

### Biblical Authority: Canon, Tradition, and Hermeneutics

#### Apology

First of all, allow me to give the limitations of this paper. It treats a subject that straddles Bible and theology. Unfortunately I cannot claim to be a specialist in the latter. I do, however, have an historian's knowledge about the Bible, canon, and tradition. As for biblical authority and hermeneutics, in the past I have tried to avoid discussing the subject. Typical of my attitude is what I wrote in 1979 to conclude an essay entitled, "The Gospel of John and the Jews."<sup>1</sup> There I carefully explained that what John says about Jews reflects relationships between the Johannine and Jewish communities during the various periods in which the Gospel was edited. Then in one concluding paragraph I barely mentioned that "unfortunately, the anti-Jewish teaching of the Fourth Gospel did not stop with its final redaction." Nevertheless, over the years I have been forced to deal with the subject, if only because I am a presbyter in the Episcopal Church, a denomination with a constitution that (in art. VIII) requires every ordained person to attest to the following, not only orally, but in writing:

I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation.

The latter part of this statement may be somewhat peculiar to the Episcopal Church, but the first part is adhered to by most Christian bodies. In any case, because of my own limitations in systematic theology, please allow me to present this paper in a somewhat personal form.

#### "The Word of God"

There are very few Churches that would object to ending Scripture readings with "The Word of God" or "The Word of the Lord"; yet, the title can be misleading, if not dangerous. If we take this expression as an objective genitive (i.e., "the word

1. In Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity, edited by Alan Davies (New York: Paulist, 1979), pp. 72-97.

about God"), then I suppose that the title could be theologically acceptable. After all the Bible does have a lot to say about God, some true and some which many of us might find more problematic.<sup>2</sup> Still, I would agree with Karl Barth, who once affirmed at his Princeton lectures, in answer to a question about his uncritical acceptance of the Protestant canon, that many have indeed learned a lot about God through the study of Scripture in its various forms, but in his case he had used the Protestant canon.

The real problem with the affirmation that Scripture is "the Word of God" is the fact that most people interpret these words as a subjective genitive (i.e., "the word from God"). It is such a view that has led to the theories of biblical inerrancy. And even many who might admit the Bible has erred on nonreligious matters<sup>3</sup> still find it difficult to believe that a "God-given" Bible could err on matters of religion. Yet, it is quite clear that the Bible does err on such matters, for example in the view held throughout much of the New Testament that the generation of the apostles would not all taste of death, that many would live to "see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28; I Cor. 15:51; I Thess. 4:15). Another example is a prophecy from Micah (3:13), which no less an authority than the prophet Jeremiah (26:18) explains did not come to pass.

Apart from false views of inspiration and inerrancy, which might arise from understanding "the Word of God" as a subjective genitive, there is also the question of avodah zarah, i.e., idolatry. For many there is certainly some confusion between the living Word, Jesus Christ, and the Bible. In fact we often tend to treat the Bible itself as an object of worship. I can remember walking into a church where the only symbol that I could see was a table up front upon which a large open Bible was facing the congregation. As far as I could tell, the Bible was there, not for reading, but simply for adoration. Again I can think of making many pastoral visits and seeing a Bible prominently displayed in a living room, again not for reading, but just for display. I particularly recall one occasion when I was chided for daring to lay something on top of the Holy Book. Surely the liturgical affirmation that the Bible is "The Word of God," does not help to dispel such idolatry.

Perhaps worse than the question of idolatry, are the hurtful attitudes which find support from biblical dicta accepted with idolatrous certainty because they come

2. As an example of something true about God, I might cite Jonah 4:2: "For I knew that you were a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and repenting of evil." As an example of something more problematic, let me follow the lead of Leo Baeck and point to the various passages in the New Testament which picture God less in terms of love than of justice and vengeance, e.g., the parable of the Last Judgement or Romans 1:18-32 and Acts 7:42, both of which depict God's abandonment of sinners.

3. The Church of England must in part thank Zulu converts for pointing out some of the scientific absurdities in the Bible. They convinced Bishop John William Colenso (1814-83) of Natal that Noah's ark could not possibly have held all the animals of the world, and Colenso was instrumental in forcing the English Church to deal with higher criticism.

from a book which has become an object of adoration rather than of study. In a discussion of women's rights last spring at the NE AAR, Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza mentioned that a major block to viewing some biblical statements about women in a relative, historical context is the liturgical affirmation, "The word of God." The same can be said on the question of antisemitism. The affirmation leads to viewing of the Bible as a magical text divorced from history where all the antisemitic statements are taken at face value as timeless truths unconditioned by historical circumstance. I am told that the Nazis extracted such passages and distributed them as tracts.

#### Ancient Church Writers and the Bible

We may tend to believe that the early Church writers were fundamentalists. However, while it is true that they emphasized the Bible's historical reliability, to call them all biblical fundamentalists is an oversimplification. Origin, for example says in his Commentary on John (X:4, ANF trans.):

I do not condemn [the evangelists] if they even sometimes dealt freely with things which to the eye of history happened differently, and changed them so as to subserve the mystical aims they had in view.

Similarly Augustine, while more conservative in his approach, still admitted quite freely that the evangelists have frequently violated the chronological order of the events and have inserted words of their own in place of or in addition to what was originally spoken. Even Calvin admitted that the Sermon on the Mount was a collection of sayings uttered on various occasions.

Such views by the early Church writers should come as no surprise to one who has studied the history of the biblical canon. After all, if one regards the Bible as the word that comes directly from God, it is well to decide what that Bible includes. I remember how once on a radio talk show someone asked me whether I believed that the Bible was inspired (in the sense of being inerrant). My answer began with the question, "Which Bible"? I then went on and explained how even today Roman Catholics, the Orthodox churches, and most Protestant denominations all have different lists of what belongs in the Hebrew Scriptures; and there is one Eastern Church which has yet to accept the book of Revelation.

4. See, for example, his harmony of the Gospels, especially II:5, 12, 17, & 21.

5. For a good survey of classical Christian authors on the gospels, see Harvey K. McArthur, The Quest Through the Centuries (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), pp. 11-55.

6. Such a New Testament (without Revelation) was also adopted in 363 at the Council of Laodicea, and evidently the reformer, Thomas Cranmer, agreed. In his lectionary for the 1549 prayer book, he set forth a lectionary with serial readings

To those of us who study the history of the canon, such a free attitude toward what books belong in the Bible is not difficult to understand. In Jesus' day Scripture was divided into the Law and the Prophets, and so the Gospels generally report that Jesus would refer to Scripture as "the Law and the Prophets." In addition there were 'other writings, some of which were not always generally accepted. Thus Luke-Acts, which I have argued may stem from a period as late as the middle of the second century, in one place (Luke 24:44) speaks of "the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms." What works were included in this third section of the Hebrew canon differed from group to group. The Essenes at Qumran had one list, the translators of the Greek Bibles had another, the author of the book of Jude evidently regarded the Assumption of Moses and some of the Enoch literature as scripturally authoritative, and the Rabbinic leaders who formed the academy at Yavneh (from 70-132) were deciding on a list that later became the Jewish and Protestant canon. Among other things they decided that the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira was not part of Scripture, but that Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs should be retained, the latter with the understanding that it was an allegory of God's love for Israel. In addition, the academy standardized the official text of Scripture, and in this they were quite successful. I once compared the text of Jonah in modern Hebrew Bibles with the book of Jonah in the scroll of the Minor Prophets from the Murabba'at caves. I found only two minor spelling differences. Thus during the whole Apostolic age, full agreement was lacking among Jews on either what books belonged in the Hebrew Bible or on the exact wording of the individual works in question.

What was true for the Hebrew Bible, was also true for the Christian New Testament. I never cease to be amazed over how long the Church existed without a universally accepted list of New Testament books. In fact, the first major council to adopt the list that we have now was the Council of Trent.<sup>11</sup> Indeed a list of New Testament books matching the one we use today is unknown until

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of the whole Bible with notable exception of Revelation.

7. "The Date of Luke-Acts," Luke-Acts: New Perspectives from the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar, edited by C. H. Talbert (New York: Crossroad), pp. 47-62.

8. The book of Jubilees and the Temple scroll seem to represent Essene attempts at rewriting the Torah.

9. For a good study of the Hebrew canon, see A.C. Sundberg, The Old Testament of the Early Church ("Harv. Theol. St.," 20; Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1964).

10. Of course, this standardization did not affect all texts of the Hebrew Bible. Rabbinic quotations from scripture vary from the Masoretic Text as much as twenty percent of the time.

11. On April 8, 1546, it made the present New Testament a matter of faith. Far earlier (in 397) the synod at Carthage had also adopted our New Testament canon, but this synod could hardly be regarded as a major council for the Church as a whole.

Athanasius of Alexandria gave such a list in his Easter letter for the year 367, and even here Athanasius recognized that many of his contemporaries still included works like the Teaching of the Apostles and the Shepherd of Hermas as parts of their New Testaments.<sup>12</sup> Other writers of the Early Church, particularly those from the Caesarean school, were more forthright in expressing doubts about what belonged in the New Testament canon. Such writers felt the need to list the books about the canonicity of which they or others had some doubts. Eusebius, for example, mentions some of these doubts about certain books (in HE 3:3:4-6, my trans.):

And the fourteen letters of Paul are obvious and plain, yet it is not right to ignore that some dispute the Epistle to the Hebrews. They say that it was rejected by the church of Rome as not being by Paul.... Nor have I received his so-called Acts. Moreover, the same Apostle in the salutations at the end of Romans has mentioned Hermas along with some others. To him, they say, belongs the Book of the Shepherd. It should therefore be known that this also is rejected by some, and on their account it should not be placed among [the] accepted works.

It seems fairly obvious from these views on canon that such early Church writers were hardly in the same camp as modern fundamentalists, particularly as regards the New Testament. If so, then what views did early Christians hold about the Bible as a whole and about the New Testament in particular? I believe, that the history of the development of the canon provides this answer: **THE CANON WAS DEVELOPED IN ORDER TO COMBAT WHAT WAS PERCEIVED AS FALSE TRADITION AND PRACTICE.** True, various justifications might be given. For example, acceptance into the New Testament generally involved the requirement for apostolic authorship, but such a requirement does not really change the picture. After all, whether one accepted an ascribed authorship was generally decided by the agreement of the writing with "orthodox" tradition.

In the case of the Hebrew canon, its history begins with the discovery of a law book in the temple under the reign of Josiah, a book which became the basis for overthrowing what II Kings 22-23 regards as false traditions and practices. These included the rejection of Baal and Asherah worship, the deposition of idolatrous priests, an end to human sacrifice, and the destruction of the local high places along with the objects of sun worship in Jerusalem.

The New Testament canon also arose to distinguish between true and false tradition. No one really felt the need for such a Christian supplemental canon, until the time of Marcion in the middle of the second century. Before his time, certain Christian writings might be read at Christian worship, much in the same way that Christian Scientists will add a reading from Mary Baker Eddy's Science

12. It is not surprising, therefore, that the earliest biblical codices contain various early works no longer considered biblical.

and Health.<sup>13</sup> But Marcion needed a new canon because he was replacing the old as part of his general rejection of all that was Jewish. He chose an early version of the Gospel of Luke plus seven Pauline epistles. As I have shown elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> our Luke-Acts was written at least partly in response to Marcion and was likely intended to be the whole Christian New Testament. It contained an expanded version of Marcion's gospel plus a work about all the apostles<sup>15</sup> including Paul. For the author of Acts this solution had the advantage of retaining Paul as a respected missionary while excluding his epistles, on which Marcion drew so effectively.<sup>16</sup> In time Paul's epistles had to be included within the New Testament, but they were watered down by the addition of the Pastorals.

There was one other difference between Marcion's canon and those which the later Church came to regard as "orthodox." Marcion had intended to replace the Hebrew Scriptures; the "orthodox" canons were never intended to stand alone. Put bluntly, the New Testament should be regarded as the Christian supplement to the Hebrew Bible. Much, therefore, of what was taken for granted in these earlier Scriptures, e.g., on the oneness of the Godhead, never had to be stressed in the writings of the New Testament simply because a supplement need not repeat what the main work has already said. When, however, the gospel was preached to the pagan world, many themes in the Hebrew Bible could no longer be taken for granted. For that reason, these themes from the Hebrew Bible play a very large role in most of those early Christian apologies that were intended for a gentile audience.

As I have already suggested, canons are developed in order to combat perceived false tradition and practice. Let me explain in more detail. True religion is a mixture of inspiration and tradition. While tradition without divine inspiration generally leads to sterility, inspiration unchecked by tradition can be demonic. All kinds of religious fanaticism and false religion can derive from people who depend solely on the indwelling of some spirit. The problem, of course, is how to know whether one's indwelling spirit is the Spirit of God or the spirit of the demonic. Nor is this problem unique to the Christian Church. One of the major problems faced by ancient Israel was how to distinguish between the true and false prophets. The problem was faced directly in Deuteronomy 13, which begins:

If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says: Let us go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them, you shall not listen....

13. Justin Martyr's well-known reference to reading the "memoirs of the apostles" (I Apology 67) seems to fit such a semiauthoritative role.

14. "The Date of Luke-Acts."

15. Thus the Muratorian Canon calls Acts, Acta ... Omnium Apostolorum.

16. Justin Martyr went further. In all of his works he never once even mentions Paul.

In other words, the prophet must follow Israel's tradition, as expressed in the book of Deuteronomy. Otherwise that prophet is false. In other words authoritative tradition is the check on false traditions arising through false prophecies.

Similarly, in the early Church there were many conflicting traditions, some of them pretty far out.<sup>17</sup> For example there were those who believed that the Apostle Thomas was Jesus' twin brother.<sup>18</sup> An even more far-out example is the sect known as Phibionites.<sup>19</sup> This group practiced random sexual intercourse at their love feasts, used male semen and menstrual blood as the elements in their eucharists, and indulged in the sacramental eating of aborted fetuses. Moreover, their traditions took written form; and in one of their books entitled, Great Questions of Mary we read the following description by Epiphanius:

They say that [Jesus] gave her a revelation, that he took her to the mountain and prayed. [Then they say] that he took a woman out of his side and began to have intercourse with her. Thus, taking his semen he showed that we need to do the same thing in order to live. And, when Mary fell to the ground in dismay, he immediately raised her up again and said: Why do you doubt, O you of little faith?

Now with such a maze of conflicting traditions available to early Christians, congregations needed some standard by which to tell the true from the false. Thus the individual dioceses adopted authoritative lists of what they believed to be apostolic writings for use in conjunction with the Hebrew Bible as a measuring stick, a canon, by which to evaluate the masses of Christian traditions.

With such an understanding of canonical Scripture, the fact that there are contradictions among the various works, even the fact that minor differences still exist about exactly what works belong in Scripture, should cause no great concern. Canon is a witness to the limits of valid Christian belief. Rather than tell us exactly what truth is, the canon affirms that truth exists within a certain range, that truth lies somewhere between here and there. According to Hebrews (10:26; cf. 6:4-6), for example, deliberate post-Baptismal sin is unforgivable; but according to Paul (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 11:28-32; etc.) the believer who continues to sin is far

17. On the extreme varieties of belief and practice among early Christians, see Stephen Benko, Pagan Rome and the Early Christians (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1984); Walter Bauer, Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity, trans. under R.A. Kraft and G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); Robert M. Grant, Second-Century Christianity (London: SPCK, 1946); and Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York: Random House, 1979).

18. So according to "The Book of Thomas the Contender" (Nag Ham. II, 7) translated by J. D. Turner in The Nag Hammadi Library in English (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 188-194.

19. The most complete description of this group is found in Epiphanius, Panarion, 26. For an English treatment, see Benko, "The Libertine Gnostic Sect of the Phibionites According to Epiphanius," Vigiliae Christianae 21(1967), pp. 103-119.

from lost. The truth lies somewhere between the two.<sup>20</sup> Thus modern Christians should not be enslaved by every detail of scripture, we should see Scripture as a more general guide in the light of which we can make informed decisions for today's situations.

A related problem of canon which has special importance for Jewish-Christian relations is this: We generally choose to read and study different parts of the Hebrew Scripture. As a practical matter Christians have adopted a non-Jewish canon extracted from the Hebrew Bible. For traditional Judaism the halakhic sections, those which give commandments are of special importance and deserve special study. Thus, since the destruction of Jerusalem Jewish boys have traditionally begun their Scripture study with the book of Leviticus, that book of the Pentateuch with the least narrative and the most legislation. But what Jews value most, we Christians seem to value the least. We like to stress the narrative parts of Torah and omit the rest as dry, irrelevant "legalism." In fact, the way the two communities tend to limit the study of Scripture to certain sections means that the communities are in practice using different Bibles. Ernst Kaesemann has had the honesty to admit that for authority he looks for a canon within a canon. I am not so sure that I can agree. I prefer to say that Scripture presents us with a collection of possibilities from which we look for suggestions and guidance in our several situations.

#### The Interpretation of Scripture for Today

In turning to the subject of hermeneutics, we must realize that words have little meaning apart from specific situations. For example, the command to love one's enemies means one thing in the context of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:44); but the same sentiment means something quite different in the context of Rom. 12:20 where we are told, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Similarly, the command to turn the other cheek means one thing in the context of Matt. 5:39; but the same command might be given to a modern guerrilla fighter to warn such a one to stay out of trouble until the day of revolution arrives. Biblical passages,<sup>21</sup> therefore, can have little meaning apart from a specific historical context. And incidentally, this necessity to study historical contexts means that

20. Richard Norris, now of Union Seminary, once suggested that with Hebrews in the Bible we learn that sin is serious, but from the other canonical books we learn that God is still able to overcome even serious sin.

21. This statement implies a rejection, not only of much that the Structuralists stand for, but also of traditional uses of allegory, typology, and even the sensus plenior, even though allegory and typology are used within the New Testament itself. Allegory and typology should only be used when they were intended as such by those who wrote the various books (e.g., Rom. 11:17-24). On the special case of the Song of Songs, see below. See also J. J. McKenzie, "Problems of



the Bible is not selfunderstandable through simple reading, even in the original language. Perhaps we need to adopt the Jewish practice of always studying Scripture with a commentary.<sup>22</sup>

There is, however, a further problem here, namely the question of which historical context. The first chapter of Genesis was probably at one time part of an ancient creation epic. Later it became part of the priestly tradition commonly designated by the letter P. Still later it became incorporated within the Pentateuch. Which context should be scripturally normative for us? One answer comes from Von Rad who maintains in his commentary on Genesis that the opening of that book must be interpreted to mean creation ex nihilo, as opposed to creation out of the chaos.<sup>23</sup> The reason he gives is that in the theology of P requires the verse to mean creation out of nothing. But does P or Genesis form the first book of our Bible?<sup>24</sup>

The problem of which context is somewhat different for the Song of Songs. Whatever the final redactor of the book may have intended, such a one did not interpret the work as an allegory of God's love for his people. Yet, when this work was finally accepted into the canon, it was accepted as just such an allegory. For the Rabbis at Yavneh it was an allegory of God's love for Israel, while for the early Church it was an allegory of God's love for the Church. Which context should we use in any authoritative interpretation of the work? That of love songs, cultic or otherwise, as intended by the final redactor, or that of an allegory, as intended by those who accepted the work into the Hebrew canon? In this case perhaps we should opt for the latter choice, at least when reading the work as a basis for our belief and practice.

The problem appears in another form when treating the Gospels. Assuming the doubtful proposition that we can determine the original context in which Jesus spoke a given saying or parable, should this context become normative for us or should we accept the context and theology of the evangelists? More specifically, if one could show that Jesus meant his saying about turning the other cheek in the sense that one should not fight the Romans just yet but await a sign from heaven, should we accept such an interpretation as opposed to the more absolute context of Matthew's gospel?<sup>25</sup> Should we perhaps accept the more militant context of Roman's 12? I am not sure of the answer, but I do know that I cannot pontificate

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Hermeneutics in Roman Catholic Exegesis," IBL 78(1958), pp. 197-204.

22. In fact synagogues regularly supply commentaries for the congregation to use during the Scripture reading.

23. The Hebrew can support either meaning. Both Rashi and his grandson Rashbam interpret Gen. 1:1 to mean creation out of the chaos.

24. Similarly Robert Pfeiffer seemed to believe that he would have a truly authoritative Bible, if only he could isolate the original L, the original Amos, etc.

25. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, R. Bultmann takes an interesting stance. He interprets what he considers to be the next to last revision of the gospel.

about what either Jesus or the Bible would have me do in such a circumstance.

Even in the epistles of Paul there is the question of which context. In the matter of salvation through pistis (usually translated "faith"), Paul seems to have interpreted the term in the sense of the Hebrew emunah, which means "fidelity." Dieter Georgi suggested in a lecture a couple of years ago that a good translation of what Paul meant by pistis would be "loyalty." I regularly suggest "commitment," and Bultmann has suggested "obedience." Paul's audiences seem unaware of the Apostle's Hebrew use of pistis. They understood "faith" to denote the kind of belief that enabled one to say, "Shall we sin more that grace may abound." Of course, in such a case we can readily choose Paul's interpretation; but the decision is not always so easy. When Paul quotes a creedal formula or a hymn, should we follow the interpretation of the original being cited, or should we use the interpretation that Paul has attached to them?<sup>26</sup>

Two problems of interpretation concern us:

1. Which parts of Scripture, if any, should we regard as more normative than the rest?
2. Out of what contexts we are to interpret the passages we select.

In regard to the first problem, I believe that we should not select out some super-authoritative canon within a canon, or even a testament within the Bible. Rather we should look at the whole range of suggestions that Scripture gives us and make our choices in light of present circumstances. As for the problem of the correct contexts for interpreting passages, I am less decided. My suggestion here is that we should generally try to determine what the final author or redactor of a book meant and that this meaning should be paramount, if only because the work in its final form is what we have accepted as Scripture. Determining an author's sources and the interpretation of these sources from a theological point of view, have their main exegetical value as an aid to determining what the final author was trying to say.<sup>27</sup> As mentioned above, the only exception that I should make is where a work was accepted into the canon with a special meaning that differed from the intention of its author, and the prime example of this exception is the Song of Songs.

But even solving these problems does not give us answers for today's questions. We are not interested so much in what Paul, for example, said to the Corinthians when he believed that God would bring this aeon to an end within a matter of a few years. Rather what we really need to know is how would Paul would speak and act today in a world where we no longer experience the institution of slavery, where people have a responsibility for determining government policy, where wives must be recognized as decision-makers on a par with husbands, where Jew and

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26. For example, Paul's sources generally refer to "the Christ" with the article and as a title, while Paul prefers to use "Christ" without the article as a proper name.

27. Of course, from an historical point of view there is a much greater need in determining such sources and their meanings.

Christian need to forge a new relationship. It is not enough to determine through exegesis what a biblical passage means in an historical context. We need to go further and apply the passages to today's situations. And, since we cannot be too certain of our results, "for now we see through a [bronze] looking glass darkly," we must make our interpretations, not in the pride that certainty tends to bring, but in fear and trembling.

Henry Cadbury once summed this method of interpretation with the following formula:

$$\frac{A}{B} = \frac{X}{C}$$

Here "A" represents what a given Scripture passage says, "B" is the context (or contexts) in which it was said, "C" is our situation today, and "X" stands for what the passage should mean for us today.

Incidentally, most of our theological disciplines can be described in terms of this formula. Biblical scholars like myself are primarily concerned with the left side of the equation. Theologians are generally concerned with applying the results from the left side to the right side and doing so in terms of specific cultures,<sup>28</sup> while sociologists help define what the cultures are. The preacher performs the task of a theologian, but in terms of a given congregation; and the spiritual adviser is helping individuals apply the message to themselves. Historians have a middle role to play. They help us gain a wider perspective by showing how the formula has been applied, knowingly or unknowingly, throughout the ages.

Of course, this method of interpretation rejects the Christocentric interpretations of the Hebrew Bible, at least in its usual form. Apart from being anti-Jewish attempts to usurp the Hebrew Scripture for us Christians alone, Christocentric interpretations are generally forced. As a Christian I believe that salvation history in a general way does lead up to a climax in Jesus Christ, at least for us; but, as it stands, the Hebrew Bible is not a story about what Paul van Buren would call, "the savior of the gentiles." It is rather a story of God's people Israel, a people whose covenant with God we have been privileged to share.

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28. Since Bultmann was both a biblical scholar and a theologian, he was able to write theology that developed both sides of the formula.

### Summary

In summary, let me give three catechetical and liturgical suggestions for easing some of the problems that I have been outlining.

1. Let us stop calling Scripture "the Word of God." The expression is too prone to misunderstanding and provides people with a false certainty that what they read in the Bible provides assured answers to today's problems.
2. Since the Bible is so easy to misinterpret, we should encourage people never to read it without some commentary, written or in the form of a homily.
3. Since some passages of Scripture are so open to misunderstanding (e.g., Matt. 27:25; John 14:6b), they should be omitted from public reading in Sunday worship and only be used in contexts where questions can be raised and treated with on the spot.