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THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD[1]

From time to time exegetes concern themselves with the problem of the unity of the Bible. *The Unity of the Bible* is the title of one of Professor Rowley's books based on the Whitley lectures. Pastor Lestringant in France had taken up the problem of the unity of the Old and New Testament which is just one aspect of the same problem. With regard to Rowley, his six lectures ended with him speaking of the Christian sacraments, which shows that he did not confine himself to the Old Testament. The first two dealt with the Old Testament under the titles, ' Unity and Diversity ', ' Law and Prophets ', the third was transitional, entitled ' God and Man ', followed by ' The Fulfilment of the Promise '. The chapter entitled ' God and Man ' was full of apposite and interesting remarks on the biblical God who confronts man in his individuality and collectivity, his sin and his righteousness. It seems to me, however, that we can add something to these remarks in the light of what our Catholic faith says to us about grace and the Church, since it is within this framework that we are to consider the question of the unity of the Bible. Rowley perceived in the Bible a dynamic unity which consisted in the experience of a people, rather like the unbroken line of development which makes a human personality. In order to sort out the confused mass of historical traditions which he had to deal with in order to arrive at this dynamic unity, Rowley singled out the idea of election, even though he had to admit, in another of his books, that this idea receives clear expression for the first time only within the Deuteronomic movement.

Another way of coming to grips with our problem is provided by studies of biblical inspiration such as the recent volume of Grelot on the Bible as word of God. This is a very thoughtful attempt at a synthesis about which we had a friendly discussion some time ago in one of our quarterly scripture meetings for the Paris area. He puts all the weight on the idea of the word of God, but also brings into play in the course

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of his study another basic datum, namely the revelation of the mystery of Salvation (p. 103) or, as he puts it on p. 229 of the same work, ' the principle of an existential exegesis in which biblical hermeneutics and the hermeneutics of existence would be mutually interactive '.

This last point of view seems to me to offer a better point of departure for rediscovering the meaning of the unity of the Bible. The word of God is in fact at its outset the Mosaic Law, the Ten Words ; but at its conclusion it is no longer a text but Jesus Christ himself, the Incarnate Word (*logos*) of which the Scriptures speak but which is not itself Scripture. The Bible is dependent rather on the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit who has inspired it and brought it to its conclusion with the founding of the Church by the Apostles, that Church which he animates with His love which is poured out in our hearts (Rom. 5:5). It seems to me that we can understand the Scriptures adequately only if we see them as fulfilled, brought to completion. Their witness is completed once the Church of Christ has been fully constituted by the work of the Apostles. The same Spirit which is given at the Resurrection gives life to this organism which is from that moment constituted and realised in human existence, although it has not yet reached its full growth (Eph. 2:21–22 ; 4:16 ; Col. 2:19). From that moment the life of divine charity can spread out over the earth through the action of the Spirit which keeps men in this organic life of grace. In this way we centre the biblical message and the unity of the Bible on the life of God which is communicated to men. The Bible would then appear as a historical witness raised up by the Spirit of God. It testifies to His purpose of setting up Israel in the midst of different forms of paganism which shows, by their mythologies, a hidden, divine aspiration. He sets it up in the midst of the nations of the world, in order to bring forth from Israel the Israel of the new covenant in which the torah is communicated to all nations (Is. 51:4–5).

The advantage of this point of view is to make written words perform their rightful function which is that of signifying, and what they signify is life. Critical studies lead us to see how the meaning of words can evolve. I believe in verbal inspiration, but in this sense, that the words have been chosen by the Holy Spirit and by the authors whom He inspired in view of a certain presence of God perceived in the historical and cultural circumstances of the life of the People of God. In the Bible the word is always a means of communication; it is socialised (it has a social function ?) right at its roots, so that we do not have to worry about the problem which occupies those philosophers who wonder whether thought can be communicated by means of words at all. The Bible came into being based on the reality of

language which is different in every age. We can see ever more clearly by means of critical study how the prophets addressed themselves to the Israelites to tell them in a very concrete and clear way where the danger lay and where life could be found, even when they did not want to hear and misinterpreted their message (Is. 28:10). The words of the prophets, articulated in sentences, are not themselves realities, and I am grateful to Grelot for having abandoned the distinction between the meaning of words and of realities. The words, sentences, books which make up the Bible are all completely relative with respect to the living realities which they are meant to signify in the minds of those to whom they are addressed. They are the bearers of a life which God is offering to men. Before the Exile, this life takes on the form of salvation offered to Israel menaced by the nations ; after the Exile, it is a life of wisdom offered to each one within the new Israel which has its climax in man's participation in the life of charity of the Holy Trinity lived out on earth in an organic unity in the Church animated by the charismatic gifts of the Spirit. It is therefore always God and man in a life which comes from God but which is received by man in a living community.

We are consequently led to see the unity of the Bible in a communication of the life of God to a human community created and animated by him, a communication which becomes more perfect with the passing of time. The Bible is the witness to the historical action of the one God of Abraham which makes it possible for men to live their lives in union with God. The source of this unity is the one God and it is realised in the one people by becoming members of which men can unify their lives. Within this people God deposits a vital energy which is capable of dispelling all destructive and divisive antagonisms. In this way we retain what is of positive value in recent reflexion on inspiration with relation to the chosen community. It is not the community which is inspired. The community is rather the beneficiary of the action of God on those inspired writers who *are* inspired precisely to enlighten and strengthen the community. After the many vicissitudes of the Patriarchs down to the time of Moses, then to David, then from the monarchy to the exile, the last stage is accomplished by the Apostles who will, through the power of the risen Christ, communicate the torah to the nations. Seen in this way, the Scriptures comprise those writings which witness to a development of structures by means of which the divine life can be shared by men in their social existence in this world. It is this sharing in the divine life which makes one the child of God. After the destruction of the Temple and the whole sacrificial system connected with it there remained only pharisaic Judaism which saw Israel as the son of God

through the gift of the torah which retained its vitality in the interpretation of the rabbis. There remained also christianity through which Christians are son of God through their sharing as a body in the life of Christ, God made man, perfect and living fulfilment of the torah, head of the body which is the Church. Understood in this way, it is the concrete life of the people of God, enduring from one generation to the next, which creates the unity of the Bible in both its formation and its fulfilment.

In the light of what we have said so far we can already see that we reach this idea of the unity of the Bible starting from a consideration which is both historical and critical, from the development of the real, historical existence of the people. More and more the Bible appears to us as rooted in time. We are no longer able to see it as a mysterious body of writing which emerges from prehistory, surrounded by the mysterious aura of its prehistoric origins. It is closely tied up with the development of a small people of the Ancient Near East whose forbears lived around the year 1800 B.C. at a time when the East was already fully developed culturally and had already invented writing some 1,200 years before. It was already the heir of thousands of years of development in the history of humanity. This people possessed traditions which went back to that period, it was conscious of having existed as a people from the time of a certain Moses who belonged to the generation before the Conquest. The various cultural and administrative structures emerge with the monarchy which was set up on the pattern of kingship in other lands, whence we find in those milieux most attached to tradition a certain distrust of this institution.

We must now go on to see how the various stages of the formation of the Bible reflect the structural development of Israel, a development such as to make it possible for Israel to maintain her religious life in the way laid down by Moses before the establishment of the monarchy, before even the epoch of the Judges dominated by the tribal amphictyony. We shall have to go through the principal sections of the Hebrew Bible to see how these are set out for the people and for the promotion of its religious life. These sections are : the Law, the Prophets, the Writings. We know at the same time that each of these sections itself reflects a part of the history of Israel.

First : the Law. Even Wellhausen and his school admitted that a part of the texts of the torah, that is, the Yahwist stratum, antedated the prophets. Contemporary criticism has developed this line, indeed it had to, if only on account of the discovery of legal corpora which are antecedent to the Prophets. But the Yahwist synthesis in the torah represents less a body of laws than a masterly sketch of the characteristics

proper to the Israelite monarchy. Texts such as Gen. 49:10 and Num. 24:7b, 17 are conceivable only in view of the monarchy of Judah. Problems concerning family affairs, inheritance and succession are also dynastic problems. The author, a genius of a high order, recognises that there is a legitimate dynasty, one which brings salvation to Israel as was the case with dynasties in other lands at that time. He lived in an age which conceived of one principle of life uniting the leader and his people (the idea of corporate personality developed by H. W. Robinson), and which accepted that the people had to suffer for the faults of the ruler, but this author relativises in some way the position of the monarchy *vis-à-vis* the people. It was not the monarchy which gave to the people the breath of life as the Pharoh was deemed to do for his subjects. The king is chosen by God only because Abraham had been chosen before him, and then the Patriarchs and the twelve sons of Jacob who received the ancestral blessing. It is not the king but Moses who is the first saviour. The king can indeed make laws, but those laws which are divine come from Moses, laws which are received at the Passover or on Sinai (Ex. 34). The Yahwist synthesis allows for the monarchy but gives it a quite different religious foundation from that which kingship had in neighbouring lands. The faith and hope of the people depended less on the sacred character of the monarch than on the fact of the divine election of his heir already made in an Israel which was established before the monarchy existed.

This text was thereafter vested with great authority. It was not, however, the Prophets who were responsible for establishing its authority ; the ritual element which we find in it would rather incline us to see it as a text emanating from the Jerusalem clergy, the guardians of the dynastic temple. While making use of popular traditions, it is similar to those Babylonian texts which centre history upon dynasties and a religious sanctuary, such as the Esagila of Marduk at Babylon. The sanctuary of Yahweh, however, belonged to the whole nation and was much frequented on the great religious festivals. We should be inclined to ascribe to it an indirect but profound influence, one which was widely felt on account of the Sadokite priesthood. The Yahwist corpus is therefore a work more sapiential than popular, put together in the first place for a restricted circle, but one which was concerned with the religious condition of the people and its salvation.

This people plays a much more direct role in the Elohist stratum. While in the Yahwist account only a small number of *'asilim* (Ex. 24:11) takes part in the celestial banquet of Sinai, in the Elohist version it is the people as such which commits itself, in Ex. 24:3, and ratifies by its *Amen* the curses of the covenant-meeting of Shechem. This is universally the case in Deuteronomy in which the divine election no longer

applies to the monarch and the dynasty but directly to the people. Moreover, history takes on the form of discourse in which Moses addresses the people as a master in wisdom his disciple, to lay before them, in urgent words, the conditions for their survival in the good land which has been given to them but which they could also lose. Already, at this early date, the prophetic movement has begun.

Second : the Prophets. These are divided into the Former and Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets form one of the most complex elements of the Bible. On the one hand, we find in Judges and Samuel, especially in the history of the Davidic Succession, pro-monarchic elements which reflect the Yahwist theology and which were probably even part of the Yahwist corpus. On the other hand, there are elements which have been added to these as part of the great deuteronomic history, which are already of prophetic and anti-monarchic inspiration and similar to what we find in the Elohist. There is the Benjaminite cycle of Joshua, that of Samuel man of God, of Elijah and Elisha, the redaction of the Book of Judges in which Gideon refuses the offer of kingship and the saviours of the people are a series of tribal chieftans—all of these reflect the attitude of Hosea : 'They have made themselves kings, but it is none of my doing !' These various cycles cannot be reduced to unity in the same way as the great history of the monarchy, but they witness to a common inspiration. Right from the ninth century the monarchy no longer represented for the *élite* of the Northern Kingdom an element of spiritual value. In the case of the Judges before the monarchic period and of the *nebi'im* under the monarchy we find that God can call men quite independently of the kingly vocation. The best etymology of *nabi'*, prophet, is the Akkadian *nabû*, 'called', in the passive voice, a title which is found among those used of a king. It is about this time that the old term *rô'eh* or *hôzeh*, seer, gives way to this term *nabi'* which is used of the ecstatics of the time of Saul and David (1 Sam. 9:9).

On the one hand we find in this period that more attention is paid to the old pre-monarchic texts which speak of an earlier covenant, while on the other hand the prophets take over a share of the religious trust which the people placed in the monarchy. This, however, is always only partial for the messianic hope goes on increasing and finally can no longer be limited to the Davidic heir but is referred to the Son of David of the eschatological age. This can be seen by comparing Is. 7:9 with 11. In the Book of Emmanuel there are many points which can be referred to Hezekiah, as we already admitted by many Jewish exegetes ; in Is. 11, however, a new David, the root of Jesse, is envisaged in a future which is much more remote. At the same time, this little

book of Emmanuel is itself an indication of what Isaiah himself and his family may have meant to his disciples. Both he and his children are a sign, parallel to Emmanuel and the dynasty of Ahaz. The insistence on the person of the prophet, his wife the prophetess and his children shows that he was for his disciples a sort of substitute for the hope and religious faith in the dynastic promises.

In this small booklet we have what we might call a rough sketch of the Book of Isaiah as a whole in which will be finally gathered together all the texts of that school whose theology was centred on the Holy City and its temple where the Holy One of Israel dwelt. In the same epoch, that of Hezekiah and the destruction of Samaria, the disciples of Hosea gathered together his oracles in order to make up the book that bears his name, while the disciples of Amos do the same with regard to the oracles which speak of the God who roars from Sion and the booth of David which shall be rebuilt. There are two tendencies in this period. On the one hand, a great amount of theological writing is produced to impress on the people that the fall of Samaria is not the end of the people of Yahweh, but that there remains the dynasty of David, with its capital city and its sanctuary. This is effected by means of the insertion of the Elohist in the Yahwist framework, the editing of the Books of Samuel which end with David sacrificing on the threshing-floor which is the future site of the temple, the first writings of the Deuteronomic school. On the other hand, prophetic groups are formed around the teaching of a *nabi'* in which they recognise a message of Yahweh just as authentic as the word or torah of the priesthood attached to the royal sanctuary. The defeat of Hezekiah at the time of Sennacherib, the reigns of the bad kings Manasseh and Amon, finally the more resounding defeat of Josiah at Megiddo just at the moment when he had made himself the instrument of the deuteronomic ideal—all this contributed to the great flowering of the prophetic schools in the seventh and sixth centuries.

These prophetic schools always listen to and search for the word of God with a view to the salvation of the People of God ; but we are now in an epoch where there is no longer any principle of theological unity even though there is, at bottom, a unity of faith which is reflected in the various expressions of faith, of hope and of a common *hesed*. The message of each prophet is received by a small group even though it concerns all. Though the question is disputed, we may suppose that the books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah only reached their final state as we have them from the time of the Exile, apart from some secundary points. These two represent rather different theologies : the one associated with Deuteronomy, the other with the priestly code. These two currents confront each other on the question of the rebuilding of the

temple after the return from Exile, as is well known. At the same time, the Book of Isaiah is being completed and takes up, as can be seen from Chapter 66, a very detached attitude to the Temple and its priesthood. In this same post-exilic period the prophetic groups are re-formed around the sanctuary and its worship with Haggai, Zechariah and Joel. But with this we come to the end of the prophetic movement which flows on into apocalyptic, the expression of the expectation and fulfilment of the last days. This movement ends with the final compilation of the prophetic books now accepted by all Israel.

Third: the Writings. The prophetic schools give place to those formed by the teachers of wisdom. Is the People of God still the theme with which the wisdom teachers are concerned? At first sight this would appear doubtful. Zimmerli and others have shown us how the reflexion of the wisdom teachers was centred on individual happiness and personal success. At the same time, we must not forget that it was Jeremiah and Ezekiel who turned religious reflexion on to the idea of personal religion. Each individual lives and dies on his own account in keeping with his conduct and face to face with his God since the new Israel, as defined by Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, is a Kingdom of God which is no longer dependent on birth and the other predetermined elements of human life. Life is interiorised, the moral character of the religion of Yahweh is no longer in dispute, but each one lives this moral life of fidelity to the Decalogue and the Torah more or less perfectly. Wise counsels are needed to help man live the precepts, and it is precisely at this point that revelation has more to offer the just man, bringing him closer to the religion of the Sermon on the Mount according to which each one lives before the Father in secret and in which it will be a question of living as the Son lives in the presence of the Father.

The sapiential schools are differentiated among themselves in the same way as those of the prophets, and the process of sorting out what can be assimilated into the life of Israel in general and what cannot will not be completed until the end of the first century A.D., by the Pharisees of the school of Jamnia on the one hand and by the canon of the Christian Church on the other. At any rate, these schools never lose sight of the fact that they have to form their disciples for a life lived as members of the People of God. This is true of the bringing together of different collections of proverbs in the great ensemble which bears that title. It distinguishes carefully between the conduct of the just and unjust man according to that fear of Yahweh, the one true king and judge, which is the beginning of wisdom. As against the seductions of the foreign woman there is the virtue of the strong woman,

which I am inclined to read as allegory. Even apart from this, however, the problem of the Book of Proverbs is that of the wish to live as a community, and also the need for education of youth, *musar*, in Israel. The Book of Job on the contrary echoes that disturbance of soul which we meet with also in Malachi. At this time the religion of Israel was defined with reference to law and morality but the people did not seem to live up to expectations. While being a wisdom book, the Book of Job is, as Richter has shown, very juridical. This sapiential school has not much in common with the idea of wisdom which we find in Proverbs, and, with Job, it only finds rest when man can see God. It is only in Israel that one can enter into the presence of God ; that is, by means of the whole sacramental ritual system of the priestly code, The Book of Qoheleth, finally, represents a different current, no less preoccupied with the life of the People of God than the others. It insists more than any other book on the basic vices current in the different forms of human society and the author, pseudo-Solomon, proclaims the defeat of political wisdom. This book which, paradoxically, will be read at the Autumn Festival, the old feast of the sacred kingship, achieves an importance all its own when it proclaims that we are not to search in the world to come what the God of Israel, the Lord of the universe, has allotted to us, but to take hold of it here and now, where we are. My own view is that this book reflects faithfully the problems facing the community of Israel under the successors of Alexander.

With the Maccabean crisis the wisdom schools give place to the sects : Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, then Herodians, Zealots, even Christians. Already the two Books of Maccabees give us two different theological interpretations of this crisis each of which has something of value to say for us. But the multiplication of sects and the writings which came from them do not disguise the fact that the essential problem is still the same, that of the salvation of the community of Israel, the People of God. First Maccabees exalts the supreme priesthood in the Hasmonaean line ; second Maccabees contests it and makes Judaism more a doctrine than a theocratic state. The major elements of this doctrine are belief in the resurrection and intrepid fidelity to the Law leading, where necessary, to martyrdom. The blood of these martyrs gives, however, more than a happy part in the resurrection ; we read that ' these persecutions took place not for the destruction but rather for the correction of our race ' (2 Mac. 6:12).

What therefore creates the unity of all these books, despite the diversity of points of view which they had to envisage in order to respond to the manifold aspects of human life lived by a people, is truly

the concern to promote the cohesion of the faithful, the development of Israel, and much more so, its salvation. The new Israel is in continuity with the old. In Is. 7:8 we even find the image of giving birth to describe the relations of Sion to the new people that is coming into the world. For the Apostles, there was also continuity between the Israel of the Second Temple and the Christian Church, for the true temple had been rebuilt in three days (Jn. 2:21). Christianity was a doctrine, but a doctrine which dealt with a divine presence in a people which had always to be gathered together in unity, even when Jerusalem had not wished that her children scattered abroad should be gathered under his wing (Mt. 23:37). Right from the order given to humanity, made in the image of God, to spread out over the earth (Gen. 1:28) to the coming down of the heavenly Jerusalem upon the earth (Apoc. 21), this gathering together of the people around its Creator is the theme which gives the whole of the Bible its unity.

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THE MYSTERY OF THE WORD

Thoughts on Biblical Language

The Swiss philosopher, Max Picard, in his book, *The World of Silence*, goes to some pains to make clear how positive is his concept of this great and much neglected state of being. Part of his care is expended on demonstrating the organic movement from silence to the word: it is the word which is the greater value because it incarnates thought and makes possible the communication of thought between man and man and between man and God. The vivid and growing consciousness which we have today of the Bible as the word of God accentuates the problem of the whole complex of human words, of language in which the word of revelation and salvation comes to us. It is not enough that a word be spoken; it has also to be understood and there are certain difficulties that prevent us from understanding the Bible. These difficulties are summed up in the question of biblical language, not this or that language, Hebrew or Greek, original or translation, but language itself, that human and contingent clothing in whch God's word comes to us. For God has given us not just a set of ideas which could be later expressed in any human form whatever; the language