The Hebraic Spirit

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TO UNDERSTAND the spirit of any people it is necessary to study their literature. The source-book for the study of the Hebraic spirit is primarily the Bible, and especially the Old Testament. The Old Testament had its roots in Jewish soil but was soon drawn into the Greek-speaking Hellenistic world. During the second century B.C. the Old Testament was translated into Greek—a translation that was not without its problems.[1] The New Testament, springing also from Palestinian soil, has been transmitted by the Church only in the Greek language.

Language is the medium of literature and every language has its own distinctive peculiarities. Therefore, the innate formal limitations and possibilities of any language and its literature are never quite the same as those of any other. This fact becomes even more obvious and demands evaluation because the thought-patterns of the Semitic languages, of which Hebrew is one, differ so widely from Indo-European thought modes. In Christian Syriac, for instance, where a conscious effort was made to express the Greek mind in Semitic speech-forms, the result was a loss of the formal Semitic character. The Semitic form was found too restricting for Greek thoughts.[2]

The difference in the modes of expression of various languages is further underlined by the fact that the Bible is now used primarily in translation by non-Semitic-thinking peoples. Many misinterpretations have resulted. The theological conflicts that arose in the early Church stemmed partly from a difference in ways of thinking between the Semitic and the Hellenistic Christians.[3]

Thorlief Boman[4] has attempted to delineate the inner logic of the Hebrew language and its connection with the psychology of the Hebrew people. Boman, discussing and comparing Hebrew and Greek thought, did not suggest that, because a certain thought pattern was characteristic of the Hebrews, it was to be considered unique. A similar mode of expression may be found in other parts of the world; and certainly among other Semitic-speaking peoples. In this study, the purpose is to isolate certain characteristics of Hebraic thought and to suggest how these may be expressed in English.

1. Cf. Henry S. Gehman, "The Hebraic Character of Septuagint Greek," *Vetus Testamentum*, 1 (1951), 81–90; "Hebraism of the Old Greek Version of Genesis," *ibid.*, 3 (1953), 141–8.

2. Cf. Edward Sapir, *Language* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), p. 222.

3. Cf. Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma* (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), Vol. I, where the formal and actual relationships between Israelite–Jewish and Hellenistic thinking, as they concern the Christian Church, are delineated.

4. Cf. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1960), pp. 25–27.

The Semites, including the Hebrews, thought concretely, directly, synthetically. In fact, we could say that, by the Semite, abstract thought was expressed only in concrete form. The Greek analytical mind was foreign to the Semites, and therefore they were unable to think abstractly. When the Hebrews stated the reason for the creation of the world, they told the story of the Garden of Eden.

The Semitic mind has always exhibited a quality of synthesis, of grasping after totalities.[5] To the Semite, such synthesis implied the building up of one idea upon another in such a way that there was always a grasping after a larger whole, a more comprehensive totality. This principle is expressed both in agglutination and in apposition. There was in this thought-process a strong sense of movement, of the dynamic rather than the static. The Greek mind, in contrast, is interested in symmetry and pattern. "There is all the difference in the world between giving a picture of life by building up a synthesis, through significant selection, combination, and contrast; and interpreting it in the Greek fashion. The one leads to variety and expansiveness, the other to simplicity and intensity."[6]

This reference to "contrast" leads us to mention a third basic characteristic of Semitic thinking—polarity. The close juxtaposition of opposites does not necessarily imply contradiction. Such opposites may be, and often are, complementary. The result of both synthesis and polarity is a strong sense of movement and depth in Hebrew thought-patterns.

There are many different ways of examining the Hebraic spirit. We could select a particular word and produce a semantic study. We could analyse a particular concept, such as the Semitic concept of time, which is aspectual rather than temporal. I propose, however, to describe the Hebraic spirit through Hebrew grammar and literary form, where agglutination and polarity can be observed. Our very first piece of evidence is found in the way in which words are formed and thoughts expressed in Hebrew. When we describe Semitic languages we refer to them as inflective and agglutinative.[7] Hebrew is inflectional, in the sense that there are internal vowel changes to denote the different parts of speech from the same root. This is the same phenomenon that we find in the English words "tread" and "trod." These internal vowel changes, which are normal in Hebrew, tend to emphasize the wholeness of form and thought. There are also external changes, which we can describe as agglutinative. This means that Hebrew tends to expand words externally at both ends, when new ideas are introduced, rather than to add new, independent words in close juxtaposition. For instance, in English we say "he killed"—two words, a personal pronoun

5. Cf. T. H. Robinson, *The Genius of Hebrew Grammar* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 2; Boman, *Hebrew Thought*, pp. 26ff.; J. Pedersen, *Israel*, I–II (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 124.

6. H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951), pp. 148ff.

7. Cf. Sapir, *Language*, pp. 126, 143, where the Semitic languages are called "synthetic."

and a verbal form. In Hebrew this thought is expressed in one word, *qāṭal*. Again, we say, "he killed him"—three words—but the Hebrew uses only one, having added the accusative personal pronoun "him" to the verbal form to produce a new totality, *qᵉṭālō*. Sometimes this procedure leads to difficulties—e.g. when a pronominal suffix is added to a participle or verbal noun. We may not know whether it is a subjective or an objective suffix. For example, *qōṭᵉlō* can mean "he who kills him" or "his killing" without the object being supplied. The agglutinative nature of the language also appears in the practice of adding possessive suffixes to nouns. In English we say "his book," but the Hebrew adds "his" directly to the word "book" to give a new totality, *kᵉṯābō*.

In Habakkuk 2:4, we have a phrase which illustrates both the problem and the danger of agglutination. The second half of the verse reads: "The righteous shall live by his faith(fulness)." The difficult word in this verse is the "his" of "his faith(fulness)." It can mean the righteous man's faithfulness or the faithfulness of "him"—viz. God or someone else. Many interpretations have been suggested. The first fact to notice in the verse is that it is the righteous man who is being discussed. The righteous man, however, is the one who has fulfilled all the requirements of the Jewish faith; otherwise he would not be called righteous. Thus the phrase "his faithfulness" does not refer to a man fulfilling faithfully all the requirements of the Jewish law. Furthermore, the Septuagint raises a question by translating the phrase "my faithfulness."[8] When we read the whole passage, we see that Habakkuk is told to wait patiently for God's word which, although it may be delayed, will surely come in the fulness of time. In the context of the passage and in the light of the Septuagintal reading, we suggest that the verse "the righteous shall live by his faith(fulness)" refers to the faithfulness of God in bringing about his promise, and not to man's faithfulness in doing God's command.

This discussion has taken us some distance from the main theme, but I have used the example to show how important it is to understand the agglutinative aspect of Hebrew. Another grammatical construction that illustrates the sense of totality and the grasping after larger wholes is the construct-genitive or *status constructus*.[9] In English, we say "the horse of the king" or "the king's horse." Here we have two independent but related concepts, joined by the word "of." According to Semitic thinking, such a phrase presents a new totality. "The Hebrew mind thought of the whole as a whole and not as an aggregate of different parts."[10] There is very good grammatical evidence for this assertion. The words "horse" and "king" have their own accents. But as soon as we write, in Hebrew, "the horse of

8. The Septuagint reads: *ho de dikaiōs ek pisteos mou zēsetai.*

9. This construction is correctly called "annexation" (*idāfa*); cf. William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language,* 3d ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1898), vol. II, p. 198B.

10. Robinson, *Genius of Hebrew Grammar*, p. 12.

the king," the word "horse" loses its accent. The vowels are shortened as much as possible, and the only accent in this new complex falls on the second word. Hence we have a new thought-whole, welded out of two originally independent wholes. This new whole is so indivisibly welded that nothing (except the article) can be placed between the two originally independent parts.

The concept of totality, so fundamental in the Semitic way of thinking, has caused many problems of interpretation for those who are not accustomed to thinking in a Semitic way. Because nothing can come between the two parts of a construct-genitive, Hebrew must write "the hill of my holiness" which really means, according to our western way of thinking, "my holy hill." Another phrase, often mistranslated in the King James Version of the Bible as "God of my salvation,"[11] should be read in our thought patterns as "my saving God."

One further observation to be made here emphasizes the theocentricity of the Hebrew point of view. The translation "God of my salvation" places the emphasis on "my," and hence is anthropocentric, whereas to translate the phrase "my God of salvation" or "my saving God" puts the emphasis on God. In Psalm 18:35 (Hebrew v. 36) we read (in the Revised Standard Version):

> Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation,
> and thy right hand supporteth me,
> and thy help made me great.

The Septuagint, however, misinterpreted the phrase and read it: "the shield of my salvation" (*sōterias mou*). Taking the lead from the Septuagint, many European commentators[12] have emended the Hebrew text because of a failure to understand the theocentric emphasis of the Hebrew. In the light of the rule that nothing can separate the two parts of a *status constructus*, we must, however, read: "thy saving shield." This reading is further corroborated by phrases appearing in the parallel lines: "thy right hand" and "thy help"—synonyms for "thy saving shield." Thus we should read the lines as follows:

> Thou hast given me thy saving shield,
> and thy right hand supporteth me,
> and thy help made me great.[13]

We can readily see the danger of attempting to interpret the Semitic modes of expression in terms of our own western logic. We not only do an injustice to the Semitic sense of totality, but we often make anthropocentric what is really theocentric.

Another grammatical construction that suggests the idea of totality is that of apposition. This means that two nouns are put side by side to explain each other. Here also we have, not two independent ideas, but one

11. *ʾlōhē yiʿ*ī.
12. Cf. W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: S.P.C.K., 1953), p. 164.
13. Cf. J. Weingreen, "The Construct-Genitive Relationship in Hebrew Syntax," *Vetus Testamentum*, 4 (1954), 50–59.

new, defined totality. This appositional construction is especially noted in the linking of two words in the same case when the first word expresses the *genus* or general category and the second expresses the *species* or specific number of that general category. In Hebrew, a phrase such as *hā'īš mošeh* represents this idea. This phrase is made up of the general word *'īš* (meaning "man") and the proper name "Moses." The Septuagint, the Vulgate, and many English versions translate the phrase literally as "the man Moses." This is, however, not necessary—or, indeed, what the Hebrew means. In English, to express correctly the Hebrew thought, we need simply say "Moses." Another example of the same usage is found in Genesis 13:8 in the phrase *'anāšīm 'āhīm naḥnū*, which the King James Version correctly translates as "we are brethren." The Revised Standard Version also has a very happy translation: "we are kinsmen." There is no need to translate this "we are men brothers,"[14] since brothers are always men and never women. The phrase *hā'īš hannāḇî'* likewise would be correctly translated into English as "the prophet" and not as "the man, the prophet."

One further example of the appositional construction may be taken from Ezra 7:11, where we read that Ezra is *hakkohen hassoṗer*, the priest who acts as a scribe. The Revised Standard Version translates the phrase "Ezra the priest, the scribe," which is a rather awkward expression in English. What the phrase means, of course, is that Ezra, who was a priest, carried out the function of a scribe or secretary. Hence the general word "priest" is more specifically qualified by adding the word "scribe" in apposition. If we dare to draw a modern parallel, we may say that Ezra would be a secretary of the World Council of Churches, or a papal secretary, or a scribe of a monastery.

In this connection, we must consider Genesis 1:26, where we read that God said: "Let us make man in our image according to our likeness." The phrases "our image" and "our likeness" are in apposition (of genus and species), in which the second phrase further defines the meaning of the first. Man is made in God's image, but only a likeness of that image. Such an interpretation is in harmony with man's role in the world, and with the divine command that man is not to try to become God, but is simply to remain like him.

Perhaps I have cited enough examples to illustrate that even the apposition of genus and species represents a striving after totality—albeit a more precisely defined totality. Hebrew thought in its most primitive period used general terms; but as life became more complex and more specification was required, nouns were written in apposition to each other to express new concepts. The modern exegete must therefore be very careful to determine whether he is dealing with different facets of a single concept or with separate ideas.

Another illustration of totality in Semitic languages is to be found in the

14. Cf. the Dutch translation of the Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap (Amsterdam, 1953).

phenomenon of polarity. For instance, in Arabic *jawn* serves to express both "black" and "white" in different contexts. Also, the Hebrew word "to sit down" (*yšb*) means "to jump up" in Arabic. In Syriac *skl* in the *p^{e}ʿal* means "to be stupid/foolish," in the *ethp^{e}ʿal* it means "to know." However, the aspect of polarity in which we are most interested is the expression of totality by the use of two opposite extremities. Honeyman[15] describes this practice as merismus, which he says is related to synecdoche. Merismus is the detailing of individual members to indicate the "genus of which those members are species or the abstract quality which characterizes the genus, and which the species have in common." There are many examples of polar merismus where the two extremities are expressed in order to exhaust the whole genus. We read, for instance, in Genesis 1:1, that God made heaven and earth. The English equivalent of such a Hebrew phrase is that God made the universe. In Exodus 18:13, 14 we find the phrase "from the morning to the evening" (*min habboqer w^{e}ʿad hāʿareb*). In English, this may be rendered as "the whole day long." In Isaiah 33:13 we read (in the Revised Standard Version):

> Hear, you who are far off, what I have done;
> And you who are near, acknowledge my might.

The expressions "you who are far off" and "you who are near" really mean "each and everyone"—not just those who are distant and those who are near, but also those in between. Genesis 8:22 is a superb example of the idea of polar merismus: "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." Here the writer is expressing absolute totality, the exhaustion of the whole genus, by listing representative members only. The writer means that not only will seed-time and harvest remain but all the other agricultural periods; not only cold and heat, but all the gradatations in between; not only summer and winter, but spring and autumn as well; and all within the limits of day and night. Finally, when the Psalmist wants to express the idea of the protection of man by God during the day-time as he goes out to the fields beyond the city to work, he says (Psalm 121:8):

> The Lord will keep
> your going out and your coming in
> from this time forth and for evermore.[16]

In the light of the rule of totality or comprehensibility, which we have just illustrated, I want to make two exegetical observations. First, I wish to

15. Cf. A. M. Honeyman, "Merismus in Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 71 (1952), 11–18.

16. Consider also Amos 1:3 ff.: "for three transgressions; yea, for four, I will not remove my anger." In II Samuel 1:23 we read: "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths they were together." It is possible to read for "in their lives . . . in their deaths," "perpetually." The same phraseology is found in an Aramaic legal text; cf. A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), pp. 22f. (No. 1, ll. 3, 8): "I give you in my life and in my death [= perpetually] a house and land."

comment on a number of passages in Isaiah which talk about God as the first and the last.[17] This phrase has no metaphysical significance. The phrase simply refers to Yahweh's everlastingness, and not to a transcendence of the world of time, since the latter idea is impossible in Semitic thought. It is another way of saying, as in Genesis 1, that God is the Creator of the world, who compasses the complete time process, ruling, determining, and completing all ages.[18] The meaning of the phrase is made clear in Isaiah 48:12–13:

> Hearken to me, O Jacob,
> and Israel, whom I called!
> I am he, I am the first,
> and I am the last.
> My hand laid the foundation of the earth;
> and my right hand spread out the heavens;
> when I called to them,
> they stand forth together.

This act is performed within the time process. In fact, Hebrew thought was so restricted to this world that when, under Hellenistic influence, the Hebrews began to think of a life after death (as in Daniel 12), there was still no adequate vocabulary available.

My second exegetical comment concerns the interpretation of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 2 and 3. Grammatically, the Hebrew phrase is a verbal form with two objects: the tree of knowing good and evil. We are not justified in separating the "knowing" from the "good and evil." The verb "to know," constructed with two direct objects, suggests our idea "to conclude" or "to know everything or nothing." The interpretations of this phrase are legion.[19] In addition to the grammatical interpretation of the phrase, we must consider it within the wider context of Genesis 2–9, where the stories of the murder of Abel, of the Flood, and of the Tower of Babel record man's refusal to be simply the likeness of God and his striving to become God.

A study of parallel passages where the same phraseology is used can assist us. In Psalm 139:2 we read that God knows man's sitting down and man's standing up. Such an expression means that God knows everything about man. In Genesis 31:24 we read that when God appeared to Laban in a dream he said: "Take heed that you [Laban] say not a word to Jacob, either good or bad." Laban was to say absolutely nothing to Jacob—advice which Laban did not heed. In II Samuel 14 we have the story of the wise woman of Tekoa, who visits David to appeal for clemency on behalf of her son, who is to be killed for the murder of his brother. The woman appeals to David in these words: "And your handmaid thought, 'the word of my Lord the King will set me at rest; for my Lord the King is like the angel

17. Cf. Isai. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12–18; Boman, *Hebrew Thought*, p. 183.
18. Cf. L. Koehler, *Old Testament Theology* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957), p. 88.
19. Cf. Th. C. Vriezen, *Onderzoek naar de Paradijsvoorstelling bij de Oude Semietische Volken* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1937), pp. 142–8.

of God to discern good and evil . . .' " (II Sam. 14:17). The woman appeals to David, not because of his judicial abilities, since David was obliged to recognize the right of vendetta in a blood feud; but because David was able to discern everything just as the angel of God could. The king is the consummation of all wisdom. Since the Hebrew word "to discern" is different from the verb "to know," some scholars have indeed rejected this as a valid example. However, in verse 20 of the same chapter we find a similar idea expressed with the verb "to know." Joab said: ". . . but my Lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on earth."

To return to Genesis 2 and 3, we conclude that the knowledge gained by man on eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was complete knowledge. This is the knowledge that God and his angels (II Sam. 14) alone have the right to possess, but for which man has been striving throughout the ages. The story of the Tower of Babel expresses the same thought in the tale of man's attempt to reach the heavens. In the paradise story man sought to become God's equal and to reject the Creator–image relationship.[20] Consequently, God was compelled to exile man from the Garden, because "man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:22)—i.e. knowing everything.

This sense of grasping after totalities, of the constant expansion of smaller wholes into greater wholes, can be observed in the very structure of Hebrew poetry. Bishop Lowth, in his lecture accepting the Chair of Poetry in Oxford in 1741, discussed Hebrew poetry with special emphasis on its main characteristic, *parallelismus membrorum*. Although scholars have since refined Lowth's thesis, his original idea of parallelism is sustained. *Parallelismus membrorum* means that the lines of Hebrew poetry are parallel, the second line repeating, in other phrases, what has already been said in the first. We hasten to add, however, that "the parallel line does not simply repeat what has been said, but enriches it, deepens it, transforms it by adding fresh nuances."[21] Isaiah 42:18–19 will serve as an illustration:

> Hear, you deaf;
> and look, you blind that you may see!
> Who is blind but my servant,
> or deaf as my messenger whom I send?

"Hear" and "look" are neither true synonyms nor contradictory words. Rather, they are complementary, suggesting a new dimension. Likewise, "deaf" and "blind" establish two complementary poles that offer a new depth and comprehensiveness or sense of totality.

This illustration from Isaiah also shows that Hebrew poetry may contain great variety. The phrases "that you may see" and "whom I send" break out of the closer parallelism into a new one. So it is that the ideas of

20. Cf. Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), pp. 43, 205, 209.

21. J. Muilenburg, "A Study of Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style," *Vetus Testamentum Supplement*, 1 (1953), 97.

comprehensiveness or totality and expansiveness or movement are held in very sensitive balance. (In contrast, Greek poetry, with its alternation of long and short syllables and rhyme, is symmetrical and intense.)

The man who composed this verse in Isaiah 40–55 was a great poet and a foremost theologian.

Let me cite one more example to demonstrate that the synthetic character of the Hebrew mentality, its sense of totality, is as apparent in Israel's rhetoric as in her psychology.[22] In the next passage Isaiah 42:1–4 we notice that the poet is able to sustain the sense of wholeness and movement over a larger unit by reciting a keyword *mišpaṭ*, "justice," at the end of each climax. On each of the three occasions when the word "justice" is used, it is found in a fuller context: the servant will "bring forth justice"; yea, he will "faithfully bring forth justice"; indeed, he will not weary until he has "established justice."

Behold my servant whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him,
he will bring forth *justice* to the nations,
He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench
he will faithfully bring forth *justice.*
He will not fail or be discouraged
till he has established *justice* in the earth
and the coastlands wait for his law.

The poet sought to present to a people in exile the promise of a God who was both Creator and Redeemer. It was a perfect message of hope. In addition, the poet, used the poetic form with its qualities of totality and movement to present the absoluteness of the divine promise.

In our discussion we have come to realize the dynamic character of the Hebraic spirit. There is always a bursting out of one totality and a grasping after, and moving into, a wider whole. The Hebraic spirit is never static. Pedersen[23] describes the psychological stages involved in western logic when an action is undertaken. The analysis of action suggests that it first originates in the area of ideas. Once an idea is started, emotions are stimulated and volition comes into play, leading to resolution, which results in action. As far as we are concerned, the results or consequences of the action lie entirely outside the sphere of the person himself. Now the Semite thinks differently: "the mental processes are not successive, but united in one. . . . No more are action and result to be distinguished from each other or from the mental activities; they are implied in the actual mental process. This is to be attributed to the fact that the soul *nepeš* is wholly present in all its works. The actions are not sent away from the soul, they are the outer manifestations

22. Cf. *ibid.*, 99.
23. Cf. Pedersen, *Israel*, I–II, pp. 127f.

of the whole of the soul." P. A. H. de Boer[24] has illustrated this idea by referring to the counsel of Hushai and Ahitophel to Absalom in II Samuel 16:15ff. Both men advised Absalom; but only Hushai's counsel was accepted. Ahitophel then went home, we are told, and hanged himself. "The counsel and the carrying into effect belong together. . . . Ahitophel and his counsel form a unity. The ineffective counsel is a dead word, hence the counsellor is a dead man."

It is possible to understand the synthetic character of Hebrew thought in still another way. In Hebrew vocabulary, any word expresses both idea and consequence. Hamlet's "words, words, words!" would have no significance in Hebrew, because the articulated word is not merely a sound but also a reality. The very utterance of the word—as in Genesis 1:3, "Let there be light"—brought light into existence. When the patriarch blessed his son, the blessing became effective and irrevocable (Gen. 27:30ff.). In Hebrew the same verbal theme expressed "to declare" and "to make." For example, the root *ṣdq* in the *Hiph'il* theme means "to declare righteous or innocent" and "to make righteous or innocent." A word or an idea and its effect or consequences are a unit in Hebrew.[25]

We are able to observe these facts more clearly when we consider the difficulty faced by the Greek translators of the Old Testament—especially with the Hebrew word for "word," *dāḇār*. *Dāḇār* means not only utterance (I Sam. 17:29), report (Num. 13:26), content of the law (II Kings 22:13), advice (I Sam. 17:6), but also the consequence (Gen. 12:17), the deeds of the king (II Kings 8:23), the matter or affair (Josh. 2:14), the thing (Gen. 22:20). *Dāḇār* contains not only the material concept (*Dingbegriff*), but also the energy found in the abstract word concept (*Wörtbegriff*), which implements the content of the word uttered.[26] In Genesis 24:66 Isaac's servant returned with Rebekah and reported to him "all the things that he had done." Here, *dāḇār* expresses not merely the words but "all he had said, done, heard and experienced."[27] A more complete example of this twofold meaning for *dāḇār* is found in the Joseph story. Joseph's brothers departed with their sacks filled with grain and, unbeknown to them, with money. Joseph dispatched his steward to pursue and bring them back. When the steward overtook them, the brothers asked: "Why does my lord speak such *words* as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a *thing*!" (Gen. 44:7). The words spoken and the thing done are both expressed by the same word in Hebrew: *dāḇār* (cf. Gen. 15:1).

What did the Greek translators do with this Hebrew word? While in

24. Cf. P. A. H. de Boer, "The Counsellor," *Vetus Testamentum Supplement*, 3 (1955), 44; Pedersen, *Israel*, I–II, pp. 183f.
25. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 167.
26. Cf. G. Kittel (ed.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1942), IV, 91f.
27. Pedersen, *Israel*, I–II, p. 168.

Greek there are two words available to translate *dāḇār*,[28] neither of these is completely adequate. *Logos* expresses "the meaning, the ordered and reasonable content" without reference to the function of articulation (*lalia*, Exod. 4:10). The other word, *rēma*, is the spoken word, the utterance. According to the statistics compiled in Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch*[29] the Septuagint used both terms altogether synonymously. Nevertheless the typical Greek view distinguished between speech and action (*logō men ... ergō de*), as between form and matter.

In the Joseph story just cited, both the words spoken and the thing done are translated by *rēma*—an impossible idiom in classical Greek. If any distinction is to be made, the words spoken should be expressed by *rēma* and the thing done by *logos*. However, we immediately sense the absurdity of such a compromise. The fact is that the Hebrew idea of *dāḇār* is dynamic and synthetic or comprehensive, whereas the Greek idea of *logos* has mainly noetic value.

If the Greek translators of the Old Testament experienced such difficulties, the writers of the New Testament and the early Church Fathers did not escape them. For example, the shepherds (Luke 2:15) said to each other after hearing the angels' announcement: "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing [*rēma*] which has happened...." In classical Greek *rēma* would render only "word" and not "thing." According to the Hebrew idiom, however, "word" (*dāḇār*) can mean thing, and thus through the Septuagint's use of *rēma* for the thing done as well as for the word spoken, the New Testament writer could find justification for his own use of *rēma*.

This particular point has important theological consequences. In approaching the problem of the incarnation from a Greek point of view, the Christian Church has often failed to grasp the comprehensiveness of the truth that Jesus Christ is both man and God. No rational or philosophical formulations will suffice to express this truth. Only the realization that God's Word is both the word spoken and the thing done will provide the clue to an adequate Christology.

We have travelled far in order to illustrate the totality and the sense of movement—the synthetic nature—of the Hebraic spirit. Hebrew thought-forms are dynamic, not static; comprehensive and complementary, not exclusive and contradictory. When we try to interpret the Bible for the men of today, we must be sensitive to these fundamental qualities of the Hebraic spirit.

28. Cf. J. D. A. Macnicol, "Word and Deed in the New Testament," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 5 (1952), 237–48.
29. Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch*, IV, 91f.