Greek attitudes. The Preacher is essentially a prophet for our age, and he is biblical through and through: he has stood before the abyss of nothingness and contemplated the vanity of all human pretensions, especially pride of knowledge. So he exhorts the young man to remember his Creator: think of your existence, its beginning and its inevitable ending. If you don't want to live in a fool's paradise, face the fact of your mortality; you are young now and full of life, but face the fact that one day you will die. Take delight in the good things of life while you can, but don't put your trust in them; put away evil from your flesh, for youth and the prime of life are vanity. The days will come when you will no longer find satisfaction in these things. When the evil days come, when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men bow down, then the theories and the philosophies of other people, all the wisdom of the books and the labs., will be but a weariness of the flesh, a vexation of the spirit. The only knowledge which will help you then will be your own knowledge of God, built up in a lifetime of remembering him, of obeying his will, of keeping his commandments and thus fulfilling the whole duty of man. You know God, not by reading books about him or speculating on his existence and attributes, but by

obeying him, fearing him and worshipping him. One is tempted to ask whether there is any book in the Old Testament more thoroughly biblical than Ecclesiastes and whether anything could better illustrate the subjectivism of the so-called "historical" approach than the treatment which it has received at the hands of the commentators since the rise of the modern critical method.

One further illustration of the inadequacy of the so-called "historical" approach must suffice. Let us consider Rudolf Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*. In this work the great Marburg scholar gives us the mature results of a lifetime's researches. The assumption of the whole work is that by the methods of scientific historical criticism it is possible to lay bare the successive stages by which the Catholic religion of the second and subsequent centuries was developed. This assumption is nowhere criticized; it is not even stated; it is taken as self-obvious. The result is a subjective and uncritical reconstruction of the process by which the *Kerugma* of the primitive Church was overlaid by the Gnostic-Catholic religion of the Hellenistic world. And it is all done in the name of scientific history. Yet the whole reconstruction is based upon a few simple dogmas of the modern mind: miracles do not happen, and therefore a large part of the apostolic witness must be explained away. The apostolic world-view is a mythology compounded of fantastic Jewish apocalyptic and legendary Greek Gnosticism, and the Gospel must therefore be demythologised. When the flesh of first century history has thus been cut from it, the skeleton of the Gospel turns out to be the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith, and all that remains to be done is to re-clothe it in the respectable garments of Heidegger's philosophy. Those of us who are not disposed to surrender the Catholic faith in favour of this attenuated and unhistorical Protestantism will at once question Bultmann's basic assumptions. We will notice that anything which accords with these assumptions is at once accepted as fact. For instance, Bultmann never questions the view that the Similitudes of Enoch is a pre-Christian work, representative of the outlook of Jesus and his disciples. Or again, Bultmann has no hesitation in using the Hellenistic literature of the second and following centuries for the reconstruction of his "Gnostic myth", which he then discovers in the New Testament. For the evidence that the myth existed in the first century he turns to such literature as Colossians-Ephesians and the Gospel according to St. John. But these writings can be used as evidence for his thesis only if it is first established that the so-called Gnostic myth was already a dominating influence in the thought-world of the first century, so that it would be reasonable to explore the possibility that they attempt to restate the Christian *Kerugma* in Gnostic categories. If, however, there is no evidence outside the New Testament itself for the prevalence of such categories, then the attempt to interpret the New Testament by means of them is anachronistic, because the New Testament literature is clearly patent of another and more Hebraic interpretation. It would appear that Bultmann finds in the New Testament merely what he wants to find in it, and nothing more.

But this is what happens to every attempt to write history. That is to say, the "scientific" study of history does not reveal the categories by which the historical "facts" are to be interpreted; these categories must be supplied by the historian himself. His interpretation of what happened in history will be controlled by his *a priori* conceptions of what is likely to have happened. The historian must always bring to his study of history principles of interpretation which the so-called historical facts do not themselves disclose. What makes a man a good historian is not his capacity to amass a great quantity of facts but his ability to interpret them. This work of interpretation, whether he understands the matter or not, is the result of the historian's own personal scheme of values, his fundamental philosophical outlook, his ideological assumptions and subjective categories. In other words, if we do not accept Bultmann's philosophy it is improbable that we shall be disposed to accept his reconstruction of the New Testament history.

From considerations of this kind certain conclusions would appear to follow for our view of the relation of historical and biblical theology. First, the historical theologian is, no more than the biblical theologian, working with "objective" historical truths which are independent of the personal and subjective attitude of the investigator. The distinction between historical and biblical theology is thus seen not to be an ultimate one; it is at best only a rough and ready way of indicating the interests and methods of approach of particular investigators. Neither the historical nor the biblical theologian is immune from the critical attention of the philosophical theologian who asks basic questions concerning the underlying assumptions of their work. What is the justification of Bultmann's undiscussed assumptions, such as that miracles do not happen, or that ultimate truth must be expressed non-mythologically in existentialist categories? These matters do not arise out of his reconstruction of history; on the contrary, his reconstruction of history proceeds directly out of them. We must conclude that in the final issue there is no such thing as historical theology, if by that term is meant a reconstruction of the theology of any given period that is objectively independent of the investigator's personal point of view.

It may now be asked whether a second conclusion is involved in this first one, namely, that there is no such thing as objective history and that we have no means to escape from the subjectivity of the historian's personal and ideological categories. In any absolute sense it is clear that the attainment of objectivity in historical reconstruction is impossible. But such considerations need not deter the historian from going about his proper work. After all, natural scientists have been able to continue with their research and its technological applications without waiting for philosophers to tell them whether any objective knowledge of the physical world is possible; they have quite a lot to do without asking philosophical questions. The same is true of historians, including biblical scholars and church historians of every kind; they will go on—in Acton's phrase—getting their meals in the kitchen without taking time off to attend the symposium which goes on in the halls of philosophy. The question which was posed by the rise and

progress of natural science in the seventeenth century was faced by Kant in the eighteenth: how is scientific knowledge possible? The question which has been raised by the rise and progress of historical science in the nineteenth century has not yet received any very sustained treatment by philosophers in the twentieth century: how is historical knowledge possible? What is "history" but a complicated web of ideas in the mind of the historian, and how are these ideas related to past events which, *ex hypothesi*, are no longer in existence? What sort of theory of historical truth do we need? Is it a "correspondence theory" or a "coherence theory"? How can our historical ideas be said to correspond with events which are past and no longer exist? But if coherence is the test, how are we to distinguish between a well written historical novel and a carefully documented work of historical reconstruction? And, in any case, is history coherent? Does it not differ from natural phenomena in being unique, unrepeatable, irreducible to types and laws? If, for example, there are unity and coherence in Gibbon's account of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, is that not due rather to the eighteenth century categories through which Gibbon sees history than to any coherence in the historical events themselves? These are deep questions, and they cannot be answered incidentally in the course of such a paper as this. But it is necessary that we should bear them in mind, for we need to be continually reminded that the study of historical theology, in so far at least as it aims at historical reconstruction, must always be accompanied by a ruthless criticism of our basic assumptions. If we are honest with ourselves in undertaking such self-criticism, we shall at least be preserved from the naïveté of imagining that we are free from the element of subjectivity and that we are writing purely "scientific" history. If we are honest with our readers, we shall make quite clear the standpoint from which we write.

It is very important to notice that the admission that there can be no such thing as "objective" or "scientific" history does not mean that the study of history has no value or that there is no such thing as historical truth. To draw any such sceptical conclusion from what we have said above would be to surrender abjectly to the positivists and scientific humanists. According to all forms of positivism and scientific humanism, the only statements which can be accepted as true are those which are capable of verification by the method which has yielded such remarkable results in the sphere of natural science. The current ideology of our age accepts this dogma as self-obvious. We must, however, deny its validity. Truth is reached in subjectivity as well as in objectivity, or perhaps we should say that a different level of truth is reached through subjective insight from that which is discovered by means of the method of the natural sciences. We must be on our guard against the use of such phrases as "merely subjective" as they are frequently employed in a disparaging sense; they imply a conscious or unconscious acceptance of the dogma of scientific humanism. History must necessarily contain an element of subjectivity, but it is not therefore to be written off as "merely subjective". All history (as I

have argued elsewhere³) is *somebody's* history—Gibbon's, or Macaulay's or Trevelyan's, and it is this personal quality of the historian's work which gives it its interest and value. It is the perspective from which he sees things, the scale of values by which he judges them, which makes the work of this or that historian of literally unique significance. In the natural sciences we try to rid ourselves of all subjectivity; we stand outside the objects of our investigation and look at them through a telescope or a microscope and observe them as disinterestedly or objectively as we can. In history, on the other hand, this is neither desirable nor possible. We cannot stand outside history, for we are inextricably involved in it, and our whole personality is totally engaged in the study of it. Every historian who is writing history in the full sense of the word is, whether he recognizes the fact or not, writing his own history; he is engaged in writing the autobiography of the human race, and for that reason all true historical writing is autobiographical, or is self-portraiture. Bultmann's theology is essentially "a portrait of the artist by himself"; that is what makes it so fascinating and so important.

In other words, history is an entirely different type of mental discipline from the disciplines which are called by the name of natural science. Apart from the personal and subjective categories of the historian there can be no true history, that is, an imaginative reconstruction of a period or an epoch. The kind of truth with which history deals is subjective, not objective. To those brought up under the influence of the positivistic dogma that scientific truth is the only kind of truth, this statement will sound like an admission that there is no truth of history; but to those who have come to think that the only way to true knowledge of reality is through the subjective apprehension of the prophet, artist, dramatist, metaphysician, man of action, and so on, it will arouse neither surprise nor despondency. If we accept any kind of religious view of the universe at all, it is obvious that there must be an insight into the world of meaning and value and reality which lies behind the phenomenal world that is investigated by means of the five senses, as they are magnified ten thousand-fold by the ingenious techniques of the natural scientists. The principle of interpretation by means of which the reconstruction of an epoch or a period is made, and without which no history could be written, is indeed subjective; it comes into conflict with the subjective principles of interpretation employed by other historians; but out of this clash of subjective interpretations new insights and fresh interpretations, which possess an ever wider universality, are reached. Thus, though no final and definitive history of any given epoch or period will ever be attained by historians *sub specie temporis*, new depths of understanding will always be possible, the aberrations and eccentricities of individual interpretations will be corrected, and views which may be described as truly historical will—theoretically at any rate—be attainable. Hence we need not be afraid of the admission that there must inevitably be in the historical and human sciences an element of subjectivity such as would not be present in the natural sciences. This does not mean that the historical

sciences are in any way inferior in truth-value to the natural sciences; it means merely that they deal with a different order of knowledge, knowledge which is accessible only to the subjective or intensely personal apprehension of individual historians, theologians, metaphysicians, artists, poets, dramatists, novelists, prophets, mystics—where shall we stop?

We are now in a position to consider in the light of these conclusions what we ought to mean by "biblical theology". This expression should not be taken to imply merely an historico-literary enquiry into the theological teaching of the various biblical books; this would be historical theology in one of its forms. We might tentatively adopt some such definition as the following: biblical theology is the attempt to understand the biblical literature and history from the standpoint of biblical faith. That is to say, the biblical theologian personally accepts the faith to which the Bible testifies and finds in it the key to his interpretation of biblical history and literature. In doing this he makes no pretence of being impartial or objective; on the contrary, he makes as explicit as he can the assumptions or principles of interpretation by which he conducts his research into the literature of the Bible and constructs his account of the biblical history. He will have no need to disguise them, or to apologise for them; indeed, he will glory in them. He will believe that he possesses the only true key to the interpretation of the Scriptures, since Christ alone is the key which unlocks their mysteries.

We have said that biblical theology is the attempt to understand the biblical literature and history from the point of view of biblical faith. If now we are asked what is meant by biblical faith, we would reply briefly and simply: "faith in Christ." The main principle of interpretation of biblical theology is the assumption that the meaning of the Old Testament lies in its proclamation of the Christ who should come, while the meaning of the New Testament is found in its testimony that Jesus of Nazareth is he. It is Christ who draws together all the diverse strands of both the Old and the New Testaments. There is no need whatever for the biblical theologian to minimise the diversity of the different parts and outlooks of the Scriptures, or to pretend that all sections of the Bible testify equally to Christ. Nor is there any need to deny that the insights of, say, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment or of modern liberalism are invalid because they are not directly derived from the biblical revelation. We are not bound by the intellectual or moral standards of either the Fathers or the Reformation. "The mind of Christ", as we can know it with the aid of every available historical method of inquiry, is to be our sole criterion in matters of interpretation and of action. In the seventeenth century—to take an illustration I have used elsewhere⁴—theologians generally thought that the command, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exod. 22: 18), was as binding as, say, the command, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exod. 20: 14): To-day we do not think so. Our changed attitude is doubtless due to the insights of the Enlightenment, but in giving our judgment we would none-

theless say, "I think I have the mind of Christ". The biblical theologian is not constrained to assert that there is no revelation of the will of God outside the pages of the Bible; all he would claim is that we can recognize what is the will of God, if we can know it at all, because of the revelation of that will in the historical situations of which we learn from the Bible. The Bible sets forth God's character and will as having been made known amidst certain situations in human history, in man's encounter with that will in his faith and obedience. For this very reason the biblical theologian must always take history seriously. Because God is known in history, the most searching and rigorous scrutiny of the biblical history, with the aid of every technique which the development of modern historical method has placed in our hands, is a matter of absolute obligation for the biblical theologian. For him, therefore, there can be no stepping out of history, no relaxation of the strictest historical discipline, no short-cuts through historical problems however "congruous" a particular solution might appear from the standpoint of the systematic theologian. He will be especially on his guard against imposing upon the biblical history patterns and types which that history itself does not suggest. Even his own deepest conviction, that it is Christ who gives unity and meaning to the biblical history and literature, will be subjected to the fiercest examination and test that historical criticism itself can devise. And there will be ample opportunity to discuss with other biblical theologians an uncountable number of differing interpretations of this or that feature of the biblical history and literature, for biblical theology is not a system of ready-made answers to historical and literary questions. It is rather a starting-point, or perhaps we should say a perspective, from which all matters of scholarship are to be seen. It does not prescribe in advance any answers to critical problems; but it predisposes the enquirer to rest dissatisfied with any interpretation which arises out of non-biblical categories of judgment or which sets aside the biblical testimony to Christ.

Although, as we have said, biblical theology is not a system of dogmatics developed by a school of interpreters who can be labelled "biblical theologians", it is clear nevertheless that there is likely to be a certain measure of agreement between biblical scholars whose perspective is that of faith in Christ, that is, a personal acceptance of the biblical witness to Christ; and similarly there is likely to be a radical differentiation between them and all other investigators whose standpoint is not that of personal commitment to the biblical testimony. Take, for example, the question of the miracles of the Gospels. If I start from belief in the biblical affirmation of the living God who is the Lord both of history and of nature, and if I accept the biblical testimony that Jesus of Nazareth is the unique incarnation of this God in all his character of *δύναμις* and *κυριότης*, then I shall have rejected other assumptions, such as that miracles do not happen, which are grounded in a positivistic type of philosophy. My judgment as historian concerning the historicity of the Gospel miracles is likely to be different from the verdict of historians who start from positivistic assumptions. History

pure and simple—if such a thing exists at all—cannot settle such questions as that of whether the miracles happened. But that does not mean that we are to accept all the stories of miracles recorded in the Gospels in an uncritical and obscurantist way; it means that we are not to allow the witness of the Bible to be set aside in the interests of non-biblical *a priori* assumptions. I have been accused of accepting all the miracles of the Gospels in general and none of them in particular; but I cannot help thinking that this is a rather unfair caricature of my argument. The argument urges that, so far from miracles being ruled out on *a priori* grounds, belief in the living God would rather predispose us to look for ‘miracles and signs’ from him, because the living God of the Bible is essentially the God of miracle; therefore we are able to turn to a historical investigation of the Gospel miracle-stories and let the historical testimony speak for itself; and then, I think, we shall conclude, when all extraneous assumptions have been put aside, that the evidence (for instance) that Jesus healed a dropsical man on the Sabbath day is just as strong as that he taught the parable of the Good Samaritan. The *historical* evidence for both stories is of precisely equal weight.

The acceptance by biblical theologians of that which testifies to Christ as constituting the essence of the biblical revelation is the criterion by which all the historical evidence of the Bible is to be judged. It is a criterion which is applicable to the biblical material as well as to insights derived from non-biblical sources. If, for example, I am asked about the story in II Kings 2: 23-25 about the forty-two children who cried “bald head” after Elisha and were eaten by two she-bears, I must reply that since I cannot see that this incident testifies in any way to the truth of Christ, I cannot judge it to be a necessary part of the biblical history. The miracles of Jesus, however, as recorded in the Gospels, are of quite a different order, because their rejection would entirely alter the portrait of the historical Jesus which has been handed down to us by the apostolic witnesses; if we cannot accept their testimony, then we can no longer share their faith in the Son of God whose almighty power was declared most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity, and we would once more be committed to the fruitless attempt of reconstructing a historical account of Jesus which must begin by setting aside the only available historical testimony out of deference to modern ideological assumptions. This is the well-trodden road to historical scepticism, and the biblical theologian has no need to set out along it. The fact is that if we reject the apostolic testimony to the historical life and words of Christ, no other historical reconstruction of the life of Jesus and the origins of his Church and her faith is credible at all.

Thus it is that biblical theologians will claim with confidence that theirs is the only perspective from which a truly *historical* view of biblical and Christian origins and development can be reached. We must believe (though, in the absence of a fully articulated philosophy of history, we cannot assert that it is more than a belief) that the correct perspective, or the valid

categories of interpretation, will give the most satisfyingly historical account of the biblical events and will make possible the most convincing reconstruction of the biblical history. The standpoint of Christian faith is the only perspective from which the historical events can be seen clearly, rationally and coherently. Such an assertion will, of course, for ever remain (*sub specie temporis*) a matter of faith, since historical interpretation is not susceptible of verification after the manner of the natural sciences; in history we cannot "repeat the experiment" as we can in chemistry. But a certain measure of accreditation is possible. If our categories of interpretation succeed in making sense of the evidence of the biblical witnesses; if we find that we have less of the testimony to explain away; if, in short, our subjective categories enable us to reach something like a coherent and intelligible history, then we shall to that extent be encouraged to think that our categories are the right ones. We would not be historians at all if we did not believe that the right categories of interpretation would yield us a truly objective understanding of the events as they actually occurred, for this is what is meant by "history". Of course this is an assumption—that an objective interpretation of events can be attained if we look at them from the *right* perspective; but it is an assumption that we must make, consciously or unconsciously, if we attempt the task of writing history. Of course, no absolute perspective is attainable in this life, for we are men and not God; and the correction of the distortions of our perspective will always be necessary. Yet we must believe that some perspectives yield a truer or more objective view of the facts than others; and it is the task of the biblical theologian to demonstrate that the perspective of faith in Christ yields a more truly *historical* view than any other. We cannot, of course, persuade others that the perspective of Christian faith yields the most adequate view of the biblical facts if they will not even attempt to look at them from the Christian point of view; but we need not be unduly disturbed by the fact that those who do not possess Christian faith do not see what we see. The ancient word of wisdom is true of historical enquiry, as of other matters: "If you do not believe, you will not understand." The paradox of Christian epistemology is simply this, that faith in all its subjectivity is that which alone can make a rational or objective view of things possible.

NOTES

1. *The Scientific Method*, 1923, p. 6.
2. *Speculations* (Ed. Herbert Read), 2nd ed., 1936, pp. 50f. See my *Christian Apologetics*, 1947, pp. 65ff.
3. *Christian Apologetics*, pp. 92–104.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 222n.