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## “FACT AND VALUE” WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

“By Christian faith is meant, not some universal truth, nor yet some universal religious experience, but a definite fact which as such is opposed to every universal, be it religion or philosophy. . . . The very nature of revealed faith involves reversing the classification of universal and special in this case, because here a particular, viz. revelation, is regarded as ranking above every universal”,<sup>1</sup> writes Dr. E. Brunner. While we may not be able to follow the writer in his absolute distinction between philosophy and revelation, we may wholeheartedly endorse his statement that the Christian faith insists upon certain particular facts as more revelatory of the truth of God than any general conceptions. Over against the non-Christian religions this emphasis is a unique characteristic of Christianity, and is fundamental to its whole conception of the knowledge of God. “For the Hindu”, writes Professor C. H. Dodd, “things and events are a veil of illusion which effectually conceals God from men. The individual can penetrate to God only by cutting himself loose from his social environment, forgetting time and space, and entering eternity through the negation of everything which (as it seems to us) makes human life distinctly human.”<sup>2</sup> Dr. H. G. Wood remarks that the attraction of Buddhism for many people to-day lies in its aloofness from history, in its acceptance of eternal philosophies rather than any reverence for persons.<sup>3</sup> The Roman Mysteries were of such a nature that Julian could say of the rites of Attis, “These things never happened, but they are eternally true”. The Gnostic systems “vary bewilderingly, but they all agree in a dislike for the concrete historical element in the Christian scheme”.<sup>4</sup> Mysticism throughout the ages, and not excepting a type which lays claim to the name Christian, rejects history from its subject matter because of its connection with the temporal and material. But in contradis-

<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy of Religion*, E. T., pp. 15, 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Authority of the Bible*, p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> *Christianity and the Nature of History*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Dodd, *History and the Gospel*, p. 18.

inction to these varied interpretations of life, Christianity has ever stood firm upon what has been called "the stumbling-block of particularity",<sup>1</sup> and has consistently maintained the universal and final significance of a series of historical happenings, locally centred in Palestine nineteen centuries ago. Thus it is that the Creeds of the Church are "dated" by the (to some) apparently irrelevant phrase "under Pontius Pilate", and the focus of her worship in the most intimate and profound of her observances turns not upon the unknown majesty of a supra-historical deity, but upon a simple meal in an Upper Room. The records of the life of her Master tell us, in comparison with similar records of other religious leaders, considerably more about what He did than about what He said.

This insistence upon the importance and meaning of the historical process is of the warp and the woof of Scripture. The special genius of the Jewish people for history, and their triumphant confidence in the real providence of God, are axiomatic, and Professor Dodd points out that "scarcely one of the Biblical writers is of the type of the pure mystic, rapt into another world and detached from temporal events".<sup>2</sup> "Israel", said Dorner, "has the idea of teleology as a kind of soul",<sup>3</sup> and this sense of the reality of history is one of the chief unifying and characteristic elements in the Old Testament. God Himself is known not by descriptive adjectives, but by the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom He had revealed Himself.<sup>4</sup> References to the Exodus as the decisive indication of the power and love of God are many.<sup>5</sup> Nehemiah calls upon God for the fulfilment of a promise made to Moses long before.<sup>6</sup> The Prayer Book of the Hebrew people is honeycombed with references to the mighty acts of God as the basis of worship,<sup>7</sup> and other examples of the importance attached to history are too numerous for mention here.

Of the many historical references to Old Testament characters and events in the New Testament, we need only single out the two occasions on which St. Paul contrasts Adam with our Lord.<sup>8</sup> It is surely necessary to assume for the establishment of St. Paul's argument that he at least considered the one as much an historical figure as the other. St. Paul's philo-

<sup>1</sup> J. S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> *History and the Gospel*, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> *System of Doctrine*, i., p. 274.

<sup>4</sup> Ex. iii. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Hos. xi. 1, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Neh. i. 8-11.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Psalm lxxviii.

<sup>8</sup> Romans v; 1 Cor. xv.

sophy of history seems to be meeting with more approval than it did forty years ago; and certainly it is integral to his whole theology. His Gospel rests ultimately only upon the historical reliability of the life and death and resurrection of Christ. The failure of the Law and the beginning of the opportunities of Grace he traces to the sending by God of His Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh”;<sup>1</sup> and the only Good News which he has to proclaim to the world is “Christ Crucified”.<sup>2</sup> To question the historicity of the Resurrection is to threaten the foundation of all Christian Faith: “if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is vain”.<sup>3</sup> This latter question has always appeared to the Church to be of decisive importance, for “the hope of the resurrection . . . embodies the very genius of the Christian idea of the historical”,<sup>4</sup> and time has proved that “it is impossible to believe in the Easter message without believing in the Easter facts”.<sup>5</sup> This intimate connection between Christian doctrine and ethics on the one hand and the factual evidences of the life of Christ on the other finds a place in every book of the New Testament. The Epistle to the Hebrews, so often characterised as Platonic in thought, which does indeed move “in the heavenlies”, nevertheless finds its authority in the fact that “we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are”.<sup>6</sup> Of this Epistle Westcott writes: “While the writer insists with the greatest force upon the transcendental action of Christ, he rests the foundation of this union [of humanity with God] upon Christ’s earthly experience”.<sup>7</sup> The first Epistle of John insists upon “that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we have beheld and our hands have handled”,<sup>8</sup> and in the book perhaps most suspect of all the New Testament on the question of historical reliability we find two of the most striking claims to factual accuracy: “he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe. . . . This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we

<sup>1</sup> Romans viii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians i passim.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians xv. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, ii. p. 305.

<sup>5</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology*, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews iv. 15.

<sup>7</sup> *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> 1 John i. 1-3.

know that his witness is true.”<sup>1</sup> St. Luke indicates at least his own conception of the importance of history over unverifiable truths in noting that after Peter had been delivered from prison “ he went out and followed; and he wist not that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision ”.<sup>2</sup>

But the real significance of the historical element in the New Testament lies in the assertion that certain incidents are not merely important as guides to the Christian Church or even to the world at large; but in the confident declaration that the events of the life of Jesus Christ are in fact the real truth about God, and that the Incarnation is consequently of unique, final, universal and absolute importance and authority for the whole of Creation. Indeed these facts do more than exemplify the being and nature of God and His attitude to Man; they eternally affect the relationship between Creator and creature. “ The Christian claim is that in this particular historical process . . . the real meaning of all history may be studied ”;<sup>3</sup> “ From the beginning of time until now, this is the only thing that has ever really happened ”.<sup>4</sup> “ It is not merely that they [these events] exemplify certain perennial truths; they have a creative, revolutionary import for religion ”.<sup>5</sup> “ God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets . . . hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son ”.<sup>6</sup> This is “ the fulness of time ”;<sup>7</sup> the “ last time ”, the *ἔσχατος χρόνος*, has indeed, to use Professor Dodd’s phrase, been “ realised ”. In contradiction to the philosophical dogma of Lessing, who declared that “ Particular facts of history cannot establish eternal truths ”,<sup>8</sup> the Christian Church has maintained and must maintain that the particular fact of the Incarnation not only has established eternal truths, but that it is itself eternal truth.

There are those, however, who, while admitting that this historical emphasis has played a large part in Christian thought, yet consider it as either directly injurious to a right understanding of truth, or at best admit its validity as a necessary concession to human frailty—a stepping-stone to higher things. Dr. H. G. Wood has maintained, in reply to this criticism, that

<sup>1</sup> John xix. 35 ; xxi. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xii. 9.

<sup>3</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible*, p. 248.

<sup>4</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *The Man born to be King*, p. 295.

<sup>5</sup> Whale, *ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews, i. 1, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Galatians iv. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Whale, *ibid.*, p. 57.

the crucial issue between Judaism, Islam and Christianity will turn on “whether individual events and the historic process as a whole are more intelligible from the Christian than from either the Jewish or the Moslem standpoint. To put it in another way, it depends on whether in the course of history Christianity can do fuller justice to Judaism and Islam than Judaism and Islam can do to Christianity”.<sup>1</sup> He goes on to argue (to our mind conclusively enough) that whereas neither Judaism nor Islam can fit Christ into their whole scheme, Christianity can give a place to the other two faiths without itself being compromised, and concludes that “the association of Christianity with history is essential gospel. . . . Christianity is more profoundly true than Hinduism and Buddhism precisely because historical events mean more to the Christian than they do to the Buddhist or the Hindu”.<sup>2</sup> Von Hügel once said that unless there is some junction between simultaneity and successiveness—that is, between God’s eternal life and man’s temporal life—man is really without God and without hope in the world.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the Christian assertion is that God cannot be known apart from the historical process; “no concrete reality other than the historical does or can exist”;<sup>4</sup> the discussion of the character of God apart from a knowledge of His acts has no value; for “whatever proof can be offered of the ultimate verities can be given only by analogy with the world of phenomena”.<sup>5</sup> Thus it is that in its contact with the actual course of events Christianity gains an objective value which is lacking in other religions; it is in touch with life, with the needs and hopes of men. “While all the ideal values may remain if you impugn the historic record set forth in the gospels, these ideal values are not certified to the common man as inherent in the very nature of things. Once they are deprived of their root in historic fact, their poetry, their symbolism, their ethical significance depend for their sanction upon the temperament and experience of the individual believer. There is gone that deep, compulsive organic faith in an external fact which is the essence of religion for all but that very small minority who can live within themselves in mystical communion or by the power of their understanding,”

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Whale, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Berdyaev, quoted by Sayers, *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> J. H. Oldham, in *The Christian News-Letter* for October 6, 1943, Supplement, p. 4.

wrote Dr. Gresham Machen.<sup>1</sup> The same writer expressed the power of Christianity, in contrast to many other philosophies, as being contained in its "indicative mood";<sup>2</sup> we may say that the Gospel is expressed not in the terms "God is love", but in the fact that "God so loved the world that He gave". Indeed it is in connection with the death and resurrection of Christ as the central tenet of the Faith that Christians have found most comfort in the assurance of God's final action for the forgiveness of sins. It is when the Cross is seen to be more than "a sacrament of His eternal act of salvation",<sup>3</sup> when the sinner is confronted with "one sacrifice for sins for ever",<sup>4</sup> that true repentance and faith are evoked. Similarly "belief in the resurrection of Christ is the assertion that the sovereignty of God and the supremacy of spirit have been vindicated in the natural creation and are not simply truths relating to an ideal world".<sup>5</sup> "The old saints", says H. G. Wood generously, "who put their faith in what they called the finished work of Jesus were by no means mistaken."<sup>6</sup> Just as a vision of the power of God was to Peter of far less value than the actuality of his deliverance from prison,<sup>7</sup> so we to-day know the need of assurance of the action of the love of God on Calvary if we are to be freed from sin; to the modern world, as to the Early Church, this alone is "true". The historical element in the Gospel is not only actual, but absolutely vital to its effectiveness.

Despite this insistence upon the historical as essential to the Christian message, we must take note of a danger inherent in the very conception of history. From the time of Lachmann's investigation of the relationships between the three Synoptic Gospels in 1835 there arose and rapidly spread a school of "Liberal Protestant" source-criticism committed to a strictly "scientific" study of the Gospels in search of a "simple ethical Gospel". With its over-confident belief in progress, its uncritical rejection of miracle, its unbalanced *Historicismus* and its Lives of Jesus which "tell us more about the mind of their authors than about the mind of Jesus",<sup>8</sup> Liberal Protestantism as a philosophy is largely a thing of the past. But one at least

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Wood, *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Christianity and Liberalism*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Nairne, *The Epistle of Priesthood*, p. 50.

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews x. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Oldham, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Wood, *ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Acts xii. 9.

<sup>8</sup> A. M. Ramsey, *Jesus Christ in Faith and History*, p. 4.

of its axiomatic principles of research is still alive, though less vigorously so, in the theological world to-day, and has an important bearing on our subject. For the Liberal Protestant school attempted to investigate the facts of the Christian faith without reference to their "value" for Christian life through the ages. The documents of the Early Church were subjected to criticism which took no account of their own history. The power of the New Testament in the centuries since it was written they considered irrelevant, the witness of all the Church to its work they ignored. Any theological or spiritual intention or conviction on the part of the writers they interpreted as perversions of the facts. They did a serious wrong to the New Testament authors by attempting to read their works without troubling first to understand their minds. The late Regius Professor of Divinity in Oxford has brilliantly demonstrated the fallacy of scientific impartiality in the study of the Gospels. The critic, because he naturally rejects the evidence of events which demand for their explanation an agency transcending the physical world, will himself be prejudiced against this evidence; the Christian, on the other hand, who knows by experience that Jesus was a unique person, will be more than ready to accept it. Nor is it possible for the critic to accept the fact of the faith which is embodied in Christian teaching, and at the same time to refuse to allow our experience to affect our estimate of the history; for this reason, that the importance of Jesus Christ rests not solely in what He said (as is true of Mohammed, for example) but largely in what He did.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, indeed, the old conception of history as the impartial collection and indexing of all the facts is largely abandoned. It is seen by students of secular history as much as by the theologians that "history is always the selection and interpretation of facts"<sup>2</sup> and "does not admit of being written with disinterestedness";<sup>3</sup> in other words, the facts of life cannot be separated ultimately from their meaning, or "value". The mere passing of some event does not constitute it as history; it must have significance for some society, more than a private interest. History can never be studied or understood apart from its meaning for and effect upon those who are involved in it, and upon those who investigate it. There is a difference, as Dr. Dodd has pointed out,

<sup>1</sup> O. C. Quick, *Doctrine of the Creeds*, pp. 146-155.

<sup>2</sup> Whale, *ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> F. R. Tennant, *The Nature of Belief*, p. 93.



between a "bare occurrence" and "the rich concreteness of events".<sup>1</sup> For the Christian this difference lies between events understood as self-contained and self-explanatory and events as interpreted in the context of the will of God, for "on a theistic view of the world, the meaning of history is what God means by it".<sup>2</sup> The importance of this distinction is well expressed by Dr. Wheeler Robinson commenting on the deliverance from Egypt: "The point of real importance is that whatever happened was interpreted by Moses as the work of Yahweh, the future God of Israel. Here we have that mingling of the event with its religious interpretation to constitute the fact for faith, which characterises the history of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament. . . . Israel's faith was created by an act of divine redemption, i.e., by the interpretation of that act as the work of Yahweh".<sup>3</sup> In this case we can see that the actuality and the interpretation of the Exodus are one whole, and Dr. Denney pointed out many years ago that "the higher we rise in the scale of reality the more evanescent becomes the distinction between the thing 'itself' and the theory of it"<sup>4</sup>—this being supremely true of the Atonement. And it was this failure to appreciate the true significance of "value" in history that led to the downfall of Liberal Protestantism; we may trace the basis of this distortion to their absolute confidence in the supremacy of the rational process, by which any event which bore a miraculous or spiritual interpretation became immediately suspect.<sup>5</sup> It is enough for us, however, to notice the danger and to remember that it is not a thing of the past.

In reaction to Liberal Protestantism developed through Schweitzer, the Form Critics, and the Roman Catholic Modernists, Loisy and Tyrrell, modern Barthianism lays stress on the importance of the value, or spiritual meaning of the facts of Christian faith as against the Liberal Protestant over-emphasis on the event itself. This shift of thought is doubtless an outcome of the reaction from the autonomy of reason to the absolute sovereignty of the Word of God. To Barth the conception of

<sup>1</sup> *History and the Gospel*, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Dodd, *Authority of the Bible*, p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> *The History of Israel*, p. 34. The same writer says elsewhere (as a counterbalance), "The Word of God is primarily uttered through His mighty acts in human history, and is not limited by human thoughts about them" (*The Bible in its Ancient and English Versions*, p. 281).

<sup>4</sup> *The Death of Christ*, p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> Ramsey, *ibid.*, p. 6, suggests that their failure to understand the relation of N.T. to O.T. was a decisive factor in their failure.

the Word of God as strictly limited for its expression to any form is abhorrent; the idea that human reason can, even in limiting itself to the study of Scripture, reach an understanding of God, he rejects out of hand. There is, he tells us, no *Anknüpfungspunkt* between the Christian Gospel and human nature. But the Barthian does not consider the facts of the Gospel insignificant; he merely considers their detail and the investigation of them irrelevant. The Word of God must break in upon man, as it did in the Incarnation; no human mind can track it down. The Word was Scripture, but let no man dare to criticise it, nor attempt to canalise the activity of the Word of God. The Barthian trend is to admit the possible fallibility of Scripture, even to accept many critical conclusions, but to claim that every passage has an infallible message for those who are enlightened by the Word to recognise the revelation. "That is to say, the New Testament is regarded as the Word of God spoken within the framework of a fallible medium of human language; and the framework itself has no significance."<sup>1</sup> We shall most easily appreciate the difference in emphasis between the Barthian and Liberal Protestant attitudes to the historical element in the Gospels by contrasting their interpretations of a particular event in the Gospels, and we will take as an example the Walking on the Water.<sup>2</sup> Liberal Protestant scholars have vied with each other in somewhat unsatisfactory attempts to show that St. Mark has here recorded a perfectly normal, everyday occurrence. Jesus, it is suggested, was simply walking out to meet the disciples in shallow water after their boat had, unknown to themselves, veered round and returned to its first point of departure from the shore. Thus we are supposed to have discovered the kernel of historic truth hidden in the shell of Marcan interpretation and gloss; but why St. Mark should have troubled to record the incident in this case, and the exact value of the discovery when the story has been denuded of everything that made it seem worth relating to the Evangelist, it is difficult to assess. The Barthian commentators (among whom Hoskyns and Davey are outstanding in this country) refuse to the reason of fallen man the liberty of examining the accuracy of the record. The chief value of the miracle is the illustration that "Christ is Lord of the Winds and Waves",<sup>3</sup> and the fulfilment of the

<sup>1</sup> L. J. Collins, *The N.T. Problem*, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> Mark vi. 45-52.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Richardson, *Miracle Stories of the Gospels*, pp. 90 f.

words of Psalm cvii. 28, 29, " They cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the winds thereof are still ". That Christ did in fact work miracles is not to be doubted; but whether in this particular case He calmed the waves and walked on the waters is a matter of irrelevance. " St. Mark ", says Richardson, " was not concerned with historical detail but with symbolic interpretation."<sup>1</sup> Thus the significance of this " miracle " lies in the theological message of Christ's presence with His Church in its hour of need and distress; before the revelation of this spiritual truth (if indeed the revelation is granted him) the student may only bow his head. It is none of his task to explore or criticise. The miracle is lifted out of the sphere of man's search into the realm of divine revelation over which he has no control. To-day the passage may mean one thing to me; to-morrow something quite different, or it may be empty of meaning for the time. It is no man's business to question the message of the Word of God through Scripture, though that Word may convey a quite different sense to him through the same passage. The Word of God is above and beyond the grasp of man alone.

We can hardly be too grateful to Dr. Barth for the strength and effectiveness of his reassertion of the autonomy of God; but we may question whether the zeal of some of his followers has not led them into a false position with regard to their treatment of history, particularly as it is recorded in Scripture. Dr. Baillie has pointed out<sup>2</sup> that Barth, in his absolute denial of any *Anknüpfungspunkt* between God and man, has stood for something which might well be true, but which, as a matter of fact, does not square with what we know of the activity of God. It seems to us that we are dealing here with a similar problem. The problem of the authority of Scripture only exists, ultimately, for those who do believe that God can use words as the expression of the Word. In one sense it is true that God can reveal Himself only adequately through a Person, but unless we dispense with the difficulty by the simple but unsatisfactory expedient of consigning it to the first century A.D. and concluding that we can now know nothing of God since Christ does not walk our streets in person, we must allow some value to words as the form of the revelation of God. " The notion of a verbal inspiration

<sup>1</sup> Richardson, *ibid.*, p. 87 note.

<sup>2</sup> *Our Knowledge of God*, pp. 22 ff.

in a certain sense is involved in the very conception of any inspiration at all, because words are at once the instruments of carrying on and the means of expressing ideas, so that the words must both lead and follow the thought”, wrote Lightfoot.<sup>1</sup> This fact is indeed practically acknowledged both by the Barthian and by the Liberal Protestant critic. As we have seen, in the matter of Christian history the event and the value are not divisible. The Christian who is conscious of the tremendous depths of meaning in the New Testament history is not thereby excused the task of determining whether the Gospels are historically accurate. “No insistence upon the religious character of the Gospels, or the transcendent nature of the revelation which they contain can make that question [of their accuracy] irrelevant.”<sup>2</sup> “What needs to be resisted”, writes Dr. Phythian-Adams, “is the suggestion that because an historical event is a sign, which in some degree reveals the character of God, it possesses no intrinsic value of its own as a concrete and outward reality, and that therefore it is really a matter of indifference whether it actually occurred or not.”<sup>3</sup> There is a danger lest, in its stress on the “value” of Scripture, the Barthian theology should fail to give that attention to the objective importance of history which ensures the distinctively concrete character of the Christian faith.

This same tendency, in a particular respect, has the support of Dr. Dodd in his book, already quoted, *History and the Gospel*. Dealing there with the question of the beginning and end of history, he arrives at the conclusion that Creation and Last Judgment represent in symbolic form the truth that in all history there is implanted a purpose of God, which must ultimately be worked out.<sup>4</sup> The story of the Fall affirms that in man a recalcitrant will opposes the purpose of God. Thus these mythological representations form the setting of the *Heilsgeschichte*—that is, all history having redemptive significance, centring upon the person and work of Christ.<sup>5</sup> The remarkable factor in Dr. Dodd’s interpretation is that, whereas he is most persistent in maintaining the importance of an historical reality in respect of the central events of the *Heilsgeschichte*,<sup>6</sup> he does not

<sup>1</sup> *Notes on Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> Dodd, *History and the Gospel*, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *The Call of Israel*, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Pp. 166-172.

<sup>5</sup> To what extent the word *Heilsgeschichte* is intended as synonymous with the Barthian *Urgeschichte* is not clear; but the two seem to have much in common.

<sup>6</sup> *History and the Gospel*, p. 15.

hesitate to abandon the possibility of historical actuality in those accounts of its origin and conclusion which (on his own showing) truly represent to us the meaning of all history. In other words, although the significance of (e.g.) the death of Christ is dependent on its historicity for eternal significance, the sources of our understanding of all history as partaking of the purpose of God (upon which indeed our very understanding of the death of Christ as in any sense *Heilsgeschichte* depends) are themselves independent of historical fact. We see in the Cross something more than the death of a good man, we recognise it as determinative of all redemption, we understand it to be more than mere history, because we know, from the mythological representations of the doctrines of Creation and Last Judgment, that God is effecting His own purpose through history. This historical context is decisively integral to the meaning of the Cross; this alone makes it "true" as far as man is concerned. Yet those incidents which enable us to understand it as *Heilsgeschichte*, those incidents which themselves form the boundaries of *Heilsgeschichte* and interpret it to us, are equally true for us, whether or not they ever happened. Was Julian right after all?

This particular difficulty has been singled out because it focuses our thoughts upon what is one of the most problematical of all aspects of revelation in relation to history—the Creation and Fall—and because the philosophy of *Heilsgeschichte* and *Urgeschichte* is gaining much popularity in these days. While scholarship is increasingly ready to recognise the historical reliability of the Gospels, and theological and philosophical thought is once more stressing the eternal value of the events of the life and death of Christ, there is little evidence of any application of this principle to revelation apart from the Gospels. Scholars are prepared to accept as reliable for our knowledge of God in the Old Testament standards of historicity which they decry as utterly inadequate in the New Testament. Thus Professor Dodd can speak of the biblical documents emerging from the process of criticism "with credit . . . as historical sources of a high order".<sup>1</sup> Dr. Wheeler Robinson, in an article in which he pays tribute to the importance of history as a means of revelation in the Old Testament, seems to falter when he comes to the point of applying his thesis to the authority of the Old

<sup>1</sup> *Authority of the Bible*, pp. 260 f.

Testament records. He concludes with a warning against "the distortion of the history itself as in timidly conservative or fundamentalistic formulations of it, which ask us to believe more than the Hebrews themselves ever believed. The true approach is to maintain that the things which really happened to the Hebrews might still happen, or rather, that they do happen".<sup>1</sup> But whereas it is clearly true that a failure to appreciate the eternal significance of the historical may rob any record of the events of their value to us, it is difficult to see how any appreciation of the eternal meaning can prevent our asking whether in fact the event took place once in history. Dr. Robinson appears to gloss over the conflict between these two methods of approach, and while maintaining the importance of history, as expressed in the case of the "nature-miracles", as relevant for all time, to beg the question of our knowledge of them as historical. Indeed, the difficulty is apparent, for there can be little doubt that much of the modern critical analysis of the Old Testament, despite Dr. Dodd's protestation to the contrary, leaves us little room for supposing that there is any affinity between the records on which we must rely for our knowledge of God's workings, and the history which must lie behind them if we are to be assured of their validity. The new approach to, or the new understanding of, history is leading us to an appreciation of its supreme importance as revelation; but instead of admitting that the value of scripture in the light of critical conclusions must in this case be declared very slight, there is a tendency either to minimise the destructive effect of the modern critical position for the historical accuracy of the Old Testament, or to attribute to the written records both historical concreteness and a certain timelessness which places them above the disquieting effects of detailed investigation.

While it may be possible theoretically to distinguish between those events in history which are in themselves part of the redemptive action of God, and others, such as the Fall, Creation, and Judgment, which are the necessary preliminaries to and consequences of the central *Heilsgeschichte*, we question whether in relation to our knowledge of the events such a distinction will stand. After all, in justifying the action of God in history for our redemption, and in claiming for His work that it is effective more especially because it is found in the context of our

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of Theological Studies*, xlv. (1944), pp. 1-12.

experience of time, we start from the position of those to whom the time process is an established hypothesis. We do not know that if men had never known the passage of the years there would have been the same absolute necessity for an act in time on the part of God; indeed, we may very much doubt it. Clearly, to those who do not know the meaning of time (any more than we now know the meaning of timelessness) the work of God in redemption if effected inside a time process would have only a limited value. It might, of course, effect something utterly objective (if such a thing is possible) for their salvation; but in itself it could never bring about a practical response in conversion. This hypothetical instance is introduced to recall us to the fact that the events through which our redemption has been brought about are also the media of our knowledge of that redemption; they cannot be separated. In other words, the history of the work of Christ is the means of revelation to mankind; and, what is more, the most effective means of revelation available to God Himself. Now, whereas it may be possible, as we suggested above, to distinguish between the prolegomena and conclusion of the *Heilsgeschichte* and the *Heilsgeschichte* itself regarded as objective action in history, the same distinction cannot be drawn between the circumference and centre of the circle regarded as revelation. For although conceivably the death of Christ might have some objective significance quite apart from the historical reliability of our knowledge of the Creation or Fall (which appears to be the position adopted by Professor Dodd and many others), it can have no meaning for us as the revelation of God's answer to sin unless we have some adequate knowledge of the nature of sin itself and its relation to the origins of mankind. Equally, we must be granted some understanding of the effectiveness of the work of Christ if it is to have any assured appeal to the human soul. Now as a matter of fact the same events which, we are assured, have eternal value for our salvation are themselves the means by which God has made known this salvation; the objective element and the subjective element in the *Heilsgeschichte* (I speak as a man) are indissolubly linked together. Consequently the distinction between the historical centre and the mythical introduction and conclusion is invalid, for if as revelation the latter are integral to any appreciation of the former, it is as vital that they should be certified to us as historically true as that we should

have the same assurance of Calvary. If, as we have sought to demonstrate earlier in this paper, history is the essential to making a truth real and dynamic for men whose lives are historically conditioned, we may expect God's revelation of the truths of life and of His being to have an historical form.

The very arrangement of Scripture encourages us in this belief, for we can only assume that history is integral to its value since its form throughout is historical. For convenience we might have desired it otherwise. An indexed arrangement of *Daily Light* would doubtless have settled many theological problems and discussion which have arisen from the present form of Scripture. In this respect the Bible may be contrasted with other religious books, and in particular the Koran, in which the historical setting of the logia is minimised. It may be objected that we are now speaking not of revelation, but of the record of revelation; but as we have indicated before, any revelation which bears no relationship to words has value only for those who immediately receive it. All the experience of the Church indicates (and this truth is being more clearly perceived to-day than for generations past) that it is in the Old Testament that we find our bearings from which alone the direction of the New Testament may be rightly understood. If we are misled here we must fail to profit from the fuller truths of the New Testament. And yet there are those who, while contending for the importance of the historical in the New Testament, see no difficulty in abandoning the possibility of historical reliability in the written revelation which leads up to it. It is difficult to conceive how, if we mean by revelation anything more than discovery, God should have failed to employ the most important human condition of the New Testament revelation in His education of us to receive that revelation. It is difficult, too, to see how those in whom God had instilled so reverent an attitude towards history should have sat so lightly to it when they came to record it either by lip or by pen.

The conclusion of this paper is that the Church has always borne witness to the essential part played by the historical process in the work of God for men, and in His revelation of Himself to men. Far from being a subject for apology this has always seemed to the Christian to be a chief glory of his faith. From this, it is suggested, we may argue that history is integral to any true revelation of God to mankind, and that this must



extend to the written record of revelation. Moreover, no distinction can be justified in this respect between those events which are themselves redemptive and those which interpret for us the meaning of God's action in history. Specifically, if the stories of Creation and the Fall are to be interpreted as rightly indicating the reason and purpose of God's intervention in the New Testament, we may confidently expect them to have their basis in history; and the same is true of all Old Testament history, which as a whole leads us up to a full appreciation of the revelation in Christ. Nothing has been said here of the degree of accuracy required to make the record of the event adequate as revelation. Such a question requires fuller investigation, but we may assume that the relation must be such as to include in the record all important facets of the history. What we are at pains to emphasise is that there is a clear distinction between pure myth and a mythical representation of history.

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