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THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF

JOHANN ALBRECHT BENDEL

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Theology

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by

Robert F. Spieler

May 1957

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Reader



SHORT TITLE

The Theology of J. A. Bengel

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## PREFACE

The position of Johann Albrecht Bengel in the history of Lutheran theology has never been defined in a detailed way for the English-speaking Church. One reason for this is the paucity of available primary sources necessary for such a project. The writer did however discover certain reasonably rare anthologies of Bengel's major writings, the most notable of which is J. C. Burk's Johann Albrecht Bengel's Leben und Wirken, meist nach handschriftlicher Materialen. Were it not for the availability of the above, the following study would not have been possible.

The writer wishes also to herewith express his gratitude to Dean E. C. Fendt of the Theological Seminary of Capital University, and to Dr. W. L. Young, Executive Director of the Board of Higher Education of the American Lutheran Church, for making possible the following study; to the members of the Department of Systematic Theology of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, for their counsel; and especially to the writer's wife for her encouragement and aid in the completion of this project.



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ment was composed in part by him and was ratified in 1536.  
Hermelink, Heinrich, *Geschichte der Evangelischen Kirche  
in Württemberg*, (Stuttgart: Balner Wunderschlich Verlag, 1919),  
p. 62.

^Preeminent among the Reformers of Württemberg in  
addition to Johannes Brenz, were Erhard Schnepf, Ambrosius  
Saurer, Martin Brecht, Theobald Milliken, and Johann Cayling.  
Hermelink, *op. cit.*, p. 62 ~~passim~~.



## CHAPTER I

### THE CAREER OF JOHANN ALBRECHT BENGEL

Bengel on one occasion referred to his childhood as having been spent in a mare misericordiae. To one who observes how frequently the life of Bengel was attended by crises of various types but how relatively unaffected his own well-being was while under these, this characterization will seem exceedingly apt, and this not only for the man's childhood but also for his entire career.

His homeland of Württemberg in many respects provided a favorable environment for one destined to become a Lutheran theologian. The principality had been a stronghold of Protestantism since the mid-sixteenth century, when under the rule of Duke Uhlrich<sup>1</sup> and through the influence of a whole corps of Reformers,<sup>2</sup> it had embraced the Lutheran

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<sup>1</sup>Uhlrich, born in 1498, was occupied mainly with the political implications of the Reform movement in Württemberg. The desire for ecclesiastical reform in the country emanated primarily from the populace and from certain clerics, both groups having been influenced by the respective movements of Luther and Zwingli. Between 1524 and 1534, congregations in the most prominent cities of Suabia espoused the principles of Protestantism. Finally, under the influence of Johannes Brenz, the "Kleine Kirchenordnung" made the theology of Lutheranism normative for the territorial Church. The document was composed in part by him and was ratified in 1536. Hermelink, Heinrich, Geschichte der Evangelische Kirche in Württemberg, (Stuttgart: Rainer Wunderlich Verlag, 1949), p. 62.

<sup>2</sup>Preeminent among the Reformers of Württemberg in addition to Johannes Brenz, were Erhard Schnepf, Ambrosius Blaurer, Martin Frecht, Theobald Billikan, and Johann Gayling. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 62 passim.



faith as its official religion. The type of Lutheranism which came finally to prevail here was somewhat unique, for it combined an explicitly Lutheran doctrinal position with a cultus somewhat akin to that of the Reformed tradition. Such an ambivalence between rigidity of doctrinal symbols and informality of liturgical forms accorded with the pattern which the Reformer Johannes Brenz had delineated for the Church of Württemberg in his Kirchenordnung. The citizenry of the principality, composed for the most part of Suabians who traditionally were not much given to ceremony, gave wide-spread approval to such a type of church.<sup>3</sup>

Württemberg had been deeply involved in the religious controversies of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. On the theological front, she had fared exceptionally well. Men such as August Hunnius, the brothers Philip and Jacob Heilbrunner, Leonhard Hutter, Polycarp Leyser, and Johann V. Andreae, all such proficient advocates of Lutheran Orthodoxy that their influence is still felt, defended well the theology of the Church of their homeland against both Rome and Geneva.<sup>4</sup>

On the military front, however, Württemberg experienced near catastrophe. So severely was she ravaged by the Thirty

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



Years' War that her population was decimated and whole areas of her domain were left in ruin.<sup>5</sup> Such statistics as there were in that time indicated that the number of men capable of bearing arms in Württemberg was reduced by the fighting from 65,400 in 1623 to 14,800 in 1652.<sup>6</sup> The deprivations which came to the country as a result of the war is evidenced also by the estimate that more than half of all her buildings were destroyed, including some 318 castles and 36,100 homes in her cities.<sup>7</sup>

Reconstruction proceeded rapidly in the principality, and by the time of Bengel's birth, some forty years after the cessation of hostilities, the marks of the war had virtually been obliterated.<sup>8</sup> This is not however to suggest that Württemberg was now enjoying an era of general security. Rather, at the very time of Bengel's birth she was facing

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<sup>5</sup>The degree of destruction wrought by this war has, as is shown by recent studies, been quite generally overestimated, due to the tendency among certain historians to generalize on the basis of limited local information. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that in especially Bohemia, Pomerania, and Württemberg the War did work havoc. Ergang, Robert, The Myth of the All-Destructive Fury of the Thirty Years' War, (Craftsmen, Pocono Pines, Pa., 1956).

<sup>6</sup>Friedrich, C. J., The Age of the Baroque, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 196.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Weber, D., Die Wüstungen in Württemberg, 1927, p. 200, mentions that even during the periods of hostility, many who had fled dared to return to their homes to begin the work of reconstruction.



the possibility of imminent invasion by the French and was also being perturbed by the cultural and religious ferment operative in Europe at that time. The land's proximity to France and its political implication in various coalitions against Louis XIV made it particularly susceptible to armed forages by the French.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the position of classical Orthodoxy which the provincial Church had espoused was being challenged by the nascent movements of Pietism and Rationalism.<sup>10</sup> The apprehension occasioned by these several foreign influences was worsened by a domestic situation which for the Suabians was unprecedented. Eberhard Ludwig, the Duke who governed Württemberg from 1677 to 1733, possessed virtually no propensities for wise and effective statesmanship. During the early years of his rule, the influence of his mother moulded his policies; then in 1707,

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<sup>9</sup>Württemberg was invaded on numerous occasions by French troops; the most severe onslaughts occurred in the years 1680, 1688-1689, and 1693. Peace was declared in 1697 (the Peace of Rijswik). This was however of short duration, and in 1707 the French again invaded. Hence, the formative years of Bengel's career were spent within the context of war. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 208 passim.

<sup>10</sup>The primary spokesman for Philosophical Enlightenment, Rene' Descartes, (1596-1650), Benedict Spinoza (1622-1677), and Gottfr. Leibniz (1647-1716) were accorded a voice in the courses of philosophy at Württemberg's major university, Tübingen, beginning in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. By the year 1724, Georg Bernhard Bilfinger, then Professor of Philosophy at Tübingen, debated with his colleagues, Pfaff and Weismann, over the question of the validity of Leibniz's monadology. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 214.



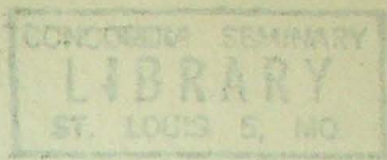
after divorcing his first wife, he married a certain Fräulein von Gravenitz, described as a mecklenburgische Zauberin of questionable repute.<sup>11</sup> Since her will informed Ludwig's policies as much as his mother's had previously, his rule may accurately be designated a "Weiber-Regiment." The citizenry of Württemberg was understandably much piqued and dismayed by such a turn of events, but nonetheless supported Ludwig's reign.<sup>12</sup>

Such then in general was the state of affairs when Johann Albrecht Bengel was born on June 24, 1687, in Winnenden, a small village near Stuttgart. His father, Albert Bengel, was a clergyman who had served as a head master in the Klosterschule at Bebenhausen prior to his coming to Winnenden in 1681. His mother was the great-granddaughter of the Reformer Johannes Brenz and is remembered for her notable piety. There were two additional children in the family, a boy and a girl, both of them younger than Johann Albrecht. In his later years, Bengel often spoke with gratitude of his parental home, mentioning with especial appreciation the fact that his

<sup>11</sup>Hermelink, op. cit., p. 208.

<sup>12</sup>A typical case in point of Eberhard Ludwig's arbitrary rule is seen in his construction of luxurious new quarters for his second wife with monies previously designated for Welfare Agencies and the Church. Incidents such as this, as well as his practice of planning inordinately lavish entertainments for his court, served to offend the citizenry. Ibid.





father was the first to instruct him in the rudiments of learning, accomplishing this "mit einer leichten anmütigen Lehrart."<sup>13</sup>

The severity of the crises which attended the boy's childhood should not be discounted. So sickly was he at birth that his parents despaired of his life and administered emergency baptism. Next, when only six years of age, the boy lost his father, who while ministering to the sick of his parish had contracted a disease which proved to be fatal. Later in the same year, the invading troops of Louis XIV plundered their way through Winnenden and burned down the boy's parental home.

Financial privation made it impossible for the mother to re-establish a home for the family, and consequently Bengel became the ward of David Wendelin Spindler. Spindler was a teacher by profession and had been one of the most devoted friends of the boy's father. The technical ability of the man was unquestionably excellent, yet by temperament he was "ein jähzorniger und trotziger Mensch . . . . ., von dem man sagte, dasz er mit spanischem Rohr oder auch mit Flüsten seine Schüler zu bearbeiten pflegte."<sup>14</sup> From such a man Bengel received his elementary education, first at Marbach, and after this village was likewise pillaged by the French,

<sup>13</sup>Keller, G., (Johann Albrecht Bengel, (Basel: Heinrich Majer, 1948), p. 19.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.



at Schorndorf. Then in 1699, Spindler was assigned to Stuttgart to teach there in a newly established Gymnasium. This was obviously fortuitous for Bengel, since by then he had fulfilled all the requisites for entering this next phase of his education.

The Gymnasium at which Bengel matriculated had been the scene of sharp controversy shortly before his arrival. In 1696 an attempt had been made by its Director, a Hungarian refugee named Bulowsky, to revise its curriculum so as to allow for greater emphasis upon the study of classical literature and of the newly-developing formal sciences. Since both emphases were in accord with the pedagogical interests of the Rationalists, the attempt was much criticized by those who desired the school to rather incorporate the curricular innovations advocated by the Pietists.<sup>15</sup> Bulowsky died in 1699, whereupon the traditional course of study was reinstated at the school, with some allowance however being made for instruction in both the natural and formal sciences.<sup>16</sup>

The school itself was preeminent among all of its type in Württemberg. Here one of the foremost Greek grammarians of that age, the astute Sebastian Kneer, taught; here also

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<sup>15</sup>Ritschl, Albrecht, Geschichte des Pietismus, (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1880), III, p. 63. Ritschl states it was the hope of the Pietists to so revise the prevailing curricula that provision might be made for the inculcation of "Gottseligkeit."

<sup>16</sup>Meusel, Carl, Kirchliches Handlexikon, (Leipzig: Justus Naumann, 1887), I, p. 121.



the empirical methods of the newer disciplines could be learned. Equally significant, however, is the fact that the spirit of Pietism was especially influential at the institution during Bengel's study there.<sup>17</sup> David Spindler was himself in the vanguard of this movement at the school. Within a year after his arrival, he had organized a student religious association of so radical a type that the local police frequently found it necessary to quiet the group at its meetings.<sup>18</sup> What Bengel's relationship to this organization was is problematical, since he never alludes to it in his writings. It is however more than probable that he had occasion to attend its meetings since these were frequently held in the home of his foster father.

Bengel acquitted himself with honor in his studies at the Gymnasium. His fields of especial proficiency were in the areas of the classical languages and of mathematics, both of which provided him with techniques later to be developed and used in his theological studies. In fact, so enthused was he by these at the time that he wrote: "Vernunftlehre und Mathematik eröffnete mir die richtige Bahn zur Zergliederung und Auflösung des Textes der Heiligen

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<sup>17</sup>Burk, J. C., Johann Albrecht Bengel's Leben und Wirken, (Stuttgart: J. F. Steinkopf, 1831), p. 4.

<sup>18</sup>It is significant to note that Spindler himself frequently led the members of his group in a study of the Apocalypse. Records show that the group was notorious for its fanaticism and millennialistic teachings. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 183.



Schrift."<sup>19</sup> In later years, however, he came to speak with considerably more restraint of the value of his Gymnasial training, and in a way which suggests that the spirit of Pietism at the school did after all help delineate his course of development there. He writes:

Mein bester und grösster Lehrer war Gott selber. Er hat dieses schlüpfrige Alter mit seiner stetigen Wache vor Abweichungen bewahrt. Wann die äuszern Verführungen und Verderbnisse an mich wollten, so wachte eine tief in meiner Seele liegende und allezeit bereite Warnung auf und unterdrückte nicht nur die verborgenen Fehler, sondern hielt auch diese Anläufe ab. Nicht ohne besondere Vorsehung Gottes verfiel ich auf solche geistlichen Bücher - namentlich Arndts Wahres Christentum, Johann Gerhards Heilige Betrachtungen - die mir dermaszen gefielen, dasz ich alle freie Zeit auf die Lesung derselben und der Heiligen Schrift verwandte.<sup>20</sup>

In the spring of 1703, Bengel, then only in his seventeenth year, was accepted as a candidate of theology at the most influential university in the entire region, the University of Tübingen.<sup>21</sup> Situated on the river Neckar and 20 kilometers due south of Stuttgart, the school had been founded in 1477 for the purpose, as its charter stipulated, of

graben zu helfen den Brunnen des Lebens, daraus von allen Enden der Welt unersichtlich geschöpft werden möge tröstliche und heilsame Weisheit zur Erlöschung des verderblichen Feuers menschlicher Unvernunft und Blindheit.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Hermelink, op. cit., p. 216.



The theological department of the University was so designed as to normally offer a five year program of study, the first two years of which emphasized especially the so-called philosophical disciplines, and the last three years being devoted to a study of the major divisions of theology. The course of study was however quite flexible, since the rate of a student's progress was left to the discretion of the faculty and since also it often occurred that the Consistory of the Church of Württemberg assigned advanced students to parishes even before the time of their final Promotion.<sup>23</sup>

The University had achieved renown as a citadel of Lutheran Orthodoxy during the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup> A generation prior to Bengel's matriculation, this tendency had been supplanted by that of pietism as the main influence at the school. Philip Spener himself had spent several months at Tübingen in 1662, propounding in his persuasive manner the thesis that Lutheranism was imperiled because

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<sup>23</sup>Meusel, op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 763.

<sup>24</sup>Immediately prior to his coming to Wittenberg, Philip Melanchthon had taught at Tübingen for six years (1512-1518). His influence continued strong at the school into the era when Orthodoxy reached its epitome. Prominent exponents of Orthodoxy at Tübingen were Tobias Wagner, who taught there from 1652 to 1688 and who wrote voluminously against the Crypto-Calvinists, Catholics, and Enthusiasts; Johann Adam Osiander, whose tenure at the school began in 1622 and ended in 1697 and whose exposition of the New Testament was cast in the forms of Orthodox doctrine; and Balthaser Raith, teacher of Old Testament at the school from 1652 until 1680, who shared in the procedure of Osiander. cf. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 149.



the Bible was no longer adequately utilized as the source for faith, and also that the virtues of personal Christianity were being neglected.<sup>25</sup> Although Spener's position was not at all palatable to certain members of the faculty,<sup>26</sup> others were greatly impressed by his plea. Those of the latter group had already openly expressed their dissatisfaction with what seemed to them as an impersonal, doctrinaire, and polemic type of instruction at their school.<sup>27</sup> These believed they saw in Spener's approach the means for injecting vitality and relevance into their teaching, and these hence embraced his programme. That Spener influenced also the students at Tübingen is evidenced by the fact that shortly after his visit a voluntary student religious association was organized, patterned after similar groups already in existence at the Universities of Halle and Leipzig, and dedicated to the ideal of nurturing "Praktische Schriftkenntnis und lebendiges, thätiges Christenthum unter sich und ihren Umgebungen."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>26</sup>Tobias Wagner, Michael Müller, Gottfried Hoffmann, and even Andreas Osiander, all teachers at Tübingen, were at first quite suspicious of the "Reformbestrebungen" of Spener and the Franckes. cf. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>27</sup>Notable among this group were Johann Andreas Hochstetter (1637-1720) and Christian Reuchlin (Prof. from 1699 to 1707). cf. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 176.

<sup>28</sup>Hermelink, op. cit., p. 216.



Hence when Bengel came to Tübingen, he came to a school where the influence of Pietism was especially strong. In the classroom, the classic texts of Lutheran Orthodoxy had for the most part been displaced by the works of the Pietists. Although some of the former, especially J. F. König's Theologia positiva acroamatica, were still utilized, the primary textbooks for theology were works such as Spener's De impedimentia studii theologici, A. H. Francke's exegetical manuals, and the devotional and ethical writings of Johann Arndt.<sup>29</sup> In addition, those teachers who impressed Bengel most at Tübingen - Andreas Adam Hochstetter and Christoph Reuchlin<sup>30</sup> - were the chief proponents of Pietism there.

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<sup>29</sup>Pelikan, J., "In Memoriam: Joh. Albrecht Bengel," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXIII (Nov., 1952), p. 786.

<sup>30</sup>A. A. Hochstetter, (d. 1717), son of J. A. Hochstetter, was an intimate of August Herman Francke and transmitted the influence of Halle to Tübingen, where he taught until 1711 when he was appointed Hofprediger by Duke Eberhard Ludwig, who later reassigned him to Tübingen in 1715. Bengel assisted him in his parish duties at Tübingen and again at Stuttgart, at the latter place from 1711-1715. He is impressed by Hochstetter in this, "daz er bey jungen Leuten jeden auf etwas Gutes abzweckenden Versuch, wenn er auch schwach und unreif war, in seinem Werthe anerkannte, und durch liebevolle Rathschläge zur Beförderung derselben beitrug, ja zuweilen sogar der Sache die Wendung zu geben pflegte, als ob ihm selbst durch weitere Ausführung des begonnenen Werkes eine Gefälligkeit geschehe." Burk, op. cit., p. 5.

Christoph Reuchlin, whose piety so imbued his classroom presentations that Bengel wrote of his lectures, "die er morgens hielt, gleich nachdem er vom Morgengebet kam," as being "recht wie ein lieblicher Tau und voll Kraft ....." Reuchlin in 1705 began conducting Erbauungsstunden, after the manner of the Spenerites, in his home. Keller, op. cit., p. 12.



It should be noted in this connection that the type of Pietism in vogue at the University was quite different from that exemplified by David Spindler, for the tendency at Tübingen was marked by

gründlich und umfassende Gelehrsamkeit, persönliche tiefe Frömmigkeit, warmes Interesse für die Erweckung des Gemeindegelbens, größere Freiheit gegenüber dem dogmatischen System, entschiedene Richtung auf eine biblische Theologie.<sup>31</sup>

Bengel's scholastic record at Tübingen was little short of phenomenal. He completed the first phase of his studies within a year, this being in half the usual time, and, though scarcely seventeen, embarked upon the final phase of the curriculum as the recognized leader of all the candidates for the Master's Degree in theology. During his first year at the University he studied logic and metaphysics,<sup>32</sup> addressing himself primarily to the systems

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<sup>31</sup>Goltz, W., "Die Theologische Bedeutung J. A. Bengels," Jahrbücher für Deutsche Theologie, VI (1861), p. 463.

<sup>32</sup>Bengel's appraisal of the value of philosophy is indicated in the following: "Man sucht es dabei dahin zu treiben, dass man das, was man in göttlichen und geistlichen Dingen glauben sollte, nicht mehr glauben müsse, sondern solches wissen könne. Gott aber hat es immer aufs glauben geführt: dem Mose hat er einen Kredit gemacht mit dem Versprechen: Das Volk wird dir glauben ewiglich. Auf Mose haben sich die Propheten, und auf die Propheten hat sich der Herr selbst und haben sich die Apostel berufen. Nun aber unterminiert man auf das gefährlichste den Glauben eben damit, dass man alles auf das Wissen führt. So wird man zum glauben leicht untüchtig. Wenn man vorher einen Gott in der Schrift hat und hernach erst hinter die Philosophie kommt, geht es schon an; sonst aber ist es geföhlt." Keller, op. cit., p. 12.



of Suarez and Descarte, of Poiret and Leibniz, all under the tutelage of Johann Christian Klemm; training in moral-philosophy he received from Andreas Hochstetter, and in ancient history from Johann Eberhard Rösler.<sup>33</sup> It is significant to note that his studies in mathematics, this under the guidance of Johann Creiling, again held an especial attraction for him.<sup>34</sup> In September of 1704 he presented his Magisterdisputation, which for him marked the conclusion of the first phase of his University training. In this he analyzed the doctrine of the atonement, advocating strongly the ransom view of the atonement.<sup>35</sup>

During his final years at Tübingen, Bengel mastered the disciplines of historical, systematic, and exegetical

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<sup>33</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>34</sup>Johann Creiling (d. 1752) was not only proficient in mathematics, but was also a fully trained theologian. He is remembered also as an Alchemist and Wunderdoktor. His treatment of mathematics was such as to make Bengel regard this discipline as "Kunst der Ordnung." Hermelink, op. cit., p. 216.

<sup>35</sup>The fruits of this investigation are to be seen in Bengel's exposition of Matthew 20:28 in his Gnomon.



theology. Under Johann Wolfgang Jaeger,<sup>36</sup> he studied the full scope of both sacred and secular history and very likely was first attracted to the concept of history which he later was to develop in detail in his writings. Andreas Hochstetter instructed him in Katechetik, Johann Fortsch<sup>37</sup> in the literature and the language of the Old Testament, and Christoph Reuchlin in the New Testament and in doctrinal theology. He likewise began an ambitious program of private study at this time in which, following the advice of Hochstetter and Reuchlin, he addressed himself to a careful reading of the primary works of the early Pietists.

Also while at Tübingen, Bengel began the personal diary which he was to continue until his death, and which provides an exceptionally valuable index to his personality and

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<sup>36</sup>Johann Jaeger (d. 1720) had been the Prinzenerzieher of the sons of Duke Eberhard III as well as a Military Chaplain prior to coming to Tübingen in 1678. Although personally holding great admiration for Spener, he throughout his career was suspicious of the tendencies towards enthusiasm, mysticism, and chiliasm apparent among the Spenerites. In the classroom, he espoused a biblically-orientated "Föderaltheologie" which unquestionably helped suggest to Bengel the basic premises of his later-to-be-developed "Heilsgeschichte." Jaeger held that within the full scope of history there is a "fortschreitende Heilsoffenbareng durch einander überhöhende Bundesschlüsse (Natur, Werk, Gnade)." cf. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>37</sup>Fortsch, of whose personal life no details appear to be anywhere recorded, dealt with the Old Testament after the manner of the Biblical Scholars of Orthodoxy. It is significant that he strongly criticized Hedinger's translation of the New Testament not only because it failed to duplicate the text of Luther's, but also because it incorporated sharp criticisms of the established Church. cf. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 216.



activity. The diary gives clear indication that his years at the University were benevolent and rewarding; yet it also bears testimony to the fact that he experienced certain Anfechtungen while at the school. The earliest of these dealt largely with intellectual questions pertaining to the validity of the truth of Christianity. He wonders, for example, "Wie, wenn alles das nicht wahr wäre."<sup>38</sup> More disturbing to him were the vivid experiences of personal guilt before God to which his diary often alludes. Entries such as the following are indicative of his sensitive conscience, which no doubt was made particularly impressible by the influence of Pietism:

O wie viele dergleichen Pfeile sind schon durch mein armes Herz gegangen, das hat mir meine Jugend so beschwerlich gemacht, dasz ich mich im Auszern nie recht habe in meine Gewalt gehabt.<sup>39</sup>

Equally significant is the fact that Bengel's Journal records that at Tübingen he became perturbed upon discovering the great number of variant readings in the various editions of the Greek New Testament available to him. The very existence of these, he feared, was such as to cast doubt upon the authenticity of the New Testament and to jeopardize the entire Christian movement itself. So disturbed was he by this matter that he promised himself

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<sup>38</sup>Hermelink, op. cit., p. 216.

<sup>39</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 18.



no rest until he had uncovered the authentic text of the New Testament.<sup>40</sup>

In 1705, his third year at Tübingen, Bengel became critically ill and was taken to the home of his mother at Maulbronn.<sup>41</sup> His sickness persisted for almost a year, and, although for several months those who attended him regarded his death as immanent, Bengel himself never doubted his recovery. The tenor of his attitude may be seen in that he appropriated as his very own Luther's well-known Psalm of confidence: "Ich werde nicht sterben sondern leben und des Herrn Wort verkündigen."<sup>42</sup> While convalescing, he formed a close friendship with Philip Heinrich Weiszensee, at that time Head-Master of the Klosterschule in Maulbronn, but who was later to become the Prelate of Denkendorf. Bengel in addition now devoted much time to studying the Greek New Testament and to reading Hedinger's version of the New Testament which had just been published.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>41</sup>His mother had by this time remarried. Burk, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>42</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>43</sup>Hedinger's version had appeared in 1704 and was immediately distributed, especially among the students and the clergymen of Württemberg. The translation is significant primarily because of the expository notes which were incorporated in the volume, many of which were sharply critical of the nominal Christianity and of the State-Church systems prevalent in that day. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 217.



Bengel at long last returned to Tübingen in the autumn of 1706, and already by December was able to appear for his first comprehensive examination in theology, which, due to the special consideration accorded him by Jäger, required no more of him than that he preach a sermon. The following spring he presented, again under Jäger's supervision, a dissertation entitled, "De Theologia Mystica". That he selected a subject of this nature suggests to what a degree the principles of Pietism were at this time already informing his thinking. In the dissertation Bengel sought to indicate the liabilities of theological subjectivism such as that advocated by Poiret and to distinguish between valid and invalid mysticism. True mysticism, according to him, involved an intuitive apprehension of God, made possible only through God's self-revelation "aus den Propheten und Aposteln;" on the other hand, a mysticism which presumes to neglect the priority of revelation and which rests "auf den privaten Eingebungen der unmittelbaren Offenbarungen" is to him entirely invalid.<sup>44</sup>

In the summer of 1707, Bengel was assigned to serve temporarily as Vicar, under the supervision of Hochstetter, in the small village of Metzingen adjacent to Tübingen. His vicarship was an extraordinary one, in that he himself was alone responsible for discharging the pastoral office in the

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<sup>44</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 7.



congregation, without the companionship of a veteran pastor loci.<sup>45</sup> He writes that here he learned two invaluable lessons: the first being the manner in which "das Volk denkt und spricht,"<sup>46</sup> and the second, the necessity for addressing one's ministry to the needs and demands of specific situations. The degree to which he appreciated such pastoral experience is obvious from his Journal:

Schon die ersten vierzehn Tage meiner Arbeit zu Metzingen haben mich auf gar mancherlei aufmerksam gemacht, was ein Kandidat der Theologie notwendigerweise ins Vikariat mitbringen sollte, aber leider so selten mitbringt; denn man findet vieles ganz anders, als man es sich in Tübingen eingeildet hat.<sup>47</sup>

After serving in Metzingen for ten months, Bengel returned to Tübingen where he now remained for five additional years, from 1708 to 1713. During this time he furthered his own studies, served as Repetent at the University, and was assigned for brief periods as assistant in the congregations at Nürtingen, Tübingen, and Stuttgart. Throughout these years he devoted himself to a study of the religious movements of the seventeenth century and of the Lutheran Confessions, in connection with which he compiled notes for "eine korrigierte Neuauflage" of the Lutheran

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<sup>45</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Op. cit., p. 15.



Symbols.<sup>48</sup> In November of 1708 he appeared for his second major theological examination, at which he was questioned concerning what he terms a "heiklen Frage," namely, "ob die Kirchengenossenschaft einer führenden Persönlichkeit gegenüber erlaubt sei."<sup>49</sup> What transpired at the examination is impossible to ascertain; it may be inferred that he dealt with the issue in a manner satisfactory to the examiners, since shortly afterwards he was appointed Repetent, a position which he occupied from early in 1709 to 1711.

His assigned task was now that of tutoring younger candidates in their philological, philosophical, and theological studies. By exercising a wise economy of time, he found it possible to continue also his personal program of study.<sup>50</sup> From both endeavors he was able to garner

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<sup>48</sup>Hermelink, op. cit., p. 217.

<sup>49</sup>The notorious court-life of Duke Eberhard Ludwig was often castigated by his Hofprediger in their sermons. Since the Duke seemed unaffected by such tactics, the possibility of subjecting him to Church discipline was considered. None was ever forthcoming. The Court Preachers, however, continued their criticism with ever increasing severity, until finally on one occasion the Duke sent a note advising Samuel Urlsperger (1685-1772) that if his criticisms persisted, he would order him to be shot down off his pulpit. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>50</sup>Bengel at this time was already following a rigid Lebensregel, a practice common among the Pietists. Johann Hochstetter, for example, followed a fixed schedule of activities for each day and likewise carried out a methodical system of spiritual exercises. In Bengel's Journal, one may discern the evolution of such a discipline in his own personal life. One notes there the detailed regulations which he imposed upon his day's activities, such as attention in precibus, curare valetudinem, inprimis oculos, "nicht zu hoch gehen," and "alle Tage einen lassen privatim zu sich kommen." Hermelink, op. cit., p. 160.



sufficient materials for two additional public dissertations, the first constituting a critical analysis of the philosophy of Spinoza, and the second an evaluation of the various forms of atheism. Even more important, he at this time published the first of his many essays, a work entitled Syntagma de sanctitate Dei.<sup>51</sup> The treatise consists of a succinct yet exhaustive study of the significance of the biblical terms kadosh and hagios, with an attempt at indicating that in each one may find comprehended the totality of the attributes of God. Brief though the treatise is, it is nevertheless important, not only in that it serves notice of Bengel's capacity for exegetical work, but also in that it evidences the fact that he had by now disowned the tendency, so wide-spread among eighteenth-century exegetes, of manipulating the Scriptures in a cabalistic manner.<sup>52</sup>

From 1711 to 1713, Bengel served as Stadtvikar in the congregations of the capitol-city Stuttgart, a position which on the one hand allowed him to maintain his association with the University, and on the other to gain even more experience in Churchmanship. Then in 1713, the Consistory assigned him to Denkendorf, to serve there both as head-teacher in the new Klosterschule and as pastor in the local congregation.

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<sup>51</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>52</sup>Pelikan, op. cit., p. 787.



It may be said in retrospect that Bengel's years at Tübingen constituted a period of almost unassessable importance for his development. Here he gained the basic materials which were later to be woven into his theological works. The technical skills necessary for his exegetical work; the critical mind which drove him to an incessant search for the most accurate text of the New Testament; the proclivity for history which helped him develop his Heilsgeschichte; the kinship with Pietism - all these were either implanted or nurtured in the mind of Bengel at Tübingen.

To appraise properly Bengel's career at Denkendorf, some mention must be made of the characteristics of a Klosterschule. Such schools existed entirely for the purpose of training pre-theological students, who matriculated at the schools in their early teens and who upon their Promotion from them were eligible to enter the theological Stift at Tübingen. Had it not been for his association with David Spindler, Bengel himself would very likely have received his preparatory training in a Klosterschule.<sup>53</sup> There had been four such schools in Württemberg since the early seventeenth century, one each at Hirsau, Maulbronn, Blaubeuren, and Bebenhausen. In 1692 the number of these was reduced to three when the school at

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<sup>53</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 9.



Hirsau was destroyed by the French. Now, more than two decades later, the Consistory decided to convert an unused cloister in Denkendorf into a school replacing the one which had been at Hirsau. The new school was pleasantly located, for Denkendorf was a quiet village located in one of the most picturesque regions of Württemberg and the cloister itself was a venerable complex of buildings, Romanesque in architecture, and dating from the thirteenth century.

Since the work of readying the cloister took longer than expected, Bengel found himself the recipient of an unexpected vacation. This gave him the opportunity of realizing a long-standing desire, namely that of visiting centers of theological education throughout Germany to observe the materials and the techniques of teaching in vogue in them. Beginning on the first of March in 1713 and returning at the end of October in the same year, Bengel visited at Nurnberg, Jena, Weiszenfels, Halle, Gieszen, Erfurt, and Frankfort.<sup>54</sup> He was impressed especially by Halle, where August Herman Francke was at that very time enjoying his most productive years. Bengel spent four months at Halle, from June to September, and upon leaving the school recorded his enthusiasm in his Journal:

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<sup>54</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.



Wer weisz ob man in der ganzen Christenheit wieder drei solche Kollegen zusammenbringen könnte, als zu Halle Breithaupt, Anton, und Francke gewesen sind. Sie sind durch das Kreuz zusammengeführt worden. Was mir am meisten gefällt, ist die Harmonie dieser Männer untereinander welche sie nämentlich auch durch gemeinsames Gebet zu unterhalten suchen.<sup>55</sup>

The trip obviously contributed much to the development of the young theologian. Besides making it possible for him to observe and evaluate the technical aspects of theological education current in that time, it also helped to develop in him the virtues of intellectual integrity and charity. He himself writes that through his associations with teachers representing the greatest divergencies in theology tendency - these including men of the Lutheran, Catholic, Calvinist, and Separatist groups - he was schooled in the ability to treat dissenters with understanding and charity, without however sacrificing or compromising his own convictions.<sup>56</sup> More significantly, the journey helped him in grasping the fact that the Church is essentially a fellowship of all Believers rather than being merely an aggregation of individual Christians. As he puts it, prior to the trip "war ich fast nur für mich allein ein Christ,"<sup>57</sup> but on the journey he learned "was es um die Gemeinschaft und Verbindung der Heiligen ist."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.



Bengel returned to Denkendorf on November 17, 1713, to begin his work there. That he approached his new position with great gravity is apparent from his statement: "Was bei meinem Anfang zu Denkendorf zwischen mir und Gott vorgegangen, hat bei mir einen guten Grund meines ganzen Aufenthalts daselbst gegeben."<sup>59</sup> At the ceremonies inaugurating the new school, Bengel, though the youngest of all its teachers, gave one of the principal addresses. This was a lecture entitled, "Fleisz in der Gottseligkeit, das zuverlässigste Hilfsmittel zur Erwerbung echter Gelehrsamkeit."<sup>60</sup> The address is significant since it presents in concise form the young pedagogue's concept of theological education. In it Bengel asserts that candidates for the ministry should indeed be well instructed in the basic disciplines of philology, philosophy, and theology, but that above all, they should be provided with an atmosphere conducive to their spiritual growth as well as with means whereby such growth might truly be realized.<sup>61</sup> It is his

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<sup>59</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>60</sup>The title of the address is given in various forms. Burk, Wächter and Keller refer to it as named above; Hermelink however calls it, "Das Trachten nach der Gottseligkeit der sicherste Weg zu wahrer Bildung." cf. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>61</sup>Ritschl, A., op. cit., p. 63. Ritschl comments that Bengel holds to a concept of theological training which differs from that advocated by Aug. Herm. Francke, especially in that Bengel gives more importance to the "gründlichen Wissenachafsbetriebs" than did Francke.



opinion that a theological student must acquire the proper habitus in addition to learning the required specialia if he wishes to engage in a faithful and useful ministry.<sup>62</sup> The key to, as well as the goal of, valid and fruitful study in theology is "Gottseligkeit," for he who possesses such a desirable spiritual disposition has the ability for perceiving, integrating, and communicating the values implicit in the technical aspects of his education. So that this proper habitus might be developed, Bengel suggests that primary emphasis be given to the study of the Bible, both as a private discipline for the student and as the core of the curriculum at the school.<sup>63</sup>

During his lengthy tenure at the school,<sup>64</sup> Bengel gained the reputation of being an understanding and patient counsellor as well as an exacting and stimulating teacher. His teaching was done largely in the fields of the classical languages and in doctrinal theology, and those who studied under him could scarcely avoid becoming proficient in Latin and Greek or well-versed in Lutheran doctrine.<sup>65</sup> It is interesting to note the young teacher's resourcefulness in providing suitable materials for his students. He himself

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<sup>62</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>63</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>64</sup>Bengel was to remain at Denkendorf from 1713 to 1741.

<sup>65</sup>Keller, Ibid.



prepared a manual edition of the Letters of Cicero for classroom purposes, and he commonly required his students to translate news of current events into classical Latin.<sup>66</sup>

As is to be expected, Bengel sought to provide such means for the spiritual nurture of his students as would, in his opinion, stimulate them to Gottseligkeit. He consequently insisted that each student memorize Spener's Katechismus and read Arndt's Wahres Christentum, but above all, that he engage himself in a scheduled program of personal Bible study.<sup>67</sup> It was also customary for him to close his lectures at the end of the school-week with the terse remark, "Colligate animas," thereby reminding his pupils to utilize the weekend in such a manner as would promote the welfare of their souls.<sup>68</sup> Such procedures do indeed bear testimony to the fact that Bengel did seek to inculcate "den Geist der pietistischen Frömmigkeit" in his students.<sup>69</sup>

Bengel's students unanimously held him in high regard. One of them wrote of him: "Das Wort Ewigkeit stand auf seiner Stirn geschrieben."<sup>70</sup> During his years at Denkendorf,

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<sup>66</sup>Hermelink, op. cit., p. 219.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ritschl, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>70</sup>Werner, Gottfried, "Zum 250. Geburtstage Joh. Albrecht Bengels." Kirchliche Zeitschrift, 61. Jahrgang (Aug. 1937), p. 449.



at least 300 candidates passed through his classes,<sup>71</sup> and it is not wrong to say that these carried his influence on into the University of Tübingen and finally into their ministries.<sup>72</sup>

Influential though Bengel's work of teaching was, his tenure at the school bore fruit in another and equally significant area, for it was at Denkendorf where his remarkable capacity for literary productivity began to assert itself. According to his own estimate, he wrote some 1200 letters yearly, some of these being addressed to the parents of his pupils, others giving advice to former students, and still others being sent to theologians and scholars throughout all Europe.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, while at Denkendorf, Bengel laid the ground-work for the majority

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<sup>71</sup>The school records indicate that twelve Promotionen, or graduations, occurred while Bengel taught at Denkendorf. Philip Hiller, the noted hymn writer, was a member of the initial class, as was E. Gottfried Autenrieth, who upon Bengel's advice, inaugurated Erbauungsversammlungen in his first parish. Jeremias Fr. Reusz, reputedly the most gifted of all who studied under Bengel and who later became a Kanzler in Tübingen, was a member of the second Promotion. Philip David Burke, later to become Bengel's son-in-law, was in the fifth class. E. Gottl. Ziegenbalg from Tranquebar, son of the famed pioneer missionary to India, was in the eighth Promotion, and Ludwig J. Uhland, in his later career the famed historian at Tübingen, was a member of the tenth class. The final Promotion included Heinrich Wilh. Clemm, the mathematician and encyclopaedist, who likewise came eventually to teach at Tübingen. cf. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>72</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>73</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 189.



of his published works. At least a dozen of his treatises were completed here,<sup>74</sup> and the remaining ones were planned. It must be noted that he was exceedingly cautious with his printed works, spending months and even years in preparing them, and then finally publishing only what he considered worthwhile.

One year after coming to Denkendorf, Bengel, then in his twenty-ninth year, married Johanna Regina Seeger, the

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<sup>74</sup>These included:

Ciceronis M. T. Epistolae ad diversos, 1719.

Gregorii Thaumaturgi Panegyricus ad Origenem, 1722.

Chrysostomi Jo. de Sacerdotio libri sex, 1725.

Discipuli de Temporibus monitum de praeiudicio hermeneutico, accuratorem Apocalypseos explicationem etiamnum impediante, 1727.

Notitia N. T. Graeci, recte cauteque adornati, 1731.

H Kaine Diatheke. Novum Testamentum Graecum, 1734.

Richtige Harmonie der vier Evangelisten, 1736.

Defensio Novi Testamenti Graeci, 1737.

Nöthige und der heiligen Wahrheit zu Steuer abgefasste Antwort auf dasjenige, was in den früh aufgelesenen Früchten, und in einer gewissen damit verwandten Disputation wider das von ihm revidirte griechische neue Testament vorgebracht wird, 1739.

Vergleichung medwürdiger Stellen des neuen Testaments, darinnen Lutheri teutsche [sic] Übersetzung, Reineccii griechischer Text, und Bengelii Revision des neuen Testaments unterschieden sind, 1740.

Die erklärte Offenbarung Johannis, 1740.

Ordo Temporum, 1741.



daughter of a governmental official, whose home had been in Stuttgart and who, in temperament and training, seemed ideally suited for him. Only rarely does Bengel allude to his courtship in his diary, although shortly before the wedding he wrote:

..... das Herz sei so genaturt, dasz es sich nicht leicht alles Zugangs und der Zuflucht zur Kreatur entschütteln könne, und daher den Ehestand, der hiezu eine erlaubte Gelegenheit gebe, also eine sehr weise und heilsame Ordnung Gottes ansehen dürfe.<sup>75</sup>

Twelve children were born to the couple, only six of whom lived beyond their childhood.<sup>76</sup> Bengel himself sought to provide the same type of nurture at home as that which prevailed in his classrooms, as the following indicates:

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<sup>75</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>76</sup>Of the eight children born prior to 1726, only two daughters survived. A third daughter was born in 1727 and a fourth in 1730. Finally, two sons were born: Viktor, born in 1732, who became a Physician, and Ernst, born in 1735, who followed his father's career and eventually taught at Tübingen. It should be said also that Bengel was greatly concerned that each of his daughters be felicitously married, which came to be true for each. Of especial interest are the marriages of the daughters Barbara and Anna Margaret. The former became the wife of Philip David Burk, a minister later to become Dekan at Kirchheim, and the second was wed to Eberhard Friedrich Hellwag, also a minister who served as Dekan at Göppingen. cf. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 219.

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<sup>77</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.



Eltern, Informatoren und Präzeptoren müssen sich in der Erziehung ihrer Kinder und Aufsicht über ihre Lehrlinge ja vor dem Zorn hüten und nicht ihren Respekt erzwingen, oder mit Gewalt der Untergegebenen Eigensinn brechen wollen. Man kann auf diese Art leicht vieles verderben. Der Endzweck musz sein, ihnen zurechtzuhelfen.<sup>77</sup>

One will not soon forget Bengel's deportment during the many instances when death visited his family. The following, written shortly after the death of a son, is a typical indication of his conduct while in bereavement:

Das meiste, was unsre Zufriedenheit beim Sterben der Unsrigen stört oder hindert, ist, dasz die sichtbaren Dinge so viel Macht über uns haben und die ewigen, unsichtbaren uns noch so unbekannt und fremd sind. Sollten wir nur einen Blick tun können in das, was mit einer so hinfahrenden Seele vorgeht, so würden wir nicht das Abscheiden der Unsrigen, wohl aber die Blödigkeit der Trauernden bedauern. Wenn beim Eingang eines Pilgrims in jene bessere Welt die Tür aufgeht, so streicht allemal denen, die es angeht, ein geschwinder Himmels-lüftschen entgegen, das sie stärkt, bis die Reihe auch an sie kommt. So sollen wir den Gnaden-wind, der uns anweht, dazu annehmen, dasz wir uns auffrischen lassen, nicht die Vorangegangenen zurückzuwünschen, sondern ihnen nachzueilen.<sup>78</sup>

A passage such as the above, penned in a period of deep emotion, and which therefore is not so much the product of reflective thought, provides an exceptionally valuable index of the personality of Bengel. The statement, if anything, betokens an attitude of quiet confidence in God in spite of one's temporal adversities. The passage in addition expresses

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<sup>77</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.



a hallmark of Bengel's position, namely, that all life ought to be viewed sub specie aeternitatis. This material order is neither the ultimate reality nor the proper goal for one's aspirations, for although earth does lay certain proper claims upon men, the ground of existence and the destiny of life both lie in the suprahistorical order. Such emphases, here expressed in a moment of passion, are themes recurring often in Bengel's later formal works.

The years Bengel spent at Denkendorf constituted the most gratifying ones of his life, for they were enriched by competency in teaching, ambition in study and writing, and by satisfying familial experiences. He himself refers to these years as the best in his life.<sup>79</sup> These were to come to a sudden conclusion in 1741 when, somewhat against his will, he was transferred to Herbrechtingen to serve there as Prelate.

The Propstei at Herbrechtingen had been vacant for several months, and Bengel, whose fame had by this time spread throughout all of Württemberg, had been strongly advised by certain of his former students, as well as by members of the Consistory, to announce his availability for the position. To this Bengel replied:

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid.



Eben darum, weil der ambitus in unsrer Zeit so grosz ist, will ich, da ich sonst nicht viel Gelegenheit dazu habe wenigstens hierin ein gutes Exempel geben und mich nicht irgendwie vordrängen.<sup>80</sup>

In spite of such a statement, Bengel received an official communication from the Consistory requesting that he announce himself as a candidate for the position. This he then did, yet not without first criticizing the Consistory for proceeding in an arbitrary and high-handed manner. Even so, the Consistory almost immediately appointed him to Herbrechtingen.

That he found it difficult to leave Denkendorf is obvious from his Journal and especially from his farewell address. There is much in the address that must have elicited strong sentiments from his hearers, for it alludes often to his personal involvement in the life of the school and to his reticence in leaving. Yet, what is more significant is that in the address Bengel enunciated almost exactly the same basic philosophy of education as that which he had presented in his inaugural address, twenty-eight years previously. This the address best epitomizes in the statement: "Nur wer der Gottseligkeit das Herz öffnet, bekommt Geschmack an der Heiligen Schrift, der Quelle aller wahren Weisheit."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.



Bengel's capacities for pastoral and administrative work were well-challenged at Herbrechtingen. His duties there entailed the supervision of both the local Klosterschule and the Lutheran congregations in the diocese. Accordingly, his career as Propst was a bifurcated one, with his work being almost equally divided between that of teaching and that of providing for the welfare of his parishes.

His talent for preaching reached full maturity at Herbrechtingen. His sermons were primarily expository in content and simple in style, consistent with his canon: "Man soll recht einfach sein in seinem Predigen und bedenken: was nicht per Du geht, ist perdu!"<sup>82</sup> Bengel was without question one of the foremost preachers of his era. Printed copies of his sermons were widely distributed, and he was constantly in demand as a preacher for special occasions.<sup>83</sup>

Shortly after coming to Herbrechtingen, Bengel began conducting regularly-scheduled informal devotional meetings for the members of his congregations. He had long felt that these might lend themselves well to the development of personal piety, yet had been reticent in inaugurating such

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<sup>82</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>83</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 154.



meetings, fearing that they might as easily become matrixes for pharisaism, fanaticism, and separatism. He strongly maintained that the Gospel should be infused into the public worship of the congregation rather than merely be allowed to effervesce in the conventicle.<sup>84</sup> Only after the laymen at Herbrechtingen requested informal devotional periods, did Bengel acquiesce.

It must be emphasized that the meetings which he planned were entirely different in character from the separatistic Privatversammlungen which were gaining currency in other sections of Württemberg.<sup>85</sup> His meetings were devoted almost entirely to the study of the Scriptures, with some emphasis also upon free-prayer. An example of the materials utilized in these sessions is his "Sechzig Erbauliche Reden des Offenbarung Johannis," a devotional treatment of the Apocalypse.<sup>86</sup> Beneficial though such meetings appeared to him, Bengel still urged the devout to look beyond the confines of their conventicles, meet "the world" boldly on their own ground, and evangelize.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup>Drummond, Andrew L., German Protestantism since Luther, (London: Epworth Press, 1951), p. 67.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>cf. Burk, op. cit., p. 154, for examples of the expositions of Scripture given by Bengel at these Conventicles.

<sup>87</sup>Drummond, op. cit., p. 67.



It is surprising that Bengel could continue with his literary productivity while at Herbrechtingen, for the demands of his administrative duties were anything but light. Yet, several of his most significant works were completed here, among them his epoch-making Gnomon, (1742). His publications were by now attracting much attention, and because of them Bengel found himself subject both to praise and criticism. He appeared quite unaffected by either, although he did admit:

Am aller meisten schmerzt es einen, wenn man nicht nur von Weltleuten herabgesetzt wird, sondern wenn auch pneumatikoi einen verdächtig machen. Das sind gewaltige Stiche ins Herz, da kommt es einem dann gut, wenn man weisz, es ist nicht auf Menschen-Stützen gebaut, und sagen kann, es ist Gottes Führung; darum bin ich getrost und ruhig.<sup>88</sup>

On several occasions Bengel was invited to teach at major universities, including Tübingen, but he consistently declined these. Then in 1747, without being forewarned, he was named a Deputy of the Consistory; two years later he was transferred from Herbrechtingen to Alpirsbach, to serve there as Prelate. Then finally, only two months after coming to Alpirsbach, he was elected to the highest ecclesiastical position in the province, the Consistory of Württemberg. In response to this he wrote:

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<sup>88</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>89</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>90</sup>Hermelink, op. cit., p. 214.



Das neue Amt, das ich nicht gesucht habe, trete ich an im Vertrauen auf die göttliche Barmherzigkeit. Was gute und fromme Leute von meiner Berufung rühmen, das tröstet und erfreut mich einerseits, andernteils beschämt es mich und macht mir bange, da ich weisz, wer ich bin, und dasz die Beschaffenheit der Welt eine solche ist, dasz es schwer hält, einer auch nur mäßigen Erwartung zu entsprechen. Der Erfolg wird daher wohl der sein, dasz ich immer kleiner in meinen Augen werde und immer mehr nach der ewigen Ruhe mich sehne.<sup>89</sup>

Bengel could see no compromise of religious principle involved in his becoming a member of the Consistory. One rather notes in his Journal that he accepted his appointment as a matter of conscience, with the conviction that it would offer him wider areas of service. Consequently, in 1749 he and his wife moved to Stuttgart, where he was to live out the remainder of his life.

An extraordinary political circumstance was disturbing the Church of Württemberg at this very time. Duke Karl Eugen, who governed Protestant Württemberg from 1737 to 1793, was nominally a Roman Catholic.<sup>90</sup> During the early years of his rule, which partially coincided with Bengel's tenure in the Consistory, he exhibited few capacities for sound rule. His reckless policies, together with his expensive personal taste, so drained the national treasury that a brief financial depression resulted, which temporarily curtailed the revenues intended for the provincial

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<sup>89</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>90</sup>Hermelink, op. cit., p. 214.



Church. Though by this situation the Consistory was hampered, in another it was aided, at least indirectly so, by Karl Eugen. The Duke gave almost no attention to the affairs of the provincial Church, and hence the Consistory found that its decisions and activities were almost never vetoed.<sup>91</sup>

Bengel was obviously exceedingly occupied in his new position. He describes the scope of his multifarious duties in a letter as follows:

Es fallen bei uns im Konsistorium viele und vielerlei Dinge vor, und unter einem katholischen Regenten haben wir eine desto freiere Hand ..... Es sind die Kirchen - und Schulämter, Vikariate, Examen, Promotionen der Alumen, Aufsicht über die Klöster und das Stift zu Tübingen. Man hat auch bei den Ehesachen mitzusprechen. Auf der Universität hat man zu tun, wenn sie visitiert wird. Neben dem, was in den Sitzungen vorkommt, gibt es täglich Gelegenheit mit Pastoren, Kandidaten und sonstigen Leuten mündlich und schriftlich zu verhandeln.<sup>92</sup>

Although the time available for writing was at a precious minimum, Bengel was still able to publish several

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<sup>91</sup>Georg Bilfinger (1693-1750), whose importance ranks next to Bengel's in moulding the religious life of Württemberg in the eighteenth century, was Extraordinary Advisor to Karl Eugen. Though a theologian by training and predilection, Bilfinger became one of the most proficient diplomats in the history of his land. He without question aided also the cause of Protestantism under the regency of a Catholic Duke. cf. Hermelink, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>92</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 54.



treatises and complete his translation of the New Testament into German during this period.<sup>93</sup>

Two years after his appointment to the Consistory, he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity, causa honoris, by the University of Tübingen. That he was not entirely surprised upon being nominated for the degree is evident from a letter:

Ich erkenne Gottes Gnadengaben mit Dank, meine Nichtigkeit mit Demuth, and den Charakter eines Doktors der Theologie als etwas Hochgültiges, vornehmlich für einen, der mit seiner erst bevorstehenden, vieljährigen Arbeit einen Eingang in der Nähe und Ferne gewinnen soll.<sup>94</sup>

Bengel at this time was in his sixty-second year and believed his end to be immanent. Within a year, his "birth into glory," the term he had coined for dying, did indeed take place.

At no time in his life had he enjoyed vigorous health. Since his infancy, in fact, sicknesses of various types were common experiences for him. Rarely does one find allusions to these in his writings, although the following comment did appear in his Journal shortly before his death:

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<sup>93</sup>The translation was published posthumously.

<sup>94</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 162.



Ich kann mich nur eines Auges bedienen, da ich von den Jahren meiner Kindheit an nicht einmal die Buchstaben zu unterscheiden vermag. Das ist zum verwundern bei meiner kritischen Arbeiten. Das soll aber, so lange ich lebe, niemandem gesagt sein. Selbst meine Frau weisz es nicht.<sup>95</sup>

It is significant to note that Bengel did not at all react to his physical infirmities in a negative or pessimistic manner. He claims that these rather helped induce him to practice a chaste stewardship of his physical strength and of the time allotted to him.<sup>96</sup> But above all, he interpreted his illnesses as means whereby the claims of eternity were made more real to him. He writes:

Es ist einem doch angenehm wenn man so weit draussen ist mit seinem Leben, dasz einem nicht mehr viele äusere Veränderungen bevorstehen. Ich habe nie Trost bei der Welt gesucht. Wer betrachtet, in was für einer schlechten Herberge er ist und dabei weisz von einer besseren Heimat, wie sollte ihn noch etwas aufhalten?<sup>97</sup>

In late October of 1752, Bengel, already weakened by a series of fevers, contracted pneumonia. His condition gradually worsened, and shortly after midnight on the second of November, he died. His family and close intimates had gathered at his bedside, and, even though he was unconscious, audible prayers were spoken, among which there was repeated one of his favorites: "Herr Jesu, Dir leb ich, Dir sterb ich,

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<sup>95</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.



Dein bin ich tot und lebendig, mach mich, O Jesu, ewig selig, Amen."<sup>98</sup> At the words, "Dein bin ich," he regained consciousness, placed his right hand upon his breast, and quietly expired. He had attained the age of 65 years, four months, and eighteen days.<sup>99</sup>

If there is one paragraph from his writings which epitomizes the legacy which Bengel hoped to bequeath to his successors, it may well be the following:

Ich wünschte, dasz kein Mensch von mir einen Gedanken fassen möge, der die Wahrheit überschreite, und dasz allein die Erbarmung Gottes an mir, als einem ihrer Gefäße den Ruhm behalte. Mein ganzes Christentum besteht darin, dasz ich meines Herrn Eigentum bin, und dasz ich dies allein für meinen einzigen Ruhm und für alle meine Seligkeit halte.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Burk, op. cit., pp. 513-523. In these pages Burk presents a detailed account of the circumstances of Bengel's death.

<sup>99</sup>Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782), who continued the tendency of Bengel in Württemberg, speaks of Bengel's death as follows: "Bengel starb nach seiner Idee, nämlich als der, der nichts von der Sterbekunst statuirt, sondern der mit seinen Correcturbogen (evidently his folder containing corrections of the text of the Greek New Testament), als seinem Geschäft, sich beym Sterben so gut occupirt als zuvor. Er wollte nicht geistlichpompös sterben, sondern gemein, wie wenn man unter dem Geschäfte zur Thüre hinausgefordert wird. Also ist auch nichts Besonderes von ihm zu schreiben . . . . . (er) sprach: Er werde eine Weile vergessen werden, aber wieder in's Gedächtnisz kommen. Ja wohl! Seinesgleichen ist nicht in Württemberg, aberfreilich in seiner Art. Der Herr kennt alle die Seinen, Seine Heiligen rangirt Er, nicht wir." cf. Burk, op. cit., p. 522.

<sup>100</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 63.



## CHAPTER II

### THE WRITTEN WORKS OF J. A. BENDEL

Johann Albrecht Bengel was a prolific and capable writer, producing works which ranged in type from poetry to serious theological treatises. The amount of his correspondence alone is such as to stagger the imagination, and in addition, scores of poems and countless sermons came from his facile mind and ready pen.

Our interest, however, lies primarily with the man's more serious treatises, for these constitute the primary source-material for delineating his theological principles, and these likewise are fountainheads for his continuing influence. There are at least thirty works included in this group, some of them philological and exegetical studies, others the products of his textual criticism, some doctrinal essays, and some being the presentations of his chronological and eschatological views. Before focusing attention upon these individually, mention should be made of certain traits which characterize all the principal works of Bengel.

In the first place, it is quite evident that the man did not write simply for the sake of writing, in the fashion of a dilettante. He had small regard for those



who wrote, as he phrases it, ex professo.<sup>1</sup> No desultory interests occasioned his writing; rather, two concerns, above all others, seemed to drive him to produce his written works. One was his deep sense of responsibility for interpreting what he conceived to be the essential message of Christianity in such terms as would be applicable to the issues of his time, and the second was his desire to serve God with the talents entrusted to him.<sup>2</sup> This is to say, on the one hand, that a profound sense of vocation lies back of his writing and, on the other, that he regarded his works as vehicles for relaying the message of the Bible to the men of his day.

It should be noted in addition that Bengel used exceptionally long periods of time for preparing his works. It was usual for him to devote an entire decade to readying a manuscript for publication; in some instances, almost twenty years were used.<sup>3</sup> While it is true that his teaching and pastoral commitments did much to prevent him from writing, the primary reason for such lengthy preparation lies rather in the fact that Bengel wished to print only such materials as were new and helpful. In his words:

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<sup>1</sup>Burk, J. C., Johann Albrecht Bengel's Leben und Wirken, (Stuttgart: J. F. Steinkopf, 1831), pp. 429-449. In the above-cited pages, examples of Bengel's poetry are given. It should be noted that all his poems center upon religious themes.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 185.



Man sollte im Bücher-schreiben viel sorgfältiger seyn. Ein jedes Buch soll den Leser in der Erkenntnis weiter bringen, oder sein Herz entflammen. Aber wie Viele bewirken keines von beydem? Ein jedes Buch sollte was Neues haben. Wo das nicht ist, sollte man nichts schreiben. Aber wie manche Bücher gibt es, in denen nicht eine einzige neue Bemerkung vorkommt.<sup>4</sup>

Hence Bengel applied to himself the dictum: "Viel denken, wenig schreiben;" hence also, he subjected his manuscripts to rigorous censorship, constantly revising what he had written and finally submitting his manuscripts to his colleagues for their critical evaluation. His primary works are consequently the products of painstaking preparation and reflect accurately his theological position. "Es ist schon lange meine Regel," he affirmed, "in Schriften kein Wort zu setzen, das mich in der Stunde des Todes reuen möchte."<sup>5</sup>

With the above facts in mind, one is the better prepared for a study of the primary works of Bengel with a view to eliciting from them the characteristics of his theology. The most rewarding procedure here will be to survey these in the order of their appearance.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.



## A. BENDEL IN HIS WORK OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Bengel's first publication of enduring significance for theology was his critical edition of the Greek New Testament, a work which is everywhere regarded as epochal, not only in that it was the first truly critical edition of the New Testament to have appeared since the time of Erasmus, but also in that it embodied principles of criticism so important that they furnished much of the foundation for subsequent work in this area.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that Bengel had already proven his capacities for textual criticism long before the publication of his critical edition. During his early years at Denkendorf, he had cast about for trustworthy editions of classical Greek and Latin works which might be used as classroom manuals for his students. None of those he examined pleased him, and consequently he prepared the following: M. Tullii Ciceronis Epistolae, which he published in 1719; Gregorii Thaumaturgi Paneyricus ad Originem, graece et latine, released in 1722; and Joannis Chrysostomi de sacerdotio libri sex, which appeared in 1725.<sup>7</sup> In each, the critical text is followed by pages

<sup>6</sup>Robertson, A. T., Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1925), p. 26.

<sup>7</sup>Bengel, J. A., M. Tullii Ciceronis Epistolae ad diversos, vulgo familiares recognitae, et iis instructae rebus quae ad interpretationem, imitationemque pertinent, (Stuttgart: Johann Benedict Metzler), 1719.



of word-studies and finally by explanations of salient sections of the text. They all reflect extensive philological research and are characterized by succinct analysis. That they enjoyed a wide and continuing usage in the German Gymnasial system is proof of their pedagogical value.<sup>8</sup>

Even while preparing the above-mentioned editions, Bengel was laying the plans for his proposed edition of the New Testament. It will be remembered how extremely perturbed he had been upon discovering variant readings in the Greek Testament. To be certain, his doubts concerning the trustworthiness of the New Testament were dissipated when he came to realize that virtually no variations exist in those passages of the New Testament which establish the foundational principles of Christianity and that textual infallibility could be predicated only for the original autographs and not for the later copies of the New Testament. These views find expression in a letter, written in 1723, a decade after Bengel had come to Denkendorf:

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<sup>8</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 190.



Über die verschiedenen Lesarten im Neuen Testament hatte ich Dir mehr zu sagen, als dieser Brief fassen konnte, Isz du nur einfältig das Brot, wie Du es vorfindest und bekümmere Dich nicht darum, ob Du etwa hier und da ein Sandkörnlein aus der Mahlmühle darin findest ..... Wenn die heiligen Schriften, die so oft abgeschrieben wurden, so oft durch die mangelhaften Menschenhände gingen, ohne allen Mangel waren, so war das Wunder so grosz, dasz der Glaube daran nicht mehr ein Glaube war. Im Gegenteil wundert mich das, dasz nicht noch viel mehr verschiedene Lesarten entstanden sind, und dasz die vorhandenen unsern Glaubensgrund nicht im geringsten verrücken. Weise also getrost diesen Zweifel ab, der mich einst so schrecklich gequält hat.<sup>9</sup>

Even though his personal doubts in this matter had now been resolved, Bengel still felt himself obligated to prepare as accurate a text of the New Testament as possible because he had vowed to address himself to this task, and because he also wished to alleviate the potential doubts of others who might note the multitude of variations as he had. Succinctly stated, it may then be said that his criticism of the textus receptus was done primarily for conscience's sake - "um eine Noth des Gewissens."<sup>10</sup> "Der reine Text," he wrote, "ist so wichtig, damit wir nicht apostolische Worte unnütz übergehen, noch statte apostolischer die Worte Gelehrter behandeln."<sup>11</sup>

In addition, a practical concern moved him to devote himself to this project. One of his especial assignments

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<sup>9</sup>Keller, G., Johann Albrecht Bengel, (Basel: Heinrich Majer, 1948), p. 31.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.



at Denkendorf was to train students in the cursory reading of the Greek New Testament. Since the students at first provided their own texts, classroom procedure was often hampered by the divergent readings their differing editions contained. Such a circumstance impressed Bengel all the more with the need for an authoritative critically-edited text of the Greek New Testament.

It is impossible to ascertain just when he set out upon the project, for he fails to record this information. One may however glean from his Journal the fact that his work was so arranged as to follow the basic scheme of textual criticism: First, the acquisition of as much pertinent evidence as possible, and secondly, the careful and thorough collation of these materials. He seems to have been fully aware of the heroic proportions of his project, for he alludes to the immensity of the task of searching through the thousands of variants which he had come to detect in the New Testament in order to uncover as nearly as possible the prima manus, and he mentions also his concern about the acceptability of his project to the theologians of that day.<sup>12</sup>

The first of his materials Bengel garnered from the varying editions belonging to his students, and especially from the edition just recently published by the English

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<sup>12</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 200.



scholar Mills.<sup>13</sup> These sources being quickly exhausted, Bengel penned a short pamphlet which he hoped would be instrumental in securing materials from elsewhere. The brochure was entitled Prodromus Novi Testamenti graeci recte cauteque adornandi and was originally appended to his edition of Chrysostom's works.<sup>14</sup> Later he published it separately and sent copies of it to most major Universities and Libraries in northern Europe. In this, Bengel announces his intention of publishing a critical edition of the New Testament and petitions for additional materials usable as evidence for his project. These, Bengel promises, will be cared for conscientiously and, above all, will be used to the glory of God.<sup>15</sup>

In concluding the tract, he promises his readers in a rather matter-of-fact way that he will eventually provide them with a much-simplified canon for textual criticism, which, in contrast to the forty-three cumbersome principles of Gerhard von Maastricht, would consist of only four words; and, in addition, that he hopes to publish a new commentary of the New Testament under the name Gnomon.<sup>16</sup>

In response to the brochure, Bengel received some thirty manuscripts. P. J. Cropius, of Strassbourg,

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.



submitted seven manuscripts, one of which contained material especially valuable for correcting the text of the Apocalypse. From Frankfort, Bengel received four codices and two rare copies of the Old Latin version. The Ducal Library at Basel sent three codices, and Matthias Marthius, a clergyman at Preszburg, submitted a splendidly preserved vellum codex of the Gospels. Seven manuscripts of the Old Latin version were provided by the Royal Library at Stuttgart. Materials arrived even from Russia, where Georg Bilfinger had contacted officials of the Russian Church to enlist their cooperation in the project. The Synod of Moscow thereupon submitted a rare and heretofore unexamined codex of the entire New Testament.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Beyssiere la Croze, a French scholar, sent several excerpts from the Arminian and Coptic versions.<sup>18</sup>

In summation, Bengel received sixteen codices, most of them as yet un-named; the remaining materials were copies of the more ancient versions. It can hardly be said that he was disappointed at such a response, since in that day it was still characteristic for possessors of ancient manuscripts to guard their treasures in almost miserly

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.



fashion.<sup>19</sup>

After spending at least four years in examining and collating these new materials, and comparing their readings with the variants he had previously discovered through his personal research, Bengel was ready to publish his findings, and in 1729 submitted his edition to the Consistory for examination. Just then, however, a probationary copy of Wetstein's edition of the New Testament came to him, and he decided to postpone the date of publication until after he had compared his work with Wetstein's.<sup>20</sup> Finally, in 1734, Bengel published his critical New Testament. The work appeared in two editions: One in quarto size, including the critical apparatus, was printed at Tübingen; the second, a manual edition, octavo in size and omitting the critical apparatus but including the preferred readings, was printed at Stuttgart.<sup>21</sup>

It is especially the larger edition which gives indication of the epochal nature of Bengel's work. What first attracts one's attention is the unique arrangement of the format of the text. Bengel broke from the precedent

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<sup>19</sup>An archivist in Friesland, newly-appointed in 1729, was informed by his employers that "after learning the secrets of our house he must carry them to the grave and reveal them to nobody." In Stuttgart, no one was allowed to enter the archives of the Royal Library without the express permission of the Royal House. Gooch, G. P., History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century, (Longmans: London, 1928), p. 12.

<sup>20</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.



of printing the text in unbroken sequence and divided the text into paragraphs, arranged according to units of subject matter. This arrangement met with general approbation and was adopted, with some modification, by the majority of later editors.<sup>22</sup>

Vastly more important than this innovation of format are the critical principles embodied in the edition. Contrary to expectation, the text in itself incorporates almost none of the fruits of Bengel's critical work. Only in the case of the Apocalypse does one find a radically edited text; elsewhere, the readings agree in the main with those of the textus receptus. Bengel explains his reticence in this matter by claiming that neither the publisher nor the public would at that time have accepted a severely altered text; hence, the corrections he did incorporate in the text - exclusive of the Apocalypse - were such as had already appeared in the previously printed editions of the Greek New Testament.<sup>23</sup>

Where then may one discover the results of Bengel's textual criticisms? These are embodied in the marginal notations, where he presents the possible variant readings applicable to each case under consideration. First stands

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<sup>22</sup>Kenyon, Fredric C., Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament, (London: MacMillan and Co., 1901), p. 237.

<sup>23</sup>Robertson, op. cit., p. 25.



the reading which he considered as decidedly more accurate than that in the textus receptus; next, the reading which he regarded as somewhat more accurate; third, a variant reading equally as valuable as that in the main text; in the fourth place, he listed a reading less accurate, and finally a variant considerably inferior to that in the text.<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that this device at times becomes quite cumbersome and has the liability of not presenting the evidence underlying Bengel's verdicts.

Following upon the main text of the quarto edition is his apparatus criticus. This section is of supreme importance, first because in it Bengel lists the evidence for his readings - book upon book, chapter upon chapter, and verse upon verse; and secondly, because he here states the principles governing his procedure. Here then one may discern the painstaking and tortuous procedure the man followed in examining controverted readings and in determining which of all the variants available to him were most accurate.

In delineating the principles governing his procedure, Bengel insists that the accuracy of any critical edition of the New Testament depends upon the proper weighing of manuscript evidence. Previous editions are faulty, he asserts, because their editors either failed to recognize

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<sup>24</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 215.



the necessity for discriminating between the worth of varying readings - as in the case of those who followed blindly the reading of the textus receptus - or because they were mistaken in their evaluation of the evidence available to them - as in the case of those who failed to give precedence to those codices which appeared oldest. But how then shall an editor properly weigh manuscript evidence? Two answers are given by Bengel, both characteristically terse. The first is his promised four-word canon: Proclivi lectioni praestat ardua,<sup>25</sup> and the second is embodied in his conviction that all manuscripts belong to one or the other of two great recensions, the African and the Asiatic.<sup>26</sup>

In explaining his first principle, Bengel argues that it would be more natural for passages to be progressively simplified in the process of copying than for readings to be rendered more difficult. Hence, in deciding between variants, the more difficult reading is to be preferred to

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<sup>25</sup>It should be noted that Lactantius had already suggested, in principle at least, such a canon. Kenyon, op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>26</sup>Bengel regarded Codex A, the only significant uncial then much known, and the Old Latin version as the primary representatives of his so-called African family; on the other hand, the Greek-Latin codices (Evan. - Acts D, Acts E, Paul D-G) he placed in the Asiatic family; these he regarded as untrustworthy, calling them re vera bilingues. Cf. his Quarto Edition of the New Testament, p. 390-401.



the simpler.<sup>27</sup> The second principle Bengel explains with much greater detail. He mentions that early in his work of collation, he had noted that certain manuscripts seemed, by virtue of the similarity of their variants, to be related. He came finally to conclude that there were two great families of manuscripts, the first of which he named the African, and the second the Asiatic. Most of the documents available to him he placed in the latter group; these, however, he tended to disparage since their readings seemed to him to be of more recent origin. The manuscripts belonging to the African recension he treasured very highly, believing that their texts were based on an earlier form of the New Testament.<sup>28</sup> It follows that the variants supported by manuscripts of the African family are to be preferred to those found in those of the Asiatic family. Simple though

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<sup>27</sup>Hermelink, Heinrich, Geschichte der Evangelische Kirche in Württemberg, (Stuttgart: Rainer Wunderlich Verlag, 1949), p. 222.

<sup>28</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 214. Circumstantial evidence points to Hager as having written the following in response to the appearance of Bengel's critical edition of the New Testament: "Wenn ein jeder Buchdrucker mit dem Neuen Testamente also verfahren wollte, so würden wir in wenigen Jahren ein ganz anderes Neues Testament bekommen ..... Die Kühnheit ist gewisz gar zu grosz, als dasz man dazu schweigen könnte, zumal man aus dieser Auflage viel Werkes macht ..... Man wird nicht leicht ein Kapitel finden, wo nicht etwas hinweggelassen, hineingesetzt, geändert oder versetzt sey. So kühn hat es noch keiner gemacht."



these two criteria seem, they were to revolutionize the discipline of textual criticism.<sup>29</sup>

As might be expected, Bengel's critical edition of the New Testament was met with mixed reaction. There can be no doubt about the fact that many welcomed the work and perceived its worth. The favorable reaction of Bengel's own colleagues and students at Denkendorf to the work gives evidence of this, as does the fact that the edition was sent to Tranquebar to be used there by the Danish-Halle missionaries as basis for the first translation of the New Testament into Tamil.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, the edition was strongly criticized by three major groups. The first was that of Lutheran Orthodoxy, which in that time regarded textual criticism with an especial suspicion, holding that any criticism of the textus receptus was tantamount to a denial of the fact of inspiration itself and that only humanists and sceptics would willingly be party to such projects.<sup>31</sup> Johann Georg Hagar, at the University of Leipzig, was a champion of this attitude and made much use of periodicals and lecture-halls to criticize Bengel for subverting the doctrine of

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<sup>29</sup>Hermelink, op. cit., p. 222.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 222.



inspiration.<sup>32</sup> Another who levelled such accusations at Bengel was Probst Kohlreif of Ratzeburg, who maintained that not only the "ursprüngliche Grundtext," but also the variants in later copies were divinely inspired, and that consequently the discrediting of any variant was again equivalent to the denial of the doctrine of inspiration.<sup>33</sup>

A second wave of criticism came from Roman Catholic scholars. The most audible expression of their dissatisfaction was voiced by Thomas Adelbert Berghauer, who published a somewhat vitriolic expose' of Bengel's work, lamenting especially the fact that Bengel should have doubted the accuracy of the Vulgate, and criticising also the revisions incorporated into the text of the Apocalypse.<sup>34</sup> "Bengel," this man charged, "habe die Offenbarung in eine neue griechische Form gegossen, und den Grundtext derselben mit seinen Morddolchen sehr jämmerlich zerhacket, zerfetzt und zernichtet."<sup>35</sup>

A third party to oppose the new edition was that of the nascent rationalists. The most able spokesman for this group was Johann Jakob Wetstein, the Swiss theologian who had begun work on a critical edition of the New Testament

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.



shortly before Bengel did so, but who, because of his apparent Arianism and the prejudice against textual criticism abroad in his homeland, was for some years suspended from his position and denied the use of the materials he had painstakingly acquired for his critical work.<sup>36</sup> Within several months after Bengel's edition appeared in print, Wetstein published his criticisms. He maintained that Bengel's text can scarcely be regarded as critical, since it is virtually identical to the textus receptus; in fact, his refusal to publish a corrected text does more harm than good to critical scholarship. Moreover, where Bengel does venture to revise the text, his decisions are governed more by intuition than by evidence. The Suabian's authorities are few and faulty, and his canons for criticism are almost laughably naive. Wetstein insisted finally that the principle of majority, rather than that of antiquity, should determine one's procedure in selecting preferred readings.<sup>37</sup>

Bengel found it necessary to defend his work of textual criticism throughout the remainder of his life. His responses, always tempered with restraint, were however nothing more than reiterations of his basic principles.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Typical of such is the following tract: Bengel, J. A., Defensio N. T. graeci, (Tübingen: Batavorum and Wishoff, 1737).



In answer to both Hager and Berghauer, he repeats his conviction that inspiration can be predicated only of the original autographs and that copies and translations are authoritative and accurate only insofar as they duplicate the original text. Hence, it is incumbent upon Christian scholars to utilize textual criticism as a means of providing as pure a text of the Scriptures as possible.<sup>39</sup>

Wetstein's criticisms Bengel countered with numerous tracts which later were incorporated in the second edition of his Greek New Testament.<sup>40</sup> His rebuttal in the main followed three lines of argumentation. In the first place, Bengel willingly admits the paucity of his evidence, but states that his preferred readings are based upon the most trustworthy manuscripts available to him. He writes:

Es sey unrichtig, wenn Wetstein behaupte, dasz er blosz 12 Manuscripte bey seiner Arbeit gebraucht habe; denn er habe nicht nur 7 Straszburger, einige Byzantinische, eine Hirsauer, eine Moskowitische und 2 Uffenbach'sche Handschriften verglichen, sondern auszerdem die Ergebnisse dreyer Basler Cod. und noch sieben anderer, so wie die Vergleichung des L. Valla und J. Faber Stapulensis zusammen getragen, und noch Überdisz über die alte lateinische Uebersetzung der Bibel so Vieles gesammelt, dasz er sehr leicht eine vollständige Recension derselben besorgen könnte; überhaupt aber habe er durch unpartheische Vergleichung aller bisher vorhandenen-Lesearten, den Streit über die richtigere Leseart in sehr vielen Stellen der Entscheidung beträchtlich näher gebracht.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 216.

<sup>40</sup>These may be found beginning on page 715 in the second edition of Bengel's Greek New Testament.

<sup>41</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 216.



Also, he defends his refusal to print all his corrections in the main text of his edition. He is convinced that a radically altered text would have occasioned an even greater opposition to his work and that the device of printing corrections as marginal notations should be sufficiently satisfying to critical scholars.<sup>42</sup> Finally, Bengel takes issue with Wetstein's principles for evaluating manuscript evidence. Wetstein is not correct regarding the quantity of evidence as being more important than the quality of evidence in determining correct readings, since the variants supported by even one ancient manuscript of the African family are to be preferred to those found in a multitude of more recent documents.<sup>43</sup> Bengel reaffirms his confidence in the validity of his canon, Proclivi scriptioni praestat ardua, and argues that

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Bengel speaks to this point as follows: "Was die Behauptung betreffe, dasz über die Richtigkeit einer Leseart die Zahl der Handschriften entscheiden müsse, so sey sie absurd, und widerspreche den Aeuszerungen Wetsteins selbst, wie man sie in seinen Prolegomenon vom Jahre 1730, und in seiner Vorrede zur zweiten, von ihm 1735 besorgten Ausgabe des Gerhard'schen N. Testaments lesen könne . . . . . Man müsse auf die verschiedene Abstammung der Manuscripte sehen, bey deren Berücksichtigung ein einzelnes zuweilen hundert andere aufwiegen könne. Im Uebrigen sey er so wenig der Meynung, dasz die Manuscripte nicht auch . . . . . das Uebrige vorausgesetzt, abgezählt werden sollen, dasz er darauf werten könne, dasz keine Recension im Allgemeinen so sehr wie die Seinige durch die Mehrzahl der Manuscripte bestätigt werde." Burk, op. cit., p. 218.



this makes for a procedure having much more integrity than that of Wetstein's.<sup>44</sup>

And so the polemic continued, even beyond the time of Bengel's death. Succeeding generations of scholars finally came to agree that Bengel's work nonetheless marked the opening of a new era in the history of the textual criticism of the New Testament, pointing out that he was among the first to reject the dogma of the infallibility of the textus receptus and to suggest a scientific procedure for correcting the text of the New Testament.<sup>45</sup> This is of course not to say that modern scholars have found no weaknesses in his work.

Two inadequacies are especially noted: In the first place, Bengel's work of collation has been found to be not entirely accurate, and secondly, his verdicts regarding preferred readings are not always consistent with his own canons. Every one of his sixteen codices has required and received more accurate analysis from those who inherited his findings.<sup>46</sup> Even so, it must be admitted that Bengel's

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<sup>44</sup>Bengel claims: "Warum der Canon: Proclivi scriptioni praestat ardua rätselhaft gefunden werden wolle, könne er um so weniger begreifen, da die dabey gebrauchten Ausdrücke schon den ältesten Kritikern geläufig gewesen seyen, und er sich noch näher über den Sinn dieser Grundsätze und den seiten Umfang, in welchem er ihn anzuwenden für gut finde, erklärt habe." Burk, op. cit., p. 217.

<sup>45</sup>Kenyon, op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>46</sup>Nestle, Eberhard, Einführung in das Griechische Neue Testament, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1909), p. 4.



technique of collation was not entirely inept, for he was the first to discover the achilles heel of the Erasmusian edition, namely, that Erasmus had incorporated a retranslation of a portion of the Apocalypse from Latin into Greek in his edition without documenting this fact.<sup>47</sup> That Bengel at times deviated from his own canons of criticism is best illustrated by his retention of Mark 16:9-20 and John 8:1-11 as authentic readings, in spite of the fact that his best authorities questioned the genuineness of these sections. Bengel explains his unwillingness to delete these verses by arguing that since they constitute lengthy passages, their appearance in the textus receptus seems to him to be sufficient proof of their authenticity.<sup>48</sup>

Nonetheless, it is generally conceded that there is abiding value in Bengel's work of textual criticism. Contemporary textual critics, favored as they are with extensive evidence and refined techniques, cannot but be awed at the prospect of Bengel working as a pioneer in acquiring manuscripts and in devising, largely out of his own ingenuity, a procedure for using them. While his critical verdicts must always be considered in relation to his age and his opportunities, it cannot be over-

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.



emphasized that his principle of classifying evidence was an epochal innovation and as such opened a new era in the history of textual criticism.<sup>49</sup>

Bengel's theory of rescensions in effect heralded the end of the traditional process of evaluating variants by the simple expedient of counting their incidence in manuscript evidence, and suggested the way whereby order could be brought out of the rudis indigestaque moles of variant readings. The theory was afterwards expanded by Semler and built into formidable dimensions by Griesbach and Eichhorn. Johann Salomo Semler (1725-91), whose influence was largely responsible for turning Halle into a center of Rationalism, divided Bengel's "African family" of manuscripts into an Occidental and an Alexandrian rescension and used these as primary authorities for his revisions of the text of the New Testament.<sup>50</sup> Shortly thereafter, Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745-1812) corrected the rescensions of his former teacher, Semler, and proved conclusively their usability in textual criticism.<sup>51</sup> Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827), who was born in the very year of Bengel's death and who labored with Griesbach

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<sup>49</sup>Kenyon, op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>50</sup>Kenyon, Frederick C., Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), p. 110.

<sup>51</sup>von Soden, H., Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments, (Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1902), p. 345.



at Jena, refined the theory of rescensions and used it likewise as basis for his correction of the biblical text. In the mid-nineteenth century, a reaction against the premises of these men set in which implicitly criticised also the Bengelian theory of rescensions.<sup>52</sup> Then finally the two great Cambridge scholars of the late nineteenth century, Wescott and Hort, revived and greatly refined the theory and definitely established it as the basis for the textual criticism of the New Testament.<sup>53</sup>

Bengel thus merits lasting appreciation for his work of textual criticism. But in the last analysis what is here perhaps most significant is the fact that he saw in textual criticism a means for demonstrating the authenticity and trustworthiness of Scripture.<sup>54</sup> The critical work of Bengel is not at all the product of doubt, nor does it seek to engender doubt; rather, his textual criticism was done out of a desire to search out the original form of the sacred text so that faith might be all the more firmly grounded in Scripture.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Kenyon, Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts, p. 111.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Dorner, J. A., Geschichte der protestantische theologie, (München: J. A. Cotta-schen Buchhandlung, 1867), p. 652.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.



## B. THE CHRONOLOGICAL STUDIES OF J. A. BENGEL

Having finally published his critical edition of the New Testament, Bengel felt free to devote attention to other areas. One would expect him to plunge headlong now into exegetical work, for here, in his own words, lay his first love. Certain brief exegetical essays did indeed appear in the years immediately following the publication of his New Testament,<sup>56</sup> yet almost a decade passed before he produced any major exegetical studies. In the meanwhile, Bengel gave much time to the study of sacred chronology, and consequently, his next significant publications were addressed to this subject.

The reasons prompting him to investigate a field so seemingly peripheral to the interests of an exegetical scholar are varied. In the first place, Bengel was attracted to this subject because he wished to explicate whatever seemed significant in the message of the Bible. During his early years at Denkendorf he had become increasingly impressed by the frequency with which chronological references appeared in the Scriptures. Every important event in Biblical history seemed to him to be marked by an allusion to chronology; hence, he concluded,

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<sup>56</sup>Fausset, A. R., "The Life and Writings of J. A. Bengel," Gnomon of the New Testament by John Albert Bengel, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1909), V, p. xxi.



the chronological data in the Bible must be of value and should not be left untouched by an expositor.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, the very atmosphere of Bengel's time was such as to attract him to the value of chronology and to acquaint him with the techniques necessary for the construction of chronological systems. His age was one when the disciplines of history and mathematics were accorded especial attention and subjected to significant refinements.<sup>58</sup>

Modern historiography quite definitely received its impetus from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries,<sup>59</sup> a fact alluded to by Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) in his claim that "History is the most popular species of writing."<sup>60</sup>

Shortly before Bengel's career began, Leibnitz had enunciated theories which in effect revolutionized the very concept of history. Breaking sharply from the view of history prevalent in his time, a concept which regarded history as little more than the lineal procession of isolated events and dominant personalities,<sup>61</sup> Leibnitz asserted that history was a multiformed organism of related events undergoing continuous development. It was his opinion

<sup>57</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 246.

<sup>58</sup>Thompson, James Westfall, A History of Historical Writing, (MacMillan: New York, 1942), II, p. 100.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.



that historic change is a genetic process in which all new developments are both the product of the past and the prefiguration of the ultimate forms of historic life.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, Leibnitz attached supreme importance to chronology. "I consider," he wrote, "chronology or knowledge of time as the basis or skeleton of the whole body of history, which forms the foundation and support of all the rest."<sup>63</sup> Without chronology, the actuality of historic events becomes questionable; but through a proper utilization of chronology, the progress of history might be precisely recorded and the validity of historic events might thereby be guaranteed.<sup>64</sup>

Likewise, in Bengel's time the entire discipline of mathematics was undergoing much revision and refinement. Rene' Descartes had in 1637 published an epochal revision of geometry, which attracted attention not only because it defined the theoretical aspects of that discipline, but also because it suggested how the principles of geometry might be utilized for the betterment of human society.<sup>65</sup> A generation later, Newton and Leibnitz, working independently, discovered calculus, an innovation which proved to be the

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Bell, E. T., The Development of Mathematics (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1940), p. 3.



harbinger of a new era in science, since it provided a technique for measuring motion and continuity, thus making possible modern physics, chemistry, and astronomy.<sup>66</sup>

Leibnitz himself thought he saw in calculus the key to all knowledge and claimed that in it lay the means for investigating, coordinating, and interpreting the full range of reality, both noumenal and phenomenal.<sup>67</sup> Later generations have come to regard such a view as quite naive; yet in that time of erudition and reason, when scholars sought to extend their knowledge to the very horizons of reality, such a view was soberly considered.<sup>68</sup>

Bengel himself was aware of such new developments in the field of scholarship, and especially of the claims of Leibnitz.<sup>69</sup> It is therefore not inaccurate to hold that through such influences he was brought to regard both chronology and mathematics as useful and mutually-supplementary disciplines. Chronology appeared valuable to him in that it provided the technique for charting with

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Both at Stuttgart and Tübingen, Bengel had distinguished himself in mathematics. Johann Konrad Creiling, whose range of interests included alchemy, trained Bengel in mathematics at Tübingen. His instruction was not only such as did inculcate the techniques of the mathematical disciplines, but also such as emphasized the epistemological value of mathematical thought. It was during this time that Bengel came to regard mathematics as "Kunst der Ordnung." Hermelink, op. cit., p. 216.



accuracy the process of history and thereby indicating the certainty of its events; Mathematics, on the other hand, provided a technique helpful in constructing and validating chronology.

This then is to say that Bengel saw in chronology a means for demonstrating the validity of the Biblical narrative and for determining the progressive development of sacred history. In his own words, "Die chronologische Linie von der Genesis bis zur Apokalypse erweist auf das festeste die unwandelbare Wahrheit der ganzen Schrift gegen alle Gegner des Neuen oder des Alten Testaments."<sup>70</sup> To accurately determine the time of all the events recorded in Scripture is to guarantee the truth of each event as well as of the entire Biblical record. Bengel was certain therefore that chronology would prove those very events upon which faith was grounded to be entirely trustworthy.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, he believed that chronology was the best means for clearly delineating the gradual unfolding of the Kingdom of God, the history of which he held was completely revealed in Scripture but which had never been accurately and thoroughly depicted by any expositor.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Bengel, J. A., Ordo Temporum, (Stuttgart: Christoph. Erhard, 1741), chapter XIII, p. 13.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 246.



Through his personal studies, he had come to detect what he called a "time-line" in the Bible.<sup>73</sup> This to him appeared to mark the observable aspects of God's kingdom activity and as such seemed to be a token of the progressively developing economy of God. Hence, he concluded that if order could be brought out of the seeming chaos of Biblical chronology, the history of the kingdom of God might be clearly mapped out from the time of creation to that of the final consummation.<sup>74</sup>

It may then be concluded that the primary reasons prompting Bengel to engage in chronological studies were his desire to indicate the trustworthiness of the Biblical narrative and to chart with clear certainty the history of the Kingdom of God. Bengel's chronological studies may therefore be regarded as apologetical writings, for he sought through them to prove the validity of the Scriptural

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<sup>73</sup>In Bengel's own words: "Ein doppeltes Denkmal giebt uns die heilige Schrift, einmal die Erkenntnis von Gott, dem Schöpfer, Erlöser, Tröster, von den Engeln, von Menschen, von der Sünde, von der Gnade, usw. Und diese Erkenntnis ist die Nothwendigste. Dann aber auch die Art und Weise der göttlichen Haushaltung in Erziehung des Menschen geschlechts, in den gegebenen, erfüllten, oder zu erfüllenden Verheissungen von Christo, in der Regierung des Volkes von den ersten Zeiten bis zu den letzten. Ein Arzt darf über die feineren Theile doch die Knochen nicht vergessen. So wird auch, wer die Schrift benutzt, wie es sich ziemt, jene Hauptstücke vom Glauben zu seinem und zu Anderer Heil treiben; aber ebenso darf er auch die Rücksicht auf die heiligen Zeiten nicht vernachlässigen, besonders wo beide Theile sich gegenseitig Licht und Befestigung geben." Bengel, Ordo Temporum, Intro., No. I.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.



account with a technique which critics and sceptics themselves had come to recognize as valid.

It shall now be our purpose to examine the various chronological writings of Bengel, indicating the salient features of their respective contents, and mentioning also the influence of each. The first of these to appear was his "Die richtige Harmonie der vier Evangelisten," published originally at Tübingen in 1736 and reprinted eleven years later in a revised and expanded form, yet with no major changes in principle from the original edition.<sup>75</sup>

Bengel begins the book with a statement of its purpose and of the premises underlying its content. It is his hope that the book will serve to clarify and correct the chronology of Christ's life and to reconcile the seeming discrepancies between the respective chronologies of the four Gospels. Furthermore, he states that his harmonization is based primarily upon two principles. In the first place, the chronology of Luke is to be normative for his harmony. He is convinced that Luke published his Gospel in Alexandria and that consequently his chronological data is patterned after the Alexandrian measurement of time and not after that of the Jews. From this he argues that the time-span from the birth of Jesus to his baptism is not quite thirty years

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<sup>75</sup>Bengel, J. A., Die richtige Harmonie der vier Evangelisten, (Tübingen: Christoph Berger, 1736).



in length, and that there could have been but three Passovers between the baptism and crucifixion.<sup>76</sup> As his second principle, Bengel states that since Jesus in his discourses followed the sequence of the lections appointed to be read on Sabbaths and festivals in the Synagogues, it is possible to date the discourses of Christ by referring them to the corresponding Jewish lections and noting when these were read.<sup>77</sup>

The book next presents in summarized form Bengel's correlation of the chronologies of the four evangelists. In this section, it appears what great a degree Luke was determinative for Bengel's scheme, for his procedure in resolving chronological discrepancies was primarily to effect an adjustment to the chronology of Luke.<sup>78</sup> Following this summarization is the main body of the book, the fully-expanded harmony of the Gospels. Bengel here lists in parallel columns all the passages alluding to each occasion in the chronology of the Gospels, pausing after each such grouping to present evidence for the accuracy of his judgments.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 261.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.



The conclusion of the book is almost entirely devotional in content. Bengel states that whoever studies seriously the chronology of the Gospels should seek not only additional knowledge of the mighty deeds of God, but should above all seek thereby to be confirmed in his faith. The book is consequently not to be regarded primarily as a technical study, but rather as a means for edification. This, indeed, is the dominant note of the book's concluding paragraph:

Liesest du etwas Gutes von Gott, von dem Heiland, von dem Geist Gottes, von den heiligen Engeln, von den Nachfolgern Christi, ..... lasz es dich zur Verwunderung, zur Dankbarkeit, zur Busze, zum Glauben, zum Wachsthum in der Erkenntnis, zum Thun des Goettlichen Willens bewegen. Liesest du etwas Mangelhaftes oder Boeses an allerley Menschen, nimm es zur Warnung an. Liesest du die mannigfaltigen in ihre Umstaende eingekleideten Geschichten, huelle dich in eben solche Umstaende ein, und wenn es zum Exempel Marc. 10:49 heiszt: Er rufet dir; so denke, Jesus rufet dir; oder thue die Umstaende in deinen Gedanken bey Seite, so hast du alsobald eine allgemeine Lehre. Steiget in deinem Herzen etwas von guten, heitern Gedanken, von sueszen, zarten Regungen auf, wende dich damit zu deinem Heiland nicht anders, als ob du immer einer von denen waerest, die ehedessen mit ihm umgiengen: so hast du Seufzer und Gebete dazu, und das besser, als man dir im Vorrath vorschreiben kann, wiewohl ich dergleichen Vorschriften gerne bey ihrem Werth lasse ..... Gott gebe immer mehr Licht und Kraft aus der Fuelle des Geliebten, in welchem Er uns Begnaediget hat.<sup>80</sup>

Bengel's "Harmonie der vier Evangelisten" was the first significant harmony of the Gospels to appear since the time

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.



of Andreas Osiander who had published such a work in the mid-sixteenth century. It was well received by the public but somewhat criticized in academic circles. His preference for the chronology of Luke over that of Mark and his method for cataloguing the times of Christ's discourses were both questioned, as were certain of the conclusions he had drawn from these premises.<sup>81</sup> Bengel answered his critics in the second edition of his Harmonie,<sup>82</sup> and in addition, published a tract refuting a certain Johann Heinrich Drümel, who in opposing the book had insisted that Christ's death had occurred on Wednesday.<sup>83</sup>

Bengel's Harmonie was used as basis for a popular "Geschichte unseres Herrn und Heilandes Jesus Christi auf

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<sup>81</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 341.

<sup>82</sup>The introduction to the second edition of the Harmonie included the following: "Diese zweyte Ausfertigung ist der ersten gleich, was die Hauptsache betrifft; denn es bleibt bey den 3 Osterfesten und bey der Uebereinstimmung der Reden Jesu mit den sabbath - und festtäglichen Lectionen. Sonst aber hat man Verschiedenes geändert, was Billigdenkende nicht befremden wird. Denn es steht in keines Menschen Vermögen, heute dasjenige mitzutheilen, was er selbst erst morgen lernen wird. Oft geben erst die Urtheile über eine Schrift, oder eigenes weiteres Nachdenken, etwas Mehreres und Genaueres an die Hand. Ein Schriftsteller soll aber jedesmal nach aller Möglichkeit ohne Eigenliebe seinen Lesern dienen. Seit der ersten Ausgabe haben verschiedene Ausleger Vieles in diesem Stücke gearbeitet, und auf meine Ausführung Rücksicht genommen. Was mir nun bey Erwägung ihrer und Anderer Schriften beiging, habe ich gehörigen Ortes zur Verbesserung oder Vertheidigung meiner Anmerkungen gewissenhaft angebracht."

<sup>83</sup>Bengel's refutation of Drümel's views was entitled, "Beweis dasz Christus an keinem Mittwoche, sondern am Freitag gestorben sey." (Leipzig, 1746).



Erden," published anonymously at Leipzig in 1765<sup>84</sup> and, as a final token of its acceptance, its contents were incorporated in a widely-distributed edition of Luther's German Bible, prepared by Gottlob Christian Storr and published at Tübingen in 1793.<sup>85</sup>

The abiding value of the book is to be found primarily in that it illustrates Bengel's conviction that the doctrine of inspiration as taught by classical Lutheran Orthodoxy was "all zu streng."<sup>86</sup> By implying that not all the Evangelists intended to present their materials in precise chronological order, the book in effect repudiates the position of Osiander, which was that the principle of Scripture's infallibility demands that one regard the narrative of each Gospel as being arranged in exact chronological sequence.<sup>87</sup> One notes in the Harmonie how Bengel reconciled the seeming discrepancies between the respective chronologies of the Gospels with freedom and facility, without however becoming arbitrary or disavowing the integrity of the Gospel message.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Pelikan, J. A., "In Memoriam, Joh. Albrecht Bengel," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXIII (November, 1952), 785-796.



Five years after the appearance of the Harmonie, Bengel published the work which may well be regarded as the magnum opus of his chronological studies. This was a book destined to become exceedingly well-known, his Ordo Temporum, published originally in Latin at Stuttgart in 1741.<sup>89</sup> The book appeared at an auspicious time in his career. A year prior to its publication, he had issued a book entitled, "Die erklärte Offenbarung Johannis," an exegetical analysis of the Apocalypse, which attracted much attention. Also in 1740, he had received his appointment to occupy the Propstei at Herbrechtingen.

Bengel spent at least a decade in devising the contents of his Ordo Temporum, and hence the book represents the ripest fruit of his chronological studies. His purpose in preparing the work was, in his own words:

Die ganze in den geschichtlichen und prophetischen Buechern des Alten und Neuen Testaments enthaltene Zeit-Linie von ihrem Anfange bis zum Ende seinen Lesern vor Augen zu stellen, und damit einen Beitrag zu dem Beweise zu liefern, dasz die Heil. Schrift ein zusammen-haengendes, schoenes und glaubwuerdiges Ganze bilde.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>89</sup>The book's full title is as follows: Jo. Alberti Bengelii ordo temporum a principio per periodos oeconomiae divinae historicas atque propheticas ad finem usque ita deductus ut tota series et quarumvis partium analogia sempiternae virtutis ac sapientiae cultoribus ex scriptura V. et N. T. tanquam uno revera documento proponatur. (Stuttgart, 1741).

<sup>90</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 246.



The project was obviously a staggering one, since it called for a consideration of every fixed date recorded in Scripture, as well as of the chronology of sacred history insofar as this paralleled that of the Bible - all in order to demonstrate the consistency and trustworthiness of sacred history.

As was his usual practice, Bengel began the book by presenting a brief apology for its contents. Here one may discern, in formal statement, his reasons for analyzing the chronology of the Scriptures. He writes that the very fact that chronological data is included as part of the Divine revelation in the Bible is by itself a sufficient warrant for the exegete to give careful attention to such references. In addition, an analysis of the time-line in Scripture is mandatory because he who gives even scant attention to this will discern that the chronology of the Bible points to one final event, namely, to the great day of Christ's triumphant return. Thus, by a careful study of the chronological references in Scripture, one may actually discern with increasing clarity the activity of God in directing all creation to the final consummation.<sup>91</sup>

Next in the book there appears a list of succinct suggestions which Bengel would have his auditors keep in mind while studying the work. He writes, by way of example, that, although many of his investigations bear

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid.



reference to the final judgment, no one should expect to find the time of the last day precisely designated. In addition, the reader should not preclude that since the future is not as yet within the scope of experience, it should not be investigated; such a notion, Bengel asserts, savours too much of judging the Holy Scriptures with one's own presumptions, failing thereby to note that the Bible does indeed refer often to the future. The reader is to carefully differentiate, in studying the book, between what is designated as a possibility, as an actuality, and as a certainty in the future. Moreover, he requests his audience to judge him not by what others report, whether verbally or in print, about his views, but by what he actually has written. Finally, there appears a reminder to the reader to the effect that he should not spend an inordinate amount of time in striving to unravel all the tough and tenuous threads of chronology, but that he ought rather to enjoy the refreshing truths connoted by chronology.<sup>92</sup>

In the main body of the book, which follows thereupon, Bengel first presents his delineation of the Biblical chronology from the time of Adam to that of the Apostles. His procedure is to first clarify the significance of all the chronological data referring to the span between these two termini, and then to summarize his conclusions in the

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid.



form of tables. Every date and number which he was able to discern in the historical books of both the Old and the New Testaments he subjects to textual criticism, so as to render each reference into as accurate a form as possible, and then proceeds to interpret its significance. In this connection, he turns quite regularly to the records of the secular historians - especially to those of Berosus, Ptolomaeus, and Josephus - to derive from these the necessary data for those epochs which in the Scriptures are marked by a paucity of chronological information.<sup>93</sup>

On the basis of the above investigation, he then offers, among others, the following conclusions: He is certain that the creation of the world coincided with our Autumn; belief in the existence of Pre-Adamite beings is assuredly a theory; man's state of innocence was of very short duration; and, finally, the day upon which the Old Testament Day of Atonement was celebrated quite probably coincides with the day upon which man originally fell.<sup>94</sup>

Next in the Ordo Temporum there appears a lengthy investigation of the chronological data contained in the prophetic books of the Old Testament. Without doubt, the most significant portion of this section is Bengel's interpretation of the famed 70 Week passage of Daniel 9:24-27,

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<sup>93</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 251.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.



for besides serving as an excellent case in point for illustrating his involved procedure in the section, the portion also introduced one of his most important conclusions. Bengel asserts that the passage is the key to the understanding of the chronology of all future events promised in the Bible, and especially to the time-line implied in the futuristic references contained in the Apocalypse of John. He then interprets the passage by comparing it with Zachariah 1:7 and Ezra 4:24, both of which Bengel understands as indicating that the second year of the reign of Darius coincided with the beginning of the 70 weeks. According to the Dionysian enumeration, this was the year 519 B.C. Bengel next finds that the first seven weeks of the seventy extended to the year 455 B.C., which date coincided with the first year of Artaxerxes Longimanus. The following sixty-two weeks - or 492-4/63 years - constitute the epoch during which the Holy City was rebuilt. According to Bengel's computation, this period extended to the end of the twenty-eighth Dionysian year, which was equivalent with the Feast of the Tabernacles recorded in John 7:2. But when then does the very last of the seventy weeks occur? Bengel is certain that it coincided with the time-span beginning with Christ's death on the cross and ending with the day when Gentiles were first admitted into the Christian Congregation (Acts 10), the second of which



events he believes occurred in the year 37, according to Dionysius.<sup>95</sup>

After thus tracing the line of sacred history from its beginnings to the age of the Apostles, Bengel presents a delineation of the significant events which he believes shall occur from the time of the New Testament Church to that of the parousia. He seizes upon the book of Revelation as the primary source for his computations, holding that within its pages the future of God's kingdom activity is charted in a definite form.<sup>96</sup>

He deems it necessary, however, to first refute the notion that it is anti-Scriptural to fix future dates. Though admitting that Christ did indeed say, with reference to the parousia, that "No man knoweth the day nor the hour," Bengel insists that the emphasis in this passage is on the present tense. In other words, during the days of Christ's humiliation, no man, not even the Son knew the time of final judgment; but after his exaltation Christ most certainly must again have had knowledge of this fact. Moreover, what knowledge Christ did have of the time and circumstances of the parousia is revealed in the Apocalypse. Bengel in fact finds in Revelation 1:6,7 a direct sanction to investigation of the time of the end.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Burk, op. cit., p. 259.



Besides the above, Bengel writes that Scripture itself established the precedent for dating future events. Noah, by way of example, was forewarned of the very year in which the flood was to break forth. Likewise, the duration of the captivity was revealed beforehand. If in former times the faithful regarded seriously the future dates communicated to them by prophecy, dare believers of the eighteenth century discredit future times and events mentioned in the Apocalypse, the only prophetic book in the New Testament? Hence, concludes Bengel, it is not only possible, but rather it is mandatory to analyze the Apocalypse for purposes of delineating the future of God's Kingdom activity.

Thereupon Bengel proceeded to define the nature of prophecy and to elicit from the prophetic message such materials as would enable him to construct the time-line of the future. To him, prophecy is preeminently a form of divine revelation wherein God's promises pertaining to the future are communicated. The prophetic message consequently testifies to the omnipotence, the just mercy, and the trustworthiness of God, for what is promised in prophecy flows from the holy love of God and shall certainly be brought to pass through His illimitable power. Bengel admits that the element of mystery ever inheres in prophecy, yet he is nonetheless certain that the most significant times and events of the future are portrayed with such clarity as to



enable these to be unmistakably discerned.<sup>97</sup>

Moreover, he regards the prophetic message as proceeding step-wise to the final consummation. Each prophecy bears testimony to a partial fulfillment of God's program and also gives an additional promise of the ultimate completion of God's purposes. The latter prophecies are thus the most vivid, and those who live in the last times should be able to discern more clearly than did their predecessors what the final end of the composite prophetic message involved. He asks in effect: Did not the Apostles see more clearly the characteristics of the parousia than did the Prophets of the Old Testament, and did not the last of the Apostles, John the Divine, behold the reality of the consummation with a perception greater than that of his predecessors? Bengel consequently finds in the Apocalypse the summation of all previous prophecies as well as the clearest depiction of the final fulfillment.<sup>98</sup>

Whoever proceeds to next read Bengel's description of the future time-line as he discerns it in the book of Revelation, will be astounded, on the one hand, by the evidences of the man's remarkable erudition and painstaking scholarship in ferreting out from this book every possible allusion to the dates and events of the future, and on the

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.



other hand, by the remarkable prognostications and assumptions ventured on the basis of these.

He reports, for example, that while preparing a sermon for the first Sunday in Advent 1724, he suddenly gained insight into the meaning of the numbers which the Apocalypse ascribes to the Beast (Rev. 13:5,6). It came to him that the 42 months of the Beast's blasphemy, and the number of his name, 666, each denoted a precise span of time, and that moreover the two denoted one and the same period. With the above he collated certain data from Heb. 9:26, 1 Cor. 10:11, 1 Peter 1:20, 4:7, and Habak. 3:2, in which passages he felt evidence was presented to the effect that the New Testament period will not be of so long a duration as was the Old. He deduced from this that the total age of the world will scarcely exceed 7880 years. Since by his time (1740) only 5690 years had elapsed, and since it seemed to him that the 2000 years mentioned in Revelation 20 had not as yet begun, he concluded that the end of the world might occur some 97 years after his time. All this led to his famous assertion, that the end of the age might occur in 1836.<sup>99</sup>

The 666 years, the time of the Beast, he holds to coincide either with the time-span extending from the beginning of the reign of Pope Hildebrand (1074) to the

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid.



death of Pope Clement XII (1740) or with that from the pontificate of Celestine II - who was elected without the assent of the people in 1143 - to the time when the Pope's relation to "Rome" would be altered.<sup>100</sup>

This entire section of the Ordo Temporum is interwoven with prognostications of the future, with reference to both the sacred and the secular, so great in number that only the most striking may be mentioned here. He for example sets the demise of the Germanic Roman Empire as occurring shortly after 1800, says the power of Russia will very likely increase, and suggests that the King of France may yet become the primary sovereign of Western Europe. Moreover, the senile years of the world-age will be marked by social and moral conditions far different from those promised by the utopians. Bengel anticipated that sins against the sixth commandment would be especially prevalent prior to the end, as would the tendencies of scepticism and materialism. Yet in all these developments, the believer is not to despair for they in themselves are signs that his deliverance is at hand.<sup>101</sup>

Such then are the primary contents of Bengel's Ordo Temporum. It goes without saying that the book, though written in Latin and intended primarily for learned men,

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<sup>100</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 324.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.



attracted quick and wide-spread attention. Much of its content had already appeared in Bengel's Erklärte Offenbarung, which was published a year prior to this book and which consequently had functioned as its harbinger.

The Ordo Temporum was subjected to more criticism than was any other work by Bengel, with the exception of his expositions of the Apocalypse. Although his friends had warned him of this possibility, Bengel nonetheless felt compelled to publish his chronological system. The age was one when men of letters seemingly reveled in using the rapiers of criticism, and Bengel now found himself a favorite target.

This situation was greatly aggravated when in 1745, five years after the appearance of Ordo Temporum, he published a brochure bearing the simple title of Cyclus.<sup>102</sup> With it he hoped to prove the validity of his chronological computations by showing that his system corresponded to the chronological periods established by the astronomers. Astronomy, he states, holds that the mean tropical year consists of 365 days, 5 hours, 49 minutes and 12 seconds. From this he inferred that after 252 apocalyptical periods, or 280,000 solar years, a cycle of the solar system would be completed and the system would then be in the same position in which it had been at the time of creation. The

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 335.



book did indeed serve notice of Bengel's breadth of scholarship and of his capacities of imagination, but to imply that it quieted the critics of his chronological prognostications would be an untruth.<sup>103</sup>

One of Bengel's most avid and at times most acrid critics was a minor ecclesiastical official named Kohltreiff. This man, though himself not at all a technical Biblical scholar, maintained that by accentuating so strongly what was obviously secondary and peripheral in the Bible, namely its chronology, Bengel was actually neglecting what was essential and was in point of fact violating the analogy of Scripture.<sup>104</sup> Kohltreiff, in addition, took offense at Bengel's practice of using secular references in order to supply his chronology of sacred history with sufficient data. This appeared to him as mingling the sacred with the secular, and even worse, as implying that the record of Scripture is fallible.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, the fact that chiliasm is evident in Bengel's computations renders his entire system untenable. Kohltreiff would remind Bengel that no lesser authority than the Lutheran Confessions repudiates chiliasm as anti-Scriptural

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 339.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.



and heretical.<sup>106</sup>

Softer in tone were the criticisms issued by such men as Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten. Baumgarten, who mediated in his position between Pietism and Rationalism, found fault especially with Bengel's propensities for numerology.<sup>107</sup> To find hidden connotations in literal numbers, and to give literal interpretations to symbolic numbers in Scripture, is unwarranted and misleading, he wrote. He sees Bengel as being guilty of violating this hermeneutical principle with his interpretations of the 70 weeks in Daniel 9 and of the symbolic numbers in the Apocalypse.<sup>108</sup>

Bengel rose to his defense by publishing two lengthy tracts, one in the year 1746 and the second in 1748. The first, the more significant of the two, bore the title, Weltalter.<sup>109</sup> In it he reiterated for the German reader the salient features of his chronological system as these had appeared in the Ordo Temporum. The primary importance of the book, however, inheres in the pages on which its

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid. Kohltreiff spoke to this point as follows: "Es kann nicht fehlen, es musz mit dem Bengel'schen Chiliasmus zu einer gefährlichen Religionszerrüttung hinaus schlagen; denn es ist etwas gar Bedenkliches, das wenn Hr. B. (sic) die geistlichen Dinge namhaft macht, welche in seinem tausendjährigen Reiche noch bleiben werden, er weder von der H. Schrift, noch von den symbolischen Büchern ..... Erwähnung thut."

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 340.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 336.



author refutes his critics. Bengel admits that the dates in Scripture may appear to a casual reader as insignificant; yet if one carefully observes them in their totality, he will note how they compositely form a connected system within which each date and number plays a role and is related to the whole. Even more, every chronological reference in the Scriptures points in some way to the ultimate goal of sacred chronology, to the final day when Christ shall return:

Von Anfang des ersten Buches Mosis bis zum Ende der Offenbarung werden nicht umsonst so viele Zeiten gemeldet, Sieht man sie stueckweise an, so scheinen sie oft etwas Vergebliches und Veraechtliches zu sein; nimmt man sie zusammen nach der Anleitung, die in der Schrift selbst liegt, so giebt es eine durchgaengig zusammenhaengende, aus proportionirten Theilen bestehende Zeitlinie, welche der goettlichen Weisheit Gemaez und von unschaetzbarer Wichtigkeit sein musz. Das Ziel diese ganzen schriftmaeszigen Zeitlinie ist der Tag Christi. Ohne dieses Ziel weisz man nicht, warum so viele namhafte Geschlechten in der Schrift ohne die Anzeige der Zeiten stehen und warum bei geringen Geschichten die Umstaende der Zeit manchmal so puentklich gemeldet werden.<sup>110</sup>

Moreover, should there be some events or epochs in the Biblical account which are not fully charted by chronological references, by what principle is one restrained from turning to the relevant secular chronologies to find data which might be of help in defining the time of these several epochs? Bengel answers that in so doing one is not forsaking his belief in the integrity of the Scriptures, but is rather

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.



indicating how the sequence of secular history agrees with that of sacred history.<sup>111</sup>

Bengel concludes the tract with a refutation of the charge of millennialism. He reminds his critics that they have failed to distinguish true from false chiliasm. There is, he claims, a valid type of millennialism, one which violates neither the analogy of Scripture nor that of faith. In contrast to an un-Scriptural chiliasm which teaches a literal period of a thousand years of halcyon days and material prosperity, he insists there is a tenable doctrine of millennialism which consists of nothing more than the belief that the Church and all believers will receive singular blessings during the final thousand years of this earthly aeon and that the soteriological activity of God will increasingly inform the processes of temporal affairs.<sup>112</sup>

Bengel's second tract of defense was addressed explicitly to Probst Kohltreiff. Entitled Das bekräftigte Zeugnis der Wahrheit,<sup>113</sup> it dealt almost entirely with the question of millennialism. Kohltreiff had just recently published a statement claiming that Bengel's doctrine of the millenium implied that during the last thousand years no need for the Bible, for the Symbolical Books of

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Fausset, op. cit., p. xxiv.



Lutheranism, for Baptism, for repentance, or for preaching, would exist. To this Bengel answers:

Ich hatte in meiner Darstellung des tausendjährigen Reiches solche Dinge aufgeführt, welche ohne die Fortdauer der H. Schrift, der Taufe und des Predigt-Amtes nicht gedacht werden können, und durch das u.s.w. angedeutet, dasz ich nicht Alles benannt habe. Es hat aber Kohltreiff jeden von diesen drey unzertrennlichen Stücken - Bibel - Taufe - Predigt-Amt, in anderes, welches in heutiger Form neuer und geringer ist, künstlich an die Seite gestellt, dessen Währung bis an's Ende der Welt er aus der Schrift nicht beweisen kann. Ist es nun eine gefährliche Religionszerrüttung, wenn ich diese Währung nicht behaupte? War denn keine Religion, ehe die symbolischen Bücher, der Beichtstuhl und Luther aufgekomen?<sup>114</sup>

Criticized as the Ordo Temporum and its related tracts were, was there then any continuing worth in Bengel's chronological studies? Theological scholarship of succeeding generations has often directed attention to the many errors contained in these, but has, on the other hand, viewed with appreciation certain of their underlying principles.

That there are errors in Bengel's ordering of sacred chronology is not difficult to ascertain. Moreover, those that exist are, for the most part, of such gravity as to hardly make them defensible. The voice of recent scholarship in sacred chronology is unanimous in saying that Bengel's methodology in this area is quite suspect. Rudolph Kittel, for example, strikes at a basic premise of Bengel's

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<sup>114</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 339.



when he asserts that it is impossible to construct an absolute chronology of sacred history.<sup>115</sup> Scripture itself, he points out, does not append chronological references to all its recorded events; nor can one expect to accurately date the events of sacred history by recourse to the schemes of the ancient chroniclers of secular history. He cites as evidence the discrepancies between biblical and secular chronology in their respective reporting of the period of the Kings of Judah and Israel. Moreover, Kittel questions the wisdom of regarding an absolute chronology of biblical events as a necessary pre-requisite for establishing the certainty of these events, for faith is grounded not so much on the chronology of a precisely arranged time-line, but rather upon the events through which the soteriological activity of God is manifested. If the former were the case, suggests Kittle, then each new archaeological or scientific discovery might potentially jeopardize the certainty of belief. This hazard was of course implicit, especially in the argument of the Cyclus. As stated, Bengel hoped with this to prove the validity of his system by showing its agreement with the computation of the tropical year as understood by the seventeenth-century astronomers. Astronomers in subsequent years however abandoned the scheme of the tropical year as

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid.



it had been in Bengel's day, and so consequently Bengel's proof was invalidated.<sup>116</sup>

Bengel's methodology in devising his time-line is questioned also because of its reliance upon numerology. No one has really spoken with more clarity to this issue than did Baumgartner, who already in Bengel's time suggested that the practice of discerning symbolic meanings in the literal numbers mentioned in the Bible was a violation of sound hermeneutical principles. It should of course be borne in mind that there was much precedence for such a procedure in the time of Bengel. Johann Coccejus in Holland, great exegete though he was, had exemplified this tendency;<sup>117</sup> nor were the schematic and artificial renditions of sacred chronology by the early Pietists any less dependent upon number symbolism.<sup>118</sup> One may in fact say that Bengel, in such a context, was somewhat chaste in his use of numerology.<sup>119</sup>

Even so, it was Bengel's claim that he possessed a gift of special enlightenment which enabled him to discover the supposedly esoteric significances hidden behind literal

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<sup>116</sup>Fausset, op. cit., p. xxi.

<sup>117</sup>Ritschl, A., Geschichte des Pietismus, (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1886), II, p. 79.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.



numbers and to determine with accuracy the literal meaning of numerical symbols.<sup>120</sup> In so doing, he employed also to the utmost his capacity for mathematical calculation, a fact which induces one to admit that in this his methodology unwittingly parallels that employed by the Rationalists, for his, as theirs, was governed largely by subjective attitudes and abilities. Albrecht Ritschl in fact baldly insists that Bengel's methodology reveals his intrinsic critical and formalistic tendencies.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless,

diese Beschäftigung mit der Chronologie ist für ihn Gemüthssache, weil er dadurch das Verständniz des göttlichen Wortes und der Weg Gottes zum Heil zu befördern Überzeugt ist.<sup>122</sup>

Theologians in more recent times have also leveled criticisms at the chiliasm implicit in the Ordo Temporum and the Weltalter. Although it is true that Bengel sought to avoid giving chiliasm a carnal connotation in holding that the millenium would consist not so much of a time of temporal benefits as of one of heavenly blessings, his insistence that these spiritual benefits would be consonant with the final thousand years of world history did nonetheless give offense to many, and especially to those who adhered to the Lutheran Symbols. He had of course expressed the hope that no one would take as literal his view of the

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<sup>120</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 258.

<sup>121</sup>Ritschl, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.



millenium or regard as infallible his dating of the end of the world, yet many came to remember little more about Bengel than that he had erred in these two items.<sup>123</sup>

There are thus manifest aberrations in Bengel's chronological studies. Had he lived a century or two later, he would very possibly have been the first to admit and rectify these, for even in his own lifetime he was continuously revising his prognostications. Nevertheless, in spite of error, there are underlying principles in especially the Ordo Temporum which guarantee to that book a lasting worth.

One principle in the book which has gained a host of adherents is Bengel's insistence that the record of sacred history as recorded in Scripture traces the progressive manifestation of God's kingdom-activity. The view had already been suggested by Saint Augustine<sup>124</sup> and Johann Coccejus<sup>125</sup> had incorporated it in his so-called Federal Theology, yet it may accurately be said that Bengel was the first to express it in a coherent and effective manner. With an almost unlimited vision, Bengel surveys the entire span of sacred history and notes how it portrays the

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<sup>123</sup>Bengel, Ordo Temporum, chp. 11, p. 15.

<sup>124</sup>Weth, Gustav, Die Heilsgeschichte, (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1931), passim.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.



continuously-unfolding activity of God in His Kingdom.<sup>126</sup>

A second emphasis in Bengel's chronological studies which has met with considerable approbation is one which though never explicitly expressed is nevertheless a prevailing motif in his writings. This is a principle integrally related to the above-mentioned, namely, that history is orientated teleologically. In his Ordo Temporum, Bengel constantly insists that the final consummation of history is immanent. He claims that all historic events, whether occurring within the realm of the Church or within that of culture, are in varying degree prefigurations of the one great and final event - the parousia of Christ. All history is thus being drawn to the ultimate telos, the return of Christ. "Das Ziel aller Zeiten in der Schrift ist die Zukunft Jesu Christi in Herrlichkeit."<sup>127</sup>

Bengel, in addition, sees the parousia not only as the consummation of all that preceeds, but also as the factor which gives all prior history its significance. This view is especially clear in Bengel's treatment of prophecy. Each individual prophetic word seemed to him to be a fulfillment of God's previous promises as well as a prediction of a future fulfillment. Hence, the composite

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<sup>126</sup>Goltz, "Die Theologische Bedeutung J. A. Bengel und seine Schule," Jahrbücher für Deutsche Theologie, (1861), p. 476.

<sup>127</sup>Dorner, op. cit., p. 654.



voice of all biblical prophecies enunciates a magnificent system of predictions, all promising a final consummation, and all so related that the latter predictions are fulfillments in clearer form of the earlier. At the same time, he asserts that the parousia gives meaning to all elements of prophecy in all the ages preceding it. Simply stated, this means that the "Endziel" of God's sovereign activity vindicates and gives vitality to all prophecy. For does not the Revelation of John reveal that the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of the Lord, and does not this promised victory give meaning to, and guarantee the certainty of, all the promises of Scripture? Thus, according to Bengel, it is the telos which gives significance to the ontos of history.<sup>128</sup>

Finally, there is a third principle in the chronological studies of Bengel which certain analysts have seized upon with favor. This is his assertion that the future history of the world will be marked not merely by increasing conflict between God and His opponents, but also with increasing victory by God over the enemy - through final judgment, yes, but likewise through the final consummation of His gracious will.<sup>129</sup> He sees the temporal order as worsening as the end approaches, but the gracious order of God for men and

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<sup>128</sup>Piper, Otto, God In History, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), p. 17.

<sup>129</sup>Bengel, J. A., Weltalter, p. 11.



society as growing progressively until the day of its consummation. This then is to say that he emphasizes the fact that future history shall lie not solely under Law and Judgment, but shall likewise be influenced by the Gospel.<sup>130</sup>

In retrospect, one is warranted in concluding that, criticized though Bengel was for his chronological studies, he had nevertheless given impetus to various tendencies still influential in our day. The opinion of contemporary analysts as regards Bengel's labors in this field is perhaps best epitomized in the comment of Karl Barth:

Jedenfalls Bengel hat im übrigen tatsächlich mit so viel Scharfblick in seine Zeit und doch auch in die damalige Zukunft hineingesehen, dass man ihn trotz jenes grossen Fehlschlusses (the claim that the end would occur in 1836) - oder vielmehr unter Verrechnung der Tatsache, dass ihm dieser grosse Fehlschluss unterlaufen konnte und unterlaufen ist - als hervorragendes Beispiel dafür anführen darf, dass das menschliche, allzu menschliche Missverständnis des Wortes Gottes die Glaubenserkenntnis seiner Vorsehung zwar in Einzelnen trüben, im Ganzen aber (und dann noch auch wieder im Einzelnen) nicht verhindern kann.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>130</sup>Elert, W., Der Christliche Glaube, (Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1940), p. 497 ff.

<sup>131</sup>Barth, Karl, Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag A. G. Zollikon, 1950), III, p. 28.



## C. THE EXEGETICAL STUDIES OF BENGEL

None of Bengel's writings reflects the scintillating brilliance of his talents so clearly as does his exegetical work. Gifted as he was with a marked proficiency for such work, and manifesting as he did an especial interest in this area, one would expect him to have published a host of studies devoted to the exposition of the Holy Scriptures. This was not only the case, but it was also true that whatever else he published was in point of fact subservient to his concern for interpreting the biblical message. He had addressed himself to the work of textual criticism so as to secure as pristine an original text as possible for his exegetical studies; in like measure, it may be said that his chronological studies again resulted, in part at least, from his prevailing desire to clarify the contents of the Bible. Thus, the majority of his writings are integrally related to his concern for exegetical work.

Bengel's primary works in this field are two-fold. In the first place, there appeared from his facile pen several writings which might conveniently be labelled Apocalyptic Studies. Secondly, there appeared his incomparable Gnomon. It shall be our intention to analyze the characteristics of each and finally to discuss the type of exegesis exemplified in them.



The first of Bengel's exegetical studies to be published were his expositions of the book of Revelation. It will be remembered that in 1740 the initial study in this series was published, a book entitled, Die erklärte Offenbarung Johannis.<sup>132</sup> This was followed eight years later by the publication of Sechzig erbauliche Reden über die Offenbarung Johannis,<sup>133</sup> a compilation of the study materials which Bengel had prepared for his Privatversammlungen at Herbrechtingen. It should be noted that the books are attempts not only at explaining the meaning of the Apocalypse, but also at clarifying the shape of future events.

At the outset of each, Bengel reminds his readers that the Apocalypse is a book of unique value. He is certain that the book serves believers in much the same manner as a beacon-light assists the traveler, leading him throughout all his earthly walk and illuminating for him also the nature of the day and the shape of the land to come.<sup>134</sup> Data found nowhere else in the Bible may be found in the Apocalypse; here alone is recorded the information which traces the history of the Church from the time of the book

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<sup>132</sup>Bengel, J. A., Erklärte Offenbarung Johannis, (Stuttgart: Joh. Christoph Erhard, 1740).

<sup>133</sup>Bengel, J. A., Sechzig erbaulichen Reden über die Offenbarung Johannis, (Stuttgart: Joh. Christoph Erhard, 1747).

<sup>134</sup>Althaus, P., Die Letzten Dinge, (Fifth edition; Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1949), p. 263.



of Acts to that of the final consummation; here alone are there such predictions as serve to delineate future world history and define the nature of the end of history.<sup>135</sup>

The book then is concerned not only with the message of Revelation for the present age, but seeks also to assess what it reveals of the future. "Man könne schon zum voraus sagen," he writes,

dasz eine Erklärung der Offenbarung nichts tauge, wenn sie nur die Dinge, nicht auch die Zahlen berücksichtige; denn nicht umsonst seyen zwanzig Zeit-Bestimmungen darin enthalten; "was der Herr zusammengefügt dürfe der mensch nicht scheiden."<sup>136</sup>

One cannot read far into the Erklärte Offenbarung without gaining the impression that Bengel's acquaintance with the Apocalypse was remarkably thorough. Such a conviction is strengthened upon discovering how long a period of study and investigation preceded the appearance of this work. Throughout his twenty-eight years of teaching, Bengel had subjected the Apocalypse to a careful exegetical analysis in his classroom program at least once yearly.<sup>137</sup> In addition, he made frequent use of it for private study and devotion, and often selected texts from it for his sermons. Such a long-enduring and intimate involvement with the book no doubt helped engender the

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 263.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.



"sudden gift" which he claims provided him with special insight into its contents. In reporting this phenomena, he states that God

liesz ihm ..... auf einmal ein Licht aufgehen, durch das ihm die Pforte zu dem göttlichen Bau der Offenbarung aufgeschlossen ward.<sup>138</sup>

Should one ask for an explanation of what precisely Bengel discovered with this esoteric gift, he would answer that through this he was enabled to determine that the 42 months of the Beast's blasphemy (Rev. 13:5,6) and the number of the Beast's name, both refer to the same period of time.<sup>139</sup> Yet it may more accurately be said that his claim to special understanding motivated him to an even more arduous study of the book and led him to attempt to depict with increasing clarity the so-called time-line of sacred history. He himself admits that through his gift of enlightenment he found

dasz er die goldene Zeit-Linie der Heil. Schrift vor - und rückwärts ergänzte, und seine Einsicht in den herrlichen Zusammenhang der Offenbarung mit der Welt - und Kirchen-Geschichte immer mehr vervollständigte.<sup>140</sup>

The preliminary findings of his investigation he published in 1727 in an article which appeared in Schellhorn's "Amoentitatibus literariis," a theological

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.



journal of that day.<sup>141</sup> The article appeared under the somewhat formidable title of Discipuli de temporibus monitum de praejudicio hermeneutico (dies prophet - 365 dies vulgares) accuratiorem apocalypseos explicationem etiam nunc impediante, and its contents were so interlaced with obscurities that two years later Bengel found it necessary to alleviate the plight of his mystified audience by publishing a pamphlet of similar title but with clarified content: Discipuli de temporibus, Grundsätze einer genauen doch ungezwungenen Erklärung der Offenbarung Jesu Christi.<sup>142</sup> The response to the second tract was so great that in 1734 Bengel released two brief brochures, each again explaining in detail certain of his earlier affirmations. Six more years of study elapsed, and then at long last Bengel presented to his expectant readers his first fully developed exposition of the Apocalypse, the Erklärte Offenbarung.<sup>143</sup>

The fact that the Erklärte Offenbarung numbers well over a thousand pages gives indication of the painstaking and detailed work Bengel lavished upon it. Even so, its

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<sup>141</sup>Bengel, J. A., "Discipuli de temporibus monitum de praejudicio hermeneutico (dies prophet - 365 dies vulgares) accuratiorem apocalypseos explicationem etiam nunc impediante," Amoenitatibus literariis, 1727.

<sup>142</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 267.

<sup>143</sup>Bengel, J. A., Erklärte Offenbarung Johannis, (Stuttgart: Christoph Erhard, 1740).



organization is surprisingly simple. The book begins with an introduction, continued with an exposition of the text, and ends with a list of concluding remarks.

In the book's introduction, the author states the purpose of his work and indicates the procedure he will follow. He writes that

er sey gesonnen, nach seinem revidirten Grund-Text eine neue Uebersetzung und Erklärung der Offenbarung Johannis herauszugeben; da es aber noch eine ziemliche Zeit anstehen dürfte, bis sie an's Licht treten werde, so wolle er, dem Verlangen einiger christlichen Freunde nachgebend, in den beyden folgenden Aufsätzen eine Probe seiner Arbeit mittheilen. Finden nun diejenigen, welche die Erscheinung Christi lieb gewonnen haben, hier eine Spur der vorborgenen Wahrheit, so mögen sie ihm aus der Fülle des Lammes, das sich hat schlachten lassen, Alles das, was ihm noch mangelt, und doch nöthig ist, erbitten helfen; ungereimte und unnütze Dinge, die sich mit diesem seinem gewissenhaft dargelegten Grunde nicht vertragen, und ihm doch beygemessen werden, niemals von ihm glauben, noch viel weniger etwas Besonderes von seiner Arbeit halten; indem er durchaus nichts habe oder suche, als was die Heil. Schrift und die Hand giebt, bey deren einfältigen Forschen er ganz unvermuthet und fast wieder seinen Willen in diese Dinge hineingeführt worden; endlich aber mögen sie das, was ihnen hier vorgelegt werde, unter eifrigem Gebet und aufmerksamer Erwägung der Weissagung selbst vorsichtig prüfen, und sich wohl zu Nützen machen.<sup>144</sup>

The main body of the book is the section deservedly meriting most attention. Bengel here begins by stating his well-known reasons why the Apocalypse should be especially treasured by all believers. Next he presents a synoptic condensation of the book's contents, indicating that its

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<sup>144</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 268.



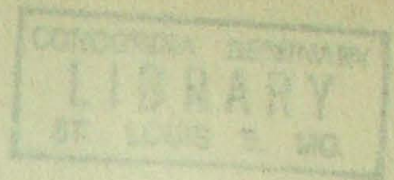
first three chapters form a prologue which then the remaining nineteen explain. There follows then a detailed exposition of the message of the book, verse upon verse, section upon section, complete with explanatory charts and graphs.

As previously indicated, the Erklärte Offenbarung gives much careful attention to the numbers and symbolic figures of the Apocalypse. Bengel holds, for example, that the prophetic day is equivalent to the length of half a common year. This computation he derives from a correlation of certain prominent numbers in the Apocalypse. According to him, the injunction in Chapter 13:8 - "let him calculate" - implies that if one would interpret the meaning of any number in Revelation, one must correlate it with at least one other related number. Thus, the key number 666 may be compared with 42 months, since both refer to the time of the Beast. By employing the laws of numerical proportion, he then proceeds to show that the number 42 is related to 666 as the number 1 is to the prophetic year. One prophetic month is accordingly the equivalent of  $15\frac{6}{7}$  literal years, and each prophetic day is approximately equal to six literal months. The duration of a chaïros, he asserts, is  $222\frac{2}{9}$  years, a chronos is identical to  $1111\frac{1}{9}$  years (Rev. 6:11), and an aion to  $2222\frac{2}{9}$  years (Rev. 16:6).<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 272 passim.





The exposition of Revelation 13 in the Erklärte Offenbarung furnishes a typical example of Bengel's procedure in explaining longer passages. After concisely summarizing the contents of the chapter, he proceeds with a detailed analysis of each verse. He notes, for example, that the Beast will spring forth from two areas: from the sea and from the bottomless pit. It seems to him that the Beast shall represent the totality of the powers of anti-godliness, and that it shall appear shortly after the cessation of the second woe. The Beast he holds to be most accurately represented by the Papacy. Its seven heads symbolize the transmission of anti-godliness down through the line of papal succession, with the last head representing the time when the Papal power shall be vested in one dominant personage. As the Dragon opposes the special glory of God the Father, and the False Prophet that of the Holy Spirit, even so shall the Beast controvert the Lordship of Christ. The Beast's opposition to the Kingdom shall mount in intensity as the time of final judgment approaches, yet even so, Bengel assures his readers, God will vindicate and extend His Kingdom in spite of such crucial times. In speaking of the Angels described in Revelation 13, Bengel writes:



Die drey jetzt auftretenden Engel bedeuten vornehmlich drey grosze Botschaften, und doch auch die Werkzeuge, durch welche die Botschaften gebracht werden. Diese Werkzeuge sind Menschen, die jedoch vielleicht von Engeln einen besondern Beistand im Verborgenen haben. Der erste ist wahrseheinlich Arndt, und daraus, dasz es heiszt: "ein ewiges Evangelium" - ist zu (zeigen) dasz hier eine gemessene Ewigkeit, die der Analogie der übrigen Termine gemäsz 2 Perioden, oder 2222-2/9 Jahre dauern wird, gemeynt seyn möchte ..... Der zweyte Engel ist Spener, durch welchen das Studium der Neutestamentlichen Weissagungen auf's Neue aufgekomen ist.

Der dritte Engel wird nicht mehr ferne seyn: sein Auftrag wird darin bestehen, unter Androhung der schwersten Strafe vor der inneren und äusseren Verehrung des Thieres zu warnen. Seiner Gesinnung nach wird er mit Arndt und Spener nahe verwandt seyn. Die Botschaft der 3 Engel wird in umgekehrter Ordnung erfüllt, erstlich kommt das Mahlzeichen auf die Bahn, hernach fällt Babylon, und zuletzt finden alle Nationen sich ein, den Herrn anzubeten.<sup>146</sup>

Attention should also be drawn to Bengel's treatment of Chapter 20, for one will find here his doctrine of the millenium in its most explicit form. At the very outset, he insists that Revelation 20 teaches a two-fold millenium. The one phase of the millenium shall have reference only to the secular order and shall consist of a thousand-year period during which Satan's power shall be relatively stayed and during which also the children of God shall experience a remarkable upsurge of piety. In Bengel's words, this aspect of the millennial age shall include

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 287.



eine überschwängliche Fülle des Geistes und einen reichen Ueberfluss der Gnadenbezeugungen und Wirkungen Gottes; einen heiteren, heiligen, einträchtigen Gehorsam und Dienst seines Volkes; gesunde, fruchtbare, friedliche Zeiten; Vermehrung des heiligen Volkes und langes Leben; Befreyung von vielem Jammer, den die Menschen sich und Andern durch ihre Bosheit bereiten.<sup>147</sup>

Partly concurrent with the first millenium, a second thousand-year period will transpire. This one Bengel sharply distinguishes from the former in that it shall occur solely in the realm of glory and shall consequently affect only the saints in heaven. He describes it as follows:

Nach Vollendung seines 1000 jährigen Gebundenseyns aber wird der Satan wieder los werden eine kleine Zeit, die der Analogie der übrigen Termine zu Folge (111-1/9) Jahre dauern möchte, so dasz die wenige Zeit (888-8/9), und diese kleine Zeit zusammen gerade 1000 Jahre betrügen. Ist aber diese Zeit auch noch vollendet, und sein letzter durch Gog und Magog versuchter Angriff abgeschlagen, so komme der Satan in die vierte Stufe seiner Bestrafung, in den Feuersee. Dagegen beginnt gleich mit seinem Loswerden die almähliche Auferstehung der Märtyrer, welche sodann mit Christo verbunden, im Himmel noch 1000 Jahre bis zur allgemeine Auferstehung und das Gericht werden V. 11 ff. beschrieben, und nach Ablauf der tausend-jährigen Regierung der Heiligen in einer nicht ganz genau vorherzubestimmenden, aber sehr schnell darauf folgenden Zeit statt finden.<sup>148</sup>

It must finally be mentioned that the main section of the book often rises to sublime heights of style. Bengel had an almost canny ability for picturesque description, and the reader at times feels himself all but caught up into

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 294.



the cacophonies of sounds and the drama of the events recorded in the Apocalypse.

The third and final division of the Erklärte Offenbarung is comprised of a series of concluding features. There is first a Zeit-Tafel, with which Bengel graphs his chronology of the Apocalypse in a chart almost identical to those used later in his Ordo Temporum. Next, he again takes into consideration the significance of the Beast in Chapter 13, this time summarizing his interpretation and defending his views. This is followed by a concise statement of what distinguishes a valid exegesis of the Apocalypse from a spurious one. As a fourth feature, he briefly sketches the rise of eschatological consciousness in the history of the Church. Next there appears a section which seeks to show the value of the Apocalypse for the daily walk of the Christian, and lastly, the book presents a short survey of past interpretations of the Apocalypse.<sup>149</sup>

As already indicated, seven years elapsed after the publication of the Erklärte Offenbarung before Bengel's second major work in this field appeared. During the years intervening, he was much occupied with studying the Apocalypse, for in his private work and in published essays he tested and defended the views advanced in his Erklärte Offenbarung. Moreover, the need of preparing

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.



Bible studies for the Privatversammlungen which he had organized shortly after coming to Herbrechtingen also afforded him an opportunity for additional consideration of that book. His presentations at the Versammlungen were so well received that members of the audience began transcribing and circulating them. Due to the many inaccuracies in these transcriptions, Bengel determined to edit his presentations and publish them himself. The resulting work was his Sechzig Reden über die Offenbarung.<sup>150</sup>

The book carries with it the distinctive style of the spoken word, and one senses from it the proficiency of Bengel for effective platform presentation. In content, the work agrees explicitly with the principal points of the Erklärte Offenbarung. It must nonetheless be said that this book is much more devotional in tone as well as much less formal. It follows no precise plan as does the former, and it abounds much more with prognostications as to the nature of the future.

Page upon page in the book is in fact devoted to the describing of anticipated developments in such diverse realms as those of religion, politics, and culture. To the original auditors, these items must have seemed nothing less than sensational. It will prove valuable to examine at least some of the more typical of them.

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid., p. 260.



In describing the future shape of European society,  
Bengel writes:

Die Zeitungsschreiber, die so im Tagelohne Journale schreiben, haben viel an dem Geschmack verdorben, so wie man aus ihren Blättern hinwiederum den Zeit-Geist kennen lernen kann. Dieser Geist wird je länger je mehr Scepticismus (Zweifelsucht) und Naturalismus (blosze Natur-Religion) .....<sup>151</sup>

Die Freigeisterey und der grobe Unglaube steckt bereits auch unter dem gemeinen Pöbel. Man hört hie und da schon, dasz sie mit der Auferstehung der Todten u.s.w. ihren Scherz treiben .....<sup>152</sup>

Bey Hohen und Niederen ist die Sicherheit und die Spöttere y gross; man trifft sie in Verbindung mit einer ungeschliffenen Ruchlosigkeit und einem verschmitzten Unglauben ..... Da wird man gar nicht mehr daran denken, dasz ein Ende aller Dinge komme, sondern meynen, dasz Alles immerfort so bleiben werde. Es wird zwar nicht fehlen an solchen, die im Glauben auf Christum warten, aber ihre Zahl wird wie Nichts seyn gegen die Menge derer, die den Glauben aufgegeben haben.<sup>153</sup>

With reference to developments in the sphere of European politics, he claims:

Das abendländliche Kaiserthum währet ungefähr 1000 Jahr von 800 an, also von jetzt an, etwa noch 60 Jahre; weiter hinaus kann man für nichts gut seyn. Man gebe nur Achtung, ob nicht der König in Frankreich noch Kaiser wird? .....<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid.



Die Länder, die vor Zeiten das römische Reich ausgemacht haben (also besonders Italien, Spanien, Portugal, Frankreich, Britannien, Griechenland u.s.w.), werden durch grosze Umwandlungen gehen, bis endlich die Zehen von dem Danielischen Kolosse und die 10 Hörner an dem Thiere heraus kommen. Es hat das Ansehen, die 5 abendländischen möchten alle aus dem Hause Bourbon erwachsen.<sup>155</sup>

True Christianity, Bengel claims, will also come into perilous times:

Man entfernt sich so viel wie möglich vom Geiste, und auch diejenigen machen es also, die doch von den Philosophen und Theologen als Fanatiker angesehen werden. In viele Dinge, die man für rein geistlich ausgibt, mischt sich die fleischliche Natur so schrecklich ein, dasz man zuletzt nicht mehr wissen wird, was geistlich ist.<sup>156</sup>

From the forceful style used in expressing these convictions, one can scarcely escape the conclusion that Bengel relished playing the role of a prognosticator. Yet for our purposes, what is even more significant about his Sechzig erbauliche Reden is the fact that in the book he also seeks to vindicate his chronological computations. Hence, one reads:

Das ist unter Anderm auch ein wichtiger Nutzen, den man von dem Anschauen der Oekonomie Gottes, die in's Ganze geht, hat, dasz man sich selbst und seine eigenen kümmerlichen Umstände darüber verfaszt, und sich nicht grosz um sich selbst bekümmert, weil das Werk und Vorhaben Gottes doch fortgehet. Eben das ist auch ein Gegengift gegen die Todesfurcht.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., p. 312.



Von dem Studium der Chronologie hab ich auch den Nutzen: weil mein Schifflein oft durch die Jahrhunderte durchlief, ist mir das Thun alles Menschen, selbst der grössten Monarchen, als ein kleines Theilchen vorgekommen.<sup>158</sup>

Je mehr ausserordentliche Dinge sich jetzt zeigen mit Inspirirten u. dergl., je mehr hat ein Kind Gottes nöthig, sich in Demuth zu halten, nach der Regel Christi umherzugehen, und genau auf Gottes Wort zu vertrauen.<sup>159</sup>

Gott hat es mit Seinen Heiligen so gemacht: Er hat eine Verheissung dem Glauben hingegeben, und es darnach durch die - dem Anschein nach - widerwärtigsten Umstände aufgezielt, aber da man es sich am wenigsten versah, plötzlich erfüllt. Darin soll man sich üben, und mit solcher Übung ist auch wahrhaftig die Übung aller christlichen Tugenden verbunden und verknüpft.<sup>160</sup>

Both books, the Erklärte Offenbarung and the Sechzig Reden, enjoyed great popularity. The fact that they dealt with a portion of Scripture which for most readers holds a particular fascination partly accounts for this. In addition, the reputation of the author and the turbulence of the times may also be mentioned as being responsible for the popularity of these books. Bengel, at the time of their appearances, was already so well known that whatever he would have written would have been widely read. And the circumstances of that time also were such as to make the reading public desirous of finding some insight into the future, which these books indeed sought to supply.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.



Popular though the books were, they were eclipsed by yet another of Bengel's exegetical works. Such was to be the influence of his incomparable Gnomon,<sup>161</sup> published at Tübingen in the year following the appearance of his Erklärte Offenbarung.

Bengel's usual arduous work lay back of the Gnomon. As early as 1706 he had determined to address himself to the writing of a commentary of the entire New Testament.<sup>162</sup> He immediately began compiling materials for the project, most of which he formulated in connection with his studies of Hedinger's edition of the Greek New Testament. Sixteen years later, having gathered a wealth of materials, he began the actual writing of the commentary. Within two years - by 1724 - he had completed the first draft of his work. Bengel now exercised his characteristic caution, and instead of publishing his manuscript, rather began the work of revising and expanding his notes. He felt, in addition, that since the commentary incorporated the findings of his textual criticism, he ought not to publish it without first making public the fruits of his critical studies. It will be remembered that in his Prodromus he had announced his intention of complementing his critical studies with a commentary, but only after the former had been published.

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<sup>161</sup>Bengel, J. A., Gnomon N. T. in quo ex nativa verborum vi, simplicitas, profunditas, concinnitas, salubritas sensuum coelestium indicatur, (Tübingae: Io. Henr. Philippi Schrammii, 1742).

<sup>162</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 344.



Bengel thus used eighteen years in preparing his commentary. One notes from his Journal that he regarded the resulting work as his magnum opus. It is scarcely surprising then to read that when the first copy off the press came to him, one of his initial responses was to pray the well-known hymn, which in English translation reads:

O Thou, who our best works hast wrought,  
 And thus far helped me to success,  
 Attune my soul to grateful thought,  
 Thy great and holy Name to bless;  
 That I to Thee anew may live  
 And to Thy grace the glory give.<sup>163</sup>

The Gnomon is a truly unique work. It may in fact be looked upon as an epochal work, for it differed greatly from previous New Testament commentaries and has strongly influenced subsequent works in this field. Instead of presenting lengthy and exhaustive interpretations of the biblical text, Bengel's intention was rather to give suggestions on how the sacred text might be personally analyzed and its message appropriated by the reader. He hoped by its very title, Gnomon, to serve notice that the work was designed to guide its readers into the heart of each passage considered.

As its title page stated, the book's purpose was that of setting forth the majestic simplicity of the Word of God, of indicating its unsearchable depth and its felicitous consistency, and of suggesting what supreme values it holds

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<sup>163</sup>Fausset, op. cit., p. xvii.



for all departments of life. All this Bengel reiterated in a letter to Christian Pfaff:

Der bescheidene Titel: "Gnomon" wird, wie ich denke, dem Werke angemessen seyn, denn diese Anmerkungen sollen nicht den Leser durch sich selbst befriedigen, sondern durch einen kurzen Fingerzeig in den Text selbst hineinführen. Ich werde diejenigen Erklärungen, welche auf eine affectirte und erzwungene Weise, einen Nachdruck in einzelnen Stellen suchten, abweisen und widerlegen, aber die ächte durchgängige Bedeutsamkeit des ganzen Bibelwortes zeigen ..... Vorerst benütze ich meine eignen Gedanken über den Text, und dann erst ziehe ich auch die Beobachtung anderer biblischen Sprachforscher und Exegeten zu Rath.<sup>164</sup>

The commentary itself is splendidly organized. Bengel begins it with a preface in which he treats twenty-seven topics of primary importance. One reads here such items as the following: A paragraph declaring that the Word of God is the greatest of all His gifts, for through it He manifests Himself and offers His redemption to all who hear; a statement of the nature and purpose of the Gnomon; a critical evaluation of the author's own edition of the Greek New Testament; a delineation of the exegetical principles used in the commentary; a defense of the book's orthodoxy, and finally, an exhortation to the constant and diligent study of the Holy Scriptures.

In the main body of the book, Bengel presents his analysis and interpretation of the New Testament. He begins the study of each book with an introduction and a synopsis of its contents, after which there appears his

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<sup>164</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 346.



interpretation of its message. The expository materials are characterized especially by their brevity and perspicuity of expression. Andrew Fausset, the British New Testament scholar, claimed that Bengel in this work "condenses more matter into a line than can be extracted from pages of other writers."<sup>165</sup>

The Gnomon in its main section also gives much attention to parallel passages and to questions of textual criticism, in keeping with Bengel's desire to let Scripture interpret Scripture and to use for this the most corrected text. Copious footnotes are commonplace, some referring to cross-references, others to points of textual criticism, still others to references found in the literature of the Fathers or that of the more recent commentators, and finally some which explain in detail obscure words of the text or technical expressions of the exposition.

Special comment should be made in this connection regarding Bengel's exposition of the book of Revelation in the Gnomon. It goes without saying that the views expressed in this section are in unanimous agreement with those which he had already published in the Erklärte Offenbarung. There is however a difference between the two in their respective forms and scope. What Bengel had explicitly and fully explained in the earlier work is given only brief treatment

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<sup>165</sup>Fausset, op. cit., p. xviii.



in the Gnomon. Hence, except for the sections in which Bengel defends the Erklärte Offenbarung against its critics, his treatment of the Apocalypse in the Gnomon presents nothing new.

It need hardly be mentioned that the Gnomon was destined to become one of the most popular and influential commentaries in the entire history of Christianity, for this fact is widely recognized. To call the work epoch-making is hardly an overstatement, since few commentaries have enjoyed so wide a distribution and so great an acceptance as did the Gnomon. It ran through several editions, was quickly translated into the major modern languages, became a standard of comparison for later expositions of the New Testament, and is still quoted by exegetes in the twentieth century.<sup>166</sup>

The commentary received numerous ovations, of which a select few may here be cited. The first of these, written in longhand on the fly-leaf of an original edition by a certain Guilielmus Henricus Baumer on October 20, 1765, indicates how certain of Bengel's contemporaries regarded the work:

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<sup>166</sup>Ibid.



D. Bengel, Christi Zeug:  
 Du hast den Herrn verklärt!  
 Des Herrn noch künft'g Reich;  
 Des Herrn Lehr und Buch;  
 Der Zeiger zeigt die Sonn;  
 Dein Gnomon Christum lehrt.  
 Wer Bengel kennen will,  
 Musz durch Bengel's Schriften such'n.<sup>167</sup>

More than a century later, Ernst Hengstenberg (1802-1869), himself a prince among exegetes, said of the work:

Bengels Gnomon ist ein Buch, wie es wenige gibt: kurz, originell, kräftig, redend und lebendig, eine gelehrte Glosse, die aus inniger Liebe, tiefster Verehrung und Erkenntnis des heiligen Textes hervorgegangen, sich diesem einfältig und demüthig unterordnet, ein Zeigefinger, der auf das Hauchen des Geistes Gottes in dem Worte des Lebens hindeutet. Seine grosse, einfache Ueberschrift charakterisirt den Inhalt und Geist dieses Werkes. Die Fülle gründlicher Kenntnisse, geweiht und beseelt von tiefer Frömmigkeit, breitet sich hier aus über die Worte der H. Schrift, den Strahl des Göttlichen Lichtes in Allem zu zeigen.<sup>168</sup>

In Great Britain, John Wesley was profoundly impressed upon reading the Gnomon, and virtually reproduced it in English under the title "Expository Notes on the New Testament."<sup>169</sup> Wesley confided that, although he had already determined to prepare his own exposition of the New Testament, when he saw the commentary he decided he would serve the interests of religion much better "by translating from the Gnomon of that great luminary of the Christian

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<sup>167</sup>The copy bearing the above inscription is in the archives of the Capital University Library, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>168</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 348.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid.



world than by writing many volumes of his own notes."<sup>170</sup>

Finally, the opinion of the Englishman Andrew Fausset should be cited:

The Gnomon has been growing in estimation and has been more and more widely circulated among the scholars of all countries. Though modern criticism has furnished many valuable additions to our materials for New Testament exegesis, yet, in some respects, Bengel stands out still "facile princeps" among all who have laboured, or who as yet labour, in that important field.<sup>171</sup>

Such then were the contents and the reputation of Bengel's primary exegetical studies. It now becomes necessary to consider a related matter of fundamental importance, namely, to investigate the nature of the hermeneutical principles apparent in these works. The most rewarding procedure in this instance will be to assess the man's exegetical system as he himself expressed it and then to record the major evaluations of his principles.

Among all the published works of Bengel, there is none which provides more explicit source material for a study of his hermeneutics than does an article which in English translation is entitled, "Essay on Right Way of Handling Divine Subjects."<sup>172</sup> Since the essay was written towards

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<sup>170</sup>Fausset, op. cit., p. xviii.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., p. i.

<sup>172</sup>The materials embodied in the above-mentioned tract were first published in the preface of Joh. Christian Storr's Epistel-Predigten (1750) and were later included in the second edition of Bengel's translation of the New Testament. Burk, op. cit., p. 231.



the end of Bengel's life, in 1750, it presents the final word of Bengel on this subject. It is couched more in the style of an informal lecture, yet a careful analysis of its contents reveals that it alludes to the basic principles of Bengel's exegesis. A correlation of its contents with the exegetical principles apparent in his other writings, whether by explicit statement or implicit exemplification in his work, will serve to delineate in toto the type of exegesis which was his.

In the first place, one is shown how exceedingly valuable Bengel regarded the task of the exegete. No discipline in the entire field of theological endeavor is more challenging and more rewarding than that of exegesis. Bengel in fact urges all to accept Luther's dictum that "Theologie nichts (ist) als die um die Worte des heiligen Geistes sich bemüehende Grammatik."<sup>173</sup> Other departments of theological study indeed have their values, agrees Bengel, but they all are subservient to exegetical theology in that they are significant only when their respective contents are derived from or compared with the content of God's Word.<sup>174</sup> Hence, it may actually be said that for Bengel there was "keinen andern Gegenstand theologischer Arbeit als Erkenntnis und Auslegung des Biblischen Worts."<sup>175</sup> He was

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<sup>173</sup>Ibid.

<sup>174</sup>Hirsch, Emanuel, Geschichte der Neueren Evangelischen Theologie, (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1951), I, p. 185.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid.



convinced that to make exegesis subject to the canons of systematic theology would result in the neglecting of the Bible, for in his opinion such a procedure would tend to exalt metaphysics in the place of Biblical theology. This, he felt, was what the Age of Orthodoxy had unwittingly accomplished.<sup>176</sup> There was consequently a pressing need for Lutheranism to explicate the implications of its Schriftprinzip by allowing the interpretation of the Scriptures to provide exclusively the source of its theology. He writes that "Die Kunde und Erkenntnis der Schrift ist bis jetzt noch nicht in die Kraft getreten, die in der Schrift selbst dargeboten wird."<sup>177</sup>

Bengel next states that no sound exegesis is possible unless the exegete himself be equipped with the necessary aptitudes and skills qualifying him for the task. He writes that whoever would interpret the Bible must first exemplify a proper spiritual disposition, which he characterizes as a vital personal faith in God, a desire to personally appropriate the values of Scripture, and a firm reliance in the ability of the Holy Spirit to unlock the treasures of the Bible. Moreover, the exegete should have a capacity for quick perception, chaste imagination, and sober judgment, all of which Bengel regards as necessary

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<sup>176</sup>Ibid.

<sup>177</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 193.



to the work of analyzing the Biblical message.<sup>178</sup>

It goes without saying that he emphasized also the importance of technical proficiency as a pre-requisite for exegetical work. He writes that the interpreter must be proficient in the biblical languages, must be expert in the fields of biblical geography and history, be conversant with archeological and chronological discoveries, and, not least in importance, be proficient in textual criticism.<sup>179</sup>

In the third instance, Bengel states that basic to sound exegetical procedure is the practice of examining individual passages not only in their immediate context but also in their relationship to the totality of the Biblical message. Such a procedure, he suggests, is demanded by the very structure of the Biblical message.<sup>180</sup> It seemed to him that the message of the Scriptures constitutes essentially an unum continuum systema, a unified and integrated account of God's kingdom activity from the very beginning to the consummation. Hence, in spite of the obvious differences between the various books and writers, the message of the Bible is still basically one and hence constitutes an

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<sup>178</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 344.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid.

<sup>180</sup>Althaus, op. cit., p. 259.



integrated corpus.<sup>181</sup>

It follows then that no section of Scripture is to be viewed as though it were an entity standing by itself; rather in Bengel's opinion, each section is organically related to the totality of the Biblical message and its meaning becomes clear only after its relationship to the whole of Scripture is discerned. This in turn suggests a certain procedure in examining individual passages. Bengel would have each passage first be studied in its local context, next be compared with parallel passages, and finally be considered

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<sup>181</sup>One of the most succinct statements regarding the nature of the Biblical message to appear in Bengel's writings is the following: "Nebst dem Grunde des Heils legt uns die Heil. Schrift noch viele andere köstliche Dinge vor. Die Bücher, daraus sie bestehet, sind nicht von ungefähr vor andern auf uns gekommen. Man hat sie auch nicht als blosze Spruch-und Exempel-Büchlein anzusehen, nicht als vereinzelt Ueberbleibsel des Alterthumes, daraus nichts Ganzes herauszubringen, sondern als eine unvergleichliche Nachricht von der göttlichen Oekonomie bey dem menschlichen Geschlechte vom Anfang bis zum Ende aller Dinge durch alle Welt-Zeiten hindurch, als ein schönes und herrlich zusammenhängendes System. Denn obgleich jedes biblische Buch ein Ganzes für sich ist, und jeder Schriftsteller seine eigene Manier hat, so weht doch Ein Geist durch alle, Eine Idee durchdringt alle. Da geziemt es sich denn, dasz wir Alle das, was Gott uns vorlegt, mit Ehrerbietung ..... annehmen." Burk, op. cit., p. 234.



in its relationship to the totality of the Biblical message.<sup>182</sup>

In the fourth place, Bengel in his essay suggests a principle integrally related to the one immediately above, namely, that Scripture must ever and always be interpreted by Scripture. Although there is obvious evidence of his vacillation from this principle in his chronological and

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<sup>182</sup> It should be noted that Bengel's procedure in this instance differs radically from that associated with Schleiermacher's principle of Schriftganze. The latter held that formal doctrines are not to be derived from those passages of Scripture which treat of them, but are rather to be derived from "the whole of Scripture," which to him connoted the basic message of Scripture as perceived by one's intuitive religious consciousness. Bengel's position in this matter differs from that of Schleiermacher's in especially two points: In the first place, Bengel refused to allow a subjective principle, such as Schleiermacher's "pious self-consciousness," to determine what in the Bible is essential. Except for his treatment of the Apocalypse, in which he did use an esoteric type of exegesis, he quite consistently followed the principle that the Bible presents the objective revelation of God; such a principle stands in sharp contradistinction to the one which regards the Bible as a compilation of the pious experiences of religious people which serves the interpreter as a secondary aid in his work of discovering a faith. Secondly, Bengel's procedure of examining specific passages in both their immediate and general contexts does not at all imply that he wished his findings based upon subjective points of reference; rather, it signifies that he intended each doctrine to be based upon the sum-total of the Biblical materials which relate to that specific doctrine.

Pieper, Francis, Christian Dogmatics, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), I, p. 210.

Mueller, J. T., Christian Dogmatics, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934), p. 23.



apocalyptic studies,<sup>183</sup> he nevertheless vigorously maintains that an expositor should bring with him no pre-conceived notions as he approaches the Scriptures, but should rather faithfully derive his interpretation fully and solely from the sacred message. Grammatical study and historical research may and indeed should be done with reference to each passage under consideration; yet one must not regard these as establishing the basic meaning of the passage or adding essentially to its message, but rather as techniques useful in clarifying its intrinsic meaning. Scripture thus must be allowed to interpret itself, and as a corollary of this, every element of a given passage must be interpreted. He would have the interpreter not only avoid reading into Scripture what is not there, but also to neglect and omit nothing that is there. He writes:

Ein Ausleger ist einem Brunnenmacher gleich der selbst kein Wasser in die Quelle giesen darf, sondern nur zu machen hat, das es ohne Abgang, Verstopfung, und Unlauterkeit durch die Teichel und Röhren in die Gefäße läuft.<sup>184</sup>

In addition, Bengel proposes a principle for the exegete which, for want of a previously-coined name, might be called "esoteric perception." If it be true that the Biblical message constitutes an integrated totality, then it follows that certain "Grundbegriffe" must pervade the content of

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<sup>183</sup>Dorner, op. cit., p. 652.

<sup>184</sup>Bengel, Erklärte Offenbarung, p. xii.



Scripture. Hence it is incumbent upon the expositor to exercise a type of esoteric perception in examining a given passage so as to indicate which Grundbegriff, if any, is implicit in its message. The sanction for such a procedure he finds in the very nature of communicated thought. All speech, he writes, possesses two attributes: Tiefe and Faszlichkeit. The two are rarely ambivalent factors in the process of communication, since usually the one is repressed for the sake of the other. However, in the Bible one may discern that clarity of expression and depth of meaning are perfectly combined. The exegete must consequently express not merely the observable clarity of a passage, but must also illuminate what realities may be hidden in its depths. Bengel holds that this may be accomplished as follows:

Aus genauem Beobachten und Vergleichen erwächst einem dann die Fähigkeit, die Art der Gedankenführung zu verstehen und unter richtiger Erkenntnis der Emphasen und Affekte die Meinung mitsamt ihren Hintergründen sich zu vergegenwärtigen.<sup>185</sup>

The above principle in effect makes Bengel's type of exposition akin to a kind of involved word-study in that it deals so extensively with the Grundbegriffe of the biblical narrative. Bengel understood these as basic concepts which undergird the entire content of the Bible, concepts such as glory, holiness, light, righteousness, faith, and eternal

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<sup>185</sup>Hirsch, op. cit., p. 184.



life.<sup>186</sup> Bengel maintained that the basic meaning of these was unchanged irregardless of where they might explicitly be mentioned in Scripture, although additional insights into their significance are given whenever they appear. He had held to this principle already in his earliest expository study, in which he sought to show that the significance of the term "holy" is identical in both the Old and New Testaments. There is one "Wahrheitssystem," he affirms, "aus dem heraus die heiligen Schriftstellen geredet."<sup>187</sup> At the same time, he held that each Grundbegriff was divided in Scripture into various components, much as light is split by a prism. Here again it is the task of the exegete to search through each passage for a portion of the principal verities of God's economy, and to correlate the part he discovers with its related Grundbegriff.

Closely related with Bengel's concern for uncovering the depths and clarifying the basic concepts of Scripture is his desire that the expositor attempt to express his interpretation in a manner consonant with the affectus and mores of the Bible. These he defines as follows:

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186 Ibid.

187 Ibid.



In einer wohlgearteten Rede ist allemal dreierlei anzutreffen: 1. Die Lehr- und Beweisgründe, logoi, womit eine Sache erklärt und bekräftigt wird; 2. die starken Gemütsbewegungen, pathe, als Liebe, Verlangen, Freude und dergleichen; 3. das, was zum Wohlstande und zur Anmuth gehört und oft Zarte Herzensbewegungen, hede, nach sich zieht. Die zwei ersten Stücke werden von den Auslegern ziemlichermassen betrachtet, aber das dritte nicht so fleiszig, als sich gebühret, mitgenommen.<sup>188</sup>

A faithful exposition of Scripture must therefore seek to convey, along with an interpretation of meaning, also the very mood pervading a passage. Few things disturbed Bengel more than did those expository works which violated the temperamentum and decorum of the Bible. He was for example aghast upon reading how the Moravians had termed the Holy Spirit "das liebe Mütterlein Jesu."<sup>189</sup> This to him was grossly inconsistent with the affectus and mores of the Bible; even worse, it symptomized a tendency which would make of exegesis "ein willkürliches Spiel."<sup>190</sup> As for him, he would communicate all the respective intensities of attitude reflected in a text. It must be admitted that in this respect Bengel acquits himself with distinction.

It is evident also from his writings that Bengel strongly advocated the use of a type of historico-grammatical exegesis. Each passage, he holds, must be viewed in the light of its historic context and must

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<sup>188</sup>Bengel, Harmonie der Vier Evangelisten, p. 153.

<sup>189</sup>Goltz, op. cit., p. 484.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid.



likewise be subjected to a searching grammatical analysis.<sup>191</sup> When then the results of both procedures are correlated, the original meaning of the text shall be discerned. The exegete must accordingly first focus all his philological skill upon a passage in order to determine the meaning of its grammatical constructions. In Bengel's own words: "Zur Exegese gehört besonders Kenntniz der biblischen Sprache, die stets der Weisheit Gottes angemessen ist, auch wo sie sich ganz zu unserem rohen Standpunkte herabläszt."<sup>192</sup> In addition to the above, the exegete must also consider the historic context of the passage. Here Bengel would have him search out especially the following: The situation and characteristic emphases of the author; the occasion for, and the time of, the writing of the passage; and the circumstances of its original recipients. The exegete dare not, however, feel his task accomplished with a statement of what meaning the passage held for its original auditors, for he must also indicate the relevance of the text for his times.<sup>193</sup> This, states Bengel involves "kurz die heutigen Leser in denselbigen Stand zu setzen in welchem die ursprünglichen Leser sich fanden."<sup>194</sup> He himself addressed his talents to this end, attempting

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<sup>191</sup>Bengel, Gnomon, p. 12.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid.

<sup>193</sup>Ibid.

<sup>194</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 163.



durch sorgsame Vergleichung des biblischen Sprachgebrauchs sich die ursprünglichen Gedanken der Apostel von Neuem zu vergegenwärtigen und von diesem Verständniss der biblischen Sprache aus den Einblick in den Geist und Plan der Offenbarung zu gewinnen.<sup>195</sup>

Such then are the primary features of Bengel's hermeneutical principles. It goes without saying that many of these were regarded with suspicion by his contemporaries and that in consequence his procedures were criticized. Ten years after the publication of the Erklärte Offenbarung, the first formal criticism of his exegetical system appeared under the title

Die Zornkelter der letzten Zeiten, oder eine Erklärung des 34. 35 u. 63. Kap. Jesaja mit einer neuen, der Heil. Schrift zu Ehren abgefaszten Anhangs-Schrift, worin aber die Herbrechting'sche Chiliasterey in ihrer Schalkheit und wider die lutherisch-evangelische Kirche gerichtete Feindseligkeit bloß gestellt wird.<sup>196</sup>

Written by Kohlreiff, who so often expressed himself negatively also against Bengel's chronological studies, the essay accused Bengel of being vainglorious, charged him with irresponsible exegesis, claimed that he knowingly perverted Scripture, said that he derided Luther and idolized Spener, and concluded by naming him a sectarian and a chiliast. As a critical evaluation, the book was less than effective. It not only failed in addressing itself to the main issues involved in Bengel's interpretation of Apocalyptic materials,

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<sup>195</sup>Goltz, op. cit., p. 482.

<sup>196</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 342.



but the very bigotry of its style also defeated its purpose, for many who read it were aroused more to a defense of Bengel than to a criticism.

Bengel sought to answer Kohlreiff with a tract entitled "Die Ehrenrettung der Heiligen Schrift."<sup>197</sup> The pamphlet is not at all couched in the strong language current among polemicists in that time, but is rather a masterful example of polite and academic self-defense. In it Bengel admits to holding Spener in high regard, but states that for him the exegetical principles of Luther shall always be normative. He also explains once more his teaching of the millenium, and claims that his view is consistent with the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church. Finally, he denies practicing an arbitrary exegesis and states that his purpose is to simply let Scripture interpret itself.

No additional major critique of Bengel's exegesis appeared until the year 1788, thirty-six years after his death. In that year, Johann Georg Pfeiffer, a clergyman in Stuttgart who likewise had already criticized Bengel for his chronological studies, published a lengthy study of the book of Revelation in which Bengel's exegetical principles were evaluated. The work was entitled "Neuer Versuch einer Anleitung zum sichersten Verstand und Gebrauch der Offenbarung Johannis, vornahmlich ihrer prophetischen

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.



Zeit-Bestimmungen,"<sup>198</sup> and is particularly significant for our purpose since it reports not only the consensus of theological opinion at that time regarding the expository work of Bengel, but also touches upon most of those points with which scholars of subsequent times were to take issue.

Although Pfeiffer presents a host of criticisms, an analysis of these will indicate that they fall primarily into three categories. In the first instance, there appear questions pertaining to the propriety and the validity of the textual criticisms which Bengel incorporated in his works. Bengel, he concludes, was too radical an exponent of this discipline and therefore with it tends to disturb much more than to construct.

Secondly, Pfeiffer addresses himself to a critical surveillance of Bengel's hermeneutics. The exegesis employed in interpreting prophetic and apocalyptic elements seems to him to be especially suspect. He finds that Bengel proceeds with allegorical and subjective methods in analyzing these areas. Pfeiffer holds that if Bengel's claim that his interpretation of the Apocalypse was prompted by a unique inner light be true, then it must be concluded that his exposition was here moulded more by subjective factors than by the objective principle of the analogy of the Scriptures. Hence also it must be said that Bengel's treatment of the Apocalypse is both arbitrary and allegorical, as is noted

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<sup>198</sup>Ibid., p. 328, passim.



especially in his tendency of turning literal elements into symbols and of making symbols into literal facts. Pfeiffer is certain that such a procedure is neither valid nor beneficial. Not only does Bengel forsake the basic principles of hermeneutics, but he also misleads his audience into accepting what is obviously personal opinion as though it were Scriptural truth.

The third major criticism leveled by Pfeiffer at Bengel's expository work is a charge implicit in the above, namely, that Bengel's interpretation of Revelation 20 is nothing less than heretical. Although he taught chiliasm in its mildest and seemingly least noxious form, Bengel is nonetheless still a millennialist. Pfeiffer asserts that his views have no moorings whatsoever in Scripture, but are based once again on a subjective and arbitrary method. Even worse, even so mild a version of millennialism tends to jeopardize personal faith in that an attitude of complacency results from its claim that prior to the judgment a period of great religious vitality will occur which will afford the impenitent ones an opportunity for return.

Aside from the above negative criticisms, Pfeiffer's evaluation of Bengel's exegetical work also has words of commendation. Even though he finds Bengel's treatment of the Apocalypse invalid, he still admits an indebtedness to him for having restored an interest in that book and for having given it a much more salutary explanation than that



accorded it by the sectarians. As for the Gnomon, Pfeiffer freely admits the validity and excellency of its hermeneutical principles, exclusive of its section on Revelation.

That Pfeiffer's criticisms are obviously well-intended and are couched in the language of moderation. As has been noted, his case against Bengel's exegesis agrees in most respects with that which the consensus of subsequent theological scholarship held against Bengel. It is, of course, true that scholars in more recent decades had little to say by way of negative comment against Bengel's textual criticism, for the necessity of this discipline was universally accepted and Bengel's superiority in the field was generally recognized. But what came to be criticized above all else was Bengel's method of interpreting apocalyptic elements.

One of the prevalent criticisms in this regard is that voiced by Terry.<sup>199</sup> He takes Bengel to task for having misunderstood the basic nature of apocalyptic literature. Whereas Bengel regarded such elements as constituting a somewhat obscured record of future history which lent itself to a literal interpretation by those to whom its significance is especially revealed, later scholarship, claims Terry, has come to see in the Apocalypse a partial unveiling and symbolic unfolding of events yet to transpire.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup>Terry, M. S., Biblical Hermeneutics, (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1911), p. 230, passim.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid.



Another widely held current criticism is one expressed by Paul Althaus.<sup>201</sup> Althaus holds that Bengel followed a typical Pietistic approach to the book of Revelation in that he, as did they, claimed for himself a gift of special insight into the meaning of its message. Such a procedure, he says, has long since been discredited.<sup>202</sup>

It is all too evident, therefore, that there was a prominent achilles heel in both the exegetical principles and the exegetical works of Bengel. This was his fanciful approach to, and explanation of, the apocalyptic elements in the Bible. Careful analysis will indicate that every ineptitude in his exegetical system is integrally related to this. On the other hand, Bengel's hermeneutical procedure was surprisingly in advance of that of his time. His emphasis upon the need of proper abilities and attitudes on the part of the exegete, his recommendation of a historico-grammatical method of textual analysis, and his stress upon examining passages in both their local context and in their relationship to the totality of Scripture, all these were given impetus by Bengel. With him there developed a type of theology which sought unabashedly to be a biblically-orientated theology, freed from the canons of philosophical inquiry and addressed to the proposition that the Scriptures

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<sup>201</sup>Althaus, Die Letzten Dinge, p. 295.

<sup>202</sup>Ibid.



should interpret themselves. It is then not an overstatement to claim that "Mit Bengel tritt der erste wirkliche wissenschaftliche Schrifttheolog in Württemberg, ja man kann sagen in Deutschland, auf."<sup>203</sup>

#### D. THE MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS OF BENGEL

Bengel's literary productivity extended far beyond the fields of textual criticism, chronological study, and exegetical work. Among his lesser-known writings one will find biographical sketches,<sup>204</sup> poems and hymns,<sup>205</sup> essays on pedagogy,<sup>206</sup> and a whole host of articles<sup>207</sup> prepared for publication in the theological periodicals of his day. From among these miscellaneous writings, the most significant one should be singled out for special consideration. This is a book entitled, Abrisz der sogenannten Brüdergemeine, published in 1751 at Stuttgart.<sup>208</sup>

The work constitutes a valuable critique of the Moravian movement in its earliest forms, and especially of the

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<sup>203</sup>Hermelink, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>204</sup>Bengel, J. A., Lebensbeschreibung des Flacius, 1724.

<sup>205</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 429 ff.

<sup>206</sup>Ibid., p. 402.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid.

<sup>208</sup>Bengel, J. A., Abrisz der sogenannten Brüder-Gemeine, in welchem die Lehre und die ganze Sache geprüft, das Gute und Böse dabey unterschieden, und insonderheit die Spangenberg'sche Declaration erläutert wird, (Stuttgart: Johann Benedikt Metzler, 1751).



theological tendencies of the movement's progenitor, Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. For thirty years prior to this writing, Zinzendorf had exploited virtually every means of establishing rapport with the Landeskirche Württemberg. As early as 1722, shortly after having opened his estate to the Moravians, he had addressed a friendly request to the Consistory of Württemberg asking this group to consider the possibility of establishing intercommunion between their Church and his group. After much deliberation, the Theological Faculty of Tübingen responded affirmatively in 1733 to Zinzendorf's request. Thereupon the Count immediately came to Württemberg to visit the most prominent theologians there, including also Bengel at Denkendorf, hoping thereby to hasten the cause of ultimate union. His hopes were however frustrated, for shortly after his visit the Consistory had opportunity to examine certain Moravian publications, from which they learned to their dismay how widely divergent the position of that group was from their own. The Württembergians were disturbed especially by the legalism and emotionalism of Zinzendorf's party, as well as by the peculiarities apparent in their doctrine of the Trinity. The Consistory in consequence petitioned the Moravians to supply them with an explicitly detailed account of their doctrine and discipline.

During this entire period, Bengel had been privately scrutinizing the Moravian movement. The results of his



surveillance in effect constitute the contents of his Abrisz der sogenannten Brüdergemeine. According to its title page, the pamphlet purports to evaluate "die Lehre und die ganze Sache ..... das Gute und Böse" of the Moravian Brotherhood.<sup>209</sup>

Although the book is nearly 400 pages in length, its significant points may be stated quite briefly. Bengel begins the work by criticizing certain aberrations which he has come to detect in the Moravian movement. He writes that their stringent moralism, their excessive emotionalism, their violation of the sense and spirit of Scripture, and their deviation from orthodox doctrine are all factors scarcely consonant with the source of the Church's confession nor productive of a valid type of Church life. Through lengthy paragraphs, he pleads with the Moravians, asking them to establish themselves more firmly upon the teachings of Scripture.

Bengel next writes that he is displeased with Zinzendorf's conclusion that organized Protestantism had become so corrupted as to be beyond recovery and as to make it incumbent upon the pious to separate themselves from its Churches and to form new communities of faith. Such a view, says Bengel, carries with it a two-fold error: In the first place, it involves a misconception of the true nature of the

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<sup>209</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 396.



Church, and secondly, it tends to substitute for the principle of grace that of works. Sinfulness and saintliness shall ever be commingled in the Church as she exists on earth; hence, the members of the Church are admittedly in continual need of renovation. Yet such renovation is accomplished not at all through the practice of separatism, but solely through the mercy of God.<sup>210</sup>

Bengel moreover finds that the type of decorum in religious matters as practiced by the Moravians is highly suspect. The terminology of their hymns, as well as of their translation of the Scriptures, he regards as symptomatic of emotionalism and irreverence. He fears that in their intense quest for religious experience, the Moravians have come to regard God with attitudes of impropriety and disrespect, as for example in their hymns they address God with terms usually reserved for one's equals.<sup>211</sup>

Bengel also questions Zinzendorf and his party in regard to the doctrinal positions they maintain. It seems to him, he writes, that the Moravians so overly-accentuate the doctrine of blood-atonement that they tend to neglect the remaining fundamental doctrines of Scripture. In so doing, they commit a double violation: First, they implicitly fail to acknowledge the whole message of the

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<sup>210</sup>Ibid.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid.



Bible, and in the second place, they deprive themselves of much salutary doctrine. Bengel then moves on to take issue with the attitude of the Moravians regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. He mentions that their publica doctrina all but omits any mention of the Father as Creator and God, and likewise neglects to give prominence to the fact and value of Christ's resurrection.

Such then were the primary liabilities which Bengel detected in the Moravian movement. He concludes his critical analysis of that group with a terse but telling verdict: "Herrnhut tut nicht gut."<sup>212</sup>

The Abrisz der sogenannten Brüdergemeine served well as a means of informing the Lutheran party of the intrinsic characteristics of the Zinzendorffian Brotherhood, and many Lutheran leaders of that period consequently came to applaud the book. David Frohberger, for one, wrote:

Der edelste und verdienstvollste Gegner des Grafen war der fromm und redliche Abt Bengel. Dieser schrieb einen Aufsatz ueber die Brueder-Gemeine, welcher viel sanfter und friedfertiger geschrieben ist als andere, und war fuer die Gemeine wahrscheinlich von Nutzen.<sup>213</sup>

Johann Philip Fresenius, (1705-1761), the renowned clergyman of Frankfort, was likewise impressed by the book, but wished that it might have stressed to an even sharper degree the antitheses between Lutheranism and Moravianism.

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<sup>212</sup>Ibid.

<sup>213</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 44.



He wrote: "Das Salz ist in dem Abrisse vortrefflich angebracht, aber mich hat gedenkt, hie und da hätte der Graf eine schärfere Lauge verdient."<sup>214</sup>

The periodicals of the day indicate that the Moravians themselves were much aroused by Bengel's book, yet none of their party attempted giving a direct answer to it. The book unquestionably helped precipitate the desire amongst them to forsake certain of the elements which had become distasteful to the Lutherans and to assume a position more akin to that of Lutheranism. It is true that in 1748, prior to the book's appearance, the Moravians had adopted the Augsburg Confession as their basic symbol; yet they had not as yet informed the full corpus of their doctrines with the implications of this confession. Finally, in 1778 the first formal presentation of their theological position appeared in a book authored by the great Bishop August Gottlieb Spangenberg and entitled Idea Fidei Fratrum.<sup>215</sup> The doctrinal system presented in this book bears a remarkable resemblance to that delineated in the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy. Without question, Bengel's critique had hastened the theological reorientation of this group.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 398.

<sup>215</sup>Spangenberg, A. G., Idea Fidei Fratrum (Barby: Christian F. Laur, 1779).

<sup>216</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 44.



## E. BENDEL'S TRANSLATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The final work of Bengel's literary career was his monumental translation of the New Testament into German. The preparations for this were as usual extended over a long period of time, reaching back at least to the year 1706, in which year Bengel had confided in a letter that he hoped eventually to publish a new German version of the New Testament.<sup>217</sup> Although in the following years his energies were addressed primarily to other fields, he nevertheless still gave attention to this project by developing the techniques and assembling the materials necessary for its completion. Yet all the while he kept his intentions secret, fearing that if his project were publicized, he would almost certainly be accused of subverting Luther's great version of the Bible. Thus he wrote:

Die Erfahrung lehrt, dass die evangelischen Theologen gar sehr darauf aus sind, keine neue Uebersetzung aufkommen zu lassen, und das Erscheinen einer solchen daher wohl nicht ohne Lärm abgehen wird. Daher fragt es sich, ob es der Mühe wert ist, zu solchem Lärm die Veranlassung zu geben. Es möchte daher ratsam sein, die Arbeit ruhen zu lassen und zu warten, bis ein anderer sich daran macht, der mehr Geschick dazu hat.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>218</sup>Ibid.



Bengel nevertheless continued planning for the translation, and during the last decade of his life he devoted himself with especial attention to this task. In order to prepare the public for the eventual appearance of the work, he made it a point often to express publicly his opinion that a new German version of the Bible was long over-due. He freely admitted that Luther's translation was an excellent one, but also called attention to the fact that since no accurate edition of the original Greek text had been available as the basis for its translation, its readings were in many cases inaccurate. Hence, "Da müsse man eine Aenderung vornehmen."<sup>219</sup>

Bengel himself never witnessed the appearance of this work nor the subsequential reaction of the public, for he died prior to its publication. The rough draft of the translation was in fact completed only several days before his final illness. That the version did finally appear in print is due to the work of the trusted friends of Bengel, who edited its contents and arranged for its publication at Stuttgart in 1753.<sup>220</sup>

It will prove valuable to focus especial attention upon the Preface of the work, since it is in this section where

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<sup>219</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>220</sup>Bengel, J. A., Das Neue Testament zum Wachsthum in der Gnade und Erkenntnis des Herrn Jesu Christ, nach dem revidirten Grund-Text übersetzt und mit dienlichen Anmerkungen begleitet. (Stuttgart, 1753).



Bengel records his arguments for translating the New Testament anew as well as the principles governing the work. He begins by reiterating his conviction that Luther's translation needs correction and modernizing. Splendid though Luther's version is, it bears several defects of so basic a nature as to warrant a newer translation. In the first place, the Greek texts of the New Testament available to Luther were relatively corrupted ones, and consequently his translation is often at variance with the readings of the corrected Greek text. Bengel moreover holds that Luther's translation was becoming outdated for reasons of linguistics. The language of his version had, to be certain, functioned as a model for the subsequential development of High German; even so, many of its expressions and constructions will be seen to be archaic when compared with current usage. It is therefore necessary, Bengel writes, that the German Church be provided with a translation which speaks in the living language of the day. Finally, he reminds his readers that Luther himself had publicly expressed the desire that, in addition to his own, many more translations of the Bible would appear throughout the Evangelical Church in Germany.<sup>221</sup>

After thus stating his case for a new version, Bengel lists the principles which he believes ought to be followed if one would product a valid and valuable translation.

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<sup>221</sup>Keller, op. cit., p. 57.



First, he mentions that the version must be based "auf einen richtigen Grundtext;" secondly, "Sie müsse das Original nach allen seinen Theilen aufs Vollkommenste widergeben;" and finally, the translation "soll ..... so viel (wie) möglich rein deutsch seyen, neben dem dasz sie die majestätische Einfachheit des heiligen Originals durch Vermeidung unserer weltlichen Sprachweise wider zu geben sich bemühet."<sup>222</sup>

The preface thereupon concludes with an appeal asking all who would read the work to do so not with criticism but primarily for their soul's welfare. Bengel states that his purpose in preparing a new version was above all else that of exhibiting the intrinsic vitality of the Scriptures for the edification of its readers. He says it is for this reason that the text of his translation is arranged according to topical paragraphs and not in the traditional arrangement of printing the text in chapter units. The second form seems to him as tending to obstruct the effective assimilation of the text, for it often divides arbitrarily the units of thought in the text. In addition, he advises the reader that he shall discover brief expository notes appended to every page of the translation, for the purpose of helping to clarify the text. An analysis of these explanatory notations will indicate that they are in substance identical to the contents of the Gnomon, and hence Bengel in his final work

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<sup>222</sup>Ibid.



provided his readers not only with a new German version of the New Testament, but also with a condensed German translation of his Gnomon.

The translation was exceedingly popular in Württemberg. Although it never did supplant Luther's in the classroom and in the sanctuary, it nevertheless came to be much used in private study. The work was so widely distributed that its first printing was soon exhausted, necessitating a second edition in 1765 and a third in 1769. One will find the translation still being used at the present time in Württemberg, especially at the family altar and in the private prayer closet.<sup>223</sup>

It is a happy coincidence that the literary work of Bengel should close with his translation of the New Testament. For if the preeminent reason for his writings was his desire to convey the message of the Bible to his contemporaries, his translation constituted his final and crowning attempt at transmitting the Word of God with vitality and power.

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<sup>223</sup>Ibid.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE DISTINCTIVE NATURE OF BENGEL'S THEOLOGY

It remains now to determine and assess the principal characteristics and the continuing significances of Bengel's theology. The first of these areas is fairly explicitly delineated by Bengel himself in his writings. It however remains for us to lead out from their semi-obscurity the distinctive elements of his position and to note their implications for theology subsequent to his time.

What then shall be said of Bengel's type of theology? There is a surprising paucity of appraisals available in this regard. Those who have attempted an assessment of his position have done so either with such brevity that the distinctive nature of his theology is blurred, or with such prejudice that the serious student is repulsed. By way of example, a much-used History of Christian Thought dismisses the career of Bengel with one sentence, saying that he was a type of Suabian pietist.<sup>1</sup> At the other extreme is Principal Tulloch's verdict, to the effect that Bengel was the only religious thinker of note between George Calixtus and David Schleiermacher.<sup>2</sup> He who is cognizant of Bengel's career will

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<sup>1</sup>Neve, J. L., A History of Christian Thought, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, Vol. II, 1946), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup>Drummond, A. L., German Protestantism since Luther, (London: The Epworth Press, 1951), p. 65.



be dismayed with the first of these but will also be quick to soften the second. What then shall be said of Bengel's type of theology? For a fair and accurate answer, one would do well to consider what in Bengel's own writings is pertinent to the question.

In the first place, it is evident that he himself wished his theology to be recognized as being consistently biblically-orientated. It was his purpose to work out in practice the implications of Luther's principle of Sola Scriptura. To him, the Bible was veritably the only and all-sufficient source and norm of the Christian confession and practice.<sup>3</sup> It will be remembered that he regarded the study and exposition of the Scriptures as being more important than any other discipline for the Christian. The historic doctrines of the Church are after all derived from and determined by the Bible; in fact, the Church herself is a product of God's Word given in Scriptures and is perpetually nurtured by the same.<sup>4</sup>

It may then be accurately said that Bengel wished to be recognized not at all as a theologian but rather as an expositor of the Scriptures. Since this is so evidently true, it will be of value to indicate his position regarding the nature and the function of the Holy Scriptures.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Dorner, J. A., Geschichte der protestantische theologie, (München: J. A. Cotta-schen Buchhandlung, 1867), p. 653.



Bengel accepted without question the fact that the Bible conveyed the unique and specially-revealed Word of God to men. This conviction is well expressed in the following:

Die heilige Schrift ist Gottes Buch. Ihr ganzer Inhalt ist heilig, heilsam und genugsam; nichts ist darin vergeblich und unfruchtbar. Nicht ein Jedes musz Alles begreifen, aber alle Heiligen aller Zeiten und Orte sind wie ein einiger Lehrjuenger, der sich den ganzen Inhalt zu Nutze macht.<sup>5</sup>

One notes accordingly that he regarded the Bible as being of a divine origin and as containing a divine communication. That the Bible was the product of divine inspiration was self-evident and indisputable for him.

Nevertheless, his understanding of the process of inspiration was rather unique. He regarded the Osiandrian view of inspiration, which held that the writers of the Scriptures wrote somewhat after the manner of passive amanuenses, as untenable and "all zu streng."<sup>6</sup> He himself avoided giving any detailed explanation of the process of inspiration, implying that when such is given, one is speculating without the sanction of Scripture and one tends to focus upon a matter of secondary importance. For what is essential here is not the depiction of the method of inspiration, but is rather the confession of the fact that

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<sup>5</sup>Bengel, J. A., Abrisz der so-genannten Brüdergemeine, (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1751), p. 24

<sup>6</sup>Burk, J. C., Johann Albrecht Bengel's Leben und Wirken, (Stuttgart: Johann Steinkopf, 1831), p. 374.



the Scriptures owe their origin to the Holy Spirit. He argues in fact that since the Bible nowhere presents a fully detailed explanation of the process of inspiration, one certainly cannot claim that those employed by the Spirit were forced to write as unconscious amanuenses.<sup>7</sup> Whoever holds to such a view, he claims, will be embarrassed by every apparent inaccuracy of historic reference or by each seeming inconsistency between parallel passages, since for him such seeming defects will tend to cast doubt upon the infallibility and ability of the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup>

Bengel was confident that whatever appeared in the Scriptures appeared due to the will and influence of God. Holy men did indeed speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and what they recorded was in truth the very Word of God. Yet, at the same time, those who wrote did so within the framework of their own congenital aptitudes and acquired experiences, which fact he thinks is evidenced by the differences in style and the variations in emphasis in the respective books of the Bible. In brief, he regarded the fact of inspiration as somewhat analagous to that of the Incarnation. Even as the Son of God was hidden yet apparent in the body of His incarnation, so is the Word of God similarly revealed in the form of human yet inspired

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



language.<sup>9</sup> Thus what Goltz reports regarding Bengel's doctrine of inspiration is manifestly true.

Seine Gedanken ueber die selbstaendige Eigenthuemlichkeit der einzelnen Schriftsteller und den Einfluss ihrer menschlichen Auslagen auf ihre Schriften waren nach dem Maszstabe des orthodoxen Inspirationsbegriffes kühn und frei.<sup>10</sup>

That Bengel regarded the Scriptures as inspired is therefore evident; yet the question now arises, what was his concept of the very nature of Scripture? Never does he give a systematized answer to this, yet one discovers very quickly from his writings the fact that he regarded Scripture primarily as constituting both the record of, and the communication of, God's special revelation to men. It may moreover be seen that he regarded the message of the Bible as comprising both a symbolic portrayal of divine realities and the literal recording of directly revealed doctrines and events. Bengel consequently regarded the ontological structure of Scripture as being two-sided: hidden within the literal message of Scripture are noumenal realities which constitute the formal element occasioning and determining the final and material sense of the Bible. What meets the reader's attention is primarily the phenomenal form of God's revelation; veiled within this, however, there is a whole system of divine realities which inform the sense of

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<sup>9</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>10</sup>Goltz, "Die Theologische Bedeutung J. A. Bengels und seiner Schule," Jahrbücher für Deutsche theologie, (Gotha: Rud. Besser, 1861), p. 480.



the former.

This is to say that Bengel understood the teaching and the history recorded in the Bible as resting upon, and constituting the manifestation of, a system of divine realities.<sup>11</sup> Nowhere does this conception become more clearly apparent than in his explanation of the Biblical doctrine of blood atonement. In his interpretation of Hebrews 9, he indicates that the sacrificial blood of atonement, whether that of the great High Priest or that of the antitypes, is both the visible instrument literally effecting atonement and the apparent portrayal of a heavenly "Stammbe-griff," which he understands as the eternally efficacious blood of Christ.<sup>12</sup> Thus, since for Bengel each literal passage in Scripture depended upon and portrayed in some measure the eternal system of divine realities, it may be said that he regarded the content of the Bible as being at one and the same time both symbolic and literal.

Should one ask him to clarify himself in this regard, his answer would be as follows:

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<sup>11</sup>Dorner, op. cit., p. 653.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.



Ein doppeltes Denkmal giebt uns die heilige Schrift: einmal die Erkenntnis von Gott, dem Schöpfer, Erlöser, Troester, von den Engeln, von Menschen, von der Sünde, von der Gnade, usw. Und diese Erkenntnis ist die Nothwendigste. Dann aber auch die Art und Weise der göttlichen Haushaltung in Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts, in den gegebenen, erfüllten, oder zu erfüllenden Verheißungen von Christo, in der Regierung des Volkes von den ersten Zeiten bis zu den letzten.<sup>13</sup>

The above passage deserves careful analysis, inasmuch as it constitutes Bengel's most succinct and significant statement in this matter. It gives clear indication that he regarded the Scriptures as comprising primarily two elements: one, the specially revealed truth of God, and the second, the comprehensive record of God's kingdom activity. The first he regarded as the conceptual element, and the second as the concrete. It seemed to him that whenever the Bible presented the direct principles of doctrine or injunctions of ethics, it was recording the inviolate and absolute truth and will of God in conceptual form. On the other hand, when it traced the mighty deeds of God, whether past, present, or future, it revealed God as concretely confronting men and intervening in their history.

It goes without saying that Bengel regarded the conceptual element in the Bible as being of fundamental importance. The doctrinal teachings and ethical standards

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<sup>13</sup>Bengel, J. A., Ordo Temporum, (Stuttgart: Christopher Erhard, 1741), p. 1.



recorded in Scripture were obviously essential for him, since these determine one's knowledge of God and one's participation in the life of His kingdom. Yet in practice he devoted much more attention to the history of God's soteriological activity as recorded in the Bible. In his own words:

Es wird in der heiligen Schrift gezeigt die grosse Haushaltung Gottes, wie er seine Verheissungen gegeben und erfuehlt hat und erfuehlen wird in Christo Jesu. Bei dieser letztern Beziehung erkennt man erst, warum die heilige Schrift in ihren Buechern so und nicht anders gestellt ist, also wie sie von Mose bis auf die Apostel nach einander verfasst sind, und eine systema oder zusammenhaengende Urkunde abgiebt.<sup>14</sup>

It must then finally be said that Bengel regarded the message of Scripture as reporting the full cosmological and soteriological activity of God. In his opinion, the Bible was essentially the revelation of the mighty deeds of God. Every passage and chapter and book constituted a component part of the history of this activity, for they all mark in their respective ways the unilateral progression of the economy of God. Such a view is nowhere more clearly expressed in Bengel's writings than in the Ordo Temporum:

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<sup>14</sup>Bengel, J. A., Weltalter, (Eszlingen: Friedr. Christian Schall, 1746), p. 23.



Ein einziges werk ist die heil. Schrift. Alle Buecher derselben machen ein corpus aus. Die einzelnen Buecher sind fuer sich ein Ganzes und erfuellen jedes fuer sich vollkommen seinen besonderen Zweck. Alle zusammen machen ein Buch aus, das aus jenen Theilen erwachst und einen allgemeineren, weit umfassenderen Zweck hat. Es ist ein Grundgedanke, der unendlich goettliche Alles in sich begreift, von dem alle Zeiten ausgehen, der Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft gemessen hat.<sup>15</sup>

Certain implications of the above must be cited in this connection. In the first instance, the opinion that the Bible constitutes a unified revelation of God's truth and of God's action is to invite two differing, yet complementary, approaches to its message. One might, on the one hand, focus primarily upon its recording of sacred history to uncover the premises, the development, and the consummation of God's sovereign activity. On the other hand, one might address himself to a consideration of the basic concepts revealed in Scripture and attempt to derive from these a type of biblical theology.

The writings of Bengel prove that he followed both procedures. He, for example, sought to gather into one system all the "Grundbegriffe" in the Bible, being of the opinion that regardless of the context in which a basic concept appeared, its meaning was ever the same. As for the possibility of deriving from Scripture the complete record of sacred history, it scarcely needs mentioning, in view of what has already been said, that Bengel also

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<sup>15</sup>Bengel, J. A., Ordo Temporum, chapter 11, section 13.



exploited this approach to the utmost.

A second implication inherent in Bengel's understanding of the Bible has its roots in his belief that the Scriptures present the full record of God's kingdom activity. If once this view be accepted, then it follows that one shall be especially concerned with the prophetic and apocalyptic elements of the Bible. The past and present of God's activity is literally reported; the future is however portrayed in the form of prophecy and apocalypse. These are the elements which reveal "die besondere stufenweise Endgeschichte ..... in welche die stufenweise Heilsgeschichte auslaufen wird. Das gilt besonders von der Offenbarung Johannes."<sup>16</sup>

Bengel is therefore perfectly consistent with his premises when he insists that the Bible should be seen primarily as the "offenbarungsgeschichtliche Urkundenbuch,"<sup>17</sup> namely, as a record of the progressively developing Kingdom activity of God rather than as primarily a compendium of proof-passages:

Man hat die heil. Schrift nicht als Spruch-und Exempel-buecher anzusehen, sondern als eine unvergleichliche Nachricht von der göttlichen Oekonomie bei dem menschlichen Geschlechte von Anfang bis zum Ende aller Dinge, durch alle Weltzeiten hindurch, als ein schoenes, herrliches, zusammenhaengendes System.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Weth, Gustav, Die Heilsgeschichte, (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1931), p. 166.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>18</sup>Ordo Temporum, chapter 11, section 13.



Next it may be asked, what did Bengel hold as to the function of the Holy Scriptures? To properly assess his views in this regard necessitates the consideration of a preliminary issue, namely, that of his views pertaining to the authority of the Bible.

His writings testify that he regarded the authority of the Bible as being implicit in its very nature. In his opinion, the Bible does not derive its validity and authority from any alien source. It is impossible for an archaeologist or an exegete to establish the truth of a passage in the Old Testament, inasmuch as the truth is already inherent in the passage. Nor is it valid to derive one's conviction of the authority of the Bible from the doctrine of inspiration. The authority and the inspiration of the Bible are both derivatives of God's activity, and hence the two are both a posteriori.<sup>19</sup> This is to say that the Scriptures are true and authoritative not simply because one can demonstrate the fact of their inspiration, but primarily because God promises that His word is true and because He acts through it to establish the doctrine and to direct the life of the Church. Bengel writes accordingly:

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<sup>19</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 71.



Was Gott uns sagt, das sollen wir uns lassen gesagt sein; wie er uns lehret, so sollen wir uns lehren lassen. Keinen ausbuendigeren Beweis von der Wahrheit und Gueltigkeit der heiligen Schrift und aller darin enthaltenen Erzaehlungen, Lehren, Verheisungen und Drohungen hat man, als die heilige Schrift selbst: wie die Sonne durch keinen andern himmlischen Koerper, vielweniger durch eine Fackel, sondern durch sich selbst gesehen wird, wann schon ein Blinder es nicht begreifen kann. Und zwar kann die Sonne keinen Blinden sehend machen; aber das Wort Gottes hat sogar die Kraft dasz es die Blinden sehend machet.<sup>20</sup>

The above citation epitomizes two of Bengel's most characteristic emphases. One is his conviction that no man will recognize and appreciate the authority of the Bible until the Spirit of God Himself, acting through the message of Scripture, has convinced him of the Bible's truth. The second is his contention that the Bible fulfills its intended function only among those upon whom God has bestowed his salvation. The unregenerate may indeed be stirred by whatever aesthetical, moral, or metaphysical values he discerns in the literature of the Bible, but he shall never perceive its divine dimension nor appropriate its soteriological benefits so long as his mind is darkened.

Such assertions serve to introduce Bengel's conception of the proper function of Scripture. There can be no question but that in regard to this matter he viewed the Bible as the only and all-sufficient source and norm for

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<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Rohnert, Wilhelm, Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen kirche, (Braunschweig: Hellmuth Wollermann, 1902), p. 98.



Christian doctrine and ethic,<sup>21</sup> as his words testify:

Alles, was der grosze Gott in seinem Wort uns vorlegt, ist etwas fuer unsern Glauben, im Wichtigern und Geringern, im Geistlichen und Leiblichen, es mag eine Sache selbst oder die Umstaende des Orts, der Zeit, der Art und Weise betreffen. Der Unglaube klaubt heraus, was ihm ansteht, und das Uebrige wirft er weg, auch unter dem besten Schein.<sup>22</sup>

But what is equally significant is his emphasis upon the fact that the Scriptures function as a means through which God himself acts upon man. The history of salvation recorded in the Scriptures is thus a saving history, for its portrayal of the glorious past of God's gracious activity in effect provides a means whereby God becomes contemporary and acts to offer and establish his salvation. In Bengel's words:

Ohne die Schrift wuerden wir heut zu Tage schwerlich mehr wissen, dasz Gott seinen Willen den Menschen kund gethan, und dasz der sohn Gottes einmal auf Erden gewandelt habe. Die Schrift aber ist es, die uns unterweisen kann zur Seligkeit durch den Glauben in Christo Jesu.<sup>23</sup>

In explanation of the above, Bengel compares the value of the Bible for the Church with that of the Articles of Incorporation for a Corporation. Without the Bible, the Church would have no valid existence; but where an organized congregation grounds itself firmly on the Bible, there the

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<sup>21</sup>Dorner, op. cit., p. 653.

<sup>22</sup>Bengel, J. A., Erklärte Offenbarung, (Stuttgart: Johann Christoph Erhard, 1740), p. 1065.

<sup>23</sup>Bengel, J. A., Das Neue Testament zum Wachsthum in der Gnade und Erkenntniss des Herrn Jesu Christ, nach dem revidirten Grundtext übersetzt und mit dienlichen Anmerkungen begleitet, (Stuttgart, 1753), p. IV.



Church is virulent:

Die Schrift erhaelt die Kirche; die Kirche bewacht die Schrift. Wenn die Kirche blueht, steht die Schrift in Ehren, und kraenkelt jene, so leidet auch diese mit; beyde theilen also im Glueck und im Unglueck ihr Schicksal, und der jedesmaligen Verfassung der Kirche entspricht ihre jedesmalige Behandlung.<sup>24</sup>

It must be stressed in summation that the most distinctive hallmark of Bengel's theology is his prevailing emphasis upon the value of the Bible. In the words of Paul Zeller, Bengel regarded the Scriptures as

die Sonne, von welcher alles Licht ausgeht, die alleinige Richtschnur fuer seine theologischen Gedanken. Wie er auch um die sprachlich-exegetische Seite der Schriftforschung sich bedeutende Verdienst erworben hat, so erscheint er vor allem wichtig durch seinen Versuch zur Errichtung einer einheitlichen christlichen Weltanschauung auf Grund der in ihren tiefsten Grundgedanken erfaszten goettlichen Offenbarung in der heiligen Schrift. Das Wort der Schrift enthaelt ihm Lehre und Licht ueber alle Fragen der Zeit und Ewigkeit.<sup>25</sup>

A second major distinguishing mark of Bengel's position is his use of the elements of sacred history as recorded in the Bible. As will be remembered, he gave particular attention to sacred history, holding that the record of God's kingdom activity constitutes the more significant part of the Biblical narrative and that the revelation of God's truth is especially apparent in this record. Such

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<sup>24</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 404.

<sup>25</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 19.



premises suggest a theology

die durch dauernde Zusammenfassung historischer, exegetischer, und dogmatischer Arbeit das Gefuehl eines einzigen Systems aufbaut und mit diesem System eine nachbildende Darstellung des offenbarungsgeschichtlichen Werdens selbst von der Schoepfung bis zum endgueltigen Durchbruch des Gottesreiches geben will.<sup>26</sup>

Hence, Bengel may be seen as providing the building-blocks for the type of theology which would accentuate primarily the significant events recorded in the Bible and which would seek to utilize the best fruits of the historic, exegetical, and dogmatical disciplines in explicating the soteriological value of these events.

This is to say, in the first place, that he regarded those elements in the Biblical narrative which delineated the history of God's kingdom activity as being of paramount importance. He admitted, of course, that those sections of the Scriptures which convey doctrinal instruction or ethical injunctions serve also to reveal the wisdom and purposes of God; yet these, he is convinced, do not present so distinctive a revelation as does the record of sacred history. Where, he asks in effect, does the Bible reveal with more clarity the nature and activity of God than in its narration of the mighty deeds of God, and especially in its portrayal of God's activity in Christ Jesus. He is certain that such portions of the Biblical message constitute "die

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<sup>26</sup>Weth, op. cit., pp. 5-6.



unvergleichliche Nachricht von der göttlichen Oekonomie bei dem menschlichen Geschlecht vom Anfang bis zum Ende aller Dinge."<sup>27</sup>

A survey of Bengel's writings will indicate also that he was convinced that the biblical history of salvation was charged with an especial efficacy in that it functioned as a type of saving history. Although he freely granted that those sections of the Bible which presented the truth of God in a conceptualized manner were valuable, he insisted that the concrete record of God's saving activity was much more efficacious.<sup>28</sup>

He in fact implies that the faith which is based merely upon the didactic portions of Scripture is less secure than is that which is founded also upon the record of saving history. For sacred history does more than instruct; it functions also as a means for the edification of the heart. From it the believer will learn of the majestic nature of God and of those unthinkably mighty deeds of God which provide for his creation, salvation, and glorification; but even more, through the record of God's "Gesamthaushaltung," the believer is confirmed in his faith.<sup>29</sup>

Should one then ask for the most decisive theme in all of Bengel's writings, he would find it in his assertion

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<sup>27</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>28</sup>Bengel, Ordo Temporum, chp. 8, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 186.



that the record of sacred history constitutes an especially significant revelation of God and is of especial value for the believer. Here is truly a clarion-call which sounds clearly above all the multiformed diversification of Bengel's work.

Several important emphases are integrally related to the above normative principle. In the first place, Bengel's prevailing concern for explicating the time-line revealed in Scriptures served to turn his attention away from the material aspects of theology to the formal ones. This is to say that in his work the principle of Sola Scriptura is given tacit prominence. His was a theology of Schrifterkenntnis in contrast to one of strict Dogmatismus. Motivated as he was by his interest in capturing the "lebendigen Realitäten" and in delineating the Ordo Temporum of the Bible, he bequeathed in splendid manner the requisites for a new system of dogmatics without however explicitly attempting to construct such a system.<sup>30</sup>

In a time when theologians commonly spent their energies in the construction of systems of dogmatics, this was obviously a new departure. Speaking of Bengel's position in this respect, Goltz writes:

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.



Er legte keinen werth darauf, dasz man auf diesen Grund ein dogmatisches System aufbauen könne, sondern vielmehr darauf, dasz der Begriff der Haushaltung Gottes thatsächlich der die ganze Schrift beherrschende und zu einem einheitlichen ganzen verbindende Grundgedanke sei.<sup>31</sup>

Bengel's emphasis upon Heilsgeschichte in addition carries with it a unique view of the ontological structure of revealed reality. It will be remembered that he had seen the "Grundrealitäten" of God hidden within the literal passages of the Bible. In similar measure, it appeared to him as though the realm of creation was in effect the manifestation of an other-worldly realm of reality. Whatever was tangible in the visible sphere was not only a reality having its own intrinsic structure, but was likewise the expression of a corresponding heavenly reality. He explains himself as follows:

Aus dem Unsichtbaren entspringt das, was im Sichtbaren geschehen soll, aber wenn es geschehen ist, so fließt es wieder in das Unsichtbare hin. Das Unsichtbare ist weit eitler und wichtiger, aber in das Sichtbare können wir Erdengäste uns leichter finden und durch dieses steigen wir zu jenem auf.<sup>32</sup>

Here once again his interpretation of the blood of Christ will serve to clarify his views. He explains that the blood of Christ is indeed a tangible substance, as real as was the incarnation; yet simultaneously, it is the

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<sup>31</sup>Goltz, op. cit., p. 473.

<sup>32</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 63.



expression of the heavenly and soteriologically efficacious blood of redemption.<sup>33</sup>

So likewise he understood the record of God's kingdom activity as portraying actual events in history as well as manifesting the supra-historical plan of God. To him, the realm of the other-worldly was of primary significance and the realm of this world of secondary worth. Yet because both are brought into juxtaposition in the Bible and in the incarnation, the tangible truth of doctrine and the observable record of history must be regarded as significant and salutary in themselves. In brief:

Die himmlische Welt mit ihren unsichtbaren Realitäten trat lebendig in das Bewusstsein. Das Auge des Glaubens werde von der irdischen Kirche als einer Anstalt der Frömmigkeit zum Seligwerden auf das Königreich Gottes gerichtet, das himmlischen Ursprungs, himmlischer Kraft, und himmlischen Zieles ist und sich weit über den Gesichtskreis dieser Erdenwelt ausdehnt.<sup>34</sup>

There is obviously much of significance in such a pattern of ontology. It meant, for example, that Bengel refused to recognize a disjuncture between the realms of spirit and body, of idea and substance. Man is a living soul, he asserted, and as such belongs both to this realm and to the unseen one; history is observable, yet underlying it are the issues of eternity; and the Bible is a book, yet also the message of the eternal God. Hence Bengel

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Goltz, op. cit., p. 479.



sees all earthly existence as being within the framework of God's eternal economy and as deriving its meaning from God's realm.

Secondly, it must be mentioned that such a scheme of ontology implied a structure of theology quite different from that which the orthodox systematians in that day had built. The dogmatians of Bengel's time were influenced, unwittingly perhaps, by the principles of nominalism.<sup>35</sup> Their method of dividing the facts of dogmatics into loci and of developing each such subject into a self-contained entity tended to minimize the coherence and organic unity of Scripture truth and to emphasize individual facts and beings. Bengel perceived in such a procedure a refusal to recognize the fact of the "Gesamthaushaltung" of God as portrayed in the Bible. His tenets, together with their implied ontology, would understandably give growth to a type of systematic theology which would weave the "Grundbegriffe" of Scripture into a unified and organic system, in preference to the multiformed distinctions and the detailed definitions of the loci method.

A third and final tendency derived from Bengel's ontology is his emphasis of the cosmological aspects of revealed truth. In common with the Lutheran theologians of his time, he did of course stress the soteriological and the

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<sup>35</sup>Dorner, op. cit., p. 651.



anthropological aspects of the Biblical message, as may be seen from his cherishing of the doctrine of justification by faith. Yet he stresses even more emphatically the Biblical portrayal of God's cosmological activity. In so doing, he gave expression once again of his conviction that the tangible world is encompassed by the spiritual rule of God and that God's "Gesamthaushaltung" influences all times and all places.

An additional characteristic of Bengel's position is his prevailing preference for the concrete aspects of Biblical theology over the conceptual ones. His very emphasis upon the "Grundthatsachen" of the Scriptures suggests such an approach, and an analysis of his writings proves that this was indeed the case. As already noted, Bengel seemed convinced that sacred truth is best revealed in concrete forms, rather than in conceptual ones, and moreover that faith finds its firmest footing not in the concepts of revealed truth, but rather in the revealed record of the mighty deeds of God. He went on to say that concepts appeal primarily to the intellect whereas concrete events constitute a challenge to one's whole being.<sup>36</sup>

It is worthwhile to note several areas in which his emphasis of the concrete aspects of theology is especially apparent. His treatment of the doctrine of God may be cited

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<sup>36</sup>Goltz, op. cit., p. 478.



as a beginning case in point. His procedure here is to consider the reality of God without using any metaphysical abstractions. Instead, he directs attention to the primary activities of God and seeks to derive from this a description of the nature of God. He claims, in fact, that to introduce the premises and procedures of metaphysics in doctrinal matters and to turn concrete facts into conceptualized ideas is invalid.<sup>37</sup>

Bengel's treatment of Christology serves also as an illustration of his propensity for stressing the concrete aspects of theology. It might indeed be said that one of the elements most often stressed in the writings of Bengel is that of the value of Christ's human nature. In contrast to those of his day who dwelt especially upon the supra-historical and metaphysical aspects of Christology, he affirmed the significance of the Savior's human nature and earthly career. He regards it as "eine Übertriebene Redensart, dasz Jesus vom ersten Moment seiner Empfängnisz zur Rechten Gottes gesessen habe."<sup>38</sup> This capacity on the part of Christ should more appropriately be referred to the Ascension, and the significance of the Incarnation must not be confused with that of the Ascension.

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<sup>37</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>38</sup>Quoted in Wächter, Oskar, J. A. Bengel's Lebensabriss, (Stuttgart, [sic], 1865), p. 388.



Moreover, Bengel focused much more upon the value of the active obedience of Christ than did the dogmaticians of that period.<sup>39</sup> The historic career of Christ he regarded as being of such supreme importance that at times his Christology borders on adoptionism.

A final indication of Bengel's taste for concretes may be found in his type of sermonizing. He seems to have studiously avoided preaching doctrinaire and didactic sermons. In his pulpit work he gave much more attention to an analysis and application of sacred history than to a consideration and clarification of doctrine.<sup>40</sup> His ideal was to avoid stringencies of form in favor of effectiveness of content, and as material for the latter, he relied heavily upon the materials afforded by Biblical history. It may in fact be said that he regarded both his doctrinal dissertations and his pulpit work as vehicles for the communication of the concrete realities of Scripture.

One final unique characteristic of Bengel's position should be cited - this the prominence which he gives to Eschatology. His theological tendency and his hermeneutical principles both were such as to lead naturally into a consideration of this area. His interest in the chronological development of sacred history implied that the last

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 85.



things are to be given especial attention, and in like manner, his high regard for the prophetic and apocalyptic portions of the Bible gave promise that his expository work would often move within the orbit of Eschatology.<sup>41</sup>

The systems constructed by the dogmaticians of the Orthodox period did of course devote some consideration to the field, yet since the spokesmen of that group were engaged more in the defense and exposition of other doctrines, they tended to treat Eschatology as little more than a final appendage to their corpus doctrinae.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the early Pietists gave much consideration to this field, yet often at the expense of sane exegesis and in violation of the analogy of faith, as is evidenced by the apocalypticism and millennialism which were prevalent in certain of their groups. The theologians of the Enlightenment were at the same time teaching a secularized eschatology, declaring that the traditional view of the future was rationally untenable and promising the advent of utopian and halcyon days through the ingenuity of men and the proper ordering of society.

Bengel stood in contrast to all the above tendencies. In the first instance, he emphasized the significance of eschatology, both for the cosmos and for the individual, in a manner far surpassing that of the Orthodox party. Next,

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<sup>41</sup>Althaus, Paul, Die Letzten Dinge, (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1949), p. 259.

<sup>42</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 16.



while the fact that he shared, to some degree at least, the chiliasm and apocalypticism of the Pietists can neither be denied nor excused, it must nevertheless be said that he took seriously, and wanted to faithfully adhere to, the views of eschatology as enunciated by the Orthodox Lutherans.<sup>43</sup> And finally, in contrast to the prophets of a secularized New Jerusalem, Bengel firmly maintained that as the end approaches, the old aeon will progressively worsen, in spite of the efforts of men to the contrary, until finally on the Last Day it shall be subjected to the righteous judgment of God.<sup>44</sup>

Those who dismiss Bengel's Eschatology with the curt observation that he was a chiliast who predicted the end of the world as occurring in 1836 fail to rightly appraise his role in the development of Christendom's eschatological consciousness. Wrong though he was in attempting to fix the date of the second coming and in teaching a type of millennialism, he nonetheless was among the first in modern times to stress the significance of Eschatology for the Church's faith and work. When viewed in the context of his total theology, his eschatological views are seen to consist of more than apocalyptic prognostications. His basic assumption was that the Last Things would be nothing more nor less than

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<sup>43</sup>Bengel, Ordo Temporum, p. 256.

<sup>44</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 337.



the final fulfillment of God's inviolate promises and the ultimate consummation of His sovereign kingdom activity. The parousia shall then be the final realization of all what God has intended and begun, the conclusion of all in a manner consonant with His nature and His previously accomplished activity.

Bengel held that only such an expectation of the end as was rooted in an understanding of God's activity in the history of Israel, in the career of Christ, and in the total history of the Church, was valid.<sup>45</sup> Should the believer ground his hope upon these bases, he will assuredly discover that the future shall provide a continuation of the same gracious activity of God as that which already filled the past and informs the present. Bengel, in fact, said that whoever holds to such a hope would avoid fruitless speculation concerning the future, since it should be evident to such an one that God shall provide such things as will surpass all understanding, and that therefore a concerned probing into the future is unnecessary.<sup>46</sup>

Such then was Bengel's depiction of the primary significance of Eschatology for the individual believer. His treatment of this was well-received by his countrymen and served to give impetus to a consideration of the unique

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<sup>45</sup>Bengel, Ordo Temporum, p. 256-264.

<sup>46</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 337.



nature and value of the Christian hope.<sup>47</sup>

One notes also how in his description of the Last Things he delineates, in implicit form at least, a unique philosophy of history. Briefly, he was convinced that history was being inevitably drawn to a final goal by God's sovereign activity. To be certain, he at times does suggest that the history is governed by the law of causation - not in that historic occurrences are nothing more than the consequences of the haphazard movements of their antecedents, but rather in that temporal events occur through the providential influence of God who intervenes in history to shape it according to his purposes.<sup>48</sup> It must be stressed, in this connection, that Bengel was careful not to depict God's governance as operating in a deterministic manner. He sought to preserve the fact of the freedom of secondary agents, temporal and limited though this be, by teaching that God's providential rule embraces all historic existences and occurrences without however occasioning the aberrations of evil and sin.<sup>49</sup>

Although he did stress the fact that historic progression is caused by the influence of God, Bengel emphasized much more the fact that the cosmos and its history is being

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>This concept of history is especially evident in Ordo Temporum, p. 256-264.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.



drawn to the time of the final completion of God's will. This view is clarified by his depiction of history as constituting an arena within which two radically-opposed principalities vie with each other - the one being the power of the old aeon, and the second that of God's kingdom. The resolution of the contest he saw as already having been determined, for although the warfare continues, the enemy has already suffered defeat at the hands of Christ. There remains however the public vindication of the victory; to this final crisis, God is drawing all history. Such a view of history, as already noted, is very evidently teleological in essence, since it is informed by the conviction that the end-purpose of history is already determined and that all historic processes are inevitably being drawn to this goal.<sup>50</sup>

Within the framework of such a view of history there appear certain points in Bengel's thought which deserve mention. In the first place, he was certain that a perfect ordering of society or of natural phenomena would be impossible within the context of history. The very fact of sin's existence makes it impossible for history to ever evolve to a perfect form. He consequently gave short shrift to the metaphysics of progress and the utopianism which the Rationalists were propounding.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 295 f.



Bengel moreover strongly affirms the reality of daemonic forces in history. He writes that there are satanic forces abroad, set in pitched opposition against God, joined in alliance with the fleshly nature of men, and infiltrating the world with the spirit of godlessness.<sup>52</sup> He is convinced that when the Christian neglects or doubts the doctrine of Satan, he is already a pawn of the satanic powers.<sup>53</sup>

Bengel's view of history however does more than to accentuate the real and potential corruption of society. It stresses even more prominently the sufficiency of God in guiding His program to completion. One notes that Bengel regards the Incarnation as epitomizing God's activity in history and as consequently constituting the very center of history. For in the redemptive work of Christ, there is on the one hand the fulfillment of all of God's previous activity in the world, and on the other the ratification of all which is yet to be done. The point is well illustrated by Bengel's assertion that through Christ the believer possesses a present victory over the foe as well as the hope of a future deliverance, yet to be fulfilled.<sup>54</sup> This is to say also that history lies both under the Law and Gospel. Whatever in history is at cross-purposes with the will of

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<sup>52</sup>Bengel, Ordo Temporum, p. 256-264.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.



God is under the Law and shall surely be brought to nought; on the other hand, where the Gospel has taken effect in history, there the eternal rule of God has already become an actual, though not a fulfilled, reality.<sup>55</sup>

All the above emphases are evident in Bengel's treatment of Eschatology. In view of them, there can then be no question but that Eschatology was one of the most prominent elements in the entire scope of Bengel's theology. The area was obviously uppermost in his mind, and his treatment of it is scattered throughout a major portion of his writings.

Such then are the primary characteristics of Bengel's theological tendency. It remains for us now to compare his position with those occupied by the major schools of theology extant in his time. This involves a consideration of Bengel's relationship to the respective tendencies of Orthodoxy, Pietism, and rationalism.

It has already become obvious that Bengel's tendency contrasted in certain significant respects from that of eighteenth century Lutheran Orthodoxy; this fact shall now become even more apparent. One will do well to remember that the period of Orthodoxy in the Lutheran Church had already passed its zenith by the time of Bengel.<sup>56</sup> The movement had come to life in the mid-sixteenth century and

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Hermelink, Heinrich, Geschichte der Evangelischen Kirche in Württemberg, (Stuttgart: Rainer Wunderlich Verlag, 1949), p. 156 f.



had experienced its golden age during the early seventeenth, when through the genius of such men as Gerhard, Quenstedt, and Calov, the faith of Lutheranism was expanded into well-defined systems which treated the full breadth of doctrinal concern and which dealt with each doctrine with an amazing perspicuity and thoroughness. By the eighteenth century, however, Orthodoxy had in many areas fallen into disrepute. Characterized now by a rigid dogmaticism and a predisposition for polemic, it had lost much of the vitality of its heritage and was being accused of equating Christianity with intellectual erudition.<sup>57</sup>

At the same time, the movements of Pietism and Rationalism, both of which had been formed in part at least within the matrix of Orthodoxy, were assailing the very foundations of Orthodoxy. Pietism, certain that the Orthodox theologians had informed Biblical theology with Aristotelian metaphysics, and convinced that it was failing to communicate the essential message of Christianity, sought to revise Orthodoxy in such a manner as to render it more consonant with an axiology of ethics.<sup>58</sup> Rationalism, on the other hand, regarded the supernaturalism of Orthodoxy as being contrary to the precepts of idealistic philosophy, and

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<sup>57</sup>Weber, Hans Emil, Reformation, Orthodoxie und Rationalismus, Zweiter Teil, (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1951), p. 49 passim.

<sup>58</sup>Luthardt, C. E., Kompendium der Dogmatik, (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1900), p. 56.



consequently sought to replace its principles with the religion of reason.<sup>59</sup>

Where then did Bengel stand in relation to all these developments? His writings evidence that he viewed the heritage of Orthodoxy with appreciation, yet that he sought to remedy whatever he regarded as detrimental in this movement. He often praised the early leaders of Lutheran Orthodoxy for their contributions in defending and defining the faith, and upon occasion referred to their views as criteria usable in the resolution of issues under question.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, he spoke critically of the Orthodox party as it was constituted in his day. He writes, for example, that this movement appears to have veered from its moorings in Scripture. He sees its spokesmen as being guilty of superimposing the method and, to a limited extent, the content of Aristotelian philosophy upon the message of Scripture.<sup>61</sup> In addition, he regarded as questionable Orthodoxy's preference for the loci method of treating doctrine, holding that this procedure in effect robs Biblical doctrine of its unity.<sup>62</sup> Thirdly, he criticizes Orthodoxy for having lost the vitality and relevance of the Biblical

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<sup>59</sup>Pelikan, Jaroslav, From Luther to Kierkegaard, (St. Louis; Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 76 passim.

<sup>60</sup>Bengel had in fact made plans for compiling a Compendium of Doctrines, cf. Burk, op. cit., p. 402.

<sup>61</sup>Goltz, op. cit., p. 462.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.



message. It seemed to him that their spokesmen treated theology as a discipline for esoteric discussion rather than as a resource for Christian living; in similar measure, he regarded their sermons as being devoid of life and meaning, since these, in his opinion, were more akin to scholarly discourses than to apostolic messages.<sup>63</sup>

Besides being displeased with the above elements, Bengel differed decisively from Orthodoxy in at least three fundamental points. One such area of contrast has to do with God's mode of revelation. Bengel agreed with Orthodoxy in regarding the Scriptures as the special revelation of God, but disagreed with it over the question of whether this revelation was conditioned by historic factors. Orthodoxy did not allow for any view which held that the meaning of a Biblical passage was contingent in part upon the relative position of the passage in the full account of revealed truth.<sup>64</sup> For the Orthodox theologian, the passages in the Old Testament which pertain to a certain doctrine are to be regarded as being of equal worth as those in the New Testament which refer to the same doctrine.<sup>65</sup> Bengel in contradistinction was convinced that God spoke through the Scriptures in such a manner that His message was clarified with each successive utterance. In other words, revelation

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<sup>63</sup>Wächter, op. cit., p. 369.

<sup>64</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid. .



is a historic process, and he who would understand the Scriptures in a manner appropriate to its nature should remember that the passages which appear early in the process of revelation must be interpreted in the light of those which appear later.<sup>66</sup>

Related to the above is a difference in the respective views of Orthodoxy and Bengel pertaining to natural revelation. Whereas Orthodoxy saw in the structure of the created order and the conscience of man the primary forms of natural revelation, Bengel held that history constitutes an equally significant area of natural revelation.<sup>67</sup> He reasoned that if God reveals himself in an especially clear and normative manner through sacred history, it follows as a subsidiary corollary that He likewise utilizes secular history to convey intimations of His truth. With this emphasis, a new principle makes its appearance in the history of Protestant thought. It is true that Luther had already suggested history as a larvae Dei, yet it remained for Bengel to explicate the implications of this principle.<sup>68</sup>

A second major area within which Bengel's tendency contrasts with that of Orthodoxy's may be seen in his answer to the question of what constitutes the material principle of theology. Lutheranism had traditionally viewed the

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.



article of Justification by Faith as the epitome, as well as the criterion, of all other doctrines. It goes without saying that Bengel also valued this article above all others. Yet it must be said that his emphasis upon the Gesamthaushaltung Gottes is equally prominent in his writings. The principle of the sovereignty of God is therefore given as much weight in his thinking as is that of justification by faith.<sup>69</sup> In fact, he strives to correlate the two by retaining the emphasis upon the soteriological activity of God and the corresponding areas of hamartology and anthropology, and by relating to this complex an emphasis upon the sovereign activity of God and upon cosmology.<sup>70</sup> Hence it appears that Bengel in effect harmonized the respective material principles of Lutheranism and Calvinism.

In the third instance, Bengel's attitude regarding the Symbols of the Lutheran Church serves to differentiate him from the Orthodox group. That he knew and respected the Lutheran Confessions is obvious from his writings; yet it is equally obvious that his confessional principle is quite different from that of the Orthodox theologians. These subscribed to the Lutheran Confessions with an explicit loyalty, holding that these were faithful expositions of the doctrine of Scriptures with reference to all the points

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<sup>69</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 15-16.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.



to which they were addressed. Bengel, on the other hand, regarded it as unnecessary and unwarranted to subscribe to every detail of the Confessions. He felt it unwise to claim that the elements of Biblical exegesis found in the Confessions were entirely above criticism, writing that "Man müsse die Diener der Kirche nicht zu allen particularibus in iis contentis, exegesi, u.s.w. zwingenwollen."<sup>71</sup> He moreover writes that to give unconditional subscription to the Symbols is to blind oneself to the fact that these may contain errors of history or even of doctrine.<sup>72</sup> He recommends that one's confessional loyalty be as follows: "Man begehret weiter nichts, als dasz man die Haupt-thesen, nicht die Ausführung, nicht den Beweis, nicht die exegesis glaube, annehme, und unterschreibe."<sup>73</sup>

Attitudes identical to these had of course already been expressed by such men as Spener and Francke. What is unique, however, in Bengel's view is his belief that the Lutheran Symbols are valuable not so much as positive norms, but rather as negative criteria for the theologian. The confessions, he held, primarily serve "als ein Zeugnis darüber, dasz keiner der dar in verworfenen Ketzereien zugethan sei."<sup>74</sup> His understanding of Article XVII of the

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<sup>71</sup>Hermelink, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ritschl, Albrecht, Geschichte des Pietismus, III, (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1886), p. 71.



Augsburg Confession may be cited as an illustration of the above opinion. He holds that this article serves more as a warning "dasz man nicht die wiederbringung lehren solle" than as a definition of the Lutheran position regarding Eschatology.<sup>75</sup> According to such a view, one must find the chief significance of the confessions in the fact that they define which positions a valid theology must avoid. Were one to ask Bengel where the affirmative patterns for a theological system may be found, his answer would be to the effect that these are clearly enunciated in the message of Scripture itself.

Closely related to the above is the fact that Bengel also entertained a rather critical attitude over against the discipline of systematic theology. As has been noted, he tended to minimize the importance of dogmatics, arguing that the emphasis accorded it should rather be focused upon the exegetical study of the Bible. He similarly decried what he regarded as an attempt on the part of the Orthodox scholars to define the imponderable verities of God's truth after the fashion of philosophers. He was certain that such a procedure in effect divested the truth of God of its intrinsic mystery.<sup>76</sup> He feared also that the theologian who sought to explain the mysteries of Scripture according to

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Dorner, op. cit., p. 650.



the categories of metaphysics was guilty of substituting the thought of men for the Word of God.<sup>77</sup>

An examination of Bengel's treatment of certain doctrines will indicate that he himself sought to carry out the above principles. In his discussion of the Sacrament of Baptism, one notes him refusing to state in detail what benefits there accrue from this sacrament to each of its recipients. He writes that Baptism does most certainly convey, grant, and seal the grace of God to the salvation of the recipient; yet "was aber in eigentlich und zwar nach eines Jeden Empfänglichkeit vorgehe, sei uns impenetrabel."<sup>78</sup>

The same attitude is evidenced in his treatment of the Sacrament of the Altar. Bengel shares the view of Lutheranism in saying that Christ truly offers His real body and blood through the means of the consecrated bread and wine. He, however, hesitates to explain the mode of Christ's presence in the Sacrament. He holds that one need not define the precise manner in which Christ inheres in the elements, and that it is sufficient to simply state that He is present in, with, and under the form of bread and wine. The Bible after all nowhere explains the mystery of the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, hence it is not incumbent upon the Church to construct metaphysical

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.



explanations of this reality.<sup>79</sup>

In speaking of the Sacrament of the Altar, Bengel also denied the tenet of manducatio impii. Although the Orthodox dogmaticians claimed Scriptural warrant for this teaching, Bengel insists that it is derived ex zelo contra Reformatos rather than from the Bible. Hence he writes:

Sive accipiunt impii corpus et sanguinem Domini, sive non accipiunt, ipsa praesentia realis eadem est. Res potest declarari ex ratione verbi divini. Coelestia bona appellant imo pulsant etiam incapaces. Ignis appropinquat aquae per verissimam praesentiam, quae inde strepit, nec tamen igni miscetur; quid, praesentia supposita accipiant actu et quam diu retineant, quis deniet? Cathecismus Lutheri agit ad fructu, qui utique fidem praesupponit, non de ipsa materia sacramenti.<sup>80</sup>

In summation, to say that the revelation of God reaches its summit in historic events rather than in conceptual truth, that the Bible is not so much "ein Spruchbuch oder ein Fundort dogmatischer Beweistellen" as "ein Geschichtsbericht," that the "Gesamthaushaltung Gottes" is a principle as significant as that of justification by faith, that personal faith finds its foundation not so much in pure doctrine as in the record of the mighty deeds of God, - is all to espouse a tendency distinct from that of Orthodoxy.

The question of Bengel's affinity with Pietism must next be examined. Is it adequate to characterize him, as do the histories of Christian thought, as essentially the leader of pietism in Suabia? Or shall one conclude that his position,

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<sup>79</sup>Wächter, op. cit., p. 388.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.



although in several respects showing great similarity to that of the Pietists, is nonetheless distinct from the one commonly held by the exponents of this movement? An examination of the matter will serve to indicate that the second is a more informed depiction.

That Bengel was influenced by Pietism and that he in turn shared many of its emphases, cannot be denied. It will be remembered that his theological training was permeated with the principles of Pietism. Reuchling and Hofstetter, the teachers most influential in shaping his mind, were both advocates of Spener's tendency, and the materials and methods in vogue among the Pietists were utilized at the schools where Bengel studied. Moreover, he had occasion to participate in Privatversammlungen and to visit personally with Francke at Halle.

It was therefore quite natural for him to exemplify certain of the tenets which characterized the position of the Pietists in his day. For example, his writings bear evidence that he agreed with the Pietists in holding that it was insufficient to regard Christianity as involving nothing more than doctrinal fidelity. He stressed, as had Spener and the Franckes, the importance also of moral rectitude for the Christian. Moreover, he followed Pietism in that he focused his concern more upon the practical and ethical implications of Biblical truth rather than upon its abstract and metaphysical aspects. It must also be said that his



desire to exalt the study of the Scriptures above the discussion of doctrines was inherited from the Pietists, as were certain of his exegetical principles, notably his subjectivistic principle of interpretation and his pre-occupation with the apocalyptic elements of the Bible. Nor can it be denied that his predisposition towards chiliasm was derived from his associations with the Pietists.<sup>81</sup> In fact, his characterization of the millenium was almost identical to the one already enunciated by Johann Spener.<sup>82</sup>

Although in the above areas Bengel shows a strong affinity for Pietism, it is evident that in other respects he differed significantly from the tendency of this group. The most prominent case in point illustrating this fact is afforded by his criticisms of the Moravian movement. Indeed, his Abrisz der sogenannten Brüdergemeine was a judgment not only of Zinzendorf's program, but also of certain emphases found in the program of Pietism as a whole.

The book questions, for example, whether it is valid to hold that a conscious experience of conversion and a life of disciplined morality are the especial criteria for determining the assurance of one's salvation, as the Pietists in general held.<sup>83</sup> Bengel reasons that to seek the certainty

<sup>81</sup>Althaus, Paul, Die Christliche Wahrheit, (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1949), p. 305.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 42.



of salvation in one's subjective experience is tantamount to a denial of the objective work of Christ. According to him, "Das wichtigste ist stets das Bewusstsein der Gnade in der man steht."<sup>84</sup>

The book likewise politely excoriates the conviction that the primary criterion for a true Christian is his moral rectitude. Morality is unquestionably desirable and even necessary, not as an end in itself, and especially not as a means to salvation, but rather as the evidence of one's regeneration. Even so, good works are never to be regarded as the infallible criteria of one's relationship to God, and this for two reasons: First, no good work is sufficient to merit favor from God, and second, such deeds as appear motivated by piety may in the sight of God be seen as the products of ulterior motives.<sup>85</sup> Bengel, in this connection, also criticizes the Moravians and certain others for invoking the authority of the Law more so than that of the Gospel in their attempts to provide a resurgence of morality. The Law, he claims is incapable of providing positive motivation, for God has designed it to function as a restraining authority; the Gospel, on the other hand, is the sole means whereby God assures the sinner of his salvation and motivates him to lead a godly life. Hence, in

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<sup>84</sup>Werner, Gottfried. "Zum 250. Geburtstage Joh. Albrecht Bengels," Kirchliche Zeitschrift, vol. 61 (August 1937), p. 450.

<sup>85</sup>Ritschl, op. cit., p. 461.



discrediting the opinion that subjective experience and moral rectitude are the criteria determining the certainty of one's salvation, Bengel repudiated one of the primary emphases of the Pietists of his day.

Moreover, in his polemic against the Moravians, as well as in other of his works, Bengel disavows the cultural defeatism and the obscurantism which he had come to detect among certain of the Pietists. Whereas it was common for men such as Spener to view society as a corrupted organism and to regard with skepticism any programs for improving the general welfare, Bengel preferred to place the best construction upon the social institutions of his homeland, and on numerous occasions gave his support to such movements as promised a betterment of the standards of life in Württemberg.<sup>86</sup>

He also regarded it as mandatory for Churchmen to be aware of new developments in the world of learning, as was evidenced by his inaugural address at Denkendorf in which he advocated the practices of intellectual honesty and vigilant evaluation of new developments in culture or science. It must have come somewhat as a surprise to the extreme Pietists when in the same address he stated that the study of great literature, secular though it may be, was helpful to the development of personality. One notes how in his

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 68.



later surveillance of new developments in the fields of mathematics and philosophy Bengel exemplified the very principles he had advocated. Here then, in his attempt to keep abreast of the developing tide of human thought, and to select from this such elements as might prove beneficial for his purposes, Bengel again indicates that he does not share completely the position of the Pietists.<sup>87</sup>

The same is evident in his conception of the nature and the function of the Church. There is no question but that Bengel regarded the organized Church and her function with a healthier attitude than did the Pietists. Instead of excoriating the territorial Churches for their worldliness and advocating that the pious ones separate themselves from those groups and organize themselves into private assemblies, he urges Christians to more fully integrate themselves in the fellowship of the organized congregations and to participate actively in their programs.<sup>88</sup>

Such an attitude on his part follows logically from his view regarding the essential nature of the Church. He follows the main themes of Lutheran ecclesiology in saying that the true Church is the assembly of all believers in Christ, and that wherever the doctrines of the Gospel are taught in truth and purity and the sacraments are

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>88</sup>Hermelink, op. cit., p. 227 f.



administered according to the command and promise of Christ, there a branch of the true Church exists. Her members might indeed manifest such attitudes and activities as are inconsistent with the essential nature of the Church, yet so long as the Gospel of forgiveness and life is offered and appropriated, it must be concluded that there a true Church exists. Bengel claimed that it was wiser to emphasize the fact of God's sufficiency in establishing and building the Church than that of the insufficiency of the members of the Church. In his words:

Unsere Kirche ist weit, weit nicht mehr die reine, aber doch die wahre. Denn man musz nicht darauf sehen, was durch Verschuldung der Menschen verderbt worden, sondern was Gott noch darinnen hat; wie es bei der Kirche der A. T. gewesen, da Israel bei allem Verderben dennoch Gottes Volk geblieben und geheissen hat. Warum? Gott hatte seine Sache, sein Feuer und Hand unter ihnen.<sup>89</sup>

It is significant also to note that Bengel regarded separatists with considerable disappointment. The Gospel, he asserted, should be infused into the Church service instead of merely being allowed to effervesce in the conventicle.<sup>90</sup> And as for the private gatherings of the separatists, he feared these were the expressions of an introverted and loveless Christianity. It was his conviction that these should forsake their cloistered meetings, return

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<sup>89</sup>Hauck, Wilhelm, Theologischer Jahresbericht, (Wiesbaden: Julius Niedner, 1870), p. 590.

<sup>90</sup>Drummond, op. cit., p. 67.



to faithful membership in the organized congregations, and meet "the world" on their own ground.<sup>91</sup>

Bengel did however endorse a certain type of Privatversammlung, namely, such an one as might function to promote the spirituality of a congregation. It will be remembered that he regularly conducted Sunday evening devotional programs in the parishes at Herbrechtingen. Evidence points also to the fact that his influence was primarily responsible for the framing of the famed Württembergische Generalreskript of 1743, which provided for the conducting of private "Erbauungsstunden" throughout his homeland, under such supervision, however, as would prevent these from developing into sectarian ecclesiolae.<sup>92</sup>

It should be mentioned in this connection that Bengel manifested a greater spirit of toleration for religious dissenters than was usual for theologians of his period. He wrote that all sectarians were to be tolerated, certainly because the law of charity demands this, but also because their very presence can function as a useful corrective for ecclesiastical laxity.<sup>93</sup> Largely due to Bengel's influence, the government of Württemberg adopted regulations pertaining

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Dorner, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.



to religious dissenters which were far in advance of the times.<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless, it is evident from Bengel's writings that the presence of sectarians was disturbing to him. According to him, the sects were not at all valid representations of the true Church, for by their very nature they were little more than the distorted projections of emphases which the major Church bodies had minimized.<sup>95</sup> He concludes that no sect can ever supplant the true Church, the vivum corpus, and that no sectarian shall ever enjoy the totality of those benefits which God bestows through the Church. It is therefore incumbent upon the territorial Churches to prevent and remedy such conditions as occasion the growth of sects.

One notes, in addition, that Bengel's position in regard to the question of the Church's relationship to its political context is quite different from that of the Pietists. He did, of course, follow them in criticizing the political order in his land for its neglect of justice and morality, and in questioning the propriety of any subjugation of the affairs of the Church to the coercion of the State. He writes that it is "einen faulen Fleck, dasz das Christenthum nach der Staatsraison eingerichtet werde."<sup>96</sup> Yet he refused

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<sup>94</sup>Werner, op. cit., p. 450.

<sup>95</sup>Dorner, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>96</sup>Werner, op. cit., p. 451.



to repudiate the role of responsible citizenship and to isolate the Church from any relationship to the State as the Pietists tended to do. To him, the ideal would be for the Church to exist as a free agency within the political order, enjoying unconditional freedom of assembly and activity, exercising the right of prophetic criticism over against all areas of the social structure, yet advocating and giving intelligent support through its membership to such governmental policies as would insure and advance the general welfare of all citizens.<sup>97</sup> Without question, such principles were surprisingly advanced for that day.

Bengel was not at all an extremist in his attitudes regarding the transformation of society, as was the radical wing of Pietism. He would far rather tolerate an inept leadership in government than advocate a revolution, as may be noted in his submission to the regency of Duke Eberhard Ludwig. He writes that the former circumstance would more easily provide for the transforming power of the Christian witness, whereas the second would be marked by such tumultuous change as to make possible conditions far worse than those which previously existed.<sup>98</sup> That such a conviction in part motivated him to accept his appointment to the Consistory of Württemberg is evident from the fact that he regarded this

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<sup>97</sup>Ritschl, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>98</sup>Werner, op. cit., p. 450.



position as providing a means whereby he might serve the best interests of both his Church and his State, and whereby he might effect such innovations as would make possible the ultimate establishment of an ideal relationship between the two.<sup>99</sup>

A view closely allied to the above is Bengel's attitude regarding the demeanor of the Christian in society as such. For the believer to lead a life of grim sobriety and somber abstinence from normal social intercourse, as the extreme Pietists advocated, was in error, Bengel held. He saw no potential threat in the common amusements and folkways of his countrymen, and wrote:

Mir ist ..... eine natürliche Fröhlichkeit noch erträglicher als die Traurigkeit eines ungebrochenen, unbussfertigen Herzens. Jene ist zwar ein unächttes Bild des seligen Gottes, diese aber das entschiedene Gegentheil. Manches wird auch für eine Sünde gehalten, was nichts als eine leere Ceremonie ist, und sogar manche eigentliche Ausbrüche der Sünde zurückhält. Solche Sachen nimmt man freilich nicht mit in den Himmel, doch machen sie einem auch keine besondere Schmerzen in der Busse, da der Mensch die Eitelkeit seines bisherigen Wandels erkennen lernt. Sie sind eben ein natürliches Ergebnisz des unbekehrten Zustandes eines Menschen, und fallen bey der Bekehrung von selbst weg. Man musz daher den Leuten nicht zuviel zumuthen, und ausgelassenes Tanzen und ähnliche Exzesse nicht mit Bitterkeit und allzugroszer Gesetzlichkeit zu hintertreiben suchen, überhaupt in dergleichen Dingen keine allgemeinen Regeln geben, sondern einen Jeden auf sein Gewissen weisen, und warnen, ja nichts zu thun, wobey er eine innerliche Unruhe und Bestrafung hat.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 110.



A final major area of contrast between Bengel and the Pietists pertains to the question of the validity of mysticism in the Christian's experience. It will be remembered that among the first formal studies undertaken by Bengel was one in which he sought to evaluate mysticism. Already at that time he came to suspect a purely intuitive approach to God which carried with it a neglecting of the fact of sin and the necessity of revelation. To claim that God may be perceived without the prior forgiveness of sins, is erroneous, he concluded, as is the claim that God may be experienced outside His Word. Later in his career, Bengel came to regard the searching for ecstatic and esoteric experiences, such as was common among the Moravians, as unwarranted. He accused the Zinzendorffians of attempting to identify themselves with Christ by means of forced, arbitrary, and exaggerated meditations upon the blood of atonement.<sup>101</sup> He is certain that such a procedure, besides tending to minimize the realities of sin and revelation, fosters an aberrant type of Christianity.<sup>102</sup>

In summation, it must be admitted that the above evidence forces one to the conclusion that it is improper to regard Bengel as simply a Pietist. For when one views his attitudes pertaining to the ground of certainty for

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<sup>101</sup>Hagenbach, K. R., Compendium of the History of Doctrines, II, (Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1852), p. 440.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.



personal salvation, to the position of the Church in its cultural context, and to the primacy of the Gospel in the life of a Christian, one must admit that in these points - as well as in others - Bengel deviated from the main tendency of the Pietists. The verdict of Dorner consequently stands:

Seine kerngesunde männliche Frömmigkeit war gleich weit entfernt von dem düsteren Ernst des späteren Pietismus, wie von der Weichheit und Gefühlseligkeit Zinzendorfs; vielmehr bildete den Grundzug seines Charakters die Vereinigung der Ehrfurcht vor Gottes heiliger Majestät, die in strengster Gewissenhaftigkeit allezeit als vor Gottes Angesicht und daher unerschrocken und frei Menschen und ihrem Tadel der Lob gegenüberstand, und ein kindliches-Vertrauens zu Gott, das frei von knechtischem Sinn und von menschlichen Schranken wie ein Sohn in den Schätzen des grossen Hauses Gottes .....<sup>103</sup>

Yet this is not to conclude that Bengel had no affinity with Pietism. It is rather that he sought to conserve the best features of this movement and incorporate these as integral components in his own tendency. Karl Barth, for example, evaluates Bengel's position in this regard as "einen nüchteren Pietismus."<sup>104</sup> Even more, it may be said that it was Bengel, more than anyone else, who moulded Pietism into the unique form in which it appeared in late eighteenth-

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<sup>103</sup>Dorner, op. cit., p. 649.

<sup>104</sup>Barth, K., Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert, (Zurich: A. G. Zollikon, 1947), p. 101.



century Suabia.<sup>105</sup>

It now remains for us to compare the position of Bengel with that of the Rationalists in his time. This movement, which had originated in the late seventeenth century as a perpetuation, on the one hand, of the untheonomic spirit of the Renaissance and as a protest, on the other, against the principles of Orthodoxy, was particularly nascent throughout Western Europe during the era of Bengel.<sup>106</sup>

In Germany, it was especially the philosophy of Christian Wolff which promoted the rationalistic tendency there.<sup>107</sup> Wolff, a contemporary of Bengel, attempted to supplant the influence of Franckian Pietism with that of Leibnitzian idealism at the University of Halle. For this he was summarily dismissed by the Pietists there, but to their dismay, was reinstated by decree of Frederick the Great, an event which prompted Voltaire to write "Socrates

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<sup>105</sup>Weth, *op. cit.*, p. 19 states: Die Württembergische Pietismus des 18. Jahrhunderts hat abseits von der Schultheologie der Universitäten, im engen Verkehr mit der Bibel, erfüllt und beunruhigt von der Gedankenwelt Böhmischer Theosophie und in ringender herausstellung seines eigenen Wesens gegenüber dem Halleschen und Zinzendorfschen Pietismus sich ausgebildet. Das gemeinsame grosse Thema, welches hier die Gemüter zur verkündigung und zum Kampfe bewegte, war das Reich Gottes, der Blick auf die Weite und Fülle seiner Taten und die brennende Hoffnung auf die "guldene Zeit" seiner vollendeten Herrscher-Herrlichkeit.

<sup>106</sup>MacGiffert, A. C., Protestant Thought Before Kant, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 247.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.



is on the throne, and truth reigns."<sup>108</sup> It was Wolff's desire to invoke the scientific method as the criterion for all areas of intellectual concern, and especially for the teaching of Christianity. Since in his view the attributes of clarity and rationality were the primary marks of truth, he concluded that whatever seemed contrary to reason in the doctrines of the Church was to be repudiated. Under the manipulations of his logic, theology was divested of its supernatural aspects and was refashioned into a system of ethical idealism.<sup>109</sup> Wolff nursed the hope that his views would rule over theology as exclusively as those of Orthodoxy had in the preceding generations.

Bengel vigorously resisted this movement, yet in certain of his emphases, as well as in various aspects of his methodology, he followed, unwittingly perhaps, the precedent of the Rationalists. His predilection for mathematical calculation, as well as his concern for historical studies, were both in part at least implanted in his mind by the Rationalists.<sup>110</sup> It should however be reiterated that in using the techniques incident to these fields, his purpose

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Kurtz, J. H., Text-Book of Church History, (Philadelphia: Nelson S. Quiney, 1881), p. 501.  
 Spittler, G. J., Grundriss der Geschichte der christlichen Kirche, (Göttingen: Vandenhöck und Ruprecht, 1812), p. 501.

<sup>110</sup> Barth, op. cit., p. 147.



was not at all that of revising Christianity so as to force it into agreement with the canons of the Enlightenment, but was rather that of defending the truth of Christianity through the utilization of the very criteria which were acknowledged as valid by the Rationalists.

In the second place, it is possible that Bengel's preoccupation with the ethical implications of Christianity was conditioned indirectly by Rationalism.<sup>111</sup> There is much in Bengel's writings which parallels the plea of the Rationalists to the effect that the various structures of society ought to be Christianized.<sup>112</sup> A close reading of his views in this regard however reveals that his depiction of both the motivation and the purpose of the Church's social action differs from that of Rationalism. According to him, the Christian witness in society is occasioned primarily by the power of the Holy Spirit, mediated through the means of grace, and secondarily by a concern for the welfare of the neighbor.<sup>113</sup> A social action motivated by a desire to fulfill the demands of a rationally-perceived natural law or to exhibit one's private sense of justice, appeared to him as a type of Pelagianism.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, he

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<sup>111</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 238.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.



entertained no hopes of constructing a perfect society through programs of moral action. It is, he held, quite naive to believe that the powers of reason are such as to promise the ultimate perfectibility of human society.<sup>115</sup>

Although Bengel did thus share certain techniques and emphases in common with the Rationalists, it cannot at all be said that he shared their position. He is sharply critical of the movement. He strikes out, for example, at their concept of ontology, claiming that the Rationalists have ruled out the possibility of the realm of the supernatural. This is to reduce existence to the unilateral level of tangible materialism and, even worse, to deny the existence and activity of a Personal God.<sup>116</sup>

Bengel in addition upbraids the Rationalists for holding that the rational capacity of man is both the key to and the criteria of all truth. He admits that reason has its proper field of utility, yet to claim that reason alone is capable of perceiving and interpreting all realms of reality seems to him to be folly. According to him:

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 60-61.



In den Stücken, wo die Vernunft ein Principium aufgibt: Mathematik, Natur- und Vernunft-Lehre, solle man der sogenannten neuen (Wolf'schen) Philosophie allen ihren Vorzug lassen, aber in andern Stücken musz die rechte Weise, mit göttlichen Dingen umzugehen, mit aller Sorgfalt verwahrt werden; damit sich die Vernunft nicht anmasze, da ein Principium oder eine Richtschnur zu setzen, wo sie nur ein Organon seyn kann.<sup>117</sup>

This is to say that in Bengel's opinion the ability of pure reason is limited to the examining and interpreting of tangible phenomena. Never is it possible for reason unaided to posit the facts of God, for unless God enlightens the mind of man and reveals Himself to man, no man can perceive His truth.<sup>118</sup> Bengel in this was obviously assailing the very foundation upon which the epistemological structure of Rationalism was reared.

It is evident then from the above comparison of Bengel's tendency with those of Orthodoxy, Pietism, and Rationalism, that it is inaccurate to simply identify him with any of these. There was almost no affinity between his position and that of the Rationalists; he stood much closer to Orthodoxy, but closest of all to the Pietists. Therefore, no other conclusion is accurate except to say that in Bengel a new tendency arose which sought, on the one hand, to abandon the errors and partialities of both Orthodoxy and Pietism, and, on the other, to unite the excellencies of

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<sup>117</sup>Burk, op. cit., p. 236-237.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.



both. In his writings one finds ample testimony to the effect that in him the conflict between Pietism and Orthodoxy was beginning to resolve itself and to point the way to a new constructive theology. In his work there was an attempted unification of conservatism with free investigation, of scholarship with piety, of penetration with clarity, all of which he synthesized with such effectiveness that a continuation of his tendency was guaranteed.<sup>119</sup>

So influential was Bengel's theology in Württemberg in the decades immediately following his death that the influx of Rationalism was all but forestalled there. Although whole sections of Protestantism elsewhere in Germany were severely affected by that movement, a resurgence of positive Christianity occurred in Württemberg. For example, at the very time when Halle was being transformed from a center of Pietism to one of Rationalism, the University of Tübingen experienced one of its most constructive periods,<sup>120</sup> this being largely due to the influence Bengel exerted upon the leading scholars there.<sup>121</sup> In fact, Wilhelm Rohnert states bluntly that Bengel was the last barrier preventing Rationalism from completely over-running Protestantism in Germany.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Kurtz, op. cit., p. 244.

<sup>120</sup>Goltz, op. cit., p. 478.

<sup>121</sup>Werner, op. cit., p. 450.

<sup>122</sup>Rohnert, W., op. cit., p. 99.



The reasons accounting for the fact that Bengel's influence was such as to forestall Rationalism are several, notable among them being the impetus he gave to a Biblically-informed Church life, but the most important of these was the fact that two theological movements eventually developed out of the matrix of his theology, both of which served to avert the influence of Rationalism in Württemberg during the eighteenth century.

A group of theologians in Württemberg took their position upon Bengel's principles in the years immediately after his death. For half a century they labored, in relative obscurity, to perpetuate and refine the implications of Bengel's theology. Then finally the group was bifurcated into two parties, each of which claimed that its teachings were sanctioned by the principles of Bengel.<sup>123</sup>

The first of these sought to emphasize especially the exegetical and historical aspects of Bengel's theology. Its proponents were of the opinion, as their master had been, that the exegetical disciplines constitute the epitome of all theological study. In addition, they held, in common with Bengel, that the record of sacred events recorded in the Scriptures constitute the normative principle for theology. The sermonizing of these men focused upon the events of sacred history more so than upon the didactic

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<sup>123</sup>Goltz, op. cit., p. 504.



portions of the Bible, and their teaching of doctrine tended to be more that of describing the significant events through which they believed God revealed his truth than that of defining the implications of a doctrinal proposition.<sup>124</sup>

The early representatives of this party are relatively unknown, largely because at the very time of their influence, the theology of Schleiermacher was monopolizing the attention of German Protestantism. The most prominent members of this group were the two Tübingen scholars, Reusz and Roos. Both were avowed disciples of Bengel and together did much toward refining his type of exegesis and his principle of Heilsgeschichte. The influence of these men, and consequently that of Bengel's, may be detected in the philological and exegetical work of such scholars as von Hoffman and Cremer, and in the prominence which the later Erlangen school gave to the Haushaltung Gottes.<sup>125</sup>

Alongside the first party, there grew a second one which drew from several of Bengel's emphases to construct a type of theosophical theology. The members of this group focused particularly upon Bengel's claim that the supramundane realm is prior and superior to the mundane and that certain literal

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Pelikan, Jaroslav, "In Memoriam: Joh. Albrecht Bengel," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXIII (November 1952), p. 792.



passages of the Bible might conceivably be the tangible expression of a whole system of unseen heavenly verities. Such emphases, together with certain others garnered from their own speculations, furnished these men with the materials for constructing a speculative theology.<sup>126</sup> One notes how the theosophists addressed themselves to two issues, both of which were more metaphysical than theological. The first was that of "der Uebergang vom Absoluten zum Endlichen," and the second that of the mutual interactions between the realm of spirit and matter. Although their conclusions varied greatly, one may discern common motifs underlying their differing views which give some unanimity to this group. It is apparent, in the first place, that the members of the second party were all vigorously opposed to Rationalism; and secondly, that they regarded the use of the Bible according to their canons as the best means for refuting this movement. They hoped, in short, to develop a unique type of Biblical theology which would supplant the empiricism and the positivism of the Rationalists.<sup>127</sup>

The foremost representative of the second party was F. Christian Oetinger (1702-1782).<sup>128</sup> Himself a pupil and personal friend of Bengel, Oetinger drew heavily from the

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<sup>126</sup>Goltz, op. cit., p. 496.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid.

<sup>128</sup>Pelikan, op. cit., p. 793.



theological principles of his teacher and wove these together with several aspects of Jakob Boehme's theosophy.<sup>129</sup> Oetinger was impressed particularly by Bengel's treatment of the significance of sacred history and by Boehme's interpretation of the meaning of the realm of nature. By the former he appears to have been convinced that in every historic event there occurs a manifestation of a suprahistorical order of reality, and by the latter that nature is primarily significant because it provides a symbolic expression of an eternal and suprasensory order of existence.<sup>130</sup> From such presuppositions he constructed a comprehensive "göttlichen Universalismus aller Wissenschaften," for the purpose not only of furthering the influence of Bengel, but also of refuting the "aufklärerischen Wissenschaftsidee," and the "pferdscheuen Idealismus" of the Enlightenment.<sup>131</sup> To these ends, he sought to indicate that

die unsichtbare Welt des Geistes nicht nur eine Welt der Gedanken und Ideale, sondern eine erfüllte und gestaltete Welt sei, deren Lebensformen sich nur unseren Sinnen entziehen, obwohl sie realer und erfüllter sind, als die der sinnlichen Welt, ja dieser als die verborgenen Kraft ihres Lebens zu Grunde liegen, und dasz die Herstellung einer geist-leiblichen Welt der Herrlichkeit der Endzweck der ganzen Weltentwicklung sei.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Weth, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>Goltz, op. cit., p. 496.

<sup>132</sup>Goltz, op. cit., p. 502.



So it was that the primary influence of Bengel was perpetuated through these two parties. Although a tracing of his continuing influence lies beyond the scope of the present investigation, it should be said that his theological views were carried on into the nineteenth century when the "Heilsgeschichtliche Schule" reiterated certain of his basic principles. This movement, which included such prominent German theologians as M. Fr. Roos, Tobias Beck, C. A. Crucius, and A. Auberlen, in effect repeated the hermeneutical principles of Bengel, as well as emphasized in common with him the view that the history of the saving activity of God is, even for the contemporary time, a saving history.<sup>133</sup>

It is likewise certain that the Erlangen theology of the late nineteenth century was fashioned in part at least out of the principles of Bengel. His view of ontology and his preference for the concretes of Scripture are evident in the ethics of Harless and the dogmatics of Thomasius. Moreover, the prince of the Erlangen exegetes, C. A. von Hoffman, paralleled certain of the exegetical procedures of Bengel, notably the use of a historico-grammatical type of textual study combined with a careful consideration of the text's immediate and general context, and followed also Bengel's tendency in accentuating the Heilsgeschichte of Scripture.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid.



One may cite even more recent theologians who perpetuated the influence of Bengel. Stilling in Baden, Blumhardt in Basel, Jaenicke in Berlin, Menken in Bremen, these all openly admit their indebtedness to Bengel, particularly to his exegetical procedure and to his accentuation of Heilsgeschichte.<sup>135</sup>

Nor has Bengel's influence ceased in the modern era. His Gnomon is still a standard reference for the technical exegete and his principles for textual criticism are yet informing the practice of this discipline today. Even more important is the fact that his principle of Heilsgeschichte is gaining an ever-increasing following, as is echoed in the following, written as recently as 1950 by George Ernest Wright:

..... the revision of our evaluational framework which has been proceeding so rapidly has left us less inclined to view the Old Testament primarily as a sourcebook for values and the evolution of ethical ideals. We are instead increasingly inclined to emphasize its nature as Heilsgeschichte, as the record of a proclamation of the great saving acts of God.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>Wright, George Ernest. "The Study of the Old Testament." In: Nash, Arnold S., Protestant Thought in the Twentieth Century, (New York: MacMillan Company, 1951), p. 45.



All this gives testimony that Bengel's deathbed prediction has indeed been fulfilled: "Ich werde eine Weile vergessen sein, aber wieder ins Gedächtniszkommen."<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup>Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

Hermelink, *op. cit.*, p. 230, states "So steht Bengel in der Geschichte der württembergischen Kirche als der Vermittler zwischen der reformatorisch-lutherischen Rechtfertigung durch den Glauben und einer pietistischen Erfahrungs- und Heiligungsfrömmigkeit, die mit ihrem Nebeneinander von mildem Luthertum und pietistischer Herzenserleuchtung den Charakter der württembergischen Kirche weithin in die Zukunft bestimmt hat. Er wirkt in Zeit und Zukunft durch die grosse Schar seiner Schüler, die durch ihn geformt, ihm als ihrem geistlichen Vater die Treue halten. Der bedeutendste unter ihnen, Oetinger, hat geurteilt: "Seinergleichen ist nicht in Württemberg, aber freilich in seiner Art. Der Herr kennt alle die Seinen; seine Heiligen rangiert Er, nicht wir."



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