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The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture *

(continued)

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III

According to Scripture

8) What then is the alternative to inerrancy? Not, of course, an assumption of wholesale error or complete untrustworthiness. That is the alternative suggested by the 'all or nothing' slippery slope argument—appropriate perhaps when the discussion has to be simplified to the level of a lower school debating society, but *not* at the level of exegesis and interpretation. So what is implied in the assertion of the Bible's inspiration and authority? What does that assertion say about the continuing authority of any particular passage in its intended meaning?

How can we answer this question? The biblical passages which express or imply a doctrine of inspired scriptural authority take us so far, as we have seen ('inspired and therefore profitable', etc.). The trouble is that on their own they are not sufficiently explicit for our purposes. What then? What is too often forgotten in such discussions is that in Scripture we have not only passages which teach an 'in principle' view of scriptural authority, but also passages where Scripture is actually used—where Scripture functioned as authority in practice. Here obviously is our best hope of a clearer answer to our question: an examination of how Scripture is actually handled by and within Scripture. If we assume a consistency of inspiration, and a consistency in the divine will expressed through inspiration, then this presumably will be reflected in the inspired writer's attitude to, and use of, earlier inspired writings. Thus we will learn how Scripture worked as Scripture; how its authority was actually perceived and regarded by Scripture. Thus we will learn what the biblical writers themselves meant when they elsewhere asserted Scripture's inspiration and authority.⁶² In other words, a properly critical method of hermeneutics need not be imposed on Scripture,⁶³ but can be derived from Scripture itself. Scripture can indeed show us how to interpret Scripture.

This procedure, it should be noted, will avoid the weakness of

Warfield's famous essay, “‘It says’: ‘Scripture says’: ‘God says’”.⁶⁴ Warfield points quite properly to the fact that these phrases can be used interchangeably in the New Testament-scriptural passages being attributed to *God* where God was not represented in that passage as the actual speaker (Matt. 19:4f.; Acts 13:34), or attributed to *Scripture* where the original was actually a message from God (Rom. 9:17; Gal. 3:8). He also notes, not unfairly, that in some instances the formula is used in the present tense ('says', not 'said'), the thought being of Scripture as 'the ever-present and ever-speaking Word of God' (e.g. Acts 13:35; Rom. 9:17; Heb. 3:7).⁶⁵ The weakness of Warfield's study is that he focuses exclusively on the formula introducing the scriptural quotation. But the question for us is, What was the precise force of that formula? How did the scripture quoted actually function as authority—as Word of God? And this question can be answered only by looking at the quotations themselves, and at how they were handled by the New Testament writers in question. To build a case simply on the introductory formulae is to run the risk of unjustified generalizations—and Warfield is certainly vulnerable to that criticism.

For example, it is not enough simply to quote the formula 'God said' in Matthew 19:4f., for the whole point of that passage is that one scripture is being used to interpret (and in some sense to discount?) another, as we shall see (below, p. 206). In other words, the function of the passage cited as authoritative Scripture is more complex than the simple appeal to the introductory formula allows. Similarly, the introductory formula of Galatians 3:8 should not be used as the basis of a wider generalization regarding the authority of the scriptural promise to Abraham, without taking cognisance of the way Paul interprets the other strand of the same promise⁶⁶ a few verses later. For, as is well known, in Galatians 3:16 Paul interprets the promise to Abraham and his descendants ('seed', collective singular) as fulfilled in Christ ('seed', single individual). In other words, he adapts the clear reference of the original and gives the scripture a different sense from that which was obviously intended in the original.⁶⁷ That, of course, is not to say his interpretation was without justification. It was an interpretation which by the canons of that time would have been wholly acceptable,⁶⁸ and from the Christian perspective was wholly on target. The point is that the scripture which is recognized as authoritative is *not* the scripture in its original and originally intended and understood meaning. The authoritative Scripture is Scripture interpreted, Scripture understood in a sense which constituted a significant variation or development or departure or difference from the original sense.⁶⁹

Such examples strongly suggest that Warfield's conclusions from his study of the formulae introducing Old Testament quotations must be received with a good deal more caution than, say, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy would acknowledge.⁷⁰ These formulae certainly show that at least these scriptures quoted were regarded as

having continuing authority. But is it right to generalize from these particular instances and conclude that every sentence in the Old Testament was regarded by Jesus and the New Testament authors as having the same continuing authority? And even if the answer to that question was 'Yes' (but see below, p. 205), it would still leave unanswered the question, How did that authority function? Was the authoritative utterance that meaning of the scripture as established by grammatico-historical investigation (then Paul is to be censured in Gal. 3:16)? And if the answer is 'No, not always', then the issue of interpretation and the canons of interpretation is back on the agenda with reinforced significance.

Our task then is to explore the way in which Scripture actually uses Scripture. As we observe how the authority of Scripture was understood by Jesus and his first followers, how the authority of the Old Testament actually functioned in the New Testament, we should hopefully gain a clearer grasp of how the inspiration and authority of Scripture should be received and expressed today. We will look first at Jesus' attitude to, and use of, Scripture; and then at the earliest churches' attitude to, and use of, Scripture. Inevitably it will be a too sketchy treatment, but sufficient, I trust, to achieve a positive and properly scriptural formulation of our theme, 'The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture'.

9) Jesus' attitude to and use of Scripture It cannot be disputed that Jesus regarded the writings of the Old Testament as inspired and authoritative.⁷¹ We need only to think of a passage like Mark 12:35ff. ('David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declares') and the repeated 'it is written' (e.g. Mark 11:17 pars.; 14:21 pars.; Matt. 11:10/Luke 7:27). On more than one occasion he met queries and disputatious questions by referring to Scripture (Mark 10:18f. pars.; 12:24–27 pars.; 12:29–31 pars.).⁷² He clearly applied at least some passages of the Old Testament to himself, and drew his understanding of his mission from them—most noticeably Isaiah 61:1f. (Luke 4:18f.; Matt. 5:3f./Luke 6:20f.; Matt. 11:5/Luke 7:22),⁷³ and probably at least also the vision of Daniel 7:13f.⁷⁴ But once again we must ask, How did this authority work for Jesus? Was every passage of the then scriptures of equal authority and of equally binding authority—inerrant in that sense? To gain a clearer picture we should also consider the following passages.

a) The first is Jesus' use of Isaiah 61:1f. We have just pointed out that if any passage of the Old Testament informed Jesus as to his mission, it was this one. But at once we have to note that a striking feature of his use of that passage, explicitly in Luke 4:18f. and implicitly in the other references: viz., his use of it stopped short in the middle of a sentence—'to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'—whereas Isaiah continues 'and the day of vengeance of our God'. Indeed, if we can take it that the very next clauses ('to comfort all who mourn...')

influenced Jesus' formulation of the beatitudes (Matt. 5:4/Luke 6:20b), it would appear that Jesus deliberately set aside or ignored the single phrase about the day of vengeance. This is borne out by his reply to the disciples of the Baptist in Matthew 11:5/Luke 7:22. Where the Baptist had clearly expected a fire-dispensing figure of judgement (Matt. 3:7–12/Luke 3:7–9; 15–17) Jesus evidently saw his mission in different terms.⁷⁵ Thus, in his reply to the Baptist he alluded deliberately to three Isaianic passages; all three of which, as Jeremias has pointed out, contain warning of judgement as well as promise of blessing (Isa. 29:18–20; 35:4–6; 61:1–2).⁷⁶ But Jesus picked out only the promise of blessing.

How was it that Jesus could be so selective in his use of Isaiah? There was nothing in Isaiah itself which even suggested that two separate pictures were in view, or that a time scale was intended for the warning different from that of the promise—particularly in Isaiah 61:2, where the threat of vengeance is an integral part of the one prophecy. We cannot say, therefore, that Jesus simply set himself under the authority of the Old Testament, or that all parts and words of these scriptures were of equal, and equally binding, authority. Evidently he approached these prophecies in a way, or from a perspective, or with an insight, which enabled him, or made it necessary for him, to interpret these passages somewhat selectively. Was it that other scriptures gave him the clue on how to read these Isaiah passages? Then the same point arises: What was it about these other scriptures which provided the authoritative interpretation of the Isaiah passages? Why, for example, did he not conversely take the Baptist's preaching as confirmation that it was the judgemental strand of these scriptures which should inform his mission? We still have to explain a certain degree of picking or choosing whereby one scripture, or one part of a single scripture, was found to be more authoritative for Jesus' understanding of his mission at that point than another. Was it his own conviction as to what God's will was for his mission—a conviction derived from his intimacy with the Father, and only partly drawn from, or informed by, Scripture? If so, then we cannot say that Scripture was Jesus' sole authority. And since it was his own immediate knowledge of God's will which enabled him to see that some passages or parts of Scripture were more relevant to his mission than others, again we are forced to deny that all Scripture was of equal, and of equally binding, authority for him.

Consequently we cannot conclude that the authority of Scripture for Jesus was simply a matter of being obedient to the words of Scripture in their grammatico-historical sense. The authority of Scripture for Jesus was a more complex interaction of finding and being found by particular scriptures, of personal conviction and knowledge of God's will—partly informed from Scripture and partly informing his understanding of Scripture and his understanding of its particular relevance to him and his mission. This complexity of the hermeneutical process in the

matter of Jesus' self-understanding must not be ignored or oversimplified.

b) Consider, secondly, three passages where Jesus had something to say about the relevance and authority of Old Testament scriptures on particular issues: Matthew 5:38–39, Mark 7 and Mark 10:2–12.

i) Matthew 5:38–39 ‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”. But I say to you, ‘Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also...’’. Jesus refers here explicitly to an Old Testament principle of retribution, as expressed in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. And it is difficult to avoid the straightforward conclusion that Jesus was thereby abrogating part of the Mosaic law.⁷⁷ I would prefer to express the point more carefully. Jesus does not deny that this was an inspired Word from God when it was given. We can quite fairly argue, indeed, that Jesus recognized the purpose of the original legislation—to limit and restrict the destructiveness of private revenge and family feud⁷⁸—and that his own words were intended as an extension of the same healthy trend. On the other hand, it is of doubtful validity to argue that Jesus' words implied a distinction between the public morality of the law court (where the *lex talionis* legislation was still valid) and the private morality of personal relations (to which Jesus' words were solely directed).⁷⁹ There is no evidence of such a dichotomy in Jesus' own mission, either his life or his teaching, and no indication that such a distinction was intended or would even make sense in the illustrations used in Matthew 5:38–42. More likely, Jesus was saying simply that this rule of the Torah is not to serve as the rule of life of those who belong to, or look for, the kingdom. In other words, here we have scriptures which Jesus did *not* regard as giving authoritative guidance for the situation he was addressing. He did not dispute that they were the Word of God for their own time. He did in effect deny that they were the Word of God for his time. These were authoritative words, but their authority was *relative* to the particular historical period for which God intended them. In the new situation introduced by Jesus' ministry they were no longer of the same relevance, no longer of the same authority.

ii) Mark 7:1–23 The context is the discussion about ritual cleanliness, where the principal object of attack was clearly the Pharisaic multiplication of rules governing ritual purity.⁸⁰ But in the course of this attack, Jesus formulated a very important principle. ‘There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him’ (7:15); ‘whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him...what comes out of a man is what defiles a man’ (7:18, 20). As stated, this principle does not mention any specific Old Testament regulation. But, as stated, it nevertheless undermines the whole distinction between clean and unclean foods—a distinction clearly promulgated in the Torah (Lev.

11:1–23; Deut. 14:3–21), and an absolutely fundamental ruling for the Pharisees upon which they were even then building their whole elaborate system of *halakhoth* (see n.80). He who denies so unequivocally that food can make a man ‘unclean’, can hardly be said to regard the Torah’s ruling on clean and unclean foods as of continuing and binding authority. On the contrary, the clear implication is that that law no longer has relevance—is no longer to have authority for his disciples—as Mark so clearly saw when he highlighted the point by adding the note to 7:19, ‘Thus he declared all foods clean’; which is the same as saying, ‘Thus he repealed the law classifying some foods as unclean and declared it void for his disciples’.⁸¹

iii) *Mark 10:2–12* The striking feature of this passage for us is that Jesus seems to play off one Old Testament passage against another; or rather, he uses one Old Testament passage to determine the relevance of another. One was the Deuteronomic permission of divorce (Deut. 24:1–4) whereby the husband could put away his wife by writing a certificate of divorce (Mark 10:4). The other was the creation narrative’s institution of marriage (Gen. 2:24), legitimating the man leaving his parents to unite in one flesh with his wife (Mark 10:7f.). The implication which Jesus drew from the latter, at least as we have it in Mark, is that the oneness of marriage is something God-given and that man should not tamper with it (10:8f). As further explained in 10:11f., it is hard to dispute that Jesus was denying the validity of divorce altogether: ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.’ That seems to allow of no exception—if it was intended to, Mark has been astonishingly careless.⁸² In other words, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Jesus was once again denying the continuing authority of a particular Mosaic ruling: no situation is envisaged where a certificate of divorce would constitute a separation of what God had joined and so validate a second marriage.⁸³

Of course it is true that Jesus does not dispute the divine origin of the Deuteronomic law—it would be a highly questionable argument to press the distinction between ‘Moses commanded you’ and the ‘he (God) said’ of the Matthean parallel (Matt. 19:4f.). And of course we need to say no more than that Jesus regarded the Mosaic permission of divorce as a divinely given law appropriate to its times (‘for the hardness of your hearts’) but no longer appropriate for the people of the kingdom.⁸⁴ But once again the key point for us is that Jesus treated a particular scripture as no longer of authority for his followers. He did not deny that Deuteronomy 24:1f. was a Word of God to Israel. But he did clearly imply that it was a Word to a particular situation, a Word whose authority was contextually conditioned, a Word whose authority was relative to the time for which it was spoken, a Word which could be interpreted only with reference to these conditioning factors. Even as Scripture, it did not have an absolute authority, an indefectible authority—certainly not the same continuing authority as Genesis

2:24. Even as Scripture, it was no longer the living Word of God for Jesus' followers.

In each case, then, we can see that Jesus did not regard the Old Testament text in question as having an absolute, infallible (= unrefutable) authority.⁸⁵ Rather, he understood these texts in their relation and relevance to the historical situations to which they were originally spoken. He did *not* deny that these scriptures were the Word of God to these situations. He *did* say or imply that they were no longer God's Word to the situation he had brought about. In other words, their authority as Word of God was relative to the particular situation to which they were addressed, for which they were intended to be the Word of God. This recognition of the historical relativity of at least some scriptures must indicate an important hermeneutical principle which can in no way be overthrown or set aside by simple appeals to introductory formulae or by sweeping generalizations drawn from 2 Timothy 3:16.

10) The earliest churches' attitude to and use of Scripture We have already noted the New Testament passages which demonstrate most clearly early Christianity's affirmation of the Old Testament's inspiration and authority. If someone should point out that 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21 most probably belong to the later parts of the New Testament, that would not alter the overall judgement. The very frequency with which Old Testament passages are cited and echoed throughout the New Testament shows that 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21 are not expressing a view which only emerged after the first generation of Christians had already left the stage. On the contrary, the claim that Scripture has been fulfilled is as important for the early speeches in Acts, and for Paul (note particularly Rom. 9–11), as it is for Matthew and John. And a glance at a Nestle Greek text shows that on almost every page (apart from the Johannine epistles) there are direct scriptural references (indicated by heavier type).⁸⁶ But, once again, the fact that the New Testament writers believed the Old Testament writings to be inspired and authoritative is not the issue. The key question is once again, How did the New Testament writers actually use the Old Testament? How did the authority of the Old Testament actually function in practice? To help us find the answer, we should observe three features.

a) The first is the point, already made, that within the earliest churches we soon find important elements in the Old Testament law being abandoned: circumcision and the sabbath law, the law requiring a distinction between clean and unclean foods, and the practice of animal sacrifice. These developments are so well known that we hardly need to pause to document them: the refusal of Paul to allow Gentile converts to be circumcized (particularly Gal. 2:3–5), even though he claimed that they were heirs of Abraham (Gal. 3) and shared the faith

and righteousness whose sign and seal in Abraham's case was circumcision (Rom. 4:11); the way in which the new weekly festival of the Christian Sunday soon superseded the Jewish festival of the sabbath in the Pauline churches at least (1 Cor. 16:2; Acts 20:7).⁸⁷ As for the law on clean and unclean foods, whatever we make of Mark 7 (above, p. 205), it is quite clear that the Gentile mission involved a complete abandonment of such distinctions more or less from the first (particularly Acts 10:10–16; Rom. 14:20).⁸⁸ And the letter to the Hebrews is a powerful exposition of the Christian belief that the old law was obsolete, and in particular that the law of sacrifice was abolished (particularly Heb. 8:13; 10:9).

We should not underestimate the significance of these developments. These were among the most cherished features of Israel's faith and life, and it was the challenge to them in the second century BC which had led to the Maccabean revolt (see e.g. 1 Macc. 1:41–50, 62f.). These were clearly enunciated rules in Scripture, unequivocal commands of God. Their continuing, binding authority on the earliest Christians was at first simply taken for granted, as Peter's reaction to the vision in Joppa well shows: 'I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean' (Acts 10:14). And yet they were abandoned. As soon as the 'how' of Gentile conversions and acceptance became an issue, so soon were these cherished requirements of Scripture questioned and quickly abandoned, outside Palestine at any rate. Why? Because in these issues a greater revelatory authority was attached to the vision of Peter, the conviction of Paul, and what was recognized as the manifest work of the Spirit (e.g. Acts 10:44–48; Gal. 3:2–5). In the light of their own (inspired) understanding of what God was doing in their own time, they were willing to take an astounding step—to set aside the authority of many scriptures and the traditions of a thousand years! In this light they saw the fulfilment of Jeremiah 31:31–34 taking place in their own ranks, and interpreted it as rendering obsolete the old covenant (2 Cor. 3:3–6; Heb. 10:11–18). In this light Mark, at least, understood Jesus' words about true cleanliness as an abrogation of the law distinguishing clean and unclean foods (Mark 7:19). Here, at any rate, whole tracts of Scripture in their obvious and intended sense were regarded as no longer of binding authority, no longer a Word of God which could be disregarded only at the greatest spiritual peril.

b) The Scripture which the New Testament writers regarded as of continuing authority was Scripture *interpreted*. We have seen this already in the case of Galatians 3:16 (above, p. 202). Two other passages in Paul illustrate the same point equally well: Romans 1:17 and 10:6–10. In Romans 1:17 Paul quotes from Habakkuk 2:4; but his quotation is significantly different from either the Hebrew or the LXX.

Habakkuk 2:4, 'the righteous shall live by *his* faith/faithfulness'; LXX, 'He that is righteous shall live by *my* faith' (i.e. probably,

God's faithfulness);

Romans 1:17, 'he that is righteous by faith shall live'.

Most commentators agree that 'by faith' is intended by Paul to go with 'he that is righteous',⁸⁹ as the rest of the letter certainly implies (Rom. 3:26, 30; 4:16; 5:1; 9:30, 32; 10:6). In which case, the scripture which provides Paul with his text in Romans is a scripture interpreted—interpreted in a way acceptable to his own Jewish contemporaries, but in a sense different from that most probably intended by Habakkuk. Even more striking is his use of Deuteronomy 30:11–14 in Romans 10:6–10. For where Deuteronomy speaks of the law as something close to hand and heart, and so relatively easy to keep, Paul transforms the meaning into a reference to Christ and the gospel. Again it is obvious from parallels in Baruch 3:29f. and Targum Neofiti that this sort of interpretation was quite acceptable for Paul's own day and purpose.⁹⁰ But once again it is clear that the authoritative Scripture is Scripture interpreted, and interpreted in a sense significantly different from the original: what Deuteronomy referred to the law as such, Paul referred to (the law fulfilled in) Christ and the gospel.⁹¹

Here again the principle of interpretation seems to be not to re-express and apply the meaning intended by the original author, but to understand and interpret Scripture in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, it must be stressed that this did not involve a wholesale abandoning of, or disregard for, the Old Testament scriptures. It was important for these New Testament authors that they could show, by using acceptable canons of interpretation, that Scripture had been fulfilled in Christ and in the gospel. The point is this: that the authoritative word of God for them was *not* Scripture *tout simple*; *nor* was it their own immediate perception of the will and purpose of God. The authoritative Word of God was heard through *the interaction of both*, through the coming together of revelation from their past and revelation in their present. If I may repeat the point for the sake of clarity—their interpretation of a particular scripture did not have to accord with the originally intended meaning of that scripture. But it had to be an acceptable interpretation of that scripture, and to accord more immediately with other scriptures (like Gen. 15:6 and Jer. 31:31–34). Likewise, their perception of God's will was often immediate, through the Spirit, and not simply through the Old Testament scriptures as though the Spirit could not speak directly (cf. e.g. Gal. 1:12 with 1 Cor. 15:3f.; Gal. 2:2; 5:16, 18, 25); though, at the same time, their overall perception of God's will was informed by Scripture and had to be shown to be conformable to Scripture. It was the fact that the revelation of Jesus Christ and the revelation of Scripture could marry and did marry so fittingly, which made (and still makes) it possible for Christianity to claim to be the proper heir of the Old Testament. But it was this marriage which was for the first Christians the authoritative

Word of God.

c) A third observation concerns the evident freedom the New Testament writers exercised in their choice or adaptation of the form of the authoritative text quoted. It is possible that Paul, for example, knew variant forms of several texts, and chose to quote the form most appropriate for his rendering (as a modern preacher may choose between RSV, NEB, JB, NIV, etc.). Cases in point may be Romans 10:6–8 (above, p. 208), Ephesians 4:8,⁹² and possibly Romans 1:17 (above, p. 209). The point would then be that Paul's aim in such citations was not to uncover and use the originally intended meaning, but to use the version which made his own interpretation most acceptable and which, to be sure, had perhaps sparked off his interpretation.⁹³ The authoritative text was an already modified text: that is, a text already altered to give a different sense from that of the original. Here we may simply recall in addition that the LXX itself, the authoritative scriptures for all Greek-speaking Christians in the early days of Christianity, was in part at least a tendentious translation of the Hebrew, incorporating alterations designed to improve (i.e. change, for the better) the sense of the original.⁹⁴ Other Old Testament citations which differ from all known texts of the Old Testament are best explained as deliberate adaptations to demonstrate a closer 'fit' between the prophecy and its fulfilment. The best examples here are Matthew 2:23, where the scripture cited does not exist as such, but was probably formed by a combination of Judges 13:5 and Isaiah 11:1; and Matthew 27:9–10, where the details have clearly (and awkwardly) been modified to fit more precisely the tradition of Judas's fate.⁹⁵ Here again it is evident that the authoritative scripture for Matthew was not a text in its original meaning, as determined by grammatico-historical exegesis, but the text in a form that can be seen (without resorting to unacceptable modification) to express most clearly the Christian understanding of it.

In all these cases, it should again be stressed, the choice of text was not arbitrary, the emendation was not arbitrary, and the interpretation was by no means completely divorced from the original intention of the author (as was the case, for example, in the allegorizing of Philo). Nevertheless, the texts used were often significantly different in sense from the original—whether the difference had been introduced by earlier translations and versions, or by the New Testament writers themselves in furthering their own interpretation.⁹⁶ This willingness to use variant versions, and readiness to adapt the text oneself, must be put in the balance and weighed together with passages like Matthew 5:18 and John 10:35. For it certainly indicates that the New Testament authors were not concerned with the iota and dot level of a text in the way that Princeton theology so readily assumes. On the contrary, their concern for the deeper meaning revealed in a text by the light of the

revelation of Christ, made them often sit loose precisely to such iotas and dots.⁹⁷

d) One further observation may be appropriate. It is that the New Testament writers appear to have treated the Jesus-tradition with something of the same combination of respect and freedom. We can see this, for example, in the case of two of the passages already discussed above (pp. 205–6): Mark 7:1–23 and Mark 10:2–12. The point is that Matthew, in his use of Mark,⁹⁸ seems to soften the sharpness of both passages. He omits not only Mark's interpretative addition in Mark 7:19 ('Thus he declared all foods clean'), but also the element in the saying itself which provided strongest justification for Mark's interpretation. That is to say, whereas in Mark Jesus affirmed twice that what goes into a man *cannot* defile him (7:15, 'there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him'; 7:18, 'whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him'), in Matthew the first saying is softened (Matt. 15:11, 'not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth...') and its repetition omitted (Matt. 15:17). It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Matthew was less than happy with the suggestion that Jesus' words amounted to an abrogation of the law on clean and unclean foods—an implication not hard to recognize within the Markan form of the saying, as Mark himself shows, but one less easy to argue for once Matthew had done his editing. Such editing can fairly be said to be concerned with the main thrust of the passage at the expense of some of its iotas and dots.

Similarly, it is now widely recognized⁹⁹ that Matthew's modification of Mark 10:2 transforms a general question about divorce and sets it within the rabbinic debate between the schools of Hillel and Shammai: Mark 10:2, 'Can a man divorce his wife?'; Matthew 19:3, 'Can a man divorce his wife *for any cause?*' The Matthean formulation goes on to show Jesus rejecting the then dominant Hillelite position (divorce permissible for any cause) and advocating the more rigorous position of Shammai (divorce possible only in cases of unchastity). That is to say, the ideal promulgated by Jesus in Mark (denying the possibility of a valid divorce—see above, p. 206) is softened by its application to the particular situation of Matthew's time, and understood, and so rendered, as supporting the stricter of the two current options. Once again, be it noted, it is the adapted form of Jesus' saying which serves as the authoritative utterance of Jesus. A similar willingness to apply Jesus' original words in a more flexible way is evident in 1 Corinthians 7:10–15.¹⁰⁰

If we have understood correctly what Matthew was doing, then it is clear that Matthew interpreted the sayings of Jesus in a way that made them speak more directly to the situation in which Jewish Christians found themselves in the second half of the first century. It was with the teaching of Jesus that he was concerned; it was that which had authority

for him (cf. 1 Cor. 7:10). There is no suggestion that he would even have thought of creating or inventing sayings *de novo* and putting them in Jesus' mouth. Nor, if his treatment of these sayings is characteristic, did he attempt to alter the meaning of Jesus' sayings in an arbitrary or dramatic way. But neither can we say that he treated these sayings as unyielding dogma whose words (including iotas and dots) could not on any account be altered. Rather we see a concern to show the words of Jesus speaking to his own time and to the issues of his own time. And where we might have felt it more proper to leave the saying in its original form and to add our interpretative gloss after it, it was evidently quite an acceptable procedure in Matthew's time to *incorporate the interpretation into the saying itself* by modifying the form of the saying. Not surprisingly, since this is precisely how he and other interpreters of his time (including Qumran and other New Testament writers) evidently handled the Old Testament, as we have seen (above, p. 206).¹⁰¹ At this point, the gap between the synoptics' handling of the Jesus-tradition and John's handling of the Jesus-tradition is not so wide as is sometimes asserted.¹⁰²

11) The significance of all that has been said under Part III can be summed up in the key phrase, *historical relativity*. What we have seen again and again in the attitude of Jesus, and of the first Christians, to Scripture is their recognition and assertion of its authority; but recognition also of the fact that that authority is relative. To understand the Word of God properly, it had to be related to the historical situation to which these Words of God were first spoken, and related also to the situation of the interpreter. Let me try to elaborate a little on these two sides of the hermeneutical circle.

This recognition of historical relativity with respect to original context was obviously one of the hermeneutical principles which determined Jesus' and the first Christians' interpretation of the law. The fact cannot be denied that the words of various scriptures, enunciating specific laws, were seen as having authority for the time preceding Jesus, but as no longer authoritative in their originally intended sense. It was not a matter of saying, for example, that the intention of the laws on clean and unclean foods or divorce had always been simply and solely to point to their fulfilment in Christ—that would have been to deny their authority in the time before Christ. It was rather that their authority was recognized as being relevant to, and relative to the time of, the old covenant. To affirm that the laws on sacrifice, circumcision, sabbath, etc., were the Word of God only and always in the sense, and with the force, that Christianity understood them, is in fact to deny that the Torah was the Word of God before Christ came. Even a doctrine of progressive revelation cannot escape this corollary, if it affirms that now the only acceptable interpretation of the law is that given by the New Testament. For it still implies that scriptural injunctions were

once the Word of God in a sense that Christians no longer recognize as authoritative. If, for example, the sabbath law is to be interpreted in a sense other than its obvious sense, and if the Christian interpretation is the only proper interpretation, then in effect we deny that the fourth commandment ever was the Word of God prior to the resurrection of Jesus. And since most Christians do not in fact observe the fourth commandment, that in effect amounts to a complete denial of the fourth commandment's authority as Word of God (in other than some very spiritualized sense). To assert the *historical relativity* of God's Word in the fourth commandment is surely preferable to affirming that it *never* was God's Word (as understood for centuries) and still is not!

If recognition of relativity with respect to original context is as it were the more negative side of the hermeneutical circle, the recognition of relativity with respect to the interpreter's context is the more positive side of the same circle. The authoritative Word of God for Jesus was that understanding of Scripture which emerged from the interaction of particular scriptures with his own consciousness of sonship and sense of mission. The one did not ride roughshod over the other: each informed the other, each interpreted the other. The result was, however, an interpretation of some scriptures which involved pronouncing them as no longer of binding authority on his followers, and of others an interpretation which involved affirming the immediate relevance (and so authority) of one part but not of another. Likewise, the revelation given immediately to Peter and to Paul, led them to judge various scriptures to be no longer a Word of God whose authority still bound them. The revelation did not come through Scripture in these cases, but its meaning was not a complete departure from Scripture. Here again, it was the interaction of particular scriptures (like Jer. 31:31-34) with their own consciousness of being led by God's Spirit which provided the hermeneutical key. The point is that the result was the same as in the case of Jesus: the rendering of some scriptures in a sense somewhat different from the original, and the affirmation that other scriptures were no longer of binding authority on Christians. Such scriptures had fulfilled their role as Word of God in their obvious sense; now that sense had been transcended by the fuller revelation of Christ and absorbed into it, with the effect that their obvious meaning was no longer relevant to, and so no longer of authority for, believers.

We saw this same interplay of historical relativities in the way Matthew quoted both the Old Testament and sayings of Jesus—quoted in a way which incorporated his interpretation of them into the words quoted. A good case in point is his handling of Jesus' words on divorce. Here again we see an interpretation which recognized the context of Jesus' original utterance, but which recognized also that these words had a different force when applied to Matthew's context. What we see, in fact, is Matthew softening the ideal expressed originally by Jesus, in

the very same way that Deuteronomy 24:1f. softened in practice the principle enunciated in Genesis 2:24. In both cases the Word that God actually spoke (through Deut. 24:1f., through Matt. 19:9) was a Word which took account of the circumstances being addressed—making allowance for the hardness of men's hearts. In the same way Paul interpreted the same command of the Lord (that the wife should not separate from her husband) in a way that took account of the particular circumstances he was addressing (1 Cor. 7:10–15). No more than the words of the Old Testament, were the words of Jesus unyielding dogma to be observed to the letter whatever the circumstances, but principles whose statement and application could vary in the light of the circumstances. In other words, we might say that the New Testament writers recognized that hearing and understanding the Word of God in Scripture and in the Jesus-tradition, involved the two-sided process of recognizing the original inspiration behind a particular saying but also of interpreting that saying in dependence upon the same Spirit (following 2 Pet. 1:20f. in its more probable sense—see above, p.108).¹⁰³

It must be stressed that this recognition of the historical relativity of the Word of God does not diminish its authority as Word of God. Precisely to the contrary, it sets Scripture free to function as Word of God in the way intended. If we insist, with the logic of the inerrancy school, that Scripture must always say precisely the same thing in every historical context, then we muzzle Scripture: we filter the Word of God through a systematizing and harmonizing process which filters out much that God would say to particular situations, and lets through a message which soon becomes predictably repetitive, whatever the Scripture consulted. Why should it be so hard to accept that God speaks different words to different situations (because different situations require different words)? In Jesus Christ, God committed his Word to all the relativities of historical existence in first-century Palestine. Paul did not hesitate to express the gospel in different terms in different contexts, terms which no doubt would sound contradictory if they were abstracted from these contexts into some system and harmony which paid no heed to these contexts (1 Cor. 9:20f.)—hence the apparent conflict between Paul and James (cf. Rom. 3:28, ‘justified by faith apart from works’; Jas. 2:26, ‘faith without works is dead’). Mark did not hesitate to press the implication of Jesus’ words about true cleanliness with a view presumably to the Gentile mission (Mark 7:19); whereas Matthew softened the force of the same words, since he had the Jewish mission in view (Matt. 15:17). If we ignore such differentiation of the Word of God in and to different situations, we rob Scripture of its power to speak to different situations. It is only when we properly recognize the historical relativity of Scripture that our ears can be properly attuned to hear the authoritative Word that God speaks to us in the words of Scripture here and now.

IV

Towards an evangelical hermeneutic

12) We may conclude by drawing together some of our findings, by reflecting further on them, and by highlighting their implications for our own understanding of, and response to, the authority of Scripture in the present. Two basic assertions provide the starting-point for an evangelical hermeneutic.

a) An evangelical hermeneutic starts, as this paper started, from the assertion of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. That starting-point has been validated from Scripture, since Jesus and the New Testament writers clearly taught and based their teaching on the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament scriptures. It is true that many evangelicals want to go further and to demand a much more precise definition of Scripture's inspiration and authority as the starting-point; in particular, a definition spelled out in terms of inerrancy: that is, a definition of Scripture as consisting of statements whose freedom from error gives them an indefectible authority. It must be stated quite firmly, however, that such a definition is *not* validated from Scripture: while the New Testament passages which teach or imply a doctrine of Scripture certainly affirm its inspiration and authority, it cannot be shown with any probability that the intention of their authors was to teach inerrancy. On the contrary, to assume such inerrancy as the starting-point for an evangelical hermeneutic is to go beyond Scripture, to out-scripture Scripture.¹⁰⁴ That is another way of saying that this inerrancy signpost points not to a scriptural hermeneutic but rather to the legalism of the Pharisees and the bibliolatry of scholastic Protestantism. It is precisely because some evangelicals pitch their starting-point too *high*, that the only way to progress in knowledge of God and of his truth for some of their disciples is *down* what they regard as the 'slippery slope'—a slippery slope which has been created more by their elevation of their interpretation of Scripture *above* Scripture (human tradition above the Word of God) than by anything else.

b) An evangelical hermeneutic starts from the assumption that the New Testament attitude to, and use of, Scripture provides a pattern and norm for all subsequent Christian attitude to, and use of, Scripture. By this I do *not* mean that Christians in the twentieth century should reproduce the hermeneutical *techniques* of the first century—as we have seen, these techniques were themselves also relative to their time and are often unacceptable for modern exegesis. What I *do* mean is that Christians should show the same *respect* for Scripture in their attitude to, and use of, Scripture as that shown by the first Christians; as that demonstrated by their first-century hermeneutical techniques when we see them within their historical context. *Nor* do I mean that

Christians today can necessarily treat the scriptures (New as well as Old Testament) with the same sovereign freedom exercised by Jesus and Paul. There is a certain once-for-allness in the impact made by the revelation of Christ upon the status and authority of the Old Testament—the only Scripture for Jesus and the first Christians. Nevertheless, that being said, the way in which Jesus and the first Christians handled the authoritative Word from God in their historical contexts does give us guide-lines for our handling of Scripture in the present.

This latter point is so fundamental that we must pause to clarify it before we move on.¹⁰⁵ The simplest way to do so is to subdivide the point about historical relativity (above, para. 11) into two subcategories, which we may designate ‘covenant relativity’ and ‘cultural relativity’.

Most of the points at which the revelation of the Old Testament was abrogated are examples of *covenant relativity*. They were abrogated because they belonged to the old covenant: sacrifice, circumcision, clean and unclean. They had been superseded by the new covenant, the revelation through Christ, the revelation of Christ. Here the twentieth-century Christian has a norm and pattern for his own handling of the Old Testament: he must read the Old Testament in the light of the fuller revelation of Christ—the New Testament witness to Christ serves as the primary norm by which all other revelation is to be understood.¹⁰⁶ It is this recognition of the covenant relativity of so much of the Old Testament which makes inevitable a certain choosing between scriptures (above, p. 204), which means unavoidably that the New Testament functions as a canon within the canon by which to measure and interpret the rest of the canon—the Old Testament (above, p. 115).¹⁰⁷ But clearly the same cannot be said of the New Testament. We cannot treat the scriptures of the new covenant as Jesus and the first Christians treated the scriptures of the old covenant. There has been a once-for-all shift in the movement of salvation-history, and the revelation of Christ which brought about that shift becomes the yardstick by which we judge everything that claims revelatory authority both before and *after* that shift took place. The church of the new covenant may follow Jesus’ footsteps and declare many rulings of the Old Testament no longer relevant and binding because they belong to the old covenant. But such considerations can never weaken or detract from the authority of the New Testament, since that provides the primary norm by which all other authority claims are to be judged—the charter of the new covenant itself.¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, several of the rulings of the Old Testament were declared abrogated not so much because they were covenant-relative, but primarily because they were *culture-relative*. This would apply to the Mosaic ruling about divorce, and the *lex talionis* (eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth), both examples of what some would classify as the moral law as distinct from the ceremonial law (above, pp. 205–6). Here, too, Jesus’ handling of the Old Testament scriptures can serve as a

model and norm for our own response to the Old Testament. But at this point the similarity between covenant relativity and culture relativity ceases. For the consideration of culture relativity has to be a factor in our response to the New Testament as well as the Old Testament. The validation for this claim can be seen in the way Matthew and Paul adapt Jesus' words about divorce to the situations of their time, or the way in which James denounces as inappropriate in his context a slogan highly appropriate in Paul's (above, p. 214). Culture relativity applies not only to Old Testament regulations, but to traditions and sayings *within* the New Testament itself. Just so, we must recognize that what was Word of God in and to a culture and time very different from ours (New Testament as well as Old Testament) may well no longer be the Word of God to our culture and time. In such cases, the normative force of the scripture will lie more in *how* God spoke to their situation and context than in *what* he said.¹⁰⁹

In short, whereas in terms of covenant relativity the New Testament's use of the Old Testament provides us a norm and pattern only for our handling of the Old Testament, in terms of culture relativity, Scripture's use of Scripture provides us a norm and pattern for our handling of New Testament as well as Old.

c) If these are the basic presuppositions of an evangelical hermeneutic, then the first step in an evangelical hermeneutic is to discover what was being said in the passage under study. *The primary task of exegesis must be to uncover the historical sense of the text:* what it was that the writer intended his readers to hear and understand. To assert the inspiration of that scripture is to assert primarily that the text thus understood was the authoritative Word of God to these readers. The more clearly we can uncover the historical context of that text—by whom it was written, to whom it was written, to what situation it was addressed—the more clearly we will hear it as it was intended to be heard, the more clearly we will hear it with its original force and authority. That is to say, recognition of the historical conditionedness of a text (written for a particular purpose to a particular historical situation) means also recognition of its historical conditionedness as Word of God (it was God's Word to that situation).

But that also means that the reference of a text may be so closely tied in to that original situation for which it was written, that it cannot have the same reference and meaning outside that situation, or abstracted from that situation. In particular, it would be unwise to assume that a word spoken to Israel at some stage in its history before Christ, must have the same reference and relevance or force for us today. On the contrary, we should accept that there will be texts which cannot function for us as Word of God in the sense in which they were written (because of their covenant conditionedness, or culture conditionedness, or both). We can affirm of such a text that it is God's Word in the sense that what it says, God *said*. We can affirm of such a text that it

played a constitutive role in God's purpose for Israel and the world, in the history of salvation (that is why it was preserved). What God said to his people at a particular stage in their development remains of crucial value for our understanding of that development, as a development planned and shaped by God. But if we want to say, in addition, that what it says God *says*, in the sense that that word (interpreted to conform with some other scripture) is still of binding authority on our faith and conscience, to be neglected only at grave spiritual peril, then we must recognize that in so doing it is functioning as Word of God in a sense different from its originally intended sense.

d) The second stage is to recognize that God still speaks through Scripture; that throughout the Christian era believers (and unbelievers) have experienced Scripture as God's Word addressed to them, convicting and converting, breaking down and building up, comforting and commissioning, tutoring and challenging. This includes, of course, scriptures understood in their intended sense, parables of Jesus, exhortations of Paul, etc. But it includes also scriptures where the word that is heard is at some remove from the sense originally intended—as when C. T. Studd heard Psalm 2:8 as a word of God addressed to *him*,¹¹⁰ without any sense of impropriety in applying a messianic prophecy to someone other than the son of David. Here we must recognize that a scripture *can* function as Word of God with a sense or application different from that intended. Here we must recognize that a word spoken with one force to a particular historical situation, can still function as Word of God with a different force in a different situation. To recognize this is simply to confess faith in the Spirit, as the living power of God still abroad, in the church and in the believer—to confess faith in the interpreter Spirit whose work it is precisely to bring home that scripture as a Word of God directly to the soul.

What is important for evangelicals is the exegetical recognition that there is plenty of precedent for such a hermeneutic in Scripture itself, precisely in the sort of passages and instances examined above in Section III. The levitical regulations governing ritual cleanliness can still be heard as God's command to spiritual cleanliness, but no longer as an attitude of heart which should accompany the ritual ablution, rather as a spiritual act which renders the ritual act unnecessary, despite Leviticus.¹¹¹ The call for circumcision was clearly heard by Paul and the others in the Gentile mission as a call for the circumcision of the heart; but now no longer seen as complementing the circumcision of the flesh as in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, rather as replacing the circumcision of the flesh. So, too, Matthew's softening of the words of Jesus regarding true cleanliness and divorce should not be regarded as a denial that the Torah ever was the Word of God, or as a denial that Mark's version was the Word of God; rather as a *de facto* recognition that God speaks with different force to different times (old and new covenant) and to different situations (Mark to Gentile Christians,

Matthew to Jewish Christians). It is only by recognizing this diversity of the Word of God (its historical relativity, different words to different times) that evangelicals can effectively shut the door to legalism and bibliolatry; for it is precisely recognition of this diversity which removes the necessity of imposing a dogmatic uniformity on such differences, which saves us from a casuistic harmonization. It is precisely recognition of this diversity which exalts the Spirit above the Bible, which prevents us shutting the Spirit up in the book, which opens us to the freedom of the Spirit rather than constricting us to the narrowness of the letter.

e) It is of absolutely crucial importance that these two steps are not taken in isolation from each other. In a proper hermeneutic—a properly scriptural hermeneutic—the two are closely conjoined, two sides of one and the same coin (to change the metaphor). As soon as the two come apart—are treated in isolation—we have lost the Word of God. If, on the one hand, we confine the hermeneutical task to discovering the original intention and meaning of a text, we run the serious risk of relegating the Word of God to a remote past, where all our textual and exegetical skill can only uncover what the Word of God was, where the Word of God is shut up in the letter. If, on the other hand, we ignore the original intention and message of a text and seek to understand it differently, or listen for the voice of God speaking through it without regard to the author's intention and meaning, we run the equally serious risk of courting a spirit of enthusiasm, of opening the door to an uncontrolled prophetism, of abandoning the Word of God for the inspiration of the moment. It is only the interaction of a strictly historical exegesis with a prophetic openness to the Spirit now, where each acts as stimulus and check to the other, which can count as a truly scriptural hermeneutic.

It is such a hermeneutic which we saw at work in the New Testament use of (Old Testament) Scripture. Generalizing from these particular instances, we can say that there will be some scriptures which speak with more or less the same force in the twentieth century as when they were first written (the human condition addressed being basically the same); that there will be others whose authoritative message has to be understood from a different context or perspective, which qualifies the original sense in some significant but not sweeping way (men's hearts still being hard);¹¹² that there will be some texts where we see the original scripture as expressing a principle in a way that is no longer necessary or possible for us, but which lays upon us the task of expressing the same principle in a different way (the same Word of God coming to diverse expression in diverse situations);¹¹³ that there will be others where the particular text can have continuing authoritative meaning only within a much broader framework and not as an individual unit on its own (individual commandments within a law understood from the perspective of its fulfilment in Christ). This two-sided hermeneutical process may often function in a very simple, even unconscious way, in

the believer's reading of Scripture. But it should not be simplified, and certainly cannot be reduced to a set of rules applicable to every text which will ensure that the interpreter has unfailing and automatic access to the Word of God. There is a certain elusiveness in the Word of God in its relation to any text, and in those texts which are closely tied to a particular historical context now very different from our own, the interaction between scriptural text and Word of God can be very subtle.¹¹⁴ This is why the interpreter can never depend simply upon lexicon and commentary, but must work in constant dependence on the Spirit who gave the text being studied.

The character of the hermeneutical process, and its bearing upon the question of authority in particular, may become a little clearer if we make a distinction between normative authority and directive authority. The Bible, that is primarily the New Testament, functions as a *normative* authority, a definition of what Christianity is and should be, a yardstick by which to test all subsequent definitions of Christianity, all other claims to revelatory authority. But for *directive* authority, in order to learn what to do in any particular situation (the kind of theological, ethical, ecumenical, political, etc. questions facing individuals, churches and denominations today), we must look to the Spirit of God, whether he speaks through or apart from the Bible. Since the Spirit *speaks* now presumably with the same character as he *spoke* previously, the New Testament will provide a check on any word or policy claiming directive authority today. But since, also presumably, he speaks to particular situations, and since our situations are usually different in significant degree from those of the New Testament, we cannot depend solely on the normative authority of Scripture but must depend on the directive authority of the Spirit revealing the mind of God here and now. It is in this interaction between the Spirit's inspiration then, and the mind of Christ now, that the authoritative Word of God is to be heard speaking to particular situations today.

f) When the hermeneutical process is thus understood and followed through, it becomes increasingly clear that the traditional evangelical dichotomy between Scripture, reason and tradition as the source and measure of revelatory authority has often been too sharply drawn.¹¹⁵ For, as we have now seen, the authoritative Word of God in Scripture is not so objective that it can always be found by grammatico-historical technique designed to uncover the original meaning of a text. As soon as we utter the word 'interpretation', we recognize the interpreter's involvement in the hermeneutical process: his own historical relativity which conditions his capacity to understand the original text, his own verbal and cultural frame of reference, his own tradition of what is the 'clear' teaching of Scripture, his own experience of God's grace (or lack of it). The hermeneutical process is a dialectic, an interaction between the text in all its historical relativity and the interpreter in all his historical relativity. In other words, Scripture and reason are not

two clearly distinct elements which can be neatly separated and opposed to each other. To pretend otherwise is disingenuous.¹¹⁶ If we take Jesus and Paul (to mention no others) as our models here, then we cannot but speak of an understanding of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God which comes about through an interplay between the inspired text and the (still) inspiring Spirit.

I might simply add that, at the end of the day, we cannot neatly separate off the other factor usually set over against Scripture and reason at this point—church, or tradition. For church and tradition are also inevitably bound up in the hermeneutical process. The Protestant, for all his protest against the authority attributed to catholic tradition, for all his individualism, is just as dependent on his own tradition in his understanding of Scripture as any other Christian—the less he is conscious of the way his tradition has shaped his standpoint and understanding, the more firmly bound he is within that tradition.¹¹⁷ And the evangelical of all people should take seriously Paul's understanding of the church as the body of Christ, where grace is experienced through mutual interdependence, and a right understanding of the prophetic word is a matter of corporate discernment. He who always relies on his own hermeneutic alone will inevitably confuse the Word of God with his own aspirations and predispositions as often as not. He needs the check not only of historical exegesis, but also of the mind of the faithful. The hermeneutical process is in fact a three-sided process; authority is a stool balanced on three legs, not just two, far less just one.

g) To sum up: We can give the Bible too much honour; we can exalt the letter above the Spirit. And that, in my judgement, I have to say with sorrow, is what the proponents of Princeton theology are doing. They have read their inerrancy dogma *into* the teaching of Jesus and of the New Testament. But in fact their position with regard to Scripture is closer to that of the Pharisees condemned by Jesus, and of the Judaizers attacked by Paul. Inerrancy is a less than scriptural teaching, because its proponents cannot show that the biblical authors intended to teach it; even in the pillar passages (above, pp.108–11) such a meaning has to be pressed upon the words rather than read out by grammatico-historical exegesis. The more scriptural way, derived from Scripture itself, recognizes the historical relativity of the word of God, recognizes the need to engage in the interpretative process, recognizes that the Spirit may speak a word through the words of some Bible passages which is not wholly in accord with its originally intended meaning.

Thus to engage in the hermeneutical process is to leave the comfortable securities of a systematized exegesis which harmonizes everything into a legalistic conformity. It allows greater diversity, leaves more questions open, lets faith be faith in face of greater uncertainties. Not, let it be stressed, that we are talking here of 'those things which are

necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation', which are clearly and consistently taught throughout the New Testament. Indeed, the more timeless the truth, the clearer and more consistent the teaching on it in Scripture. But not a few words of scriptural teaching were more conditioned to situation and context-addressed—a properly scriptural exegesis has to acknowledge that—and a properly historical exegesis will usually be able to determine the extent of the contextual conditioning. Consequently, in many secondary matters of belief and conduct, what we mean by 'the infallible rule of faith and life' is not Scripture *per se*, Scripture in its grammatico-historical sense as such, but the *Spirit speaking through Scripture as understood by the faithful*. And this is just as it should be, for it was as an authority functioning in this way that Jesus, Paul and the other New Testament writers honoured the Old Testament. Such, in a word, is the authority of Scripture according to Scripture.

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NOTES

- * This paper was given at the 1981 Anglican Evangelical Assembly in London.
- 62 One response to an early outline of this paper posed as alternatives the NT doctrine of Scripture and NT phenomena (how the NT handled the OT), and objected that I was preferring possible inferences drawn from the latter to the (presumably clear) teaching of the former. My point is precisely: 1) that the NT doctrine is not as clear as such an objection presupposes, and that, in particular, the idea of inerrancy is itself at best a possible inference drawn from these passages; and 2) that in order to clarify what the doctrinal passages mean, we must observe how Jesus and the NT authors used the OT. To characterize this approach as 'perverse and essentially unbelieving' is surely unjustified, on scriptural grounds to mention no other.
- 63 As Maier argues (*The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, p. 11).
- 64 *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 10, 1899, pp. 472–510, reprinted in *Inspiration and Authority*, pp. 299–348.
- 65 *Inspiration and Authority*, p. 316.
- 66 Note how the two strands, separate in Gen. 12:3, 7, are woven together in Gen. 18:18; 22:17f.; and 28:13f.
- 67 Note how Paul elsewhere understands 'seed' (singular) in similar contexts in its usual collective sense, viz. Rom. 4:13, 16, 18; 9:7; 2 Cor. 11:22; Gal. 3:29.
- 68 See particularly D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Athlone, London 1956) pp. 438–44.
- 69 Since the Warfield school tends to make much of the fact that Paul counted the individual word of Scripture (seed) as of authoritative significance here (cf. above, p. 109), we should perhaps just point out the corollary: to build an argument for inerrancy on that fact here gives indefectible validity to a particular style of rabbinic exegesis which we no longer regard as acceptable exegesis.
- 70 *Does Inerrancy Matter?* quotes Warfield with unqualified approval at this point. There is a similar weakness in the Warfield school's presentation of the views of Luther, Calvin and other Christian leaders of earlier centuries. A fully rounded appreciation of Luther's views, for example, must take into account his comment in his preface to the Revelation of St John: 'I can in nothing detect that it was

provided by the Holy Spirit... I stick to the books which give me Christ clearly and purely... If anyone can harmonize these sayings (of Paul and James) I'll put my doctor's cap on him and let him call me fool' (quoted in W. G. Kummel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems* [1970, ET, SCM Press, London 1973] p.26). What on earth can it mean that Luther believed the whole Bible to be inerrant, when he could say such things about books historically held to be part of the NT?

- 71 This remains true, even if talk of 'the OT' at this stage is rather imprecise (see my *Unity and Diversity*, p.81).
- 72 See also J. W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Tyndale Press, London 1972) pp.16–29.
- 73 Dunn, *Jesus and Spirit*, pp.53–62.
- 74 See discussion in Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, pp.35–40; also *Christology*, pp.82–7. Jesus' use of, and dependence on, further OT figures and material is discussed by R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (Tyndale Press, London 1971).
- 75 See further my 'The Birth of a Metaphor—Baptized in Spirit', *Exp. Times* 89, 1977–78, pp.135–8.
- 76 J. Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (1956, ET, SCM Press, London 1958) p.46.
- 77 So e.g. H. McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* (Epworth, London 1961) pp.45–8; J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: Vol. One: The Proclamation of Jesus* (1971, ET, SCM Press, London 1971) pp.206f.
- 78 Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, p.35.
- 79 cf. N. B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ* (Tyndale Press, London 1944) p.208.
- 80 See particularly J. Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: the Emergence of Rabbinic Judaism* (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs 1973) pp.78–80, 82–90; A. Oppenheimer, *The 'Am Ha-aretz* (E. J. Brill, Leiden 1977) pp.51–66, 83–96, 121–4; Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, Vol. 2 (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1979) pp.475–8.
- 81 As Wenham points out, there is 'no denial of the divine origin of the law that is now repealed' (*Christ and the Bible*, p.31); similarly Wenham, 'Christ's View of Scripture', Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy*, p.25. But the point remains that the law is 'repealed'.
- 82 In Mark's version we can defend the continuing authority of Deut. 24:1f. only by criticizing and qualifying the authority of Mark's rendering of Jesus' words.
- 83 He denies the continuing force of Deut. 24:1 itself, not just of 'the traditional interpretation of Deut. 24:1', as Wenham puts it (Geisler, op. cit., p.28).
- 84 cf. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, p.34. 'The commandment was contingent, not absolute; it was temporary and positive rather than permanent as an expression of God's moral will' (Stonehouse, *Witness*, p.205).
- 85 cf. Barr, *Fundamentalism*: 'It is in the defensive apologetic situation, where opposition to critical scholarship becomes the one supreme goal, that conservative writers find themselves forced to deny the critical character of Jesus' use of the Old Testament, in order to make the Old Testament, and through it the New Testament also, absolutely and unqualifiedly authoritative in all respects for the church' (pp.82f.).
- 86 D. Hay reckons that the NT contains over 1600 citations of the OT (*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supp. Vol., 1976, p.443).
- 87 See the full treatment of W. Rordorf, *Sunday: the History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (1962, ET, SCM Press, London 1968).
- 88 See, e.g., F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, New London Commentary (Marshall Morgan & Scott, London 1954) pp.218f.
- 89 See, e.g., F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (Tyndale Press, London 1963) pp.79–81; C. E. B.

- Cranfield, *Romans*, International Critical Commentary (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1975) Vol. 1, pp.100–2. See also the briefer argument in Gal. 3 (Hab. 2:4 cited at 3:11).
- 90 See further my *Christology*, pp.184–6.
- 91 Not only is the interpretation different from that intended by Deut. 30, but it is also somewhat at odds with the original; for part of his apologetic against Jewish understanding of the law is that the Jews had *not* found it easy to keep the law (e.g. Rom. 2:21–4).
- 92 R. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1975) pp.123, 125.
- 93 Since Paul shows himself to be such a sharp exegete elsewhere, it would be unwise to assume that in the above cases it was only the Targumic rendering of the texts he knew, and not also the Massoretic and LXX forms. Longenecker's thesis is that Paul may have selected one variant form out of more than one known to him (n.92 above).
- 94 See, e.g., S. Jellicoe's reference to the studies of D. W. Gooding on the LXX text of Samuel-Kings: 'LXX reflecting "disquieting features" and a very questionable methodology, and at times making "factual nonsense" as in 3 Kings 6:17–21' (*The Septuagint and Modern Study* [Clarendon Press, Oxford 1968] p.285).
- 95 See further my *Unity and Diversity*, pp.92–3.
- 96 See further *Unity and Diversity*, pp.94–6 with bibliography in n.24.
- 97 cf. Longenecker's conclusion: '... they looked to Jesus' own use of the OT as the source and paradigm for their own employment of Scripture... All treated the biblical text with some degree of freedom... What was distinctive in the exegesis of the apostolic witness to Christ was a pesher approach to Scripture which felt both compelled to reproduce Jesus' own understanding of the Old Testament and at liberty to develop it further along the lines he laid out' (*Biblical Exegesis*, pp.207–12). cf. also G. Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics* (CUP, Cambridge 1979) pp.47–53: 'the Old Testament text must be made present as *logos* usually through the creative, interpretative, reflective activity of one member of the congregation for the others... the way in which the *logion* becomes *logos* when it is brought into relationship with Christ...' (p.51).
- 98 I assume Markan priority, with the majority of NT scholarship. For slightly fuller treatment of the following passages, see my *Unity and Diversity*, pp.247f.
- 99 See, e.g., D. Hill, *Matthew*, New Century Bible (Oliviphants, London 1972) p.279; D. R. Catchpole, 'The Synoptic Divorce Material as a Traditio-historical Problem', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 57, 1974–75, pp.92–127 (particularly 93–102); J. A. Fitzmyer, 'The Matthean Divorce Texts and some New Palestinian Evidence', *Theological Studies* 37, 1976, pp.197–226.
- 100 cf. C. K. Barrett, *1 Corinthians* (A. & C. Black, London 1968) pp.162f., 166; D. L. Dungan, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Churches of Paul* (Blackwell, Oxford 1971) pp.92f.
- 101 e.g., E. E. Ellis finds nearly twenty OT citations in Paul which seem to be 'a deliberate adaptation to the NT context' (*Paul's Use of the Old Testament* [Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1957] p.144); see also n.97 above.
- 102 For further examples of the way the gospels handle the traditions of Jesus' words and deeds, see my *Unity and Diversity*, pp.70–6.
- 103 We might well compare the fact that Luke records a word inspired by the Spirit to Paul through others (Acts 21:4), which Paul nevertheless did not regard as of binding authority on himself (cf. Acts 20:22). Even here the link between an utterance's inspiration and its authority in a particular situation can never be simply assumed: a word may be inspired by God's Spirit and yet be judged irrelevant to the decision made in a particular situation!
- 104 See also Achtemeier, *Inspiration*, pp.112–4: 'Scripture itself apparently thinks it can be inspired as witness to God's saving deeds without having to be regarded as inerrant in matters not central to that witness' (pp.113f.).

- 105 The necessity for fuller exposition of this point became clear at the consultation to which this paper was delivered. The following paragraphs and the final paragraph in section (d) below (p.218), are the only substantial modifications to the text of the original paper.
- 106 Only so can the Christian abandonment of the sabbath and its replacement by Sunday as the Christian holy day be justified in the face of a clear OT (including prophetic) commandment and a NT which leaves the position unclear.
- 107 Maier recognizes the point about covenant relativity (*Historical-Critical Method*, pp.56, 84–6) but, like most of those who overplay the significance of Matt. 5:18 (see above, pp.109–10), fails to inquire into, or to spell out, what this must mean for the ‘indefectible authority’ of the OT, and for the slogan that ‘revelation requires nothing but obedience’ (above, n.56).
- 108 The only exception to this rule would be NT passages which remained within the limitations of the old covenant as judged in the light of the overall NT witness to Christ—a case in point very arguably being Paul’s (pre-Christian?) argument about the relative status of man and woman in 1 Cor. 11 (cf. P. K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* [Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1975] pp.111–19).
- 109 cf. N. T. Wright, *Evangelical Anglican Identity: The Connection Between Bible, Gospel and Church*, Latimer Studies 8 (Latimer House, Oxford 1980) p.26: ‘All the Bible is “culturally conditioned”... Looking for “timeless truths” is in fact part of an attempt to distil ideas and principles out of their original contexts and reapply(ing) them in the present day—analogous, in fact, to the allegorical method and to Bultmann’s demythologization.’
- 110 N. P. Grubb, *C. T. Studd: Cricketer and Pioneer* (Lutterworth, London 1933) p.40.
- 111 cf. F. Hauck, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, III, pp.423–5: ‘It is of the essence of NT religion that the older, ritual concept of purity is not merely transcended, but rejected as non-obligatory. The idea of material impurity drops away... The purity of the NT community is personal and moral by nature.’
- 112 Remarriage of divorced Christians can be given properly scriptural legitimacy once this point is recognized.
- 113 Those arguing for the ordination of women can develop a properly scriptural case along such lines, particularly in view of Jesus’ attitude to women and of the prominent roles filled by many women in Paul’s churches. It is difficult, however, to see how a similar case for the acceptance of homosexual practice can be made, since the biblical position is so uniform, and was maintained despite homosexuality’s cultural acceptability in the Hellenistic world.
- 114 See further the valuable study of A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Paternoster, Exeter 1980), particularly pp.10–23, 103–14, 304–9.
- 115 As in E. M. B. Green, *The Authority of Scripture* (Falcon Booklet, London 1963); more carefully, Packer, ‘Fundamentalism’ pp.46–51.
- 116 Since inerrancy is not an exegetical conclusion, but a logical deduction drawn from a particular understanding of God (above, p.111), the inerrancy school itself cannot escape the charge of putting reason above Scripture at this fundamental point (cf. Achtemeier, *Inspiration* pp.69, 73f.). Maier does at least recognize the inevitable ‘subjectivity which necessarily attaches to every theology’, ‘For we know in part... (1 Cor. 13:9)’, while justifiably warning against a ‘high-handed subjectivity’ (*Historical-Critical Method*, p.56).
- 117 cf. Wright, *Evangelical Anglican Identity*: ‘We all in fact do read the Bible in the context of our traditions, and evangelicals who fail to realize this are therefore peculiarly in danger of failing to re-check their traditions in the light of Scripture, and of hearing the voice of tradition imagining it to be the voice of the Word itself’ (p.27).