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THIS is a paper on the intelligibility of some of the concepts of what we commonly call "biblical theology," or sometimes "the biblical point of view," or "the biblical faith." Although my remarks relate only to the Old Testament and at some points concern only two distinguished American representatives of the "biblical viewpoint," G. E. Wright and B. Anderson, the number of scholars of both testaments whose thoughts are based on the so-called "biblical view," and so who share the difficulties outlined below, is very great indeed. My paper stems not from a repudiation of that theological point of view. Speaking personally, I share it, and each time I theologize I use its main categories; but I find myself confused about it when I ponder it critically, and this paper organizes and states rather than resolves that confusion.

My own confusion results from what I feel to be the basic posture, and problem, of contemporary theology: it is half liberal and modern, on the one hand, and half biblical and orthodox, on the other, i.e., its world view or cosmology is modern, while its theological language is biblical and orthodox. Since this posture in two different worlds is the source of the difficulties and ambiguities which exist in current biblical theology, I had best begin with its elucidation.

Our problem begins with the liberal repudiation of orthodoxy. One facet of this repudiation was the rejection of the category "revelation through the special activity of God," what we now call "special revelation," "Heilsgeschichte," or popularly "the mighty acts of God." Orthodoxy, taking the Bible literally, had seen this special activity in the simple biblical twofold pattern of wondrous events (e.g., unexpected children, marvelous victories in battle, pillars of fire, etc.), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a divine voice that spoke actual words to Abraham, to Moses, and to their prophetic followers. This orthodox view of the divine self-manifestation through special events and actual voices offended the liberal mind on two distinct grounds: (1) In understanding God's acts and speech literally and univocally, the orthodox belief in special revelation denied

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the reign of causal law in the phenomenal realm of space and time, or at least denied that that reign of law had obtained in biblical days. To the liberals, therefore, this orthodox view of revelation represented a primitive, prescientific form of religion and should be modernized. (2) Special revelation denied that ultimately significant religious truth is universally available to mankind, or at least in continuity with experiences universally shared by all men. On these two grounds of causal order and universality liberalism reinterpreted the concept of revelation: God's acts ceased to be special, particular, and concerned with phenomenal reality (for example, the stopping of the sun, a visible pillar of fire, and audible voices). Rather, the divine activity became the continual, creative, immanent activity of God, an activity which worked through the natural order and which could therefore be apprehended in universal human experiences of dependence, of harmony, and of value — experiences which in turn issued in developed religious feeling and religious consciousness. The demands both of world order and of universality were thus met by this liberal reconstruction of religion: The immanent divine activity was now consistent throughout experience, and whatever special activity there was in religious knowledge was located subjectively in the uniquely gifted religious leader or culture which possessed deeper insight and so discovered deeper religious truth.

Against this reduction of God's activity to his general influence and of revelation to subjective human insight, neo-orthodoxy, and with it biblical theology, reacted violently. For them, revelation was not a subjective human creation but an objective divine activity; God was not an inference from religious experience but he who acts in special events. And Hebrew religion was not the result of human religious genius or insight into the consistent continuity of God's activity; rather, biblical religion was the response of faith to and the recital of the "mighty acts of God." Both contemporary systematic and contemporary biblical theology are in agreed opposition to liberalism in emphasizing that revelation is not a possibility of universal human experience but comes through the objective, prior, self-revelation of God in special events in response to which faith and witness arise. Whether or not this self-understanding is accurate is a question we shall try to answer.

Contemporary systematic and biblical theology have, however, often failed to note that in repudiating the liberal emphasis on the universal and immanent as against the special and objective activity of God, they have *not* repudiated the liberal insistence on the causal continuum of space-time experience. Thus contemporary theology does not expect, nor does it speak of, wondrous divine events on the surface of natural and historical life. The causal nexus in space and time which Enlightenment science and philosophy introduced into the Western mind and which was assumed by liberalism is also assumed by modern theologians and scholars; since they participate in the modern world of science both intellectually and existentially, they can scarcely do anything else.

Now this assumption of a causal order among phenomenal events, and therefore of the authority of the scientific interpretation of observable events, makes a great difference to the validity one assigns to

biblical narratives and so to the way one understands their meaning. Suddenly a vast panoply of divine deeds and events recorded in Scripture are no longer regarded as having actually happened. Not only, for example, do the six days of creation, the historical fall in Eden, and the flood seem to us historically untrue, but even more the majority of divine deeds in the biblical history of the Hebrew people become what we choose to call symbols rather than plain old historical facts. To mention only a few: Abraham's unexpected child; the many divine visitations; the words and directions to the patriarchs; the plagues visited on the Egyptians; the pillar of fire; the parting of the seas; the verbal deliverance of covenantal law on Sinai; the strategic and logistic help in the conquest; the audible voice heard by the prophets; and so on — all these "acts" vanish from the plane of historical reality and enter the never-never land of "religious interpretation" by the Hebrew people. Therefore when we read what the Old Testament seems to say God did, or what precritical commentators said God did (see Calvin), and then look at a modern interpretation of what God did in biblical times, we find a tremendous difference: the wonder events and the verbal divine commentaries, commands, and promises are gone. Whatever the Hebrews believed, *we* believe that the biblical people lived in the same causal continuum of space and time in which we live, and so one in which no divine wonders transpire and no divine voices were heard. Nor do we believe, incidentally, that God could have done or commanded certain "unethical" deeds like destroying Sodom and Gomorrah or commanding the murder of the Amalekites. The modern assumption of the world order has stripped bare our view of the biblical history of all the divine deeds observable on the surface of history, as our modern humanitarian ethical view has stripped the biblical God of most of his mystery and offensiveness.

Put in the language of contemporary semantic discussion, both the biblical and the orthodox understanding of theological language was univocal. That is, when God was said to have "acted," it was believed that he had performed an observable act in space and time so that he functioned as does any secondary cause; and when he was said to have "spoken," it was believed that an audible voice was heard by the person addressed. In other words, the words "act" and "speak" were used in the same sense of God as of men. We deny this univocal understanding of theological words. To us, theological verbs such as "to act," "to work," "to do," "to speak," "to reveal," etc., have no longer the literal meaning of observable actions in space and time or of voices in the air. The denial of wonders and voices has thus shifted our theological language from the univocal to the analogical. Our problem is, therefore, twofold: (*a*) We have not realized that this crucial shift has taken place, and so we think we are merely speaking the biblical language because we use the same words. We do use these words, but we use them analogically rather than univocally, and these are vastly different usages. (*b*) Unless one knows in some sense what the analogy means, how the analogy is being used, and what it points to, an analogy is empty and unintelligible; that is, it becomes equivocal language. This is the crux of our present difficulty;

let us now return to biblical theology to try to show just how serious it is.

We have said that there is a vast difference between ourselves and the Bible concerning cosmology and so concerning the concrete character of the divine activity in history and that this difference has changed biblical language from a univocal to an analogical form. If, then, this difference is there, what effect has it had on the way we understand the narratives of Scripture, filled as they undoubtedly are with divine wonders and the divine voice? A perusal of such commentators as Wright and Anderson will reveal that, generally speaking, there has been a radical reinterpretation of these narratives, a reinterpretation that has been threefold. First, the divine activity called the "mighty deeds of God" is now restricted to one crucial event, the Exodus-convenant complex of occurrence. Whatever else God may not have done, we say, here he really acted in the history of the Hebrew people, and so here their faith was born and given its form.

Second, the vast panoply of wonder and voice events that preceded the Exodus-covenant event, in effect the patriarchical narratives, are now taken to be Hebrew interpretations of their own historical past based on the faith gained at the Exodus. For us, then, these narratives represent not so much *histories* of what God actually did and said as *parables* expressive of the faith the post-Exodus Jews had, namely, belief in a God who was active, did deeds, spoke promises and commands, and so on. Third, the biblical accounts of the post-Exodus life — for example, the proclamation and codification of the law, the conquest, and the prophetic movement — are understood as the covenant people's interpretation through their Exodus faith of their continuing life and history. Having known God at the Exodus event, they were able now to understand his relation to them in terms of free covenant and law and to see his hand in the movement of their subsequent history. In sum, therefore, we may say that for modern biblical theology the Bible is no longer so much a book containing a description of God's actual acts and words as it is a book containing Hebrew interpretations, "creative interpretations" as we call them, which, like the parable of Jonah, tell stories of God's deeds and man's response to express the theological beliefs of Hebrew religion. Thus the Bible is a book descriptive not of the acts of God but of Hebrew religion. And though God is the subject of all the verbs of the Bible, Hebrew religious faith and Hebrew minds provide the subjects of all the verbs in modern books on the meaning of the Bible. Incidentally, we avoid admitting these perennial human subjects by putting our verbs in the passive voice: "was seen to be," "was believed to be," etc. For us, then, the Bible is a book of the acts Hebrews believed God might have done and the words he might have said had he done and said them — but of course we recognize he did not. The difference between this view of the Bible as a parable illustrative of Hebrew religious faith and the view of the Bible as a direct narrative of God's actual deeds and words is so vast that it scarcely needs comment. It makes us wonder, despite ourselves, what, in fact, do we moderns think God *did* in the centuries preceding the incarnation; what *were* his mighty acts?

The nub of this problem is the fact that, while the object of biblical recital

is God's acts, the object of biblical theological inquiry is biblical faith — that is to say, biblical theology is, like liberalism, a study of Hebrew religion. Thus while the language of biblical theology is God-centered, the whole is included within gigantic parentheses marked "human religion." This means that biblical theology is fundamentally liberal in form and that without translation it provides an impossible vehicle for biblical-theological confession, since it is itself a witness to Hebrew religion and not to the real acts of God. For of course the real action and revelation of God must precede and be outside these great parentheses of Hebrew faith if the content of that faith — as a response to God's acts — be not self-contradictory and illusory, beguiling but untrue, like the poetic religion in Santayana's naturalism.

As we noted, most modern Old Testament commentators reduce the mighty acts of God to one event: the Exodus-covenant event. Let us, therefore, look at our understanding of this event, for around it center the problems we see in biblical theology. Here, we are told, God acted, and in so doing, he revealed himself to the Hebrew people and established his covenant relation to them. Since current biblical theology is, like most contemporary theology, passionately opposed to conceptions of God based on natural theology or on general religious experience, we may assume that before this initial divine deed there was no valid knowledge of God at all: if knowledge of God is based only on his revelatory acts, then prior to those acts he must have been quite unknown. Exodus-Sinai, then, is the pivotal point of biblical religion.

Now this means that the Exodus event has a confessional as well as a historical interest for us. The question of what God did at Sinai is, in other words, not only a question for the scholar of Semitic religion and theology, it is even more a question for the contemporary believer who wishes to make his witness today to the acts of God in history; and so it poses a question for the systematic theologian who wishes today to understand God as the Lord who acted there. We are thus not asking merely the historical question about what the Hebrews believed or said God did — that is a question for the scholar of the history of religions, Semitic branch. Rather, we are asking the systematic question, that is, we are seeking to state in faith what *we* believe God actually did. For, as biblical scholars have reminded us, a religious confession that is biblical is a direct recital of God's acts, not a recital of someone else's belief, even if it be a recital of a Hebrew recitation. If, therefore, Christian theology is to be the recitation in faith of God's mighty acts, it must be composed of confessional and systematic statements of the form: "We believe that God did so and so," and not composed of statements of biblical theology of the form: "The Hebrews believed that God did so and so."

If we had asked an orthodox theologian like Calvin this confessional and systematic question: "What do you believe God did at the Exodus?" he would have given us a clear answer. "Look at the book of Exodus," he would have answered, "and see what it says that God did." And in his commentary he recites that deed of God just as it appears on the pages of Scripture; that is, his confessional understanding of the event includes the divine call

heard by Moses, all the plagues, the pillar of fire, the parting of the seas, the lordly voice booming forth from Sinai, and the divinely proclaimed promises and legal conditions of the covenant. At the Reformation, therefore, statements in biblical theology and in systematic theology coalesced because the theologian's understanding of what God did was drawn with no change from the simple narratives of Scripture, and because the verbs of the Bible were thus interpreted univocally throughout. Thus in Reformation theology, if anywhere, the Bible "speaks its own language" or "speaks for itself" with a minimum of theological mediation.

When, however, one asks Professors Wright or Anderson the systematic or confessional question: "What did God actually do in the Exodus-Sinai event, what actually happened there?" the answer is not only vastly different from the scriptural and orthodox accounts, but, in fact, it is extremely elusive to discover. Strangely enough, neither one gives the questions "What did God *really* do?" "What *was* his mighty act?" much attention. First of all they deny that there was any miraculous character to the event, since "the Hebrews knew no miracles." They assert, therefore, that outwardly the event was indistinguishable from other events,[1] revelation to the Hebrews always being dependent on faith. And finally they assert that probably there was a perfectly natural explanation of the objective side of the event. As Anderson puts it, the rescue of the Hebrews resulted "probably from the East wind blowing over the Reed Sea";[2] and in a single sentence Wright makes one mysterious reference to "certain experiences that took place at the Holy mountain . . . which formed the people into a nation."[3] Considering that each writer clearly feels that the Bible is about the real acts of God, that our religion is founded thereon, and that Christian theology must recite these acts of God, this unconcern with the character of the one act that God is believed actually to have done is surprising.

In any case, this understanding of the event illustrates the uneasy posture in two worlds of current biblical theology and thus its confusion about two types of theological language. When modern biblical writers speak *theologically* of the revelatory event, their attention focuses on the prior and objective event, and they speak in the biblical and orthodox terms of a God who speaks and acts, of divine initiation and human response, and of revelation through mighty, divine deeds in history. When, however, they function as *scientific* historians or archeologists and ask what actually happened, they speak of that same prior event in purely naturalistic terms as "an ordinary though unusual event," or as "an East wind blowing over the Reed Sea." Thus they repudiate all the concrete elements that in the biblical account made the event itself unique and so gave content to their theological concept of a special divine deed. In other words, they continue to use the biblical and orthodox theological language of divine activity and speech, but they have dispensed with the wonders and voices that gave univocal meaning, and thus content, to the theological words "God acts" and "God speaks."

This dual posture in both biblical orthodoxy and modern cosmology, and the consequent rejection of univocal meanings for our theological phrases, raises our first

question: "Are the main words and categories in biblical theology meaningful?" If they are no longer used univocally to mean observable deeds and audible voices, do they have any intelligible content? If they are in fact being used as analogies (God acts, but not as men act; God speaks, but not with an audible voice), do we have any idea at all to what sort of deed or communication these analogies refer? Or are they just serious-sounding, biblical-sounding, and theological-sounding words to which we can, if pressed, assign no meaning? Note I am not making the empiricist or positivist demand that we give a naturalistic, empirically verifiable meaning to these theological words, a meaning outside the context of faith and commitment. I am asking for a confessional-theological meaning, that is, a meaning based on thought about our faith concerning what we mean by these affirmations of faith. The two affirmations I especially wish to consider are, first, "God has acted mightily and specially in history for our salvation, and so God is he who acts in history." And second, "Our knowledge of God is based not on our discovery of him but on God's revelation of himself in historical events." My point is that, when we analyze what we mean by these theological phrases, we can give no concrete or specifiable content so that our analogies at present are empty and meaningless. The result is that, when we push the analysis of these analogical words further, we find that what we actually mean by them contradicts the intent of these theological phrases.

Let us take the category of "mighty act" first. Perhaps the most important theological affirmation that modern biblical theology draws from the Scripture is that God is he who acts, meaning by this that God does unique and special actions in history. And yet when we ask: "All right, what has he done?" no answer can apparently be given. Most of the acts recorded in Scripture turn out to be "interpretations by Hebrew faith," and we are sure that they, like the miracles of the Buddha, did not really happen at all. And the one remaining objective act, the Exodus, becomes on analysis "the East wind blowing over the Reed Sea," that is, an event which is objectively or ontologically of the same class as any other event in space and time. Now if this event is validly to be called a mighty act of God, an event in which he really did something special — as opposed to our just believing he did, which would be religious subjectivism and metaphysical naturalism — then, ontologically, this must in some sense be more than an ordinary run-of-the-mill event. It may be epistemologically indistinguishable from other events to those without faith, but for those of faith it must be objectively or ontologically different from other events. Otherwise, there is no mighty act, but only our belief in it, and God is the God who in fact does not act. And then our theological analogies of "act" and "deed" have no referent, and so no meaning. But in current biblical theology such an ontologically special character to the event, a special character known perhaps only by faith but really "out there" nevertheless, is neither specified nor specifiable. For in the Bible itself that special character was understood to be the very wonders and voices which we have rejected, and nothing has appeared in modern biblical thought to take their place. Only an ontology of events specifying what God's relation to

ordinary events is like, and thus what his relation to special events might be, could fill the now empty analogy of mighty acts, void since the denial of the miraculous.

Meanwhile, in contemporary biblical theology, which dares to stray into the forbidden precincts of cosmology and ontology only far enough to deny miracles, all that can be said about the event leaves the analogy of the mighty act quite empty. We deny the miraculous character of the event and say its cause was merely an East wind, and then we point to the unusual response of Hebrew faith. For biblical theology, that which remains special about the event, therefore, is only its subjective result, namely, the faith response. But if we then ask what this Hebrew response was *to,* what God did, we are offered merely an objectively natural event. But this means merely that the Hebrews, as a religious people, were unusual; it does not mean that the event to which they responded was unusual. One can only conclude, therefore, that the mighty act of God is not his objective activity in history but only his inward incitement of a religious response to an ordinary event within the space-time continuum. If this is what we mean, then clearly we have left the theological framework of "mighty act with faith response" and returned to Schleiermacher's liberalism, in which God's general activity is consistent throughout the continuum of space-time events and in which special religious feeling apprehends the presence of God in and through ordinary finite events. Thus our theological analogy of the mighty act seems to have no specifiable referent or meaning: like the examples of God's speaking, the only case turns out on analysis to be an example, not of God's activity at all, but of Hebrew insight based on their religious experience.

A similar problem arises when we ask what is meant by "revelation" in a modern mighty acts theology. The correlation of ordinary event and faith response is basic for contemporary theology: no event, we say, becomes revelatory (i.e., is known to be revelatory) unless faith sees in it the work of God. Now this correlation of ordinary event with discerning faith is intelligible enough once the covenant relation between God and his people has been established: then God is already known, faith has already arisen, and so God's work can be seen by faith in the outwardly ordinary events of Hebrew existence. But can the rule that revelatory events are only discerned by faith be equally applied to the event in which faith takes its origin? Can it, in other words, provide a theological understanding of *originating* revelation, that is, of God's original self-manifestation to man, in which man does not discern an already known God but in which God reveals himself to men who know nothing of him? Certainly it is logical to contend that faith cannot be presupposed in the event which purportedly effects the origination of faith.

When we consider the description that biblical theology makes of the origination of faith, moreover, the problems in this view seem vast indeed. Theologically it is asserted that God is not known through general, natural, historical, or inward experience. Thus presumably the Hebrews fled from Egypt uncognizant of God, having in their minds no concepts at all of the transcendent, active, covenant deity of later Hebrew religion. How, then, did they come to know this God? The an-

swer of contemporary theology, of course, is that at this point the East wind over the Red Sea rescued the Hebrew people from the Egyptians, and so according to Wright, their faith arose as the only assumption that could make sense of this great stroke of good fortune: "They did not have the power themselves (to effect the rescue); there was only one explanation available to them. That was the assumption that a great God had seen their afflictions, had taken pity on them. . . ."[4] Thus Hebrew faith is here presented as a human hypothesis, a religious assumption arising out of intuition and insight into the meaning of an unusual and crucial experience.

One can only wonder at this statement. First of all in what sense can one speak of *revelation* here? Is this not a remarkably clear example of natural religion or natural theology? The origination of Hebrew faith is explained as a religious assumption based on an unusual event but one which was admittedly consistent with, of the same order as, other events within the nature-history continuum. In what way does this faith come from God and what he has done rather than from man and what he has discovered, or even just poetically imagined? It seems to be only the religious insight and imagination of the Jews that has created and developed this monotheistic assumption out of the twists and turns of their historical experience. And second, why was there "only one explanation available" to them? Why was this response so inevitably tied with this event as to make us feel that the response was revealed in the event? Why could not the Hebrews have come to believe in a god of the East Wind, or a benevolent Fate, or any of the thousands of deities of unusual events that human religion has created? Surely on neo-orthodox principles, the theological concept or religious assumption *least* available to the imagination of men who knew not God was that of the transcendent, covenant God of history—exactly the assumption now called "inevitable" when an East wind had rescued them.

Furthermore, we should recall that for biblical theology the entire meaning of the concept of revelation through divine activity rather than through subjective experience or insight hangs on this one act of divine revelation. Thus the admission at this vital point that Hebrew faith was a daring human hypothesis based on a natural but unusual event is very puzzling. For it indicates that despite our flowery theological language, our actual understanding of Hebrew religion remains inclosed within liberal categories. When we are asked about what actually happened, and how revelation actually occurred, all we can say is that in the continuum of the natural order an unusual event rescued the Hebrews from a sad fate; from this they concluded there must be somewhere a God who loved them; thus they interpreted their own past in terms of his dealings with them and created all the other familiar characteristics of Hebrew religion: covenant, law, and prophecy. This understanding of Hebrew religion is strictly "liberal": it pictures reality as a consistent world order and religious truth as a human interpretation based on religious experience. And yet at the same time, having castigated the liberals, who at least knew what their fundamental theological principles were, we proclaim that our real categories are orthodox: God acts, God

speaks, and God reveals. Furthermore, we dodge all criticism by insisting that, because biblical and Christian ideas of God are "revealed," they are, unlike the assumptions and hypotheses of culture and of other religions, beyond inspection by the philosophical and moral criteria of man's general experience.

What has happened is clear: because of our modern cosmology, we have stripped what we regard as "the biblical point of view" of all its wonders and voices. This in turn has emptied the Bible's theological categories of divine deeds and divine revelations of all their univocal meaning, and we have made no effort to understand what these categories might mean as analogies. Thus, when we have sought to understand Hebrew religion, we have unconsciously fallen back on the liberal assumptions that do make some sense to us. What we desperately need is a theological ontology that will put intelligible and credible meanings into our analogical categories of divine deeds and of divine self-manifestation through events.

Our point can perhaps be summarized by saying that, without such an ontological basis, the language of biblical theology is neither univocal nor analogical but equivocal, and so it remains empty, abstract, and self-contradictory. It is empty and abstract because it can provide us with no concrete cases. We say the biblical God acts, but we can give neither concrete examples nor analogical description; we say he speaks, and no illustrative dialogues can be specified. What has happened is that, as modern men perusing the Scriptures, we have rejected as invalid all the innumerable cases of God's acting and speaking; but as neo-orthodox men looking for a word from the Bible, we have induced from all these cases the theological generalization that God is he who acts and speaks. This general truth about God we then assert while denying all the particular cases on the basis of which the generalization was first made. Consequently, biblical theology is left with a set of theological abstractions, more abstract than the dogmas of scholasticism, for these are concepts with no known concreteness. Finally, our language is self-contradictory because, while we use the language of orthodoxy, what we really mean is concepts and explanations more appropriate to liberal religion. For if there is any middle ground between the observable deed and the audible dialogue which we reject, and what the liberals used to call religious experience and religious insight, then it has not yet been spelled out.

In the cases both of the mighty act of God and of the speech of God, such a spelling-out is an enterprise in philosophical theology. While certainly this enterprise cannot be unbiblical, it must at least be ontological and philosophical enough to provide theological meaning to our biblical analogies of divine deeds and words, since today we have abandoned the univocal, literal meanings of these words. One example may illustrate. Commenting on the "biblical view," Wright says: "He [God] is to be known by what he has done and said, by what he is now doing and saying; and he is known when we do what he commands us to do."[5] Unless we can give some analogical meaning to these concepts "do," "say," and "command," we are unable to make any confessional sense at all of this sentence, since every actual case of doing, saying, or commanding referred to in the Scripture has for us van-

ished into subjective Hebrew religious experience and interpretation. One might almost conclude that without a theological ontology, biblical theology is in danger of becoming a version of Santayana's poetic view of religion, in which believing man paints the objective flux of matter in the pretty subjective pictures of religious language and myth.

Two changes in our thinking can, I believe, rescue us from these dilemmas. First of all, biblical theology must take cosmology and ontology more seriously. Despite the undeniable but irrelevant fact that the Hebrews did not think much about cosmology, cosmology does make a difference in heremeneutics. When we say "God acts," we mean something different cosmologically than the writers of JED and P, or even than Calvin, did. Thus the modern discipline of "biblical theology" is more tricky than we perhaps assumed when we thought we could just lift out theological abstractions (God speaks, God acts) from the narratives of Scripture and, calling them "the biblical point of view," act as if they were the only theology we needed. If in doing this we pretend that we are "just letting the Bible speak for itself," we are fooling no one but ourselves. Actually we are translating the biblical view into our own, at least in rejecting its concrete content of wonders and voices and so changing these categories from univocal concepts to empty analogies. But we have done this translating without being aware of the change we have made and thus without thinking out the problems in which this shift in cosmology and the resultant translation of biblical language involve us. Hence the abstractness and self-contradictory character of our categories in present "biblical theology." To speak the biblical word in a contemporary setting is a difficult *theological* task as well as a difficult existential task.

This means in turn that two very different enterprises must be distinguished in Christian theology, for they cannot be confused without fatal results. First there is the job of stating what the biblical writers meant to say, a statement couched in the Bible's own terms, cosmological, historical, and theological. This is "biblical theology," and its goal is to find what the Bible truly says—whether what in specific instances the Bible says seems to us in fact to be true or not. Then there is the other task of stating what that Word might mean for us today, what *we* believe God actually to have done. This is confessional and systematic theology, and its object is what *we* believe the truth about God and about what he has done to be. To use Wright's language, we must distinguish between *Hebrew* recital (biblical theology) and *our* recital (confessional or systematic theology) if our confessions are to make any sense at all. To confuse the two, and to try to make a study of what the biblical writers said also and at the same time an attempt to say what we believe to be true about God, is fatal and leads to the kind of confusions we have outlined.

Second, it is clear that throughout this paper our central problem has been that, in the shift of cosmology from ancient to modern, fundamental theological concepts have so changed their meaning as almost to have lost all reference. The phrases "God acts" and "God speaks," whatever

they may ultimately mean to us, do not signify the wonders and voices of ancient days. As we have seen, it is no good repeating the abstract verbs "to act" and "to speak," if we have no intelligible referents with which to replace the vanished wonders and voices; and if we use these categories as analogies without any discussion of what we mean by them, we contradict ourselves over and over. When we use the analogies "mighty act," "unique revelatory event," or "God speaks to his people," therefore, we must also try to understand what we might mean in systematic theology by the general activity of God. Unless we have some conception of how God acts in ordinary events, we can hardly know what our analogical words mean when we say: "He acts uniquely in this event" or "this event is a special divine deed." Thus if we are to give content to the biblical analogy of a mighty act, and so to our theological concepts of special revelation and salvation, we must also have some understanding of the relation of God to general experience, which is the subject of philosophical theology. Put in terms of doctrines, this means that God's special activity is logically connected with his providential activity in general historical experience, and an understanding of the one assumes a concurrent inquiry into the other. For this reason, while the dependence of systematic and philosophical theology on biblical theology has long been recognized and is obvious, the dependence of an intelligible theology that is biblical on the cosmological and ontological inquiries of believing men, while now less universally accepted, is nonetheless real. There is no primary discipline in the life of the church, for all of us — biblical scholars and theologians — live and think in the present and look for the truth in documents from the past. And for all of us, a contemporary understanding of ancient Scriptures depends as much on a careful analysis of our present presuppositions as it does on being learned in the religion and faith of the past.

NOTES

[1] G. E. Wright, *Books of the Acts of God* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1959), p. 18.

[2] B. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), pp. 47—49.

[3] Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 32.