

present, and centre upon a future Saviour-King, whose coming would bear alike the mark of utter humiliation and of Divine triumph. In broad outline they all testify "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow" (I Pet. 1: 11), thus again accentuating the twofold mystery of His coming. We may note in passing that a literal rendering of Peter's phrase would be "the sufferings *unto* Christ," thereby linking into one harmonious and inclusive whole not only the historical movement leading up to Christ but the prophetic revelation through which that movement was made known to men. In addition there are types and shadows, veiled hints and indications, half-disclosed intimations and significant events that confirm and illustrate the clearer predictions. The cumulative effect of all these is of a broad background of prophecy against which events are taking place. This is something even more convincing to the mind than spectacular fulfilments of single prophecies, however numerous these also may be, and points to an ordered comprehension of things in the mind of Him from whom they proceed.

These "moments" of revelation each contain some enigma of Divine truth, and epitomize in gnomic form supernatural realities that were to find expression in particular historical happenings. When first uttered they must have seemed mysterious, and yet something in them arrested attention and invited inquiry. All revealed truth retains an element of unfathomable mystery as well as of unmistakable disclosure, so that the certainty of faith is mingled with the wonder of worship, and leads to ultimate humility of mind. This is why the rigid dogmatist can never understand why simple believers with a firm hold upon their God sometimes refuse assent to over-simplified formulations of Divine truth, and yet maintain an orthodoxy that stands the shocks of life and is triumphant over death.

Whatever mysteries lie hid in Messianic prophecy are due to the themes that they treat of, which are both supertemporal and supernatural. The Bible speaks of them as "wonders," "miracles," "works of God"—things that can only be expressed through signs or visions or dark sayings. Thus we are led into the knowledge of another and spiritual world where God reigns in higher glory than in this, a world comprehensible only to faith. Christ is the great Sign given to men in order that they may read what otherwise would have been hidden from them for ever. In Him God is manifest in flesh. The incarnate Word is the great expression of the Divine mystery. Of God we read that He is "the King eternal, incorruptible, invisible" (I Tim. 1: 17), that He dwelleth "in light unapproachable; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (II Tim. 6: 16). Yet we also read that "the only

begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1: 18).

The word of prophecy discloses this intervention of God through Christ into the stream of human history. Christ is therefore named "Wonderful" (Isa. 9: 6), as being the great *sign* or *miracle* of God's redemptive activity among men. The angel of the LORD who appeared to Manoah said unto him, "Wherefore askest thou thus after my name, seeing that it is wonderful?"—that is, *secret* (Judges 13: 18)—and in confirmation "the angel did wondrously," ascending up to heaven in the flame of the sacrifice. This then is the element out of which prophecy comes, and that which gives it its mysterious character. To reduce prophecy to rationalistic terms is to rob it of its prime value. Why should it be thought strange that there are levels of thought and life beyond that perceptible by human reason? Or that there is a meaningful value in prophecy which demands that it be taken seriously by all who find themselves confronted with facts in human experience for which reason can give no adequate explanation? The more so since those who have made the venture of faith assure us with one voice that it gives significance and validity to life, that although many problems still remain unresolved these do not affect the inner certainty given by the Word of God.

X

THE UNITY OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

THE UNITY OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY IS IN ESSENCE rather than form. We have here no elaborate system formulated with artificial skill, but living flashes of truth coming from a central sun. Yet how much more convincing is this than would have been a mere programmatic outline of coming events. Prophecy as a whole is thus a rich and complex texture of human situations wrought into one pattern by a single organic purpose and held together in a living Person. This is not to say that there are not traces of meticulous and accurate detail within this general prophetic view, but that as a whole Scripture does not present it to us in this fashion. The writings of Daniel, it is true, clearly indicate the existence of a Divinely ordered but not fully disclosed chronological plan. And there are discernible sequences of events in the prophetic calendar of Hebrew festivals which no serious student of Scripture can afford to neglect. For they correspond in some remarkable way with the order of events taken by the New Testament history of redemption. The date

of the Passover, the feast of unleavened bread with its presentation of the wavesheaf on "the morrow after the Sabbath," and the feast of Pentecost concluding the feast of weeks, have chronological parallels in the death and resurrection of Christ, and in the descent of the Holy Spirit too remarkable to be dismissed as pious imagination. And the inference may be legitimately drawn that the whole series of Sabbatic feasts represents in ritual the pattern of some heavenly original that has its final embodiment in Christ.

To acknowledge this, however, is something quite other than to attach specific meanings of our own to every detail of ancient ritual, especially since Scripture uses sparingly this method of handling the types and in general draws only broad moral and spiritual lessons from them. Indeed, it may safely be said that with the types, as with the prophecies, interpretation is surer when confined to instances having a definite Scriptural warrant. Even in such instances there is usually some pointed practical application, prophylactic against the speculative or conjectural. Scripture suggests methods of study which we do well to follow.

A unity of the kind described presupposes an active superintending Mind within and behind the writings, which therefore have coherence and order. This gives them also that something which eludes literary definition and relates them to a living Personality. For as in human literature we can recognize a single mind shining through various modes of writing by one and the selfsame author, so in this Book the spiritual mind perceives one animating impulse and intelligence illuminating the whole range of its prophetic writings. The consistency throughout of law and of personal prevision (already dwelt on in earlier chapters) indicate this essential unity, a common ambience and direction surpassing any that might have come through mere formal arrangement of the material.

This vital element in Old Testament prophecy springs from the constant inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, the third Person in the blessed Trinity, who in this aspect of His office is termed "the Spirit of Christ." For the flow of prophetic inspiration is attributed throughout Scripture to the Spirit, and also in a particular way is linked with Christ in His incarnation and redemptive work. The resultant unity is implied in such a passage of Scripture as I Peter 1: 10-12, where the testimony of the prophets and that of the early evangelists are alike attributed to the Holy Spirit. The armies may indeed be scattered over a wide front, and it may be difficult to see how troops in one sector are co-ordinated with those in another, but the fact of a Central

Command ensures that one strategy governs the whole. The fulfilment of prophecy must therefore be considered in relation to the scope of its ultimate purpose and not be reduced to a narrow temporal perspective.

When prophecy is thus viewed as the Word of God everything is duly subordinated to the will of the Most High, Who "doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth" (Dan. 4: 35). If it be objected that this is nothing other than pure determinism and fixed fate, and so subversive of moral responsibility, it may be replied that the practical effect of prophecy, rightly understood, has ever been to stimulate consciousness of good and evil, and to promote right action. Warnings and promises link themselves with prediction, as in Jonah's prediction of the fall of Nineveh, which, while in categorical enough terms, must (in view of the sequel) be held to contain an implied condition ("unless it repents"). Jonah himself, though disapproving, was aware of this (Jonah 4:2). Other like prophecies even more explicitly give an "*either or*" as consequent upon obedience or disobedience. Human responsibility thus moves within the circle of God's sovereignty. If, in the interests of human freedom, it be affirmed that man retains the power of personal choice (and this may be freely conceded), is not this also, in degree, determinism? Why then should it be thought out of place that God, whose wisdom and power and love are infinite, should exercise His own will and determine how the course of His own universe should be shaped? "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? . . . Hath not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom. 9: 20-21). It may not be otherwise, yet how that right is exercised also lies within His power, who delights in mercy and whose prerogative is grace to the undeserving. Prophecy, therefore, in this determinative sense also, is the Word of the living God.

The Word of God is more than statement. It is the germinal Seed that produces the event. The original word of creation endures, even until now, in the continuance of the stars in the heavens. God's Word does not weaken and die from its moment of utterance. Rather does it from that point initiate some new activity, which straightway begins to develop in a certain direction, and without interruption continue toward its destined goal. In this final consummation the Word reaches its full measure: only then is its inner power and significance adequately expressed. This self-fulfilment of the Word of God is expressed with poetic elevation and spiritual truth in Isa. 55: 10-11.

“For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, and giveth seed to the sower and bread to the eater;

“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

The Word of God is to be thought of as having the creative force of a Divine fiat. We ought not therefore to dissociate the Word from the historical embodiment of its inherent powers. These powers, it is true, may not at first sight be evident, but that the Word of God is vitally active, running to and fro over the face of the earth, and that its utterance sets in motion spiritual forces whose movement may run through centuries, will in the end be seen to be so.

But, it is objected, this creative word is something else than the written word preserved in the Bible. Should it not rather be thought of as the motion of God's will within God's own mind? Before even a page of the Bible was written had not this word gone forth from God's mouth, calling all things into existence? This must be frankly admitted. God's Word, as a term, is indeed frequently used without the Scriptures, as such, being in view. While this is so, it does not inevitably follow that the prophetic word, spoken or written, is not in as valid a sense the living and effectual Word of God. Speech, surely, no less than volition, may utter God's mind. Shall He that formed man's tongue not use it if He will? The language of Isaiah attests with extreme particularity that the word of prophecy is, as the Word of Jehovah, as powerful in its effects as the word by which the worlds were made.

“I am the LORD that maketh all things . . . that stretched forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth.

“That confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the council of his messengers,

“THAT SAITH of Jerusalem, She shalt be inhabited, and of the cities of Judah, They shall be built: . . .

“THAT SAITH to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers;

“THAT SAITH of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure:

“Even saying of Jerusalem, She shalt be built, and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid” (Isa. 44: 24-28).

The Word of God, therefore, works creatively in history, and controls the issue of events. Prophecy is a transcript of that

Word: it interprets the past, directs the present, and determines the future.

If prophecy must thus be regarded as the Word of the LORD are we thereby justified in ascribing a like sanctity to the writings of Scripture? Any reply to this question must take account of the claims that the Bible makes for itself on this matter, and also of the impression made upon any unbiased and careful reader of the Book. One thing is certain: that, according to the use and wont of the writers themselves, an appeal to the other Scriptures carried with it an assurance of unquestioned authority; and also that it was the invariable practice of the Lord Jesus, both before and after His resurrection, so to use the Scriptures. Finality of this kind can only come from one Source. For who, save God, can speak with absolute finality on things heavenly and eternal? We cannot escape the fact that the “Thus it is written” of the Bible is equated with the “Thus saith Jehovah” of the prophets; and that both are explicitly identified with Him whose Word spake all things into existence. “He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Psa. 33: 9).

If this be so, there must of necessity be a Divine unity binding all prophecy into one harmonious and self-consistent pattern, and conforming in its general outline to the shape of things taken in the course of human history. This broad design is glimpsed in those lofty prophetic visions given to the prophet Daniel, and to the apostle John in the book of the Revelation, which, though they elude at present our full grasp, create within our minds an immediate impression of grandeur and sublimity suited to a Divine *Weltanschauung*.

Old Testament prophecy and Old Testament history go hand in hand. Each reaches its point of interpretation in Christ, and both are co-ordinated in Him. They develop in unison, the partial and progressive in the one keeping pace with the partial and progressive in the other. Thus the broad cryptic utterances of early prophecy correspond with the basic but undeveloped movements of early Bible history. There is in this a propriety of mood and measure that has something in it of what the Romans called “*mores*,” which includes among other things action and manner appropriate to every occasion and circumstance. When both prophecy and history reach their culmination in Christ, they harmonize in Him with like fitness, and so attain their ultimate and mutual correspondence.

Some important issues spring from these facts. To begin with, had a merely systematic unity been presented to us, a programmatic arrangement of events which any intelligent mind could grasp apart from moral disposition or spiritual character, prophecy

could not have served the purpose for which it was intended, namely, to bring men into sympathy with the mind of God, and to prepare them for faith in Christ. Prophecy addresses, not the rational element in man's nature only, but the whole man, heart and mind, will and intelligence, conscience and active life.

In Christ we have the supreme touchstone whereby the essential values of Old Testament prophecy are brought to the surface. This test applied, all prophecy responds thereto and "comes alive." Christ Himself is the unifying element of prophecy. This being so, apart from faith in Him prophecy is a sealed book. The Jews, because of unbelief, did not understand their own Scriptures, despite indefatigable zeal in studying them. "Ye search the Scriptures," Christ said, "and these are they which bear witness of me; and ye will not come to me" (John 5: 39-40). Even yet, when Moses is read, the veil is on their hearts. But when they shall turn to the Lord, the veil will be taken away, and their ancient Scriptures will shine out to them with fresh meaning. This is the major significance of Isaiah, chapter 53, which foretells prophetically how Israel, once blinded in unbelief, shall come to recognize in the Lord Jesus their true Messiah. "We in our ignorance and mistaken zeal," they will say, "thought Him an outcast from God, an impostor rightly suffering His deserts, but lo, in these very sufferings He was being wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." What Rabbinical lore failed to discover, spiritual need and the revelation of Christ to the heart will make clear. Have nominal Christians nothing to learn from this? Valuable though it be, theology is not enough.

The unity of prophecy is therefore something true and real, and its correspondence with the unity of Old Testament history, also something actual and vital, brings it into the centre of total human experience. In some sense it provides the Divine philosophy of history—only, it is not abstract but concrete philosophy. This brings us to the sum of our argument: behind history lies prophecy, and behind prophecy, God.