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# The Unity of Scripture

By WALTER R. ROEHRS

[ED. NOTE: This article was originally prepared for and read to the laymen, teachers, and pastors of the Northern Illinois District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, assembled in convention at River Forest, Ill., June 1958.]

**T**HE unity of Scripture is an article of faith. This unity is also an objective fact that exists apart from faith and does not become a fact merely when I believe it (existentialist theology). But it is more than an arithmetic problem. It is not a mere unit sum at which we arrive by adding a number of given parts and fractions into a whole. This means that it is more than the addition of demonstrable facts and figures. Only he who is at one with God has eyes not only to see the fact but also to understand the purpose and to experience the unifying power of the Scriptural Word. By means of that Word the Holy Spirit has put together his fractured life and has brought healing integration to its disunity and conflicts, the fightings and fears within and without. He knows that there is no longer division and disunity between him and God, for "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). At peace with God, he can integrate everything that pulled his life apart and disturbed its unity into an harmonious whole that radiates from one single controlling focus, for he says: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Gal. 2:20)

Our children are taught early in life that one cannot add two sheep and two cows.

Incommensurables cannot be added. This is the predicament of unbelief. The various parts of Scripture are made up of such incongruous parts as to defy addition into a unit total. It is only in the higher arithmetic of faith that human sin + the grace of God in Christ Jesus = salvation. But this is the sum total of Scripture. All its parts add up to it. That is its unity. The cross of Christ is the great plus sign of Scripture. It gives positive value to all the deadly negations of life. There are no elements of life so incongruous that it cannot add them together into a meaningful whole. The unbeliever cannot find this unity in Scripture. Even the words of the one verse John 3:16 do not for him add up to a coherent sum of meaning. But he whose life of contradictions and conflicts is put together by the cross finds in Scripture the united and unifying voice from beyond his predicament, the voice that brings healing and salvation.

## I. THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE IS WONDERFUL BECAUSE SO MANY DIVERSITIES ARE COMBINED IN IT

### A. *In the Bible as a Whole*

The unity of Scripture is an article of faith. This also means that it is not something that we can or must bring about. It is a fact which we can only explore. And the more we do so, the more we marvel at the wonders of that unity. Let us begin by recalling briefly how manifold and variant the elements are that are combined in this unity.

When we have our Bible in our hands, it is held firmly together by the glue and the staples of the printer. But I need not



remind you that it did not fall from heaven neatly bound together in a book. God could have given it to us in that way, I suppose. But He chose a different way. Perhaps He did so that already thereby our Bible might be different and unique among the other so-called holy books of other religions. Their unity, if there is any, consists in this, that they are the finished product of a single author. The Koran, the bible of the Muslim, came into existence as the result of the labors of Mohammed. Nor are there any golden plates of revelation for our Bible like those that Joseph Smith claims to have found.

What a contrast in the Bible! Diversity seems to be the very stuff out of and by which it came to be. It did not come ready-made at a given point in a man's life or during the entire lifetime of a single man. Centuries elapsed between the composition of the first and the last of its component parts. Not one man but scores of men are the instruments of its revealed message. And what a motley crowd they are! From every walk of life they come, from all strata of society: Amos, the shepherd; Moses, trained in all the wisdom of Egypt; Isaiah of royal lineage; Micah the rustic; Ezekiel the priest; Ezra the scribe; Matthew the tax collector; Luke the physician; Peter the fisherman; Paul the Pharisee of the Pharisees.

And what a variety of personalities: Jeremiah the retiring introvert; Peter the blustering extrovert; Hosea the sensitive man; Ezekiel the self-contained and stalwart man; John the gentle and benign!

And when they write, it is not in the uniform style of a single holy man like Mohammed. Judged from a purely literary point of view the Bible exhibits the full range from matter-of-fact prose and even

pedestrian composition to an unequaled beauty of poetry and loftiness of expression.

Furthermore, the most varied types of literature are represented in this book. There is poetry, prose, oratory, history, law, parable, allegory, fable, proverb.

### B. *In the New Testament*

What is true of the whole Bible also holds for its two major parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Each has its own peculiarities. Let us look at the New Testament first. A British New Testament scholar says in a recent book: "From a purely literary point of view the New Testament is vastly inferior to the Old Testament" (A. M. Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1945, p. 9). He goes on to say that from a literary angle "the New Testament is a literary hotchpotch. Here are all sorts of literary forms and specimens: four gospels, like biographies in some respects, in others quite unlike; a very mixed epistolary bag; finally a specimen of apocalyptic writing." (P. 113)

But the diversity does not end there. It extends to the presentation of the contents themselves. On the surface it might appear as if the various New Testament writers were discussing totally different things. In the first three gospels the subject seems to be "the kingdom of God"; in the epistles the dominant note is "being in Christ," an expression that occurs more than 150 times there; in the writings of John, "eternal life" (Hunter, p. 113). E. W. Parson (*The Religion of the New Testament*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939) makes these differences irreconcilable and considers a harmonized cross section of New Testament theology as an



impossible and arbitrary undertaking. He finds three distinct and incompatible strands: the religion of Jesus, the religion of the pre-Pauline Christians, the religion of Paul. So also E. S. Scott (*The Varieties of the New Testament Religion*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), who finds these four opposing theologies: The primitive teaching, the Hellenistic Christianity, the religion of Paul, the rivals of Paul.

### C. In the Old Testament

In the Old Testament there are likewise not only diversities of form, but its various parts set forth opposing ideas and concepts to the point where they appear to exclude one another as contradictory. We see this difference, e.g., in the Law on the one hand and in the prophets on the other. In the one instance we have the most stringent and detailed instructions regarding sacrifice and ceremony with the threat of dire punishment for their neglect. Some prophets on the other hand seem at first glance to inveigh against sacrifice as useless, yes, even as detrimental. Furthermore, the maxims of the so-called Wisdom Literature appear to be independent of both prophet and priest. In the opinion of some people these varieties also are irreconcilable. In his book *The Religious Pilgrimage of Israel* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947) I. G. Mathews maintains that it is possible to isolate no fewer than 14 different "religions" in the Old Testament. Robert C. Dentan asks: "What concord can there be between Proverbs and Amos; or between Leviticus and Jeremiah?" ("The Unity of the Old Testament," *Interpretation*, V [April 1951], 154)

There is also the difference of the Old

Testament and the New Testament, the revelation of promise and fulfillment, to which we shall refer later.

We have established these diversities not in order to pit them against one another but to call attention to the kind of unity that exists in Scripture. If all these various dabs of paint combine to give a single portrait, an artist of the most consummate skill must have directed the brush of the painters. If so many artists, ages apart, wielding small and great brushes, using bright and somber colors, sketching line and counterline, using media of every sort, produced a painting in which each contribution has its place, we marvel how unity could come about out of such diversity.

## II. MANY EXPLANATIONS OF THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE ARE NOT SATISFACTORY

### *The Revived Interest in Finding a Unifying Principle*

Biblical scholarship in recent years has again shown an interest in the unity of the Bible. This movement is a reaction to the results of an atomizing process that stressed the diversities to the point where no meaning could be found in its parts. Particularly since Wellhausen, critical scholars had done a thorough job of taking the Bible apart. There it lay like so many pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that no longer would fit into a meaningful pattern: a verse here by one author, a half-verse there by another; a section from one tradition, another from an opposite point of view. To use another illustration, it was felt that the time had come that all the king's horses and all the king's men should put humpty-dumpty together again.

This revival of reassembling the diversi-



ties that had been established is evident in the appearance of a whole spate of books with such titles as *The Unity of the Bible*, *The Relevance of the Bible*, *The Unity of the Old Testament*, *The Unity of the New Testament*. H. H. Rowley says on the first page of his book (*The Unity of the Bible*, London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1953): "The emphasis then was predominantly on the diversity of the Bible, and such a title as that of the present book would have involved some suspicion that the author was an out-of-date obscurantist."

What this author says applies to another shift of emphasis in recent years. It is again respectable for Old Testament scholars to speak of a theology of the Old Testament. Under the spell of research into the environment in which the Bible originated, the best term that could be found to describe its contents was not the theology of the Old Testament but the religion of the Jews. It was a religion, perhaps with some points of difference from that of primitive peoples of old but in the main very much like it. Now books are appearing again that unblushingly bear the title *The Theology of the Old Testament*. This theology, furthermore, is linked with the revelation found in the New Testament. And so there are also modern books with the title *The Old Testament in the New Testament* (R. V. G. Tasker, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947) or entitled *According to the Scriptures*, the phrase that Paul uses in 1 Cor. 15 to assert that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were foretold in the Old Testament (C. H. Dodd, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953). Summing up the Haskell Lectures of 1949 by G. Ernest Wright, Floyd V. Filson says: "We nowhere find a real

parallel to the Bible. . . . The things that are vital and determinative in the Bible we do not get from archaeology, or from literary study any essential parallels or any basic dependence on environmental forces. Moreover it is precisely in these distinctive features that the kinship between the Testaments makes itself felt." ("The Unity of the Bible," *Interpretation*, V [April 1951], 138)

We can only applaud this change of emphasis. But we must add that in most instances it is only that: a change of emphasis. It has not always resulted in establishing a unity of the Bible which accounts for its diversity on its own terms and claims. Some parts remain archaeological curiosities, which continue to be used because they agree with prevailing religious ideas; others are rejected for the same reason.

A. *The Unity of a Common National and Cultural Background.* — In viewing the Bible as a whole we find, first of all, human and natural factors that this body of literature has in common and that give it a character all its own. The unity of the Bible may be found in this, that "its several books are all the production of one and the same people or nation, written in the national language that was current and all exhibiting the distinguishing marks of the national genius" (Dentan, p. 155). This observation applies particularly to the Old Testament. National traits are evident throughout and set this literature off in a class by itself. We need only compare it with Roman and Greek thought, the Hebrew spirit with the Greek spirit, to notice the difference. "There is the well-known interest in the concrete as opposed to the abstract; a concern for events rather than



for ideas; a vigor and intensity of style which contrasts markedly with the diffuseness and relaxed spirit of the Greeks; the absence of mythology; a lack of concern with cultural, literary, and aesthetic values as such and a corresponding passion for religious and moral values" (Dentan, p. 155). These observations have merit. The Hebrew language moves in concrete terms and did not develop a vocabulary to express abstractions. When the New Testament substitutes Greek words for these Old Testament terms, the dictionary to use in determining their basic meaning is first of all the Old Testament. It is also true that the concreteness of the Hebrews is a safeguard against degrading theology into a philosophic or a mystic system of abstract ideas. It seems safe to say that you can be quite sure that your theology is on the right road if you can translate it into Hebrew. This is not to say that only Hebrew categories of thought and language forms are adequate to express the truth of revealed religion. But it is without doubt providential that the language of the Old Testament is what it is as a vehicle of revelation and that God used it also for this specific reason.

But the Old Testament is more than a compendium of a national literature that is characteristically Hebraic. In an anthology of all ancient Greek authors, e.g., there is nothing remotely to compare with the cohesion of thought and singleness of purpose displayed by all Biblical writers. Therefore "past generations . . . bound all these books, apparently so heterogenous, into a single volume and called it not 'Ancient Hebrew literature'—to borrow the title given the Old Testament in the *Everyman's Library* edition — but 'The

Bible' or 'The Old Testament,' . . . convinced that there was something in this literature which set it apart from all other writings and which made it possible to speak of it collectively as *hai graphai* (the Scriptures)." (Dentan, p. 154)

*B. The Unity Achieved by Elimination.*  
— Another very unsatisfactory attempt to maintain or to salvage a unified viewpoint limits the acceptable parts of the Bible to one of its major divisions, the Old Testament or the New Testament. Judaism can find no unity between the Old Testament and the New Testament and therefore rejects the New Testament as a disparate element in its religion. Some Christians in effect do the same thing. This is true of the extreme "Jesus of history" school, which strips away the account and portrayal of our Lord as we have it in the New Testament and finds a Jesus that bears only the slightest resemblance to the Jesus of the gospels. There is in effect no New Testament left.

The Old Testament is likewise removed by some as an incongruous element that defies assimilation into a single pattern. Already Marcion in the second century of the Christian era found the God of the Old Testament so different from the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that he felt constrained to repudiate the whole Old Testament. The Nazis of Germany discarded it because it disturbed their fantasy of racial purity and unity. G. E. Phillips in *The Old Testament in the World Church* (London: The Lutterworth Press, 1942) reports that some foreign missionaries also think they would fare better if the Old Testament were eliminated. They feel that it would be "better to bring the nations to the New Testament and to



Christ by building on the native religions and their writings rather than by using the Old Testament as the essential basis for understanding the New Testament" (cited by Floyd V. Filson, *Interpretation*, V [April 1951] 136). Filson (p. 149) also quotes Rudolf Bultmann as saying: "For Christian faith, the Old Testament is no longer revelation as it was and is for the Jews. Israel's history is not revelational history for Christian faith" (*Glauben und Verstehen: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1954, pp. 333 f.). Finally there may be, in effect, a surrender of the Old Testament to Judaism in the expression "the Judaeo-Christian tradition." This phrase can be understood correctly. But it also may be used to imply that we really do not need the New Testament to complete the Old Testament and that Judaism and its rejection of Christ are justified.

*C. The Unity of the Ethics of the Bible.* — It is not enough, furthermore, to seek the unity of the Bible merely in its ethical teaching. For a time many Old Testament scholars found its abiding and central value in the social justice and uprightness as proclaimed by the eighth century prophets and onward: Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah. In this phase of the Old Testament they recognized flesh of their flesh and bone of their bone. After trekking through the arid and waste places of irrelevant patriarchal history and the even more meaningless details of Israel's provisions for worship, they felt that in the ethical teaching of the prophets they had come upon springs of living waters. And this aspect also supplied the basis for a unity of the Old Testament with the New Testament. It is summed up in the Golden Rule and

achieves new beauty and perfection in the great Exemplar of the good life. But such an eclectic procedure uses the Bible only to the extent that it finds support for its subjective fancy and does not do justice to its message as a whole.

It is gratifying to note that such an emphasis on one strand of Biblical teaching to the neglect of other basic elements is not so prominent today. Perhaps the shattering experience of two world wars has disillusioned those who believed that men can be made better merely by holding before them the precepts and the ideal of moral behavior. A British scholar who forthrightly states that he is no longer the liberal theologian of his early career says: "If the peculiar virtue of the New Testament lies in its ethics, clearly three-fourths of it must be regarded as irrelevant. . . . To remove all but ethics is like Hamlet with the Prince of Denmark left out." (Hunter, p. 10)

*D. The Unity in Man's Ability to Respond to God's Revelation.* — There is another view of the unity of Scripture which proves to be unsatisfactory because it fails to integrate all of its parts into an acceptable whole. It says indeed: "Yes, the whole Bible belongs together because it has its origin in God," but it adds: "It is, however, authoritative for us only after those parts that represent imperfections of earlier stages in its development have been sloughed off and discarded. It becomes progressively more reliable and valid as its writers were able better to understand and transmit what God was saying." This is the position of many who have broken with the old liberalism and want to be constructive in their Biblical studies rather than atomistic and destructive.



To their credit it should be said that they do not hold that the Bible represents the growth and development merely of the human spirit. What we have in the Bible is more than an evolutionary process of the human mind or intellect. There is more involved than the development of the spirit of man which enabled him to learn from the mistakes of his forebears, to climb step by step to greater heights, and thus by his own ingenuity to wrest from the heavens the secrets of the unknown. Man, they say, may be able to launch a satellite today because he is the heir of countless scientific contributions of others who have gone before. It is not so in the realm of man's spirit. No matter how high his spirit attempts to fly, it cannot penetrate the myteries of what God is, what man is in the sight of God, and what the relationship of God to man is. In other words, they confidently assert that if man is to discern spiritual things, God must reveal them to him. And He has done so; He has miraculously influenced and energized and vitalized the spirit of men in such a way that they became the instruments of His revelation. They were inspired. And the record of what they relayed from God to man is the Bible — it is all one because the same God spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament and the evangelists and the apostles of the New Testament.

Unfortunately this is not the whole story. We cannot dip into the Bible, into this unit product of God's inspiration indiscriminately, they say, and draw from it the pure water of God's revelation. Not all parts of the Bible are of equal value; in fact, there are parts that contradict everything that God is and that are wholly unworthy of Him. How does this come about?

Permit me to give the explanation of this anomaly by one of the most outstanding and prolific Old Testament scholars of Great Britain, H. H. Rowley. In many respects he represents the best in the modern reaction to a previous negative and purely humanistic point of view. He believes that the writers of the Bible are inspired. In his book *The Unity of the Bible* (1953) he insists in a whole chapter that God has spoken so clearly in the Bible that he can formulate authoritative doctrines on the sacraments. He can say: "It [the Bible] nowhere tells how men by the exercise of their minds wrested the secrets of life and of the universe from God, but how God laid hold of them and revealed Himself through them" (p. 8). "[But] here [in the Bible] the continuing thread that gives unity to the record is the divine element. The unity is not the unity of the spirit of Israel and of the Church but the unity of the divine revelation given in the context of history and through the medium of human personality" (pp. 15 f.). So far so good. We agree also when he says: "The kind of unity which the writer sees in the Bible is a dynamic unity and not a static unity." He recognizes an unfolding of divine truth and in particular a development from the Old Testament to the New Testament. "Yet it is not to be supposed that development was brought about by the unfolding of the human spirit through the mere passage of time." (P. 7)

What then is the reason for a unity with exceptions? The fault is not on God's side, it is said. He, indeed, revealed Himself in the perfection of His truth. "What limited the revelation was not God's willingness to give, but man's capacity to receive" (p. 34). "God being personal cannot adequately reveal Himself save through personality and



can only reveal Himself perfectly in perfect personality. That is why the incarnation was necessary for the whole revelation of God" (p. 25). Jesus Christ alone is the perfect personality that could transmit to men an undistorted picture of God and His revelation to men. So, it is maintained (p. 14), "Christians recognize that whatever is alien to the Spirit of Christ and His revelation of God [in Scripture] has no validity for them."

The writers of the Old Testament particularly were not such perfect personalities. They did not understand entirely what God was saying to them and naturally could not convey it without some distortion to others. Because inspiration was not mechanical so as to entail "the suspension of human personality," the message of the Bible is "colored by the glass through which it passes" (p. 36). Or to use a different picture, God poured the pure water of His revelation into a vessel that had no capacity for its full meaning. It is like trying to pour the contents of a quart bottle into a pint bottle. Besides this the pint bottle was not clean. It contained impurities, the impurities of human frailty. And so the pure water is there only in part and contaminated and adulterated with unwholesome debris.

Applying this to the Bible, we find, says Rowley, "some conceptions of God [in the Old Testament] which fall below the standards of the highest even in the Old Testament," to say nothing of the New Testament, and "it cannot be said that the God who revealed Himself deliberately gave men false ideas about Himself" (p. 14). In some passages of the Old Testament the agents of inspiration are said to show how incapable they were of reproducing the picture of God that He

had shown them. It is an allegedly faulty, yea, even an ugly caricature of God, who is not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The writer of the Book of Samuel, for example, still thinks of God as an ogre who delights in the wholesale murder of the Amalekites and puts these words into God's mouth: "Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (1 Sam. 15:2). Or the writer of Kings has the conception of a God who deliberately misleads people into error:

And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him and prevail also. Go forth and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee. (1 Kings 22:22 f.)

These examples can be multiplied. (Cf. 2 Sam. 21:1-14; Gen. 18; the imprecatory psalms.)

So, they say, we can account for inspiration only if it is dynamic in this sense and not static. Learning from the previous and continued revelation of God, later inspired men were able to absorb more fully what God was saying. The final touchstone of what is valid is the Word made flesh, in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. There is a unity of the Bible, it is the result of God's revelation, but God was hampered and frustrated by the frailties of men so that He could not give us so unified a message that it does not require a sloughing off of misunderstandings on the part of men.



But Scripture itself gives no support to such a theory of inspiration. It does not establish its unity on the basis that only those parts that are judged good belong together while other parts must be rejected. At this point we might mention that the view that all of Scripture is valid is often called a theory — and a mechanical one at that — of inspiration. We must be satisfied, it is said, to accept that the Bible is the Word of God but must not go beyond that point to describe how this inspiration came about. The moment we do that we are becoming involved in a mere theory of inspiration, which has not support in Scripture itself. But we submit the view of the unity of the Bible that we have just described and rejected and ask: Is it not also based on a theory of inspiration? Clearly there are two theoretical assumptions involved. The first consists in the unproved axiom that God can only reveal Himself through a personality. We look in vain in Scripture for such a restriction of God's power. The second axiom also imposes limits on God by the theory — and it is only that — that God was frustrated in revealing Himself by the inadequacy of the instruments of inspiration. Because they were imperfect God was handicapped and could not get through to men with His message. Is this the God who spoke and by His Word brought the universe into existence? Another parallel may be drawn from the incarnation itself. All the sons of Adam are tainted and wholly inadequate instruments for God in the flesh. But the second Adam is such a perfect man. God had a way to become man without man's sin. The parallel to Scripture is drawn in Heb. 1:1: "God, who spoke through His Son, also spoke in times past to the fathers

by the prophets." In neither case is He frustrated by the impossible. When He speaks, He will be heard, all theories about God notwithstanding.

When we say that God succeeded in revealing Himself through His chosen instruments we are not attempting to explain a miracle or to bolster faith in a miracle by intellectual proof. Inspiration is a miracle, and the moment we explain it, it is no longer a miracle. I cannot explain the process by which the miracles of our Lord came to pass. I can only stand in awe and reverence before this display of divine power. In the same way I do not understand, and I should never claim to be able to understand and to explain, the process of inspiration. How fallible men were able to speak the infallible truths of God is a miracle that I can only accept because by the power of the same divine Spirit the miracle of faith has been wrought in my heart by that Word. And finally it should be added that I can get a correct understanding of God's perfect revelation in and through Christ only as God enabled men to give me a perfect account of Him and His acts of salvation. It is a false contrast to assert that "revelation is by action rather than words, by deeds rather than by doctrine" (Hunter, p. 4). Goethe is supposed to have said: "The highest cannot be spoken, it can only be acted." But in Scripture the highest has been acted, and it has been spoken.

I have dwelt a little longer on this explanation of the unity of Scripture for two reasons. We are happy to note, on the one hand, that recognized Biblical scholars again do not shun the expression "inspiration" as if it were a nasty word. It is true, of course, that we still have such



liberals about us as say, for example: "The search for unity goes on. We would be false to our trust to take as absolutely final the New Testament deductions on the meaning of the death of Jesus. . . . We must make our own appraisal of it . . ." (Paul E. Davies, "Unity and Variety in the New Testament," *Interpretation*, V [April 1951], 185). On the other hand, we must hasten to add that it is only an old theory of a partial inspiration in a new form which Rowley presents, and this theory cannot account for the unity of the Scriptures by saying: "The underlying unity is of greater significance than the things on which they are divided." (Rowley, p. 8)

Our discussion so far has been for the most part negative. But I hope that it will serve the positive purpose of our seeing more clearly what a wondrous unity amid diversity exists in the Bible when we now explore some of the more basic aspects of that unity.

### III. THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE COMBINES THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The two major component parts of our Bible are known as the Old Testament and the New Testament. Regarding the term "testament" to designate these divisions Tasker says the following:

It is unfortunate that the two parts of the Holy Bible should be called the Old and New *Testaments*. As is well known, the name "Testament" came into the English versions from the Latin Bible, where the word *testamentum* is used to translate a Greek word, which usually means "last will or testament," but which was used in the Greek version of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word meaning "covenant." Neither

*testamentum* nor its English equivalent "testament" conveys the idea of covenant; yet the main theme of the Bible is the covenant-relationship between God and man, a relationship which was initiated by God for the reconciliation of sinful man to Himself. First He entered into a covenant-relationship with the Israelites, whom He called out of Egypt for the special purpose of revealing through them His purposes for mankind; and later in the person of His incarnate Son He inaugurated a new covenant with the new Israel. The membership of this new Israel consisted of all who accepted Jesus both as the Christ, who fulfilled the prophecies made to the old Israel, and as the Saviour, who by His death and resurrection had won salvation for all mankind. Instead therefore of speaking of the Old and New Testaments we should strictly speak of the Books of the Old and New Covenants. The makers of the Revised Version altered "testament" to "covenant" in the text, but retain it in the titles. [R. V. G. Tasker, *The Old Testament in the New Testament*, p. 13]

But even when we understand the term "testament" properly as a designation for each of the two parts of the Bible, the fact remains that they are distinguishable parts and are distinguished from each other by the contrasting modifiers "old" and "new." This distinction is made in the Bible itself. The New Testament speaks of "reading the Old Testament" (2 Cor. 3:14), and the Old Testament speaks of a coming "new covenant." (Jer. 31:31)

The manner in which unity arises out of these two diverse parts is truly marvelous. It is not a synthetic and mechanical union but one of inner growth and fulfillment.

It is not a unity of an artificial identification; rather it is the unity of integration into one historical process, into one total



and progressive revelation. The history of creation and the history of redemption are united into one indivisible whole because creation and redemption form one line of divine action flowing from God's goodness through God's Word in the world. [Quentin Lauer, "The Hebrew Point of View," *Theology Digest*, VI (Spring 1958), 105]

We marvel at this unity because it involves a paradox. There is the full yea and amen to the Old Testament in the New and at the same time just as emphatic a nay to pages and pages of Old Testament provisions and prescriptions. Again, there is not a no to the Old Testament in the New Testament which discards it as being old and useless and giving way to something that takes its place. There is rather in the newness of the New Testament a continuity with the Old which the New Testament affirms as valid and as still relevant. It is the kind of unity that cannot be the invention of the human mind. It passes human understanding.

#### A. *Outward Different Circumstances*

Before we directly take up the links that unite the Old and the New Testament, we want to pause for a moment to recall some of the elements of diversity in each that are combined in this unity.

There is, first of all, the very real difference in the outward circumstances. When we hold our Bible in our hands we may overlook the fact that there was a time when there was no Bible at all. We are not told, e.g., that God had provided a Scripture, a written message of His way of salvation, for Abraham and the patriarchs. And yet Abraham was saved by faith, and the New Testament affirms this fact.

Furthermore, when God proceeded to

give a written Word to the people of old that we now call the Old Testament, He apparently took His time about it — centuries of time, a millennium of time. The circumstances also are as varied as the time is long: in the desert when Israel was an unorganized horde of tribes; in Palestine when the people of God were in possession of the Land of Promise; during the time of the kings when one powerful empire of the ancient world after another rose and fell and in their rise and fall were brought into contact with Israel; in the exile when the kingdom of David had fallen and Israel was scattered among the Gentiles; in the restoration from the exile although Israel was still under the sway and the control of a foreign empire.

By contrast think of the New Testament. Here there were not hundreds of years involved but merely a few decades. In this short time the inspired writers completed their task and all of it in the outward uniformity of the one rule of Rome, the Pax Romana.

The point that we want to make is that the one testament grew out of the most diverse conditions during centuries of outward change, and the New Testament came into existence in a uniform situation of one and the same generation. But these differences of circumstances in each case do not result in a clash of the Old Testament with the New Testament. If these two parts form a unity out of such diversity of circumstances, can the explanation be found in natural causes? What a miracle of unity in diversity!

#### B. *The Completeness of Both and the Incompleteness of Each Without the Other*

The marvel of this unity grows when we turn from these outward diversities and



look at the content and purpose of each testament. Each is at the same time complete and incomplete in itself. Let us look at each testament from this point of view.

First of all, the Old Testament can be said to be complete and incomplete by itself. We must remember again that there was a time when there was no New Testament. How complete in itself was the Old Testament without the New Testament? Furthermore, we must also recall that it took centuries before the Old Testament was completed. There is not only a passing of time, but in the Old Testament itself there is a progressive unfolding of God's plan of salvation. We need only to cite one example. Isaiah 53, speaking of the vicarious suffering of the Servant of the Lord, is not found in Genesis 3, where the more general promise of a woman's Seed is recorded. There is, then, some justification for the question: Was the Old Testament at every stage of its coming into existence complete in itself?

Furthermore, the Old Testament was all that Israel had when it finally was finished. Was it complete to teach the way of salvation? The answer is, of course, yes. We can be certain that the people of Isaiah's time knew how to be saved. It was by faith in the forgiving mercies of God and not by the works of the law. There were, indeed, many laws. But from the beginning God made two things clear. First, salvation did not come by a mechanical or outward observance of a ritual and the cultic laws. These laws were not, as in the religions all around Israel, magical formulae whose mere recitation automatically gave man control over God and put Him under obligation to man. Second, the keeping of the Law did not produce salvation.

The Old Testament religion was not one of good works by which God's favor could be procured. Salvation was something that God gave to undeserving, sinful people. "As Paul noted, the thread of faith runs through its story even in the Pentateuchal narratives. . . . Thus back of the Law and deeper than the Law are God's choice of Israel, His gracious action, and the note of faith" (Floyd V. Filson, "The Unity of the Old and New Testaments," *Interpretation*, V [April 1951], 142). At every stage, then, as the Old Testament grew book by book and when it was completed, nothing was lacking to teach men how to be saved.

But standing by itself the Old Testament is also incomplete in a real sense. It looks forward to a completion of God's great acts of redemption begun in Israel. Its whole history is open to the future. It is history, real history, but there is in all of it, explicitly or implicitly, what the Germans call *Zielstrebigkeit*—a consciousness of not having attained but a pressing forward to a goal still to be reached. There is a provisional character about it that looks to the future for its validation. I want to stress the point that this expectation of greater things to come is found not only in those passages that we call Messianic prophecies. The whole Old Testament is pregnant with this anticipation. It is awaiting the completion of what God has begun (cf. the Benedictus).

On the other hand, to the Christian the Old Testament is incomplete, its major tensions are never really resolved, the time to which it points is not realized, its manifold diversities are never sufficiently gathered into a unifying center (cf. however Second Isaiah), the dynamic quality of the prophetic proclamation never reaches a culmination, the kingship of God is never



radically present, the hour of the ἐφάπαξ is never struck. . . .

The early Christians were profoundly aware of the newness of the revelation in Jesus as the Christ; like the men at Qumran they had been waiting for "the coming of the new." But this category of newness is itself drawn from the Old Testament, as the New Testament records clearly affirm: new Exodus, new covenant, new creation, new redemption, and indeed, the new Adam, new Moses, and new Elijah. Again, the New Testament appropriates all the themes and motifs I have been describing and refashions them for its own purpose. [James Muilenburg, "Problems in Biblical Hermeneutics," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXVII (March 1958), 21, 24]

The Old Testament is complete; the Old Testament is incomplete. Both statements are true. And their very contrary nature is what produces the unity. Passing strange indeed! But the same kind of a remarkable unity is found also when we turn to the New Testament. It, too, is complete and incomplete at the same time.

It certainly is complete. It has written over all its pages the glorious message from the cross: It is finished. The goal has been reached. Nothing remains to be done for man's salvation. In Christ Jesus all the promises of God find their yea and amen. In the events of the New Testament we have God's signature of finality. Once for all times, all times are fulfilled. What was yesterday, what is today, and what comes tomorrow stands still in the completion of God's eternal plan of salvation. Here the incompleteness of the Old Testament is complete. I need not spell this out in detail. We know and have the Gospel of the perfected redemption through Jesus Christ. Blessed be His holy name!

And yet the New Testament is also not complete by itself in a real sense. The New Testament, first of all, is not complete without the Old Testament. It needs the Old Testament. Without the Old Testament the New Testament would be like a tree that has no roots, like a house that has no foundation.

It is on the basis of the Old Testament that we fully understand the New Testament. We might be tempted to think that the only value of the Old Testament for the New Testament lies in the fact that here we have the evidence that God has kept His promises. The New Testament indeed supplies that evidence. But God's faithfulness to His promises is also taught in the New Testament itself. (Cf. Rom. 11:29; 3:3)

When my uncle writes me a letter and promises me a check of \$5,000, I am happy in anticipation, and I am sure that I shall receive this gift because I know that he is a man of his word. Soon another letter comes which contains the check. Now that I have the check, why make much of the first letter? I may for sentimental reasons tie the letter up with a pretty ribbon, wrap it up with my souvenirs, and keep it in a drawer with other keepsakes. To put it differently, if the New Testament says merely in plain language what the Old Testament says in strange hieroglyphics, why bother about the Old Testament's cryptic and mysteriously strange sayings?

But the dependence of the New Testament upon the Old Testament for its completeness is far greater than that. The New Testament needs the Old Testament for an understanding of its own message.

This help from the Old Testament, however, is not merely an outward or literal dependence of the one on the other. We



might refer to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. This poetic masterpiece is so full of allusions to ancient mythology that it is unintelligible without some knowledge of that mythology. In the same way it is, indeed, true that the New Testament constantly refers to characters, events, and institutions of the Old Testament. Without the Old Testament we should be at a loss to understand these allusions. But that is only a part of the situation. The New Testament writers couch their message in Old Testament language and terms not merely because they were familiar with the literature of the Old Testament and because this literature was the best known in the world in which they lived. It was not merely an accident of time and place, therefore, that the New Testament writers were familiar with this literature and dipped into it for literary embellishment and forms of expression. Milton may not be intelligible without ancient mythology. But ancient mythology does not need Milton. In the Bible it is different. Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament is fully clear without the other. (Cf. Rowley, pp. 93 f.)

We need the Old Testament to understand what has been fulfilled in the New Testament. Without the basis of the Old Testament it has been possible to present a picture of Jesus of Nazareth that is wholly a caricature of Him. Rowley in his book *The Relevance of the Bible* (London: James Clarke and Company, 1941), p. 78, says: "Christianity is not based on myth or speculation; it is not a philosophy or a cultus alone." He goes on to say: "It is rooted in history. From the soil of Judaism Christianity sprang, and neither Christ nor His teachings can be understood, save in relation to the Old Testament. He [Jesus]

was born a Jew because the whole history of Israel was a preparation for Him and because the religion of Judaism alone provided the inheritance He needed."

Just one more area in which the Old Testament prevents a false interpretation of the New Testament. No one who takes the Old Testament seriously can let Christianity degenerate into "an amiable sentimentality" such as we have in the sweet and utopian optimism of a Norman Vincent Peale (cf. the German *der liebe Gott*).

Finally, the New Testament is incomplete also in the same way that the Old Testament looked beyond itself to a fulfillment. The kingdom of God is complete here and now, but it is also the object of our expectation and hope. The New Testament expresses a longing for its consummation. To that extent our faith, even from the vantage point of the New Testament, is still an Old Testament advent faith based on promises, the promises of an inheritance in light. The Old Testament already knew about these final things, but the end has not come in its finality with the message of fulfillment in the New Testament. And in that sense and to that extent the New Testament does not record the complete realization of Old Testament hopes and expectations.

We are often asked how much of the New Testament fulfillment the people of the Old Testament understood. It is difficult to answer this question precisely. We get impatient with the obtuseness of even the disciples who had the Old Testament Scripture and who, even after three years of instruction by our Lord from the Old Testament, still "understood none of these things," so that Peter, for example, tried to dissuade Jesus from walking the way of the cross.



What did the Jews of earlier centuries know and understand? I am sure we can say that by God's grace they were saved by faith in God's promise of salvation from sin. As a parallel we might think of ourselves awaiting the fulfillment of God's promises in the final day. We have all we need to know to be certain that this promised day will come and that it will usher in our eternal glory. I am also convinced, however, that when the final trump will sound forth, some things will happen in a way different from what I had expected on the basis of my understanding of these promises. In fact, their full meaning is beyond my comprehension this side of their fulfillment. So, I am sure, was Israel's faith. The fact of its redemption from sin was unmistakably sure, while Israel's failure to understand the details of the "how" and "when" did not vitiate or destroy their faith. So says Peter: "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." (1 Peter 1:10, 11)

### C. *Some General Aspects of the Unity of the Old and New Testaments*

We have so far stressed the diverse elements in each of the two great divisions of the Bible that in a purely human product and development would and could not unite to form a unity. A book the two parts of which come into existence under such widely different outward circumstances of time and place, a book of which each part is complete and yet incomplete in itself, would defy any attempt to unify

its parts into an harmonious whole. But what is not true of other literary productions is gloriously true in the case of the Old Testament and the New Testament which constitute Holy Scripture. So we proceed to look for this unity and to see how it manifests itself.

There are various levels on which this unity of the Old and New Testaments becomes apparent. As we have pointed out, even a materialist can recognize a "certain historico-cultural continuum in ancient Palestine which threads its way through this vast complex material from beginning to end" (J. Stanley Glen, "Jesus Christ and the Unity of the Bible," *Interpretation*, V [July 1951], 260). But he who has the eyes of faith recognizes elements of unity of a far more basic, decisive, and fundamental character. As we look at these elements, we will begin with some wider circles of unity that revolve about a common core before we look at the center itself from which all these circles radiate.

1. *The Common Pattern of Revelation.* — As the first of these general aspects of unity we note that in both the Old and the New Testament we have a common pattern of revelation. Rowley describes it as follows:

It will be remembered that it has not been argued above that the uniqueness of the Biblical revelation is to be found in its mediation through history, or in its mediation through prophetic personality. It is in the structure of the combination of both that the uniqueness lies. Moses claimed that by Divine initiative he was sent to deliver Israel. Though he promised deliverance he could not effect it by human power, and it was not to the achievement of freedom by Israel's own efforts that he summoned them. It was to



faith in his promise that he called them, and then deliverance was achieved by forces beyond his and their control. His promise was fulfilled by circumstances, and his claim to have spoken in the name of God was vindicated in history. No intelligent anticipation could offer the explanation, and the vindicating circumstances can no more explain his prior faith and promise than his prior faith and promise can explain the vindicating circumstances.

In the New Testament we find that our Lord appears before men with claims and promises. To examine them all is unnecessary. Suffice it to say that He believed that His work was of wide and enduring importance to men, and that His death would be of unique significance and power. If He was no more than a village carpenter and His word arose from no deeper source than His own heart, and if His claim that he delivered the word of God Who had spoken through Moses was false, then there could be no power in that word to effect its own fulfillment. Yet it has undeniably been fulfilled, and whether we like it or not the fact remains that His word has been of uniquely enduring importance to men, and His death has proved the uniqueness of its power in the experience of men. His confidence could not of itself give power if it were falsely based, and it is quite impossible to explain His confidence from its subsequent vindication. The vindication was given in verifiable history, and there is precisely the same evidence for the hand of God in this complex of personality and event, as there was in that of the period of the Exodus. [H. H. Rowley, *The Unity of the Bible*, pp. 97, 98]

That the new pattern is not a mere repetition of the old in its promise and achievement we shall stress later.

## 2. *The Same Content of Revelation.*—

Besides this general pattern of revelation we also find the same content of revelation. We do not have time now to trace this agreement in detail, nor do we at this point want to begin at the center and work to the circumference of this unity circle and see how all that the Bible has to say runs together into this center like so many radii of a circle. We shall content ourselves with mentioning only two teachings that lie within the orbit of Scripture: God and man. Perhaps it would be better to put it this way: What does the Old Testament and the New Testament say about God and man's relationship to Him?

In the first place we want to stress again that it is not true that the Old Testament knows of a God who makes the keeping of the Law the condition of man's becoming acceptable to God, while the New Testament has a God who does everything Himself that man may be united with Him. In other words, it is an oversimplification to speak of the Old Testament as the religion of the Law and the New Testament as a religion of grace, or that the Old Testament contains the Law and the New Testament the Gospel. If that were the case, there would be no unity between the Testaments in an area of its most basic concern, and then there might be considerable justification for the abandonment of the Old Testament on the mission field by the missionaries and by people in general. Nor is it true that the God of the Old Testament was satisfied with the outward deed of complying with the Law and that the New Testament is the religion of the heart.

We can only sketch the unified view of God and His relationship to man in both



the Old and New Testaments. There is a perfect agreement in all of Scripture in proclaiming the "otherness," or transcendence, of God. God is not nature, and nature is not God. A wide gulf separates God and man whom He created. This distinction of creature and Creator, however, became a tragic and disastrous cleavage when man became unlike God in that which is the sum total of all of His attributes: His holiness. It is the sin of fallen man that is in constant and absolute contradiction to the holy God. Now men must cry out as did the men of Bethshemesh (1 Sam. 6:20): "Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?" The presence of this holiness is now a consuming fire. Isaiah, who heard the praises of God's holiness sung by the seraphim, exclaims: "Woe is me, for I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Is. 6:3). Yet the holy God demands holiness of men. "Ye shall be holy; for I, the Lord, your God, am holy." (Lev. 19:2 etc.)

The God of the New Testament is no less holy. Jesus addressed God as Holy Father (John 17:11). And the demand for holiness on the part of man is no less stringent. "But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Peter 1:15). "He hath chosen us in Him that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." (Eph. 1:4; cf. Col. 1:22; 1 Cor. 3:16 f.; Heb. 12:10)

The God of the Old and New Testaments is also a loving God. In the Old Testament He says: "It was not because you were more numerous than other people that the Lord set His heart on you and

chose you, but because the Lord loved you" (Deut. 7:7 f.). His prophets say: "With an everlasting love have I loved thee; therefore have I drawn thee with loving-kindness" (Jer. 31:3). "When Israel was a child, I loved him and called My son out of Egypt" (Hos. 11:1). "The loving-kindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him." (Ps. 103:17)

One short sentence from the New Testament will suffice: "God is Love" (1 John 4:8, 16). And if the term "Father" is our Lord's characteristic term for God and the name by which He teaches us to address Him, so in the Old Testament we read: "Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer, from everlasting is Thy name" (Is. 63:16). "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" (Ps. 103:13). "And I said, Ye shall call Me Father and shall not turn away from following Me" (Jer. 3:19). (Cf. H. H. Rowley, *Relevance of the Bible*, p. 130)

We hear the anguish and the disappointment of unrequited love when Jesus speaks tearful words over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not" (Luke 13:34; cf. 19:42). We hear the same thing earlier in the prophet Hosea: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? . . . Mine heart is turned within Me, My repentings [compassions] are kindled together." (Hos. 11:8; cf. Hos. 11:1 ff.; Jer. 2:3)

The God of the Bible does not remain aloof in the transcendence of His deity. He is "self-communicating." In the Old Testament we find the expression "Thus saith the Lord" or its equivalent more than



300 times. The New Testament acknowledges this speaking God and adds to it its own revelation of the eternal Word itself. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." (Heb. 1:1, 2)

The God of the Bible rules and reigns. He is never frustrated in achieving His purposes, whether in the individual lives of men or in the massive combination of empire might. "Thine is the Kingdom," we say in closing the prayer that Jesus taught us in the New Testament. His also is the kingdom in the Old Testament, Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Persia notwithstanding. (Cf. Dan. 1:7, 27; 2:44)

Not only do we find the same God in both Testaments, the description of man and his relationship to God is also the same.

Both the Old and the New Testament describe man as at odds with God. The perfect fellowship that once existed has been broken by man's rebellion against God. Left to himself, man would remain in the curse of this godlessness, shut out from life, in trespasses and sin. And yet man was not left to die like the animal of the field. What God put into man in creation, His own image, has not been lost totally. In the marred image there remains — as it were — still a point of contact from which God proceeded to recreate a fellowship with man.

Just a few illustrations. This rupture with God is the sad condition of all men. Both Testaments recognize unmistakably the universality of sin. "There is no man that sinneth not," we read in 1 Kings 8:46. "Who can say I have made my heart clean,

I am pure from my sins?" (Prov. 20:9). The New Testament passages are known to us from our Catechism instruction: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23; Rom. 5:19; etc.)

Furthermore, every sin is a sin against God. There are no purely social sins. True, we may hurt and harm our fellow man — and this is forbidden — yet more profoundly and in the final analysis every injury of the neighbor is a sin against God. David, rebuked by Nathan for his mistreatment of Uriah and Bathsheba, says: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13). "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight" (Ps. 51:4). Paul, in the New Testament, says the same thing: "But when ye sin so against the brethren and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ" (1 Cor. 8:12). Surely there can be no higher social ethic.

Again, sin is man's destruction. It is self-destructive. The Old Testament stresses particularly that evil does not come about in man's life mechanically or in an inevitable chain of unavoidable circumstances. It is God's retribution upon sin. "The God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, and he carried them away" (1 Chron. 5:26). "The Lord sent against him [the king of Jerusalem] bands of the Chaldees. . . . Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah" (2 Kings 24:2 f.). "Shishak, king of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem because they had transgressed against the Lord" (2 Chron. 12:2). In this context the prophet Amos can make the sweeping statement: "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done



it?" (3:6). In the New Testament we have our Lord's own words about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and its cause: "because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." (Luke 19:42 f.)

The curse of sin is more than a physical disaster. Its consequence is death written with a capital "D." When Amos pleads, "Seek the Lord, and ye shall live" (Amos 5:6), or when Ezekiel says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4), it does not mean that merely a cessation of breathing and a stopping of the heartbeat is involved. Nowhere does the Old Testament envisage dying as a mere disintegration of the body, as little as the curse of sin is merely temporal death when the New Testament says, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." (Rom. 6:23)

Man's inability to free himself from the curse that separates him from God and life is fully recognized in the whole Bible. Without documenting this fact with well-known Bible verses from the Old and New Testaments let me merely point out once more that man is not saved by the keeping of the Law in the Old Testament in spite of its multitude of requirements and prescriptions. The initiative for man's salvation always is with God. He chose Israel, He brought Israel back from the Babylonian Captivity not "for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for Mine holy name's sake" (Ezek. 36:22). "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways and live?" (Ezek. 18:23). The covenant that God made with His people in the Old Testament is not a contract between equals. It is a covenant of grace. It is God's promise to forgive and

thus to receive man back into fellowship with Him. The keeping of the Law does not create a reunion with God but it is the expression of this reunion and man's response to the mercy of God.

Not only Paul had to set men's thinking straight on this point. The prophets of old already fulminated against a way of salvation that man thought to achieve by observance of the Law. So absolute was their denunciation of the perversion of what God intended by these laws and so sweeping was their insistence on a penitent heart, pleading God's mercy, that for a time some Old Testament scholars were led to believe that the prophets repudiated sacrifice and cult worship entirely. Contradictory as it may appear, these laws were God's way — and we shall not ask why God chose it — of keeping men aware of their unholiness and their constant need of grace and mercy until He came who by His perfect obedience to God's will and the shedding of His blood redeemed men from the curse of the Law. In the Old Testament God imposed the yoke of the Law. But God's purpose was not that man should earn salvation by the keeping of that Law, something no man could do.

God claims a response from man in the New Testament that is no less all-inclusive. Jesus sums up its requirements by quoting the Old Testament: "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind . . . thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matt. 22:37-39)

In this sketch — and it is a very brief one — of the doctrines of God and of man the unity of the Bible is evident. But we still have not gone to the center of this unity, although we could not avoid touch-



ing on it. The unity of the ideas of the Bible is striking. But the religion of the Bible is not primarily one of ideas, abstractions, and systems of speculative thought held together by consistent categories of logic. The religion of the Bible is the story of God in action to save men. To tell of the Christian religion we need, above all, action words. God made, He planned, He chose, He promised, He fulfilled, He loved, He gave, He sent, He redeemed, He raised from the dead. It is *Heilsgeschichte*, a history of salvation. Lest this term be understood falsely, as it is often used falsely, let me add that one of His acts is that He also spoke — He spoke to interpret these great acts to man. And He did so infallibly, and by the working of the same miraculous power, that we might fully understand the significance and the meaning of His great deeds of salvation. God has indeed achieved His purposes of grace. God has completed the wondrous deeds of His eternal counsel. But deeds have no meaning in themselves. So He acted again. He moved holy men to speak and to write the infallible and absolute truth about Himself and His deeds so that men by the power of that same Word might be enabled to become wise unto salvation, which He has made possible.

#### D. *The Unity in Jesus Christ*

These acts of salvation and this message of salvation culminate in Jesus Christ. He is the Center of Scripture. To Him and from Him flow and return all the lines of this one book.

But the Savior was not born of Eve. The son of Eve was not the woman's Seed. Centuries elapsed, millennia, before Christmas Eve came. The Old Testament was

composed and finished long before that holy night. The New Testament was not written till after Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day. But this "before" and this "after" is the wondrous unity of a "now" in the two Testaments. It is the unity of promise and fulfillment, but in such a marvelous co-operation of its parts that not only is there no grinding of gears, but it develops its full power precisely when the Old and the New Testament are meshed together.

1. *The Unity of Promise and Fulfillment.* — Let us examine this unity of promise and fulfillment. If Jesus Christ is not the Center of the Bible, then it falls apart into a formless heap of meaningless and irreconcilable pieces. Then the hope of the Old Testament was an illusion. Then the New Testament in looking back to that hope as fulfilled is a hoax. But Jesus Christ is the great, powerful Magnet that attracts and holds together the many particles of Scripture, and its particles all are of such a nature that they respond to this magnetic field and cluster about Him.

And because Christ is the Center of Scripture, only he who in faith accepts Him can see the full and decisive unity of Scripture and experience its unifying power. Paul said that the Jews did not understand Scripture because there was a veil over their eyes. It is always so. To someone who is born blind you can talk days on end about color, the green of the grass, the blue of the sky, and the scintillating hues of the rainbow, and he will fail to understand entirely what you mean. When the Holy Spirit removes the scales of unbelief from the spiritually blind eyes of man, then he sees — more certainly than anything that is perceived by physical sight



—that the unity of Scripture is the foolishness of the Cross. When John 3:16 no longer is a contradiction of man's proud wisdom and self-sufficiency, but has become his glorious hymn of praise and is spiritually discerned, then all of Scripture, which like John the Baptist bears witness to the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, becomes an harmonious whole of God's promise and fulfillment of His salvation that transcends man's understanding and transforms his life.

Only the whole man — the man made whole in Christ Jesus by the Spirit of God — can understand the whole of Scripture as it wants to be understood. This is not to say that in the promise and fulfillment of Scripture no clear and consistent pattern of unity is recognizable. The Old Testament is not a dissertation in abstract terms and ideas about universal man. It is the history of one people, chosen by God for His own special purposes. When Israel as a nation failed to serve as God's instrument, He destroyed it that in a "remnant" His design and plan might be carried forward. And to the New Testament writers the whole story of the people of Israel, their divine call, their redemption from Egypt, the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, their establishment in the Holy Land, the building of the temple, the tragedy of the exile, and the subsequent resurrection and return of the remnant to Zion, are all foreshadowings of the greater and final salvation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Apart from this, they have in themselves no abiding significance and are not fully comprehensible (cf. Tasker, p. 16). St. Augustine said it long ago: "The New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old becomes manifest in

the New." And this relation and correspondence is not imposed upon Scripture, it is there in the very woof and web of its texture. It has one story to tell from Adam to the apostolic age.

"So as a Christian Paul did not lay aside as useless all the great knowledge of the Old Testament which he had received at the feet of Gamaliel. Rather did he baptize into Christ all this knowledge, seeing the whole history of Israel as incomplete apart from the redemptive work of Christ, but as lit up with fresh meaning when interpreted in the light of the final revelation in which it finds its fulfillment" (Tasker, p. 94). Paul's sermon at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13) is an interesting example of the way in which he connected the Old Testament with the New Testament. For him it was not merely a record of prophetic utterances but the account "of a series of acts of God, acts of saving grace which reach their climax and find their fulfillment in the redemption brought about by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (Tasker, p. 85). Paul's sermon is a part of our New Testament and is evidence of the unity that is in Scripture for all to read and to behold.

Rowley calls attention to an example of how the fulfillment bears in itself the evidence of the design of God. The death of Jesus was to achieve what the sacrifices of the Old Testament foreshadowed. Perhaps the clearest promise of it is found in Isaiah 53. Uncounted Christians have stood under the cross of Calvary and found no better way to express what happened there than to repeat the Old Testament Scripture: "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. . . . He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for



our iniquities." This is not a fanciful and forced reading of the New Testament back into the Old Testament. The dying Servant of the Lord in Isaiah is the Passover Lamb led to the slaughter. Was it accidental that the sacrifice of the Lamb of God took place at the time of the Old Testament Passover festival? "If someone had sat down to create a story that should be dramatically appropriate, one could understand his lighting on the time of the Passover for the climax of his story." But the fact of the matter is that it was the enemies of Christ who chose this time to strike, not in order to fulfill Scripture but to gain their own objectives.

If the hand of God was at work, carrying the old revelation forward into a new one, lifting the old deliverance to a new plane of deliverance, filling the ancient festival a second time with fresh significance, one could understand it. But if it were merely the accident of the choice of Christ's foes that caused this remarkable coincidence, it would be both surprising and beyond all explanation. For to declare a thing an accidental coincidence and to leave it at that is to offer no explanation, but to declare that it is incapable of explanation. [Rowley, *The Unity of the Bible*, p. 113]

Just as remarkable is our Lord's prior declaration that His foes would strike at that time and the manner in which He linked His death with the old covenant sacrifice by speaking of His blood as the blood of the new covenant (Cf. Jer. 31:31 ff.). "So many Old Testament streams run together here that only a blind prejudice can hide their significance." (Rowley, p. 113)

## 2. *The Unity in Newness*

But the unity of promise and fulfillment is not merely the sequence of one happen-

ing following another. It is not merely the continuity of new events following old ones. It is not merely the arrival of something bigger or an improved model. In the fulfillment there is indeed, as we have already seen, a full and resounding "yea and amen" to the old. But there is also an unmistakable "nay." The fulfillment of the New Testament expressly supersedes enactments of God in the Old Testament as they are set forth on so many of its pages. But it is in this very abrogation and supersession by the new that the tie with the old is so clearly to be found. This may seem contradictory and absurd, but it is in this paradox of "yes and no" that the divine unity of the Bible manifests itself.

The old covenant is not a previous covenant of God of a different nature, on a different basis, and for a different purpose that God has repudiated. But in the new covenant the old has reached its fullest expression and validity. What once was promise has now become full — a full reality. But thereby everything that had meaning only as a part of the promise, everything provisional, has served its purpose, and it, too, is fulfilled. Old in that sense and abrogated for that reason are what we call the ceremonial and political laws of the old covenant. All that lay dormant and hidden in them has now risen into reality.

Perhaps we have come to take for granted this yea and nay of the New Testament to the Old Testament and have lost some of the wonder of its paradox. It is when we look at Judaism that the radical claim of the New Testament to be the fulfillment of the old becomes evident.

Post-Biblical Judaism also is rooted in the Old Testament and is unintelligible



without the Old Testament. But the Old Testament does not need modern Judaism to make the Old Testament intelligible, as is the case in the New Testament. The Old Testament continually looks forward to something beyond itself; and the New Testament continually looks back to the Old Testament. Neither is complete without something beyond itself. There is nothing of this kind in Judaism. It is a development out of the Old Testament but not that something to which the Old Testament looks forward and which should follow it; it is not the response to its hopes. (Cf. Rowley, p. 95)

#### IV. THE UNITY OF THE SCRIPTURE COMPREHENDS LAW AND GOSPEL

We have seen that the God of the Bible in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament is the holy and righteous God before whom sinful man must flee because His wrath is a consuming fire. We have also seen that the God of the Bible is the God of love and mercy who invites and enables the creatures deserving His wrath to be united with Him and to share His life.

We want to stress here that according to all of Scripture this unity exists in God without a compromise of His holiness or of His love. His righteous holiness is intact when He is Love, and His love is unadulterated and pure when His righteous holiness asserts itself. Surely this is not a God whom men have fashioned in their own image and according to the pattern of their own thinking.

Heathen religions are unable to unite these irreconcilables into one God, as they see evil and good come to them in their lives. They need more than one God. They divide. They have a good god whom

they love and a bad god whom they fear and try to placate or make harmless by magic. The same inability of man to have such a unified God finds expression in much of modern thought. There are those who claim adherence to the God of the Bible but can fit into their thinking a God who is only love. To assume that the God of love would permit men's lives to be snuffed out in disaster and even cast out men into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth is an insult to God, they say; yea, it is a complete negation and denial of God. Such a division of the God of Scripture is ultimately a relapse into heathenism. It demonstrates man's tendency to make God in the image of his disharmonious confusion; it reflects the disunity that is within man: a spiritual schizophrenia. But the Scripture proclaims it unequivocally already in the old confession of Israel: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord, our God, is one God."

But this unit God and yet "double" God does not remain bound up in the mystery of His being. In the Bible He expresses and reveals Himself and His relationship to us in the same unfathomable "double-ness" of His holy judgment and loving acts of redemption and salvation. We refer to these two central teachings of Scripture as Law and Gospel. Here again is a unity of Scripture that is incomprehensible in its diversity.

Law and Gospel are and remain opposites. They are not mingled. The one does not tone down or neutralize the other. The teachings of Scripture do not become something sweet-sour as when we combine sugar and vinegar for a salad dressing. This black and white of Scripture does not merge into a compromising gray. For only



when the Law and the Gospel are applied in their absolute and exclusive difference does the teaching of Scripture accomplish its purpose. The Law always accuses, say our Confessions. It condemns every sin and pronounces the death sentence on every sinner — its curse is never softened by the Gospel. Conversely, the Gospel is the absolute and categorical message of life — its promises, if accepted, are not affected by the Law; the Law does not apply to the Gospel; there is no Law and no curse and no demand of the Law in the Gospel.

So absolutely different are the Law and the Gospel. But while they are distinct they dare not be separated if God is to achieve His purpose. Together they are the unified teaching of Scriptures for a unified purpose. The Bible does not permit us to preach the Law without adding the Gospel when the Law has accomplished its purpose. It does not permit us to preach a Gospel which does not bring help from the curse of the Law, for without the Law the Gospel is meaningless.

This absolute diversity and yet "togetherness" of Law and Gospel of the Bible, this distinction and yet interaction, meets the need of man. It supplies, above all, the solution of the tension that the Christian still sees and experiences in his own life. Because the Christian is what he is, he finds in this "double" and yet single Scripture that which answers to the mysterious double-mindedness which he senses, although he is at one with God through faith in Christ. In fact, the more he progresses in a Christ-centered life, the more does he realize how much he needs the Law undiluted in its severity and at the same time how precious and absolutely necessary the Gospel is in its unconditional

promise. Keeping them separate, yet experiencing the need of both, this is the mystery of the distinctive and yet unified Word of God as the believer knows it. And he knows it better and more fully as he lives his life of faith and exercises himself in holy living.

This was the great discovery that Luther made when he read and studied the Scriptures. In them he found the only true and satisfying description of himself and his needs. He expressed it in the well-known phrase that is at the heart of his theology: the Christian is at the same time just and a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*). This paradoxical statement was not a theoretical proposition for Luther to be debated in detached isolation from life. It represented the victory over the agony of his soul; it came to him from Scripture by the Spirit's help to end the turmoil that drove him to the edge of despair when he tried to find the answer to the question: How do I get a gracious God? Just, absolutely just and free from all condemnation by virtue and power of the Gospel; a sinner subject to the Law — contradictory as this may be, it solved the contradiction that he found in his inmost being. It was the only answer to his needs.

Therefore Luther was most insistent that this paradox of Scripture be left intact. Any compromising of the absoluteness of this fact, any watering down or dilution, he rejected as ruinous. He made the ability to distinguish between Law and Gospel the prime requisite of a theologian. He said: "Whoever is able well to distinguish the Law from the Gospel, let him give praise to God, and let him know that he is a theologian" (WA 40, 1, 207). But this distinction is not merely a theoretical profi-



ciency or a skill required of the professional theologian; it is an art that every Christian can and must acquire. "Whenever the Law and sin terrify and crush conscience, then you should say: There is a time for dying and a time for living, there is a time for hearing and a time for casting aside the Law, there is a time for hearing the Gospel, there is a time for not knowing the Gospel" (WA 40, 1, 209).

But by this distinction he did not minimize the fact that the center of Scripture is Christ, the Savior. Luther would get very vehement when Law and Gospel were mixed so that Christ was given the role of another Lawgiver, another Moses. He could even say: "If Christ comes and speaks to you like Moses when you are penitent of your sins and says: What have you done? then strike Him dead. But if He speaks to you like God and like your Savior, then listen with both ears" (WA, TR, II, 2655a). So distinct is the Gospel from the Law. They exclude each other as absolutely as wrath and love, judgment and grace, heaven and hell.

Yes, it is true in a sense that all of Scripture in the effect which it produces can be Law — it is that for the unbeliever since it comes to him as a demand to keep the Law and to repent of his wickedness. Likewise all of Scripture in the effect that it produces is Gospel — it is that for the believer who knows that his infractions of the Law are canceled and that the demands of the Law have been fulfilled for him.

Yet both are necessary and cannot be separated. Luther says: "Although these two are the most distinct (*distinctissima*), they are nevertheless the most conjoined (*coniunctissima*) in the same heart. Nothing is more conjoined than fear and

trust, Law and Gospel, sin and grace; for they are so conjoined that the one is absorbed (*absorbeatur*) by the other" (WA 40, 1, 527). Both Law and Gospel in their absolute antitheses meet the needs of the believer. It is only by the working of the Holy Spirit that the Christian is able to distinguish them. But by the operation of the same Holy Spirit he recognizes himself for what he is: just and a sinner. He knows, as Luther says in the first of his 95 Theses, that the Christian's whole life is one continuous living of repentance. That means that he also acknowledges the Law and its condemnation of his sin. In fact, the more he embraces the Gospel, the more does he find himself falling short of the demands of the Law, so that he cries out with Paul: O wretched man that I am — I am chief of sinners.

But the daily repentance of the Christian is also a turning away from the Law to the Gospel, for he knows that he is just by faith through grace. He knows that in the Gospel the Law is fulfilled and that the threat and the coercion of the Law as Law no longer exist. The claims of the Law have been nullified through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ; they are nullified by faith in Christ; they will remain nullified forever even after death.

The daily repentance of the Christian also brings about the resolve to do the will of God. Here above all he recognizes himself as just and sinner. The same words of Scripture that demanded obedience and certain death for their transgression and that said, "Thou shalt," no longer comes to him as a "Thou shalt" in their coercion and threat. He needs no Law in its coercive and threatening power. He does the



will of God as spontaneously and as freely as light will shine because it is light.

But at the same time, he knows that he does not succeed in being wholly just; he remains a sinner. And to that extent he needs the Law. The old Adam, crucified though he is, has not been annihilated but revives again and again and must be held in check lest he erupt in the blackest of sins. The Christian still is beset by the same temptations that brought mighty David and self-secure Peter to fall. The old Adam is as self-righteous as ever and must daily be shattered in his unholy claims of self-righteousness by the annihilating and crushing demand for perfection of the Law. A hidden Pharisee lurks still within every Christian. The old Adam is also a cunning mystic, he devises his own standards of what is God-pleasing in his service to God. By the letter of the Law he must be instructed in what is well-pleasing to God.

Much more could and should be said about these two great doctrines of Scripture. The point that interests us at this time is that both are in Scripture, each in its absolute difference, the Law is Law and never Gospel: the Gospel is Gospel and never Law. And yet in their absolutely different purpose and effect, they meet the demand of the whole man. Where else could such a unity in diversity originate than in God? This conviction will grow in the measure that we immerse ourselves in Scripture. We are overwhelmed alike by the inexhaustible grace of the Gospel and by the implacability of the Law. We shall be the more convinced that we cannot adequately and fully distinguish them as we ought, and this means that we never fully can understand the miracle that is the

one Bible. We don't only know of the unity of the Bible, we live the miraculous unity of Scripture every day of our lives, as Law and Gospel guide, direct, and sustain us.

#### V. *The Unity of Scripture Is of God*

Unified in our inmost being through the Word of Scripture by the working of the Holy Spirit in its proclamation, we say triumphantly: This is the Word of God. Words that so fit my most desperate needs and meet them so perfectly, words that so combine opposites and yet remain opposites, are not the invention or the product of man. They can come only from a God who Himself is holy and who is Love.

And so we end as we began: the unity of Scripture is an article of faith. For it is only by faith that we accept for our salvation the words spoken and written by men as God moved them to speak and to write. This is the miracle of the unity of Scripture that it is the unified product of an otherwise impossible combination of opposites: fallible, sinful, dead, death-cursed creatures, and the holy and infallible God. Scriptures themselves call this unified and unifying process inspiration. To accept this Word is not a heavy and burdensome demand before which the Christian cringes. This Word calls forth rejoicing and thanksgiving. Before this miracle of God's condescension faith sings its paean of praise and says: All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, because it can add: It is profitable for correction, for reproof, "for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Thanks be to God for His unspeakable love!

St. Louis, Mo.