

The Old Testament in the New

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[p.3]

Any reader of the Bible who is accustomed to the salutary, if now somewhat old-fashioned, practice of using an apparatus of marginal references cannot fail to be aware of the immense extent to which writers of the New Testament quote passages from the Old, or make unavowed but unmistakable allusions to such passages. Sometimes the appositeness of a quotation will set the reader at once upon a profitable train of thought; sometimes, but by no means always. From time to time he will have an uneasy feeling that there are links of association which elude him, which indeed may perhaps never have existed except in the fancy of an individual writer. When this is so, further study is discouraged. And the whole mass of quotations and allusions is so unwieldy and seemingly so amorphous that it is not easy to discover any system in it. Our present task is to seek for some clue to the intention, and the methods, of New Testament writers which may perhaps help us to see the relevance, not of this or that quotation, but, in some measure, of their use of the Old Testament in general.

We must no doubt allow for the possibility that in some places we have before us nothing more than the rhetorical device of literary allusion, still common enough, and even more common in the period when the New Testament was produced. Such an allusion may stimulate the fancy and give liveliness to an argument which threatens to drag; at its best it may give perfectly legitimate æsthetic satisfaction; but there is not necessarily any deeper significance in it. I believe that such writers as Paul and

[p.4]

the author to the Hebrews, both of them accomplished in Greek rhetoric, were not above employing such a device occasionally. We must allow these two at least, and possibly other New Testament writers, rhetorical license; though I believe the number of places where they have in fact availed themselves of it is less than might appear at first sight.

Yet when we have made this allowance, it is clear that in many places the New Testament writers have a more serious purpose in view. In adducing passages from the Old Testament they are consciously appealing to an authority. A quotation may be introduced to provide an unassailable premiss upon which an inference may be founded, or to test a conclusion drawn by

logical argument or put forth as a corollary of experience. In such cases as these it is pertinent to enquire into the propriety of the interpretation offered, and the validity of its application to the matter in hand.

It is in the course of such enquiry that we may hope to come upon evidence of the principles upon which the early Christian use of the Old Testament was based.

In the Greek world of the New Testament period there was a widely recognised method of interpreting an ancient literature which was venerated as an authority while its antiquity presented difficulties to the 'modern' commentator—the so-called allegorical method. It had apparently been devised for the purposes of Greek teachers who employed the Homeric poems as an authoritative text-book for the instruction of youth and the guidance of those who aimed at moral improvement. This method had been taken over by Jewish interpreters of the Hebrew scriptures. Its best known exponent is Philo the Jew of Alexandria. He employed it, with great skill and subtlety, not only to circumvent certain stumbling-blocks which the traditional text presented to the Greek public he wished to reach, but also to discover in this venerable literature 'modern' philosophical ideas of which its authors hardly dreamed. The same method came into extensive use among the Fathers of the Church in the early Christian centuries. It is not surprising that

[p.5]

is to be found also in the New Testament. What is surprising is that it is employed so seldom.

There are a few outstanding examples. Paul's treatment of the story of Hagar and Ishmael, in Galatians iv, 21-31, is (as he expressly says allegorical; and in fact it observes the strictest rules of the game. Hagar stands for Sinai, the mountain of the Law; Ishmael her son for the Jews as 'sons of the Law'; Isaac, the child of promise, for the Christian Church; and the whole story falls into line. Similarly, in the Epistle to the Hebrews (vii, 1-10) the story of Melchizedek in Genesis, xiv, 17-20 is treated on allegorical principles closely similar to those on which Philo treats the same story, though to a different end.

In allegory proper, as we have it here, the historical setting of the original, and the intention of its author, go for nothing. The Old Testament supplies only the imagery through which an idea may be forcibly presented. The idea itself is not derived from it. Any fictitious personage would do as well as Hagar or Melchizedek.

But such examples of true allegory are far from common; and while occasional traits of allegory may be detected in passages which are not in the strict sense allegorical, the method is not characteristic of the New Testament. Here the contrast with Philo is instructive. For Philo the Old Testament presents a picture without perspective; it is two-dimensional, on the flat. The writers of the New Testament, in comparison, show themselves aware of the historical perspective. Thus Paul notes the conflict of Elijah with Baal-worship, and Isaiah's announcement of the 'remnant', as successive stages in a continuous process of 'purposive selection' which was

in operation for many centuries, and prepared the stage at last for the coming of Christ. Farther back in history, he is impressed by the long lapse of time between the covenant with Abraham and the promulgation of the Law on Sinai—430 years, he computes, and he is not so very far out by modern calculations. The author to the Hebrews, in spite of his Alexandrine proclivities, is acutely aware of the tedious

[p.6]

centuries during which the fathers lived and died in faith, not having received the promises, because God had prepared some better thing for us. For him Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not lay figures upon which to hang an allegory, but human beings who played their obscure part in the early stages of a process now visible in its completion. The evangelist Matthew, again, is interested in the run of the generations, from Abraham to David, from David to the Babylonian exile, from the exile to the birth of Christ. His chronology, indeed, is symbolic rather than exact, but it is clearly his intention to present the coming of Christ as the culmination of a real process in history. In the Acts of the Apostles, the speech of Stephen before his judges is almost a cento of quotations from the Old Testament, but a cento curiously unlike the linked series of allegorically interpreted texts which we find in Philo. Stephen's quotations mark the strictly historical sequence of events, from the call of Abraham to the apostasy of Solomon, at which point the survey breaks off as tension rises and argument is swallowed up in violence.

I recall these passages—and there are others that might be placed alongside them—to point the contrast between the characteristic attitude of the New Testament writers to the Old Testament and the attitude which underlies its thoroughgoing allegorical treatment by Philo and his like. In the main, these early Christian writers are aware of the Old Testament as history, that is to say as reflecting the process of God's dealings with His people over many centuries. With such an attitude, although they may occasionally fall into the fashionable method of allegory, and although from time to time they may make use of a phrase from scripture simply for its aptness, without deeper consideration, yet it is unlikely that they would be systematically indifferent to the historical setting or the original intention of the scriptures which they quote, as they understood it. In studying their quotations, it will at any rate be worth while always to turn up the context in the Old Testament and ask how far it is being kept in view.

[p.7]

We must begin, naturally, by noting what passages are actually quoted in the New Testament. These are usually quite short, more often than not confined to the limits of a single sentence, or even a single phrase. Only rarely do we meet with a passage amounting to several verses reproduced *in extenso*. But suppose we turn up each such quoted passage in its Old Testament context, and mark it by underlining. We soon begin to discover that there are some books, and some portions of books, where such underlinings cluster thickly, while other long tracts are almost or entirely devoid of them. Closer examination reveals that sometimes a particular cluster of quotations may all be made by a single New Testament writer; as for example certain chapters of Exodus and Leviticus will be thickly underlined with quotations in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Such cases we may discount as representing no more than the predilection of an individual author. But in other places references will accumulate from a considerable variety of New Testament books, and here we must be on the track of something more significant. It seems clear that certain portions of the Old Testament scriptures commanded greater interest among early Christian thinkers than others. I will presently give some examples. But for the moment let us suppose that we have before us a given passage of the Old Testament which has been largely laid under contribution for quotation in the New. By simple examination of the facts it should be possible to draw some inferences not without importance.

If it can be shown that one particular sentence has been quoted in two or more writings of the New Testament, where we have no reason to suspect literary dependence of one writer on another, there is surely a fair presumption that the sentence had been recognised as having special significance for Christians at a date earlier than the first such quotation. If adjacent or contiguous sentences from the same context are similarly quoted, it begins to be probable that something more than the single sentence had been thus early recognised. The probability

[p.8]

is all the stronger if the sentences quoted are in the original context very closely connected. To take one example: Psalm lxi. 9 reads, 'The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up, and the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me'. The first member of this verse is quoted by John (ii, 17), the second by Paul (Romans xv, 3). The possibility that Paul is dependent on the Fourth Gospel, or that the Fourth evangelist had read the Epistle to the Romans, is too remote to be seriously considered. Yet it would be too much of a coincidence if the two writers independently happened to cite the two halves of a single verse, unless they were both aware that at least this whole verse, if not any more of the Psalm, formed part of a scheme of scriptural passages generally held to be especially significant.

Again, if within the same chapter there are several detached sentences, in different parts of it, quoted independently by two or more writers, it seems to be a probable inference that the whole chapter was before these writers as a unit from which they might profitably draw illustrative material for their argument or exposition of the Gospel. For example, in the same sixty-ninth Psalm, not only are the two halves of verse 9 independently quoted by John and Paul, but verse 4 is cited by John, verse 21 by Matthew, and verse 25 in the Acts of the Apostles. It seems at least a plausible hypothesis that Psalm lxi belonged to a group of scriptures which had already attracted the attention of Christian thinkers even before the date at which Paul wrote to the Romans—say A.D. 57-59. This hypothesis will need testing by the examination of a large number of similar cases. If the same order of facts is to be observed elsewhere, the probability of our tentative conclusion will grow accordingly.

As a matter of fact there are many portions of the Old Testament for which there is even weightier evidence of the same kind, and I believe it is possible, by using the method I have exemplified, to compile a list of fairly lengthy portions which formed, from a very early date indeed, a body of scripture to which appeal might be made by Christian evangelists, teachers

[p.9]

and apologists for the elucidation and justification of the main themes of the Gospel. I am not thinking of the kind of classified . anthology of detached proof-texts which has come down to us in the shape of the later 'testimony-books'—the earliest of them edited by Cyprian in the third century. There is no convincing evidence that any such book was compiled in the earliest period. I am not thinking of a book at all, but rather of something belonging to the body of instructions imparted, orally in the main, no doubt, to those whose duties in the Church led them to Old Testament research; a sort of guide to the study of the Bible for Christian teachers.

I now proceed to give some examples of the phenomena in question. A very striking example is the poem upon the sufferings of the 'Servant of the Lord' in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. Of the twelve verses in this chapter there is only one which does not reappear, as a whole or in part, somewhere in the New Testament. No one author quotes the chapter extensively; it is rarely that two or more writers quote the same verse; only one writer quotes as many as two successive verses—quoting them, however, in a way which shows that he had the whole chapter before him (Acts viii, 26-40). But one sentence or another from the chapter is quoted, or unmistakably echoed, in all four Gospels, in Acts, Romans, Philippians, Hebrews and I Peter. In fact, if the original text of Isaiah had been lost at this point, it would have been possible to restore almost the whole chapter (in a Greek translation, of course) out of the New Testament. This surely means that the writers of the New Testament, while one of them might choose one sentence for quotation and one another, all considered this chapter, taken as a whole, to have outstanding significance for the understanding of the Gospel, and the significance it possessed as a whole has determined the sense in which extracts from it are employed.

Now let us look at the 'plot' of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. It is the story of a character, distinguished as the Servant of the Lord, who voluntarily submits himself to contumely and

[p.10]

suffering for the sake of others, endures the consequences of other men's sins without resistance or complaint, and is put to death, but after death achieves the glory of final achievement. Who the Servant was meant to be, whether an individual or a personified community, and if an individual, whether an historical character or an ideal figure of the future, is a point on which there seems to have been no agreement in antiquity, as there is no agreement among modern scholars.

A similar doubt arises about certain psalms which have some affinity with the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. Their plot is similar, at least so far that they describe the troubles of someone who suffers undeservedly in unshaken loyalty to God, and is ultimately delivered and glorified through His grace and power. We may call them Psalms of the Righteous Sufferer, whether the sufferer is to be conceived individually or collectively. These Psalms are largely laid under contribution by the writers of the New Testament, and applied in general to the sufferings of

Christ: in Christian tradition they are often known as 'Passion Psalms'. For the moment we note the similarity of their 'plot' to that of the Isaianic 'Servant' poem, and the similar ambiguity between the individual and the collective in the description of the hero.

I now turn to another example, of a different kind: the vision of the Son of Man in the seventh chapter of Daniel. Unmistakable allusions to this chapter are to be found in all four Gospels, in the Pauline epistles and in the Revelation, and less clear but almost certain echoes elsewhere. Again we ask, what is the 'plot'? The hero is a figure described as 'like a son of man' i.e., a human figure in contrast to four beasts, red in tooth and claw, ramping over the earth. He has been (it is implied, though not directly stated) subject to the ravages of the beasts; but at last the tables are turned. The Son of Man is called into the presence of the Eternal, enthroned at His side, and given an everlasting kingdom. The whole story is highly symbolic, borrowing its imagery from mythology. But the writer himself

[p.11]

has supplied a key. The Son of Man, he says, stands for 'the people of the saints of the Most High', long oppressed by foreign powers, but called by God to victory and glory. A seemingly individual figure, who acts like an individual in the visionary drama, and yet represents a whole people, he clearly has affinities with the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah, who also appears in a guise which makes it doubtful whether he is an individual person or a community; and his fortunes are not widely different, when allowance is made for the different convention—in this case the apocalyptic convention—in which the matter is presented.

And here we may usefully compare two other scriptures which in different ways speak of a 'Son of Man'. The eightieth psalm describes, in the kaleidoscopic imagery of oriental poetry, the fortunes of God's people in prosperity and adversity. They are the vine which He brought out of Egypt and planted. For a while it flourished, but then wild beasts entered the vineyard and ravaged it. 'Look down from Heaven', the poet prays, 'and visit this vine.' But then the imagery changes: 'Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the Son of Man whom thou madest strong for thyself.' Here again, though the psalm is never expressly quoted, it has clearly supplied much of the standing imagery of the New Testament.

But we have not yet done with the 'Son of Man'. The same expression occurs in Psalm viii, a poem to which there are numerous references in the New Testament, with one long quotation:

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou madest him for a little while inferior to the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands; thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet.

This is quoted by the author to the Hebrews (ii, 6-8), after the Greek version, which this writer invariably follows, and which I have here translated. Here the Son of Man is clearly no mere individual, nor does he any longer stand for any single people.

[p.12]

He stands for man as such, for the human race, which is described as almost too insignificant for God to notice, and yet destined, through His sole grace, to be 'crowned with glory and honour'. Once again we have a variation upon the same plot: the Son of Man, who is the Servant of the Lord, who is the Man of God's right hand, who is the people of the saints of the Most High, who is the Vine which God brought up out of Egypt, who is in the end the whole human race, is first brought very low and then, by grace of God, exalted to glory. The parallel which the New Testament writers imply between man's dominion over the 'beasts of the field' in Psalm viii, and the victory of the Son of Man over the four beasts in Daniel vii, is surely more than a passing fancy. To follow it out might lead us to reflect upon the relations between the realm of nature and the realm of grace. But for that this is not the place.

We shall now look at some further scriptures in which a similar plot is worked out in different terms.

In the short book of Joel, in chapters ii-iii, we come, once again, upon a context where passages quoted or echoed in the New Testament are fairly thick on the ground, among them the long passage about the Spirit poured forth upon all flesh which is reported to have been quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost, as a clue to the meaning of the surprising events of that day. These chapters contain a dramatic and highly coloured picture of what the prophet calls 'the Day of the Lord'. It begins, 'Sound the trumpet in Zion!' and goes on to depict in lurid imagery the terrors of a day of judgment—the ravages of a destroying army like demon locusts, the darkened sun, the quaking earth, and 'multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision'. Out of the darkness and terror emerges the picture of a purified and renovated people of God with the Lord dwelling in Zion, and a spring of perennial waters giving life to the whole land. There is here no suggestion of an individual hero of the drama: the hero is Israel, the people of God: Israel as a community subjected to humiliation and suffering—this time as

[p.13]

divine judgment on their sins—and yet destined, through the sheer grace of God, to final peace and blessedness. May we not say, it is the Son of Man, the Servant of the Lord, in a new guise?

Once more, in Zechariah ix-xiv we have a longer context full of passages which are either quoted or echoed in the New Testament. It is a group of prophecies whose interrelations are not too clear; but essentially it constitutes, like Joel ii-iii, an apocalypse of the Day of the Lord, and it employs much the same stock of imagery. It begins with the King entering Zion, meek and riding upon an ass, to bring peace and to liberate the prisoners, and it ends with all the nations of the earth coming up to Jerusalem to worship Jehovah their King—in other words, with the proclamation of the universal Kingdom of God. Between this beginning and this ending there is a complicated plot, in which Israel, the 'flock' of God, passes through stages of rebellion against God and the punishment it entails, in the course of which the shepherd is smitten and the flock

scattered. A drastic purge follows, which selects out of the whole nation a faithful nucleus called to be God's own people, with whom the future lies. Much of the story is obscure and mysterious, after the manner of apocalypse; yet we can recognise it as an elaboration of the general plot: humiliation and suffering turned into triumph by grace of God. Here the humiliation and suffering are in the main deserved by the unfaithfulness of God's people, as in Joel, and in contrast to Isaiah liii and Daniel vii. But there are obscure hints of a martyred leader, or at least expressions which might be so understood.

I will take one more example, of a still more complicated kind: Isaiah vi, 1-ix, 6. The opening scene is that of Isaiah's awe-inspiring vision of the glory of God, which carries a message at once of judgment and of forgiveness; for the prophet is stirred almost to despair with a sense of the impurity that clings to him and his people, and he is cleansed by the touch of fire from the altar of God. This tension between judgment and

[p.14]

forgiveness strikes the keynote of all that follows. The prophet is moved to pronounce a terrible sentence of all—but extinction upon a people whose heart is waxed fat and their ears dull of hearing. Yet almost immediately thereafter the names of two children—Shear jashub, 'a remnant shall turn', and Immanuel, 'God with us'—hold out a gleam of hope. As terror falls darkly on the scene, the prophet separates his small circle of disciples to wait for the promised redemption. At last dawn breaks over the darkness of Galilee of the Gentiles, heralding the peaceful and perpetual reign of the Prince of Peace. The exact sequence, the true interpretation, and the primary historical reference of many of these obscure prophecies are still matters of doubt and debate among scholars, but it is easy to see how for a first-century reader it all worked out as an elaboration and enrichment of the same broad plot of suffering and humiliation followed by triumph through grace of God. Here the suffering is wholly a deserved judgment upon the people's iniquities, and the triumph is granted, not directly to the people as a whole, but first to the faithful nucleus, and ultimately to the King whom God in His mercy sends them.

We have now to ask, with what intention, and in what sense, the New Testament writers adduce these and similar passages of the Old Testament for the consideration of their readers. We should evidently be far from their main intention if we supposed that their interest was confined to single verses or expressions where some coincidental similarity might be discerned to incidents in the Gospel story, such as the fact that Jesus, like the peaceful King in Zechariah, rode into Jerusalem on an ass, or that, like the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah liii, He was silent—or almost silent—before His judges. Such similarities, though suggestive and often moving, are in themselves superficial, and they do not take us to the heart of our authors' intention. We have seen reason to suppose that they often quoted a single phrase or sentence not merely for its own sake, but as a pointer to a whole context—a practice by no means uncommon among

[p.15]

contemporary Jewish teachers, as they are reported in the rabbinic literature. The reader is invited to study the context as a whole, and to reflect upon the 'plot' there unfolded. In some way, an understanding of the plot will help him to see the significance of the strange events of the life and death of Jesus, and what followed.

In one of those passages of the Acts of the Apostles which appear most directly to represent the apostolic preaching (ii, 2 3), Peter is reported to have said that those events took place 'by the determinate counsel of God'. It is a challenging statement. The events, to all appearance, were tragic and even scandalous. The atrocious persecution of a good man to death under the forms of the two most advanced systems of law that then existed seemed to impugn both the decencies of human nature and the divine government of the universe. Yet these events, we are asked to believe, were under 'the determinate counsel of God'. Having said so much, Peter was bound to say more. To suppose him to have meant that the whole drama was a pre-arranged puppet-show would go against the entire trend of biblical teaching. In what sense, then, was 'the determinate counsel of God' at work in the events that took place under Pontius Pilate? It is this question which the Church undertook to answer—and to answer out of the Old Testament. Where else, indeed, upon the basic assumptions of biblical religion, could it be learned what the counsel of God is? For that man cannot by searching find out God is axiomatic.

Now let us look at the specimen scriptures which we have had before us. They may all be said to be in part a record of (or a commentary upon) events that happened in the course of the history of Israel—as for example, in Isaiah vi-ix, the struggle of Judah against the northern coalition and the menace of Assyria, or in Daniel vii, the oppression of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes—and in part a forecast of events yet to come. The exact point in each case where historical record ends and a visionary future begins is often difficult to determine. But for

[p.16]

these writers history and post-history are parts of one whole. In both it is the one purpose of God which is at work. In the swaying fortunes of war in which eighth-century Judaea was involved, in the Seleucid assault upon the last sanctities of Jewish life in the second century—and the consequent flaring up of the Maccabean revolt, the principles of God's providential government of the universe are disclosed in part: in the final upshot—in what Joel and other prophets call the Day of the Lord—they will be fully and finally disclosed.

For the way in which these prophets of different periods interpret the history of their own times, and forecast the future in its light, shows that they conceive the course of events, with all its unpredictable vicissitudes, to exhibit certain universal principles, embedded in the structure of this world as governed by the law and providence of God. These principles are permanent, and condition the results of human choice and action at every period of history. Upon the assumptions of biblical religion, they are most clearly to be perceived in the dealing of God with Israel as interpreted by the prophets. In this interpretation, both the comment upon contemporary events in the prophet's own time, and his vision of the Day of the Lord, are equally relevant. The process is not to be fully understood or valued apart from its consummation; but also, the true

meaning of the vision of the Day of the Lord is not to be understood apart from the process which finds fulfilment in it. For the Day of the Lord, if unrelated to the moral and spiritual values recognised by the prophets in the struggles, failures and achievements of their people, might be no more than a compensation in fantasy for a too painful reality, without spiritual worth—as Amos showed. Thus each of the different prophetic pictures of the changing experience of God’s people, with the hope at the end of the road, helps to illuminate in different aspects the one purpose of God running through it all to its fulfilment.

The early Church believed that with the coming of Christ, His death and resurrection, the Day of the Lord had dawned.

[p.17]

To elucidate and justify this belief they appealed to prophetic descriptions, not only of the Day itself, but of the essential elements in the process which led up to it. Here all the various prophetic descriptions are relevant; for the Day of the Lord is fulfilment, not merely in the sense that it is the end of a process whose stages may now be put out of mind. It is fulfilment in the sense that the true meaning of all the strange and often tragic experiences of God’s people in via is now at last made clear, and those experiences in turn give depth and richness to the Christian understanding of the consummation that Christ has brought.

All this seems to be implied in the New Testament appeal to prophecy. It is to be observed that its writers are not troubled by the variety, or the seeming inconsistency, of the imagery employed, as we are apt to be, with our more literal bent of mind. Being Orientals they take symbolism in their stride. Nor do they make any difficulty about finding their own situation reflected, or foreshadowed, in such different pictures as those which Isaiah, Joel and Zechariah draw after the pattern of historical situations in remote centuries before Christ. All these illustrate, in the last resort, varying aspects of the one divine plan now brought to its fulfilment in the events of the Gospel story.

It seems clear that in recalling such scriptures the New Testament writers imply that they and their contemporaries are in some sense living through the drama of disaster and glory, of death and resurrection, which in a variety of ways, and with greater or less elaboration, is the ‘plot’ of them all. It is sometimes illuminating to note the precise point at which the writer conceived himself and his contemporaries to stand in the development of the plot. To take one example: in Joel’s prophecy of the Day of the Lord the outpouring of the Spirit marks the transition from the first act of the drama to the second. In the first act Israel is purged by the terrible judgments of God and restored to favour. The second act is the judgment of the nations and the harvest of the world. The author of Acts, in

[p.18]

quoting the prophecy of the outpouring of the Spirit, clearly intends to set the events of the day of Pentecost in this light, as the turning point of the drama. This explains the significance of the

‘Parthians, Medes and Elamites’, and the rest of the nations whose names roll so sonorously in the catalogue of Peter’s audience on that memorable occasion: they are the first-fruits of those ‘multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision’ whom the prophet summoned into the presence of the Eternal. In this setting, Joel’s call, ‘Proclaim among the nations!’ (iii, 9), becomes a direct command to the Church to enter upon its missionary task, now seen to be an essential element in the fulfilment of the purpose of God, since through its faithful discharge the multitudes of the nations are in fact summoned into the presence of the King.

But if this is so, it seems to be implied that the first act of the drama is already over; and again, if so, the story of suffering, disaster and recovery which occupies the second chapter of Joel must be held to find its fulfilment, in some sense, in the sufferings, death and resurrection of Christ; and that in fact is the view taken by New Testament writers. To recognise it supplies an essential key to the fundamental teaching of the New Testament. There is no question of a literal ‘fulfilment’ of apocalyptic traits such as the darkening of the sun and the shaking of the earth. This is well understood imagery suggesting the magnitude and horror of the situation; and all that horror is present in the events of Christ’s conflict and death. The Gospels may be thought to hint as much when they say that at the crucifixion of Christ the sun was darkened and the earth quaked. We must always be prepared for this acute sense which the New Testament writers betray for the deep purport of imagery.

It is not always as easy as it is with the prophecy of Joel to determine the precise point in the development of the drama at which a New Testament writer conceives himself and his contemporaries to stand. The question deserves investigation in each case separately. But the general assumption clearly is that the course of events in which the early Christians are caught

[p.19]

up—that is to say, the conflict, sufferings and death of Jesus, His resurrection, and the emergence of the Church as the witness and embodiment of His finished work—exhibits the essential traits of the prophetic drama of God’s purpose, and is to be understood in its terms.

The plot of the drama turns, as we have seen, on what in Greek tragedy is called *peripeteia*, a startling reversal of fortune in this case the transformation of a scene of suffering and disaster into a scene of triumph for the good cause. There are many variations upon this theme. The various renderings differ about the identity of the hero, the cause and character of the sufferings through which he passes, the manner of his deliverance, and the nature of the ultimate triumph; they differ so widely sometimes that their inconsistencies seem hardly reconcilable. Yet it would not be wise to assume without long and careful consideration that the New Testament writers either did not observe the differences or forced them into harmony by arbitrary interpretations. I will call attention in particular to two of the most conspicuous points in which the prophecies seem to differ fundamentally. Both of them we have noted in passing.

First, there appears to be no agreement whether the hero of the drama is an individual or a people. In some passages it is apparently an individual hero who passes from disaster to triumph;

in others it is clearly Israel as a whole, or some smaller circle within Israel deemed more fit to be a people of God; and sometimes it is difficult to say with certainty whether the conception in the author's mind was individual or collective.

Secondly, there is no agreement about the nature and cause of the disasters and sufferings that fall upon the hero. As is natural in any transcript from human experience there are unanswered questions. Is suffering the stern judgment of God upon the sin of an apostate people? Or the undeserved persecution of His faithful servant, or servants, at the hands of His enemies? Is the suffering to be put down altogether on the debit

[p.20]

side of the account—sheer loss to be made good only by the intervention of God *ex machina*—or does it possess some positive value? Does it, for example, serve as a test and a purge, to determine who truly belongs to the people of God? Or as chastisement or discipline for the faithful? Or can the martyr—death of a leader conduce to the salvation of the whole people? Such questions, necessarily arising out of the situations depicted, are answered in different ways.

Yet all these variations of plot are applied by New Testament writers to the interpretation of the same series of facts, those comprised in the Gospel story. I believe they did not so apply them irresponsibly, in mere carelessness, or without appreciation of the differences. On the contrary, the richness and depth of their interpretation of what happened 'under Pontius Pilate' results largely from bringing together these apparently inconsistent features and super-imposing them to form a single composite picture of the 'determinate counsel of God' and its achievement.

Thus, in interpreting the passion of Christ the New Testament writers find in it not only the undeserved persecution of God's faithful Servant; they find also the element of judgment upon human sin: 'Now', says John on the eve of the Crucifixion, 'now is the judgment of this world'. They find the element of discipline: 'Although a son, he learned obedience through the things He suffered', says the Epistle to the Hebrews, and draws inferences regarding the sufferings of God's people. They find the element of vicarious self-sacrifice, of which the classical expression is the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. It is the drawing together of these separate strands, and others, all derived from the Old Testament, that provides the basis for the Christian theology of Atonement. It would have been well if theologians had always remembered this.

Again, the New Testament doctrine of the person of Christ depends for its richness and depth, almost for its intelligibility, upon the inseparable fusion of two figures of prophecy: the

[p.21]

leader and sovereign over God's people, and the 'inclusive representative', or embodiment, of that people, and indeed, in the last resort of redeemed humanity as a whole. All the ideal attributes of the Church are assigned to it in the New Testament solely in so far as it is

comprehended 'in Christ', and as being 'in Christ' is itself the true Servant of God and the suffering and exalted Son of Man. All that is said about the significance of the work of Christ presupposes that He includes in Himself the whole people of God, or redeemed humanity. His death and resurrection are not to be understood if they are thought of as no more than the death and miraculous resuscitation of an individual, but only if they are seen as the fulfilment of the whole purpose of God to raise up for himself, through suffering, tribulation and disaster, a people made wholly one in faith and devoted to His righteous purpose. Christ 'rose the third day', says the ancient formula quoted by Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians, 'according to the scriptures'. But in the scriptures—*videlicet*, in Hosea vi, 1-3—it is Israel whom God will raise on the third day. The bold application of that prophecy to the resurrection of Christ in the earliest Christian confession of faith known to us lies behind the Pauline doctrine of the Church as dead and risen with Christ.

I have here only hinted at the significance for Christian theology of a right understanding of the treatment of the Old Testament in the New. I believe it represents an intellectual achievement of remarkable originality, displaying penetration into the meaning that lies beneath the surface of the biblical text, and a power of synthesis which gathers apparently disparate elements into a many-sided whole, not unsuitable to convey some idea of the 'manifold wisdom of God'.

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