

INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

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Is every statement actual fact? Is truth ever conveyed by other means? These and other questions are discussed as the author defines and comments on Literal Fact, Compressed Fact, Metaphor, Parable, Symbol, Type, Allegory, Myth and Saga.

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INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

Any discussion of the inspiration of the Bible gives place sooner or later to a discussion of its interpretation. To say that the Bible is true, or infallible, is not sufficient: for it is one thing to have an infallible Book, and quite another to use it. Evangelicals are not Bibliolaters: they do not worship the Book. But, believing that the Book is true, they seek to draw out the truths that it contains, and to apply and interpret them. The important thing is to have certain criteria of interpretation. For example, is every statement the literal truth? Or is the truth ever conveyed by other than literal means? If it is, then how may we know when a statement is to be understood literally, and when it is to be given some other interpretation? A useful method of approach to this question will be by way of a series of definitions. The advantage of this method is that it will give a means of classification, and will go some way towards providing a consistency of interpretation, and a justification for employing now one type of interpretation and now another.

I. LITERAL FACT

'The verbatim record, or accurate summary, of something that is said or done, so that every phrase is to be understood in its simple sense.'

It may seem strange to start with a definition of literal fact, but it is essential. When the ordinary man speaks of accuracy, this is what he means. In fact,

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he may mean only the first three words of the definition, 'the verbatim record'. So it is that, sometimes, people imagine that one has in mind only these first three words when one speaks of literal accuracy. They then gain an easy victory by pointing to verbal differences between one Synoptist and another. This is of course unfair. An accurate summary may be literal fact, and a man's words may be summarized in several different ways, each of which may be literally true.

Most of the addresses recorded in the Bible are probably summaries. Peter's address at Pentecost, for example, must have occupied longer than the two or three minutes in which we can now read it in the Acts. The teachings of Christ also cannot be regarded as the *ipsissima verba*, in so far as He spoke in Aramaic while the biblical version is in Greek, though scholars like Burney have shown that some of the Greek sayings can be translated back into an Aramaic original, with a metre and arrangement that suggests that here we have the actual words that Jesus used in committing His teaching to the memory of His disciples.

II. SUBSTANTIAL FACT OR COMPRESSED FACT

'The compression of irrelevant details in the interest of some main fact, so that the literal interpretation of individual phrases, which may be untrue in isolation, is subordinate to the complete fact that the full statement is intended to convey.'

The point of this can best be seen by taking an illustration from ordinary life. A child has a temperature. The doctor is called, and cannot detect what is wrong. On his second visit he finds further symptoms

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and tells the parents that the child has scarlet fever. The doctor then arranges for the child to be taken to hospital and the ambulance comes two hours later. That is literal fact. The mother might, however, tell the same story in the form of substantial fact. 'John had a temperature. I sent for the doctor at once, and he found that he had scarlet fever, and took him off to the hospital.'

By isolating each clause in the mother's account I might gather that the doctor diagnosed scarlet fever on the occasion of his first visit and personally removed the child to hospital. But that would not be true. The mother has compressed the irrelevant details in order to stress the main facts.

This type of compression is certainly found in Scripture. A striking example is found at the end of St. Luke's Gospel, where one gathers the impression that the ascension took place on the same day as the resurrection, whereas, when Luke himself gives fuller details at the beginning of Acts, it becomes clear that forty days elapsed between the two events.

This example is particularly valuable because the same author is involved. But the same principle can be applied where two authors are concerned. In the story of Jairus's daughter Mark v and Luke viii give the literal fact, that Jairus came and said that his daughter was dying, and that later messengers came to tell Jairus that his daughter was dead. Matthew, in

ix. 18f., compresses the details, and makes Jairus tell Jesus straight away that his daughter is dead. If we had Matthew's account by itself, we should probably not realize how the details had been compressed, just as we might not realize it from the mother's account of the child's ill-

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ness, which has been used as an example above. But once we learn the literal sequence of events, we can see that the compressed account can harmonize with the true sequence.

It is probable that a similar compression accounts for the difficulty concerning the healing of Bartimaeus. From Lk. xviii. 35-43 we should gather that it was before Jesus entered Jericho. But Mt. xx. 29-34 and Mk. x. 46-52 specifically state that it was when Jesus was leaving Jericho. If Luke compresses here as he does in the ascension account, we may surmise that Bartimaeus heard the multitude and enquired about it as Jesus was entering the city (35-37), but was too late to make his appeal until Jesus was leaving. Luke presumably had some reason for not relating the story in two parts. A glance at chapter xix suggests that he wished to bring the parable of the pounds, which only he relates, into association with the arrival at Jerusalem without any break in between (11, 28).

III. METAPHOR

Here is a dictionary definition. *'A word or phrase used to denote or describe something entirely different from the object, idea, action, or quality which it primarily and usually expresses, thus suggesting a resemblance or analogy.'*

In the use of metaphor we enter largely, though not entirely, into the realm of poetry. In its presentation of facts poetry differs from prose. No one indeed should qualify as a biblical commentator unless he has some appreciation of poetry and of the force of metaphor. Take, for example, Dr. Oesterley's comment on Ps. xxix, the psalm which speaks of the voice of the Lord:

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'The old-world conception of the thunder being the voice of Yahweh appears here in pronounced form'. Of course the psalm is inspired by the thunderstorm; but no one with a spark of poetry in him could suppose that the psalmist thinks that the thunder is actually God opening His mouth and growling.

The purpose of metaphor is to convey a truth by means of a vivid picture. There is something in man's unconscious that responds to it, so that it stirs him often more profoundly than the recital of literal fact can ever do.

In seeking to make man feel the wonders of creation, the biblical writers often employ metaphor. Such expressions as 'the pillars of the earth' (Jb. ix. 6; Ps. lxxv. 3) or 'the pillars of heaven' (Jb. xxvi. 11), 'the firmament' (Gn. i. 15), 'the windows of heaven' (Gn. vii. 11), 'the water under the earth' (Ex. xx. 4), do not justify the wonderful drawings that we find in Old

Testament Introductions showing the Old Testament conception of the universe. One might as well employ an architect to draw a scale plan and elevation of the New Jerusalem.

If we recognize this metaphorical truth, we can clear up certain difficulties. We may apply it to Gn. i, and be impressed by the majestic steps in creation depicted as days. Some have applied it to Joshua's long day in Jos. x. 12-14, where the command to the sun and moon to 'be silent' is interpreted as an appeal to them to hide their faces in clouds, when the blazing heat was hampering the Israelites.

The application of metaphorical truth is also seen in the anthropomorphic language of Scripture. It is almost impossible to convey truths about God apart from

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anthropomorphic and metaphorical language. 'God is love', 'God is light,' 'Father,' 'Son,' 'Spirit,' are all either anthropomorphic or metaphorical terms. But there is no reason why even more vivid terms should not be used, provided that they do not convey a degraded idea of God. Thus God's creation of man's body is pictured under terms that suggest the work of a potter (Gn. ii. 7). The imparting of the principle of life is pictured in the same verse as God's breathing into man's nostrils. His acceptance of Noah's sacrifice is described as smelling a sweet savour (Gn. viii. 21). His response to man's change from good to bad or from bad to good is called repentance (Je. xviii. 7-10).

One could multiply these instances; but perhaps one more thing should be pointed out. There is such a thing as anthropomorphic action as well as anthropomorphic description. According to the Old Testament there have been times when God came down from heaven and walked on earth. The statements that God walked in the garden of Eden (Gn. iii. 8) or came down to see the tower of Babel (Gn. xi. 5, 7) may be no more than metaphors; but they may equally well denote visionary appearances of God under human form, such as certainly occurred when God appeared to Abraham in Gn. xviii. Although it is true that no man has seen God in His essential Being (Jn. i. 18), it is equally true that from time to time God has manifested Himself in a veiled form as man (Gn. xviii), as fire (Ex. xxiv. 17), and as a bright enthroned spiritual being (Ezk. i and probably Is. vi). Such appearances are concessions to man's humanity, and are intended to show that the supreme God is a personal Being, and not a vague unknown presence.

IV. PARABLE

'A story, generally taken from a life situation, to illustrate a point that the speaker wishes to drive home.'

It is important to note that the purpose of the parable is to illustrate a point, normally one point. If a number of points are illustrated, the story is sometimes classified as an allegory. Yet, in practice, one commonly calls Christ's stories *parables*. None the less there is a difference between such a story as the Good Samaritan which answers the question 'Who is my neighbour?' and the illustration of the wheat and the tares (Mt. xiii. 24-30, 36-43) in which every item stands for something else.

Since most of the parables are intended to teach a single point, it is obvious that much of the story consists of furniture to fill up the room. The parables thus resemble the similes of Homer, Virgil, and Milton, where a single point of comparison is elaborated for its own sake. Thus, in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. x. 30-35), it is futile to look for some mystical significance in the two pence, or, in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. xv. 11-32), to find a spiritual lesson in the fattened calf. In some parables it even becomes dangerous to draw conclusions from details in the story. The unjust steward, for example (Lk. xvi. 1-9), is not an example to be followed in his dishonesty: but the parable is told to illustrate how keen a man of the world is to use his money to make influential friends for the only future he knows. Why do not Christians use their money to make friends for the future that *they* look for?

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The problem of the furniture of a parable comes out acutely in the story of Dives and Lazarus (Lk. xvi. 19-31). Although this is not called a parable, the analogy of other similar stories inclines one to believe that it is to be counted as one. The point to be illustrated is that riches without repentance are useless, and will bring a complete reversal beyond the grave. The question is whether, for the purpose of the parable, Christ employs the traditional Jewish furniture of the life to come, or whether He is actually revealing facts about the nature of existence beyond the grave. Almost certainly we must decide on some compromise. There is definitely some unreal imagery in the use of the term 'Abraham's bosom'. But it is hard to suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ could speak of the impassable gulf and the finality of the choice in this life if these had no correspondence with eternal realities. May we go further and deduce from the parable that there is both consciousness and a sense of joy or of torment in Paradise or Hades before the final judgment? On this interpreters differ. My own feeling is that we may accept these features of the story as in accord with the truth.

V. SYMBOL

'The representation, in fact or vision, of one thing or event, which has no meaning or significance in itself but only in what it portrays.'

A simple example of this is Ezekiel's action in holding two sticks together in his hand to look like one stick (Ezk. xxxvii. 15-28). The two sticks stand for the northern and the southern kingdoms, and the joining

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of the sticks represents the re-uniting of Israel and Judah. All the symbolic actions of the prophets are of this kind.

The use of symbol is also seen in a striking form in apocalyptic. Daniel and the book of the Revelation are of course the fullest examples of apocalyptic in the Bible. Here beasts, horns, bowls and trumpets come and go in what may seem bewildering fashion. In themselves they are meaningless, but frequently they are interpreted by an angel as though they were in some sense algebraic formulae. Where the interpretation is not given, we are left to find our own,

with such help as we can derive from those that are interpreted and from sanctified commonsense.

It would be beyond our province here to discuss how far these symbols were really seen by the seer and how far they are only literary devices. The tendency of modern commentators is to regard them as literary devices, but a study of the symbolism of dreams should make us cautious about regarding them as wholly fictitious.

VI. TYPE

'The representation of a permanent and a greater truth by a thing or an event, which also has a real existence and a significance of its own.'

The point of this definition can best be seen by looking at the ritual law as a type of Christ and His work. The basic truths are expounded in the Epistle to the Hebrews. For the Christian the ritual law has now in itself no significance at all. There can be no return to it, for its meaning has been completely fulfilled in Christ.

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But the law did once have a significance of its own. It was the means by which a godly man could enjoy forgiveness, and through which he might have access to God. It pictured Christ; but it also had its own validity.

An illustration would be that of paper money. £1 and 10/- notes are pictures of the equivalent gold and silver. In themselves they are worthless scraps of paper; and, if there were no gold and silver to back them, they would be as valueless as paper. But as tokens they are valid for making purchases. In theory it might conceivably happen that one day a country would find itself able to back the whole of its notes by gold and silver, and would then call in the notes entirely. Then they would become valueless. Certainly this has happened with the Jewish law. The paper types, which were valid for the time, even though they could never take away sins, have been replaced by the pure gold of the Kingdom.

Typology may at times have been abused by interpreters: but there is no doubt that the New Testament warrants its use. When our Lord Jesus Christ opened up all the Scriptures to show how they spoke of Him, some of the references must have been to types; otherwise one doubts whether the early Church would have dared to use them in the way that they did. During His earthly ministry He used the story of Jonah as a type of His death and resurrection (Mt. xii. 39, 40). In fact it must have been from Jonah and from the equally typical passage, Ho. vi. 2, that Christ was able to show that the prophets had foretold that His resurrection would be on the third day (Lk. xviii. 31-33).

A type may at times be worked out in considerable

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detail. Thus Heb. v - vii discusses the use by Ps. cx of Melchizedek as a type of Christ. Since the only historical reference to Melchizedek is in Gn. xiv, the writer of Hebrews extracts

every possible significance from words and phrases there, even to the extent of seeing a type of the eternity of Christ in the fact that no mention is made of Melchizedek's parentage, birth, or death (vii. 2, 3).

The word type (τύπος) is used in the New Testament in Acts vii. 44 and Heb. viii. 5 of the original plan of the tabernacle that was given to Moses; in Rom. v. 14 of Adam as a type of the second Adam; in 1 Cor. x. 6, 11 of the experiences of the Israelites during their wanderings. The word antitype (ἀντίτυπος) appears to have the same sense as τύπος in Heb. ix. 24 where it represents the tabernacle. But in 1 Pet. iii. 21 it has the sense of that for which the type of Noah's salvation stood. The exact interpretation of this sentence is notoriously difficult.

Another New Testament word employed to denote the same usage is 'shadow' (σκιά). In Heb. viii. 5 and x. 1 it is used of the ritual law, and in Col. ii. 16, 17 of meat and drink (in the ritual sense), of the feast day, new moon, and sabbath.

In Gal. iv. 24 Paul employs the verb ἀλληγορεῖν from which our word 'allegory' comes, in using the story of Hagar as a type. None the less our word allegory has a different meaning, and it is better to classify the story of Hagar as a type, since it is clear from Paul's use of the story of Abraham and Sarah in Rom. iv that he regarded these records in Genesis primarily as historical fact.

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VII. ALLEGORY

'The depiction of a truth by a story that can be enjoyed as a story though the events did not, and often could not, occur in the form in which they are stated.'

The supreme allegory in literature is Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. While it is possible to point to scenery near Bedford that may have inspired the setting of the story, the events of the story are pure allegory.

A study of Jewish and Christian methods of interpretation of the Scriptures shows the tremendous use that has been made of allegorical interpretation. In the hands of Philo of Alexandria, at the beginning of the Christian era, the Jewish Scriptures were twisted to fit into the mould of Greek philosophy. The same method ran riot in the Christian Church, supported by Origen, and only opposed by the school of Antioch under Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia. It persisted up to the Reformation, when the Reformers boldly struck against it.

Allegorical interpretation has proved an easy method of removing difficulties and of making the Bible fit in with current thought. Present-day interpreters are rightly suspicious of it.

Apart from two simple allegories in Jdg. ix. 7-15 and 2 Kgs. xiv. 9, there are two major places in Scripture where we might allow allegory, i.e. when the original writer intended what he wrote to symbolize something else. The first is the story of the garden of Eden. Some would interpret this wholly as an allegory of the fall of the first man, or perhaps of the fall of every

man. This, I think, is too sweeping. The detailed geographical references in Gn. ii. 10-14 suggest

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that the story is intended to have a factual background. Others have regarded such things as the two trees as wholly allegorical. This may be so. But allegorical of what? What was the form that the testing of man took? It seems to me that it might well have been a test of eating or not eating the fruit of a certain tree. If it cannot be shown that the test took another form, I prefer to take this part of the story as literal.

The other possible major allegory is the Song of Solomon, and saints and mystics of every age have found wonderful blessing in regarding it as an allegory of the soul's relation to God. It may be that in Oriental fashion it was deliberately written in this sense. Personally, however, I should regard it primarily as a human love song. I think it was written as a tribute to a country girl who, in the atmosphere of the court, remained true to her shepherd lover in spite of the seductions of Solomon. She may well have been Abishag the Shunammite of 1 Ki. i and ii. 'Shulamite' of Ct. vi. 13 is regarded as equivalent to Shunammite. If this is the true interpretation of the Song, one can see that it has a powerful moral and spiritual lesson as well as a mystical interpretation. In other words, it is a type rather than an allegory.

VIII. MYTH

Personally I believe that 'myth' is such a misleading word that Evangelicals should avoid it altogether in connection with biblical interpretation. Those who do use it do so in several ways. Thus S. H. Hooke (Clarendon O. T. Vol. vi, Chapter iv) says '*Myth was the spoken part of ritual, when the story was recited of what the priest, the king, and others were depicting*

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by their actions.'

Hooke gives as an example the Babylonian New Year Festival, when the king, as representing the gods, fought and overcame a monster who represented evil forces that were threatening the kingdom. During this drama the priests recited the Babylonian story of creation. Hooke thus holds that the question of the truth or falsity of myth did not arise. The myth was the word of power, and a necessary part of the ritual. When, however, the ritual was discarded, the myth might continue to be elaborated as a story for its own sake. It might pass as a story into the folk-lore of other peoples.

In spite of the theories of Hooke and others there is no historical evidence that the Jewish kings practised an annual ceremony comparable to the Babylonian New Year Festival. But it is frequently held that myths from Babylonian and other sources have come into the Old Testament under the form of allusions to Leviathan, the dragon, and Rahab (Is. xxvii. 1, li. 9; Ps. lxxiv. 13, 14). The primary reference of Ps. lxxiv. 13, 14 appears to be to Egypt, but even so it seems to have a fuller allusion. The source of the reference is thought to be the primitive Semitic story of the warfare between the gods and chaos. But what was the source of this

story? Might not the story be a polytheistic version of what the Bible suggests in several places to be an actual truth, namely the rebellion and fall of Satan? He is 'the great dragon' and 'that old serpent' of Rev. xii. 9, and what better title could be found for him than 'Rahab' or 'Pride'? If this is so, then these references must rank not as a myth, which may or may not be true, but as allusions to

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factual occurrences which had become known through a primal revelation.

The second definition of myth, which is also allowed by Hooke, and which is worked out by the late Edwyn Bevan in an extra chapter in the Clarendon Old Testament Vol. vi, is that *myth is a folk tale designed to account for the existence of some place or practice.*

The wanderings of the patriarchs in Genesis are said to afford examples of this. Stories are told to account for such things as circumcision (Gn. xvii), substitution-ary sacrifice (Gn. xxii), the sanctity of Bethel (Gn. xxviii) and other high places, while the river spirit of Jabbok is baptized into Hebrew story as a manifestation of the true God (Gn. xxxii. 22-32).

Granted that we are dealing here with folk-lore, it is purely a subjective judgment to declare that it is untrue folk-lore. Its truth or falsity must be demonstrated on other grounds. Recent research, as many scholars have pointed out, is confirming that the background of the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is true to the period in which they lived and not true to the period in which the Genesis records are supposed to have been written down by J, E, and P. This means that we are bound to postulate contemporary records of some sort for much of the story. But once contemporary records are admitted, there is no valid reason for doubting their essential truth, even if they were transmitted orally for some time. Therefore we need not write off these stories as fictitious folk-lore, or as folk-lore which has been built upon only small fragments of truth.

A discussion of myth would be incomplete without reference to what is known as demythologizing.

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This is the English version of the German word *Entmythologisierung*, as used by Professor Bultmann and others. Bultmann holds that the gospel terminology is derived from mythological conceptions of the universe and of the spirit-world. This terminology must be demythologized before it can be received by the modern mind. Bultmann's demand is for something more than what is commonly meant by explaining biblical terms. Thus he not only rejects any conception of heaven as above, but also holds that the idea of Christ as the pre-existent divine being, and of the world of demons and spirits, is drawn from the mythology of Gnosticism and Jewish Apocalyptic. Bultmann, therefore, is concerned to extract the meaning of the biblical statements from the outmoded expression of the meaning, and to restate the meaning in terms of personal encounter with God.

Bultmann's line of thought also emerges in a book by C. D. Kean, *The Meaning of Existence*, where myth is defined as '*a description of Existence, the importance of which is its revelation of the meaning of experience rather than the truth or untruth of the details of its story*' (p. 115). On this basis Dr. Kean rejects 'Biblical fundamentalism, because no appreciation of

mythology is possible if the myths themselves are literalized' (p. 150). He thus speaks of the myth of the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension.

We are bound to notice, first of all, that this is not New Testament Christianity. The first Christian gospel was factual and historical. It differed from the myths of the pagan religions by its assertion that Jesus Christ had really died, risen, and ascended; and that

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He had come from a pre-existent life with the Father to be born as man. Paul and John, who both lay such emphasis on union with Christ, are equally emphatic that such union has its basis in historical fact. The essence of the gospel is that Jesus Christ 'died for our sins... was buried... and raised on the third day' (1 Cor. xv. 1-4). The gospel is concerned with One who has been 'seen' and 'handled', even though He had an eternal existence with His Father (1 Jn. i. 1-4). This emphasis on history and pre-history saves Christianity from degenerating into subjectivism, in which experience reigns supreme. Evangelicalism has always seen the importance of experience, but it has always grounded this experience upon objective and historical truth. Once this truth is dispensed with, it is doubtful whether any stable experience will remain. Bultmann and others have not taken sufficient account of the legacy that they have inherited from historical Christianity.

It is clear that everyone who indulges in demythologizing is governed by his own ideas of what is myth. For example, Bultmann supposes that demons have no real and objective existence. This is an arbitrary assumption which experiences in the mission field and in spiritualistic seances would challenge with good reason. Bultmann also adopts an attitude of negative scepticism towards biblical miracles. But this is a phase of critical thought that many would strongly deny.

Bultmann naturally makes a strong point of the mythological view of the 'three-decker' universe, with heaven above, the earth on the ground floor, and sheol or Hades in the basement. Yet even here it is

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preferable to speak of *metaphor* rather than *myth*. The terms 'up', 'down' and 'above' are metaphorical terms that are necessarily used in translating the terms of one order of being into the terms of another. For example, a blind man can only understand colour in terms of sound and smell. The classical example is that of the blind man who understood scarlet as something like the sound of a trumpet, - an excellent comparison. God and heaven are non-perceptible to those senses which we use in this space-time world. Their state must therefore be described in metaphorical language, of which the most suitable is that of 'up' and 'above'. Let us suppose that we try to understand them under modern terms. We might speak of heaven as a different vibration or a different dimension. But what adjective shall we use to distinguish the heavenly vibration or dimension? Almost inevitably we say 'a higher vibration' or 'a fourth dimension' - and four is a 'higher' number than three.

It is not unreasonable to hold that the terms 'up' and 'above' are necessary terms to employ of God and heaven, thus saving us from the erroneous view of the total 'withinness' of pantheism, without eliminating the Christian doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The ascension of the risen body of the Lord Jesus Christ from the Mount of Olives is likely to

have been an historical fact, since it is testified to by Luke (Acts i), whose historical accuracy has been vindicated repeatedly. And, indeed, it underlies all references to the present position of Christ at the right hand of the Father, and to His future coming again. If we consider the matter thoughtfully, it may

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well be that the category of 'up' is so far common to earth and heaven, that the visible passage from the former to the latter would inevitably take place in a direction away from earth. Similarly there is not the slightest reason to deny that the visible Second Coming of the Lord will be in a contrary direction, and that He will indeed be seen coming from heaven to earth.

The demythologizing movement must be regarded as an arbitrary subjectivism, which is totally different from the anchored experience of the original gospel. All that it tries to safeguard of vital encounter with God is already incorporated in the gospel that Evangelicals preach.

IX. SAGA

We may well adopt the definition given by S. H. Hooke (Clarendon O. T. Vol. vi): '*Primarily a story, transmitted orally from generation to generation, which preserves memories of the wanderings and adventures of clans or tribes, or the exploits of heroes belonging to such groups*' (pp. 59, 60).

We may make the same comment on this as we made on the second definition of myth. The accuracy of the background of the patriarchs suggests that, whether the stories were transmitted orally or in written form, they may be regarded as accurate.

There is another use of the term saga in Martin Buber's book on *Moses*. His opening chapter discusses the relation between saga and history. He quotes and paraphrases Ernst Herzfeld as follows:

'Saga and the writing of history start out from the

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identical point, the event, and it is the saga which in particular preserves historical memories, not of what the consequences show to be "historical event", but of that which roused the emotions of the men undergoing the experience' (p. 14).

Saga would then be the psychological and interpretative reactions of participants in some event. An example is the Song of Deborah, which probably assumed poetic form at an early stage, and so remained virtually unchanged.

Dr. Buber points out that, if the original saga is not expressed in a fixed form from the beginning, it tends to grow, and then it is not always possible for the investigator to trace it back to its original form. Even if this is possible, it will not necessarily mean that one can recast the exact form that the historical events took.

Dr. Buber treats the Moses story as saga, and, though his book is helpful and reverential, one feels that this acceptance of the saga principle has made him unnecessarily cautious in his treatment of the Bible story. For his interpretation rests upon the assumption that Moses himself did not record the events that are described in essentially the form in which we have the record today. This involves the whole critical question of the authorship of the Pentateuch. Incidentally Dr. Buber rejects the documentary theory, but holds that the traditional story was continually worked over as a whole. Obviously we cannot discuss this now.

If, however, we assume that Moses is substantially the author, it might still be possible to hold that he wrote saga, in Dr. Buber's sense, and not history. Our main ground for rejecting such a view would be that,

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as Dr. Buber says, saga tends to assume a rhythmical form, and there is little of this form in the Pentateuch. The impression one receives is that the author is writing sober history, and as such we may receive it, even though it contains much that is miraculous and beyond our experience.

This discussion has covered most of the figures employed in Scripture. There will not be unanimous agreement on every point, but at least one can see that in speaking of the truth of the Bible one realizes that truth can be conveyed under various terms. Where literal truth can reasonably stand, it will naturally be accepted as such. In other places it will be clear that other figures are employed, and it is the task of a reverent interpretation to discover what these figures are, both by a comparison of Scripture with Scripture, and, not least, by the use of sanctified commonsense.

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