

view Jesus' Last Supper was not a celebration of the Passover,¹ and therefore from the Christian, theological point of view as distinct from the historical, the eucharistic references in Christ's last discourse are better placed within the discourse given at the time of Passover (cf. Jn. 6:4).

The determining of the original historical contexts of Jesus' teaching is bound to be conjectural, but this has not been our real task. We have undertaken to interpret the text of Jn. 6 as it now stands; to determine what its author intended to convey, and not what the words meant at the time they were first uttered. But we must emphasise strongly that this does not mean that John makes use of Christ's words to signify something different and altogether new. As we have tried to show, John has composed this discourse in this way, to teach us that Christ is the bread of life pre-eminently when, as the climax to hearing his heavenly wisdom, we believe in him and eat of the bread of the Eucharist, so that we are united with the source of life by faith and by sacrament together.

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REVELATION IN THE BIBLE²

III IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Hebrew word which the LXX translated with fair consistency by *apokalyp̄tō*, 'reveal,' is *galah*. But its usage is much looser than that of *apokalyp̄tō* in the New Testament. Thanks doubtless to the vogue of apocalyptic literature, Daniel, Enoch, Jubilees, etc., in the last two centuries B.C., *apokalyp̄tō* as used in the New Testament is a strongly religious word; rather like the English 'revelation,' which can of course be used in profane or secular contexts, but whose proper field is generally felt to be the religious. Certainly *apokalyp̄tō*, when used in the active voice in the New Testament, always has God, Father, Son, Christ, or Holy Ghost for its subject; and in the passive its subject is usually though not invariably something religious.

The case is quite different in the Old Testament. There *galah* is a neutral word, equally at home in a secular or sacred context. Like the English 'disclose' or 'uncover' it can be applied to sacred or profane objects, and have human or divine subjects indifferently. A thing

¹ cf. Jn. 18:28

² cf. *Scripture* 1963, pp. 1-6; 103-9

which people frequently uncover in the Old Testament, whether God or men, is somebody else's ear. In properly revelational contexts God discloses either Himself, as at Bethel to Jacob (Gen. 35:7) or at Silo to Samuel (1 Sam. 3:21); or His glory, His arm, His word, His justice. Other things that are disclosed or uncovered in variously religious contexts are deep places (Job 12:22), iniquity (20:27), the gates of death (38:17)—though in this latter case it is a question rather of what has *not* been revealed or disclosed—and blood (Is. 26:21). Often being uncovered in social, legal and moral contexts are nakedness and shame, for instance in marriage legislation (e.g. Lev. 18:6 and *passim*). But this phrase also occurs in a transferred sense in prophecies of divine wrath and judgment, thus leading up to the New Testament idea we have already observed of ultimate revelation all round, when God (or at least His justice) stands revealed to us and we to Him.¹

The commonest revelation word in the Old Testament is in fact 'word,' *dabar*, as in the phrase 'the word of the Lord came unto X'; perhaps the verb '*amar*, 'say' is more common, and 'God said' more often occurs than 'God spoke' or 'the word of the Lord came.' I confess I have not troubled to investigate, and it is a point of little significance. Also very common, and parallel to divine communication by speech, is communication by sight. God appeared to people and showed them things, visions, His glory, etc. The verb used is various parts of *ra'ah*, 'see.'

We saw that in the New Testament *apokalyptō* and *phaneroō* were both climax words, and that the climaxes of which they are used are exclusively New Testament climaxes, namely the restoration of all things in Christ, whether at his first advent or his second.² And this impression, that revelation in its most proper religious sense is really a New Testament value, is borne out, I consider, by an examination of the Old. There is indeed constant revelation going on in the Old Testament; God speaks in it far oftener and at much greater length than in the New. Again, He frequently manifests His glory; and knowledge of the Lord undoubtedly grows by His revelation, and understanding of His will and hope in His promises. But the fact of revelation itself seems to be theologically insignificant and colourless; it is simply the fact of God communicating with men, telling them a lot of things; a wonderful fact, of course, but liable to be taken for granted, so that whenever He kept silent for an unusual length of time, it was remarked on that 'the word of the Lord was rare in those days' (1 Sam. 3:1), and God threatens to withdraw His word as He might threaten drought or famine (Am. 8:11). It was wonderful, but

¹ *Scripture* 1963, p. 5

² *ibid.*, p. 4

theologically as neutral as ESP, second sight in the Isle of Skye, or leprechauns in Ireland. In the New Testament, on the other hand, the concentrated theological value of revelation is that God communicates Himself, not things, to men ; he utters but one thing, His eternal consubstantial Word ; He clinches all that has gone before in a final and irrevocable giving of Himself to men and taking of men to Himself. All this is involved in the fact of New Testament revelation, it is not just what that revelation is about.

There are, however, two things about Old Testament revelation that are theologically significant. The first is the affinity of its modes or mechanics—how it was done—with the religious practices of the pagan world. I have already suggested that all these modes were resumed in the New Testament as part of the outpouring of the Spirit.¹ The second thing is the uniqueness of Old Testament revelation, its absolute non-affinity with anything pagan, in its connection with—not to say control of—history.

Its affinity with pagan practices

Revelation by a searching of the Scriptures, such as we at least suspected to be the primary New Testament means, cannot be the primary Old Testament means, since it presupposes sacred writings. But it is now commonly suggested by exegetes that some such midrashic technique controls the composition of some of the later books—Daniel, for example, or in quite another genre Wisdom. For pagan analogues we need only mention the Sibylline Books or the Sortes Virgilianae.

The outstanding mode of revelation in the Old Testament was of course prophecy. That this was not a unique Israelite phenomenon the Bible itself informs us, when it talks not only about false prophets but also about prophets of Baal. And in any case seers and prophets, like Teiresias, were almost hackneyed features of other ancient cultures. And finally most of the various prophetic techniques exhibited in the Bible—seizure by the spirit, symbolic actions of a more or less grotesque sort, visions, etc.—are all to be paralleled not only in the New Testament as we have seen, but also in the pagan world.

Besides such pneumatic modes of revelation, the pagan world also used mechanical techniques of augury and divination. So did the Israelites ; there was the means of consulting the Lord by Urim and Thummim, whatever precisely they were—probably something like a pair of dice, a sort of heads or tails (1 Sam. 14:38ff.). There was consultation by an ephod, whatever that was ; and unlike Urim and

¹ *Scripture* 1963, p. 108

Thummim it came to be frowned on (Jg. 8:27). To consult the Lord by such means seems originally to have been the chief function of levitical priests (ibid. 17:5 ; 18:5). Joseph had a cup in which he divined (Gen. 44:5). Jonathan took an omen from the Philistines (I Sam. 14:8ff.), as Gedeon had done from the Madianites, in addition to the signs he sought in the fleece (Jg. 7:9ff. ; 6:36ff.). There were doubtless other methods that are not indicated ; at least, something must lie behind such phrases as ' God said to Abraham, Take your son, your only son Isaac . . .' (Gen. 22:2). Sometimes the manner of the divine communication is indicated—a vision or a dream. Where it is not I suggest that in these early stories some manner of divination may be assumed.

For all ancient peoples, and I imagine it is still true for peoples of comparable culture, some form of divination technique, of communication with the divine, was the merest necessity of life ; life simply could not continue if one had no means of finding out what the gods intended, what they had in store for men, how this or that problem or dispute should be solved in accordance with their decrees. Without divination wars could not be fought, nor houses built, nor crops sown, nor girls married.

The interesting thing, to my mind, is that not only did Israel share these techniques with neighbouring peoples—that was to be expected ; but that God was willing to co-operate with them in revealing Himself to and in Israel. Revelation, as the manuals define it, is a divine act, and therefore is not subject to any human skills or pressures as antecedent conditions of its being granted us. And yet we can talk about divination techniques, and even about prophetic techniques, developed by men in their ' feeling after God ' (Ac. 17:27) ; and we can see in the Scriptures how these techniques were often as it were extrinsically authenticated or validated by God in His entirely gracious and free decision to reveal Himself or His will. For all we know He may have done the same outside Israel, and used pagan oracles such as Delphi to communicate genuine revelations to men. The inference I would draw from these affinities between the techniques of Israelite and gentile communication with the divine, and from God's condescension towards them, certainly in Israel and possibly among the nations, is that from the very beginning of His unique revelation to Israel it was potentially adapted to and designed for all nations. From the human side revelation in Israel developed out of a common and universal human need of divine grace.

Its uniqueness and non-affinity with pagan phenomena

But though salvation is for all men and adapted to their common

human need, it is *from* the Jews alone (Jn. 4:22). Israelite revelation is therefore unique, the unique instrument of universal salvation, and its uniqueness lies in its sustained connection with Israelite history. It is a kind of divine running commentary on the nation's history, pointing its meaning, clarifying its purpose. This historical connection is reflected in the development of the modes of revelation themselves. All the modes I have indicated flourished side by side in the pagan Greek and Semitic world; the pneumatic, mantic or ecstatic, together with the taking of omens and auspices by various 'mechanical' devices, whether the examination of entrails or the tossing of dice.

But in Israel there is a progressive development. In early times the cruder mechanical devices of divination prevail, some accepted as proper, like Urim and Thummim, others frowned on as being associated with idolatrous cults, like Gedeon's ephod and the wizards and soothsayers and necromancers whom Saul suppressed (1 Sam. 28:3). But we see cases of some things that were originally tolerated and later banned, like the brazen serpent in the temple (2 Kg. 18:4), and we may suspect the same to have been the case with the ephod and even perhaps with the soothsayers. We see Urim and Thummim become obsolete and finally forgotten as a technique (1 Esd. 2:63). Such devices are replaced by the pneumatic techniques of prophecy—which to begin with are banal and crude enough, bands of prophets dancing, the seer consulted about strayed donkeys (1 Sam. 9:6; 10:10), but which develop into the great inspired utterances of the 'writing' prophets. And then, after it had carried Israel through the valley of the shadow of Babylonian death, and assisted at the rebirth of the nation, even prophecy falls into disrepute (Zach. 13:3ff.), and is finally forgotten (1 Mac. 4:46), being replaced by the much less spectacular and evident mode of revelation by midrashic reflection on Scripture.

The logic of this development—which in sketching I have of necessity oversimplified—is, I think, clear. God's revelation to Israel is part of His control of Israel's history; to begin with, when it was simply a matter of the destiny of an individual patriarch, or of establishing the law which is to govern the people's life in the land, the 'mechanical' means of giving answers at local shrines—simple yes or no answers to simple questions propounded—were on the whole sufficient. But such means were clearly not sufficient for doing what the prophets were sent to do, for recalling God's people to a true sense of His holiness and their moral responsibilities, and for explaining their fate in the contemporary power struggle of empires, in terms of their apostasy and repentance and God's wrath and mercy. Finally, when the prophetic tradition had firmly established Judaic religion after the exile, scope for further prophecy was limited; the lines of the sacred

history were too definitely drawn for further prophecy to be much needed.

But when the time of fulfilment came, all these modes of revelation came alive once more, only to subside again when the need for them was past. So in the second century Church prophecy seems to have become as suspect as it had been in the time referred to by Zacharias. And quite rightly : after the time of revelation in the apostolic Church, whose now universal mission is as it were authenticated by the *anakephalaiōsis* of all the Old Testament modes of revelation, with their affinity to things pagan, the Church no longer had any need of the charisms for the most part, because its possession of revelation was henceforth sufficiently ensured by its divinely instituted but non-charismatic hierarchy.

No similar historical development is to be observed in the divination techniques of pagan cultures ; instead, they all co-exist happily together as long as pagan society feels the need for communicating with the gods, because there is no question of their oracles controlling a significant development of history. They *are*, of course, nearly always concerned with concrete issues, often political, as Hebrew prophecy was ; but not with any rhyme or reason such as is demanded of a grasp of history. The purposes of the pagan gods in their dealings with men are inscrutable—for the very good reason, ultimately, that they are not there.

The purposes of Israel's God, on the other hand, are very definitely there. And though His ways are unsearchable, the intention of revelation is to render them to some extent scrutable in the nation's history. It is in that history that God's purposes take shape. It is thus a dramatic history, it has a plot, and it leads up to a climax—a climax of final revelation.

(concluded)

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A metaphor is illuminative only for a certain audience. To tell a civilised audience that a certain mountain is as tall as the Empire State building would convey new knowledge. The same metaphor would be ineffective in speaking to natives in the heart of the Dark Continent. Therefore in reading any historical document, removed from us by centuries, we must carefully reconstruct the 'backdrop' of any metaphor used in the document, if we are to reach the depth of meaning intended by the author.