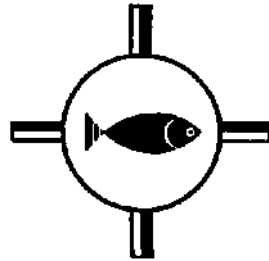


# LIBERAL CATHOLIC INSTITUTE OF STUDIES



## Unit 9

CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

## Paper 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL STUDIES

Volume 1

by the Rt. Rev. R. S. McGinnis Jr.



090.001. Printed in Australia



## UNIT 9

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## PREFACE

The centrality of the Bible in areas of heritage, doctrine, worship and ethics in the Christian Church make it incumbent upon Liberal Catholic clergy and laity alike, or any committed Christian for that matter, to give special attention to a serious attempt to properly understand these Scriptures. This is not always easy, however, because of the overlay of centuries of misuse and misunderstanding associated with the Bible resulting from insistence upon infallibility, literalism and fanciful symbolic interpretations. Also, there is the matter of one's time as well as decisions pertaining to helpful and appropriate methods and materials to be chosen for this study. Nevertheless, the need and challenge remain for biblical studies as a part of Christian formation and practice.

*An Introduction to Biblical Studies* is just that, an attempt to guide the beginning student as well as anyone else who desires to review some of the fundamentals in this field. Far from being exhaustive, this study follows a selected approach to help assure students a good beginning. In doing so it attempts to provide a person with a succinct and timely overview of what the Bible is all about, along with related areas, as well as offering a flexible guide to follow in an initial study or review of the Christian Scriptures.

The student will find some very basic suggestions for a hopeful good start in Chapter III, "Scriptural Usage", Section E. This is a brief discussion relating to motivation, time, planning, versions and resources. A "Bibliographical Reference" listing appropriate and suggested books immediately follows the final chapter.

This introductory study represents both the exoteric and esoteric nature of the Scriptures. Although this work has been initiated within and primarily for the Liberal Catholic Church, there is no reason for it to be limited to this one community. Its appropriateness rests, however, with the reader's background and needs.

The study of the Bible is a progressive work that actually is a lifetime endeavour. Yet, there must be a beginning to this process and this study is such an attempt. The admonition in II Timothy 2:15 urges Christians to "rightly handle" the word of truth. Reading the biblical texts themselves and gaining information and knowledge from critical studies involving history, archaeology, geography, language and the like go a long way in this direction. The Christian becomes more aware and better able to interpret the Scriptures and make applications from them. However, those interested in spiritual development will recognize that this is but one approach to the truth. Besides the scholarly aspect the student of the ageless Wisdom of God will also give attention to those interior matters which make known the Christ within.

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## CHAPTER 1 THE BIBLE: ITS ESSENCE AND LIBERAL CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

Christianity has accorded the Bible a special and reverent place within this community. This book is not only accepted as a record of people responding to God's revelation in history but also provides a basis for worship practices, a source for teaching and doctrines as well as a direction for moral questions; that is, the foundation for the Church's cult, creed and code. Throughout the ages of Christian history the Scriptures have been an inspiration to millions and have illuminated the lives of saints while indicting the ways of sinners.

At its best the Bible has been a light in darkness, a vehicle revealing the Ancient Wisdom and a comfort to innumerable struggling souls. At its worst it has been used in divisive and dogmatic ways and sometimes degenerating to various forms of Bibliolatry.

While the uniqueness of the Bible among sacred writings has been insisted upon by orthodoxy, unfortunate divisions have resulted from time to time within the Church itself as a result of differences of interpretation expressed in unbrotherly and unbending ways. Given such limitations imposed upon the Christian Scriptures by various opinions, the primacy of the Bible is still undaunted. Although Catholics follow one numbering of the books of the Old Testament and Protestants another, they both find unity at least in agreement upon the same books in the New Testament canon.

What Christians call "The Bible" is, of course, the combination of these two bodies of sacred writings, namely, the Hebrew Scriptures, or Old Testament, and the New Covenant, or Testament, of the Church.

The word "Bible" is derived from a Greek word meaning "the books"-- which is precisely what the Bible is--a collection of books officially recognized as canonical. These writings are composed of various types of literature such as poetry, history, mythology, allegory, stories, legal materials and the like. The different books have been written by various authors, many of whom are unknown, over a period of many years. Some have been set down evidently after a period of oral transmission first. Some of the writings are superior to others in style, content and even spiritual matters. Within the diversity of this book, the Bible, there are many stories to be told, lessons to be learned and truths to be unveiled.

The Christian Scriptures traditionally have been considered to be a presentation of God's self-revelation to man along with his response to God in many times and places and under various circumstances, a true encounter between the Divine and the human. In this deeper sense the Bible speaks of man's evolutionary process, his progress along the path or "the working out of his salvation" as some would prefer to say (Philippians 2:12). Throughout the Bible are to be found unfolding spiritual truths for all pilgrims and seekers of the way within.

There are considerable differences on the opinion concerning the manner and uniformity of biblical inspiration. The Liberal Catholic Church, for example, views various books of the Scriptures to be of differing value. Moreover, the Bible is not a neatly systematized treatise on doctrines or a rule book where all answers may be found, much less to be looked upon as a sacred source for the proof of certain cherished beliefs. Rather, it is a collection of religious writings which reflect human situations and limitations. The present number of books considered to be canonical, or official, have been set by Church authority, the differences between Catholics and Protestants having been noted. A proper interpretation of the Bible will include background materials, the immediate context of a

passage and surrounding material, the deliberation of councils of the Church along with the aid of the individual conscience, the latter being an important balance for Liberal Catholics. In this way the Bible remains a continuing and living corpus of truths rather than assuming the restricted role of a beloved book written in ancient times or as a source for infallible teachings.

Since the heritage of the Liberal Catholic Church is Christian, and Catholic in particular, the Bible is among the basic principles contributing to the formation and practice of on-going Christianity.

The Scriptures, along with the creeds and the traditions of the Church, according to the Liberal Catholic *Statement of Principles* are "the means by which the teachings of Christ have been handed down to his followers". This Church also recognizes the importance of the Seven Sacraments and the maintenance of correct Apostolic Succession as cardinal tenets.

These beliefs, together with a strong faith in the Living Christ, form fundamental pillars for the Church's existence.

*The Liturgy* of the Liberal Catholic Church breathes with scriptural quotations and allusions. The propers for the annual cycle of the celebration of the liturgical year provide appropriate Epistles and Gospels. Furthermore, as a sign of respect for the reading of the Gospel liturgically at the Eucharist, the book is censed and the congregation is asked to stand for this event. The daily offices of Prime and Complin call for the reading of a first and second lesson from the Bible, although they may be omitted when there is a need to shorten the service. There is, however, a need for the Bible to be placed in proper perspective. The Liberal Catholic Church is an altar-centered Church and not pulpit oriented. Not only is this fact recognizable from the physical arrangement of furniture and appointments in the churches, but also from the structure of the Eucharistic liturgy wherein the biblical lessons are employed as preparatory elements in the Mass, things which are no different from Roman Catholic and Anglican practice. However, this is carried one step further in Liberal Catholic rubrics which permit the biblical readings to be omitted upon certain occasions although normally retaining the gradual. A case in point could be a private celebration by a priest.

The Liberal Catholic Church teaches that the Scriptures are inspired but in a general sense, and certainly not verbally, or even uniformly. The *Statement of Principles* acknowledges that the Bible contains "much that is truly the product of divine inspiration" while recognizing that along with many things literally true "are mingled other things to be allegorically and spiritually understood." Furthermore, this document also states that there are even some disedifying passages in the Scriptures and that "the books of the Old Testament are of very unequal value." Taking a fully Catholic, or universal, position, the Liberal Catholic Church also suggests "that there are evidences of the highest inspiration in other scriptures of the world" as well. In matters of interpreting the Bible this Church allows members freedom in doing so since there are often more than one viewpoint on certain passages as well as the fact that different people are at various levels in the unfoldment of their Spiritual Self.





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## CHAPTER 2 NATURE OF REVELATION, INSPIRATION AND TRADITION

### A. REVELATION

Thomas Aquinas believed that knowledge about God and religious questions were disclosed partly to people when they employed the use of reason to discern these truths. General revelation, or natural theology, is the term given to this concept. Besides this approach he indicated that there is another method which is much more narrower and is called special revelation or revealed theology. It follows that these two possibilities of revelation recognize that there is ample reason or natural theology, but it requires a special or revealed theology to be informed that there is a Trinity. The Bible particularly participates in the latter understanding of revealed knowledge as sacred writings.

The Christian Scriptures confirm the idea that Divine truth is discernible in some measure by written documents which have been accepted by the Church as canonical and preserved for use in the community. That is, religious ideas have been translated into written form. It should be remembered, however, that scripture is not revelation itself but the reporting of revelation, and that Divine revelation is not necessarily Divine doctrine. The Liberal Catholic Church, while regarding the scriptures as foundational, "does not invest them with any idea of infallibility" as the *Statement of Principles* declares. In some instances Protestants have substituted an infallible Bible for an infallible church.

### B. INSPIRATION

When Paul speaks of all scripture as being inspired of God in II Timothy 3:16-17 (given Pauline authorship), he is speaking of the Hebrew writings, of course, since what was ultimately to become the Christian New Testament was in a state of formulation at that time, being written, circulated and discussed. Moreover, a careful examination of the Bible clearly shows that extra canonical sources were employed on occasion within books now officially accepted. For example, in Numbers 21: 14-15, *The Book of Wars of the Lord* is mentioned and quoted from just as in Joshua 10: 12-13 the *Book of Jasher* is quoted.

*The Book of the Kings of Israel* is mentioned in I Chronicles 29:29, and in the New Testament Jude quotes from the *Booh of Enoch* in verses 14 and 15 (*Enoch* 1:9). If these books contained valid revelations used by writers of now canonical texts, it is evident that the questions of inspiration and revelation need to be addressed in a much broader manner than allowed by some of an orthodox persuasion.

Also, it is a matter of history that the process of selection and retention of certain books qualifying for the canonical list has not only been a matter of usage in the several churches in geographic areas but a deliberate choice ultimately by Church authority in conciliar pronouncements. For instance, in 397 A.D. the Third Council of Carthage ordered that only canonical writings were to be read in churches under the title of divine scriptures. Certain books such as *The Didache* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* as well as *Barnabas* were not included in the selection for the New Testament. Also, the finding of the *Psalm Scroll* among the Dead Sea Scrolls discoveries in Qumran Cave Number 11 reveals that other psalms were in use beyond the 150 in today's Old Testament.

The intention of this discussion is not to insist that writings long since lost with remote possibility of being discovered should be considered canonical, or to question the sincerity of those formulating the official loss of books which limited the canon. Neither is there a desire to try to reopen the issue of the present listing of canonical books of the Scriptures. Rather, it is to point out that in the days of the early Church orthodoxy was particularly concerned with eliminating Gnostic writings of the period

since these were often considered to be a threat to the young faith, and to suggest that there can be other writings containing revealed truths about God outside the established canon.

As noted earlier, the Liberal Catholic Church endorses the idea of the inspiration of the scriptures but in a general sense because it recognizes that some books are of greater value than others. In the preface of the first and second editions of *The Liturgy* this concern is illustrated in the forthright statement that Christians have "saddled themselves with the jealous, angry, and bloodthirsty Jehovah of Ezra, Nehemiah and the others--a god who needs propitiating. . ." While it is perfectly true that the Scriptures were inspired by the Holy Spirit, as Liberal Catholic Bishop Charles Hampton said in his writings, "they are not to be regarded as infallible, because inevitably, the eternal truths become limited and colored and somewhat distorted by the imperfections of the intelligence through which they come." Furthermore, difficulties stemming from a literal reading of certain biblical passages often disappear if they are interpreted allegorically or in a spiritual sense.

The Bible is not only a record and communication of ideas but a story as well. Jewish theologian and philosopher Martin Buber explained in his book, *On the Bible*, that the Bible "presents us with a story only, but this story is theology." These stories were told and retold, collected, annotated, reflected upon and rearranged, systematized, sanctioned and proclaimed. This suggests that theology does not begin with nothing, but some kind of a revealed knowledge, some communication of Divine Wisdom, some form of God's Word.

While it is true that God has communicated or revealed himself in the Christ story in a definitive manner, it is also true, from another point of view, to understand this revelation of the Christ as an on-going reality among men and women. This process creates a continually new and dynamic "becoming" community rather than a historical relic.

Bernard Lee expresses this idea in his book *The Becoming of the Church* as does John Cobb, Jr. and David Griffin in *Process Theology*. Geoffrey Hodson considers the story of the life of Christ from both the literal and historical and allegorical significance in his writing,

*The Christ Life from Nativity to Ascension*. As he examines the four canonical Gospels he argues that "the wondrous story was never intended to be read merely as a record of external events but also as a revelation of the Divine behind man's mortal and underdeveloped material manifestation." In this sense the Bible is cosmic in scope rather than earthbound and past and present. The focus, of course, is on the universal Christ who not only has historical significance but ever lives existentially in our lives. As Paul said, "In him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28, NAB). Hodson, in Volume I of *The Hidden Wisdom of the Holy Bible* discerns in the Gospel narrative "three Christs", that is, "the deific life and presence in all nature and in all things; the mystical, or the Christ-presence in every human being; and the historical figure. . . who appeared on earth some 2,000 years ago in Palestine".

### C. TRADITION

The Scriptures, the creeds and traditions of the church, as previously noted in the Liberal Catholic Church's *Statement of Principles*, are "the means by which the teachings of Christ have been handed down to his followers." Every individual and each generation becomes a part of the continually evolving Church. While inheriting these accumulated teachings and practices of former times from their predecessors, they in turn add their own contributions to this living and on-going continuum. No single mind or denomination has the ability to comprehend the whole of truth or to avoid completely misunderstanding some aspects of it, however dedicated and trained. Moreover, the changing of the times, the new technology, discoveries of science, contributions of psychology and the like form a contributing host of factors in contemporary understanding of the Bible.

Some Protestant denominations today insist that the only source of Divine revelation is to be found in the Bible, that is, with the Apocalypse of John, revelation has ceased. This, of course, is a narrow view of revelation and an interesting question remains whether there is anything to preclude the writing of new sacred scriptures. Admittedly their acceptance by the great majority of Christians would be a serious limitation. Catholic Christianity has addressed the issue of the validity of new truth after Apostolic times, as well as the process to receive it, in terms of a living tradition alongside the Scriptures. This, of course, has led to the proclamation of the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary as a result for Roman Catholics, the latter also being a holy day for Liberal Catholics.

Christianity is not alone in this problem of tradition and the question of an on-going revelation of God. The Jewish Faith, for instance, retains other documents which are held to be of special religious value besides the Bible, though not on the same level. First the *Mishna* (teaching). Besides the Bible and the later *Talmud* the fifteen writings of the *Apocrypha* (hidden writings) should be mentioned since these books were considered scriptural especially by Alexandrian Jews.

Muslims also deal with the question of tradition as it affects their scriptures, the *Koran*, in the body of writings known as the *Hadith*. This is an extensive body of Muslim tradition concerning the prophet Muhammed, a collection of material over a period of two or three generations. Realizing that some of this tradition was more trustworthy than other, scholars finally divided the *Hadith* into three classes: sound, good and weak.

Hindus have addressed the problem of tradition in two periods, identified as the Sutra and Scholastic Periods. The former saw the development of thought and reflection upon the *Vedas* and *Bhagavad-gita* by both orthodox and heterodox, and the later period still going on involves commentaries upon the sutras.

The Catholic viewpoint is that the whole content of God's revelation is not limited to scriptural writings. The Bible and tradition are intimately related. The *Vatican II Constitution* on "Divine Revelation" reconfirms this duality and compatibility from the Roman Catholic standpoint just as the Liberal Catholic Church does in the *statement of Principles*. Scripture and tradition both flow from the same source and ultimately 'draw upon the truth of Christ. In this sense, to answer a question previously raised, the consideration of the need for the development and acceptance of new additional books for the Bible is excluded. From this viewpoint the tradition of the Church is not static but dynamic and develops under the leadership of the Spirit unveiling the mysteries of God.

In his book, *New Horizon Theological Essays*, Gregory Baum expresses the above sentiments when he affirms that the Gospel needs "periodic reinterpretation", that it is not sufficient to simply repeat formulas of the Bible or reiterate ecclesiastical pronouncements because questions change in every age and the "message of the selfsame Gospel must also change." This echoes the sentiment of the Liberal Catholic Church wherein it declares in the *Statement of Principles* that a theology "can justify itself and be of permanent value only in so far as it can withstand constant re-examination in the light of the progress of human knowledge and in individual spiritual awakening." Furthermore, "spiritual truths are at all times capable of discovery or re-verification by spiritually developed men" and that "the forms of religion should keep pace with human growth and enlightenment."

There are two particular dangers which need to be avoided concerning scripture and tradition. Although individual conscience is of primary importance in interpreting the Scriptures, it ought to be remembered that many ill-informed, prejudiced and strange ideas have resulted. In the matter of tradition there ought to be the caution against permitting traditions formulated in one historical period to become set and infallible in themselves. A real problem is dealing with truths that have been officially determined, a case in point being, the Roman Catholic teaching of trans-substantiation concerning the Eucharist which scholars since Vatican II have reappraised. As a safeguard against misused individualism in interpretation and a static tradition, the Church needs a balance which in turn may

not always assure the negation of all human error. This balance and corrective will include such things as discussions of general councils and synods, ecumenical deliberations, the living traditions of the great sees of Christendom, relationship to other teachings of the Church and traditions, liturgical observances and the insights of saintly men and women along with the conscience of the individual including meditative insights.





## CHAPTER 3 SCRIPTURAL USAGE

There are various uses made of the Bible and the purpose of the following inquiry is to briefly discuss some of these. This will vary from highly critical studies by scholars to the public reading of lessons liturgically or the private use by the individual for enlightenment and meditation. Although a best publisher, the Bible is often little known in depth or understood only in the superficial manner by those who claim its allegiance and respect.

### A. LITERARY AND HISTORICAL

Needless to say, the Christian Scriptures have been quoted and used as plots or included as background to much literature in the Western world. Who can read Shakespeare or Milton, for instance, without having some knowledge of the Bible. Contemporary literature of all kinds, religious and non-religious, express in words needs of people and human nature which are ageless. This is not to say that the intent of a novel is a tool of religion, but there is a common concern for the response of man to his world and other men as Sallie TeSelle makes clear in *Literature and the Christian Life*. As an example, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* exhibits a natural symbolism which grows out of action rather than mere abstraction; and one basic area of symbolism in this novel is the universal need for spiritual meaning in life. Gatsby is swept into a "spiritual wasteland" calling to mind T.S. Eliot's book by that title. And who cannot appreciate more profoundly Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* by understanding the actions of Santiago in the light of Christological symbolism?

The Bible also contains historical records and presents stories in historical settings. These include the history of the Jewish people in Egypt and Canaan, events in the life of Jesus Christ and the developing primitive Church in apostolic times. Archaeology continues to clarify and collaborate many historical events and places in these writings such as discoveries at Megiddo and the findings in the excavations at Hazor, Lachish, Jericho and Qumran to mention some. However, the mythologies of the early Genesis stories which deal with creation and the flood ought to be recognized as such rather than literal history or scientific records. Moreover, reputable scholars of various backgrounds recognize that the exact dating of the Nativity of Christ is unknown and that the December 25th date has been chosen by Western Christians to commemorate the event and not the calendar. Also, many other events in the Gospels are undatable and should be examined beyond a purely historical perspective. For example, the words "in those days" introduces the story of the feeding of the four thousand in Mark 8:1-10 (also repeated in Matthew 15:23-39). It is certainly legitimate to make use of the historical approach in Bible study as long as it is genuinely applicable, and this method is valuable for a better understanding of the Scriptures themselves. However, the Bible should not be considered just as a historical record.

Compared with Eastern religions, Western scriptures are historical in the sense of moving from one point of time to a definite ending whereas Eastern religious writings, like the *Upanishads* of Hinduism involve periods of created epochs which are repeatable sequentially.

## B. LITURGICAL

The primitive Church made use of biblical writings through public readings liturgically and exhortation. This was in keeping with the Jewish ritual which included reading their scriptures in the synagogues. Lessons from the Bible in the early Christian Church was normally in the context of the Eucharistic rite. Justin describes these readings in Rome in about mid second century A.D. in his *Apolo-ogy* (1,57) when he says, "and the memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read as long as time allows." A half century later after Justin's time another leader in the church at Rome, a presbyter named Hippolytus, speaks about the readings of the Scriptures and their exposition at the Eucharist in *The Apostolici Tradition*. Following this ancient custom the Liberal Catholic Church makes use of an Epistle and Gospel reading at the Eucharist and two lessons at the daily offices of Prime and Complin as already noted. In the contemporary Roman Catholic rite a lesson prior to the traditional Epistle and Gospel is provided from the Old Testament. Provision is also made for this in the newly proposed *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church in the United States.

More than just the reading of the Scriptures in common worship, or having expositions of their text, the biblical lessons are an important element of Eucharistic celebrations as the "illumination and gathering of thought" working towards "The Supreme Wisdom" in this special concentration of our mental efforts as J. B. Parry and M. C. Godby point out in *The Work of Transformation*. More will be said concerning "Liturgy and the Bible" in Chapter VIII of this *Introduction to Biblical Studies*.

The Christian Scriptures may be approached from a devotional standpoint and used in a private manner as opposed either to their being incorporated liturgically in public worship or being assigned strictly to scholastic studies. As an aid to devotion the Bible can be a superlative companion and guide. It is indeed a rich storehouse and highly suggestive for themes, stories, words and symbols helpful in meditative and contemplative matters. The "Jesus Prayer" of the Eastern Orthodox, the "Hail Mary" of the Roman Catholic tradition and the Lord's Prayer, common to all, have their inherent mantra-like effect.

In devotional practices a person may employ the Scriptures in a variety of ways. One approach is simply to select various books of the Bible and read them with devotional intention. An alternate is to follow the weekly liturgical propers of the Liberal Catholic *Liturgy*. Another is to make use of a prescribed lectionary of daily Bible readings such as provided by the American Bible Society or found in the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*. Besides this, there are numerous devotional books and materials available in religious book stores or from publishers. Whatever, there are certainly ample resources and a variety of ways to continually use the Bible devotionally. One thing to keep in mind, however, is that this usage requires a certain detachment from the scholarly approach and a decision to employ biblical readings in an intuitive manner. This distinction may not always be easy to maintain in either direction, and it is certainly not a fast rule, but rather a question of intention and purpose. Nevertheless, the devotional stance is meditative and requires being still, listening, reflecting and encountering the Divine within.

## C. DOCTRINAL

The Greek-rooted word didactic means "teaching" and for normative Christianity the essential teachings of the Church are grounded in the Bible. In this sense scholars and students speak correctly about "Biblical Theology" because scriptural story is theology. Doctrines developed slowly in the early Church out of experience with a firm basis upon Jewish monotheism. Related cardinal beliefs also were formulated in terms of the humanity and divinity of Christ, the resurrection of Christ and his ascension. Through statements of faith, catechism, classes, encounters, discussions, writings and sermons the teachings of the Church have been made known throughout the ages with the Bible as source and commentary upon particular beliefs.

Referring to the scriptures, creeds and traditions, the Liberal Catholic Church's *Statement of Principles* declares that "it deduces from them certain principles of belief and conduct which it regards as fundamental, true and sufficient, while not exhaustive, as a basis of right understanding and right conduct." However, this Church insists that any theology can be justified and remain of lasting value only when it undergoes continual re-examination in the face of on-going human knowledge. Yet, the cognitive status of religious apprehension is not to be limited to rational approaches alone. The intuitive understanding of spiritually awakening people also makes an important epistemological contribution. This emphasis upon the individual conscience is necessary in the quest for spiritual understanding since the empirical method helps to serve as a corrective over against imposed dogmatic spiritual interpretations which were formulated as doctrines, something that may not only be limited but limiting as well. This concern for theosophy (Greek for Divine Wisdom) is part of Liberal Catholic theology.

#### D. STUDY

The personal study of the Bible is essential to Christian formation and various methods may be used to accomplish this. A student may enroll in courses at area institutions such as schools, churches and study centers. Participation in study courses, attending lectures and forming Bible study groups are other ways. Whatever choice, one's study of the Scriptures becomes a different approach from liturgical or devotional purposes as noted earlier. The intention in this instance is to gain factual knowledge about the various biblical books themselves, the times and circumstances in which they were written, the places and people involved, the languages used, their content and the like.

A critical study of the Scriptures is encouraged and by the term "critical" is not meant anything negative. Rather, it is used in the nature of discovery, inquiry and investigation in a very positive sense, that is, a search for correct information and validation. In a specialized sense the term "lower criticism", when applied to the Bible, is concerned with the correct text and "higher criticism" centers upon questions of authorship, dating and interrelationships of the various scriptural books.

The word "hermeneutics" is also used in biblical scholarship. It can be defined as the science of the laws and principles of interpretation or how the meaning of the Bible is to be ascertained. Although seldom a formal discipline it identifies the broad study which contributes to textual criticism, historical criticism, historical setting, archaeology, geography, language and form criticism. This general inquiry is preparatory to "exegesis" which is the actual interpretation of particular passages. Various methods of interpretation will be considered in Chapter IV of this *Introduction to Biblical Study*. The Liberal Catholic Church supports and encourages such scientific, critical, open and on-going approaches to scriptural studies.

A committed student of the Bible needs to determine from the beginning that the study of the Scriptures will become a definite part of the process of Christian growth. This means setting apart time regularly to do the work that is required. A person motivated by an honest desire to know and understand the Bible must give attention to this matter of discipline if there are to be results in this endeavour. Besides agreeing upon making this study part of one's regular schedule there is the necessity to arrive at some definite goals and plans to follow. The first and most obvious need is simply to become familiar with the various biblical books themselves, that is, what they are and where they are. The second step to be taken is to pursue a course of action that will enable the student to secure a broad background of the Bible in the fields of history, archaeology, language, geography and the like. After this overall survey a third task is to begin the study of particular books individually so that all of the writings in the Old and New Testament will have been investigated in some degree. Beyond this one may wish to look for certain themes in the Bible or specific teachings. It is evident that thematic suggestions and passages related to doctrines will be in evidence in any critical approach to the Bible and there is no reason that these ought not to be noted for one's personal devotions and other interests. However, these things should be considered secondary for the task at hand.

There is nothing that will take the place of the actual reading of the biblical text itself. Concentration upon this is essential for the student to feel comfortable in finding various books and having some sense of an overall understanding of the Scriptures and their interrelatedness. Factual material will in turn become more applicable to the primary documents themselves rather than just dealing with information and ideas about them. Reading the Bible through may have some merit in itself but without proper reflection and the assistance of outside sources and references, along with a purpose in mind, it is a limited exercise. A beginning student would do well to begin readings in the New Testament first and then turn to the Old Testament books.

It is highly recommended that the student secure a contemporary version of the Bible from the outset for his studies. *The New American Bible*, the *Jerusalem Bible*, *The New English Bible* and the *Revised Standard Version* are good choices to select from. However, one should remember to purchase either of the later two versions with the *Apocrypha* included. The familiar *King -James Version* has its own beauty and sentiment for many English speaking people but contemporary versions are not only easier to read because of modern language employed but they reflect a more accurate translation because of textual criticism and archeological findings since 1611.

The study of the Gospels in the New Testament will be enhanced with the use of a Gospel parallel which prints the text in parallel columns for comparison such as the one published by Thomas Nelson and Sons. A good concordance for locating biblical words and passages, and a Bible atlas to assist in finding places and understanding chronological sequences will prove to be very helpful. There are, of course, many excellent books, journals and articles on biblical studies which are available to help guide the student, but the multiplicity of these publications in this field make it difficult especially for the beginner to know which of them to choose. In order to make this easier a list of references has been provided at the conclusion of this *Introduction to Biblical Studies*. Although not exhaustive, it does offer appropriate sources for an initial study.

As indicated, the Bible may be understood, and should be, from a critical approach in formal study. However, the student of Divine Wisdom will always keep in mind that an overriding purpose of this study is to search for better illumination and not just for more proficiency in factual information no matter how interesting or helpful. In this sense orientation to biblical studies will always be from the perspective of "student" in a deeper meaning of the word rather than the limited concern for correct texts, scholarly findings or researched information. These things will be recognized as valuable tools, and important ones, to aid him in the unending quest for the Christ within. In this way the Bible is truly a guide and light along the path.







## CHAPTER 4 METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

Biblical students may be able to work together in relative harmony investigating common concerns as they pertain to scriptural texts in terms of background information such as language, history or geography. However, the actual interpretation of scriptural stories and their implications or bearing upon the formulation of particular sectarian teachings may be quite another matter. Such differences of opinion, and sometimes unbecoming conflicts, are not limited always to disagreeing denominations one with another, but tensions regarding these matters will occur within a particular faith community itself.

A satisfactory and constructive approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures is necessary for any religious body. This chapter deals with various types of primary interpretations being used by Christians today. Each of these types represents various approaches to the understanding of the Bible, and each one has some measure of truth or is motivated at least by a partially legitimate cause. Neither is the exclusive property of any one particular group, although one choice may be more appealing to certain persuasions. It will be evident that some methods are more limiting than others or even objectionable to some traditions. Moreover, it ought to be recognized that there are numerous biblical passages which are legitimate subjects for more than one level of interpretation and that it is reasonable and salutary to be able to use any one, or a combination, as a specific context demands.

### A. PROOF-TEXT

There are those who look for particular biblical verses in order to substantiate their claims on preferred ways to live the Christian life or to support favored beliefs concerning the nature of this faith.

A fragmentary approach like this treats the Scriptures as if they were merely a collection of bits and pieces or isolated verses to be wrenched from their immediate context to support and validate one's own position. This action has the inherent danger of forcing certain verses into the blanks of puzzles where they don't belong or building a case on a cut- and-paste method. Because of the divisional structure of the Bible into chapters and verses it may be convenient to single out certain sentences or sections to help illustrate a point being made. Nevertheless, this approach is certainly superficial if one attempts to engage in any serious biblical study. Why, one can almost prove *anything* following this approach.

### B. DOGMATIC

The doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is supported by such scriptural references as John 1:14, to use a proof-text example.

Of course, this belief is more involved than one single verse. The Christian Church, in a very positive sense of the word, is "dogmatic" regarding certain cardinal beliefs like the Incarnation. In fact, courses in theology in some seminaries are listed under the title of "Dogmatic Theology". However, the general use of the word "dogmatic" implies something going beyond the mere assertion of a religious belief formally stated by competent church authority. The meaning associated is often that of rigidity, arrogance, legalism uncompromised and closed minds to further investigations. This attitude is aptly illustrated by the outlook of the Anglican Parson, the Rev'd. Mr. Thwackum, toward his own Church of England in Henry Fielding's novel, *Tom Jones*.

This is not to say that one's interpretations and beliefs do not matter or that one ought not to have convictions or take a position in religious matters. The Liberal Catholic Church insists upon the contribution of the individual conscience in these matters. There are certain doctrines, however, which admittedly separate Catholics from Protestants and to not recognize these differences is simply not facing reality. The admission of the varieties of beliefs may in itself be a healthy opportunity for understanding, dialogue and growth. The question being raised is the way in which differences are expressed and dealt with among Christians. This certainly should include courtesy, openness, sincerity and a sense of charity for those giving allegiance to the Prince of Peace. Unfortunately this is not always the case and instead of creative conflict, or dialogue, there is sometimes divisiveness and ill feelings among "brothers". When membership in a particular church or the mode of baptism or the jurisdiction of a particular body becomes the *only* correct way, and even casts doubt upon the sincerity, integrity or "salvation" of other Christians, the term dogmatic becomes self-implicating. The trail of Christian history is sadly marked by such tell-tale monuments along the way. If anything, ecumenism seeks to make operative the underlying fact of brotherhood in "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." (Ephesians 4:5, 6, KJV). There is not *a* truth, but truth.

### C. SYSTEMATIC

Following closely upon the positive concept of dogmatic theology, some interpreters treat the Scriptures as if they present a systematized theology. The study of biblical theology recognizes that the story of the Bible cannot be separated from theological implications.

Admittedly, typeological ideas such as messiahship, covenant and sacrifice expressed in the Jewish Scriptures are further developed in the New Testament by the early Christian writers. Thematic subjects like prayer can also be traced through the two testaments. Nevertheless, a systematic approach to the Bible must take into account the particular historical settings and not lift these ideas from their context. Also, it is naive to assume that everyone's experiences must follow exactly the same pattern regarding minor details, and to look for neat packages is futile. If these limitations are accepted, a systematic approach can be helpful in identifying themes, movements, types, concepts and the like as well as seeing the interrelatedness of particular ideas and their development.

### D. LITERAL

Fundamentalists who claim a completely literal interpretation of the Bible, insist, for example, that the world was created by God in six days spanning twenty-four hours each. This does not take into consideration, however, that the Hebrew word for day, *yom*, also has a broader connotation. It also means "an expanse of time" such as "in the day" in which David was King of Israel. Neither does it give proper attention to scientific discoveries by astronomers, archaeologists and geologists. Nor does it take into account the nature of types of literature such as mythology which form the early chapters of Genesis.

There are certain factual materials in the Scriptures which can hardly be contested, and a straightforward reading of any number of passages is the only rational and honest course to follow. However, the challenge of modern science, along with the presence of internal linguistic uses of allegory and symbol in biblical texts, make it difficult to accept a wholly literal reading of the Scriptures. Another contributory factor is the presence of literary devices like hyperbole, as in Matthew 5:30, wherein Jesus advocated the severance of one's right hand from the body if it caused serious offence. Ignoring the exaggeration element, deliberately employed, would lead to a painful physical response while missing the intentional meaning altogether. Affirming the idea

that since the Bible says it, one ought to believe it, is hardly a reasonable, reflective or responsible approach.

It has been noted earlier that there may be good reason for more than one level or stage of interpretation of particular passages. This recognition ought to relieve the anguish of the necessity of making a single choice approach in given situations, such as only a literal one. In no way does this change or dilute the truth, but on the other hand, assists the serious student of the Scriptures to have a more complete or deeper access to Divine Wisdom.

Literalism is also involved in the debate concerning the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible. Along with other Christians the infallibility of the Bible is accepted by Liberal Catholics as discussed before in Chapter II. However, it was noted that this is limited because of the unequal value of some books in the canon. The intention is that one is not misled in truths that are revealed in the Scriptures and that the primary teachings found in the biblical texts contribute to a reliable authority for Christian faith and practice. The question of inerrancy is another matter because of human error, human fallibility in matters of judgment, prejudice and limitations of knowledge as well as the historical context of certain writings. To insist upon a literal reading reflecting some of these limiting factors is certainly inconsistent with common sense and responsible scholarship.

#### E. PROPHETIC

The concept of prophecy, with the dual questions relating to prediction and fulfillment, is part of the biblical story. Some prophecy is written as conditional like Jeremiah's call to Israel to repent, saying that the Lord would have mercy and the terrible things predicted would not happen if they mended their evil and apostate ways (Jeremiah 3:12; 4:1-2). The prophet Isaiah envisions the destruction of Jerusalem along with the fall of the monarchy (Isaiah 3:1-4), things that come to pass with the conquest of the capital of the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Looking to a happier outcome, Deutero-Isaiah predicted the liberation of the Jewish people in exile (Isaiah 41), and this was accomplished with the return of the captives from Babylon beginning in 557 B.C.

Prophecy is also associated with the life of Jesus Christ. Some Christians accept the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 as being fulfilled in the story of the virgin birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:23). There is also the belief in the return or Second Advent of Jesus to be considered. Acts 1:6-11 portrays the Ascension of Christ witnessed by a close band of apostles. A liturgical phrase developed to express the longing for his return, that being "Maranatha"<sup>1</sup>, meaning "Our Lord Cometh!" (Rev. 22:20b). Paul writes that this second appearance of the Lord will be swift "as a thief in the night" (I Thessalonians 5:2b); therefore, Christians ought always be prepared for this potential eschatological occurrence. However, in time Paul had to revise his understanding of the immediacy of this expected event as he wrote a second letter to Christians in Thessalonica in which he still asserted the truth of this hope but also admonished the idle believers in that city who were sitting about waiting (II Thessalonians 3:11-13).

The prophetic element is plainly visible in various places in the Bible as just illustrated. An important question is whether to interpret these prophecies literally or allegorically --or both perhaps. A continuing literal interpretation of the Scriptures in matters relating to prophecy as-

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<sup>1</sup> An Aramaic or Syriac expression used by St. Paul at the conclusion of his first epistle to the Corinthians. (I Corinthians 16:22)

sumes that the Bible is replete with far-distant predictions which will happen given time. This one-dimensional approach can become an obsession which utterly disregards the historical context of biblical writers--or the deeper spiritual mysteries. Clyde T. Francisco points out in his *Introduction to the Old Testament* that the prophets in the Jewish Scriptures were not primarily predictory of the future. "They were 'forthtellers' more than 'foretellers, that is, particularly concerned about their immediate situations.

Passages which look to the future imply change and often conflict or crisis. Paul speaks of the Christian life in terms of conflict (Ephesians 6:17) and the Essene writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls have a secular document expressing this concept in its title, *The War Between the Sons of Darkness and the Sons of Light*. The search for the Christ within is never static but dynamic. Those who have been "baptized into Christ" (Galatians 3:27) were "new creations" (II Corinthians 5:17) and they are aware that the Kingdom of God has come upon them (Matthew 12:28). In this sense "the Age to Come" (Hebrews 6:5) has been manifested or revealed in Christ, and as C. H. Dodd has said in *The Apostolic Preaching*, primitive Christianity's Gospel is one of "realized eschatology". Time-measurement becomes irrelevant and the Day of the Lord is realized in moments of human experience. In this sense the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ are fully participatory as inner initiations on the evolutionary path towards the unfoldment of Divine Wisdom. Moreover, the Eucharist perpetually provides for the coming of Christ within each person sacramentally and reconstitutes the events of Holy Week and Easter of that history has become suprahistorical.

#### F. LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

The analytic approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures takes its cue from such philosophical writings as A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic* and Ian T. Ramsey's *Religious Language*. The analytic method seeks to place theology on a new contemporary footing by dispelling the confusion that often arises from imperfect understanding of the users of language. Paul M. Van Buren's *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* deals with the language system as it relates to religious ideas in the Scriptures. He has attempted to translate major theological issues rooted in the Bible through a careful analysis of its language so that secular man may understand them properly.

The analyst attempts to clarify biblical statements by inquiring into the ordinary way in which they are used. Having done this, the language of faith must be honestly dealt with. What do terms like God, belief and love really mean in a religious context? Also, what about overused or wornout words and phrases or cliches? Traditional logical positivism considers all theological statements to be meaningless since they cannot be verified or falsified empirically. However, others recognize that there are various kinds of language appropriate to different situations. In a very positive way analysis helps to clarify thinking about issues, and aids in logical expressions and statements about matters having to do with the faith community. While recognizing the problem of religious language, and benefiting from a method that encourages clarity, objectivity, verification and logical thinking, the analytic approach is a limited endeavor if it stops there because this leads to a reductive and sterile end for Christians. Van Buren is certainly correct in asserting that the linguistic analytic inquiry should be a tool to aid in the interpretation of religious statements rather than an end in itself. This is, of course, not to deny the assistance analysis offers, but to place it in a proper perspective.

#### G. SPIRITUAL

Anglican Bishop John A. T. Robinson's book, *Honest to God*, instigated a debate in the mid-sixties which indicated the need for a careful assessment in contemporary times to be "honest" in biblical theology and scriptural interpretations. With recent advances in science and technology, the findings of historical research, along with the challenges of new philosophies in modern society's increasing secularization, intellectual honesty and religious commitment sometimes appear to be in conflict. This should not be the case. Recognizing the existence of a sacred language of symbol in the Scriptures may help to overcome this dilemma. A spiritual approach to the interpretation of the Bible offers ways to unlock the wisdom which is often concealed in the myths, typeology and allegories in these canonical writings.

Carl G. Jung points out the fact in his book, *Man and His Symbols*, that since man's language is filled with symbols he extends his range to understanding and speaks to the unconscious aspects of the perception of reality through these vehicles of symbolic terms. Therefore, cultural and religious symbols are able to express "eternal Truths" across the ages as they become collective images accepted by particular communities. In this sense, as Alfred North Whitehead discusses in his *Symbolism, Its Meaning and Effect*, "actual things are *objectively* in our experience and *formally* existing in their own completeness." However, many hard-headed men of the twentieth century tend to want facts, and not symbols, and push them aside as make-believe. This pragmatic outlook, along with the abuse and misuse of symbolism, have contributed to this repulsion from the validity of symbolism. It is hardly necessary to elaborate on the significance of the Body and Blood of the Eucharist or the emblems of wheat and grapes as liturgical motifs in art forms and their implication as outer signs of the inner life, the Real Presence of Christ.

Liberal Catholic Bishop E. J. Burton, in *The Communication of Religious Experience*, indicates the need to accept the limitation of imperfect communication and avoid the tendency to search for some absolute way which often leads to many difficulties and quarrels philosophically and religiously as well as personal frustrations. In Volume One of *The Hidden Wisdom of the Bible*, Geoffrey Hodson notes that with the passage of time the "esotericism of one age becomes the exotericism of its successor." Furthermore, Hodson believes, as he says in *The Christ Life from Nativity to Ascension*, that the story of the life of Christ ought to be considered both from the historical and allegorical viewpoints. He argues, referring to the canonical Gospels, that "the wondrous story was never intended to be read merely as a record of external events but also as a revelation of the divine behind man's mortal and underdeveloped material manifestation." The above books by Hodson, as well as H. P. Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, along with Annie Besant's *Esoteric Christianity* and C.W. Leadbeater's *The Inner Side of Christian Festivals* are examples of suggested sources for keys to help interpret much of the symbolic and allegorical imagery in the Scriptures.

From the earliest times Christians have discussed not only the role but the legitimacy of the spiritual method of interpreting the Bible. Before the Christian era the allegorical method learned from the Greeks had been adopted by Jews in Talmudic interpretations. Early Christian exegesis followed the contemporary precedents (I Corinthians 9:9-10; Galatians 4:21-31, etc.). Already by Patristic times there was a serious debate concerning the validity of this approach with the Church Father Origen himself defending the proper use of a spiritual sense in biblical interpretations. Medieval writers spoke of the multiple sense of the Scriptures regarding interpretation which included the literal and the spiritual or esoteric. The following section will discuss the latter alternative in terms of mythology, typeology and allegory.

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## 1. MYTHOLOGY

The cosmology of the New Testament is essentially mythological in character in its presentation of a three-storied universe which includes the triple imagery of earth, heaven and hell. Not only this, but the idea of redemption is present in the language of mythology.

"In the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4) God sent his pre-existent Son (John 1:1) who, after death and resurrection (Matthew 12:40), will sit on the right hand of God the Father in heaven (Romans 8:34), and later return in the clouds (I Corinthians 15:23) to complete his work which is to include the final destruction of death itself (Revelation 21:4).

The word "myth" is misunderstood many times and in contemporary usage, more often than not, implies a fairy tale or reference to something that is untrue. Precisely the reverse is the case. Sometimes ordinary words are often not adequate, nor available, and therefore myth is used to express in story form a deeper reality or truth. Actually, myth is the accumulation of wisdom of a given society or community of people, the collective experience of a particular group. Myths of primitive societies, as well as those of the Near Eastern culture, share basic themes in their pre-occupation with questions of origin. An example is creation, along with other pondered subjects like immortality, and the meaning and purpose of life. As vehicles, myths are able to communicate these timely truths across the ages. The Galgamesh Epic of the Babylonians (and earlier Akkadian sources) expresses a concern for immortality as well as the ancient Mesopotamian story of Adapa and the stories of the Creation and Fall of Man in the Genesis account, not to mention the narrative of the Paschal mysteries in the Gospels.

Myths may have historical roots, but they are universal in that they transcend history and overcome the limitations of time. Or as Geoffrey Hodson expressed it in Volume One of *The Hidden Wisdom of the Holy Scriptures*: "The authors of the scriptures saw eternal "truths mirrored in events in time." Therefore, myth is not totally dependent upon factual history or chronology to be "true" since there is a deeper meaning involved and a far-reaching truth to be understood beyond the story itself. In other words, a myth is "a symbolic account containing a theory of reality" as Joseph L. Tisch explains in "The Fall of Man" in *Ubique*. Or to put it another way, as Mircea Eliade does in *Myth and Reality*. "Man is what he is today because a series of events took place. . . .The myth tells him these events and, in doing so, explain to him how and why he was constituted in this particular way."

If mythology is an important element in communicating spiritual truth, the translation of this truth into the language of the present, or "demythologizing", is of primary consideration. The German theologian Rudolph Bultmann is well known for his contribution in this field. He has suggested ways in which to emancipate the Gospel message from mythology. In his *Kerygma and Myth*, Bultmann recognizes the kerygmatic character of the Gospels as well as the fact that the proclamation of the Good News of Christ was not confined to the historical narratives of the Evangelists. A danger, of course, is that instead of freeing the Gospel message from the vehicular story, and finding the deeper truths expressed in the mythology, the myth may be dissolved altogether. "Demythologization" may not be the most appropriate term to describe those engaged in this process since it implies that one may want to eliminate myth altogether, but this is quite the opposite intention as just indicated. The presence and value of mythology must be clearly recognized, the myths identified and appropriately dealt with in responsible biblical interpretation.

## 2. TYPOLOGY

Christian reflection upon the Old Testament has often been in a typeological sense especially concerning Christological matters. The Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 42:1-4) has been considered actually to foreshadow Christ himself and events in the life of Jesus from his nativity (Matthew 2:6/Micah 5:1) to his death (Matthew 27:46/Psalm 22:2) have often been interpreted in a typeological manner. In this sense the Old Testament passages have been taken as veiled foreshadowings finding fulfillment in the Gospel narratives of the New Testament. As indicated in the above biblical references, the Evangelists themselves employed the Hebrew Scriptures as commentary upon Christian theology.

Early Christian art also often interpreted the New Testament events in terms of the Old Covenant. Noah's ark was associated with the Church while the flood waters with Christian baptism and David the shepherd was a prototype of Christ as the Good Shepherd. The plausibility of this approach, of course, rests upon the prior acceptance of Jesus Christ's role as the *fui fi Her* of such ideas and concepts (Matthew 5:17). Although not denying the importance and validity of typeology, Lampe and Woolcombe point out the dangers of unchecked speculation in these matters in their *Essays on Typeology*.

From a technical viewpoint typeology can never escape history, that is, in the literal sense. It must first "pay attention to the circumstances of the original event, the type, and show a similarity or analogy in the event, or anti-type, which is claimed to be its (historical) fulfillment," as G. W. Olsen points out in his article on "Allegory, Typeology and Symbols" in the *International Catholic Review*. On the other hand allegory can demonstrate whatever relation desired, or even none at all, because there is no need to show similarity. It is not tied to any "historical examination of a type", as Olsen says, but can ignore or transcend the literal circumstances in order to draw out a moral or teach a philosophical truth. This is not to say, however, that allegory must disregard the purport literal event portrayed in biblical writings, but it is employed to meditate upon rather than critically interpret a given text.

## 3. ALLEGORY

The New Testament affirms that Christ abolished death and brought life and immortality to light (II Timothy 1:10). Paul employs esoteric language in Romans 6:4 ff. as he explains how a disciple of the Lord can actually participate in Christ's Resurrection. This is accomplished in the present in a dramatic dying and rising with him in the sacrament of Baptism as the initiate enters the Christian community. Elsewhere Paul declares: "In Christ all will be brought to life" (I Corinthians 15:22, NEB).

Jesus himself used the allegorical method in such parables as the "city set on a hill" (Matthew 5:14-16); the "hearers and doers of the word" (Luke 6:47-49); the admonition about treasures (Matthew 6:19-21); the interpretation of the parable of the sower (Mark 4:13-20); the parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32); the parable of the net (Matthew 13:47-50); and the familiar story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).

Images are basic to writing in that images work in the mind to stir up association, forcing the mind ultimately to discover likenesses. The allegorical method is a form of extended comparisons and is effective for clarifying the abstract or unknown by comparing it to something familiar. Such comparisons are often expressed in metaphors, a way of defining things by saying one thing is another. A symbol is much like a metaphor in that it transfers the meaning from one thing to another, however, a symbol differs from a metaphor in its ability to suggest a meaning larger than itself. Allegory is a very special use of symbolism and can be defined in terms of either prose or

poetry in which the events and/or characters are more important as symbols than as literal elements. The parables noted above are examples of the allegorical method. Another illustration is the character Barnabas in the simple medieval story "Our Lady's Juggler" in which he is much more important as a symbol representing "everyman" than the individual in the narrative. Another example would be the unnamed Good Samaritan in the parable told by Jesus recorded in Luke's Gospel. In these instances symbolism through allegory communicates or mediates deeper truths than the literal reading indicates.

An example of spiritual truth under the veil of allegory may be found in the story of Jonah and the great fish. A literal reading of this account would appear foolish to many thinking people today, but this should not be a cause to reject any truth communicated through the symbolism in this narrative. Moreover, Jesus himself interprets the Jonah episode as a prototype of his own projected climatic crisis: "For as Jonah was in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights" (Matthew 12:40, JB). Three interpretations of this story are possible and have to do with three aspects of the understanding of Christ. In *Esoteric Christianity* Annie Besant has identified three elements of Christ which are applicable. They are the Historical Christ, the Mythic or Cosmic Christ and the Mystic Christ. "Three days and three nights" refers to the historical Jesus in the garden tomb outside the walls of Jerusalem, whereas the Word (or Logos) is the outpouring of Divine creativity into the universe in a cosmic sense.

This descent and involvement in matter is symbolized by the rock tomb within the earth, but with an upward return through resurrection and ascension. The mystic Christ suggests that every person shares the Christ-Presence within which his spirit is being continually unfolded along the evolutionary path.

Episcopal Bishop Francis E. Bloy points out a further allegorical interpretation in his foreword to G. de Purucker's *Clothed with the Sun*: when he refers to the Master Jesus caught in a storm in a small boat on Lake Galilee with his closest disciples, a story reported in all of Synoptic Gospels. This "Christ-within", Bloy declares, "is too often asleep in the little boat which is man's self, as the storms and circumstances of life greatly threaten."

Such examples as the above, of course, are only a few illustrations from the countless number available to be used to illustrate the concept and importance of allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures. A word of caution ought to be made against the exclusive use of this method, or any other, because many fanciful suggestions are possible in this approach. A desire for integrity, common sense, the study of reliable exponents of the Bible, the use of meditation along with the determination to discern the essential truths will go a long way as safeguards towards responsible and satisfactory allegorical interpretations.

## H. OTHER

There are other methods of interpretation which have not been dealt with in the above discussion. The historical approach has been suggested as one usage of the Scriptures previously and the limitations noted. As indicated, the Bible is not just a historical record nor is it a book of science. Since the Scriptures are beloved by so many there is a natural tendency to treat them in an idealized manner, especially some of the characters who are portrayed in these writings and consequently failing to note their shortcomings along with their strengths.

Both ancient and modern writers have employed various methods to interpret the Scriptures and the more important of these have been identified and discussed in some measure. Neither of these approaches is infallible nor invariably to be employed in biblical studies. However, the serious student will want to understand each of these possible choices according to its limita-



tions and advantages in order to be better equipped to insure a more mature, responsible, knowledgeable and profound understanding of the Christian Scriptures.





## CHAPTER 5 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF BIBLICAL CANON

Many factors contribute to the uniqueness of the Bible among Christians. It is certainly not the only religious literature claiming to be inspired or to be said to be a holy book--as the VIIth chapter in this work will discuss. Nor does age make the Bible unique in the annals of history because other religious writings could claim greater antiquity. The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic and the myth of Adapa are certainly more ancient than the origin stories of Genesis. Neither is the distinction of the fact that the Scriptures took over a thousand years to write. More telling perhaps is its circulation among the millions of people as a best-seller in society. And why? one may ask. It is a library book of a variety of types of literature including history, documents, laws, poetry, stories and dramatic accounts which reflect a Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cultural milieu. More than this, however, these Scriptures have become an authoritative document basic to the Church's instruction, evangelical outreach and constant source of inspiration. It is a record of the continuing action of God and the continuing response of those living out their lives. Through the biblical pages God reveals Himself in a variety of ways, through different people, at particular places, under divergent circumstances and in diverse times — the reading of which establishes existential rapport overcoming the barrier of the centuries.

The Psalmist speaks for the pilgrim in search of the Ancient Wisdom when correctly referring to the Bible as "a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105, KJV).

The story of how the Bible came to be written is a very long, interesting and complex affair. Many people representing a variety of traditions and themes are involved in this fascinating story. The student of the Scriptures has important questions to be answered such as why certain books came to be accepted as the official text while others were not approved, and how the process developed. Other questions have to do with the texts themselves, the languages used, the cultural setting of the authors and the like as well as the reproduction and preservation of the Scriptures over the years. These are among some of the important areas of inquiry in this chapter which deals with the origin and development of the biblical canon.

### A. THE CANONICAL SCRIPTURES

#### 1. AN OFFICIAL LIST OF BOOKS

The word "canon" is a transliteration of a Greek word which translates a Semitic word meaning "reed". This refers, of course, to its usage by people as an early measuring instrument, and it is understandable how the term has become a technical one meaning "a rule, guide, standard or official sanction". During the third century A.D. the scholar Origen used the word *canon* to designate those religious books considered to be divinely inspired and, therefore, to be accepted as the official rule and guide of faith and conduct among Christians. The Church inherited from Judaism the Hebrew Scriptures with the particular Christian viewpoint of many of their interpretations. In fact, the Scriptures referred to in the New Testament are none other than the Jew-

ish Bible, the Old Testament (Mt. 21:42; Mk. 14:49; Jn. 5:39; Acts 17:2; Rom. 15:4). Determination concerning the collection known as the New Testament (or Covenant) had to be accomplished after the early beginnings of the Church.

Agreement may be reached upon a definition of the term *canon*, but there it stops when Christian bodies actually apply the term to books which are accepted as "canonical". Protestant Christianity agrees that there are only thirty-nine books to be accepted in the Old Testament whereas Catholic and Orthodox Christians allow a greater number for the Old Testament since certain deuterocanonical books (or Apocrypha) are included as scriptural.

Whereas Anglicans accept these extra books to be read "for example of life and instruction of manners" as their "Articles of Religion" declare in the *Book of Common Prayer*, But they are not to be accepted to establish any manner of doctrine. The Liberal Catholic Church, as a Catholic body, accepts the deuterocanonical books mentioned as scriptural but prefers to set them apart separately and entitled as "The Apocrypha" in the manner of St. Jerome. More will be said about this when the Apocrypha is discussed later in this chapter. Not all is lost, however, since Christians have been able to agree upon the same books as canonical in the New Testament. But the acceptance of these twenty-seven books in the present-day New Testament of Christianity was not reached without a process of trial, even disagreements, and questioning as will be seen later.

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## 2. THE ALEXANDRIAN CANON: THE SEPTUAGINT

In contrast with the Hebrew Bible, the Greek Bible (known as the Septuagint) is composed of a larger and more diverse canon. The Jewish scholars at Jamnia (c. A.D. 90) settled upon an official list of books to be included in the Hebrew Scriptures, but no similar action was taken to fix the limits of the Septuagint at the same number of thirty-nine books; therefore, it remained fluid and open.

The setting for the writing of the Septuagint was in Alexandria in Egypt, where the Hellenistic culture flourished. This city, founded in 332 B.C. by Alexander the Great was one of the centers where many Jews settled outside of Palestine, and where certain Jews began a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek Bible about 250 B.C. But under whose auspices this version was actually made and for what specific purposes remains largely unknown. It certainly made the Bible more available to those Greek-speaking Jews living in Egypt in a Gentile society. An apocryphal writing known as the *Letter of Aristeas*, and addressed to Philocrates during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.), indicates that this King of Egypt had seventy scholars make this translation for his library at Alexandria--and thus the reference to the Greek Bible as "the Septuagint". It is also known as the "LXX" because of this traditional number of scholars doing the translation. Whatever, there is evidence that Jews used Greek in their synagogues by 100 B.C. in Alexandria in Egypt where they constituted about two fifths of the city's population at that time.

The Greek Bible was the Bible of the early Church, and one of the earliest extant manuscripts of this Septuagint is Codex Vaticanus (c. A.D. 350) now in the Vatican Library in Rome. Although early Christians employed the Septuagint, there were some who recognized that there was a distinction between it and the Hebrew Scriptures with reference to the books contained. Origen (c. A.D. 254) was one of these early Christians to note the difference between the Hebrew and Greek text of the Old Testament. He produced a Bible known as the *Hexapla* because of the six parallel columns giving the Hebrew and Greek texts from several comparative sources.

### 3. CLOSING THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The transmission process of manuscript copying is always more or less a fluid undertaking, unless there are strict measures to ensure that every fresh copy will be an exact and faithful copy of the original. References in Deut. 17:18ff. and Jos. 1:9 are examples of early concerns to preserve this authenticity and purity. Nevertheless, there were occasions of accidental and even deliberate modifications in minor matters made by copyists and, more important, the possibility of some editorial changes. In the first century A.D./C.E. Jewish scholars were not only concerned about this question of textual purity but also the limitation of the official corpus itself. Meeting in Yavne-Yam (its Greek name being Jamnia) in a town 13 miles south of Jaffa on the Mediterranean coast, rabbis discussed these matters in about A.D. 90. Twenty years before, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, Jamnia began to emerge as a center of Jewish learning and the seat of the Sanhedrin. At this meeting the canon of the Hebrew Old Testament was discussed and for all practical purposes settled upon as numbering thirty-nine books (the same books as in a Protestant Old Testament).

It is helpful in understanding the significance of the Old Testament canon to realize that not all of the religious writings of Israel were accepted as scriptural. In fact, there is sufficient evidence of literature which was never included in the canonical collection. Jewish writings of the second Temple period resembling the Apocrypha in general character and not included in the Old Testament canon have been gathered together in a collection known as the Pseudepigrapha. The latter will be discussed briefly in a following chapter. There is even reference to books withheld from canonical status in the Old Testament itself such as Num. 21:14, Jos. 10:13, II Sam. 1:18 and I Kgs. 11:41. Also to be considered is the discovery of the Dead Sea Psalm Scroll (11QP) from Qumran in early 1956 which clearly demonstrates that the 150 figures in the Hebrew Scriptures is quite limited and even arbitrary.

Early Greek speaking Christians, when referring to the Old Testament, would naturally mean the Septuagint (LXX) rather than the Hebrew text. The fact that the Septuagint had such great prestige among Christians soon led the Jews to react against it. Jews, still needing a Greek version for those unable to read Hebrew very well, or even at all, set to work and made other translations into Greek. However, such translations followed the Hebrew text closely and did not include the extra books of the Alexandrian canon.

In 128 A.D. a translation was made from Hebrew into Greek by a proselyte to Judaism namedquila which replaced the LXX. But Christian usage and Jamnia had done their work well. The Septuagint has survived only through Christian copies.

### 4. THE NEW TESTAMENT CORPUS

Along with the authoritative Jewish Scriptures (II Tim. 3:15) the early Christians were in the process of the formation of their own particular body of sacred writings. This New Testament, or Covenant, was developed and served in part to interpret the Old Testament writings (Mk. 11:17, Jn. 19:37, Acts 8:32-35). Just as the books of the Jewish canon did not receive immediate recognition and acceptance, so was the process of the New Testament. However, the time-frame for the latter was much shorter than the formation of the Jewish Scriptures. The present order in the New Testament is misleading if it is thought that the books are listed in chronological order. The letters of Paul were probably the first books of the New Testament to be written.

Those books recognized as canonical in the New Testament were called *homologoumena*, "confessed or acknowledged", by Origen (A.D. 245) and those which were considered "questionable or disputed" were termed *antilegomena*.

As was true with Jewish writings, there were many Christian books which were ultimately not accepted as canonical by the Church. It would certainly be incorrect to assume that those books which finally received canonical status within the Christian community were the only valuable ones. Books now known as *The Apostolic Fathers* such as the *Didache or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Shepherd of Hermas* and *I Clement* were often included as canonical, especially by Christians in Egypt. More will be said about these non-canonical writings later in this Paper.

The temporary recognition of some of these books as canonical focused attention on the need to have a clearly defined list of officially accepted books for Christians. Also, outside forces such as the edict of Emperor Diocletian (A.D. 303), ordering the burning of all sacred books of Christians, necessitated the preservation of a carefully defined canon.

Not only were there differences about what are now considered to be non-canonical books, as mentioned above, but several of the presently accepted books in the New Testament canon were questioned by early Churchmen. For instance, the eminent church historian of the fourth-century A.D., Eusebius of Caesarea, listed as disputed, or questioned, James, Jude, II Peter, II and III John. The well-known church leader John Chrysostom, of the same century, did not accept the latter books nor the book of Revelation. It is apparent from these examples the extreme care and intense desire to have a correct and acceptable corpus of official books for the Christian Church.

One must also wonder at the suppression of certain writings by orthodox Churchmen and their opposition to others because the content dealt forthrightly with esoteric themes of the Ancient Wisdom. Gnostic writings, such as the second-century A.D. Nag-Hammadi texts (see Chapter IX of this Paper), indicate the use and appeal of such wisdom literature among various Egyptian Christians of the early Church. The Gnostic movement was a struggle within the primitive Church which also helped to compel the formal declaration of what was to be accepted as canonical books. With reference to Gnosticism, it is well to remember that there were various groups within the movement and one ought to look for central ideas and themes rather than rigid acceptance of certain positions.

Several criteria were involved in the selective process of official books for the New Testament. One was apostolicity, that is, the writer being an Apostle—the claim being made for having a close association with such a personage. Another criterion was that the subject matter should be consistent with basic Christian teachings and outlook as well as a high order of spirituality. A third criterion employing placing a stamp of approval upon such books was their universality—their general acceptance. Another factor, and even more difficult to decide, was the question of inspiration itself. The procedure leading to canonical recognition was one of usage, acceptance and reflection by Christian people and their leaders. The first list identical with the present day copies of the New Testament is found in a letter issued on Easter A.D. 367, by Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria. Gradually the contest concerning correct books produced an acceptable canon by about A.D. 400 in the West and by A.D. 500 in the East. The Third Council of Carthage (A.D. 397) rendered the first decision on the canon and declared that only "canonical" books could be read in the churches. These were listed exactly as our present-day twenty-seven New Testament books.

## B. SCRIPTURAL TEXTUAL STUDIES

The study of the Bible is both interesting and complex. The serious student must not only be familiar with the content of the Scriptures and levels of interpretation, but ultimately needs to come to grips with the biblical texts themselves from the standpoint of their development, language, cultural settings and the like. Hermeneutics, as noted in Chapter III of this work, is the name given to this study of the laws and principles of the interpretation of the Scriptures in a scientific manner. Traditionally, this approach to biblical inquiry has been divided into "lower" and "higher" criticism. The former is concerned primarily with language and manuscripts as a prelude to the latter which has to do more with the literary-historical approach. The distinction between these two methods of approach are understandable but arbitrary designations that are not too fortunate in their terminology. Much of this work, however, is highly specialized and needs to be understood as a team effort. One does not have to be an authority in the many areas of inquiry in order to be a serious student of the Bible. Nevertheless, if a person uses an English version, he begins by accepting the textual critics and linguists who have provided him with the translation from a Hebrew and/or Greek Bible. Furthermore, if the student uses a Bible dictionary or commentary, he is accepting the work of others in his own efforts of study.

### 1. BIBLICAL LANGUAGES (HEBREW, GREEK AND ARAMAIC)

Two predominant languages were employed in the original writings of the Christian Scriptures. Hebrew was the primary language of the Old Testament whereas Greek was employed in the Apocrypha and the New Testament with some minor usage of Aramaic in these works. Suffice it to say that the question of both a trustworthy text and competent translators who are specialists in these languages is of extreme importance to biblical scholarship and scriptural interpretation.

Hebrew is a language belonging to a group of languages sometimes called "Semitic". Aramaic, another of these ancient languages, had become the ordinary speech of the people by the time of Jesus Christ in Palestine. The rise of Hellenic influence under Alexander the Great led to the widespread usage of Greek throughout the Mediterranean area and this language became the vehicle for communication in both the Septuagint and the New Testament.

Old Testament Hebrew employs twenty-two consonants. There was no punctuation in the written text originally nor did it contain any vowels. The appropriate vowels were supplied by the reader. Later vowel points were invented and inserted during the seventh century A.D. by a group of Hebrew scholars known as the Massoretes. These learned Jews, whose name meant "Traditionalists", also helped to standardize the text including textual variants and marginal readings as well as employ their particular system of vowels and accents to punctuate the Hebrew Scriptures. The awareness that even the smallest alteration of the written letters could change a meaning is illustrated when Jesus speaks of minute details referring to the "jot" (as the King James Version says, meaning the *yodh* or smallest Hebrew character) or "tittle" (referring to a corner or stroke of a letter) in Mt. 5:18.

A debt of gratitude is owed these Massoretes for their important contribution which helped to preserve and pass on a more pure and authentic text than could have been preserved in anticipation of the printing press in later years.

The consonants of the Hebrew language are written always from the right to left, just reversed laterally from the English writing. Historical development of the language is discernable to the eyes of the Hebrew scholar. As examples, the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles and Esther reveal a later form of Hebrew and show a development of certain grammatical forms. That Hebrew continued to be written in the inter-testamental period is evident from such writings as Ecclesiasticus of the Apocrypha and the non-biblical material from Qumran known as the Dead Sea Scrolls.

It is significant that the Greek language which was used in writing the Christian New Testament did not employ the classical Greek usage. Instead, the Koine, or the vernacular of the common people, was chosen for this activity so that the Gospel, or the Good News, would have a maximum of exposure and understanding. This Koine, or non-literary Greek of the first century A.D., is like that found in inscriptions in Asia Minor and in the many thousands of examples of papyri in the form of business contracts, deeds, bills, decrees and correspondence. It was the basic means of communication throughout the Roman Empire and serves as an important bridge between various alien languages spoken throughout the compass of the Mediterranean. As a common language, Koine ignored or lacked such subtleties of expression and moods which delighted the minds of the Golden Age of classical Greek. This Greek alphabet of the Koine had twenty-four letters including vowels and is always written from left to right as in English—just the reverse of Hebrew mentioned above.

The Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) was also written in the Koine which, of course, includes the books of the Apocrypha. Of interest to some may be the fact that the liturgical *Kyrie* has been maintained in its nine-fold form in the Greek language in the Eucharistic rite of the Liberal Catholic Church.

It should be noted that there are Hebraisms and Aramaisms in the Greek New Testament. How natural for Jews who spoke and wrote the Koine to reveal here and there familiarity with Hebrew and Aramaic. The latter is actually a general term used to cover a group of Semitic dialects which are closely related to Hebrew. In the Old Testament Ez. 4:8-6, 18; 7:12-26, Dan. 2:4b-7; 28 and Jer. 10:11 were in Aramaic. Words in Aramaic are also found in the New Testament such as *talitha cumi* (Mk. 5:41), *maran-atha* (I Cor. 16:22), *Eloi, Eloi, . . .* (Mat. 27:46) and *ephphatha* (Mk. 7:34). "Ephphatha" is a word still retained in the Liberal Catholic Church's baptismal rite in the exorcism portion of this sacrament in the particular form appointed for infants. Although it is commonly accepted that the New Testament was written in Greek, Dr. Robert L. Lindsey makes a compelling argument in his *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark* for the position that the roots of the Greek Gospels of the New Testament are more complicated than admitted and postulates an early creation of a "Life of Jesus in Hebrew He reflects upon the fact that Mark's Greek was more like Hebrew than Koine.

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## 2. ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS

Back of the literary (written) forms of the Old Testament lay a long period of oral tradition and, of course, a very abbreviated period with reference to the New Testament account. Writing materials were scarce and it was expensive and time-consuming to copy the scriptural texts by hand.

Egyptians and Babylonians kept records of important events on stone monuments and clay tablets. The common writing material of the ancient world, however, was papyrus, which first came

into use in Egypt. By the sixth-century B.C. this ancestor to paper was in common use in Palestine. To give an example, Jack Finegan points out in his *Light from the Ancient Past* that a book such as the Gospel of Luke would have filled an ordinary papyrus roll about thirty-one or thirty-two feet long whereas the book of Acts would have required a second such roll. A roll of this nature is mentioned in Rev. 5:1 and 22:18ff. The common reed pen used in writing is referred to in III Jn. 13 while the ink employed is mentioned in II Cor. 3:3. In Greek the papyrus rolls were called *Biblia* in the plural, such as in II Tim. 4:13, meaning "the scrolls" or "the Books"--hence our term Bible.

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a. PAPYRUS AND PARCHMENT

The papyrus scroll was somewhat inconvenient to use and had to be rolled and unrolled as needed. Consequently, the codex was welcomed as a more practical form. The codex placed leaves of the manuscript fastened together as in a modern book. However, the early codices were written without chapter or verse division and punctuation. The earliest fragment of a manuscript of a New Testament book that is known today is the Papyrus Ryland Gk. 457, a tiny portion of the Gospel of John discovered in 1935 in the John Ryland Library in Manchester, although it had been acquired in Egypt twenty years earlier.

A problem with papyrus was its fragility in climates less favorable than Egypt. Parchment, or vellum, was also employed as a writing material and was, of course, more durable. The reference in Jer. 36:4 probably is speaking about such a roll of leather. Vellum designated the finer grade of parchment, made from young animal skins. The Jews required that their Scriptures be written on skins whereas Christians wrote their sacred text on both papyrus and skins. An internal example of this in the New Testament is in II Tim. 4:13 which refers to "the books" or papyrus, no doubt, and "especially the parchments". The Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumran have been preserved through the centuries written on animal skins as these.

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b. AUTOGRAPH AND MANUSCRIPT

The term "autograph" applies to the original copy of a particular book of the Bible, and none is now known to exist. The word "manuscript" is used, in turn, to refer to a copy of the original biblical text and in the same language as the autograph. Copying the writings of the New Testament probably began at a very early date. Ephesians may have been sent to the various churches simultaneously as a result of multiple copies of the letter. The closest to an original biblical book in the Old Testament today would be fragments of Daniel which were part of the Dead Sea Scrolls of the Essenes (4QDan). Four fragments of Daniel were found in Cave 4 at Qumran according to Yigael Yadin in the *Message of the Scrolls*. In his *Ancient Library of Qumran* Frank Cross points out that one copy of Daniel is inscribed in the script of the later second-century B.C. If a Maccabean date is allowable for the original composition of Daniel (c. 165 B.C.), this Qumran manuscript could be within fifty years of the original. Cross also points out another possible contender in the New Testament, that being the Ryland Fragment of John's Gospel (second-century A.D.). However, Charles F. Pfeiffer is one who would caution against this dating of the book of Daniel just mentioned in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible* and opts for an earlier, possibly sixth-century B.C. dating.

According to Frank Stagg in *How to Understand the Bible*, there are at present seventy-six Greek manuscripts on papyrus pertaining to the New Testament and 341 Greek New Testament manuscripts on vellum in uncials or capital letters and over 2,500 in minuscule or small, flowing letters. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 added immensely, of course, to textual recovery for the Old Testament and provides the oldest copy of the Hebrew Scriptures to date, one



thousand years older than previously possessed, that being the Massoretic text. The oldest complete New Testament known today is designated as Codex Sinaiticus because it was found at Mt. Sinai at St. Catherine's Monastery a century ago by the young German scholar Tischendorf and subsequently presented to the Czar of Russia. It is a fourth-century Greek manuscript written in uncial letters, codex form, and on vellum. The story of this scholar's search for biblical manuscripts and his fortuitous find at Mt. Sinai is an exciting account to read. In 1933 Codex Sinaiticus was purchased by the British Museum where it is today.

It would be impossible in such a short compass to make reference to all of the great manuscripts of importance in Greek and early versions. However, the biblical student is wise to be aware of these manuscripts in libraries and museums in various parts of the world and the use of photographic facsimile of many of them as well as microfilm. Besides Codex Sinaiticus, already mentioned, notice should be taken of Codex Alexandrinus (fifth-century) probably produced in Egypt and the first main acquisition of the British Museum. Also of importance is Codex Vaticanus (fourth-century) located in the Vatican Library in Rome and said to be the most reliable text. Codex Ephraemi (fifth-century) is preserved in the archives of the National Library in Paris. A final word ought to be said about the Christian monasteries of the East and West which helped to preserve the Christian Scriptures by having them carefully copied by hand for well over a thousand years before the invention of the printing press and maintaining libraries for their maintenance and study. There is a definite debt of gratitude owed to these religious orders and their centers of learning during the Middle Ages.

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### 3. VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE

A manuscript has been taken as a term to mean a copy of the original, or the autograph, and in the same language such as Hebrew or Greek as the case may be. A version, on the other hand, signifies the translation from the original language of a manuscript into another language such as Latin or English. St. Jerome (A.D. 342-420) is noted for his scholarly translation of the Bible in Latin, the Vulgate Version (or common). He was commissioned by Pope Damasus to revise the Old Latin Version of the Bible by comparing it with the Greek Old and New Testaments. He came to realize that this was not sufficient and that an adequate translation of the Old Testament must be based upon the original Hebrew which he studied and employed in his work as he resided at Bethlehem in Palestine. As Jerome prepared the Latin Vulgate in the fourth-century, he used only the Hebrew canon and recognized the additional books in the Septuagint as "deuterocanonical" or secondary. However, the Council of Trent (1545-63) later ruled that the larger Alexandrian Canon was canonical in the Roman Catholic Church. It is interesting that Jerome's translation met with opposition even by the renowned theologian St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) who at first had his doubts about it.

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#### a. TYNDALE'S HAND-COPIED ENGLISH BIBLE

There were other early translations of the Bible into the vernacular such as those into Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian and Arabic. The first complete Bible in the English language was the result of the efforts of John Wycliffe in England about 1384. This version was not translated from the original languages but from the Vulgate Latin Version and included the Apocrypha. There was opposition to such vernacular translations by officials of the Church and it was so intense that the Council of Constance condemned the writings of Wycliffe to be burned in 1415 and ordered that his bones should be disinterred from consecrated ground and burned to ashes! Tyndale's Bible, of course, was hand-copied since this preceded the invention of the printing press. With the advent

of this new technology it would not be as easy to gather up vernacular versions mass-produced and circulated. This same Church, in time, would be using the facilities of the press to publish Bibles in various tongues for study and missionary outreach worldwide.

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b. THE GUTENBERG BIBLE

A German printer by the name of Henne Gensfleisch, who assumed the other name of Johann Gutenberg, is widely credited with the invention of printing by moveable type, although Lourens Janszoon Coster of Haarlem, Holland, appears to have printed a Latin grammar about a decade earlier. Whatever, the "Gutenberg Bible" was printed in double columns, forty-two lines to a column, in a two folio volume as a Latin edition at Mainz, Germany in the late summer of 1456. One of the about forty copies which still exist is owned by the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. This new technology opened the door, of course, for the printing of other versions of the Bible—and in the vernacular. Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into German was produced in 1534. A modern German translation of the Bible from the Hebrew was completed in 1961 by the Jewish scholar Martin Buber after he had begun it thirty-six years earlier with his friend Franz Rosenzweig who died soon after their project commenced.

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c. ENGLISH VERSIONS IN PRINT

The first printed New Testament in English was completed by an English Priest, William Tyndale, in 1525 or 1526. Tyndale was ultimately arrested and condemned to death on October 6 1536, when he was strangled and then burned. His often quoted last words were "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." In time, however, the Bishop's Bible was finally produced in England with ecclesiastical backing at the direction of the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury. Completed in 1568, it did not have royal confirmation. The so-called Rheims and Douai Bible was issued for English-speaking Roman Catholics. The English college in Rheims, France issued the New Testament in 1582 and the English college in Douai, France, published the Old Testament in 1609-10. Both sections of the Bible were with appropriate commentary for the reader.

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d. THE KING JAMES VERSION AND OTHERS

The most well-known English version of the Bible, of course, is the King James Version published in 1611 with joint approval of the Church and State—in fact, named after the ruling monarch in England. This version, as the title page announces, was translated from the original tongues and included the Apocrypha as a separate unit between the Old and New Testaments. The translators were Anglican scholars from Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster Universities with no nonconformists on the committee. This "authorized version" has served many generations of English-speaking Christians and its matchless English has endured and has endeared itself to countless thousands. Those desiring newer and better translations at once found opposition as a result of the place and heritage of this time honored and revered version of the Bible. One contender was the American Standard Version of 1901 which had the advantage of more manuscripts for comparison and better texts to use than those scholars in the seventeenth-century. The recovery of early texts of the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testament, have enhanced the work of biblical translators. A major translation of the Holy Scriptures in this century which met with enthusiasm and greater acceptance was the Revised Standard Version which was published in the United States. The New Testament was issued in 1946 just after World War II and the Old Testament six years later in 1952 and the Apocrypha in 1957. (There is also now a Roman Catholic edition of the Revised Standard Version.) The object of this translation was to provide an English version which

embodied the best results of modern scholarship and to faithfully express the meaning of the Bible in English diction designed for use in public and private while preserving those qualities which gave such a prominent place to the King James Version in literature and liturgy. The International Council of Religious Education composed of major Protestant denominations carried out this project. In 1950 it became the Division of Christian Education within the National Council of the Churches of Christ.

Other English versions of the Bible have continued to appear on shelves of bookstores since the advent of the Revised Standard Version. Among these has been the New English Bible which is a fresh translation of the Bible into modern English and enriched by the most recent biblical scholarship. The New Testament of this version was published first in 1961 and followed by the Old Testament and Apocrypha in 1970. It is the work of a Joint Committee representing the major Protestant churches and the Bible Societies in the British Isles which was joined in the later stages by observers representing the Roman Catholic Church. The Jerusalem Bible (1966-1968) was translated by Roman Catholic scholars from ancient texts in the light of the up-to-date biblical knowledge and follows the interpretations of the L'Ecole Biblique in its *Bible de Jerusalem*. The first official Catholic Bible to depart from the Latin Vulgate text is the version called The New American Bible (1969-1970) and sponsored by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. It was prepared by members of the Catholic Biblical Association of America from the oldest available texts of the Scriptures.

Other well-known English translations include the Holy Bible which was translated from the Latin Vulgate into modern English by Msgr. Ronald Know in the late 1940s. The New Testament in Modern English is a popular paraphrase in contemporary language done by an Anglican clergyman, the Rev. J.B. Phillips, and first printed in 1958 as a complete work. The Living Bible (paraphrased) was issued in 1971. The work of this version was done by Kenneth N. Taylor in consultation with others and initially was based on the American Standard Version (1901). It has a definite evangelical emphasis. The American Bible Society, aiming at communicating the Bible's message in very simple terms, sponsored Today's English Version (Good News for Modern Man). The New Testament was first issued in 1966 followed by the Psalms in 1970.

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e. VERSIONS FOR THE LIBERAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

The standard English version of the Bible for the Liberal Catholic Church has been the King James Version. This version commended itself to this church which had its beginning as a result of the reorganization of the Old Catholic Church in England in 1916. Contributing to this decision with some accuracy, no doubt, was the earlier Anglican background of the first two Presiding Bishops, J. I. Wedgwood and C. W. Leadbeater. Besides this, however, and more important, were other considerations such as the beauty and place of this version in the English-speaking world compared with the alternate Rheims-Douai Roman Catholic English version, produced practically at the same time as the King James Version. Also, the ordering of the latter was in keeping with the preference of the Liberal Catholic Church in separating the deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament apart as the Apocrypha.

Today, contemporary versions of the Bible may be used instead of the King James Version as authorized by the Regional Bishop of a province within the Liberal Catholic Church. This action was ratified by the Sixth General Episcopal Synod in 1971. The Revised Standard Version and The New English Bible (both with the Apocrypha) commend themselves for Liberal Catholic usage. The New American Bible and the Jerusalem Bible are also good possibilities as long as one is aware that the deuterocanonical books are included in the Old Testament and not set apart as a separate unit.

The Jerusalem Bible is especially helpful for study purposes with its commentaries, footnotes and maps.

## C. JUDAISM'S BIBLE: THE OLD TESTAMENT

### 1. THE LAW

As a background to the written forms of what is today the Old Testament lay long periods or oral tradition. The time period during which the history of the Hebrew Scriptures v/as taking place covered a time span of two thousand years before Christ. Many of the books of this Old Testament canon represent weaving together various strands of writing by editors such as the Song of Deborah in Judges, Chapter 5. The first five books of the, Old Testament are called the Torah (Hebrew for Law) or Pentateuch (Greek for Five Scrolls or Books). Scholars have shown various sources which have been put together to form the Torah and they have been identified with special designations, those being the letters "J, E, P and D". This is the traditional documentary hypothesis of the Pentateuch. According to this theory the "J" material is so designated because it prefers the name *Yahweh* (i.e. Jehovah) for God whereas the "E" material uses the name *Elohim*, which is another Hebrew name for God. "D" identifies the material which is mostly the book or Deuteronomy and the "P" designator is that material reworked from the standpoint of the Priests of Israel. Each of these contributors comes from a different location and time. It is a highly complicated method of study. The "J" material is generally accepted as a product of the southern kingdom and the "E" writings from the northern jurisdiction. This "J-E" document was then later enlarged, as the theory indicates, by the addition of the discovery of Deuteronomy and followed later by further editorial revisions by a school of priestly scholars. According to Geddes MacGreggor in *The Bible in the Making*, the chronology of these events would have the "J" and "E<sup>M</sup>" contributory material being written about 850 and 750 B.C. respectively while the "D" input was around 550 B.C.

The Pentateuch reached its final form under the "P" redaction around 400 B.C. Present-day Samaritans continue to recognize only the Pentateuch as their Bible whereas Judaism eventually recognized a much larger canon than the Torah including a three-fold division, that being the Law, the Prophets and the Writings.

### 2. THE PROPHETS

When Jesus expressed the summary of the commandments in terms of the principle of love and said that upon this depended "the Law and the Prophets" (Mt. 22:40), he indicated that in his time the "Prophets" already constituted a definite body of sacred literature which had acquired prominence second only to that of the Law. This group of writings is two-fold in itself, that is, the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve "Minor Prophets" or Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi). Frank Stagg indicates in *How to Understand the Bible* that this division of the Prophets was probably collected and recognized as authoritative between 250 and 175 B.C.

### 3. THE WRITINGS

The Law and the Prophets account for twenty-six of the thirty-nine books of the Hebrew canon. The other thirteen books are known as the Writings.

These include the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, Esther, Ruth, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. In the prologue to the book of Ecclesiasticus (c. 132 B.C.) in the Apocrypha the threefold division in the Hebrew Scriptures is mentioned as being the Law, the Prophets and other books. A reference to this arrangement is also to be found in the New Testament in Lk.24:44 which mentions it as the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms (the Writings being headed by the Psalms). It is interesting that the book of Esther, assigned to the Writings, is missing from the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, a further example of the process of selection for canonical purposes. In his *Introducing the Old Testament* Clyde T. Francisco speaks for a date not before 100 B.C. when books accepted for inclusion in the Writings were closed. The fact that Jesus and the Apostles possessed the Old Testament substantially as today would be supportive of this chronology.

Attention has already been drawn to the fact that the Hebrew Scriptures in their final form consist of thirty-nine books whereas the Greek translation or Septuagint was more inclusive of others which even today contributes to the difference of the numbering of books in the Bible by Catholics and Protestants. These deuterocanonical books of the Apocrypha are to be discussed next.

## D. BOOKS OF THE APOCRYPHA (DEUTERO-CANONICAL)

### 1. ALEXANDRIAN CANON (THE SEPTUAGINT)

A definition of the Apocrypha depends upon an understanding of the Greek version of the Bible or Septuagint mentioned earlier in this chapter. As indicated, the Alexandrian canon was more fluid than the Hebrew counterpart and included books beyond those considered official in the Bible of Palestinian Jews. The list of the approved books for the latter, it will be remembered, was settled basically by the Jewish Council of Jamnia (c. A.D. 90) whereas the LXX remained open. The rise of the Primitive Church led to a reaction against the extra inclusions in the Old Testament and helped to cause a return to the more conservative numbering in the Hebrew Text. Conversely, early Christians in a Greek-language environment accepted the Old Testament gratefully in the Greek version. Christian usage of the Septuagint is reflected in such ancient manuscripts previously noted such as Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, both written in the fourth-century A.D.

### 2. WITNESS OF ORIGEN, JEROME AND TRENT

It will be remembered that Origen (c. A.D. 254) realized the difference in the Hebrew text and the Greek variant and allowed for this in his six parallel column *Hexapla* which included Hebrew and Greek texts for his mainly Christian readers. When St. Jerome produced his Vulgate Version of the Bible in Latin he expressed his preference for a limited Hebrew canon over the Septuagint and all of the extra books were gathered by him into a separate unit, called, not too appropriately, "Apocrypha" (books hidden away). During the Middle Ages, however, the Church looked

upon these deuterocanonical books as canonical and the Council of Trent decreed that the Canon of the Old Testament included them (except the Prayer of Manasseh and I and II Esdras in 1546). The latter were placed as a supplement in the official Vulgate Version. When the books of the Apocrypha are referred to as deuterocanonical this term does not imply in Catholic understanding that they should be considered less authoritative or non-canonical. The Eastern Orthodox Church acknowledges ten of the books of the Septuagint which are beyond the normal Hebrew canon as "genuine parts of Scripture" as the Council of Jerusalem (1672) declared, but many Orthodox scholars today are more likely to follow the opinion of St. Athanasius and Jerome in considering the deuterocanonical books as part of the Bible but standing on a lower footing than the rest of the Old Testament, as Timothy Ware indicates in his *The Orthodox Church*.

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### 3. LUTHER AND PROTESTANT USAGE

When Luther translated the Bible into German in 1534 he separated the deuterocanonical books and placed them in a separate section by themselves known as the Apocrypha and located at the end of the Old Testament. He rejected the Roman Catholic teaching of his day that these books were canonical Scripture. The Reformed Churches then included in the Apocrypha the three books which the Roman Catholic Vulgate Version placed in the appendix as noted above. Altogether these books of the Apocrypha are listed as I and II Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Addition to Esther, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Sirach), Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasseh and I and II Maccabees. Something should be said about I and II Esdras because a student can become easily confused if he is not aware of the problem in numbering these two books. The books which the Septuagint and consequently the Vulgate Version called I and II Esdras became Ezra and Nehemiah for the Protestant Churches and this accounts for the renaming of the old II and IV Esdras as "I and II Esdras". Msgr. Ronald Knox's translation of the Vulgate Version of the Holy Bible uses the designation of I and II Esdras for Ezra and Nehemiah in the Old Testament whereas the more contemporary The Jerusalem Bible and The New American Bible, which have been mentioned earlier in this chapter, have dropped the older designation of I and II Esdras, thereby helping to relieve some of the earlier confusion.

Although Protestants never accorded any of the books of the Apocrypha with canonical status, these books were retained and placed separately between the Old and New Testaments in the King James Version. Furthermore, the Church of England recommends them to be read for devotion and instruction but not to establish any doctrine. Until the end of the eighteenth century Protestant Bibles continued to carry the Apocrypha, but in 1827 the British and Foreign Bible Society as well as the American Bible Society decided not to continue their inclusion in editions anymore. The disregard for the Apocrypha seems to be taking somewhat of a change toward a greater understanding of these writings as valuable if but nothing more than their importance as a bridge between the testaments. An indication of this renewed interest is in being able to purchase copies of the Revised Standard Version and The New English Bible with the Apocrypha included if desired. The latter properly places it at the close of the Old Testament, but the former version just mentioned unfortunately placed the Apocrypha as a third unit following the New Testament. This Revised Standard Version is also available in a Roman Catholic edition.

#### 4. LIBERAL CATHOLIC VIEWPOINT

*The Liturgy* of the Liberal Catholic Church appoints certain books from the Apocrypha to be read upon occasion at the Eucharist as the Epistle for the day. Unlike Protestant rejection of these books, or the mediating position taken by Anglicans, Liberal Catholics accept these deuterocanonical writings as scriptural just as the Old and New Testament, as does the Roman Catholic Church. However, the three books separated from the deuterocanonical writings as non-canonical (I and II Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh) have been reunited with the rest of the books of that corpus in accepting the Apocrypha as a unity. Moreover, the preference of the Liberal Catholic Church is to follow the earlier example of St. Jerome in placing these books separately after the Old Testament and identifying them as The Apocrypha, to use his terminology--but as canonical. The Rt. Rev. J. I. Wedgwood, the first Presiding Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church, for example, speaks of the designation of the Apocrypha in *New Insights into Christian Worship* and reference is made to this distinct three-fold division in the terminology of Resolution 6 of the Sixth General Eposcopaly Synod (1971) and confirmed by the Seventh in 1976.

In accepting the books of the Apocrypha as canonical, and not as secondary material, the Liberal Catholic Church applies the same criteria in value clarification as with the Old and New Testaments. That is, according to the *Statement of Principles and Summary of Doctrine*, the Liberal Catholic Church teaches that "the scriptures are not verbally or uniformly inspired, but only in a general sense." The recognition of the fact that biblical books "contain much that is divinely inspired" and also that "with things literally true are mingled others which may be" helps to account for the fact that some books in the Bible are of more value than others, the Apocrypha included. The acceptance of a book as part of canonical Scriptures does not imply that each book (or parts thereof) is automatically to be placed together and on the same level. This fallacy is difficult to overcome just as the case of a single approach to interpretation instead of obvious multiple levels required at times.

## E. NEW TESTAMENT OF CHRISTIANITY

Twenty-seven separate compositions form what is known as the New Testament. By tradition these have been called "books" although by modern standards they are hardly longer than articles or chapters in a column. The arrangement of the writings in the New Testament, beginning with Matthew and ending with the book of Revelation, is not in order of chronological writing but in a general grouping of categories of material. That is, the first division includes the Four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John which give a narrative account of the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. This is followed by the single Book of the Acts of the Apostles which records the doings of the first generation of Christians and deals with the origins of the Primitive Church. A third section is composed of letters (or epistles in older terminology) addressed to particular groups or persons within the Christian community, the majority of them being written by Paul. Finally there is the Revelation of John (or Apocalypse) which is a circular message addressed to seven groups or churches in Asia Minor at a time of persecution for Christians using highly symbolic figures of speech. These books were composed within a century or less after the time of Jesus Christ. The language in which they were written was, as discussed earlier, the Koine or vernacular Greek of the Roman Empire in the first century A.D. This formative period in which various books were tried and tested was ultimately settled in the West, for all practical purposes^ by the end of the fourth century. The twenty-seven books accepted as official then are today's New Testament both for Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christians.

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### 1. THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND JOHN

Questions concerning the Four Gospels of the New Testament have been the concern of scholars through the years. Even by about A.D. 150 the Marcionites not only rejected the whole Old Testament, but wished to reduce the New Testament down to a version of Luke and of selected writings of Paul.

Of all the writers Luke comes the closest in telling how he prepared for his task in which he wrote his two-volume work, Luke-Acts. Comparing Luke with the other three Gospels discloses some striking similarities and differences. The Fourth Gospel, John, is a writing which is more unique by itself. It is much more of a theological treatise and shows a maturity of Christian consciousness. There are several discourses unique to John, and his presentation of the Last Supper seems to be other than a Passover meal in contrast to the other Evangelists. Like the Essenes, John speaks of light and darkness in conflict. This Gospel was written after the other three and probably about A.D. 90 or a short time thereafter. Because Matthew, Mark and Luke have more in common and are more alike than the Fourth Gospel, these three documents have traditionally been grouped as the "Synoptic Gospels".

Thomas Nelson's *Gospel Parallels* (1949) in the Revised Standard Version is helpful in studying the text of these separate writings in parallel columns. Much earlier A.T. Robinson had come out with *A Harmony of the Gospels* (1922) using the same format but including all four of the Gospels and in the King James Version.

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### 2. THE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPELS

It is without doubt that oral tradition lay behind all of the Gospels in the New Testament. But when were these Gospels actually written down, and what were the original sources which they drew upon, and to what degree are they related to one another? The well-known



"two-document hypothesis" tries to settle this matter by holding that Mark was the original Gospel written and that Matthew and Luke followed Mark and another source common to them identified as the mysterious "Q" (*Quelle*, meaning "source" in German), but not to Mark. There is also the possibility that this block of material known only to Matthew and Luke may come from more than one source, written and oral. There is also a "four-document hypothesis" which affirms, like the "two-document" theory above, that Mark is the original Gospel from which Matthew and Luke derived and a source known only to them designated as "Q".

In addition, however, this theory posits material found only in Luke as "L" and that found only in Matthew as "M". There is also a much simpler "one- document hypothesis" which attempts to solve the synoptic problem by accounting for the similarities and differences by acknowledging an original Gospel in Hebrew or Aramaic from which the present-day Gospels were translated into Greek. A thorough discussion of these theories will be found in Dwight M. *Beck's Through the Gospels to Jesus*.

Present day writings generally accord Mark the distinction of being the first Gospel written whereas through the nineteenth century Matthew was usually accepted as the original Gospel. Biblical scholars A. T. Robinson and B. H. Streeter helped to establish the Markan priority in the 1920s. However, early Christians seem to have understood Mark as being an abridgment of Matthew. Papias (c.A.D. 140) referred to Mark as "the interpreter of Peter" and St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) claimed that the order of the four Gospels was with Matthew first like today's present arrangement in the New Testament.

Mention has been made earlier of a biblical scholar, Dr. Robert Lindsey, pertaining to his belief that the first Gospel story was written in Hebrew and then translated very literally into Greek. Dr. Lindsey advances the theory that the first Gospel to be written was Luke who was in turn used by Mark and then by Matthew--a reversal of both the Markan and Matthewan theories.

A discussion of this theory is to be found in Dr. Lindsey's *A Hebrew Translation of the Gospel of Mark* and a shorter volume, *The Gospels*.

The serious student of the Bible needs to be aware of these various theories discussed and advanced pertaining to the Scriptures in order to better understand, appreciate and interpret the writings for himself. The complexity of the issues at times should not become discouraging. Rather, it should allow the student to accept the fact that the writing, selection and development of the Gospels was not a neat and clear-cut affair as some would like it to have been. Those who hold to a basically literal interpretation of the Scriptures, or tend to rely upon dogmatic positions based on biblical texts, cannot help but be reminded of the fluid foundations beneath. Perhaps the inner truths being conveyed in the Sacred Scriptures are ultimately of more value than the interesting search for historical accuracies or harmonization of materials. The unity desired may be there, of course, but at a deeper level of understanding. This is certainly not to deprecate the importance of critical and scholarly research, but it is to see this factor in proper perspective and make reasonably certain that the student of the Bible is on the path towards the proper goals.

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### 3. THE HISTORICAL JESUS

The Gospels deal primarily with the historical Jesus in Palestine and place him there during the first-century A.D. These testimonies record many of the things that he did and said, but certainly not all. As noted already, the Evangelists themselves will often vary in their emphasis, reporting or selection of material. The historical record is obviously not complete.

Mark, for instance<sup>^</sup> does not speak about the infancy narrative of Jesus- whether he knew about it or whether he did not consider it important to his purpose at that time. Only Matthew and Luke

relate the accounts surrounding the Nativity of Jesus in Bethlehem of Judea, the former recording the Adoration of the Magi and the latter describing the coming of the Shepherds from their Galilean fields—and prior to the Wise Men.

Nothing is known about the life of Jesus and his boyhood from the canonical Gospels until the story about his visit along with his parents to the Temple in Jerusalem at his age of puberty. This is immediately followed by a gap—chronologically—until his baptism by John the Baptist at the river Jordan and the subsequent beginning of his ministry before his death and resurrection in Jerusalem about three years later. However, there are non-canonical sources which offer to fill in these gaps in response to pious curiosity about such chronological spaces in the official texts. Two noncanonical gospels dating to the second half of the second-century A.D. particularly deal with the early years of Jesus from infancy through his childhood. *The Protevangelium of James* adds miraculous details to afford an expansion of the canonical Gospels of Matthew and Luke—even projecting backwards into the life of Mary and her family before the encounter with Joseph and the Archangel. *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* portray the child Jesus as a miraculous wonder-worker with whom people are well-advised not to trifle with. Moreover, Edgar Cayce, the American seer of contemporary times, indicates in *On Jesus and His Church* (in one of his readings) that after Jesus' sixteenth birthday he began his education abroad and was sent for a short period to Egypt and then spent three years in India and afterwards visited in Persia. This would no doubt enhance what Mary had said about her son that he continued to increase in *wisdom* and in stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52).

It is plain from the Gospel accounts that Jesus the Master was "remembered". Many of the accounts about him have been handed down and repeated from one to another. In Luke, Chapter 11, for example, when the Evangelist reports the origin of the Our Father it says in the King James Version, "And it came to pass", or even better in *The New American Bible*, "One day. . . .". He was praying in a "certain place" but the time and the place are, of course, no longer remembered—or in the eyes of the writer unimportant. In spite of this bit of internal evidence, tourist guides will be delighted to take the pilgrim to the church of the Pater Noster in Jerusalem on the traditional site where Jesus taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer. In another instance in Luke, Chapter 10, there is the narrative of the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan. The story is introduced with the words "On one occasion. . . . as the New English Bible translates, and again using unspecific and general terms. This is not denying that Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth and the Lake Galilee are never mentioned or that there are not specific places recognized. What this is indicating is that much of the material forming entries to the Gospel records consists of individual and independent stories, sayings and events pertaining to Jesus which have been carefully and reverently woven together by writers to present the story of the founder of Christianity. This is not only a record but propaganda material for evangelical proclamation (*Kerygma* in Greek) and a basic resource for teaching (*didache* in Greek). Thereby the Church produced a document appropriate for authenticating her very existence, mission and hope.

Albert Schweitzer's *Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1906) speaks of the very search which the title of his book describes "as an activity distinct from faith in Jesus. . ." which "is a phenomenon of modern times."

The Gospels, although giving details about certain things in the life of the historical Jesus, are not complete and they are certainly not intended to be a biography of him in the modern sense of the word. The rise of historical criticism in the study of the Gospels has been enhanced through the discovery of more reliable texts and an appreciation of the times and places through the findings of biblical archaeology. But Jesus himself is not to be limited to the Christ of history because of the two other basic aspects that cannot be overlooked or forgotten as Geoffrey Hodson agrees in *The*

*Hidden Wisdom of the Holy Bible*. Besides the historical Christ, he is also the Cosmic Christ (Logos) as well as the Mystical Christ unfolding himself within the lives of those who follow him as The Way. The light of Bethlehem's star must illumine this three-fold dimension of the Christ for the fullness of his radiancy to be understood and appreciated.

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#### 4. ALTERNATE CHRISTOLOGICAL CHRONOLOGY

Before turning from this discussion about the Gospels and the Jesus of history there is a serious question concerning dating that ought to be addressed. The traditional and orthodox chronology of the life of Jesus Christ has been set in the early part of the first-century A.D. beginning with Herod the Great and concluding at the time of the Roman procurator, Pontus Pilate. There are those, however, who suggest an earlier date for the Master Jesus than the traditional one. G.R.S. Mead addressed this question in 1903 in a book with the title expressing his specific inquiry: *Did Jesus Live 760 B.C.?* Mead brought forth a certain amount of evidence but did not receive too much attention among historians since he discussed various traditions in the Jewish Talmud and dealt only briefly with evidence in the New Testament itself.

In *Esoteric Christianity* (1901) Dr. Annie Besant gives the date for the Nativity of Jesus at 105B.C. in Palestine. Furthermore, the young Jesus is said to have been trained in an Essene community in southern Judea. Liberal Catholic Bishop Charles W. Leadbeater was in accord with this alternate chronology concerning the infancy of Jesus in *The Inner Side of Christian Festivals* (1922). In other words, this different understanding of dating places Jesus historically about one hundred years earlier than the traditionally accepted time. This time sequence is also supported by the Rev. G. Nevin Drinkwater, a Priest of the Liberal Catholic Church, who has written on this subject both prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran in 1947 and afterwards in 1957. Articles by him concerning this problem of chronology appear in the international quarterly magazine, *The Liberal Catholic*, in issues during the years of 1932 and 1957. Father Drinkwater is convinced that the life of Christ as portrayed in the Gospels has a very close resemblance to the Saviour-Gods of the Mystery Religions of the Graeco-Roman culture. Furthermore, he suggests that during the early and obscure formative period of Christianity the Gospel allegories may have become materialized "histories", that is, the reader is advised to search for the deeper meanings expressing certain truths rather than belabor or stumble on the literalness of certain recorded historical events.

Furthermore, Drinkwater is in accord with Edgar Cayce's position in his readings that Jesus was an Essene, but at this earlier dating than orthodoxy allows. The supposition of Essenic origin by these men, as well as by Besant and Leadbeater, was heavily underlined by the discovery of the Qumran manuscripts in the caves overlooking the Dead Sea. For Drinkwater, the unnamed Palestinian Teacher of Righteousness of the Essenes can be none other than this same Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. Professor Dupont-Sommer of the Sorbonne holds that this Teacher of Righteousness bears an astonishing likeness to Jesus, but in his *Essene Writings from Qumran* will not allow for the identification of the two nor will another Essenic scholar, Frank M. Cross, Jr. in *The Ancient Library of Qumran*. Cross recognizes many similarities between the two covenantal founders, but rejects anything more than the fact that the Essenes anticipated the early Christian community in many ways.

The Rev. Geoffrey Hodson, another priest of the Liberal Catholic Church, also favors the earlier date for the birth of the founder of Christianity and in his *Clairvoyant Investigations of Christian Origins and Ceremonial* (1977) he expresses the viewpoint that the Master Jesus undertook his ministry in Palestine about 100 B.C. He also indicates that the Gospels are not accurate

always concerning the sequence of events represented and suggests that much is mystical and the life-story personifications of the Initiate life.

In an earlier work published two years before, *The Christ Life from Nativity to Ascension*, Hodson deals with the sequence of the events in the life of Jesus in the light of the foregoing orientation. This Jesus, who is "The Way", passes through the experiences and initiations in his own life as he travels along the Path which is open to every human being who would imitate the Christ and follow him to victory (Jn. 14:6; Mk. 8:34). The new chronology, of course, requires adjustments in the dating sequence of some of the other books of the New Testament besides the Gospels, and Hodson takes this into consideration in his writings just mentioned.

There are others convinced of this alternate and earlier chronology in dating the life of Jesus besides those referred to. However, the fact that the three mentioned happen to have been Liberal Catholic Clergymen does not mean that this is an official teaching of this Church. There are those within the Liberal Catholic Church who do not accept this earlier time sequence for Jesus—and argue for the traditional framework. It does indicate, however, that this Church is not afraid to examine positions which may be viewed as highly unorthodox by some in the search for a higher truth. Moreover, it illustrates the fact that freedom of thought is a reality within the Liberal Catholic Church and that those with honest differences, even about important questions concerning Jesus, can share a common brotherhood with courtesy of expression and tolerance as the *Statement of Principles and Summary of Doctrine* puts forward. It also affirms that this Church is very much concerned about the esoteric meanings within the Holy Scriptures and considers them as bearers of the Ancient Wisdom. The Liberal Catholic Church is open to metaphysical insights as a valid means of human inquiry and welcomes this along with other scientific study.

This particular chapter generally deals with the Holy Scriptures, including the life of Jesus Christ, from the traditional standpoint since a majority of scholars and their works approach the study from this perspective. As a result of this particular orientation of scholarship, the beginning student does well to understand this frame of reference first--and well.

Only then can some of the problems and questions take on their full meaning and appreciation. As one becomes attuned to and made aware of the esoteric teachings within the Sacred Scriptures there is a sense of enlightenment that occurs and "he who has ears" begins "to hear" (Mk. 4:9). That which has been hidden and overlaid, sometimes suddenly--like on a road to Damascus-- becomes clear and self-evident; and the mysteries begin to unfold their "hidden" truths. That is to say the study of the Bible is a long journey-- and a rewarding one. Of necessity, the student of the Ancient Wisdom requires that knowledge which is both exoteric and esoteric, a goal which this work is trying to accomplish.

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## 5. THE BOOK OF ACTS

That the Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles were written by the same author is almost universally acknowledged. The author of the two-volume Luke-Acts is dedicated to a certain Theophilus and according to traditional dating was composed by a first century Christian between A.D. 80 and 90 although an earlier date of A.D. 63 has also been favored. Luke, the author, is a literary artist and his style is very supple and varied.

In fact, some scholars believe that several sources were employed in the writing of the Acts of the Apostles. This second volume of Luke's work is important as one of the earliest documents of the record of the history of the primitive Christian Church. The reader will notice that the book is easily divided into two parts, the first devoted to Peter and the early Church in Jerusalem whereas the second centers upon Paul and his missionary activities, but this division, of course, is not absolute. Part of the importance of Acts is that it bridges the period between the time of the four Gospels and the later Epistles. It shows the progress and movement of Christianity from Jerusalem to all Judea and Samaria, even to "the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

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## 6. THE LETTERS

After the four Gospels and the Book of Acts of the Apostles come the Letters (or Epistles) in the structure of the New Testament. These letters are divided into the Pauline corpus and the Catholic collection. Whereas in the Gospels the person and work of the historical Christ are presented, the Pauline writings address the mission, hope and destiny of the Church of Jesus Christ. Here the doctrinal revelations and theological understanding of certain matters are discussed and expounded. Doctrines such as faith, grace, salvation, justification and glorification are considered by Paul.

Those letters generally attributed to Paul are I and II Thessalonians, I and II Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, I Timothy, Titus and II Timothy. These books are listed in a probable chronological order of writing from about A.D. 52 as a probable date for I Thessalonians to A.D. 57-58 for Romans to the middle or late sixties for II Timothy. The book of Hebrews was attributed to Paul in the past but modern-day scholarship generally contests this authorship and leaves the author anonymous.

The Catholic Letters, or General Epistles, are distinguished from those written by Paul. In the fourth-century A.D. the church historian Eusebius used the term "Catholic" to designate the seven non-Pauline letters included in the New Testament canon. These are James, I and II Peter, I, II and III John and Jude. Some of these books were disputed in the early church but finally accepted as official writings.

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## 7. THE REVELATION

The concluding book of the New Testament "library of books" is the Revelation of John, also known as the Apocalypse (meaning "to make known" or "unveiling"). This highly symbolic and often misunderstood book is addressed to the Christians in Asia Minor as a revelation of the Lord to John. The epithet St. John "the Divine" was added in the fourth-century.

The Johannine authorship is established internally (Rev. 1:1, 4 and 9) but which John has been another question for scholars. Early Church Fathers Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus identified him with John the Apostle. Whatever, this book's prophecy, allegory and high symbolism not only make it very difficult to interpret for today's readers but opens it to multiple levels of meaning and some quite fanciful. The Protestant reformer Luther thought Revelation to be so confusing that he

opposed it even canonically, an action that now seems arbitrary and unfounded ultimately. In spite of various difficulties with this book it has an important place in Christian writings, and especially if one remembers the nature of the **type** of literature involved. As apocalyptic literature the Book of Revelation was written to encourage Christians to stand fast during whatever came and to hold to the faith even under persecution. All of this in full view, of course, of the ultimate victory of the Christ and his followers! Evidence seems to place the writing of Revelation somewhere in the mid 90's at the time of the close of the reign of Domitian when Christians were being persecuted in the Roman Empire. This book of hope and encouragement concludes appropriately with the Aramaic phrase, *Marana-tha*, meaning "Our Lord, come!" (Rev. 22:20b).



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