

THE SCRIPTURES (Articles 6—8)

In the first five Articles the English Reformers rehearsed in traditional terms their faith in God as Trinity, in the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and Holy Spirit, as they had received it from the early centuries of the church's development and as they held it in common with their theological adversaries, at least those on the Roman side. There was little polemical material in those articles, and what there was was directed, more incidentally than deliberately, at Unitarian trends that emerged on the radical wing of the Reformation.

In the sixth, seventh and eighth articles everything has changed. Here we encounter the epistemological principle that was, more than anything else, more, even, than the doctrine of justification by faith, the hallmark of the Reformation at large: the authority and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. Not everything that the document has to say about Scripture is included in these three articles: the subject recurs in Article 20, where it is said that the Church may not so expound one place of Scripture that it is repugnant to another, and again in Article 21, where it is said that the decrees of General Councils touching matters necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority unless they can be shown to be derived from Scripture. It is worth pondering on what this division of the subject matter implies.

We have, in the first place, Scripture, a collection of books which may be listed by their titles, thirty-eight of them in the Old Testament and a further twenty-seven, which are so controversial that they need no listing, in the New; and the task is to define the limits of Scripture and explain the authority which it possesses. In the second place, we have the exposition of Scripture, the corporate interpretation of the sacred text which constitutes the evangelical heartbeat of the church's life, and some limited directions as to the way in which this exposition may proceed. We must be struck at once by how different this organization of things is from what has become almost unquestionable in modern discussions. It is not so much that the exposition of the Scripture is thought of as an activity of the *church* (which is familiar enough to us) — but that it is thought possible to treat of Scripture and its authority quite separately from the question of how it is interpreted. What we would nowadays call "hermeneutics" is considered as a distinct question, which follows from other questions, already asked and answered, about the limits of Scripture and its authority. This approach is strikingly characteristic of the Anglican reformation. It reminds us that one of the earliest acts of the Henrician reform was the placing of an English Bible in churches; and that Cranmer's famous preface to the 1549 Prayer Book was principally concerned with defending the reform of the lectionary and Psalter — the ordered *reading* of Holy Scripture, rather than the *exposition* of it, being the centre of Anglican worship. Scripture is independent of, and prior to, the church's exposition of Scripture, and the church relates to it, in the first place, simply by reading it aloud and only secondly by preaching. The implication is clear: the books of Scripture are not authoritative because the church views them in a certain way; the church views them in a certain way because they are authoritative.

Nevertheless, it is still the case that the statements about Holy Scripture in Articles 6-8 are conceived as a theological *epistemology*. That is to say, they tell us about the order of knowledge, not about the order of reality. If this were not what was intended, then the assertion "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation" would be blasphemous. In the order of reality, it is Jesus who contains all things necessary to salvation, who is the locus of God's self-giving and self-revelation. God was incarnate in a man, not a book. Complaints about the "bibliolatry" of modern conservative Christians often focus on this point — and in principle they are right to do so. Even if such complaints have not always been made in good faith, with the serious intention of being responsible to the revelation of God, who would dare say that they have never been justified? The Articles, at least, are not inclined to bibliolatry, as is clear enough from their whole mode of proceeding as well as from the statement of Article 7: "Both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only mediator between God and man."

The puzzle for the modern reader is to conceive of how there may be a way of knowledge (which does not overstep its bounds and lay claim to become the thing known) that is not defined entirely in terms of the knowing subject. How can we speak of the way in which God's

self-disclosure is known, without (as we say) "beginning where we are", with our modern exercise of reading the Scriptures and trying to make something of them from our modern point of view? How can there be any knowing that is not knowing *by us*? — and by "us" we usually mean an abstractly conceived, modern man, sceptically disposed to almost everything, though we may sometimes mean (equally abstractly) a jolly modern Christian layperson, participating freely in coffee and biscuits at a Bible-study group. Our difficulty is entirely created by a one-sided conception of knowledge in general. We fail to see that the way of knowing any given thing is dictated in large measure by *what that thing is*, and not only (or even mainly) by the situation of the person who has come to know it. This is why pre-modern Christianity had no difficulty saying, what strikes us as so strange, that there is a *way of access* to the knowledge of God's saving deeds in Christ, which is presupposed by our actual access, an authoritative sphere wherein Christ is made known, which commands the way in which he actually becomes known *to us*. And that authoritative sphere is Scripture.

This is not an arbitrary decision. Scripture is authoritative precisely because of what it is and contains: within it "everlasting life is offered to men by Christ". It testifies in a decisive way to the historical event of the incarnation. Only on that ground can any book belong to the canon and count as Holy Scripture. The early patristic church, in its debate about the definition of the New Testament canon, laid the very greatest weight on apostolicity — not, that is, on apostolic authorship narrowly conceived, but on general apostolic provenance. It expected to be reasonably satisfied that a book which laid claim to canonical status was of an apostolic date and arose from some circle with close access to apostolic teaching. The authority of the New Testament is essentially the authority of the apostolic circle. And the apostles have authority on two counts: because they were eye-witnesses of what God did among men in Jesus, and especially of his resurrection, and because they were commissioned by Jesus to bear his message, and the message about him, to the world. In the final analysis, then, the New Testament has no authority which is not the authority of Jesus and the authority of the mighty acts of God involving him. But, correspondingly, the authority of Jesus and of these events is (from an epistemological point of view) vested entirely in the New Testament, and communicated exclusively through its witness. There is no other route by which those events make themselves known to later generations.

The positive statement, "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary", implies, therefore, a position hostile to the claim for an unwritten apostolic tradition, handed down orally through the early church and providing an independent and complementary access to the apostolic faith and practice. The Council of Trent had resurrected this centuries-old claim at its fourth session in 1546; and although the Articles make no explicit reference to it, it forms the background to their discussion of Scripture and tradition. The statement of Article 6, we say, rules out the idea of an unwritten apostolic tradition, although it is obviously possible to conceive of a non-scriptural tradition that did in fact go back to the apostles and was yet not "necessary to salvation". (An example might be the association of St. Peter with the see of Rome.) But such a tradition, however apostolic from a purely historical point of view, could not be regarded as carrying *apostolic authority*; it was not part of the apostolic witness to the facts and meaning of what God had done in Christ. The problem lies in the appeal to such a tradition as the authoritative grounds for Christian life and practice. But could it not, we might wonder, have authority without actually being "necessary to salvation"? Could we not think that true Christian faith must indeed recognize the claim of the Roman see to exercise the authority of Peter, while yet allowing that those who denied or doubted would not suffer the fires of hell? Such a train of thought would put a construction on the words "necessary to salvation" which is hardly to be credited to the Reformers' intentions. They were not in the business of defining a *minimum* content of Christian faith which, however deficient, would suffice to ensure the believer his place in the Kingdom of Heaven — and nor should any of us be in that doubtful business. "Necessary to salvation" can mean one thing only: that it is pertinent to the gospel of Jesus Christ, which demands of us, for the salvation of our souls, our total faith and obedience. Belief in Christ is indivisible. None of us can say of another person's defective faith whether God will recognize it as faith in Christ or not; we can only say of ourselves that if we refuse obedience to what we see to be intrinsic to the gospel, then we are, by implication, refusing Christ. This principle will become explicit in another context, in Article 14.

Laying claim to an unwritten tradition is one of two ways in which the church may assert its own authority against the authority of the apostolic witness in the New Testament. The other way (which is also the more modern way, since belief in the existence of an unwritten apostolic tradition has fallen out of favour on scholarly grounds) is to maintain the accrual of authority to longstanding beliefs and practices, to the point where they become treated as premisses in every argument, never as conclusions, and so stand on an equal footing with the teachings of Scripture. I say, the church asserts its *own* authority; for it is important to see that in speaking of the authority of tradition we are not speaking of the authority of past practices but of the present ones. Nothing is "tradition" unless it is believed or practised *today*. Though it certainly has the sanction of custom, the essential thing about "tradition" is the "handing on", and when handing-on stops, the tradition is no longer a tradition but only a memory. Tradition, then, is the life and faith of the contemporary church, insofar as it is in continuity with that of immediately preceding generations; its authority is the authority of continuity with the nearer past, the authority to go on doing and thinking what this generation has been brought up to do and think. The question is: what authority do we have to do that? What are the proper claims of conservatism?

For clarity we ought to distinguish two different aspects of the question; on the one hand the question of non-scriptural *formulations of faith* — for example, the term *homoousios* in the Nicene creed — and on the other the question of non-scriptural *ecclesiastical institutions* — for example, monarchical episcopacy. The Articles treat of the two separately, dealing here with the question of tradition in dogma, and in later Articles (especially 34) with institutions. We may say as a generalization that they are more generous to traditional institutions than to traditional dogmas; yet we should notice that there is a consistent approach to the two aspects of the question, which may be summed up in three ways: (a) they incline to favour traditions common to the universal church and of patristic antiquity; (b) they assert the freedom of the church with respect to tradition, over against the obligation of the church with respect to Scripture; (c) they qualify the church's freedom only as far as is necessary to safeguard the freedom of the individual believer not to have improper burdens imposed on his conscience, faith or vocation. This constitutes an approach which is, and has remained, distinctively Anglican, unlike the Roman approach on the one hand, with its higher valuation of tradition, and unlike other Protestant approaches, which tend to pay less respect to patristic traditions, and have often laid greater stress on the freedom of the individual believer.

In Article 8 the English Reformers take their stand in relation to dogmatic tradition in the form of the three creeds traditionally accepted in the mediaeval Western church as embodying the faith of the universal church of the patristic era: the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian creeds. As is customary, we murmur a word of regret that they chose these three documents to sum up the patristic legacy, the Apostles' Creed weighed down as it is with mediaeval developments, and the Athanasian creed being not, in truth, a creed at all, but only an individual composition and of Western provenance at that. The misjudgement of sixteenth-century theologians on such matters (which seventeenth-century researches would disclose) is a happy illustration of the very problem which impelled the church towards a scriptural reformation in the first place: the capacity of doubtful dogmatic traditions to cover themselves with borrowed pretensions. Nevertheless, it is clear what the Reformers wished to establish by their selection of documents: points of contact with the pre-Nicene church, with the Niceno-Constantinopolitan settlement of the trinitarian question, and with the Chalcedonian settlement of the Christological question (to which the Athanasian creed gave the most convenient documentary access). And in establishing these contacts with the church of the first five centuries they intend to be free of the opinions of any individual theologian, however great, and associate themselves only with the most considered doctrinal confessions of the church speaking as a whole.

There were, of course, many voices to be heard in the sixteenth century (as today) which would have counselled the Anglican Reformers to dispense with the doubtful blessing of a dogmatic tradition expressed in terms unknown to Christ and his apostles. It is much to their credit that they refused such advice. They realized, as Athanasius in his day had realized, that to restrict theology to the actual words of Scripture was to inhibit its critical task. Any form of words, even the scriptural ones, can be pressed to accommodate opinions hostile to their original intent. Words are a soft material, their sense easily eroded by the weathering of time,

through genuine misunderstanding or through dialectical cleverness. The task of biblical exegesis is to restore and maintain the clear outline of the scriptural sense, assisting the reader to hear the words of Scripture with the force which they had at their first uttering, so that they are effective in bringing to critical examination the ideas and speculations which prevail at any given age. But exegesis is not simply reading over the text, though its aim is to facilitate reading. It uses other words; it must do so if the words before it are to be "drawn out" (as the term "exegesis" suggests) to reveal their sense. To refuse theology the use of other words is to refuse exegesis; and to refuse exegesis is to refuse the critical impact of the Scriptures, and to protect one's ideas and speculations, which can perhaps make peace with the *words* of Scripture, from any serious criticism or examination before the *sense* of Scripture.

The dogmatic tradition, therefore, offers us a paradigm of the task of theology, and its achievements are to be taken seriously. The patristic dogmatic tradition had the additional advantage, in the Reformers' eyes, of pre-dating the first major divisions of the church and the arrogation of a false authority to the Roman See, which (with a somewhat one-sided perception) they understood as a major influence in the corruption of biblical truth. They attached themselves to the patristic tradition at those points where its achievements were most thoroughly thought through — the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas — and they did so not unaware that there was much in the thought and practice of the patristic era which anticipated later false directions or was in itself purely bizarre. The somewhat puzzled affection and respect for the patristic era, so characteristic of successive generations of Anglican theology, was present at the beginning. But there was no formal reason given for it. The only principle they mention in relation to the patristic creeds is something that could be said of any theology of any age which was valued by succeeding ages: they are to be "believed, for they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture". The value of the fathers' contribution to our theology has always to be measured against Scripture itself. It never goes without saying that what they achieved and defined was right; it is our duty to satisfy ourselves of that by measuring their work against the apostolic witness.

"The most certain warrants of Holy Scripture" are not, of course, proof-texts for the concepts and terms with which the fathers expressed their faith. There could be no such proof-texts. Since those concepts and terms are intended precisely to *draw-out* the force of the scriptural words, it is obvious that the scriptural words themselves (*qua* words) cannot validate them. If the author of a catechetical handbook writes, "Christ died for the sins of the whole world" and then adds the reference, "1 Jn. 2:2", he is validating his claim by drawing attention to an actual verbal echo. If an exegete writes: "The term 'world' refers to the human community as a whole, understood as being in rebellion against God," or if a dogmatician refers to the "universality" of salvation in Christ, there will (simply by virtue of the different nature of the task) be no such reference — or if there is, it will serve a different function. Yet in these cases, no less than in the first case, the adequacy of what the theologians have said will be measured by the Scriptures. If we would judge of this adequacy, we must read through the Scriptures with them, pose the questions they posed in the light of them, weigh the answers they gave. And if we find their work good, we may confidently adopt their conclusions and their conceptualisations, making them our own, yet all the time knowing that they are still answerable to scripture. The map may be excellent — possibly even faultless. Yet precisely because it is a map, it is answerable to the countryside, not the countryside to it. The experienced walker does not assume too quickly that the map is in error; yet the question of its adequacy can never be settled absolutely, once and for all. And so it is with our guides in theological exploration. They are our seniors, much to be respected and never to be scorned; we will always, if we are wise, assume that we have much to learn from them. Yet we learn from them best when we hear them critically, testing and proving the value of their work against the measure which judges all theologians equally and without respect of persons.

But to our modern perceptions, shaped by traditions of questioning so different from those of the sixteenth century, all that we have said so far must seem out of place, like a manoeuvre of procrastination, staged to delay our encounter with the central and most difficult question which a scriptural theology must meet: how can we continue to treat the Bible as an authority, when we read it not as a unity but as a diversity? So pressing is this question to Christians of our own age (whether "conservative" or "liberal" — for those labels do not indicate any

profound disagreements about the agenda for discussion) that it is a healthy exercise of thought to endure a little procrastination over it. It is better to wait upon the priorities of another age than to rush in with loud insistence upon our own. But we cannot follow the order of the Articles any further than this, but must bring forward the thesis which the Tudor authors were happy to defer until Article 20: that the church may not "so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another".

The very presence of such a thesis show us that they were not altogether unconscious of the pressures which have led us to put all the weight of scriptural authority onto the question of "hermeneutics". They had had sufficient experience of diversifying expositions of Scripture to know that they had negative implications for the question of authority. They knew that it was not enough to assert the authority of the sacred text and simply leave the hermeneutical question wide open. They had met polemical arguments which accommodated comfortably enough the *formal* claim for Scripture, but which made such great play with the diversities and contradictions as to rob that formal claim of all its substance. The ordinary reader, it was suggested, could only be bewildered by the biblical text, and so, for all practical purposes, must resign himself to the teaching authority of the church. In response to such disingenuous arguments, the Reformers were prepared to insist, if not on the good sense of the ordinary reader of Scripture, at least upon the *ordinary readability* of Scripture, without which the attribution of authority to Scripture would be a mere *pro forma* gesture. Yet if Scripture is ordinarily readable, there must be a unity and coherence to it. The readability of the whole is not established merely from the readability of its various constituent books and texts. Unless we can think that Scripture is readable as a whole, that it communicates a unified outlook and perspective, we cannot attribute doctrinal authority to it, but only to some part of it at the cost of some other part. The authority of Scripture, then, presupposes the possibility of a harmonious reading; correspondingly, a church which presumes to offer an unharmonious or diversifying reading may be supposed to have in mind an indirect challenge to the authority of Scripture itself.

This is what the Reformers thought; and in expressing that thought they appropriately placed their prohibition of diversifying interpretations under the heading of the church's teaching authority. The difference in our position today is that we cannot make this last supposition with them. We cannot impute a sceptical intention to every diversifying interpretation of Scripture. This may seem a strange observation to make at the end of an era which has demonstrated beyond question that the prevalence of diversifying interpretations does, indeed, breed scepticism on a large scale, an era marked by a painful loss of confidence in scriptural authority and by a petulant wilfulness in theological utterance at every level, from the most scholarly to the most popular. Yet it is the case. The hold which diversifying interpretations have gained upon the mind of the church over the past century and a half is attributable, not simply to the perennial cry of "Let us break their bonds asunder", but to a positive discovery: that reading for contrast, rather than simply reading for harmony, can be wonderfully illuminating of the text. At the heart of the modern difficulty with the authority of Scripture is the simple fact that there is a modern tradition of reading the Scriptures, which genuinely is a tradition of *reading* and not of destructive dialectic, yet which is itself dialectical to the extent that it depends upon doing precisely what Article 20 instructs us not to do.

The sixteenth century could hardly have imagined such a thing to be possible. Indeed, even for us it is easier to say that it *is* the case than to say *how* it is the case; for reading must be directed to discerning a unifying sense within a text, which is to say, to treating it as *one* text; and a policy of dismemberment must appear *prima facie* to be a policy of *not* reading. Yet our experience is that within the modern tradition, too, we have been helped to read the Bible — not necessarily better than our forefathers read it, but differently, so that we have become responsible for what our own kind of reading has discovered there. And that means that we cannot simply repent of the modern tradition of reading and put it behind us, as would be appropriate with a sin or a temptation; for that would be to turn our backs on the Bible, a refusal no less serious than the scepticism to which the modern tradition itself can tempt us. The intellectual task which has faced the church ever since the modern tradition came to prevail within it is to appropriate it critically. Among the faithful it has always been controversial (one of its many ill effects has been the gulf between the body of not uneducated church members and a self-conscious elite of biblical scholars), and among

practitioners of other neighbouring intellectual disciplines its excesses have always made it suspect. Today there are more signs than before that its weaknesses are understood within the theological community itself — perhaps because its powers of illumination are nearly spent — and there is some possibility of a critical reappraisal of what it has given us, and why its gift has left us in dreadful disarray.

What is this "modern tradition of reading"? I have chosen the phrase in order to avoid the title customary among scholars, "critical method", a highly misleading expression. It suggests that the heart of the modern tradition is methodological: that is, that it applies certain abstractly-formulated systems of enquiry, perfected independently and in other contexts, to the material of Scripture. Although it is true that this is what many scholarly practitioners set out to do, it is doubtful whether they actually do it, and more or less certain that none of the really important contributions made to our understanding of the Bible in the modern period has been achieved in this way. On the contrary, it is the methodological self-consciousness of the modern biblical scholar, his determination to impose a pre-planned programme of interpretation irrespective of the violence it may do to the text, which has produced that incessant flow of exaggerated absurdities which scornful observers unkindly call his "assured results". When we add the epithet "critical" to the term "method", the obscurity becomes worse. We imagine that there is *one* critical method, a kind of universal system of enquiry which will serve its turn on any material, whereas in fact the history of modern scholarship is that of constantly replacing one method with another. The origin of this term was, of course, the nineteenth-century application to scriptural study of the so-called "higher criticism" — a phrase which acknowledges that there is, in fact, more than one form of critical investigation and refers quite particularly to *historical* enquiry, undertaken with the then current Hegelian view that every concept is attained and comprehended only through a dialectical history of ideas.

To explain why the modern tradition of reading has been successful (and its success does need explaining, given the doubtfulness of so many of its scholarly conclusions) is to explain why historical enquiry — and particularly that motivated by Hegelian conceptions of history — could be illuminating when applied to the Bible. And that, surely, must be because a belief in sacred history is one of the fundamental elements in Christian faith itself. And the Hegelian conception of history is peculiarly suited to illuminating the Bible, precisely because the concept of history which Hegel applies, with only intermittent success, to universal history is so evidently a concept of *sacred* history, and therefore not only suitable to, but implicitly derived from, the reading of the Scriptures. We may notice, as a matter of curiosity, that modern biblical studies have had two major points of fruitfulness, and in both of them they have been under strong philosophical influence: one in the nineteenth century under the tutelage of Hegel and one in the twentieth century under the tutelage of Kierkegaard. But the great argument between Kierkegaard and Hegel was always an implicitly theological one, over how history is to be understood and over how the eternal interacts with the historical in the Christian understanding of revelation. So far from disapproving of the philosophical influences on biblical study as a non-scientific distortion, we ought rather to think that it is just these influences which have given the modern tradition of biblical study its authenticity as a theological enterprise, so that it has offered (with whatever excesses) a reading of Scripture that responds to issues which Scripture itself raises, and which must dominate any scripturally oriented thought.

If we wish to understand what it means to say that Jesus is "the Christ", we must come to grips with the history of the Messianic idea in the Old Testament. That is the way in which the Holy Spirit has expounded the concept of the Christ for us. But the history of the idea in the Old Testament is a history of change and transformation. It is not simply a matter of seeing a "type" of the Messiah in the Davidic king. We have to comprehend the history of kingship itself, including its rejection by God in the Babylonian captivity (with the consequent vacuum of political authority and theocratic authenticity) which is the negative side of the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, preparing the way for the emergence of the transcendent Son of Man from the anointed king, the "Son of God". We have to comprehend the ambivalence in Israel about the origins of the monarchy, the tussle between the theocratic and the monarchic ideals, in order to see how the Messianic expectation which emerges brings together the notions of mediate and immediate divine rule. But in order to trace this history, we must be able to distinguish the successive voices that emerge at us from the Old Testament:

distinguishing them historically, so that we can tell the voice of Messianic monarchism in the royal psalms from the voice of transcendent post-monarchical Messianic expectation; and also distinguish them thematically, so that we can tell the voice of anti-monarchic theocratic prophetism from that of monarchist legitimism in the early period. So we are caught up, then, in pointing contrasts between one moment in the story and another, in a diversifying pattern of interpretation which seizes upon the ways in which one part of the Scripture sounds differently from another. We do it, not because we are refusing to treat the Bible as the Bible, but because this is the actual character of the Bible (or rather of the Old Testament) that we have before us: it is the record of an emerging theological idea, concretised and lived out in a society whose history is woven together with that of the idea.

Is this, in effect, to debunk the Christological concept, to rob it of its meaning by showing it up as the product of centuries of chance evolution and sociological conflict? On our answer to this will depend our attitude, not simply to the modern tradition, but to the biblical revelation itself. For we cannot avoid the conclusion that this is, in effect, how the Scriptures show us God making himself known. What if we say that God *cannot* be made known in this way — that this is not a way in which anything of eternal significance *may* be known? Then we are simply rejecting the biblical God, who makes himself known by acts in history, whose self revelation, therefore, must take the form of history. This is not to embrace modern historicism, with its denial of eternal truths and its opposition to metaphysics. It is merely to say that (within the Scriptures, at least), eternity does manifest itself in historical process, the history of Israel and the unfolding of its theology being the elect vessel of that manifestation. The appropriateness of a historical-critical approach to the Old Testament, then, is simply that the Old Testament itself, *qua* sacred history, demands it and gives rise to it. The same can be said about the New Testament, in which the claim that God makes himself known supremely in the historical event of Easter demands of us a discrimination of the pre-Easter and post-Easter perspectives.

But once we have said as much as this, we have come full circle and have joined hands with the prohibition of Article 20 again. We are forbidden any presentation of this historical dialectic which supposes it incapable of yielding a meaningful revelation — whether in the interests of a sceptical debunking of the supposed revelation or in the interests of a return to pre-critical understandings of the Bible. We are, then, at one with the Tudor theologians in forbidding an interpretation which treats historical diversities, contrasts and conflicts as *repugnancies*. A term which should be banished for ever from the exegesis of Scripture is the word "contradiction", which bespeaks an ahistorical, two-dimensional understanding of the Scriptural texts that conceives of them all as synchronous and competing propositions, rather than dialectically successive and mutually implicating testimonies of God's unfolding self-disclosure. The modern tradition has been entirely wasted on us if we end up with as ahistorical a conception of scriptural revelation as we started with, but merely with the added presumption that we can make our choice between contrasting elements according to our own prejudices. What, for example are we to say about the degenerate liturgical habit of expurgating the Psalms of those elements which are "incompatible" with Jesus's command to forgive our enemies? Does it not express the idea that the Psalms, with their cries for vengeance, are liturgically contemporaneous with Jesus's words, and so in direct competition with them? Is it not the virtue of retaining these contrasts in our liturgy (however distasteful to our unreflective sensibilities) that it will prevent us from hearing even Jesus's words ahistorically, and from failing to comprehend how they came to be uttered, and so what they mean within the history of salvation? In such ways we see that the sense of Article 20, though formally seeming to oppose the whole enterprise of historical dialectic, must, at a deeper level, undergird it: and that historical interpretation collapses (as it has constantly done) into ahistorical repugnancies precisely when there is a failure of belief in the unity of God's disclosure through historical process. For it is not only "reading" that makes a presupposition of unity; "history" does, too.

And here we must venture a warning against some recent trends which have set out to recover the unity of the text of Scripture without, it would appear, grasping the nettle of finding the unity in the history behind Scripture. It is not enough to read the text of Scripture as a text, and look for the textual unity which properly belongs to it as such. That way lies the danger that we will treat of an abstraction: a "Scripture" which has been carefully lifted out of the

history through which it came to be, and with which it seeks to put us in touch. History will be abandoned to the chaos which (it is presumed) the modern tradition has made it out to be. Unity will be located in a purely literary phenomenon, a text which is something of an artificial construct. To stress the unities of the text, *qua* text, may, of course, be very useful as a counterbalance to unliterary projects of dismemberment on the part of the old-style form- and source- critics. But if the end of the enterprise is not to discern a unifying purposiveness in reality, that is, a "history" which belongs to events and not merely to art, then its service to us is merely aesthetic.

With these considerations in mind, we return to the Articles on Scripture, and especially to Article 7, which deals with the oldest and most persistent challenge to the theologian to demonstrate the unity which lies behind the diversity and contrasts of historical revelation: the place of the Old Testament in the Christian Scriptures. This offers a test of our thesis that historical criticism of the Scriptures was evoked above all by the datum of the Scriptures themselves; for if this is so, we will expect to find, here more than anywhere else, anticipations of the insights which one associates with the modern tradition of reading.

The Article begins with a stress upon the unity of the Testaments, by denying the contention, (historically associated with the second- century gnostic Marcion, but also exercising an influence upon some groups within the Reformation) that "the Old Testament is contrary to the New".

Before we follow the criticism of this contention, let us remark upon its strengths. It was determined to be radically Christian, to take its stand on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and nowhere else. It was suspicious of the claim that God gave the law to Moses on Sinai, that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah or that the Lord had opened the Psalmist's lips. It took its bearings from the New Testament alone, because in it was to be found the apostolic witness to Jesus, whereas the law, the prophets and the writings, composed long before, could know nothing of him. But, of course, the apostolic witness to Jesus is full of references to the law, prophets and writings. In order to rid the church of the incubus of the Old Testament Marcion had had to excise large parts of the New. And this shows up the true character of the Marcionite proposal: it lacked a sense of historical depth which could see Jesus, as the apostles saw him, as the ultimate confirmation of the "sure mercies of David" and the promise of God to Abraham. The Jesus it could cope with was a mere abstraction. It was the great achievement of Luther, that in seeking to show up the centrality of Christ as a revelation of divine mercy, he never allowed the opposition between Moses and Christ to develop into a simplistic Marcionite refusal of the Old Testament, but held to the sharp historical dialectic in which Law and Gospel were both true manifestations of the one God.

Article 7, however, does not start where Luther starts, with the opposition of Law and Gospel, but with a much more Calvinist stress upon the unity of the divine revelation: "both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only mediator between God and man." The Old Testament always contains the message of Christ implicit within it, "Wherefore they are not to be heard which feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises." Certainly the Old Testament is full of these so- called "transitory promises" which relate only to the history of Israel and have no universal reference: a land, a king descended from David, an existence free from threat of war, a fruitful economy. But each of these local and limited hopes is made a vehicle by which something universal, looming on the horizon of the future, makes itself known. "They were reaching out", says the Epistle to the Hebrews (11:16) "for a better homeland, that is, a heavenly one."

This general programme for the Christian reading of the Old Testament, uncontroversial in the Catholic West as in the Orthodox East, is open to a number of different exegetical interpretations. One might, for example, find in the Old Testament an extended *theophany*, which contains symbolic representations of heavenly and eternal realities: images of the divine Trinity, the Kingdom of God or the spiritual purity of the redeemed soul. Or one might find narrative types which anticipate the salvific role that is to be played by Christ, in Isaac, for example, the restored sacrifice, or in Joseph the pioneer of his people's journey, thus extending to the narrative elements the character of *prophecy*. Both these exegetical

approaches were familiar enough to the Western church, but the English Reformers make no mention of them here. They point us, instead, to the character of the Old Testament as *law*, a move in a somewhat surprising direction given the remark about "promises" in the preceding sentence, and one which leaves a slight sense of hiatus in the text. But that move is not only characteristic of the Reformation as a whole, which develops its understanding of the Old Testament in response to Luther's treatment of Law and Gospel; it also shows a willingness to develop the general thesis of continuity in the direction of historical dialectic. For to speak of "law" is to speak not only of eternal realities, but of orders that are tied to particular societies at particular times; it is to speak of that which passes away, as well as that which endures.

The law of any society has two aspects. On the one hand, it is that which establishes and maintains order, and as such mediates the order of creation and establishes a relation between the life of society and the good for which mankind was created. On the other, it is not simply identical to the social good, but is in various respects arbitrary: societies are different from each other, and live under different pressures, with different capacities for organization and communication, different educational levels, different motivations. The law (even assuming that in every case it is wise and good law) will differ in accordance with differing social needs. It had been said consistently since the early fathers of the church that the religious law of ancient Israel was determined by its structure in salvation-history, as an order of sacraments which communicated the benefits of Christ yet to appear. In the middle ages an additional point was made: that the law of ancient Israel was determined by its contingent character as a society: by its social, educational, moral structure within history. These two elements of contingency in Old Testament law are recognized in the remark that "the law as touching ceremonies and rites, do (*sic*) not bind Christian men, nor the civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth". Thus a division is set between the Christian era and the society to which the Old Testament (as law) bears witness. The dialectic of historical development is acknowledged. The order by which the social good was mediated in ancient Israel cannot claim us immediately, but is part of the historical dialectic through which the gospel of Christ was revealed. Yet this contingent social order was *also* a mediation of the universal good; to understand it is not enough to understand its contingency, but we must understand its relation to the universal good as well. Hence we detect also within this law a revelation of created order and the good to which all men are called, a "moral law" by which every human being is claimed and which belongs fundamentally to men's welfare. The theologian's task in expounding the Old Testament is to allow the contingent and the universal to emerge distinctly. If the *universal* does not shine through the contingent, then what is done is not theology, but only history: if the universal does not shine *through the contingent*, then what is done is bad theology, not founded in the narration of God's mighty deeds in saving-history, and so inadequately Christian.

The importance of the Old Testament to Christian faith lies in the history to which it bears witness — by which we mean not only the dramatic events of exodus, conquest and exile but also the institutional context which forms the fabric of Old Testament society: monarchy, temple and law. This history matters because it is the pre-history out of which was to arise the history of the Messiah. Through it we discern the end for which God created the world — the good for human existence, to which the economy of salvation is directed. The particular instruments do not bind us, not simply because time as such has moved on, but because God's time has moved on, and we stand the other side of the great climax towards which they tended. As we read the Old Testament we acknowledge the importance of all of it; yet we have to distinguish different ways in which it is important to us. And our key to that lies in the New Testament. Article 7, in using the threefold categorization of Old Testament law to bring out the continuity of the whole Scripture and the historical opposition of old and new, achieves very nearly a perfect balance.