THE BIBLE THROUGH THE AGES

[This is a revision of a series of lectures originally presented at a Pastors Institute at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in the fall of 1974.]

Richard D. Balge

Lecture I

THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

In the century before the birth of Jesus, perhaps earlier, the Jews used an expression to distinguish certain sacred scrolls from the remainder of their religious writings. There was a fixed group of writings which, they said, "defiled the hands." There have been various explanations of what that expression meant. One of the more plausible is that the quality of holiness which inhered in those sacred scrolls should not be transferred by touch to other less worthy books or objects. Thus, the man who had handled a sacred scroll must wash his hands after such handling.

The canon of the Old Testament

In his *Jewish Antiquities* Josephus referred to a body of writings which his people regarded as the decrees of God, normative for their lives, precious enough to die for, not to be augmented or edited or mishandled in any way. He said that this sacred corpus included the books written from the time of Moses to the time of Artaxerxes. Now, Artaxerxes died in 424 B.C. This was the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, of the writer of the Chronicles and of the prophet Malachi. So, what Josephus was saying was that the normative writings of Israel's literature were the books written from the time of Israel's first prophet, Moses, to the time of her last prophet, Malachi. "Just this is God's Word because just these were God's prophets."

The number of books which Josephus mentions in his *Contra Apionem* (I.8) is 22. These 22 books were 22 scrolls, and many of the scrolls contained more than one of what we call "books." The *Pentateuch* comprised five scrolls. The *Former Prophets* comprised four scrolls. But these are *Joshua, Judges, Samuel* and *Kings*, six books. The *Latter Prophets* comprised four scrolls. These are *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel* and the *Twelve Minor Prophets,* fifteen books. There are three scrolls for *The Writings: Psalms, Proverbs* and *Job,* three books. The Five Rolls are just that, and they include *Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes* and *Esther,* five books. One more scroll contained *Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1* and *2 Chronicles,* five books. The 22 books or scrolls are counted as 39 by us.

Although they did not use the word, the rabbis and Josephus were describing the Old Testament canon. There was a normative group of writings which served as the standard for doctrine and the rule for life. They regarded that group of writings as normative because they considered it to be the written Word of God.

We know that Jesus regarded that collection of writings in the same way in which his contemporaries regarded them: limited in number and unlimited in authority. It is not only that they are authoritative because he appealed to them. No, he appealed to them because they are authoritative.

As to the number of these books, two passages in the Gospels are especially interesting. In Luke 11:49-51, where he speaks of the slaying of the prophets from Abel to Zechariah, Jesus is surveying the Old Testament from Genesis 4 to 2 Chronicles 24:20,21. Today we would summarize or survey from Genesis to Malachi, because these are the first and last books in our English Old Testament. But the Hebrew Old Testament ends with 2 Chronicles. Jesus knew and appealed to a closed number of books. There has been considerable contention in recent years that this closed number did not include the *Book of Daniel.* It is, therefore, of special interest to us that Jesus cited that book and mentioned the author by name: "So when you

see standing in the holy place the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Mt 24:15,16).

As we have already seen (Lk 11:49-51), our Lord summarized a Hebrew canon that included Genesis through Chronicles. A casual scanning of the margins in the Nestle or UBS text of the Greek New Testament reveals that Jesus' apostles also regarded them as authoritative. Only *Ezra, Ecclesiastes* and *Song of Solomon* are not quoted or alluded to. No argument from silence should be based on their absence.

But why does the collection of books to which Jesus appealed or referred during his ministry stop where it does? The Bible itself answers the question, at least indirectly, in the book of the prophet Malachi. Malachi was the prophet in Judah after the Restoration. The Lord prophesied through Malachi that a messenger would prepare the way of the Lord (Mal 3:1; 4:5), and that this messenger would be Elijah the Prophet. There would be no prophet between Malachi and "Elijah," between Malachi and John the Baptist. The Hasmonean "theocracy" of the 2nd century B.C. recognized that there had been no prophet in Israel since Malachi (1 Maccabees 4:46; 9:27).

But when was the Old Testament canon gathered and who did this work? The apocryphal 2 Maccabees 2:13-15 ascribes to Nehemiah the work of gathering the books which follow the Pentateuch. A Jewish tradition ascribed the gathering of the entire canon to Ezra and a "Great Synagogue." Professor John Schaller in his *Book of Books* is typical of most scholars in regarding much that was written concerning Ezra and the Great Synagogue as incredible, but also acknowledging that the legend might have some basis in fact. In any case, the books were there to be gathered; the writing of the Old Testament had been completed at the time of or immediately after Ezra and Nehemiah. Though there is no historical record of it, it is at least plausible that the collection was completed at that time.

The Apocrypha

But if Jesus and his apostles operated with a completed canon Which included just 22 (39) books, why does the canon decreed by the Council of Trent in 1546 contain more books than that? How did Trent arrive at a canon which includes eleven of the books which we call *Apocrypha?* What about those books which Luther called "*...Buecher, die der Heiligen Schrift nicht gleich gehalten und doch nuetzlich und gut zu lesen sind*?"[1] In the Jewish diaspora a considerable number of Jews began to lose their ability to read the Scriptures in the original language. From the 3rd century B.C. onward, for the sake of Jews living in a Hellenistic civilization, the Scriptures were translated into Greek. And, appended to the 22 scrolls, the 39 books, were a number of books written after the time of Malachi and Ezra and Nehemiah. In time, these appended books numbered fourteen. The resulting confusion, aggravated by the proliferation of still more apocryphal writings, prompted the rabbinical school at Jamnia (Jabneh) to decree that the Scriptures contained the 22 scrolls and only those 22. Acting about 90 A.D., they were regularizing and ratifying something that Jews in Palestine (including Jesus) had recognized and accepted many years before.

The fourteen books which were collected with the Septuagint but which were not part of the Palestinian canon are: *1* and *2 Esdras* (sometimes called *3* and *4 Ezra); Tobit* (in which an angel gives instruction for the practice of witchcraft); *Judith* (after whom Shakespeare named one of his daughters); *Portions in Esther* (which is an attempt to "improve" *Esther* by adding long prayers and a theological evaluation of the story); *The Wisdom of Solomon; Ecclesiasticus,* also known as *The Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach* or simply *Sirach* (written about 130 B.C. and the only apocryphal book, written in Hebrew, in which Sirach acknowledges the rest of the canon and claims no prophetic status for himself); *Baruch; The Prayer of Manasses; 1* and *2 Maccabees* (of which the second book speaks in an approving way of suicide and intercession for the dead [2 Maccabees 12:43ff and 14:41ff]); and three additions to the *Book of Daniel.* These are *Song of the Three Holy Children* (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego); *Susanna* (which is a plea for legal reform in the dress of a narrative); and *Bel and the Dragon* (which is included to ridicule idolatry). Incidentally, Shakespeare's other daughter was named Susanna.

[1] From the heading of the Apocrypha in Luther's Bible: "...books which are not to put on a level with Holy Scripture but are nevertheless useful and worth reading."

The Jews referred to books which were not part of the fixed group as *sepharim hitsonim,* outside books. They kept these books in a separate case, never read them in a public meeting or public worship, and declared that they did not "defile the hands." An *apokryphon* is literally something that is hidden away, and that describes what was done with these "outside books." It is thought that the term *apokryphon,* used in the synagogues of the diaspora, is a translation of *genuzim* (from *ganaz:* to hide, store away). It is a fact that the *genizah* (from the same root) was a closet or garret in which noncanonical books were hidden away, along with worn or defective copies of canonical books.

After the decree of the rabbis at Jamnia, even Hellenistic Jews gradually accepted the limits of the Palestinian canon. But Christians generally, most of whom knew no Hebrew and felt no need to study Hebrew, continued to regard the entire Septuagint as Scripture.

If the Old Catholic and imperial and medieval churches were somewhat careless and too inclusive with regard to what is Holy Writ, that lack of discrimination can be ascribed at least in part to the fact that by the middle of the 2nd century the monarchic episcopate and the rule of faith figured at least as importantly in the church's thinking as did the Scriptures. Bishops and traditions, creeds and fathers of the church were becoming as authoritative in practice (if not in theory) as the Bible was. It did not seem as important for the institutional church under those conditions to exclude books which are not the inspired prophetic Word of God as it does for a church which insists on the principle of *sola Scriptura.*

Naturally, when Jews and Christians met in controversy or wrote polemics against one another, there was a problem in the fact that they were using two different canons. About 200 A.D., Melito of Sardis went to Palestine to learn what he could about the problem. We do not know what he learned, but the fact that he made the effort testifies that the problem was recognized. Early in the 3rd century Origen acknowledged that there was a discrepancy and pointed out the difficulties this caused in communication and controversy with the Jews. He did not receive much of a hearing on this subject; he was questioning 150 years of church usage.

It is important that in the mid-4th century Athanasius distinguished between canonical and apocryphal books of the Old Testament. He listed the canonical books which were read by Jews and Christians. He *might* have had reservations with regard to *Esther,* but otherwise his Old Testament canon was ours. He then listed books which were read by Christians only. These are the *Apocrypha* as they were published in the *Septuagint.* His third list numbered apocryphal books which were accepted by neither Jews nor Christians. His view prevailed in the Eastern churches, which do not include the *Apocrypha* in the canon. In the West it remained for the Reformers of the 16th century to pick up what Origen, Athanasius and Jerome had called to the church's attention and do something aboutt it. Incidentally, the oldest *Peshitto* (vernacular translation) of the Syrian Church omitted the scroll which contained *Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah* and *Chronicles.* The reasons for this cannot be definitely established. The Eastern Council of Laodicea (A.D. 363) listed a canon identical to that of Athanasius.

A man who learned much from Origen's writings and exegesis raised the question of the *Apocrypha* 150 years after Origen's death. When Jerome moved from Rome to Bethlehem to spend the last 39 years of his life in study, writing and translation, he made it his business to learn Hebrew. In that he was almost unique among Churchmen of his time. There was very little felt need among the earlier fathers to learn Hebrew. Jerome, however, steeped himself in the language of the Old Testament, and he studied cognate languages as well. When he set out to revise the *Itala,* the Latin Biblele of the Western church, he determined to work with what he called the *Veritas Hebraica.* He immediately noticed that the apocryphal books were not there in Hebrew. He called attention to this fact and tried to convince the Western church that it must limit itself to the Palestinian Canon, as the Eastern church had begun to do. His most influential and effective opponent in this was Augustine of Hippo. At African synods in 393, 397 and 419, Augustine persuaded his compatriots to affirm the Septuagint as the standard version of the Scriptures. Pope Innocent I issued a decree to the same effect in 405. It was this that Trent reaffirmed in 1546, although neither the two apocryphal books of *Esdras* nor the *Prayer of Manasses* were included in the canon of the Roman Church.

After Augustine and Pope Innocent had squelched Jerome's attempt to distinguish between canonical books and apocrypha, the Western church did not consider the matter again until the time of the Reformation. In

1520 Karlstadt published a *Little Book concerning the Canonical Scriptures,* in which he called *The Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Judith, Tobit, 1* and *2 Maccabees* "holy writings" of less than canonical status and declared the rest of the *Apocrypha* unworthy of use by Christians. Luther, Zwingli and Coverdale grouped the *Apocrypha* at the end of the Old Testament rather than leaving them interspersed in the body of the canon. After 1599 some Geneva Bibles omitted them entirely, and after 1629 some editions of the *King James Version* did the same. It may be that most of us have never seen a KJV which includes the *Apocrypha.* The charters of the English and American Bible societies forbid the inclusion of the Apocrypha in any editions which they publish or distribute.

Certain other books had currency in some parts of the Jewish Dispersion and therefore in certain translations of the Old Testament used in Christian churches. For example, there are an Ethiopic *1 Enoch,* a Slavonic *2 Enoch* and *3 Baruch,* and a Syriac *Apocalypse of Baruch.* There are about twenty other similar writings. The Reformers coined the term *pseudepigrapha* for these writings falsely ascribed to various Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, as well as to Jewish heroes and oracles.

An obvious question which we have heard people ask in connection with the Scriptures is: Who decided that just these books and none other are to be regarded as the Word of God? How do we know that all of them really belong to God's inspired Word and that no part of God's inspired Word has been left out? With regard to the Old Testament the answer is quite simple: "Jesus himself operated with the Old Testament, and his Scripture is ours."

The New Testament canon

The answer to the same question concerning the New Testament is not quite as simple. The Greek term *kanon* derives etymologically from the semitic root *kanna,* which meant a reed or cane. Since a straight reed could be used for a straight-edge, a level or a measuring rod, *kanon* came to mean something normative, standard, delimiting. Before the term was applied to the New Testament Scriptures in the 4th century, it had been used since the 2nd century in connection with the accepted doctrine: *kanon tes pisteos,* the rule of faith. Then it was used for the normative decisions and decrees of church councils. We often think of the canon as "the list." More correctly, the list tabulates the canon, lists what is canonical.

As noted above, the term was not used for the biblical books until the 4th century. It was used then by the church historian Eusebius. Later in the same century (367) Athanasius listed "the books to be read in church." Still later in the same century, this collection was referred to by John Chrysostom as *Biblia*—the first record we have of that term being applied to the Scriptures as a whole.

But, of course, the concept antedated the term. Long before the 4th century there was a body of writings which the church regarded as authoritative (the fathers appealed to those writings to support their teachings); as apostolic (that is why they appealed to them); as inspired by God; as normative for faith and life. The earliest postapostolic writers had collections of the apostles' writings which they studied and to which they appealed. That is not to say that they had the entire canon or that they called their collections complete. It is simply to say that the work of collecting the apostolic writings was under way. Indeed, there is evidence that it was under way in Paul's lifetime, before all the New Testament had been written. See Peter's allusion to Paul's letters (2 Pe 3:16). The *Didache* (ca. 120) refers to "the Gospel"—a written document, not simply the Good News. Later writers used the same expression for the collection of the four Gospels and spoke of the Gospel *kata Matthaion, kata Markon,* etc. The first to use these designations with which readers of the Greek New Testament are familiar was Papias, about 135.

Tatian's work makes clear that the church possessed the four Gospels and that it did not honor more than the Four. His work was the *Diatessaron,* a harmony similar to our Passion History readings, based on the four Evangelists. He began with *John's* Prologue and omitted the genealogies in *Matthew* and *Luke.* This harmony was used as "The Gospel" in the 2nd-century edition of the Syrian vernacular version, the *Peshitto.* The other collection to which the early fathers refer is "The Apostle." We know that it was a collection because when they refer to "The Apostle," they are referring to something in one of Paul's letters, but not referring to the letter by its proper name.

So, there is evidence from the first quarter of the 2nd century (Didache, Justin, Ignatius, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Epistle of Barnabas and Tatian) that the four Evangelists and Paul had been collected into a corpus of apostolic writings. This does not mean that the other New Testament writings were not being collected and used. We can only report on the documentary evidence that exists and on the conclusions which have been drawn from it.

In the late 2nd century, about 180, Irenaeus of Lyons referred to a collection of such writings as "The new Testament" to distinguish it from the Scriptures of the believers who lived before Christ came. He called those Scriptures which had been given before Christ came "The Old Testament." The real significance of this is that he was placing them on a par. Some liberal scholars have made an issue of the fact that the early fathers did not refer to the apostolic writings as Scripture. But it would have been confusing for them to do so. "Scripture" (hai graphai) was a technical term applied to a very specific body of literature, the Old Testament. It would have been confusing to apply the term to the books of the New Testament. But there is no doubt that they regarded them as authoritative because they were apostolic. It is not nomenclature that really matters. What matters is the way in which the apostolic writings were regarded, quoted and relied upon.

The first person to draw up a definitive list of books to which he appealed for authority and from which he excluded all other writings was Marcion. He arrived in Rome about 144. he was determined to exclude everything Jewish from the life and work of Jesus. He rejected the Old Testament, the God of the Old Testament, the justice of God, the judgment of God, the Jewishness of Jesus. He edited all such references out of the Pauline corpus and called what was left "The Apostle." He chose the Gospel according to Luke as the least Jewish and edited out whatever of Judaism he thought he detected there. He justified his activity on the ground that what he excised had been added to the Apostle and the Gospel by Judaizers and other legalists. He rejected the other three Gospels and all non-Pauline Epistles. He regarded the Pastoral Epistles as non-Pauline and excluded them. There are many clues as to how he edited Paul and Luke in the apparatus of the Nestle text of the Greek New Testament. Because of Marcion's recension, the church had to begin to argue the question of what is apostolic and what is not. Before then, the collection had gone on in a natural, unhurried manner, determined by use rather than by formal critical standards. There had been a gradual consensus, without any contest we know of.

Marcion's influence, however, was by no means the only challenge which the church faced in the latter half of the 2nd century. The charismatic movement known as Montanism appeared about 155 with its "New Prophecy" and its claim that the Holy Spirit was updating his message to the church. Obviously, it was increasingly important for the church to appeal to the body of apostolic writing in defense of the catholic doctrine.

A further impetus to defining the canon was provided by the Gnostics. The Gnostics had new writings for which they claimed apostolic authority, and their writings needed to be tested. There was apocryphal and pseudepigraghic literature appearing from other sources, and there had to be some separating of the chaff from the wheat. A group of anti-millenarians in Asia Minor, the Alogoi, were denying all of John's writings because they could see no other way of dealing with Revelation 20.

Let us consider the working canon of some of the men of the last quarter of the 2nd century. Irenaeus of Lyons, originally from Asia Minor, cited all of Paul except *Philemon* and all of the *Catholic Epistles* except *2 Peter* and *2 John.* He accepted *Hebrews, Revelation* and *Acts* at a time when these were still regarded with caution in certain areas of the church. Around 200, Hippolytus of Rome (also from Asia Minor and the last Roman theologian to work in Greek) shows familiarity with the whole of our canon except *Philemon, 2 John* and *3 John.* Notice that we have not said that these men granted or refused canonical status to certain books. They did not have the right or the inclination to do that. They *used* the books. But of course, to use them as they did was to appeal to their authority, which is finally what the question of canonicity is all about.

Of a somewhat different nature and intention was the so-called Muratorian Canon. In 1740, a Vatican archivist, Professor L. A. Muratori, published a three-page fragment of an 8th century copy of a Latin translation from Greek. Dated around 180, it provides a list of books which may be read publicly in the services at Rome. It lacks a beginning, but it is quite clear that it introduces the Four Gospels. Then it says, "Luke also wrote the

Acts of all the apostles in one book." With the expression "all the apostles" the author seems to be rejecting other (that is, apocryphal) books of Acts of various apostles which were current in his day. Thirteen *Pauline Epistles, Jude, 1* and *2 John* and *Revelation* are included. Missing are *James, 1* and *2 Peter* and *Hebrews. 3 John* is subsumed in *2 John.* Included are *The Wisdom of Solomon* and *The Apocalypse of Peter.* A number of other writings are mentioned and rejected. This canon at Rome was not identical with that of all other contemporary churches, as we shall see.

In Alexandria, Clement (active ca. 200) accepted the Four Gospels and took *Acts* to be written by Luke. He accepted *Hebrews,* the *Pauline Epistles, 1 Peter, 1* and *2 John, Jude* and *Revelation.* He spoke of "the 27 books," but he was including a number of apocryphal books. His successor, Origen, included the New Testament books which Clement had omitted. He referred to them as *antilegomena,* books which were spoken against in some places. Two books which Clement had regarded as canonical Origen listed as *antilegomena: The Epistle of Barnabas* and Hermas' *The Shepherd.* Thus, he seemed to be according them less respect than Clement had, but they were still in his canon.

At this same time Syria was much less inclusive than either Rome or Alexandria in its canon. The *Diatessaron,* some of Paul's Epistles and perhaps the book of *Acts* were suitable for reading in the service along with the Law and the Prophets. In North Africa at the same time, Tertullian listed the Gospels, the 13 letters of Paul, *1 John* and *Revelation*—19 of the 27 books in our canon.

There is no record that in the year 200 any church had a complete collection of what came to be regarded as the New Testament canon. This did not always mean an outright rejection of certain books. More often it meant that the bishop or the church at a given place did not have a particular book in possession or had not yet given it sufficient study. The experience of various local churches at this time could be compared with the experience of the individual Christian who does not read the entire Bible at one time but reads the individual books over a period of time.

It seems that from about 200 to about 360 the Muratorian (Roman) Canon was not widely questioned in the West. The situation in the East, however, was one of continued discussion and questioning. Around 250, Dionysius of Alexandria discussed the canon and came up with results about like those of Origen in the generation before. He denied that John had written the *Apocalypse,* but he regarded it as apostolic nevertheless.

Eusebius of Caesarea, church historian, chronicler of the Council of Nicea and biographer of Constantine, listed the *homologoumena* (books agreed upon) and *antilegomena* (books spoken against) along lines similar to that of others who had written on the subject in the East. He, however, rejected Hermas' *The Shepherd,* the *Acts of Paul,* the *Apocalypse of Peter,* the *Epistle of Barnabas,* the *Didache* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews.* Rather diffidently and apologetically, he also rejected the *Revelation,* "if it seem proper, which some, as I said, reject, but which some class with the accepted books." The reason that *Revelation* was questioned by many in the church was that then, as now, the church was troubled by chiliasts, especially by the Montanists, who were the Pentecostalists of their day. To be rid of Revelation 20, it seemed, might make it easier to deal with those fanatical spirits.

The Council of Laodicea in 363 listed a canon like ours, with the single difference that it excluded *Revelation.* It forbade (for its province) the reading of non-canonical books in the service. Then, in 367, Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria and hero of Nicea and the trinitarian struggle of the 4th century, warned in an encyclical that "gall is not to be mingled with honey" and listed the 27 books of our New Testament canon as "the wellspring of salvation from which he who thirsts may take his fill of sacred words...." His contemporaries, Gregory of Nazianzen and John Chrysostom still rejected *Revelation.* Cyril of Jerusalem was in accord with Athanasius. Around 400 Jerome's revised Latin New Testament appeared with the 27 books. This was supported by Augustine and Pope Innocent I, and so the West accepted just those 27 books which we today call the New Testament.

Why did it take so long for the *antilegomena* to be universally accepted? We have mentioned the fact that they did not receive wide dissemination as early as others. We have seen that, when they arrived somewhere at a later time than the other books, they were often regarded with some hesitation or even suspicion. We must not overlook the difficulties which the gnostic movement caused in the church. The

Gnostics proliferated apocryphal gospels, epistles, acts and apocalypses in order to lend their strange doctrines the aura of apostolic authority. They claimed to have information and teaching from Jesus through the apostles which was not available to ordinary Christians. This special gnosis, which they valued more highly than faith itself, they claimed to discover in hitherto unknown writings which had come into their hands. Careful Christian scholars in the centers of Christianity would naturally be very cautious about accepting any book—even a purported epistle of John or Peter—which they had come to know only recently. Even when the contents were acceptable, there was often some degree of uncertainty about authorship (as is still the case with *Hebrews).* The identity of James, the Lord's slave, is not definitely known. The *Second* and *Third Letters of John* are addressed to private individuals; *2 Peter* had no addressee.

With regard to the *antilegomena,* it must be reported that Luther revived that concept in his translation of 1522 and in some of the remarks he made at table and in lectures. He questioned the apostolicity and therefore the canonicity of *Jude, Hebrews, James* and *Revelation.* He also challenged *James* and *Hebrews* on doctrinal grounds. He grouped the four books at the end of his translation, and did not assign numbers to them as he had to the others. This is by no means to suggest (as some have suggested) that he doubted that the Bible is God's Word in all of its words. He rather questioned, for at least part of his life, that these particular books were really part of the Bible.

The church which bears his name has not agreed with Luther in this matter. We include those four books in the canon. It is interesting that Bugenhagen in his sermon at the memorial service after Luther's death applied to Luther a passage from one of the books that Luther questioned. That same passage, Revelation 14:6,7, is one of the readings for the Festival of Reformation in our churches today. The *Great Bible* in England (1539) and all English versions after it, have listed the New Testament books in the order with which we are familiar today.

The fact that some books were for some time *antilegomena* has no real bearing on the authority of those books as the Word of God. It is simply a historical fact that some of them were not always and everywhere recognized at once as the Word of God. Just as certain doctrines were true before you and I learned them and are still true although some deny them, so these books were God's Word and had real apostolic authority before some recognized that fact and even now after others have denied that the Bible is God's Word at all.

But to get back to our original question of practical pastoral concern, who decided on these books and how did they decide? No individual or council ever said, "These are the criteria for apostolicity." At certain times and certain places various individuals and councils said, "These books are apostolic and these are not." In 367, when Athanasius finally listed the canon as we have it, he did not tell us what his criteria were. He simply treated the books as received. Any criteria we speak of today are really established by inference. We can look at the historical process and then say the church accepted nothing post-Johannine as apostolic—obviously because all the apostles were dead by the time John died. In fact the Muratorian Canon rejected *The Shepherd* on just that ground, although we would certainly reject it on other grounds. We know that "apostolic" did not have to mean "written by an apostle in the narrowest sense," for the church accepted *Mark* and *Luke* without any resistance except from heretics. We know that those Gospels were accepted because they harked back to the apostolic age and were written by men who accompanied the apostles. We know that the New Testament writings agree with one another as to what the apostolic doctrine is, and we know that several of the early fathers expressed that assumption. We know that Irenaeus appealed to the miracle of Pentecost and to the consequent inspiration of the Holy Ghost in the apostolic writings. It does not help us today, however, to say that the books were included because they were inspired. That is true, of course, but it was an assumption of faith rather than a I demonstrable fact in the 2nd century as it is in the 20th.

And that brings us to *autopistia,* the self-authenticating quality of the books of Holy Writ. They themselves have the power to convince us of their authority. As Christ opens them to us, our hearts burn within us. As we search the Scriptures, we accept them on their terms; we are convinced by them. History's way of stating how the canon came to be is to say that it was by a consensus of use. Another way of saying it, and this is what we mean by *autopistia,* is to say that we know by faith that these books and only these books constitute the *norma normans.*

New Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

It is really much easier to say why a multitude of books were excluded from the canon than to explain the process by which the 27 were included. Of the patristic writings that were at certain times and certain places received to be read in the church, the best is the *Epistle of Clement.* Written from Rome to Corinth about 97, it is quite orthodox and sane and historical. We assume it was finally excluded because it is obviously not apostolic in the sense of having been written by one who was contemporary with the apostles. We would exclude it today for that reason and also because it urges a particular form of church government as normative for all time. It establishes a New Testament ceremonial law. We would reject *The Shepherd* of Hermas for its legalism, its neglect of the historical Jesus and its teaching of works of supererogation. We would reject *Didache* for its externalism and its legalism. The *Epistle of Barnabas* is reasonably sane in its theology and its treatment of Bible history. It treats the Old Testament Law, however, as allegory. It was attributed to Paul's traveling companion on the first mission tour, but it was most likely written by an Alexandrian convert from Judaism about 130. It is the last book in the *Codex Sinaiticus* and was regarded as canonical only in Alexandria.

To mention just a few of the more serious apocryphal books, there was a *Gospel of the Hebrews* which from its content appears to be the product of Ebionites—Jews who denied Jesus' divinity and who regarded him as a mere teacher of morality. The *Protevangel of James* purports to offer a "historical exposition how the most holy Mother of God was born for our salvation." The *Acts of Peter* is the basis of the *Quo Vadis* story and a source of the legend that Peter was crucified head downward. The gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* begins with the statement, "These are the secret words which Jesus the Living spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote." In it Jesus is quoted as saying, "He who will find the interpretation of these words will not taste death." After these the quality drops off, theologically and historically.

The person who challenges the canonicity of any book today must realize that the burden of proof is upon him and that the matter is beyond proof. The only objective test which he can apply is the test of unity in doctrine, and he must then tell us: what new doctrine or what contradiction does the *antilegomenon* introduce? Perhaps his exegesis—like Luther's in *James* and *Hebrews* is incomplete, inaccurate or mistaken. What is there in the book that he is not willing to be held to? What practical pastoral purpose will he serve by announcing that he no longer regards one or more of the *antilegomena* as included in his ordination vow? How will it serve his task of edifying the church and equipping the saints for ministry? Let the questioner bear in mind that the challenge to the *Apocrypha* has stood the test of historical investigation, and that the challenge to the New Testament *antilegomena* has not. Let him look again at what was left out, and he will most likely be persuaded that the *antilegomena* breathe a different spirit, the Holy Spirit. And let him thank God for the process and the Providence that has preserved these 27 books for us.

Lecture II

The Text Of Scripture

When and why the autographs of the Scriptures were lost we do not know. We are grateful that before then men had made copies of the holy writings in order to preserve what was written there by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the years before Jesus' birth it had long been the custom that the Law and the Prophets and the Writings were copied carefully onto the cured skins of ceremonially clean animals. It is said that a master copy of all the scrolls was kept in the temple at Jerusalem until 70 AD. Presumably, these master scrolls perished in the destruction of city and temple.

The text of the Old Testament

One of the survivors of God's judgment on Jerusalem was the scholar and textual expert Johannan ben Zakkai. Before the final destruction he was carried out of the city on a bier, as a dead man. When the burial

party had walked well into the Roman lines, ben Zakkai got off his bier and went to General Vespasian. He asked permission to establish a school for rabbis in an area that was already pacified, and permission was granted. Thus was founded the school at Jamnia, the Vineyard of Jabneh, and its greatest resource was a man who was reputed to be most conversant of all men with the scriptural texts, ben Zakkai. He gathered other scholars about him, and for sixty years the Jamnia academy near Lydda (modern Lod) worked to insure the integrity of the inspired text. This was the group that ratified the canon sometime between 90 and 100 AD, under the leadership of Rabbi ben Akiba. It was the theory of the late 19th century scholar Paul Anton de Lagarde that all extant Hebrew manuscripts, except for the Dead Sea scrolls, derive from the text established at Jamnia.

Another Jewish war (132-135) brought an end to the academy of Jamnia and new schools grew up in Galilee at Tiberias, Sepphoreth and Safad. Here the rabbis collected, collated, edited and transcribed the Talmud, the body of traditional commentary on the Old Testament and Jewish law. Here they also continued to work at the task of preserving inviolate the text of the Scriptures. The text they worked with was consonantal. Pronunciation was part of the tradition to be preserved, and the lector in any synagogue had to be carefully trained. There were no vowel markings, no accents, no verse and chapter divisions. In a scroll, one cannot even refer to a page number when searching out a reference. The scholar had to *know* the scroll in order to find a particular passage for study or citation. The lector had to *know* the lection in order to read it correctly and intelligibly in the service.

In Galilee, the scholars worked to preserve *hammasorah,* the tradition. The word derives from māsar, "to hand down." The text which the scholars of Galilee and elsewhere handed down came to be known as the Masoretic Text. We say "elsewhere" because Galilee was not the only center of this activity at this time. There were several such schools in various parts of the diaspora. Most notable besides the western or Palestinian school was the Babylonian school. The West prevailed and what we call the Masoretic Text is the text of the West. It should be stated, too, that this Masoretic Text comes from manuscripts dated in the 10th century or later.

Lest we doubt, however, that the 10th century text can be a faithful reproduction of 2nd or 6th century texts, let us consider the prescribed procedure for making a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures.

> A synagogue roll must be written on the skins of clean animals, prepared for the particular use of the synagogue by a Jew. These must be fastened together with strings taken from clean animals. Every skin must contain a certain number of columns, equal throughout the entire codex. The length of each column must not extend over less than 48 or more than 60 lines, and the breadth must consist of 30 letters. The whole copy must be first lined; and if three words be written in it without a line, it is worthless. The ink should be black, neither red, green nor any other color, and be prepared according to a definite recipe. An authentic copy must be the exemplar, from which the transcriber ought not in the least to deviate. No word or letter, not even a *yodh,* must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him....Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene; between every word the breadth of a narrow consonant; between every *parashah* or section, the breadth of nine consonants; between every book three lines. The Fifth Book of Moses must terminate exactly with a line, but the rest need not do so. Beside this, the copyist *(sōphēr)* must sit in full Jewish dress, wash his whole body, not begin to write the name of God with a pen newly dipped in ink, and should a king address him while writing that name he must not take notice of him....The rolls in which these regulations are not observed are condemned to be buried in the ground or burned; or they are banished to the schools, to be used as reading books.[2]

[2] Kenyon, Sir Frederick, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts,* rev. A. W. Adams (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode,1958), p 78f.

Just this care to destroy anything defective and thus to prevent the corruption of the text has also worked to deprive text critics and historians of any manuscript material copied between 70 and 1000. Even an accurate ceremonial scroll was either burned or buried after being soiled or torn. The scribes of Judaism were not motivated by a concern for history but by a zeal to keep God's revelation uncorrupted by scribal error and unsullied by careless treatment.

But if, as de Lagarde believed, all extant complete manuscripts derive from the single text at Jamnia, from what did that text derive? That is, were there various textual traditions upon which the Jamnia text (or the master text in Jerusalem) could have drawn and from which they selected readings? Were there other text traditions which had been passed by and rejected in the time before Christ? In 1616 Pietro delta Valla discovered the Samaritan Hebrew Pentateuch. It was published as a part of the Paris Polyglot in 1632. Scholars soon observed that in the Five Books there were about 6000 variations from the Masoretic Text. They also discovered that about one third of these variants could also be found in the Septuagint. This alignment of the Samaritan text with the Septuagint seemed to enhance the reliability of the Septuagint and to call into question the authenticity of the Masoretic Text. Kenyon says: "...In the Samaritan Pentateuch we have preserved a form of the Hebrew text of greater antiquity than that of any Hebrew manuscript..., when allowance has been made for deliberate alteration and the accidents of transmission, its readings must be reckoned with."[3]

A more recent find has added further considerations to this question. Among the scrolls found at Qumran are some which are more closely related to the Samaritan Text than to the Masoretic Text. Now, this does not prove that the Masoretic Text is wrong or that the Septuagint is more reliable than our Hebrew text. It does prove, however, that there was more than one text tradition in Palestine even while there was a master text in the temple of Jerusalem. It proves that there was more than one text tradition in existence at the time when the scholars of Jamnia began their work. It does not settle any question as to the reliability of any of the respective texts. And, let it be emphasized, no doctrine of Scripture is undercut or affected by any of those 6000 variants.

A discovery similar to that of the Samaritan Pentateuch in its significance is the fragment called the Nash Papyrus. Published by S.A. Cook in 1903, it has since been dated about 100 B.c. Some scholars have regarded it as part of a liturgy or lectionary rather than as a biblical fragment. Like the Samaritan text, it varies from the Masoretic, and where it varies it frequently agrees with the Septuagint.

One thing to remember in the matter of agreement with the Septuagint is that there was probably not just a single Greek translation of the Old Testament. We shall discuss this matter further in the section on translations of the Bible, but there is a body of evidence which suggests that Septuagint was a name applied to several translations and editions in order to give them the aura of authority which attached to the fabled 72 translators. Another way of saying it is, "Not every Greek translation of the Old Testament was the Septuagint." It is noteworthy in this connection that Jerome, working before 400, found little to question in the Hebrew text with which he was working. He never suggested that it might be one of several competing texts. While he found frequent and wide divergences in the manuscripts of the Latin and Greek translations with which he worked, the Hebrew text with which he worked was substantially the same as our Masoretic Text.

The work of the Masoretes was capped by the 10th century European rabbi, Aaron ben Moshe ben Asher. Ben Asher manuscripts provided the standard of excellence for accuracy and usefulness. In 1008 a copy of his text was made which now resides in Leningrad. It is the *Codex* Leningradensis, and the third edition of Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* was based on it. Subsequent editions of Kittel-Kahle are substantially based on the third edition.

Another text which Ben Asher worked on and improved where it needed improving is the Aleppo Codex, copied between 900 and 950 A.D. The travels of this codex make a fascinating story in themselves. It was taken as plunder by the crusading Baldwin of Flanders in 1099, admired by Moses Maimonides at Cairo in the 12th century, moved to the Sephardic synagogue at Aleppo in northwest Syria in the 15th century, and reported destroyed in the fighting for Israel's independence in 1948. But the codex was not destroyed. It was

---

[3] *Ibid,* p 93.

rescued from a burning building and eventually found its way from Jordan to Israel. There it was consulted in the preparation of the Jerusalem Hebrew edition.

A source of readings for comparison when there are variants lies in the scriptural quotations which appear in the *Talmud* (the running and cumulative interpretation of the Law) and the *targums* (Aramaic commentaries on the Scriptures). Readings which appear in these, readings which are suggested by the Septuagint, readings which appear in the Samaritan Pentateuch, as well as readings found in the Masoretic Text are all represented in the scrolls and fragments found at Qumran in 1947 and in the years since.

We will not recount here the familiar story of the shepherd boy and his stone and the tinkling of broken pottery in a cave at the northwest end of the Dead Sea in 1947. What was found in that cave and in other caves at Qumran reduced the time between the oldest complete manuscripts and the writing of the Old Testament Scriptures by one thousand years. *Codex Leningradensis* and the *Aleppo Codex* belong to the 10th century A.D. The oldest pieces found at Qumran date from the 3rd century BC. The style of writing, the composition of the ink, the manner in which the pages were lined, the containers in which the scrolls had been placed, coins found with the scrolls—these and other evidences show that the biblical materials found at Qumran are at least 1000 years older than the oldest codices which represent the Masoretic Text.

In 1895 Sir Fredrick Kenyon had written in the first edition of *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts:* "There is, indeed, no probability that we shall ever find manuscripts of the Hebrew text going back to a period before the formation of the text which we know as Masoretic."[4] In the very year of the Qumran discovery a scholar despaired of doing further work in textual criticism with the materials at hand. He expressed the hope that the discovery of a few more manuscripts might shed light on a few more textual problems. By the time the archeologists had finished with Cave 4 at Qumran, every book except Esther was represented by at least fragments. The sifting and evaluating of this mass of material will occupy several generations of scholars and text critics.

Before Qumran it was assumed by many critics that any ancient textual find would prove the Masoretic text to be a confusion of errors. The Qumran Isaiah scroll was scrutinized and found to be in close agreement with the Masoretic Text. The translators of the Revised Standard Version (1952) adopted thirteen readings in all in which Qumran's Isaiah A deviates from the traditional text. One of the scholars involved, Dr. Miller Burrows, later expressed the view that in some cases the traditional text against which he voted ought to have been retained.

It might be well to say at this point that there are no textual variants in the Old Testament Scriptures that affect any doctrine. It is true that there are difficult passages and obscure expressions which could be readily understood if there were no difficulties with the text. But this does not shake the doctrines of the Word or the doctrine that the Word is reliable. Unreliable scribes and presumptuous "editors" may have made it more difficult for us to understand all the details of God's Word. But the fault does not lie with God's Word.

In 1516 and 1517 a Christian printer, Daniel Bomberg, cooperated with an editor who was a convert from Judaism, Felix Pratensis, to publish a rabbinical Bible. That is, they produced a work in which the Hebrew text was accompanied by *targums* and rabbinical commentary. This was the first printed Bible to have the official *qere* in the margins. The margins contained variants in addition to the *qere* readings. The second edition of this rabbinical Bible in 1524-25 was a great step toward obtaining the best possible text of the Hebrew Bible, because it took into account the work of the Tunisian refugee Jacob Ben Chayim. Paul Kahle, who carried forward the work of Rudolph Kittel, used Pratensis' 1524-25 edition along with fragments found in the Cairo Genizah as a resource for the third edition of the Kittel *Biblia Hebraica.* Incidentally, Luther used a Hebrew text which had been published in Brescia, Italy in 1494 for his translating work in the Old Testament.

The text of the New Testament

[4] *Ibid*, p 31.

There are about 5000 New Testament Greek manuscripts. Only about thirty of these are complete. Those thirty complete manuscripts and the thousands of incomplete manuscripts might be disappointing to us if we did not know that only Virgil of all ancient classical writers can begin to compare with the New Testament in regard to the availability of ancient manuscripts. In a sense, Virgil's works, especially the *Aeneid,* were religious writings. Part of his object was to breathe new life into dying paganism by recounting the divine origins of the Roman people. For some of Aeschylus' work there is only one ancient manuscript. A late manuscript of the poet Catullus was copied in the 15th century and then disappeared. In the 19th century, Westcott and Hort could say: "In the variety and fullness of the evidence on which it rests, the text of the New Testament stands absolutely and unapproachably alone among ancient prose writings."[5]

The oldest manuscript material for the New Testament reaches back into the 2nd century. The great find in New Testament texts as far as antiquity is concerned is the Chester Beatty collection of papyri, found in 1931. It consists of parts of biblical books copied in the 2nd to 4th centuries and discovered in Egypt. With a single exception these papyrus portions are in codex form. That is, they are not scrolls, which Jews and pagans alike used for literary works. Rather, they are in what we think of as book form, page on page, gathered into clusters of pages and bound. Long before that form was used for literature in the pagan world, it was used for copies of the Scriptures in Egypt.

Who taught the Christians in Alexandria that this was a good way to publish the apostolic Word? The theory is that first the Gospel of Mark—the shortest Gospel—circulated as a codex. The codex was easier to carry than a scroll, easier to refer to and, if necessary, to hide. The theory continues that a factual basis for the tradition that Mark founded the church at Alexandria is that his Gospel was the first Christian writing to arrive there. There, it is further theorized, copies were made; and not only was the writing copied, the codex form was also imitated. This then became the accepted form for all copies of all biblical writings, at least in Egypt. One more fascinating item here is that no manuscript found in Egypt or anywhere else, which can be dated in the 2nd or 3rd centuries, had writing on the recto side (the face) of the papyrus. The beginning of the book was not to be carelessly exposed to hostile eyes.

There were hostile eyes, of course, and this may account in part for the fact that there are no complete manuscripts from earlier than the 4th century. Before 250 there was no empire-wide policy of persecution against the Christian church; there were simply many local riots and suppressions directed against the believers. But in 303 an imperial edict of Diocletian and Galerius required that all Christian writings be turned over to the authorities for destruction. The losses to text history and to the history of doctrine during that period must have been considerable.

From the 4th to the 10th centuries come about 200 manuscripts, most of them fragmentary. They are of the type called uncials, so called because they were written with capital letters. Not only was there no punctuation but the words were not separated, there were no chapter and verse divisions, no breathing, no accents. Most familiar to us of these uncials is *Codex Sinaiticus,* discovered by G. F. C. Tischendorf in the monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai in 1844-56.[6] This is a 4th century manuscript, containing the entire Bible, with the Old Testament in Greek. This has been designated *Codex Aleph.* It got that Hebrew letter under the system of *sigla* devised by Professor Caspar Rene Gregory. Tischendorf's find occurred after the other major codices had already been assigned their letters and, because it is older than *Alexandrinus* (A), it received a letter which would signal its greater antiquity.

Codex Vaticanus is also 4th century and is designated by the letter B. It includes the Septuagint and the New Testament as far as Hebrews 9. The Pastoral Letters, Philemon and Revelation are missing. Erasmus became aware of this codex in the Vatican Library in 1533, but papal officials denied him access to it. In 1809 Napoleon took it as a prize of war and it was inspected by scholars in Paris. After its return, its use was again forbidden to even the most eminent scholars. Samuel P. Tregelles, the renowned English Bible scholar (1813-1875), was introduced to officials of the Vatican Library by a cardinal friend. He was permitted to

---

[5] Source uncertain.

[6] See "Tischendorf and the Greek New Testament Text, " by Armin J. Panning in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 68:1 (January 1971).

examine the codex, but forbidden to carry any writing materials with him. The text has, however, been printed several times, and so it is available for scholars to read and make comparisons.

As mentioned above, Codex A is *Alexandrinus,* 5th century. It includes the Septuagint and the *Epistle of Clement,* but there are several considerable gaps in the New Testament. In 1628 it was sent to Charles I of England by the Patriarch Cyrillus Lucaris of Constantinople. Of all the uncial codices, it is the first to have been used by modern Bible scholars. It arrived seventeen years too late for the translators of the *King James Version* to benefit from its use.

Codex C is *Ephraemi.* It dates from the 5th century, and what first meets the eyes is not a New Testament manuscript at all. It is a copy of a theological work by Ephraem the Syrian (d.372). In the 12th century someone wanted that work of Ephraem more than he wanted a copy of the New Testament. So, he scraped off the New Testament text and reused the parchment. The New Testament text of this palimpsest (reinscribed parchment) was recovered by eyestrain and chemical means in 1835. Of an original 238 leaves 145 remain; so this, too, is an incomplete codex.

The fifth of the great codices is D, *Bezae,* named for the Reformed theologian, Beza, who sent it to Canterbury in the 16th century. It contains only the Gospels and Acts, in Greek and Latin. It was probably produced in Southern Gaul, for it was found in a monastery at Lyons. It dates from the 6th century, which was the time when theological leadership in the West passed from North Africa to Southern Gaul. Beza did not use his precious possession in his critical work because it differed so much from the other texts in his possession.

None of these uncials are in complete and perfect agreement with one another in every detail of the text. The same is true of the *minuscules,* so called because they were written in lower case letters.

Where do variants come from? Anyone who has copied any material over a longer period of time has probably introduced variant readings into the material. If your eye passed over a word or phrase to another like it, you may have committed haplography, writing only once what should have been written twice. If a copyist writes twice what only appears once in the master copy, he has committed dittography. A hazard of the scribe as his eyes moved from the original to the copy and back was homoioteleuton. Where two phrases end in a similar way it is easy to omit one of them. Scribes working in a group in a scriptorium were involved in an early form of mass production. They did not have many copies to work from. They were supposed to produce many copies. So, a capable reader read from a single copy while a number of scribes took dictation. That could result in errors of hearing, where diphthongs such as *ai* and *ei* were confused; or when ἡμεις and ὑμεις were interchanged.

Some variants resulted from the copyist's attempts at "correction." They might attempt to harmonize the Gospels or the accounts of Paul's conversion. They might try to "improve" on a New Testament use of the Old by replacing the apostolic quotation with a Septuagint rendering or (less frequently) their own translation from the Hebrew. A combining of Gospel accounts, called conflation, may occasionally have been caused by the scribe's reference to Tatian's *Diatessaron,* the 2nd century harmony of the Four Gospels.

Tent criticism from Erasmus to the present

In Erasmus' first edition he shocked his contemporaries by omitting 1 John 5:7, the famous proof text for the doctrine of the Trinity. He knew it was in the Vulgate, but he could not find it in any Greek text of the eight which he was using. Objections were raised to his omission, and he rashly promised to restore the verse in his next edition if it could be found in any Greek manuscript. Such a manuscript was found in Dublin, late and worthless, but Erasmus inserted the reading into his second edition in 1519. Luther did not include the verse in his translation but others did, including the translators of the *King James Version.* As recently as 1897 the Vatican declared the passage authentic but reversed itself in 1937.

One of the great literary events of the 16th century was the publication of the *Complutensian Polyglot,* printed during the years 1514 to 1517. Sponsored by Francisco Jimenez de Cisneros, confessor to Queen Isabella, it appeared in six volumes. For the very first time all of the Bible appeared in Greek and Hebrew, along with a number of other ancient and modern languages. Its publication was delayed because the pope withheld his sanction until Jimenez should return certain books to the Vatican Library. That is how it came to

pass that Erasmus' Greek New Testament gained great popularity just when the *Complutensian Polyglot* could have provided the reformers with a more critically sound Greek text.

Dr. Martin Luther used the second edition of Erasmus' New Testament for his translation, as did Tyndale. Erasmus did not have the earliest manuscripts, and he occasionally adjusted his readings to agree with the Vulgate (which he published with the Greek). Nevertheless, his text caught on and eventually became known as the *Textus Receptus,* which simply meant the commonly accepted text. This acceptance was firmly established by the 17th century when Bonaventura and Abraham Elzivir, brothers at Leyden, published a neat and handy edition of Erasmus' text. The *Textus Receptus* type of text is called Byzantine or Imperial. It is a very large but late group manuscripts, represented mostly by cursives of the 10th century onward. It is signified by a Gothic K (for *Koine)* in the Nestle text and with Byz in the UBS text.

In the late 17th century John Mill of Oxford University reprinted a Stephanus text of 1550 and added variant readings from nearly 100 manuscripts, along with readings of various translations and the fathers. His work provided scholars, for the first time, with a broad base of textual evidence for comparison and critical analysis of New Testament texts. Because of this publication and because of the principles which he laid down in his prolegomena, Mill is regarded as the father of scientific textual criticism.

What Mill began was carried forward by a host of followers, most notably the 19th century text-critical scholars Westcott and Hort. Their edition of the New Testament, along with those of Tischendorf and Weymouth, underlie our Nestle text. In 1898 Eberhard Nestle published what he called a "resultant" text. He relied on the three aforementioned editions and, where they differed with one another, he went with the choice of the two who agreed. Incidentally, Weymouth had followed the same method.

Now, which texts are to be accorded the most respect? How do critical editors come to choose one reading over another? What should we think when we consider the sources of the variants which appear in the apparatus of our New Testament editions? Let us at least sketch the approach of Westcott and Hort to this question, while mentioning at the same time that their theories and methods have not found universal acceptance. The basic flaw in their approach is the assumption that some scribes handled the New Testament text "loosely" (by careless copying or arbitrary editing), because they did not regard the apostolic writings as God-given Scripture.

Westcott and Hort classified their sources into four general groupings: Syrian, Western, Alexandrian and Neutral. They regarded the Syrian grouping as least authoritative. None of the major codices represent this group and most of the readings appear as quotations in Chrysostom and a number of Antiochene fathers. In the fathers before 250 these particular readings do not appear. To abbreviate, Syrian readings are late in origin and therefore seemed less reliable to Westcott and Hort.

The Western group is represented in Latin versions and Codex D (Bezae). It is characterized by frequent additions and omissions. Manuscripts in this family contain whole verses or even longer passages which are not to be found in any other copies. According to Westcott and Hort, variants which show traces of this tendency of adding material must be rejected unless they are supported by readings in other groups.

The Alexandrian group is not represented by any one codex, but appears in parts of *Alexandrinus* (A), *Ephraemi* (C) and occasionally *Sinaiticus* (Aleph). These readings appear most frequently in the Alexandrine fathers. They are readings imposed by grammarians seeking to "improve" the Greek style, not the content of the text. They are not accorded much significance by Westcott and Hort and those who follow their methods.

Westcott and Hort believed that the Neutral Text best represents the original text of the New Testament. It is not characterized by the uniqueness of the Syrian, the tendency toward amplification of the Western or the grammatical concerns of the Alexandrian. Its main center was Alexandria, but it was not limited to that city, appearing in areas quite remote from the center of Egyptian Christianity. The principal authority cited for the Neutral Text is B *(Vaticanus).* It is frequently supported by Aleph *(Sinaiticus).* According to Westcott and Hort, where *Vaticanus, Sinaiticus* and others of the Neutral family concur, they are to be trusted even when a majority of other texts disagree. This theory of text selection was of considerable influence in the text-critical decisions of the men who produced the *RSV* and the *NEB.* The approach of the men who translated the New Testament for *NIV* has been characterized as "eclectic" with respect to following these canons of Westcott and Hort.

At Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary students are taught to *consider the external evidence* when they evaluate variant readings. Specifically, which reading is most ancient and widespread? Readings from the first six centuries which appear in texts from most regions of the early church are most likely to retain the reading of the autograph. This "ancient and widespread" approach avoids the error of settling subjectively on a single manuscript or group of manuscripts as more reliable than all others. It recognizes that there is no way to prove superior reliability in an objective manner. It is willing to examine all the available evidence without prejudging.

Such an approach does not predispose the reader in favor of manuscripts of the Byzantine text-type which, although they constitute one half of the total, are all very late. Neither does this approach predispose the reader to manuscripts of the Alexandrian text-type which, although they are all early, constitute only a small fraction of the total witnesses.

Since the external evidence, what is "ancient and widespread," will not always be conclusive, the reader must also *consider the internal evidence.* Here context, the linguistic usage, the possibility of a copyist's error or an editorial alteration come into consideration. Because there is a subjective element in such analysis, it should not be undertaken apart from prior consideration of the external evidence.

It has been said that in 95% of the variants, the correct reading is easily established. Of the remaining 5%, 95% do not materially affect the sense. Professor John Schaller wrote in 1924 that there were about 150,000 variants and that of these about 400 affect the meaning of the text, and that of these about 50 in all were important. Then he wrote: "Not one article of faith and not one exhortation to godliness of life is changed or eliminated."[7] There have been additional manuscript finds and the number of variants has increased, but the judgment expressed by Professor Schaller in 1924 is still valid.

III. The Use And Interpretation Of Scripture

"Turn it and turn it, for all is in it." That advice of the rabbis expressed the attitude of the people of Israel to the Scriptures, and it described the activity of the Jews who took the Law and the Prophets seriously. The very act of reading the Scriptures was considered to be an act of piety. To provide centers for the study of the Scriptures as well as for worship, the Jews in exile and in the dispersion established and maintained synagogues. It was in connection with these synagogues that the Jews introduced an ideal of universal education for boys from age six onward. While other ancient civilizations limited educational opportunities to the privileged few, the Jews in 70 B.C. were establishing schools for orphan boys.

Jewish biblical interpretation

Because Hebrew was no longer the everyday language of the Jewish people, Aramaic translations and interpretative paraphrases, known as *Targums*, were developed. It also became customary to comment on the portion of Scripture which had been read. Before the time of Jesus' ministry, interpreters of the *Torah* had begun to accumulate a body of systematic exegesis which attempted to connect and justify contemporary customs and beliefs with Scripture. The result was the *Mishnah* (remembrance), a practical summary of applied biblical law. Some of its contents are probably representative of that "tradition of the elders" to which Jesus referred when he condemned those who used those traditions in a way that undercut God's Word. The present form of the *Mishnah* probably dates from about 200 A.D.

The *Mishnah* constitutes the first part of the *Talmud,* which the 19th century German hebraist Franz Delitzsch called "a vast debating club in which there hum confusedly the myriad voices of at least five centuries."[8] The American church historian Philip Schaff called it "a rabbinical Bible without inspiration,

---

[7] Schaller, John, *The Book of Books: A Brief Introduction to the Bible for Christian Teachers and Readers* (St.Louis: Concordia 1924), pp 287f.

[8] Cited in Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1968), Vol II, p 39.

without the Messiah, without hope."[9] The second part of the *Talmud* was produced by subjecting the *Mishnah* itself to further commentary. This is the *Gemara* (Aramaic for "sayings"), which discusses, explains, and amplifies the *Mishnah.* As a matter of fact we should not be speaking of *Talmud* or *Gemara* as singular. There was a Jerusalem or Palestinian *Talmud,* for which the *Gemara* was completed about 350 A.D. There was also a Babylonian *Talmud,* for which the *Gemara* was completed about 550 A.D. The legal opinions and counsels of hundreds of rabbis are offered on the subjects of agriculture, Sabbath and festival observance, marriage, congregational life, sacrifices, and travel.

Jewish biblical and legal scholarship did not end with the completion of the *Talmud.* While the *Talmud* was in development and after its completion, another body of literature was being compiled. From the root *darash* (rub, beat, tread, thresh) came the term applied to homiletical and legal interpretations of the Old Testament: *midrash.* The term is applied to all extracanonical and extratalmudic literature up to the 13th century. The homiletical material consists of rabbinical legends, anecdotes, and parables. The homilies are *haggadoth,* "things related." The legal interpretations establish traditional practices and rules which are not provided in the earlier talmudic writings. They are called *halakoth.*

Now, it is important for the history of Bible interpretation that the rabbis who gathered and contributed to *Talmud* and *Midrash* asserted the basic hermeneutical principle: No verse of Scripture can lose its literal (plain, simple) meaning. For the sake of homiletical invention, however, it was permitted to attach a figurative meaning to the literal sense. We shall hear later of a Jew who used that method and developed it to the utmost, and of the Christian theologians who learned from him to misuse and misinterpret the Old Testament.

Early Christian use of the Scriptures

But while the Jews wove ever more tightly the veil which hides Christ from the legalist, how were Christians using the Old Testament? There are those who believe that before any of the books of the New Testament were written, the apostles and others were using a Christian "Book of Testimonies," a selection of Old Testament passages which prophesied, foreshadowed, or typified Christ. So their use of such a book and their reason for compiling it would have been to show that the Old Testament "urges Christ," and that Jesus of Nazareth must be the fulfillment of the messianic hope which the Old Testament fostered.

Whether such a "Book of Testimonies" existed or not, we do know that the Holy Spirit moved the authors of the New Testament to use the Old in just that way. Long before Augustine ever expressed it, they were practicing the axiom:

> The New Testament is latent in the Old.
> The Old Testament becomes patent in the New.

The Apostolic Fathers, for 150 years after the resurrection, also did a major part of their exegetical work on the Old Testament, trying to demonstrate—as the apostolic writers had—that the Law and the Prophets and the Writings find their real significance in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

But the Scriptures were not only central in the studies of theologians. They also had a central place in the public worship of the church. It is most likely that Tatian's *Diatessaron* (c. 170), the harmonization of the four Gospels, served the same purpose in the worshiping congregation that our seven harmonized readings for the Lenten Season serve. The Psalms had been used in the temple liturgy and sung in the synagogues, and that portion of the Scripture was used with hymns and spiritual songs in the church's worship from the beginning. It is possible that the Psalms were used in a triennial course. Justin Martyr's account of second century worship states that a Psalm was sung between the reading of the Gospel and the reading of the Prophet. It was probably after the codex form came into general use that the lectern for the reading of the Scriptures was invented.

---

[9] *Ibid.*

Incidentally, we are told that in the early medieval church the lector would place the massive Book on a desk to avoid muscular strain on his chest and thus allow his diaphragm full play to project his reading voice.

Use of the Bible by the laity

How many copies of the New Testament or its portions were available for reading by ordinary Christians in the early centuries of the church's history we cannot know. We have seen that the universal acceptance of the canon was a gradual process, and we know that publishing was actually the distribution of hand-copied texts. But we need not assume that the lay Christian's only contact with the Bible was in hearing it read at the Lord's House. After 321, a series of Christian emperors made universal education one of their goals, and it is safe to say an increasing number of believers at least had the ability to read the Scriptures for their own edification. In that century, the fourth, there were writers who assumed that lay Christians could get the Bible for personal study if they wanted it. John Chrysostom told his people in Constantinople to procure at least the New Testament. In 6th-century Gaul, well after the Germanic invasions had disrupted the Empire and closed down much educational enterprise, Caesarius of Arles could urge his flock to buy the Bible and read it at home in the long winter evenings. There is no hint that there might be a shortage of copies or that they might be terribly expensive.

Then came the Dark Ages, when reading was something that only monks (and not all of them) learned to do. Books were burned by Norse invaders, children went without letters, Catholicism saw little reason to encourage people to read what might lead them to question the church's doctrines and practices. Charlemagne revived the dream of universal literacy for his European empire, but it remained only a dream. His successors did not share it or could not carry it out. When, at various times in the Middle Ages, movements for lay Bible reading sprang up, they were usually associated with heresy—sometimes justifiably.

As we shall see in the lecture on the translation and dissemination of Scripture, it could be a dangerous undertaking to translate the Bible and place it into the hands of the people. One of the truly heretical movements which did encourage Bible reading was the Albigensian or Catharist religion, in the 11th to 13th centuries. Their Manichaean dualism and resultant extreme asceticism, but especially their anti-Roman Catholic stance, brought down on them a crusade, then an all-out war, and finally the Inquisition. It also led to the decrees of the Council of Toulouse in 1229, which forbade lay people in the south of France to read the Scriptures in any language whatsoever. In 1234 the Council of Tarragona decreed that neither priest nor layman should read the Bible in the Romance dialect of southern France. Similar prohibitions arose elsewhere, although there was never a universal decree on the part of the Roman Catholic Church directed against all use of the Bible by all lay people.

We know now that the medieval Bible was chained to protect it from the people rather than to protect the people from it. Still, Luther once wrote, describing the period when he was a university student: "When I was twenty years old I had not seen a (whole) Bible. I believed there to be no more to it than the Gospel and Epistle pericopes which were read in church. Those traditional pericopes...are often a rather poor guide to what is central in Scripture."[10] A few years later he was in a position to do something about the general ignorance of the people (and many of the clergy) regarding the Scriptures. The contemporary who provided him with a Greek text to be translated into German, Erasmus, wrote in his First Edition in 1516: "I vehemently dissent from those who would not have private persons read the Holy Scriptures, nor have them translated into the vulgar tongue....I would wish all women, girls even, to read the Gospels and the Letters of Paul. I wish they were translated into all languages of all peoples."[11]

Thirty years later, at Trent, the Spanish Cardinal Pacheco and his theologians put the Spanish attitude toward Bible reading by the laity on record. They called vernacular Bibles the mothers of heresy. It was pointed out to them that the Catholics of Italy, Poland, and Germany would not accept an outright prohibition of Bible reading. It was likewise recognized that the hierarchies of Spain and France would not accept a decree which

[10] WA, TR, III, 599, n. 3767.
[11] Goodspeed, Edgar J., *How Came the Bible?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1940), p 91.

permitted Bible reading by the laity. The Council finally got off the horns of the dilemma by suggesting that where the vernacular Bible was already in use, only portions like the Psalms and Acts should be allowed. On no account should the people read the Epistles and Revelation without supervision. It was further decided that all versions should be officially annotated.

In Protestant lands, when lay people were taught to read, it was for the express purpose that they should be able to read God's Word. The Bible was the basic component in elementary education, and much of it was learned by heart. It helped to shape the vernacular languages of Europe. In Geneva, to encourage Bible reading, all citizens were to be provided with at least an elementary education. In France, Spain, and Italy the Catholic Church followed the Protestant example, but not so that more people could read their Bibles. Rather, the interest in a more widespread literacy was to keep the citizenry of those Catholic countries from falling too far behind their Protestant counterparts in the knowledge needed for commerce.

In America the foundations of education were laid by the Calvinist Puritans of New England. In 1642 the legislature of the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law requiring all parents to give their children elementary education. In 1647 a second law required each town of at least 50 families to provide an elementary school teacher. The other New England colonies established similar town schools. In every case the object was first of all that people know how to read God's Word.

"Biblical" theocracies

The New England theocracy was a new attempt to build a City of God along biblical lines, and that was in the best Calvinistic tradition. Calvin's organization of church and state at Geneva, and the blurring of the lines of distinction between the two of them, had been an attempt to establish a Bible-based society. Calvin was not alone in this attempt. At Muenster in 1534 the Anabaptists used force of arms to establish a theocratic kingdom. A decade earlier, Anabaptist delegates from a wide area had met in Waldshut to legislate a morality derived from the Bible.

But long before the Reformation, whole people tried to place their history into a biblical context and to establish their cultures along biblical lines. For example, when Alfred the Great of England (871901) drew up his legislative code, he began by enacting the Mosaic laws of Exodus 20 to 23. The royal genealogies traced the descent of the old English kings back through the Germanic heroes, through Odin to Noah and Methuselah, and thus back to Adam. The Frisian people rearranged their chronologies to make them conform with the sequence of events in the Old Testament. The Bible was the basic book of medieval European culture.

Monastic, scholastic, and artistic use of the Scriptures

As far as the monastics and the clergy were concerned, two ways of reading the Scriptures were practiced during the Middle Ages. The one was the way of the contemplative monk, *lectio divina.* The purpose here was to taste and savor the Word of God, to strengthen the contemplative life, and to strive for closer union with God. This use of the Scriptures was devotional rather than informational or educational. It was not far removed from what Gerard Groot and his Brethren of the Common Life, along with other mystics, later tried to encourage in the approach to Scripture known as *devotio moderna.*

The second way to approach Scripture developed somewhat later in the Middle Ages. It was the way of the scholastics. There, the Bible text was *pagina sacra,* the sacred page. In order to gain light on intellectual and moral problems, questions were addressed to the Scriptures: "It is asked," and "It remains to be asked." The matter was then disputed on the basis of what can be known from Scripture and what might be deduced with the help of whatever philosophical system the master followed. The *devotio moderna*, and mysticism generally, were in part, reactions to such a "talmudic" approach to the Bible.

In the latter part of the 12th century a Paris master, Peter Comestor, produced the *Historia Scholastica*. In it he recounted the whole biblical history, drew upon nonbiblical writers who had been contemporary with the writers of the events of the Bible, and at the appropriate places inserted the histories of the Persians, Greeks,

and Romans. The book did not always enjoy high esteem in the universities, but it remained popular throughout the Middle Ages. Chaucer was familiar with it.

In the universities all the Scriptures were glossed, that is, commented upon. The parts most glossed, however, were the Psalms, the Pauline Letters, and the creation account. The Psalms were an important part of the monastic life since they were used several times a day at the canonical hours. Those who chanted them wanted to understand better what they were chanting. The interest in Paul and in Genesis evidences a concern with doctrine.

We are accustomed to thinking of cathedral and church art—statuary, painting, windows—as the Bible of the illiterate. That was true, and it was not done first in Europe. Constantinople (later Byzantium) adapted many forms of art from the East and integrated them into the service of proclaiming the great Bible truths. Even before Byzantium and its Christian emperors, by 200, the Christian congregation at Dura-Europos in Mesopotamia worshiped in a building whose walls held paintings which represent scenes from the New Testament. One hundred or more years before that, biblical themes were depicted in symbolic form in the catacombs. The desire to make the Bible live for the people of Christendom issued in literature, drama, and painting. Literature and painting came together in the illuminated manuscripts. In the late Middle Ages a "Biblia Pauperum" circulated in manuscript form and was block printed in the mid-15th century. About 40 pages long, it depicted the story of salvation with many pictures and minimal text—a king of "Bible Comics."

Tools for Bible study

There are many tools which we use in our study of the Scriptures which have not always been available to those who meditated on God's Word. We will mention only a few, to honor the men who produced them and to demonstrate how relatively late in the history of the Bible many of these taken-for-granted tools made their appearance.

It was the Masoretes who gradually developed the system of vowel points, accents, and punctuation which are now a part of our Hebrew Bibles. They realized that in the diaspora more and more pronunciations were being called into question. To preserve the pronunciation in a form which they regarded as correct, and thus to preserve the correct sense, the Masoretes began to mark up the consonantal text. These markings became so much an accepted part of the Hebrew text that when Elijah ben Asher Levita (ca. 1500) suggested that the vowel points were not really integral elements of the autographs, he stirred up a controversy that raged for three centuries.

The Spaniard Menahem ben Saruk (910 ca. 970) compiled the first complete lexicon for the Hebrew Bible. He made the error of reducing all berbal roots to or two letters. A generation later Judah ben David Hayyuj (ca. 940-ca. 1010) corrected the error and established the trilateral law of Hebrew verb roots. He was also largely responsible for developing the conjugations which modern Hebrew grammars employ. Konrad Pellicanus (d. 1556) was the first Christian to produce a Hebrew grammar (1504). His work was supplanted in 1506 by that of the humanist Johannes Reuchlin. It was Reuchlin who resisted the effort, spearheaded by a convert from Judaism, Pfefferkorn, to have all Jewish writings destroyed.

The most popular commentary of the Middle Ages was the *Glossa Ordinaria* of Walafrid Strabo, the squinting Abbot of Reichenau in the early 9th century. A Jewish commentator who made an enduring contribution to the study of the Old Testament, particularly the Pentateuch, was Rabbi Solomon ben Issac of Troyes (1040-1096). He was often referred to as Rashi, from the initial letters of his title, his given name and his father's name. Christian exegetes from his day to at least the time of the *King James Version* drew upon his work. One of those who was very dependent on him was the commentator so often referred to by Luther: Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1340). According to a popular saying, "If Lyra had not played, Luther would not have danced, and the whole world would have gone to perdition."

An indispensable aid in finding our way through the Scriptures is the division into chapters and verses. The chapter divisions were first applied to the Vulgate, early in the 13th century. Some ascribe this work to Hugo Cardinal de Sancto Caro, others to Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury. The chapter divisions

with which we are acquainted did not appear in a Hebrew test until the 15th century. They were borrowed from the Vulgate for the convenience of Christian readers of the Hebrew Scriptures. About 1550 (300 years after the chapter divisions), Robert Stephanus (Etienne) divided the chapters into verses. Unfortunately, this influential printer set off each verse as a paragraph. This has led many people to regard each verse in isolation, and what that has meant in terms of ignoring context and founding new sects we cannot measure. The *Antwerp Polyglot* (1569-72) was the first edition of the Hebrew Bible to mark the verses with Arabic numerals.

Another invaluable aid in Bible study is the atlas. Eusebius of Caesarea, in the early 4th century, had written a book on the geographical names of the Bible: *Concerning the Place Names Which Appear in the Divine Scripture.* But there were no maps in the book. In the last years of the same century, Jerome amplified Eusebius' work in his *Book concerning the Situation and Names of Jewish Places.* Jerome's contemporary, Augustine, expressed appreciation for this work, but asked for a work "which would carefully classify and accord individual treatment to the geographical localities, the flora and fauna, and the stones and unknown metals of Scripture . . . ."[12] He was asking for a Bible dictionary. We do not know how soon good maps were available for a biblical atlas, but we do know that Augustine's plea for a Bible dictionary was not answered for 1200 years. In 1625 Johann Heinrich Alsted published his *Triumphus Bibliorum Sacrorum seu Encyclopaedia Biblica,* at Frankfurt.

The first concordances were somewhat like a modern topical concordance in that they grouped parallel or related passages, rather than listing verses in which a particular word is used. Each group of passages constituted a *concordantia.* The first producer of a concordance may have been Anthony of Padua in the 12th century, who drew up his *Concordantiae Morales* on the basis of the Vulgate. The first concordance on the complete English Bible was that of John Marbek in 1550. Four years before that the first concordance of the Greek New Testament was published at Basel, the work of Sixtus Birk, also known as Xystus Betuleius. Isaac Nathan ben Kalonymous of Arles completed the first concordance of the Hebrew Old Testament in 1448.

One ingenious aid to the study of the Gospels, which still appears in the Nestle text, was the system devised by Eusebius of Caesarea. It was a system of cross references, based on the Gospel harmony of Ammonius of Alexandria. Ammonius divided the Gospel of Matthew into 355 sections, Mark into 236, Luke into 342 and John in 232. The number of each Ammonian section appears in the inner margin of the Nestle text. In order to enable the reader to see parallels and compare the various gospel accounts, Eusebius drew up ten tables or lists, called canons. The first contained the numbers of all the sections common to all four Gospels, arranged in parallel columns. The second, third, and fourth tables gave the sections common to three Gospels. Tables 5 through 9 gave those which are common to two, and the 10th gave those contained in only one Gospel. These "Canons of Eusebius" are to be found on pages 33-37 of the introductory material in Nestle.

Interpretation from the Fathers to the Reformation

How did the saints who used the Scriptures from the time of the Apostle John's death to the appearance of Luther interpret the Bible? Seminary students learn that the Bible interpreter must remember that he is dealing with an ancient text, a literary work, a historical document, and a sacred writing. From the 2nd century to the 16th, there were few who forgot that they were dealing with a sacred scripture. For that matter, most seemed to realize that they were dealing with an ancient text. But what was too often forgotten was that the Bible is also a literary work and a historical document. That is, very early in the church's history there was shift away from the grammatical-historical method of interpretation. The ancient fathers learned early to allegorize, and the accepted method of exegesis in most centers of Christianity for 1300 years was to seek the sense behind the sense by allegorizing.

The allegorical method is traceable to the Greek philosophers of the time before Christ. They were attempting to harmonize or reconcile two traditions. One was the literature of Homer and Hesiod, the source books for what could be said or written about the gods of the Greek world. To doubt or to deny their truth was

[12] Danker, Frederick W., *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1960), p 151.

regarded as an irreligious act. They were, in a sense, the "scriptures" of Greek paganism. But these philosophers had to contend with their own highly developed principles of logic, criticism, ethics, religion, and science. As lovers of wisdom they could not accept much that appeared in the classical mythology. They tried to reconcile religion and philosophy by allegorizing. They said, in effect, "Under the literal words of the stories of the gods is a real and secret meaning. Let us explain it to you."

One hotbed of this activity was the great House of the Muses (Museum) in Alexandria. And one of the great centers of the Jewish diaspora in the centuries just before Christ's birth was also Alexandria. Now, how could a Jew living in Alexandria cling to the sacred Scriptures of his ancestral religion and at the same time do justice to the philosophy which he was learning and which he respected ? How could he make his religion intellectually respectable and his philosophy religiously orthodox ? He could allegorize. The writer who seems to have introduced the allegorical method to the study of Torah was Aristobolus (160 B.C.). His work survives only in fragments and in quotations by other writers. Aristabolus believed that Greek philosophy had borrowed from the Old Testament, especially from Moses, and that one who employed the allegorical method could find the teachings of Greek philosophy in Moses and the Prophets.

Better known to us, because he left a considerable body of writing, is Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary (20 BC to 40 AD) of Jesus of Nazareth. It is his name which is usually associated with the beginnings of the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament. Philo did not completely disregard the literal meaning, but he believed that it represented an immature level of understanding. For him, the literal sense was only the body of Scripture, while its soul was to be found in the allegorical sense. Of course, every Platonist and every Stoic knew that the soul was more important than the body. Philo did not deny the historical data which the Scriptures present. He simply regarded the literal interpretation of those data as inferior to the allegorical. He insisted that the text must be allegorized if it says something unworthy of God, if a statement contradicts some other statement or in any way presents us with an intellectual difficulty, or it the text itself is clearly allegorical in nature.

How did this theory work out in practice? With reference to the creation of Eve, Philo wrote: "That which is said here is mystical….For how could anyone accept that a woman, or any human being at all, came out of a man's side?" His solutions to such "embarrassing" accounts in the Scripture sound very much like modern demythologizing. Perhaps we understand where his heart really lay when we notice he habitually refers to the Creator as το ον, the Existent One (impersonal and neuter) rather than θεος or κυριος. There is more of Athens than of Sinai and Moriah in his approach to Scripture. There is more of the Tempter's, "Yea, hath God said?" than of Samuel's, "Speak, Lord." Philo made the superficial observation that Genesis contains two accounts of the creation of man. He explained this as a good Platonist: The man of Genesis 1:27 is the *idea* of man that lies behind humanity, but the man of Genesis 2:7, fashioned from the clay, is earthy, material man.

This method of biblical interpretation ticked away like a time bomb in Alexandria. It went off in the Christian church near the end of the 2nd century. Pantaenus, Clement, Origen, Dionysius, and Cyril all used the method there. Origen's ingenuity provided models for the rest of the church's Bible interpreters for the next 13 centuries. These theological leaders were, of course, correct in perceiving that the Old Testament is really a sacred scripture of the Christian church. But their treatment of the Old Testament also reveals a spirit not too different from Philo's in that they often strove to interpret along lines which accorded with their philosophical presuppositions. Thus Clement of Alexandria handles the story of Hagar and Sarah in a way quite different from Paul's method in Galatians. For Clement regards Hagar as worldly *paideia* and Sarah as heavenly *sophia*. As Abraham progressed from Hagar to Sarah, so must we grow from worldly lore to the heavenly wisdom. For Clement, and for his successor Origen, salvation was not so much the gracious forgiveness of sins as it was instruction in true knowledge and wisdom.

Clement's treatment of the Sarah and Hagar story is an example of what the Alexandrians called "spiritual" exegesis. That is, it pointed to spiritual truth which required considerable "spiritual" insight to understand. A moral interpretation (which must also be sought in every text) would have to do with monogamy and the way in which God withheld his full blessing from concubinage. The literal meaning was simply the story as it appears in Genesis.

This was the threefold interpretation which became standard in the church: literal, moral, and spiritual. Origen recognized that the principle did not always stand up in practice. He even allegorized to find a "scriptural" explanation for this difficulty. He said that just as the water jars at Cana held two *or* three firkins apiece, so each portion of Scripture holds two *or* three meanings.

Now, that seems more humorous than harmful. What was harmful in the history of Scripture interpretation was that less and less time was spent on what the Bible really says and more and more time was spent on fanciful hidden meanings. Jerome and his sometime friend, Rufinus of Aquileia, translated Origen's work into Latin. Gregory I, the Great (590-604), popularized it in the West and so set the course for medieval exegesis. Support for dogma was found in allegorical readings, something the Alexandrians themselves had not done. The grammatical-historical approach was simply forgotten. Among a few exceptions, people who still tried to do legitimate exegesis, were the School of Antioch (until the 6th century), Druthmar of Corbie (in the Carolingian age), and the Abbey of St. Victor (during the High Middle Ages).

Still, let it be said that if Origen and all who used him had not believed the Scriptures to be God-breathed, the vehicle of Christ, the Word of the Spirit, they would not have bothered at all. They did still regard the Bible as sacred Scripture. There is still gospel in Origen's treatment of the parable of the Good Samaritan:"…The injured man is Adam, Jerusalem is Paradise, Jericho is the world, the bandits are hostile powers, the Samaritan is Christ, the wounds are disobedience, the ass is Christ's body, the inn is the church, and the Samaritan's promise to return refers to the Parousia . . . ."[13] Luther's treatment was not so different.

The schoolmen of the Middle Ages refined and defined the methods of interpretation until they could speak of literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical meanings. What had been added was the anagogical, which we could call eschatological, for it dealt with the expectations of the Church Triumphant. An example: Literally, the city of Jerusalem is that geographical place. Allegorically, it is the Church Militant. Tropologically (morally), it represents the faithful soul whose conscience is at peace. Anagogically, it is the Church Triumphant. This and similar treatments compelled Geiler of Kaisersberg to say, about 1500, that this was making the Bible into a nose of wax, to be twisted every which way to suit the allegorical artist. A generation later, Martin Luther would have even stronger things to say about such hermeneutical methods.

In the second lecture we spoke of the efforts of those who contributed to the preservation and determination of the text of both Old and New Testaments. The Masoretes, the editors of polyglot Bibles, the Renaissance and Reformation scholars, the archaeologists and the text critics of the 19th century all faced up to the implications of the fact that in biblical interpretation we are dealing with an ancient text. For faithful and accurate interpretation it is necessary to have that ancient text in as complete and perfect form as possible. The Western Catholic Church before the Reformation was in practice already violating this hermeneutical canon when it made the Vulgate the authentic version for public lectures, disputations, sermons, and expositions. In 1546 that practice was regularized by the Council of Trent, and from then until this century the ultimate textual authority in the Roman Church was the Vulgate—not the Hebrew or Greek Scriptures.

Interpreting an ancient literary text

We must not overlook some of the people who, through two millennia, have tried to uphold the principle that in biblical study we are dealing with a literary work. These were people who at least reminded biblical theologians that there are rules of language which must be observed, even when dealing with an ancient text. While they did not always live up to the principle, and while they often deliberately diluted it by their spiritualizing and moralizing, they did give expression to the principle, so that it was never completely forgotten.

Palestinian Jewish hermeneutics "...insisted that a word must be understood in terms of its sentence and a sentence in terms of its context....A clear passage is to be given preference over an obscure one if they deal with the same subject matter. Very close attention is to be paid to spelling, grammar and figures of speech."[14]

---

[13] Source unknown.

[14] Ramm, Bernard, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: W. A. Wilde, 1956) p 46f.

When Augustine set forth his principles of interpretation, he correctly perceived that "no verse is to be studied as a unit in itself. The Bible is not a string of beads, but a web of meaning. Therefore we must note the context of the verse, and what the Bible says on the same subject somewhere else."[15] To that he appended the thought that "we cannot make the Holy Spirit our substitute for the necessary learning to understand Scripture."[16] Augustine himself did not learn Hebrew, but Origen and Jerome certainly demonstrated a commitment to the grammatical approach when they studied Hebrew and the cognate languages at a time when very few churchmen (including great church fathers) bothered to do so.

In Anglo-Saxon England, after control of the English church had passed from Celtic to Roman hands, the Venerable Bede preserved the wholesome Celtic influence by teaching Hebrew, Latin, and Greek to his monastic pupils. In the 11th century the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris became a center of exegetical labors which paid more attention to language and less to traditional glosses. There had been philosophical and scholastic reasons for assigning a certain shape and dimensions to Noah's ark in the traditional exegesis. Hugh of St. Victor questioned whether that shape and those dimensions could be ascribed to the ark on the basis of the language in Genesis. He built a model according to the traditional view of what the ark's structure must have been. It kept tipping over! He built a model according to the grammatical sense of the Hebrew words. It was stable. His pupil Andrew continued the Victorine approach to the Scriptures with his zeal in the study of Hebrew.

"The Council of Vienne (1311-12) decreed that chairs of Greek and oriental languages be set up and endowed in the principal schools and universities of Christendom. In England, at least, the ecclesiastical authorities took steps to enforce the decrees by allotting revenues to the proposed chairs. Nothing came of it either at Oxford or Paris; perhaps it was too hard to find competent teachers....(In general) students of theology got no preliminary training in language."[17] It seems that the theologians of the European universities regarded Greek as the language of the notorious heretics and schismatics of the East. That naturally dampened enthusiasm for the study of Greek. The study of Hebrew was handicapped by the suspicion that it would lead to Judaizing tendencies.

And so, in the providence of God, it was renaissance humanism rather than the theological schools that provided the linguistic tools for the Reformation. Erasmus, Reuchlin, and others may have been moved chiefly by their concern for human dignity and by their intellectual honesty, rather than by a concern for the Word of God. But Luther and his co-workers and the other Reformers used the tools of the humanists for their biblical work in the interest of God's truth. One of the earliest lasting developments of the Reformation used the tools of the gymnasium (a high school-college). In Magdeburg, in 1524, a school was opened for the study of the traditional liberal arts in Latin, with a view to training boys in the biblical languages and thus preparing them for theological study and the gospel ministry. The goals and methods and curriculum of the gymnasium live on in modified form in preseminary training schools of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

There are several post-Reformation developments in the understanding of the Bible as a literary work which are worth mentioning here. In the 18th century the Oxford professor Robert Lowth detected and pointed out the principle of parallelism which underlies Hebrew poetry, and thus made a considerable contribution to the understanding of the Old Testament. His German contemporary, J. D. Michaelis, revived the idea of the importance of the cognate languages for the understanding of Hebrew. The culminator of such work in Hebrew and cognate languages was Wilhelm Gesenius with his *Hebraeiches und Chalaeisches Handwoerterbuch* (1810-12), and its successor in three volumes: *Thesaurus Philologus Criticus Lingune Hebraeae et Chaldaeae Veteris Testamenti* (1829-58), finished posthumously.

Early in his career Joseph Barber Lightfoot suggested that New Testament Greek was probably not a unique language which had never been used by anyone except the Holy Spirit. Rather, he conjectured, it was an everyday language spoken and written for everyday purposes during the first Christain century, a language which the Holy Spirit chose to use as his vehicle in the inspired Word. Letters and documents which would

---

[15] *Ibid*, p 37.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] Lampe, G. W. H., ed. *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol 2, *The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, p 218.

prove this had actually been discovered and some of them were already in Europe at the time Lightfoot was engaging in his speculation. Till then, however, on one had paid them much attention, and no one had yet connected them with the language of the New Testament.

Then, in 1877, a large number of Greek papyri were discovered at Arsinoe in Egypt. A decade later, 1888-90, Sir Flinders Petrie found another quantity of such papyri in a cemetery at Hawarah. A decade after that, 1897, the site of the ancient Oxyrrhyncus yielded many more. Since then, many thousands of these and other *koine* texts and documents have been published.

These papyri are not literary texts. They consist of legal papers, notices, personal letters, lists, and business accounts. And all of them were written in the everyday Greek of the New Testament times. In the early 1890s a young German pastor, Adolf Deismann, was looking over some recently published Greek papyrus documents and was struck by the similarity of the Greek in the documents to that of the New Testament. He saw as fact what Lightfoot had nurtured as conjecture.

Interpreting a historical text

The other necessary ingredient of the grammatical-historical approach is that we realize that the Bible is a historical document. It not only records history (which the allegorists and gnostics and demythologizers deny or ignore), but it was also written in a historical context (which even those who want to uphold the Bible's authority and believe the Bible's message can easily forget). The ancient church's best and most consistent advocates of a historical-grammatical treatment of Scripture were the fathers of the School of Antioch. "School" here has reference to a school of thought rather than to a particular institution (although there were a number of such institutions). Also known as the Syrians, these 2nd-, 3rd-, and 4th-century teachers rejected the allegorism of Alexandria and the arid traditionalism of the West. They practiced a literal and historical exegesis. They recognized that there is such a thing as figurative language, but they insisted that straightforward prose. They insisted on the reality of the Old Testament events, which the allegorists were explaining away in the manner of Philo. Outstanding among them was a man who has vanished from the list of orthodox fathers because he was posthumously condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council as a Nestorian: Theodore of Mopseustia (c. 350-428). He saw that if Adam and the story of the Fall are not treated historically, then Paul's theological treatment of Adam's sin and its consequences for all men has no basis in reality. Theodore read the Old Testament as the account of God's grace in dealing with a rebellious people (which is not to say he ignored God's judgments on those same people). He saw that the purpose of Israel's history was to provide the setting for God's world-redeeming act in Christ.

Why did not such exegesis find a lasting and honored place in the catholic orthodox church? Unfortunately, the School of Antioch came to be identified (with some justice) with heresies. Paul of Samosata, Arius, Apollonaris, Nestorius, and the three men condemned by the Fifth Council—all had received training in the School of Antioch. What led Arius and the rest into heresy was not their grammatical-historical exegesis but their philosophical presuppositions, which they could not completely leave behind when they studied the Scriptures or tried to formulate a Christology. So the school and its method were discredited by a number of its "graduates." The ancient church was not ready to distinguish between an exegetical approach and a philosophical bias, and so it threw out the baby with the bath. Allegory which supported orthodox dogma was preferred over honest exegesis that seemed to spawn heresies.

It is not that the grammatical-historical exegesis was completely lost from then until the time of the Reformation. We have noted some exceptions to the rule, and we have seen that in the midst of all the allegory there were those who did not succumb completely. Even in the time of high scholasticism Aquinas did not lose sight of the need for literal interpretation. He even stated that no dogma could be based on "spiritual exegesis." But the emphasis, the main thrust, the old reliable approach lay in the traditional and allegorical and safe glosses of the fathers. It is generally recognized that from the rejection of Theodoret and the other Antiochenes to the Reformation there was no sustained and widespread and broadly influential grammatical-historical exegesis.

We are familiar with Luther's hermeneutics. We hope it is our own. But let us, before we leave this survey of interpretation in the ancient and medieval churches, recall that he rejected allegory. Commenting on Genesis 3:14, he said: "I adhere simply to the historical and literal meaning, which is in harmony with the text."[18] He insisted on the primacy of the original languages. He said: "In proportion then as we value the gospel, let us zealously hold to the languages."[19] He insisted that the interpreter must give attention to grammar, to the time, circumstances, and conditions in which the biblical writers worked; that the context must never be ignored; that Scripture interprets Scripture; that the Scriptures "urge Christ" (*Christum treiben*).

Five epochs in the history of interpretation

To summarize what we have surveyed, it might be useful to outline the history of Bible interpretation. Someone has divided that history into five neat epochs.

First, there was the ancient period, in which the Word of the Prophets and Apostles was ultimately authoritative. Despite a certain reliance on the episcopacy, the rule of faith, and tradition, the Scriptures were recognized as the Word of God as no other authority could be. It was a time in which the laity was encouraged in Bible reading and in which the allegorical method was adapted for Christian use.

Second, there was the long medieval period during which scriptural and traditional authority were fused and confused. Allegory was refined to a low art, the use of the Bible by the laity was generally discouraged, and the papacy established itself as the ultimate authority in the western church.

Third came the Reformation. The principle of *sola Scriptura* was articulated. Hermeneutic insisted on one literal sense. Scripture was to interpret Scripture. The Protestants began to systematize scriptural doctrine for use in polemics against Rome and against one another. And, early on, the principle of private judgment (which is traditionally Protestant but not historically Lutheran) began to result in false interpretations and exotic sects. Pietists began to dwell on personal feelings and attitudes and reactions to the inspired Word, and the hermeneutical thrust centered once again on man instead of on the meaning and message of the objective Word.

This, of course, prepared the way for the fourth epoch, Rationalism. Reason became the supreme arbiter in all matters, including biblical study. Inspiration and everything else supernatural was ridiculed as superstition and rejected as irrational and unworthy of an enlightened age.

The fifth epoch is the one in which we live. All of the aforementioned attitudes have carried over into our time. The situation has been further complicated and confused by the almost universal acceptance of evolutionary thought among educated and uneducated people, liberal and conservative attempts to reconcile the Bible with evolutionary thought, and fundamentalism. In the lecture (which follows) on the authority of Scripture we shall speak from the vantage point of the fifth (modern) epoch and proceed on the assumption that all the attitudes of all previous epochs really are still represented in our time.

IV. The Translation And Dissemination Of Scripture

“The translator is a traitor," said an old Latin proverb. The Babylonian Talmud expressed it this way: "He lies who renders a verse as it reads, with strict literalness; he blasphemes who makes additions."[20] A modern writer has said: "Literalness is wrong because it doesn't really transfer the thought of the original; paraphrase is wrong because it reads in other meanings."[21] But, ever since there have been Jews who could not read Hebrew, it has been desirable to translate the Old Testament into other languages. And, ever since the gospel has gone out beyond the bounds of the Greek-speaking Roman Empire, it has been necessary to translate

---

[18] *LW* 1, 185.
[19] *LW* 45, 359.
[20] Reumann, John H. P., *The Romance of Bible Scripts and Scholars: Chapters in the History of Bible Transmission and Translation* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p 2.
[21] *Ibid.*

the New Testament into the languages of the people. The reasons usually assigned to the need for translation and for providing new translations are liturgical, literary, educational, and evangelistic.

The Septuagint

One of the earliest translations of the Old Testament, perhaps *the* earliest, is still in use in the Greek Orthodox Church today. That is the *Septuagint,* used by the early Gentile Christians and quoted more frequently than the Hebrew Old Testament by the apostolic writers. The purported origins of this translation are described in "The Letter of Aristeas." The writer was an official in the court of Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt (285-247 B.C.), one of the great patrons of the Museum in Alexandria. Since the goal of the Museum was to gather, catalog, and analyze all of the world's literature, it was suggested to Philadelphus that the collection could not be complete without a copy of the Jewish law. He moved to correct the deficiency. He asked for and got six scholars from each of the Twelve Tribes and set them to work on the Island of Pharos. Seventy-two days later, according to tradition, the seventy-two translators presented the king with their completed work, the Scriptures in Greek. The product was read to the assembled Jews and acclaimed by them as faithful. How the translation came to be called "The Seventy" (Septuagint) instead of "The Seventy-Two" is a mystery. Perhaps it is simply an abbreviation.

It is, of course, much more likely that the process took much longer than 72 days and that it was done in stages. That is the case with translating work generally. Many scholars believe that the *Pentateuch* was completed before 250 B.C., the *Prophets* around 200 B.C., the Writings somewhat later. This is the traditional view, set forth by Professor Paul Anton de Lagarde of Goettingen in the 19th century.

We are accustomed to think of the three great uncial codices—*Sinaiticus*, *Alexandrinus,* and *Vacticanus*—as New Testament manuscripts. They are that, but they also include considerable portions of the Greek Old Testament. Most printed editions of the Septuagint represent the text of one or more of those three great uncials. Either because the Septuagint was corrupted by copyists and editors, or because there were actually a number of Greek translations, there were text-critical problems almost from the beginning of the Christian era. We shall see in a moment that a number of translators made early attempts to remedy that situation. Just now, though, to demonstrate that there were differing textual traditions, we shall quote from Jerome's polemic "Against Rufinus": "Alexandria and Egypt praise Hesychias as the author of their Septuagint. Constantinople as far as Antioch accepts that of Lucian the Martyr. The provinces between these areas read the Palestinian codices edited by Origen and published by Eusebius and Pamphilus. The whole world is at odds with itself over the three-fold tradition."

Professor Paul Kahle argued that there never was just one Septuagint, at least before the 1st century A.D. Rather, in his theory, there were in all the great centers of diaspora Judaism versions produced locally and varied as to their quality. Kahle believed that about 130 B.C. the Jews in Alexandria published a kind of "Revised Standard Version," which was to be normative for all Greek-speaking Jews. The "Letter of Aristeas" was an attempt to give this edition the authority of age and of an inspired translation. But this did not put an end to the use of other Greek translations. Thus, when Christians in various locations cited the Old Testament, they borrowed from a variety of Greek versions.

Opposed to this theory and favoring the more traditional views of Professor de Lagarde is the opinion of Professor Frederick Kenyon: "It is at least possible to maintain that what Kahle has taken to be rival translations might instead be different recensions of the basic *Septuagint* text, which had been revised at various times so as to bring it into close agreement with the Hebrew as it was received in the Jewish community."[22] In short, the existence of other Greek versions in the early Christian centuries does not preclude the existence of the *Septuagint* as a recognized version before the Christian era.

As the *Septuagint* gained favor and currency among Christians, it lost its position in the synagogues. One Jew who tried to provide a Greek translation which would not have the disadvantage of being quoted

[22] Kenyon, Sir Frederick, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, rev. by A. W. Adams (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1958), p 112.

extensively in the New Testament and the fathers was the 2nd century scribe Aquila. Until recently his work was known chiefly from fragments, but the discovery of the Old Cairo Genizah has provided a considerably increased and improved knowledge of his translation. His anti-Christian bias is apparent in his translation of *mashiach,* in Daniel 9:26 as *eleimmenos* instead of *Christos.* In Isaiah 7:14 he translated *almah* with *neanis,* young girl, rather than with *parthenos. Now* this man was a scribe, not working for a translation that would be read in the synagogue service but for a translation that could be used by rabbinical scholars. His method was to render a given Hebrew word with the same Greek word wherever it appeared. All Hebrew words based on a particular word must be translated by Greek words derived from a single equivalent root, even when that meant inventing Greek compounds that were never used before and have not been used since. He insisted that even particles like *eth* must have a consistent equivalent in the Greek. Since the sign of the accusative can also sometimes be translated as "with," he used the Greek *sun* wherever *eth* appeared in the Hebrew—even for direct objects. The result was sometimes *sun* followed by the accusative, an impossible construction. But Aquila was not acting from ignorance. He was showing with Greek symbols what stood in the Hebrew text. His translation was to be a scholar's tool, not a people's Bible.

Somewhat later than Aquila's work was the effort of a Jewish Christian (possibly from Ephesus), who undertook to revise the *Septuagint* or some other Greek version on the basis of the traditional (Palestinian) Hebrew text. That was Theodotion. His method was just the opposite of Aquila's. Theodotion's rendering tended to be more free, even paraphrastic. His translation was generally well received by the church, and his rendering of *Daniel* actually replaced that of the *Septuagint* in the church's manuscripts.

About 200 A.D. Symmachus rendered the Hebrew into good and idiomatic Greek. A rabbi who tended to soften anthropomorphisms, he was not accepted by either Jews or Christians. Two hundred years later, however, Jerome made considerable use of his work in the preparation of the *Vulgate.* Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus were all represented in Origen's six-column comparative text, the *Hexapla.*

It was sometime before 250 when Origen laid out his *Hexapla:* Hebrew text, transcription of Hebrew text in Greek letters to provide vocalization, Aquila, Symmachus, *Septuagint,* and Theodotion. The bulk of his work has been lost, and the chief source for trying to reconstruct it has been a Syriac translation of 617. His goal was to bring the Greek Old Testament (the Old Testament of the Greek-speaking Christian churches) in line with the Hebrew original. In the early 4th century, in keeping with Origen's intent, Eusebius and Pamphilus of Caesarea used resources left behind by Origen to prepare an edition of the *Septuagint* which was widely used in the East.

Syriac and Coptic versions

One of the earliest translations of the New Testament or a part of it was the work of Tatian. About 150 he produced a harmony of the Gospels which we know by the Greek name *Diatessaron,* "through the Four (Evangelists)." He was a Syrian, and his harmony marks the beginning of New Testament versions in Syriac. Tatian was an Encratite, an "abstainer," and so references to the marriage of Joseph and Mary were edited out of his version. He had John the Baptist drinking milk instead of eating locusts with his wild honey in the desert. His merging of the Gospel accounts is responsible for many of the variant readings in the Gospel manuscripts. Perhaps his heretical views or more likely a simple preference for the Gospel in its four constituent parts prompted his countrymen to produce the *Old Syriac* translation.

Probably in the 4th century (some say the 5th), both Tatian and the *Old Syriac* were superseded by the *Peshitto,* that is the simple or popular or vernacular Syrian Bible. The earlier date seems more likely, since the *Peshitto* did not include 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, or Revelation. These books were being accepted by the Syrian Church in the late 4th century. Although the language of the people has changed through the centuries, the *Peshitto* is still used in public services by Syrian Christians. Scholars are generally agreed that it is the most faithful and literary of ancient versions in any language.

In the 5th century, remaining copies of Tatian's *Diatessaron* were searched out and destroyed. Among the burners was Theodoret of Cyrrhus, another of the Antiochene fathers who was condemned posthumously by

the Fifth Ecumenical Council. He personally destroyed 200 copies. The version does not survive in Syriac, but it served as the basis for Gospel harmonies in other languages. The library of Samuel Pepys contained the single surviving Middle English version.

Other early translation work was done in Coptic, the native tongue (or rather tongues) of the Egyptians. "The Sahidic version of the Old Testament...was probably made before the end of the second century; the Bohairic somewhat later. The Sahidic New Testament version may be assigned to the late second century; the Bohairic version to the first half of the third. Versions of the New Testament have been identified in manuscripts written in all the main Coptic dialects."[23]

South of Egypt, Ethiopia was Christianized in the early 4th century. According to tradition the first bishop produced the Ethiopic version of the Bible, "which is highly prized by scholars for its fidelity and beauty."[24] The language is Geez, now used only in worship. In its written form it is *boustrephedon,* "as the ox plows." That is, the lines are written and read alternately left to right and right to left, as the ox plows.

The Vulgate

The references to *Itala* in the Nestle text apparatus often refer to a group rather than to a single Latin version. It is likely that the New Testament was translated into Latin in North Africa before it was done in Italy. In Italy itself, it was Milan rather than Rome that first turned from Greek to Latin in its liturgy. The churches of Italy did, however, produce an *Old Latin Version* which succeeded the *Itala* and preceded Jerome. It was this *Old Latin Version* which already had the name "Vulgate" when Pope Damasus in 383 commissioned Jerome to produce a new Latin rendering. Before the name was applied to Latin translations, the term *Vulgata* had been used in the West with reference to the *Septuagint.*

Jerome was instructed to base his revision on a careful comparison with the Greek text. He went far beyond his instructions and paid a Jewish teacher from Lydda to help him with the translation of Job. Before that, he had studied not only Hebrew but also Aramaic and Arabic. His translating work occupied him for more than twenty years. For some books he made a fresh translation; in others he simply revised earlier Latin work. Some of his fresh translating was based on the Greek Old Testament; some of it was based on the Hebrew and Aramaic. In short, what we know as *The Vulgate* was from the beginning of mixed origin and mixed quality.

As we have seen in an earlier essay, "The Canon of Scripture," Jerome's version of the Old Testament was not welcomed with open arms in the West. Because of his attitude toward the *Apocrypha,* it was resisted by Augustine and the North African church. Pope Innocent I concurred with this reluctance to accept a "Hebrew" version of the Old Testament. But by the early 7th century Isidor of Seville could write of a general preference for Jerome's version as more faithful and clearer than the *Old Latin.* Jerome's translation had become the *Vulgate.* Its official acceptance as the normative text of the West, however, did not occur until 1546, at Trent.

In recent years historians have questioned whether the *Vulgate* was really the first book to be printed by Gutenberg, using the movable type. Gutenberg's production was five years in preparation, and it is not likely that he suspended all other printing activity during that time. In any case, the *Vulgate* was the first Bible version to be printed with the movable type process.

The German Bible

The first missionary to a Germanic people of whom we know was a Mesopotamian monk, Audius, who worked among the Goths in southern Russia and died there in 370. Better known is the son of a Gothic father and a Cappadocian mother named Little Wolf, Woelfli, Ulfilas (310-383). At the age of 30 he was ordained a bishop by Eusebius of Nicomedia. For 33 years he worked among the Visigoths along the Danube in Moesia, in what is now Bulgaria. He was an Arian, and his Visigoths later took Arian Christianity to numerous other

[23] Schaller, John, *The Book of Books: A Brief Introduction to the Bible for Christian Teachers and Readers* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1924), p 293.
[24] *Ibid*., p 293.

Germanic tribes. His translation of the Bible into Gothic marks the beginning of Germanic literature. The version is preserved only in part, but it is said that Ulfilas did not give his people the *Books of Kings,* lest their warlike nature become even more warlike. He translated *euaggelizomai* in Luke 2:10 as *spillo*, a clear hint as to the origins of our word *gospel.*

The most famous manuscript of Ulfilas' Gothic Bible is the *Codex Argenteus* (CA), "the Gospels written on purple parchment in silver and gold ink....(It) contained 330 folios; 187 have survived. This manuscript is mentioned for the first time between 1550 and 1560 in the correspondence of German scholars. At that time...it was at the monastery of Werden near Cologne. It is conjectured that it was brought there from Italy in about 795 by Liudger, a disciple of Alcuin and founder of the monastery. At the beginning of the 17th century the manuscript was at Prague in the collection of the Emperor Rudolph II. In 1648 the Swedes took the town and the Codex Argenteus formed part of the booty they carried away. After passing through several more hands, the codex was bought by Count de la Gardie, chancellor of Sweden, who had a silver binding made for it and presented it in 1669 to the University of Uppsala, where it still is."[25] There are other Gothic codices.

Ulfilas followed a system somewhat like that of Aquila in his translating work. He aimed to render every word in the Greek by a corresponding word in Gothic. Even particles like *men* and *de* received their equivalents, regardless of idiomatic sense. The word order of the original was also followed without regard for Gothic idiom. This is really a sign of his respect for the sacred text, and it actually makes it easier to reconstruct what the Greek text was which underlay his translation. It was, not surprisingly, Byzantine.

Another landmark in German Bible translation dates from the time of Charlemagne. An early 9th century manuscript, found near Salzburg, contains fragments of the *Gospel of Matthew* in a Bavarian dialect. It was translated from Latin. There are some mistranslations, but the German is often idiomatic, except where the order of words has been influenced by the Latin. It probably represents the pastoral and missionary concern of a single monk rather than official activity on the part of Charlemagne's government.

About 830, in Fulda, Tatian's *Diatessaron* was rendered in East Franconian German, with Latin and German in parallel columns. "The *Diatessaron* was the primary source of another vernacular translation, the *Heliand* (*sic*), so called by its first modern editor. (It) is a versified Gospel in the form of a book epic..., written in a Saxon dialect. A second poem, worthy to be compared with the *Heliand,* was produced a generation or two later. This was the *Liber Evangeliorum* composed by Otfrid, a monk of Weissenburg in Lower Alsace....His dialect is Rhenish Franconian. "[26] In an introduction to the work Otfrid asks why a people as great as the Frankish Germans should not have God's Word in their own language, as the Greeks and Romans had it in theirs. "It is perhaps not irrelevant to recall that Otfrid was composing his German work at the time of the controversy about the use of Slavonic instead of Latin in the Moravian church. Both the Roman papacy and the German bishops were interested in drawing Moravia into the western orbit and were opposing the official use of Slavonic. They realized that this would mean a neglect of Latin and strengthen connections with the East. As the underlying political conflict was being fought out, partly in terms of Latin versus a vernacular, the time would hardly be auspicious for writing in German either."[27]

Notker of St. Gall (c. 950-1022) made translations into German of the *Psalter* and *Job*. From that time to the time of Gutenberg's movable type (1455) various complete translations appeared in manuscript form. Many of these were lost when the Inquisition worked in southern Germany, when councils were leery of translations, and when the Bible became more and more a book for specialists.

The first Bible *printed* in a modern European language was the *Mentelin Bible* of 1466, which "actually reflects the language and translation technique of about the beginning of the 14th century."[28] Mentel used a "version which was then at least 150 years old."[29] The point is not that Mentel used old material but that in

---

[25] Lampe, G. W. H., ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol 2: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1969), p 340f.
[26] *Ibid*., pp 418-420.
[27] *Ibid*., p 422.
[28] *Ibid*., p 433.
[29] *Ibid.*

about 1316 there was a German Bible which a modern reader of German could have read. In all, four Low German and 14 High German versions had appeared in print before Luther ever began his work. Eight to ten thousand copies were on the market, each costing the equivalent of a town house or fourteen oxen. "From the evidence of bequests, most vernacular Bibles were owned by laymen—which is what one would expect....Early German Bibles tended to be huge cubes of board and paper, almost impossible to carry and even to use. (After) 1478 the bulk was greatly reduced in several editions from Augsburg."[30] Just before Luther's translation appeared, German Bibles began to dispense with marginal notes. This resulted in a price reduction, so that where the purchase of a Bible had once been comparable to buying a house in today's market, it was now comparable to buying a car.

Luther's adversary John Eck was critical of the pre-Lutheran Augsburg translation. He said that the translator "tried too hard to translate word for word into German, so that he often became impossible to understand, and the simple reader can make no sense of it."[31] The Lutheran Johann Mathesius found it "un-German," "dark," and "difficult."[32]

Luther began translating the New Testament from Greek to German in late November or early December, 1521. He completed it in March of 1522 before leaving the Wartburg. It was published in edition after edition and was widely pirated. Although Eck found 100 heresies in it because it did not agree with the *Vulgate*, it was necessary for Emser to rely on it after all when the papists countered with a defective version in 1527. Translating the Old Testament from the Hebrew was a larger and longer undertaking. Beginning in 1522, Luther, Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, Cruciger, and others worked until 1534. Luther continued to improve this Old Testament in succeeding editions. "At the time of his death in 1546, corrections were still being made by the faithful Roerer from marginal notations in Luther's...personal copy. Traditionally, however, a 1545 edition, which lacks some of those last alterations which Luther did not personally see through the press, has been regarded as the 'Textus Receptus' of German-speaking Lutheranism."[33]

It was not only the Catholic Emser who relied heavily upon Luther's version. Two Anabaptists, Ludwig Haetzer and Johannes Denck, based a translation of the Prophets on the Hebrew text. It was a linguistic success, and after 1529 it was published in combination with those parts of the Old Testament which Luther and his coworkers had completed. Luther was critical of their work because they were "Rottengeister," but he did use it as an auxiliary in certain difficult passages—usually for particular words and phrases but never for longer sections. The manuscript of his translation bears the marginal note at Hosea 10:14, "Vide Haetzer." Before we leave the subject of German versions, let us note that "the first German Bible printed in America was published in 1743 by Christoph Saur, at Germantown in Pennsylvania."[34]

Other early European versions

Returning for a moment to pre-Reformation vernacular Bibles, the 19th century saw the recovery of the New Testament which the Catharists or Albigensians of southeastern France produced. Although the cult was Manichaean and anti-Catholic, its Provencal translation of the New Testament was accurate and readable. The followers of Peter Waldo also had a Provencal translation, as well as one in Flemish. The Inquisition in Germany uncovered German versions of the New Testament and at least part of the Old, in 1260. The Inquisition assumed that these must be heretical, and one of its agents wrote of unlettered countrymen who could recite *Job* word for word and of others who knew the entire New Testament verbatim.

"From the last quarter of the twelfth century onward the southern Netherlands and also the area around Cologne were the scene of popular religious revival. Great numbers of lay people, men and women, banded

---

[30] Greenslade, S. L., The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol 3: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day (Cambridge: The University Press, 19xx), pp 423f.
[31] *Ibid*., p 104.
[32] *Ibid*.
[33] Reumann, John H. P., *The Romance of Bible Scripts and Scholars* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p 70.
[34] Schaller, p 304f.

themselves together into communities to live apart in apostolic simplicity. These were Beghards and the Beguines....Gospels were needed, and this need was in part met...(by a translation of) Tatian's *Diatessaron.*"[35] A Dutch version of about 1250 "is the earliest surviving biblical vernacular text in the Netherlands apart from the *Low Franconian Psalms.* The *Liege Diatessaron* is regarded as the Dutch peer of Luther's translation. Though the vocabulary is now archaic, the idiom is substantially the same as in modern Dutch."[36]

In connection with the Hussite movement, two Czech versions appeared at Prague and Kuttenberg in 1488 and 1489. A Spanish version appeared at Valencia in 1478 but was burned, and no complete copy survives. Another Spanish version was published at Barcelona in 1492.

Luther's work signaled a burst of translating activity throughout Europe. In his lifetime Low German, Dutch, Danish, and Swedish Bibles were completed. Before the Reformation century ended, Icelandic, Finnish, modern Greek, Polish, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Wendish, Slovenian, and Croatian versions had been printed. The New Testament was translated into Hebrew for use in mission work among Jews. The Czechs produced the *Kralice Bible,* which became not only a Protestant treasure but also a symbol of resistance to Catholic rule in Moravia and Bohemia. Copies were printed in Berlin, Silesia, and Hungary, to be smuggled into Bohemia. At the beginning of the 19th century, Czech nationalists tried to revive their neglected native tongue on the basis of the *Kralice Bible.*

A Calvinist edition of the *Brest Bible* appeared in Danzig in 1632, under sponsorship of Prince Radziwill. It became the official Protestant version for Poland. The Counter-Reformation was even more successful in Poland than it was in Bohemia, and it was another Radziwill, Prince Nicholas Christopher, who bought up the copies of the Brest Bible which his father had underwritten and caused them to be burned with other Protestant books in the main square of Wilno.

The English Bible

And now, the Bible in English. In the 7th century there was an Anglo-Saxon version of the creation account upon which Caedmon, "the father of English song," drew for his poetic rendering of Genesis 1 and 2. An Anglo-Saxon version, of course, belongs to German history as much as to English, but we must begin somewhere. In the next century Bede worked at translating, but did not complete the entire Bible. Alfred the Great encouraged translation in the 9th century. Aelfric Grammaticus undertook to prepare a *Heptateuch,* a text comparing seven versions, for the purpose of preparing an Anglo-Saxon translation. Recent scholars have questioned his part in this work and doubt that he really prepared the Anglo-Saxon column. However, it was done. More significant in Aelfric's lifetime was the work of someone else, anonymous: a complete, accurate, and readable translation of the Gospels called the *West-Saxon Gospels.*

The Norman invasion of 1066 undid whatever had been accomplished in English Bible translation to that time. The new official language of England was Norman French, and until it became AngloNorman the people would not have Bibles or preaching or justice in their own language. An unknown priest of the time lamented: "Saint Bede...(and) Abbot Aelfric...taught our people in English....Now is the learning lost and the people forlorn....Those who teach the people now are men of other tongues."[37]

Sometime in the early 14th century a partial English translation appeared, despite the attitudes of people like a certain Friar Claxton, D.D., who said that Holy Scripture was a false heresy. Then, in 1366, John Wyclif produced *De Dominio Divino.* In it "he appealed to Scripture as the highest expression of the divine law, in opposition to the manmade statutes of the church. From his assertion of the supreme authority of Scripture he argued the need for making the Bible readily available to every Christian, and hence the need for translating it from Latin into the...language of the people."[38] He argued for a translation from Latin, and worked from Latin,

---

[35] Lampe, p 428.
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] Ackroyd, P. R., and C. F. Evans, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol 1: From the Beginnings to Jerome* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1970), p 378.
[38] Source unknown.

because he had no Greek. Greek was really a dead language in England at the time. Wyclif's work is dated in 1382. It is uncertain how much of the work is Wyclif's and how much his followers did. Nicholas of Hereford seems to have translated the greater part of the Old Testament.

Wyclif's followers, called Lollards, traveled around the country reading "Goddis lawe" and "Christis lawe"—the Old and New Testaments—to the common people who could not read the Scriptures for themselves. In 1407 Archbishop Arundel condemned the Lollards as heretics and forbade the reading of any translation of any part of the Bible until approval had been gained from the diocesan bishop. In 1411 he wrote to the pope: "This pestilent and wretched John Wyclif, of cursed memory, that son of the old serpent...endeavored by every means to attack the very faith and sacred doctrine of Holy Church, devising to fill up the measure of his malice—the expedient of a new translation of the Scriptures into the mother tongue."[39] A short time later an English chronicler wrote: "This Master John Wyclif translated into English—the Angle not the angel speech—the Gospel that Christ gave to the clergy and doctors of the church...so that by this means it has become vulgar and more open to laymen and women who can read than it usually is to quite learned clergy of good intelligence. And so the pearl of the gospel is scattered abroad and trodden underfoot by swine."[40] John Purvey completed a revision of Wyclif's translation in 1388, and it is this version that appears in most extant manuscripts, which number 180. Wyclif was condemned and burned posthumously by the same Council of Constance (1414-1418) which consigned John Huss to the flames.

But God raised up another man for England whose work would be printed, not only in the version which bore his name but also in the *King James Version.* Goodspeed says that "92% of the King James Version is still just as William Tyndale wrote it."[41] Tyndale (c.1490-1536) received the master of arts degree from Oxford in 1515, studied for a time at Cambridge, then took a job as tutor in the home of a country knight. There he met many distinguished clergymen and said to one of them: "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more scripture than thou dost." He probably borrowed the challenge from the similar expression found in the preface of Erasmus' 1516 Greek New Testament.

Finding no patronage or employment to support his translating work in England, Tyndale went to Germany in 1524. Authorities in Cologne stopped the printing of a New Testament there just as the printer was setting the type for Mark's Gospel. Tyndale fled to Worms, and in 1525 a 6,000 copy edition was printed in that city. It was available for sale in England by April of 1526. Much of that edition was lost to the fires of the Archbishop of Canterbury. A single copy survives at Baptist College in Bristol. The final authoritative edition of Tyndale's testament was printed in 1535. Meanwhile, he had begun to work on the Old Testament. He never finished it.

Tyndale worked from the original languages of the Bible. For the New Testament he used Erasmus' text, with help from the *Vulgate,* Luther's German, and Erasmus' Latin rendering. For the Old Testament he used the Hebrew text, the *Septuagint,* the *Vulgate,* and Luther's German translation. Scholars generally agree that "Tyndale made of the spoken English of his day a fit vehicle for the communication of the Holy Scripture."[42]

From the point of view of church authorities in England, his version had to be banned and burned because it was a Lutheran document. "Tyndale wrote repent, not do penance; congregation, not church; senior or elder, not priest....(He) printed prefaces which...drove home the basic Lutheran principle of justification by faith. Many of the prefaces, not only the important Prologue to Romans, are essentially translations from Luther."[43] Not satisfied to ban his work in England, the English ecclesiastical authorities effected Tyndale's arrest in Europe. He spent his last year in prison near Brussels, still trying to complete the Old Testament. On October 6, 1536, he was burned at the stake in Antwerp, his final prayer being: "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." Incidentally, the word "trespasses" in our version of the Lord's Prayer derives from Tyndale.

---

[39] Ackroyd, p 388.
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] Source unknown.
[42] Greenslade, p 145.
[43] *Ibid*., p 145f.

The first English printed complete Bible came out the year before Tyndale's death. An Augustinian by the name of Miles Coverdale (1488-1569) made use of Tyndale's work and then translated the rest of the Old Testament from the best German and Latin versions available, thus giving Luther's version another "in" to the translation of the Bible into English. No one knows who the printer was, where it was published, or who paid the cost of publication. Coverdale simply said, "God moved other men to do the cost hereof."

The first licensed English translation of the Bible was dedicated to "The Most Noble and Gracious Prince King Henry VIII." It was known as "Matthew's Bible." It was later recognized that John Rogers (1509-1555), alias Thomas Matthew, had published it at Antwerp in 1537. It was a compilation of Tyndale's Old Testament manuscript, Tyndale's corrective edition of the New Testament, and parts of Coverdale's Old Testament. The license was withdrawn, and John Rogers was burned under Bloody Mary at Smithfield in 1555, not for plagiarism but for heresy.

In 1537 the English theologian Edward Foxe wrote: "The lay people do now know the Holy Scripture better than any of us; and the Germans have made the text of the Bible so plain and easy by the Hebrew and Greek tongue that now many things may be better understood without any glosses at all than by all the commentaries of the doctors."[44] In 1534 royal injunctions "commanded the clergy to set up in every parish church (parishioners paying half the cost) one book of the whole Bible of the largest Bible in English."[45] This authorized version was the *Great Bible* of 1538. It was called great because it was a huge book, so huge that no London printer could produce it. The work was sent to Paris, but the Inquisitor General of France ordered the seizure of 2500 completed Bibles. The printer and his crew barely escaped with their lives. Through the intervention of the English ambassador, the King of France finally released manuscripts, paper, type, and printers; the job was finished in London after all. Miles Coverdale was the editor, commissioned by Thomas Cromwell. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer wrote the preface. It was released in 1539 and in most parishes it was chained to the reading stand, lest the people be tempted to carry it away. It passed through several editions, one of them called *Cranmer's Bible,* and survived the persecution under Queen Mary.

Refugees from Mary's rule published a cross between Tyndale's version and the *Great Bible* in 1560. This was the *Geneva Bible,* greatly influenced by Reformed as distinguished from Lutheran theology. It was the first English Bible to use Stephanus' verse divisions. It used italics for words not found in the original. It was about 10 inches in height, a hand Bible rather than a pulpit Bible. Its marginal notes were so extensive that the editors believed they had left no verse of Scripture without a clear explanation. This was the Bible of Shakespeare, Oliver Cromwell and his Puritans, and the Pilgrim Fathers. Its publishers knew Greek and Hebrew and made some necessary improvements in the latter half of the Old Testament. This *Geneva Bible* was also known as the "Breeches Bible" because it has Adam and Eve sewing "breeches" for themselves out of fig leaves.

A certain confusion set in because the *Great Bible* was being used in the churches and the *Geneva Bible* was very popular in homes. For that reason the bishops of England rather hurriedly prepared a revision of the *Great Bible.* It appeared in 1568 as the *Bishops' Bible.* It could not replace the popular *Geneva Bible,* but it served as the forerunner of the *King James Version.*

During much of the foregoing period, English Roman Catholic theologians and clerics were in exile in Europe. There were still Romanists in England and Scotland, and there was a desire for an English translation which had the "old church's" sanction. The English College at Reims produced a Catholic New Testament in 1568. In a few years the faculty moved to Douay, and there Gregory Martin worked at the rate of two chapters a day to complete the Old Testament within four years. In 1610 a complete Bible was published, the *Douay-Reims,* more often simply called the *Douay.* It was frequently revised, the last time by Challoner in 1749. One of its notes in 1 Corinthians says: "The Corinthian speakers of tongues are much like to some fond linguists of our time, who think themselves better than a Doctor of Divinity that is not a linguist."

At a conference of churchmen at Hampton Court it was suggested that a revision of the Bible, with the *Bishops' Bible* as its basis, be undertaken. King James I favored the idea, and 47 scholars and theologians used

---

[44] *Ibid*., p 149f.
[45] *Ibid*., p 150f.

the original languages, earlier translations, and the *Bishops' Bible* to produce the *King James Version,* published in 1611. "For eighty years after its publication...it was denounced as theologically unsound and ecclesiastically biased, as truckling to the king and unduly deferring to his belief in witchcraft, as untrue to the Hebrew text and relying too much on the *Septuagint.* The personal integrity of the translators was impugned....They were accused of 'blasphemy,' 'most damnable corruptions,' 'intolerable deceit,' and 'vile imposture.' But the *King James Version* quickly displaced the *Bishops' Bible* in...the churches. The *Geneva Bible* continued to be printed until 1644, and only gradually fell into disuse....No evidence has been found that the *King James Version* received final authorization by the convocation of bishops of Parliament or by the king in council. It did not need that."[46] It was revised from time to time, the last time under Benjamin Blayney of Oxford in 1769.

We shall leave the translation of the English Bible there, confident that the reader is somewhat familiar with most of the significant translations produced since 1611, and especially in the 20th century. We are privileged to live in one of the two great ages of Bible translation. Under God, this may still result in another great age of Reformation, of free course for the unconditioned gospel. In October of 1978 the complete *New International Version* was published, following the publication of the New Testament in 1973. Professor Frederic Blume had served as a consultant to the New Testament translation committee. Professor John Jeske was part of the translation committee for the Old Testament.[47]

The Bible as a mission tool

It is a commonplace that from the 12th century onward the Roman Church censored, discouraged, and sometimes persecuted to death those who translated and distributed the Holy Scriptures. It is also true that in the mission ages before Rome controlled the West, the efforts of missionaries—especially non-Roman missionaries—involved Bible translation and distribution. After the Reformation, the vernacular Bible once more became a mission tool. The first translation of any portion of Scripture into a non-European modern language was done by a trader. "In 1629 Albert Cornelius Ruyl, an agent of the Dutch East India Company, translated the *Gospel of St. Matthew* into Malay and later added *St. Mark*."[48] This was the beginning of a complete Malay Bible, which was completed in 1735. "Netherlands traders were also responsible for the beginning of translation into Formosan Chinese (1661) and into Sinhalese (1739). In the New World, John Eliot, working among the Mohican Indians, prepared the first version in any North American Indian tongue (1663); and Danish missionaries translated the New Testament into Eskimo (Greenland) in 1766. A beginning was also made on the languages of India by another Danish missionary, Ziegenbalg, who completed the New Testament in Tamil in 1715."[49]

The work has continued and multiplied. As of 1983 there were 1,763 languages and dialects in which at least one book of the Bible was available. The New Testament has been translated into 551 tongues, the complete Bible into 279. Dr. E. R. Wendland of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa has been part of a translation team which has rendered the entire Scriptures into Chewa and the New Testament into Tonga.

It has been pointed out, perhaps a bit simplistically, that while Catholic missionaries tried to bring people into the church so that they could learn the gospel, Protestants of Europe and North America sent the gospel to nations in order that the church might be born among them. This really did happen in Korea. Korea was not opened to westerners until 1882, but two Gospels had been translated into Korean and smuggled across the Manchurian border in quantity for some time before 1882. When western missionaries were finally admitted to Korea, they found a considerable number of Christians in Seoul, awaiting baptism. They had been converted by those smuggled Gospels.

---

[46] *Ibid*. p 361.
[47] See Jeske, John C., "New International Version Completed," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly,* Vol 75, No 4 (October 1978), pp 292-305.
[48] Greenslade, p 385.
[49] *Ibid.*

We might think of Bible Societies as an invention of the Great Mission Century, the 19th. The first such undertaking was, however, sponsored in the early 18th century by Baron Hildebrand von Canstein. In 1710 he underwrote the Canstein Bible Institute at Halle, joining it with the other institutions of August Hermann Francke in that city. The purpose of this institute was to place Bibles in the hands of those who could not afford to purchase them.

Other German societies which grew out of the Awakening and were instructed by von Canstein's example were the Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft at Basel (1780), the Priviligierte Wuerttembergische Bibelanstalt at Stuttgart (1812), and the Preussische/Saechsische Hauptbibelgesellschaft of Berlin and Dresden (1814).

In England, the Naval and Military Bible Society was founded in 1780 for the purpose of distributing Scriptures among soldiers and sailors. The French Bible Society was founded in London in 1792, a safer base of operations just then than anywhere in revolutionary France. The great British and Foreign Bible Society was established in 1804, the American Bible Society in 1816. The field agents, the frontline soldiers of these organizations, were, and in many places still are, the colporteurs. "The colporteur...is usually a native of the country, a man of humble origin but of deep personal conviction; he goes out alone, day by day, with his bag of books, often uncertain of his reception....Broadly speaking, it has been the colporteur who has carried the main burden in Muslim countries and in the Far East."[50]

A Russian Bible Society was organized in 1812 with the Czar's approval, but it was dissolved 14 years later when he withdrew his patronage. In Greece the authorities of the Orthodox Church first welcomed the Bible Society movement wholeheartedly, but the Greek constitution of 1911 forbade the use of Scripture in modern Greek. At least two popes of the 19th century resisted the movement, and one of them had to deal with Scottish smugglers at Leghorn who were bringing Bibles into Italy for the Waldensians. An Arabic translation which had been prepared by Jesuits in Beirut was, however, distributed by Bible Society people, and more recently the Vatican has taken a more tolerant attitude toward Bible Societies. In fact, it has cooperated in recent translation work.

From the anonymous translators of the *Septuagint* to the committees of the *New International Version,* from Bede to Coverdale, from Jerome to Canstein, the translators and distributors of the Word of God are some of the real heroes of church history. It is said that Ambrose of Milan liked to "insert a word of thanksgiving for translators and grammarians" into the litany of his church. We would do well to imitate him in this thanksgiving. We would do well to emulate them in their zeal for making plain the Word of God.

V. The Authority Of Scripture

What do we mean with the hermeneutical maxim that we must interpret the Bible as a sacred scripture? We mean that it is the Word of God, that all its words are God-breathed, that these words of the Spirit of Truth are self-evidently true and without error, that central to the Scriptures is the message of Christ the Savior, and that these Scriptures must be understood according to the law-gospel principle.

This approach to the Bible was not invented by the Lutheran Reformation and Lutheran orthodoxy. It was, rather, rediscovered, emphasized, and articulated in the 16th and 17th centuries in a more consistent way than it had ever been before. Origen had said that "Christ is the inner principle of Scripture and only those with the Spirit of Christ can understand Scripture,"[51] but he had gloried in gnosis more than in the gospel of the Crucified. Augustine regarded the Old Testament as christocentric and tried to practice his conviction that "the expositor is to get the meaning out of the Bible, not bring a meaning to it,"[52] but we know that in the crunch he was too ready to submit to the authority of the church: *"Roma locuta, causes finita*." Gregory the Great wanted to operate with the principle that the Bible's single subject is the revelation of God in Christ, but we know that he more than anyone else introduced Origen's allegories to the western church.

---

[50] *Ibid*., pp 399f.
[51] Ramm, Bernard, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: W.A. Wilde, 1956), p 32.
[52] *Ibid.*

Luther's view

For Luther the Bible was the only authority. "To say that the church takes precedence over the Bible because (the church) existed before the canon of the Scriptures was complete is as foolish as if you would hold John the Baptist in greater honor than Christ because of John's temporal precedence over Christ."[53] The truly revolutionary thing which Luther did at Leipzig and Worms was to place the Scriptures over the church and the individual conscience to the exclusion of popes and councils. The Lutheran Confessions sounded the same note: "We believe, teach and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with all teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament alone."[54]

Calvin and other Protestants wanted to follow the same principle, and they said so. This, and not the so-called "right of private interpretation" which was soon perverted into an anarchic subjectivism, is the true "Protestant principle" regarding the interpretation of the Bible. Article 6 of the Church of England's *Thirty-nine Articles* declared: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary for salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation."[55]

Subversive legalism

Before we leave the reformers it is necessary to say that nothing undermines the power of the gospel and therefore the authority of the Word so much as does any form of legalism. And Calvin did regard the Bible as a legal document. He and his spiritual heirs have used the Scriptures as the legal basis for forms of church government, ideals of civil government, a sabbatarian doctrine of Sunday, views of the sacraments which stress obedience rather than grace, and a confusion of the functions of church and state. Anyone who seeks to establish a theocracy on the basis of the Scriptures must operate with the Bible as a book of laws, to the detriment of the evangel. Bearing the name Lutheran does not, of course, guarantee an immunity to legalism.

Subversive subjectivism

Almost at once, in the years following 1517, an unwholesome subjectivism or anthropocentricity began to undercut the *sola Scriptura* principle. The devil, who taught people to concentrate on their own works and attitudes under the papacy, was ready to teach people to concentrate on their own feelings and responses outside the papacy. Karlstadt spoke of a special illumination through which alone the Scriptures are truly efficacious. Schwenckfeld denied the power of the Scriptures to produce spiritual life in man. They can only be properly understood, he said, by one who has experienced spiritual renewal apart from them. For Sebastian Franck "the Scriptures are in the last analysis the human letter as contrasted with the divine Spirit."[56] He believed that the Holy Spirit is a natural possession of man: "The light is already kindled in the lantern of our hearts, and whosoever would but allow this flame to burn, rather than to prefer the lamp of the flesh [the Bible]..., would not be forced to look for it in heaven, for the Word is in us."[57] In the next generation Theobald Thamer (d.1569) taught that "the original revelation of God lies in conscience and nature. The Bible is the truth only where it agrees with both of these."[58]

---

[53] Neve, J. L., *A History of Christian Thought,* Vol 1 (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1943), p 237.
[54] Formula of Concord, Epitome, Introduction, 1; *Conocordia Triglotta*, 777.
[55] Schaff, Philip, *Creeds of Christendom,* Vol III, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds, with Translations* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1919), p 489ff.
[56] Neve, J. L., *A History of Christian Thought,* Vol 2, *History of Protestant Theology,* by O.W. Heick (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1946), p 43.
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] *Ibid*, p 44.

This rejection of the written Word in favor of a personal inner illumination found its most famous exponent and greatest following in the 17th century, in England. George Fox (1624-1691) began to receive mystical revelations when he was 19 years old. The voice of God, he said, told him to be directed by the "inner light" rather than by Scripture. "He described his experience as coming to him while he waited in an absolutely calm frame of mind," and the revelation "was signaled by violent physical agitation or, as he called it, 'quaking.'"[59] Thus he and his Society of Friends came to be known as Quakers.

Meanwhile, back in Germany, zealous Christians who wanted to see the fruits of right teaching in their lives and in the lives of their fellow Christians developed an approach to the Christian life which came to be known as Pietism. With regard to the Bible, their emphasis was away from the objective Word and toward the individual's subjective feeling and reaction toward the Word. Their spiritual descendants are still with us under a variety of names and movements. A striking example of where the emphasis on subjective Christian experience at the expense of the objective Word leads is the 19th century dogmatician Schleiermacher. He wrote a four-volume dogmatics without basing a single one of his fundamental theses on Scripture. He said: "Not he has religion who believes in a Holy Scripture, but he who needs no Scripture and himself might be able to make one."[60]

Needless to say, where the objective truth of the Word is deprecated, objective justification will be lost sight of, the objective truth of the resurrection will recede in importance, the objective validity of the sacraments and the objective power of the gospel in the sacraments will be forgotten. The end result will be that a pan-protestant enthusiasm replaces evangelical truth.

Subversive Catholicism

But if subjectivism with its emphasis on the individual's reaction subverts the place of the Word in the church, so does the spirit of Catholicism which regards the Word of Scripture as a coordinate authority rather than the sole authority. In fact, that principle was strong in the West, particularly in Rome's sphere of influence, from the second century onward. Then the authority of the bishop and the traditional rule of faith were pitted against gnosticism, and there was at least as much reliance on those authorities in coping with the soul-destroying errors of the speculative systems as there was on biblical exegesis.

During the Middle Ages there was implicit acceptance of the fathers, the councils, and the pope as authoritative with the Bible. Where the Bible must share authority, however, it does not really have authority at all. It is the Scriptures alone, or it is not the Scriptures at all.

The Fourth Session of the Council of Trent regularized this situation in 1546. This means that the Catholic Bible interpreter "accepts all verses which the church has officially interpreted in the sense in which they have been interpreted....The Catholic Church is the official interpreter of Scripture..., custodian of Scripture."[61] In practical terms, it means that the Catholic Christian does not ask what the Scriptures teach, but what the church (as represented by fathers, councils, and popes) teaches. The Second Vatican Council has not changed that situation. The ancient tradition and the living teaching authority of the church are equally authoritative with the Scriptures.

But this kind of subversion of biblical authority is not limited to the Roman Church. One of the Anglican *Thirty-nine Articles* also assigns to the bishops the authority which Article 6 had earlier given to Scripture. Another so-called Protestant manifestation of this Catholic spirit appeared in the 17th century in Germany. Urging the reunion of all Christian churches on the basis of the things in which they agreed, Calixtus insisted that the early church's rule of faith constituted the real criterion of essential truth. The Ecumenical Creeds were not to be regarded merely as *normae normatae* but as real *normae normantes.*

John Henry Cardinal Newman went so far in his traditionalism as to say that allegorical interpretation and orthodox Christianity would stand or fall together. As we speak of these things and make judgments

[59] Source unknown.
[60] Neve, p 108.
[61] Ramm, pp 40-42.

concerning them, we do not lose sight of the fact that we face the temptation to let Luther, the dogmaticians, the congregational constitution, or the synodical resolution decide. These must not be the ultimate authority, because someday they might be wrong.

Subversive rationalism

Another great foe of biblical authority with which we have to contend and which is probably most obvious to us in our work is rationalism. It has taken the form of many isms goes by many names, has been disguised in various movements but remains in essence the same. It makes human reason the ultimate judge of what the Bible teaches and what is to be believed concerning that teaching. The phenomenon is one of the oldest in the world, for it is embodied in the first recorded false witness of the Father of Lies: "Yea, hath God said?"

What concerns us particularly as we consider "the Bible through the ages" is the development of that lie within the church. The rationalist's approach to Scripture and to Christian doctrine was already there in the apologists of the 2nd century. The method of apologists, medieval scholastics, and some dogmaticians was to argue that certain things which Scripture teaches *must* be true, and to argue that on rational rather than on scriptural grounds. If a new genius could demonstrate that the argument was not that compelling, the next generation of apologists and scholastics was reduced to arguing that it might be true. When still more rational arguments were marshaled against a biblical teaching, it was finally abandoned.

This has happened in the case of inspiration, vicarious atonement, miracles, resurrection, creation, heaven, and hell. It was not sects or schools outside the church setting out to attack the church so much as it was rationalists within the church who approached the Bible with presuppositions which made it unacceptable to believe what could not be supported by experience. Socinianism, deism, humanism, naturalism, criticism, objectivism—all grew up in the circle of baptized Christians and called servants of the Word. Men who had been entrusted by the church with the responsibility of teaching in the church and of teaching the church's teachers forsook the sound hermeneutics of Luther and the relatively sound hermeneutics of Calvin. They did not set out to overthrow the Word and the church and the truth. They did set out to test all things in Scripture by the criteria of rationality and rational ethics. And then they *did* overthrow the Word's authority and robbed the church's faith of its foundation. They did give the lie to God's truth.

As Lutheranism has made Scripture the formal principle and justification the material principle, so Rationalism made reason the formal principle and morality or ethics the material principle. Kant stated philosophically what the Old Adam has always wanted to believe: that man knows better than God and that man can satisfy God. Kant did not invent that with his "Thou canst because 'Thou shalt.'" He only stated it in a way which seemed to be intellectually respectable. And those who tried to defend the Scripture and the Christian doctrine, those who wanted to be apologists for the truth, too often also relied on rational argument rather than on the Word's authority.

Subversive fundamentalism

It seems at times that we are too ready to buy books and borrow ideas from other Christians who also affirm the authority and inspiration of Scripture. We should not forget that the very authority of the Word which we want to uphold is undermined in a very dangerous way when certain fundamentals are insisted upon as necessary for salvation and for fellowship, while other so-called "nonfundamentals" are dismissed as nonessential. This, too, is a form of rationalism—reasoning that some parts of God's Word are less important than others.

Conclusion

We have not named many names or traced all the movements or marked every development in the history of unbelieving criticism. But let us not be fooled into believing that the views espoused, even by people who bear the name Lutheran, are the necessary fruit of modern biblical scholarship. Such expressions as "The Bible is not a manual of theology," "The Bible is a record of religious experience," "The Bible's authority and veracity do not extend beyond the doctrinal," "Not the words but the writers are inspired," "The Bible is not revelation but the record of revelation," and "The Bible is not a science textbook" are at least a hundred years old. The same spirit that produces these views produced such "assured results" of the past as that Acts is unhistorical, that John's Gospel could not have been written in the first century, that Paul was not the author of half his books, that Moses could not have known how to write. In the grace and providence of God certain conclusions of the negative critics of the Old Testament with regard to place names and religious terminology have once again been disproved by the early findings in the recently uncovered royal archives of ancient Ebla.

We should never fail to remember with gratitude that there have always been some men who worked at drawing out the meaning of the Scriptures. What does the Bible actually say? Not what do this age's "assured results" permit it to say, or what is the accepted meaning according to tradition, or what is intellectually respectable? But, as Professor John Meyer used to ask, "What does the text say?" As Dr. Paul Peters used to insist: "Let the prophet speak." As Professor Carl Lawrenz has said: "Do an exegetical study of the issue." This is the single great thing a seminary can do: Take the Word of God on its terms and hear what it says. Then train men who can stand up and say: "This is God's Word. This is what it means. This is what it means for your life."

The kingdom of God comes not with argument and apologetic and appeals to the reasonableness of our confession. The gracious rule of God operates in the lives of sinners by the gospel of forgiveness, by a proclamation based in historical events recorded in the Bible. The truth about God's creating activity is presented factually, not mythically, in Genesis. The truth about Jesus Christ's triumph over death and hell is based on the facts, not the myths, of his resurrection and ascension. The truth of our forgiveness and our eternal hope is rooted in the factual account of what God has done in Christ, as presented in the Bible. We do not argue these things because they are logically necessary. We proclaim them because they are God's truth.