

Editorial

THE UNITY OF THE BIBLE

IN a day when one of the most marked theological tendencies is a revival of interest in the scriptures of the Old Testament, it is scarcely surprising that a new conception of the fundamental unity of the Bible is manifest on all hands. Gone is the day when it was considered fashionable—and even clever—to dismiss the Old Testament as irrelevant or unnecessary and to set the New Testament over against it in sharp and violent contrast. It is now freely acknowledged that the Old Testament is an essential part of the sacred scriptures. Indeed, a modern writer has pointed out that “strictly speaking, only the Old Testament is ‘the Scriptures,’ while the New Testament brings the good news that now the content of these Scriptures, the meaning of all its words, its Lord and fulfiller, has appeared in the flesh” (Wilhelm Vischer).

Old Testament and New Testament together make up one volume, a fact which is capable of demonstration along a number of different lines. For instance, a unity of structure has been discerned between the two Testaments. The various attempts which have been made to express this fact have sometimes bordered on the extravagant, and perhaps none of them is wholly satisfactory or convincing; yet almost any one of them is sufficient to indicate the broad underlying truth. More than fifty years ago Dr. J. Monro Gibson, in his book *The Unity and Symmetry of the Bible*, followed the line of dividing the Old Testament into four sections, comprising (1) the Pentateuch or Hexateuch, the characteristic of which is *Manifestation*, i.e., the revelation of God in the Law; (2) the Historical Books, which set forth the *Application* of the Law to the nation of Israel; (3) the Poetical Books, making together a volume of *Experience*, showing the results in the life of the people; and (4) the Prophetical Books, a volume of *Outlook*. In the New Testament there is precisely the same sequence: (1) a volume of *Manifestation*, embracing the revelation of our Lord in the four Gospels; (2) of *Application*, comprising the historical book known as the Acts of the Apostles; (3) of *Experience*, namely the Epistles, showing the results of the Gospel in the life of the people; and (4) of *Outlook*, the Apocalypse.

To some, such an arrangement will have an appearance of artificiality. Such will agree that we are on more solid ground when we discern the unity of the Bible in another direction, namely, in the great fundamental themes which are common to both of its parts and which are gradually unfolded through the whole in the form of a progressive revelation. Thus in Old Testament as in New Testament the dominant ideas are those of divine grace and government, election and redemption, righteousness and judgment, sin and atonement, the Church and the Covenant. These are the grand unitive themes which pervade the Scriptures in every part. There is a sense in which the story of the

Bible is one throughout. From beginning to end it is the record of the love of God in action, choosing out a people for Himself, redeeming them from bondage, disciplining them in holiness, and fitting them to become the instrument of His purpose in the world. That, in a word, is the sustained theme which pursues its way through the pages of the living oracles, from Genesis to Revelation.

Yet having said that, we are conscious at once of one significant omission, and we come to yet a further—indeed, the final and fundamental—line of argument for the unity of the Bible. For among the dominant themes of the book there is one theme which predominates; and that theme is a Person. "In the volume of the book it is written of Me." What book and what person? inquired Luther. And he answered: The book is the Bible; the person is Christ. In their entirety the scriptures testify of Him. The whole of the divine library is unified in the Messiah—the anointed Prophet, Priest and King predicted in the writings of the Hebrew economy, and presented in the glory of His redeeming work and risen power in the scriptures of the Christian Church.

"The two parts of Holy Scripture, the New Testament and the Old Testament, correspond to the two terms of the Christian confession, 'Jesus is Christ,' the proper name Jesus, and the official name Christ. The Old Testament tells us what the Christ is, the New Testament who He is—and in such wise as to make it clear that we know Jesus only when we know Him as the Christ, and we understand what the Christ is only when we know that He is Jesus. The two Testaments point to each other" (Wilhelm Vischer¹). The relation between them has been variously expressed. St. Paul spoke of the law as being our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. The writer to the Hebrews conceived of it as a shadow of good things to come. In Christ the shadow has given way to the substance, the promise to the fulfilment, the type to the anti-type. Christ is the key to the whole Bible.

In the record of the Emmaus walk the Risen Lord said to His disciples, "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" And it is added: "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself." It is significant that He began at Moses; for it means that there is "Gospel" in the very books of the Law. What is there in the Pentateuch that points to the necessity of His Cross? De Wette remarks, "It were much to be wished that we knew what prophecies of the death and triumph of Jesus are here meant. There are but few that point to the subject." But the probability is that our Lord was not referring merely to specific events, such as the Passover lamb and the sprinkled blood, but emphasising certain fundamental principles which characterize the entire "law," with its suggestive ritual of priesthood and sacrifice and atonement, all alike testifying with one voice, "Without shedding

¹ The two quotations in this article from Vischer's *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ* are taken with grateful acknowledgment from Dr. F. W. Dillistone's forthcoming book, *The Word of God and the People of God*, to be published early in 1948 by the Church Book Room Press.

of blood there is no remission." Likewise He interpreted the witness of the prophets, perhaps more especially expounding the references to the Suffering Servant, who, though despised and rejected of men and pierced through for their transgressions, nevertheless prolonged His days and divided the spoil with the strong and was exalted above the kings of the earth. As Ottley has said, "From first to last the prophets of the Old Testament look and wait for a Kingdom of God; they depict its nature and conditions in varied and many-sided imagery; they point with ever-increasing clearness to a personal Being in whom and by whom all the types, figures, and anticipations of the old dispensation will be brought to fulfilment" (*The Hebrew Prophets*, p. 106).

The above reflections may serve as an introduction to the present issue of *The Churchman*, the three main articles of which are concerned with the general theme of Biblical Interpretation. It is a subject not only of engrossing interest but of profound importance to every student of the Scriptures. To accept the Bible as final and authoritative is one thing; to gain an insight into its true message and meaning is another. Almost every heretical sect of ancient and modern times has boasted its loyalty to the Word of God and has not hesitated to quote copiously from the written record whatever has suited its particular purpose. The worst enemies of the Bible have not infrequently been its professed friends. Misinterpreted, misunderstood and, in most cases divorced from their context, texts of Scripture can be made to support almost any doctrine, from the extravagant superstitions of medieval popery to the barren inanities of British Israelism and Christian Science. The crucial question is not only, "What saith the Scriptures?" but "How readest thou?"

In the first of the articles that follow the great principles of biblical interpretation are considered by the Rev. J. Stafford Wright, who is Senior Tutor of Oak Hill Theological College and also a member of the Editorial Board of *The Churchman*. In the next article the Rev. W. M. F. Scott, Vicar of Christ Church, Liverpool, examines the relation between the Old Testament and the New and deals with the legitimate use which the Christian Church may make of the Hebrew writings. The third article treats of a subject of peculiar importance to Evangelicals, who have traditionally adopted a somewhat negative attitude towards modern historical criticism of the Bible and have been slow to recognise its positive contribution to the right understanding of the Word of God. The article by the Chaplain of Queen's College, Cambridge, will challenge thought by its realistic approach to the whole question of literary criticism and its candid admission of the gains that have ensued in the realm of biblical interpretation.

The present number completes Volume LXI of *The Churchman*. We gratefully acknowledge the debt we owe to all who have contributed to its pages during the past year, as well as to the members of our Editorial Board and our Correspondents. Beginning with the next number (March, 1948) it is hoped in future to maintain a regular issue of 64 pages.

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