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M.R. Westall, "The Authority of the Old Testament," Indian Journal of Theology 21.4 (Oct.-Dec. 1972): 223-240.

The Authority of the Old Testament?

M. R. WESTALL

It is possible to embark on a subject such as this for one of two reasons. One may be convinced that one has received some massive new insight, which will lead to the definitive pronouncement on the subject, or at least place it in an entirely new light. On the other hand, one may have only an insistent question, pressing itself on one like an obstinate headache and demanding attention. I belong in the latter group. As a teacher of the Old Testament, what place can I justly claim for it in the life of the Church? And, as a Christian believer, to what extent and in what respect can I accept the Old Testament as authoritative for myself?

Though the authority of the Old Testament, as an integral part of the Bible, continues to be affirmed by the churches, it seems obvious to even casual observation that in practice many people have serious reservations about this. One might point to the scarcity of sermons preached on an Old Testament text, and the fact that, on the rare occasions when it is used, it is frequently only to have a moral drawn from it which has little or nothing to do with the intention of the passage. One could notice the liturgical practice, quite common now, of observing a period of silence after the New Testament lesson, but not after the Old Testament, on the assumption, presumably, that there is no authoritative Word to be absorbed in the latter case. It is not unknown in services for there to be one biblical reading only from the New Testament, and this was in fact the recommendation for the Evening Office in *The Daily Office* produced by the Joint Liturgical Group in England.[1] Professor James Barr in a recent article refers to 'widespread doubts about the importance of the Old Testament'. He continues: 'I have discussed the matter with groups of active clergy of whom only

[1] *The Daily Office*, ed. Ronald C. Jasper (London: S.P.C.K. and Epworth Press, 1969).

one out of twenty would admit that he found any significant place for the Old Testament in his work; and I am particularly struck by the fact that the ones who are most ready to admit to a lack of interest in the Old Testament are also often the most lively and progressive ones'.[2]

If these observations are correct, they should not be the cause of great surprise. For in Protestant theology, at least from Schleiermacher onwards, there has been a vein of thought which has depreciated the significance of the Old Testament. Schleiermacher himself wrote: 'Christianity does indeed stand in a special historical connection with Judaism; but as far as concerns its historical existence and its aim, its relations to Judaism and heathenism are the same'.[3] Schleiermacher uses the term Judaism for the faith of the Old Testament, which is thus placed on the same level as paganism. This disparagement of the Old Testament reappeared in the Ritschlian school. Though Ritschl regarded the Old Testament as indispensable in the sense that the New Testament could not be understood without it, nevertheless it could not itself be properly regarded as a source of revelation. The fact that revelation was tied so exclusively to the historical Jesus inevitably meant that one could not logically speak of revelation before him. Ritschl's disciple, Hermann, went further along the same path. The Church had erred in putting the Old Testament alongside Christ for it is not revelation in the same sense as the New Testament. 'We cannot even transplant ourselves into the religious life of a pious Israelite with complete understanding. For the facts which acted on him as the revelation of God have for us this power no longer'.[4]

Others during this period in Germany shared their doubts. Wellhausen evidently considered that his critical approach was undermining the authority of the Old Testament and indeed of Christian faith as a whole. In 1882 he felt in conscience obliged

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[2] James Barr, 'The Old Testament and the New Crisis of Biblical Theology', *Interpretation*, Vol. XXV, No. 1. (Jan. 1971), p. 29.

[3] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, eds. (1928), p. 60.

[4] W. Hermann, *Verkehr die Christien mit Gott* (1886), p. 49. Eng. trans. by J. Sandys Stanyon, *The Communion of the Christian with God* (1906), p. 53. Quoted by Alan Richardson, 'Is the Old Testament Propaedeutic to Christian Faith?' in *The Old Testament and Christian Faith*, ed. B. W. Anderson (London: S. C. M. Press, 1964), pp. 40f. For the attitude of Ritschl and Hermann to the Old Testament, see this essay.

to withdraw from the theological faculty of Greifswald. He wrote this to explain his decision: 'I became a theologian because I was interested in the scientific treatment of the Bible; it has only gradually dawned upon me that a professor of theology likewise has the practical task of preparing students for service in the Evangelical Church, and that I was not fulfilling this practical task, but rather, in spite of all reserve on my part, was incapacitating my hearers for their office'[5]. Harnack in his work on Marcion came to the conclusion that he was basically right in his attitude to the Old Testament, even if a little ahead of his time, and stated this in a well known passage: 'To have cast aside the Old Testament in the second century was an error which the Church rightly rejected; to have retained it in the sixteenth century was a fate which the Reformation was not yet able to avoid; but still to keep it after the nineteenth century as a canonical document within Protestantism results from a religious and ecclesiastical paralysis.'[6]

More recently this depreciating of the authority of the Old Testament has been continued by Rudolf Bultmann.[7] Bultmann does not wish to reject the Old Testament in the manner of Harnack. The Old Testament has value in that it has the same understanding of human existence as the New Testament, and therefore it can teach us valuable lessons about our own situation. There is moreover a material connection between the Old Testament and New Testament, since the Gospel can only be preached to man who stands under the Law. Indeed there is a profound understanding of grace as well as sin in the Old Testament, and it is this which leads to the eschatological hope of the prophets which finds its fulfilment when salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is proclaimed in the New Testament. It thus appears that there is an intimate theological link between the two Testaments.

But although the Old Testament shares the New Testament's understanding of existence, it is not thereby revelation. Critical historical reflection is not equivalent to hearing the Word

[5] Quoted by A. Jepsen, 'The Scientific Study of the Old Testament', in *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. C. Westermann, (London : S.C.M. Press, 1963), p. 247.

[6] A. von Harnack, *Marcion, Das Evangelium vom Gremden Gott*, (2nd ed. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs Verlag, 1924), pp. 221-222.

[7] See particularly 'The Significance of the Old Testament for Christian Faith' in *The O. T. and Christian Faith*, pp. 8-35, and 'Prophecy and Fulfilment' in *Essays on O. T. Interpretation*, pp. 50-75.

of God and faith. And although the New Testament presupposes the Old as the Gospel presupposes Law, nevertheless there is no reason why Law, which receives embodiment in the Old Testament, should necessarily be the concrete Old Testament. And although the New Testament proclamation fulfils the eschatological hope of the prophets, nevertheless fulfilment comes in a manner which completely supercedes the Old Testament's understanding of God's saving action being present in the concrete events of Israel's history. For Christ, as the eschatological deed of God, puts an end to all ethnic history. Thus to attempt to recognise God's action in the history of Israel or of any other people is irrelevant. The only thing that is now important is the decision which each individual makes in the crisis of his hearing Christ preached, for it is here that revelation takes place. Thus according to Bultmann, 'to the Christian faith the Old Testament is no longer revelation as it has been, and still is, for the Jews'.[8] It provides a pre-understanding for hearing the Gospel, but not one which is unobtainable elsewhere. 'Jerusalem is not a holier city for us than Athens or Rome'.[9]

The significance of the Old Testament is, then, questioned both popularly, if only implicitly, in the churches and openly and explicitly by a theological tradition within Protestantism. What are the causes of this situation? So far as the latter group is concerned, it might be argued that it follows as a logical result of their theological position. But this does not take the argument much further, since one's initial understanding of the significance and relevance of the Old Testament is one of the elements which help to dictate a theological position.

An obvious cause of the Old Testament's precarious position is the old and familiar problems which it presents. There is the simple question of inaccuracy. Though it is true that in general archaeological discoveries have helped to lend more credence, for example, to the accuracy of the historical background in Genesis 12-50, there is a core of undoubted inaccuracy in the Old Testament left behind. It is unnecessary to refer to such instances at length. Obvious, if not particularly vital, examples include the anarchronistic references to the Philistines (e.g., Gen. 21:32-34; 26), who in fact arrived in Palestine after the Israelite conquest; or the reference to Shalmaneser as the Assyrian King who took Samaria (2 Kings 18:9), whereas contemporary

[8] *The Old Testament and Christian Faith*, p. 31.
[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

Assyrian documents show that the city was in fact taken by Sargon II, the successor of Shalmaneser V.

There are the moral limitations of the Old Testament. Not only do we see the imperfections of human piety, the psalmists who breathe a spirit of hatred and spite, the nationalistic religious exclusivism, but even God is portrayed as immoral, killing people for the unintentional breach of ritual laws (1 Sam. 6:19ff, 2 Sam. 6:6 ff), ordering at the time of the conquest the *herem*, the complete slaughter of the Canaanite population, (e.g., Josh. 8:2), demanding, according to Samuel, that Saul completely exterminate the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:3).

Perhaps even more difficult today, there is the apparent irrelevance of much of the Old Testament. However suitable or unsuitable for Israel, the large amount of law which lays down the different kinds of sacrifice, regulates the observance of different festivals and so on, appears to have little significance today. And even if the genealogical list in 1 Chronicles 1-8 were regarded as accurate, it gives little indication of speaking to the need of modern man.

There is of course nothing novel about these facts. They are as old as the Bible, and the rejection of the Old Testament by Marcion or the allegorising of it by the Alexandrians show the church aware of and trying to deal with at least some of these problems. It is the context in which these facts are experienced which has lent added weight to them, particularly the context provided by the rise of biblical criticism. As well as its immediate discoveries, criticism had more far reaching effects. By calling into question the traditional authorship of many of the books, criticism threw doubt upon the authenticity of the Bible. Though the denial of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentatauch may now seem trivial, yet in fact it cannot be so easily dismissed. For, as J. K. S. Reid wrote, '(men) were accustomed to turn to the Bible as the record of things and judgements committed to writing by those who were conceived to have the right to speak, and to speak authoritatively'.[10] This authority was now being called into doubt. A further result, as Reid goes on to mention, was that the unity of the Bible was undermined. Instead of one document speaking with the voice of Moses, there were now four or more documents speaking in discordant voices. The Old Testament, it became apparent, was of a composite character,

[10] J. K. S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture*, (London: Methuen, 1957), p. 17.

coming from different periods and backgrounds, and by no means all the elements could be harmonised with each other. It seemed to follow that not all of these voices could be right, so that once again the Old Testament's claim to be authoritative was undermined.

Whether or not this correctly analyses the reasons, the fact of widespread disregard of the Old Testament seems undeniable. How has this situation been met by those who wish to uphold it? At the risk of classifying too tidily, I suggest that there are basically four types of defence.

First there continue to be those who insist on the verbal inerrancy of the Bible as a whole.[11] This is to ignore rather than to answer the problems, and is hardly a fruitful way to attempt to establish the authority of the Old Testament. First, J. D. Smart has demonstrated that the concept is itself unbiblical.[12] If one looks at the way in which later Old Testament traditions make use of earlier ones, for example, the way in which the priestly writer makes use of the J and E sources in the Pentateuch, there is a combination of respect for their authority with great freedom about the way in which they are used. Precisely the same might be said of the way in which Jesus and Paul use the Old Testament as a whole, or of St Paul's relationship to the words of Jesus. In each case the relationship is a dynamic one, combining dependence with freedom, for the Spirit who inspired the earlier writing is still experienced. Against this, Smart maintains, the literalistic view originated in Greece. Here from an early period was the deeply entrenched idea of sacred writings which were directly communicated by the gods and were therefore divine in every detail. Inspiration, instead of being the result of personal communion, is seen in impersonal terms, the deity more or less obliterating the human faculties of the recipient. It is this conception which became dominant in Judaism and in certain periods of church history, but it is nevertheless not biblical, and on some occasions at least the dynamic view of inspiration has been regained.

In particular, J. K. S. Reid in a careful study has shown that the doctrine of verbal inerrancy cannot be attributed to either

[11] E.g. C. F. H. Henry (ed) *Revelation and the Bible*, (London: Tyndale Press, 1959); Skevington Wood, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids Zondervan Publishing House, 1967).

[12] J. D. Smart, *The Interpretation of Scripture*, (London: S.C.M. Press, (1961), ch. 6.

Luther or Calvin.[13] Though in both cases it is possible to quote passages which by themselves might suggest this doctrine, in the context of their whole theology this interpretation can be seen to be incorrect. For Luther, Scripture and the Word of God are not identical. Though he can refer to Scripture as the Word of God, yet when he can dismiss discrepancies in the Bible as 'not of much importance',[14] or recommend the omission of the Epistle of James from Scripture on the grounds of its theological content,[15] it is clear that a distinction has entered in. This Word of God which is distinguished from Scripture is Christ and it is He who is the norm against which Scripture is to be judged. 'What does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even if St Peter and St Paul teach it. Again what preaches Christ is apostolic, even if it is Judas or Annas or Pilate or Herod that does it'.[16] 'For Luther, Scripture is not the Word, but only witness to the Word, and it is from Him whom it conveys that it derives the authority it enjoys'.[17] Calvin's thought about the authority of Scripture is more hotly debated, and yet the doctrine of 'testimonion spiritus sancti internum' does appear to rule out a theory of verbal inspiration. For, although the Word of God is authoritative because it is God speaking, it is not necessarily recognised as authoritative. The Word of God does not in and by itself convict. In addition the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary. The Holy Spirit Himself retains the function of inspiring men and does not delegate this power to the Scriptures. Scripture is authoritative, but 'it obtains the credit which it deserves with us by the testimony of the Spirit'.[18] The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, so that it can equally be said that where Christ is absent the Scriptures cannot convict. 'The letter therefore is dead and slays the readers of it, where it is separated from the grace of Christ and only sounds on the ears without affecting the heart'.[19] For Calvin thus the authority of Scripture does not inhere in the theory of verbal inerrancy, rather 'it is a derivative and conceded authority, imparted to them by Him to whom they witness'[20].

[13] J. K. S. Reid, *op. cit.*, chapters 2 and 3.
[14] Luther, *Works*, Weimar Edition 46. 727.
[15] *Ibid.*, 2.125.
[16] Luther, *Epistle to the Romans* (ed. Ficker) 3.21.
[17] Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
[18] Calvin, *Institute of the Christian Religion*, 1.7.5.
[19] *Ibid.*, 1.9.3.
[20] Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

The theory of verbal inspiration is thus neither biblical nor historically the invariable belief of the Church. It is even arguable, as Reid suggests[21], that it is precisely this which has exacerbated the problem of the authority of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. In earlier periods when a theory of verbal inerrancy was held, the problems it generated were at least mitigated by a multiple interpretation of Scripture which in practice dissolved the rigidity of the theory. It is in the modern age alone that there has been a theory of verbal inerrancy coupled with an insistence on interpreting Scripture in its plain sense so that A. G. Hebert writes, 'the modern fundamentalist is asserting something that no previous age has understood in anything like the modern sense'[22]. Such a combination can only help to make the problems connected with the authority of the Old Testament outlined above much more intractable.

A second way of maintaining the authority of the Old Testament is found in the writings of H. H. Rowley. In several of his works,[23] Rowley argues that the Bible is not only unique in content, but possesses a unique medium of revelation. In certain events in Israel's history (and in the New Testament), he sees the revelation of God as constituted by a combination of personal and impersonal factors which is without parallel. For example, in the Exodus from Egypt, there is on the one side the prior confidence of Moses through which he summons the Israelites to follow him, and the justification of his confidence by impersonal factors entirely outside his control, the wind and the tide which enabled Israel to escape. Here, Rowley argues, there is 'a complex of human and non-human factors, and neither could determine the other and the only common source of both was God'.[24] There is a similar combination of prior confidence and the justification of this by non-personal factors entirely outside human control also in the case of Deborah and the battle against Sisera, and in the case of Isaiah and the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem. Thus, Rowley suggests, there is 'objective evidence that

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 25-27.

[22] A. G. Hebert, *The Authority of the Old Testament*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), p. 98.

[23] See particularly the Joseph Smith Memorial Lecture for 1949 on 'The Authority of the Bible', reprinted in *From Moses to Qumran*, London: Lutterworth Press 1963), pp. 3-31; *The Unity of the Bible*, (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1953), pp. 10ff., 65ff, 105ff.; *The Faith of Israel*, (London: S. C. M. Press, 1956), pp. 23-47.

[24] *From Moses to Qumran*, p. 19.

God was active in event and personality, and that both belonged together'.[25]

Though this may appear an attractive suggestion, it contains serious difficulties. The first is that it is forced to lay such stress on the accuracy of the accounts of certain events which are at least open to question. Even if we agree with Rowley in accepting the story of the Exodus as correct in its broad outline, there is still the question of the prior confidence of Moses. Could this not simply reflect the interpretation of the event placed upon it by a later age? The same might be said of the other examples. The point is not whether this interpretation is justified, but that even if the possibility is allowed that prior confidence might represent later interpretation, then the whole combination of personal and impersonal factors collapses.

Secondly, the theory does not tell us in what the authority of the Bible consists. It tells us that God has, so to say, left his signature on certain particular events within Israel's history, but in what respect authority is possessed by the Old Testament as a whole and how the various problems already outlined affect this authority, we do not know. In fact Rowley goes on to see a certain pattern in the Old Testament and taken up in the New which gives a unity to the Bible as a whole, but this is a separate question and not integral to his theory of a unique medium of revelation.

Thirdly, it can at least be questioned whether the God of the Bible, who is living and active and purposeful, never an abstract idea, can be reached as the end of a chain of argument, 'the only common source of both'. We must conclude that this does not provide an adequate basis for establishing the authority of the Old Testament.

A completely different approach to the position of the Old Testament is given by A. A. Van Ruler.[26] Van Ruler stresses those factors which separate Old and New Testaments: Christ cannot be said to be the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises, since there are many, some of which are mutually contradictory; in the Old Testament the Messiah is a man, and in the New he is

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[26] A. A. Van Ruler, *Die christliche Kirche und Das Alte Testament* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1955). I have not had access to this book and have depended on the accounts given by J. J. Stamm ('Jesus Christ and the Old Testament') and Th. C. Vriezen ('Theocracy and Soteriology') in *Essays on O. T. Interpretation*, chapters 9 and 10.

God Himself; the New Testament form of missionary work through sending out messengers is not anticipated in the Old. The two Testaments are thus prised apart, and allegory and typology are ruled out as methods of reuniting them. This approach however is not used to depreciate the Old Testament, quite the contrary. The central theme of the Old Testament is the theocracy which is the goal of God's purpose in history. The record of this overarching purpose is the primary Scripture for the Christian and in relation to it the coming of Jesus Christ is simply 'an emergency measure which God has delayed as long as possible',[27] a course taken when everything else had failed. Even the claims of Jesus cannot be validated apart from the Old Testament, for the truth of the claims must be assessed according to whether He does the works of God, and what these are can only be established from the Old Testament.

Both Stamm and Vriezen[28] demonstrate that the thesis, at least in the form in which Van Ruler states it, is not tenable. On the one hand, in order to maintain it, the distinction between the Testaments has been exaggerated, by looking in a literalistic way for the fulfilment of Old Testament hopes and promises without grasping them in their inwardness and seeing their unity within the whole movement of thought in the Old Testament. On the other hand, the overall relationship of the Testaments has been distorted by trying to find only theocracy in the one and only soteriology in the other. There is here a failure to reckon with the diverse material in both Testaments. The relationship between the two is both closer and certainly much more complex than Van Ruler allows.

It may appear arbitrary to group other attempts to maintain the authority of the Old Testament together. They belong together in this respect, that all those which I have had the opportunity to study preserve the authority of the Old Testament, but at the cost of subordinating it to some other standard outside it, usually the New Testament. Let us see some of the ways in which this is done.

There is, first, the approach which makes Christ or the teaching of the New Testament the standard against which the Old Testament is to be judged. This has been so popular that it hardly needs documenting. One or two examples must suffice. This was the answer held almost universally in the Liberal Protestantism

[27] Van Ruler, *op. cit.*, p. 65. [28] In the essays cited above.

of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. But it has continued to find representatives even among those who might not welcome the label 'liberal'. For example, C. H. Dodd, in his well-known book on the authority of the Bible,[29] bases his argument on the concept of the inspired person who is the expert in religion and therefore possesses authority as any expert does in his field. But there are clearly different degrees of inspiration within the Bible. Further, since the receivers of inspiration were human, there can be uncertainty or distortion in their reception and recording of inspiration. Thus there needs to be a standard by which inspiration can be assessed. This is provided by Jesus, for 'the total impression made upon us by the Jesus of the Gospels is that there is not in Him any such uncertainty or disharmony'.[30]

More explicitly, in the World Council of Churches symposium *Biblical Authority for Today*, Vinjamuri E. Devadutt, having unexceptionably stated that the authority of the Bible consists in its being a record of revelation, continues 'Christ is the value judgement on the record of revelation'.[31] For others, the standard of judgement is the New Testament Kerygma. So, for example, Franz Hesse states on the one side that the Word of God from the Old Testament claims authority over us, but on the other that the Old Testament statement does not in itself make it clear whether it contains an instructing or a warning Word of God. The standard is provided by the New Testament Kerygma.[32]

This point of view has fairly obvious limitations. It originated in an attitude which tended to stress the Bible as a source of ethical and moral teaching. But it proved difficult to locate within the New Testament that standard by which the Old Testament was to be judged. It could not be assigned to the New Testament as a whole nor even to the words of Jesus, since these sometimes betrayed the influence of the early church. There was, therefore, a tendency to make the individual conscience the arbiter of all Scripture. Thus in dealing with certain difficulties in the New Testament Dodd writes that 'here the Christian

[29] C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible*, revised edition, (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1960).

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 225.

[31] Vinjamuri E. Devadutt, 'A Baptist Contribution' in *Biblical Authority for Today*, W. C. C. Symposium, ed. A. Richardson and W. Schweitzer, (London: S. C. M. Press, 1951), p. 72.

[32] Franz Hesse, 'The Evaluation and Authority of Old Testament Texts', in *Essays on O. T. Interpretation*, pp. 308-309.

mind exercises an instinctive criticism of the Gospels'.[33] However for our present purpose it is not so important to criticise the inadequacies of this point of view as to note that here the Old Testament is being judged by a norm outside itself.

A second approach to the Old Testament is thoroughly christological. Karl Barth's use of the Old Testament belongs in this category, but among biblical scholars it is associated particularly with Wilhelm Vischer.[34] Though Vischer disclaims allegory and typology and insists that the text is to be accepted in its plain meaning, the meaning is to be seen only in the context of the whole theme of Scripture, which is Christ. Thus 'The Bible is the Holy Scripture only in so far as it speaks of Christ Jesus'.[35] True exegesis must take this theme into account. He therefore reads the Old Testament as a witness to Christ. It is not simply that the whole outline of Old Testament history points to Christ as its goal, but a witness to Him may be found in all its smallest details. Thus the sign of Cain (Gen. 4:15) points to the Cross where it is renewed;[36] the unnamed figure with whom Jacob wrestles at the Jabbok (Gen. 32) is Jesus Christ;[37] Ehud's sword plunged into the Moabite King (Judg. 3:12-30) represents 'the word of God ... sharper than any two edged sword'.[38] (Heb. 4:12) and so on.

This approach has been much criticised.[39] For, in spite of his professions, many scholars regard Vischer as departing very considerably from the plain meaning of the text and introducing a new era of allegory and typology. However much truth there may be in this, his importance to us is that once more the Old Testament is subordinated to an outside norm. For even though all Scripture may be about Christ, it is evident that he is veiled in the Old Testament and therefore, without

[33] Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

[34] See particularly *Das Christuszeugnis des Alten Testaments* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, Vol. I, 7th ed., Vol. II, 2nd ed., 1946). ET: *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ*, Vol. I (London: Lutterworth, 1949). I have been unable to consult this. References are from John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1967), pp. 86 f. See also Vischer, 'Everywhere the Scripture is about Christ Alone' in *The O.T. and Christian Faith*, pp. 90-101.

[35] *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ* (English ed.) I pp. 86 f.

[36] *Ibid.*, I, pp. 75-76.

[37] *Ibid.*, I, p. 153.

[38] *Ibid.*, (German ed.) II p. 89.

[39] E.g. by Bright, *op. cit.*, pp. 88 ff, J. D. Smart, *op. cit.*, pp. 91 f.

the New Testament as a standard or guide, impossible to recognise.

Thirdly there are those who see the Old and New Testaments linked in terms of development, the Old Testament preparing historically and theologically for the New, or alternatively, when the divine initiative receives more stress, in terms of progressive revelation.[40] The Old Testament is then seen as the record of the way in which God prepared his people for the coming of Christ.

There is truth in these positions: the Old Testament clearly does form the background of and preparation for the New Testament, both historically and theologically. But if they are made into the overall guide to interpretation, then they are full of difficulties. First the idea of development or of progressive revelation does not correspond to the actual reality of the Old Testament. Any pattern which places Moses at the bottom of a gradually ascending scale or which considers Haggai to be further up the scale than, for example, Isaiah or Jeremiah is clearly an artificial one imposed to satisfy certain preconceptions. There is further a certain difficulty in the notion of a series of gradual revelations by God, the earlier ones of which were imperfect and inadequate and so superceded. But once again, for our present purpose the most significant fact is that they were superceded. If religious development or progressive revelation come to their highest point in Christ, then Christ becomes the standard by which the rest is judged and the Old Testament is again subordinated to a norm outside itself.

Fourthly, the Old Testament is sometimes related to the New Testament as Law to Gospel. Though this interpretation has appeared in other writers,[41] it is particularly associated with Bultmann, as we have already seen.[42] Though Old and New Testaments share a common understanding of human existence, nevertheless they stand in almost total discontinuity with each other. The Old Testament does have a useful preparatory function, since it is only the man who has stood under Law who is open to hear the Gospel. But this means only that it mediates God's Word in an indirect way and it is not correct to call it

[40] E.g. L. Hodgson, 'God and the Bible', in *On the Authority of the Bible*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1960, pp. 1-24).

[41] E.g. E. Hirsch, *Das Alte Testament und die Predigt des Evangeliums*, (Tübingen: J. C. Mohr, 1936).

[42] Pp. 225-6 *supra* and note 7.

revelation. Further, this preparatory function need not necessarily be performed exclusively by the Old Testament. Anything which makes man understand his existence as under judgement would be fulfilling an equivalent role.

Parts of the Old Testament clearly conform to this notion of Law and in preaching can usefully be so used as a preparation for hearing the Gospel. But this is certainly not true of the Old Testament as a whole and should not be made a universal hermeneutical principle. It is equally obvious that the Old Testament contains also God's grace, God's forgiveness (as Bultmann himself admits)[43]. However, we note again here that the result of looking at the Old Testament under the heading of Law is once again to subordinate it to the New Testament, this time still more radically. The Old Testament is in itself not revelation and therefore not authoritative.

There has been during the last generation a revival in the typological interpretation of the Old Testament.[44] Sometimes, as in the case of Hebert, this serves a primarily christological interpretation of the Old Testament, sometimes, as with Eichrodt and von Rad, the framework is rather that of promise and fulfilment. We shall return to the latter, for the moment we are concerned with typology itself as a method of interpretation. Sometimes it appears that there is no strong exegetical control of typology to distinguish it from a fanciful allegorical approach, for example where Hebert makes the general sense of Scripture the norm for deciding the legitimacy of a typological correspondence,[45] or when Lampe sees Jonah's adventure with the whale as a type of the death and resurrection of Jesus.[46] Generally this is avoided. Von Rad sees in the judgements and redemptions of the Old Testament a prefiguring of the New Testament Gospel, yet he is fully aware of the danger of elaborating this into exact correspondence of details, since rarely is this the case. Eichrodt echoes this and makes a careful distinction between typology and allegory on the one hand and prediction on the other. It is

[43] *The O.T. and Christian Faith*, pp. 22 ff.

[44] E.g. A. G. Hebert, *The Throne of David*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), *The Authority of the Old Testament* (cited n. 22 *supra*); G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woollcombe, *Essays on Typology*, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1957); G. von Rad, 'Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament', W. Eichrod 'Is Typological Exegesis an Appropriate Method?' both in *Essays on O.T Interpretation* (Chapters 1 and 4).

[45] Hebert, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

[46] Lampe and Woollcombe, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

distinct from allegory in that it insists on the historical reality of the Old Testament types, whereas allegory disregards the historical reality and so is able to discover a meaning which has nothing to do with the original event. It is distinct from prediction in that the Old Testament writer was quite unconscious that the event was a prefiguring.

That such correspondences between Old Testament and New Testament exist need not be questioned. Yet, if typology is made into a general interpretative principle, we find again that the Old Testament has been deprived of independent authority. As Pannenberg says: 'So long as the connection between the Christ event and the Old Testament is sought primarily in structural agreements, the primary realization in Christ necessarily depreciates the preliminary representation in Old Testament history'.[47] John Bright puts it more simply: 'If the Old Testament offers but analogies to the New, foreshadowings of what the New gives plainly . . . is it really needed in preaching? Is it any more than a book of illustrations?'[48]

Perhaps the most common way of all of uniting Old and New Testaments is in terms of their relative positions in the history of God's redemptive purpose, or by the pattern of promise-fulfilment.[49] The term covers many approaches with variations in detail, but they all of them see the Old Testament as the story of God's promises to his people and his activity in their history which point forward to and are fulfilled by his decisive act in Jesus Christ. This position points to a theme which is obviously important in the Bible. The Old and New Testaments do relate the story of a single redemptive history, the two halves of which stand in an overall relationship of promise and fulfilment. Zimmerli's presentation is particularly attractive, since he sees throughout a continuous movement from promise to fulfilment to fresh promise, and so is enabled to account for the element of fulfilment in the Old Testament itself. It may be argued against this point of view that the Old Testament is not simply

[47] W. Pannenberg, 'Redemptive Event and History', in *Essays on O.T. Interpretation*, p. 327.

[48] Bright, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

[49] E.g. H. H. Rowley, *The Unity of the Bible;* G. E. Wright, 'The Faith of Israel' in *Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 1, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952) pp. 349 ff., *God Who Acts*, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1952); W. Zimmerli, 'Promise and Fulfilment', H. W. Wolff, 'The Hermeneutics of the O.T.', both in *Essays on O.T. Interpretation*, (Ch. 5 and 8).

fulfilled in the New Testament, but that elements in it are repudiated; it may also be argued that the New Testament is not simply fulfilment, but points ahead with further promise. But the New Testament itself witnesses to the fact that the two stand in the fundamental relationship of promise and fulfilment. Yet, where the authority of the Old Testament is concerned, this scheme poses the same problem as the others posed. If the Old Testament is seen only as a history of redemption which has now reached its goal, as a record of promises which have now been fulfilled, it is in danger of again being relegated to a secondary position, historical background, useful for understanding the New Testament, but having no obvious relevance for preaching or authority for faith.[50]

John Bright in his *Authority of the Old Testament*[51] makes a determined effort to avoid this impasse. Recognising both continuity and discontinuity in the relationship of the two Testaments, he argues for a flexible approach to the Old Testament which allows one to see different parts of it related to the New Testament in different ways. A given passage in the Old Testament may be simply taken for granted by the New Testament, it may receive confirmation by the New Testament, it may be related as Law to Gospel, as promise to fulfilment and so on. Thus one part may speak an objective word to the Christian about the nature and purpose of God, while another speaks to him about the condition of man apart from faith. But although this is useful homiletic advice, which helps the preacher to use all parts of the Old Testament, the question of the authority of the Old Testament remains unanswered. The Old Testament is not in itself authoritative, but must still be judged by the standard of the New Testament, as Bright himself admits. 'The preacher must . . . bring his text to the New Testament, as it were, for a verdict. He must ask what the New Testament does with this aspect of the Old Testament faith in the light of Christ'.[52]

This analysis of some recent approaches to the interpretation of the Old Testament tends, it appears, to this conclusion: either an independent authority is assigned to the Old Testament which fails to take account of the actual problems it raises, or, in the attempt to meet these problems, the Old Testament has been subordinated to an external authority. The real difficulty, I

[50] John Bright, *op. cit.*, p. 195.
[51] *Ibid.*, Ch. 4.
[52] *Ibid.*, p. 211.

suggest, lies in our determination to use the word authority in relation to the Old Testament. There appears to be a strong feeling that, if we do not show the Old Testament to be authoritative, we have in fact jettisoned it.

Richard Hooker wrote in the *Ecclesiastical Polity*:[53] 'As incredible praises given to men do often abate and impair the credit of the deserved commendation, so we must likewise take great heed lest by attributing to Scripture more than it can have, the incredibility of that do cause even those things which it hath abundantly to be less reverently esteemed'. He would doubtless have been surprised to hear his words used in this context, and yet they are applicable. It is frequently pointed out that the Bible is only authoritative in so far as it witnesses to God's revelation.[54] But in the Old Testament that revelation, or rather the manner in which it has been received, is broken and distorted. That alone can account for the practice of the *herem*, the vengefulness of certain psalmists, the exclusivism of later Judaism and so on. They are therefore right who see that to evaluate the Old Testament it is necessary to subordinate it to some other criterion. But this means that the word 'authority', if applied to the Old Testament, can have little resemblance to any normal usage. For whether authority is defined, for example, as the right to enforce obedience or as inherent ability to command respect and confidence or as a normative standard, it refers in each case to that to which appeal, rather than from which appeal, is made. Of all the definitions of 'authority' given in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, only that of 'derived or delegated power' is at all compatible with what has just been concluded about the position of the Old Testament. Yet when reference must constantly be made to another criterion to determine whether power has in fact been delegated in the particular instance, even this definition can hardly be an accurate description.

This needs some qualification. It is not a proposal to abandon the Old Testament. It is clear that historically it is linked inextricably with the New Testament. It is clear too that the New Testament can only be understood in the context provided by the Old Testament, in terms of Law and Gospel, promise and fulfilment or some other pattern. It is arguable that, without the Old Testament, the New Testament is open to

[53] *Ecclesiastical Polity*, 2.8.1.

[54] E.g. by H. Cunliffe-Jones: *The Authority of the Biblical Revelation*, (London: James Clarke, 1945), pp. 166 f.; J. D. Smart, *op. cit.*, Ch. 7.

serious misunderstanding. Brunner[55] has pointed to the way in which that which is peculiarly biblical is veiled in the New Testament under Greek form, but unveiled and plain in the Old Testament, so that 'the understanding of the Old Testament is the criterion and basis for understanding the New'.[56]

Further still the Old Testament does contain the record of God's revelation. Bultmann's statement that 'to the Christian faith the Old Testament is no longer revelation' cannot be accepted. In spite of the fact that men could and did misunderstand God's self-disclosure, so that the witness to it is broken and distorted, nevertheless, unless we are to divorce God's self-revelation from history (which is of course what Bultmann does), then the Old Testament remains the record of that revelation.

Thus we may call the Old Testament indispensable, in that both historically and theologically it is essential for understanding the New. We may call it the record of revelation, even though the record is received with distortions and misunderstandings. But to call it authoritative is not to do it honour, it is to use a term which does not properly apply and which can only be made to do so by emptying it of any significant meaning. Perhaps we would be freer to assess and appreciate the Old Testament for what it is, if we were less worried about what it is not.

[55] E. Brunner, 'The Significance of the Old Testament for our Faith', in *The O.T. and Christian Faith*, (ch. 13).

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 264.