

OUR LORD'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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I SAY "Old Testament" in the interests of strict accuracy; but I should rather be inclined to speak more generally, and say, "Our Lord's use of the Scriptures," as indicating that portion of God's revelation of Himself which is enshrined in literature—in a book or books.

We too have for our use the same sacred writings that He had, though we supplement them by the further writings which are our record of Him, His deeds and His words. We, in the main, have for our instruction, our comfort, our inspiration, as He had, God's word written. It is the authority for our distinctive beliefs; it is part of the business of our ministerial life to read it and to expound it to others; in every generation of Christians from the beginning there are those who have found the support of life and the joy of life in devout reflection on its words.

The reading of the Scriptures and meditation on them, would, I think, without any question, be regarded as an essential part of the genuine Christian life. And so it is a matter of supreme interest for us to consider what the Scriptures were to Him Who is not only our Saviour, but our example; to learn if we can, how He regarded them, how He treated them, how He explained them; which portions of them He preferred to others, on which parts of them He seems to have relied more particularly both for the stay of His own soul and for the proclamation of the Gospel about Himself. To put it in simple and precise terms, it may be helpful to consider our Lord's use of Scripture in private reading and in public teaching, for it is in these respects that we are called in to imitate Him and to carry on His work.

In order the better to appreciate His treatment of the Old Testament, it may be interesting and useful to glance quickly at some of the methods, other than His, which have appeared in the history of the Church.

For instance, we are confronted from the very first by the method of allegorizing. This came into vogue with later Judaism, and we can see clear traces, in the writings of St. Paul, that it was adopted by the earliest Christian teachers. We see it in his reference (1 Cor. x. 4) to Christ as the rock which was said to have followed the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings, in his interpretation of the law and the earthly Jerusalem, in terms of Hagar and Ishmael (Gal. iv. 21-31). What was the purpose, and the meaning of this purpose, of allegorization? It was based on the conception of the essential spiritual worth of every part of the Old Testament, on the view that even those parts of it which seemed most matter of fact, most unsuitable for edification, were still edifying, if you only

had the right key to unlock their contents. It was really the outcome of a right instinct, and it shows us, too, how in the earliest times the interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, were free from any slavish literalness, how they moved in an air of what might be called exegetical freedom.

It was the Old Testament, so interpreted, that had fulfilled a work of world evangelization. We remember how the Jews of the Dispersion took it to the Gentile world. The Gentiles would seem to have been little impressed by the ceremonial and legal aspects of the book; but they appear to have been strongly convinced by what one may call its devotional and prophetic side. And it was in the ranks of those who had been proselytes to Judaism that the apostles and evangelists of Christianity found their most ready converts. We may indeed say that it is not very probable that the Old Testament alone would have won the Greek and the Roman world; but we may legitimately wonder whether the Gospel itself would not have been gravely hampered in its work of conversion, apart from its union with the Old Testament Scriptures.

Let us bear in mind clearly how important and how necessary, at the time, this method of allegorizing was. There is much in the Old Testament that seems, when taken as it stands, not very edifying; the slaughter of the Canaanites, the murder of Agag and his family by Samuel, the slaying of Uzzah for laying his hand on the Ark, and many other episodes that will occur to the recollection of the careful reader. The actions themselves do not seem defensible, and the God Who could permit, and even enjoin them, does not seem a very worthy or adorable person. We see clear evidence of this point of view in the attitude of Marcion. We are not concerned here with his doctrinal position as a whole, but with his attitude to the Old Testament. Following, and, exaggerating, St. Paul's antithesis between law and gospel, works and grace, flesh and spirit, Marcion suspected and disliked everything Jewish. He declined to allegorize the Old Testament and so to find it edifying. He took everything in it literally, as meaning exactly what it said, and meaning nothing more. He said that the God of the Jews, depicted in their Scriptures, was one of stern justice, and therefore anger, contentiousness and unmercifulness—the very opposite of the God and Father revealed by Jesus Christ. He made a complete antithesis between the "Just God" of Judaism and the "good" God of Christianity. He called the "Just" God of Judaism the World Maker, with the inference that the world He had made was not a very satisfactory place.

We seem to have a modern echo of this Marcionite conception in Mr. H. G. Wells' imagination of the toiling God who works with intractable material out of which He evolves a creation only as good as He can make it out of the very indifferent world stuff at His disposal.

Marcion's drastic criticism is interesting because it is a symptom of the uneasiness and restiveness felt by earnest believers with regard to the less spiritual parts of the Old Testament, the moral

difficulties which it raised, and its obsolete moods of faith. His proposed solution of the difficulty was to reject the book absolutely, to cut Christianity free from its Jewish origins. But the Church could not accept this; the book had the sanction of Christ and His Apostles. It must be retained and it must be explained in some such way as to make it acceptable to the enlightened moral consciousness. And so, as a matter of fact, the Church was pushed still farther down the somewhat slippery slope of allegorism.

When we come to the work of Origen of Alexandria we find this reduced to a consistent and well-ordered system. In his *First Principles* he sketched the system of interpretation that is usually associated with his name.

Every Scripture, he said, had three meanings :

- (i) The historical and grammatical.
- (ii) The moral.
- (iii) The spiritual.

The first of these was the food for beginners only, milk for babes. But by the third method, the mature Christian was taught to "spiritualize" any text that caused him any difficulty. By the application of each, or all, of these methods, the most unpromising and unlikely text in the Old Testament could be made to yield a truly Christian meaning, and so, the whole Bible, from Genesis to Malachi, could be regarded as speaking with one voice.

This method of exegesis has lasted for centuries, and, I dare say, can still be found existing in our midst. It always seems to me that an extreme instance of it is the fondness of mediæval Commentators for dwelling on the Canticles, the Song of Songs, that highly realistic love poem, and finding in it an appropriate expression for the sentiments of Christ the Bridegroom and the Church His Bride.

The system has one advantage, and it has very considerable disadvantages. It has its good side in the attempt to give a value to every part of Scripture and to make it profitable for Christian usage. The disadvantages are, that it is artificial and unreal. It wrests Scripture away from its primary intention. By means of it, each text becomes a peg on which to hang various aspects of the truth, and so, each text might mean anything or everything according to the personal estimate or idiosyncrasy of its expositor. It tends to become subjective and fanciful. It was an excellent attempt to cope with a real difficulty, but it is not the method by which the Bible is going to be commended to thoughtful and instructed men.

The fact that the old difficulty is still with us is seen in the rise of Fundamentalism in America. Fundamentalism is simply the stark, unrelieved expression of an attitude with which I imagine that many people here in England are in more or less complete sympathy. It has been ridiculed, but it is not wholly ridiculous. It is simply the expression of an intense need for authority and certainty, of a very real fear lest the foundations of religion should be destroyed; a conviction that there must somewhere be an infallible authority to say to us: "Thus saith the Lord." It rises from

the pathetically earnest desire to emerge from fears and uncertainties, to arrive at some certitude as to the religious worth and value of the Old Testament.

In the light of this history and of all these recurring perplexities, it will now be almost a relief, and certainly a help, to sit quietly at the feet of the Master. He had the same Old Testament that we have. Was it to Him a source of perplexity, or was it a help and a joy? We know the answer to that question. Can we learn, then, anything about the way in which He treated it, the way He regarded it, the way He read it, that so it may become to us something of what it was to Him?

We approach this inquiry as Christian men; that is, men who reverently regard Christ as the Divinely sent Saviour of the world, God's own Son, Himself Divine. It may be that the Definition of Chalcedon with its doctrine of One Person and two Natures has not said the last word in answer to the question: "What think ye of Christ?" and we know that attempts have been made, and are still being made, to explore and to express that central mystery of His Person which we call the Self-consciousness of Jesus. Many of these attempts are so limited by the psychological and philosophical prepossessions with which their respective authors approach the inquiry, that they do not as a matter of fact carry us very far. It may be admitted, too, that the secret of Christ's personality is possibly a mystery that eludes our grasp; but it may reasonably be claimed that we are carried a little nearer to the heart of it—in other words, we are enabled to realize something about His thoughts and His outlook, if we consider His use of the Old Testament, the particular parts of it that He quoted, the occasions on which He quoted them, the way in which He used them—what He saw in them. There may be, there must be, in Him much that transcends our powers of understanding; but His use of the Old Testament cannot but reveal to us something of what He thought about God, about Himself and about His work.

This subject—His use of the Old Testament—is so large that we can only hope to touch on some of the outstanding aspects of it.

We can, in the first place, indicate generally what He as a Jewish child, brought up in a religious and devout Jewish home, would be enabled to know about the Scriptures.

We can, then, consider the actual occasions on which our records indicate that He used the Scriptures. Here we must be on our guard against illegitimate inferences, against any misuse of the argument from silence. It does not follow of necessity—especially when we consider the fragmentary nature of our records, that if there should be parts of the Old Testament to which He makes no allusion at all, that He disapproved or, as we should say, had no use for that part; but we can, I think, safely infer from His recorded quotations what parts of the Old Testament made the strongest appeal to Him; what were the parts of it which He used and on which He preferred to dwell; and, further, we can form some idea how He used it; and this, more especially when we consider His

treatment of some of the controversial questions by which He was confronted, questions about His own relation to the Law and the Temple, His own claims and His own work.

It may perhaps give point to what I am trying to say if I put at once the conclusions at which I shall arrive, even now, at the beginning, before I put before you any of the detailed considerations on which they rest.

I think we may say that He handles the Scriptures in a way peculiarly His own—quite free from traditional methods, from formalism, from Rabbinical interpretation. He treats them with the spirituality and the freedom of a Son, walking at liberty in His Father's House. In His hands, as Harnack says of His relation to the Old Testament: ¹ "Even its dross was changed into gold; its hidden treasures were brought forth; and, while the earthly and the transitory were recognized as the symbols of the heavenly and eternal, there rose up a world of blessings, of holy ordinances, and of sure grace prepared by God from eternity." To somewhat the same effect Dr. Headlam says: "He is the great discoverer, who had not a relative, but an absolute insight. His teaching had its origin in the Old Testament, but continually transcends and transforms it, even when it reproduces the form of it." In other words, our Lord not only approves the Old Testament, but He improves it. It was this unique attitude of His that impressed so powerfully the minds of His hearers, compelling them to say that "He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. vii. 29).

We may also say, I think, that in the Divine Library of the Old Testament, He had His own preferences, a Bible, as we might say, within a Bible. In certain instances, as we know, He criticized the teaching of the Old Testament, and set it aside, either indirectly by His silence, or directly by His own personal authority. And yet, in the main, the soul of the Old Testament, the goal and purpose of it, were accepted by Him as God's Voice, and God's way of life. He interpreted it, as I think we may reverently claim to do also, in the light of His own consciousness of Sonship; His conviction that the God whose voice He heard as a Father's voice in His own heart, was the same God who to earlier generations of men had spoken in such tones as they were able to understand, leading them onward by their hand in the infancy of the world's spiritual life.

Returning, then, for a moment, to the history of our Lord, let us recall the circumstances in which He would come to know the Scriptures. (1) We allow, to the full, for the influences of what must have been an intensely religious home. (2) We remember that in early childhood a Jewish boy was taught the Shema or Creed: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One" (Deut. vi. 4). (3) We know that at the age of six the formal education of boys began, when they entered the "House of the Book," that is, the Bible, and were taught by an official of the Synagogue. It has been said that in the education of children, the Hebrews were *facile princeps* among

¹ *History of Dogma*, I, 42.

the nations of antiquity. There was no controversy for them about the place of religion in education ; the two were one. (4) At the age of twelve, the Hebrew boy became a " Son of the Law," and along with certain other privileges and duties, was expected to accompany his elders to the various feasts celebrated at Jerusalem. In connection with this episode in the life of Jesus, we have an interesting sidelight on His knowledge of the Scriptures ; the questions He asked, the docility of His demeanour—the amazement caused to the Rabbinical teachers by " His understanding and His answers." On this, the first occasion of contact between Jesus and the Scribes, what He knew and understood of the Scriptures aroused both their attention and their respect.

To understand the Scriptures requires thought ; and—for most of us—real thought needs something of seclusion and retirement. Here, I can only remind you, in passing, of the constant habit of Jesus to retire into seclusion for meditation and prayer. We may reasonably infer that amongst the subjects of His meditation the truths conveyed by the written word would have an important place.

And so learning, reading, thinking, praying, Jesus grew to manhood. I have no time now to make detailed reference to the circumstances of His call to public ministry on the occasion of His baptism by John in the Jordan, or to sketch even in outline the religious and social environment into which He entered. I must limit myself strictly to this immediate question of His relation to the Scriptures and His use of them.

What do we learn from the Gospel records as to His actual use of the Scriptures, so far as His recorded quotations provide us with information ? My answer to this question can only be by way of suggestion, leaving to my readers the investigation, if they are sufficiently interested, of detailed references.

We know, from His recorded words, how the great outstanding personalities of the Old Testament appealed to Him ; Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Lot's wife, Moses, David, Solomon, the queen of Sheba, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah and others of the prophets. Beside these historical characters, we know that His mind ranged freely over Deuteronomy, the Prophets and the Psalms. A computation has been made by the late Dr. Moulton in his essay contributed to the *Cambridge Biblical Essays* (p. 475) that in the New Testament generally 25 per cent of the Old Testament quotations are from the Pentateuch, 50 per cent are from the Prophets (including Daniel), 20 per cent from the Psalms, while about 5 per cent are from other parts of the Old Testament. I think it would be found, on examination, that our Lord's own quotations conform, in the main, to these proportions.

It will be remembered that for the purpose of this investigation we have to distinguish carefully between our Lord's quotations and those which the evangelists themselves make in reference to Him. Their usage is by no means His. The compiler of the First Gospel, for example, applies Old Testament passages to Christ, in a way

of which we have no example in the Master's own recorded words.¹

May I now recall to your recollection one or two—and only one or two—instances of our Lord's appeal to the Old Testament and use of its words, with reference to some of the great outstanding problems, showing how He found in its words the expression of permanent and abiding truth.

(i) Take, for example, the question of abiding interest ; that of resurrection and the immortality of the Soul. This is an interesting occasion, because, on it Jesus confidently charged His opponents with ignorance of the very Scriptures to which they so confidently appealed. They tried to pose Him, by a question as to the ultimate position of a woman, who, as the law enjoined, had had seven brothers for her successive husbands. He quoted, in reply, the passage from Exodus iii. 6, 16, the passage, known as " the Bush " : " I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living " (Matt. xxii. 32). He bases His argument for the eternal life on a God who Himself lives and who will not allow His children to die, and so He placed the argument for the immortality of the Soul on the only sure foundation on which we ourselves can confidently rest it to-day ; and He discovered that foundation in the revelation recorded in the Book of Exodus.

(ii) Take again the question of recurring interest in the religious life, the question of altar and of sacrifice. We know that in the time of our Lord, sacrifice was confined to the central sanctuary of the Temple. We also know that in His time the whole system of Temple worship was attended by extortion and the gravest abuses. He did not scruple to describe it as " a den of robbers " (Mark xi. 17), an expression which He took from the words of Jeremiah vii. 11 : " Is this house which is called by my Name, become a den of robbers in your eyes ? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, saith the Lord." The worst feature was that the bargaining of the money-changers and the noise of the animals made worship impossible in the courts of the Temple set apart for the Gentiles. This was the only part of the sacred precincts into which the Gentile stranger could enter, and it was here that " greedy and unscrupulous traders " enriched themselves at the cost of those who came to offer their sacrifices to God. The other quotation which our Lord used on this same occasion makes it clear that He did not primarily regard the Temple as a place for sacrifice, but as a house of prayer, not for the Jews only, but for all men. He quotes the words of Isaiah lvi. 7 : " Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all peoples." Here, He saw to the very heart of the true spiritual situation and He chose the appropriate words of prophecy to express the exact truth.

(iii) It may indeed be pointed out that after cleansing certain lepers He bade them show themselves to the priest and offer the accustomed sacrifice (Mark i. 44 ; cf. Luke xvii. 11). But this was

¹ Cf. Matt. ii. 15, " Out of Egypt," and occasions when " that it might be fulfilled " occur.

probably in conformity with the social and sanitary legislation of the age, and, not with any particular emphasis on sacrifice as such.

(iv) It is true too that He kept the Feast of the Passover with His disciples, though it is open to question whether the Last Supper in the Upper Room was the Passover meal. If we accept the testimony of the writer of the Fourth Gospel, it certainly was not. But, in any case, His mind was not fixed on this. We see the drift of His thought rather in the passage where He says that a man should defer offering his gift at the altar till he has become reconciled to his brother (Matt. v. 24); in the passage in which He forbids men to excuse themselves from the obligations of filial piety, on the ground that their money is Corban, a gift offered to the temple (Mark vii. 11); in the interview with the Scribe (Mark xii. 28 ff.) who declared that to love God wholly, and one's neighbour as oneself, is "much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices," and so evoked the words of commendation from Christ: "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." These passages show that our Lord turned away from that sacrificial system which had usurped the highest place in Jewish religion and preferred to dwell on considerations that were purely ethical.

I have only time now to hint quickly at one other aspect of His use of the Old Testament. We see in the Temptation narrative how in the words of Deuteronomy and the Psalmist He found the answer to the suggestions of the evil one. We see in the Sermon on the Mount the way in which His principles of action transcended and superseded the enactments of the earlier law. We see, in the description of the walk to Emmaus (Luke xxiv. 27), how He indicated that the Christ, crucified, was the fulfilment of Old Testament anticipation. We see how (Luke xxii. 37) He claimed to fulfil in His suffering and humiliation, the rôle of the suffering servant of Jehovah: "And he was reckoned with transgressors" (Isaiah liii. 12).

These references, and hints at further possible references, show that even when Jesus transcended the older revelation, He still emphasized and preserved the religious value of it. He put the prophets above the Law, and He interpreted the Law in the spirit of a prophet.¹ In His interpretation of the Old Testament, literalism, verbal inspiration, allegory find no support. It has been said that by the process of allegorizing every man seeks in the Bible his own dogmas—and finds them. It is possible to read the Old Testament in this way, and it has been done; just as the Greeks allegorized Homer, or, as we are told, reformed Hinduism interprets by Glosses the sacred books of the Hindu religions. But we find no trace of such servile letter worship in Jesus. He nourished His soul on the Old Testament, and yet, He has, not without reason, been called "its first critic." If the Old Testament is to be saved for the purpose of religious faith and religious life, it must be as consecrated by His usage, as appropriated by Him who is to us the perfect interpreter of God's mind, the perfect Mediator of God's will.

¹ Cf. Box, in *The People and the Book*, pp. 465, 466.