

## *Hermeneutics: The Bible as the Vehicle of God's Word Today*

**E.C. Blackman**

[p.238]

The Bible has been traditionally regarded as the word of God, and must still be so regarded. Those who have ceased to believe in God clearly do not accept it as such. Nor do those—a large number among regular churchgoers—whose belief in God is really belief in a non-speaking God, i.e. a God who started the universe on its course, and even inspired the Hebrew prophets and Jesus of Nazareth, but since then, at some time between the Reformation and Nietzsche, has “died”—or at least retired from his more personal involvement with the human scene. This deistic type of religion, whose God has never spoken a living word, is not to be despised. It is far better than atheistic existentialism; it has a certain dignity and is not hopeless. But our concern is with those who accept the Bible as the “word” of the living God, with relevance for A.D. 1965 as well as for A.D. 65, i.e. as conveying through its ancient words and their reference to ancient situations a continuing reference to our modern situation.

This involves us at once in the need for clear thinking and precise definition. How is the Bible to be interpreted so that its ancient word becomes a contemporary word? The problems of biblical interpretation are very much in the forefront of current theological discussion and the word “hermeneutics” has been brought into use again. This is a considerable gain, as compared with the usage of two generations ago, when it was assumed that critical introduction to the biblical documents was enough in itself to equip a man to be an expositor; it is a gain also as compared with the practice of those who are content simply to quote the Bible (in a modern translation, of course, but often with suspicion toward the most recent translation). Quoting is not enough, because what you quote literally is strictly what the Bible said, and this is not to be taken without due reflection as being what the Bible says to us today. Here is the problem.

There is a prior question concerning the Bible's authority. What is it about the Bible that justifies taking it so seriously? What makes it, and no other book, the word of God? This is a stupendous claim for its uniqueness and we need to be as clear as we can about what is implied in the claim, and the reason for it. The problem of interpretation does not arise at all for those who decide that the Bible belongs to antiquity and not to the present and future; it is just an ancient book, no less and no more capable of being made relevant for today than Plato or Epictetus. But to give up the claim

[p.239]

for uniqueness and continuing relevance, which is implied in the phrase “Word of God” as applied to the Bible, is not only to give up the traditional attitude to it; it is to step down from the level of true criticism through not discerning what the Bible is and the claim it makes for itself. It is vital to assess rightly the nature and distinctiveness of our subject matter.

What, then, is the Bible's claim and content? Limits of space force us to be selective, and it must suffice to refer to the moral teaching that has pride of place in the Old Testament. The books of the Law (Torah) were placed first by the Rabbis who put the Old Testament into its

present shape. They were considered the primary element, the highest revelation of God's will. And this was understood not as demand only, as bleak imperative, but as guidance and gift. The word "Torah" does not suggest the restraining force of the policeman and the magistrate (as "law" does to us); it suggests God and his gracious succour. Some of the old Hebrew requirements may be tedious and irrelevant. We are not tempted to allow our cattle to gender with a diverse kind, nor are we bothered about not seething a kid in its mother's milk (the commentators cannot tell you what it means anyhow). But are we beyond the need of warning about adultery and coveting; or that "thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people"; or about those revolting sexualities referred to at the end of Romans 1? One of the things on which the Bible is not ashamed to be quite elementary is the way in which crime and vice perpetuate themselves in every generation. Man is a creature of God, but he is also a sinner, and "sin lieth at the door." This assertion comes early in the biblical record and is fundamental to the biblical understanding of the human problem. The more avowedly religious content (I do not say theological, because there is relatively little theology in the Bible) is, of course, that which reveals God's handling of this vast moral problem, diagnosed in terms not only of crime and vice, but of sin. Sin is a distinctively religious-theological term, but it is always implied in the moral teaching of the Bible which presupposes God as its author. Righteous living is God's will, and failure in duty is a breaking of his commandments. The biblical ethic is not autonomous, but grounded in the biblical faith; to put it another way, it is not anthropocentric but theocentric. The Bible is about us and our duty and our potentiality and destiny—all visualized as part of God's eternal purpose. It is the revelation of that divine purpose. The Bible comes to us as the affirmation that this purpose is to some extent made known—and that human life has meaning only in relation to it.

We have arrived again at the point where the Bible's authority is being defined, that is, its claim to confront man with his Maker, to put man where he can hear, not the best of human wisdom, but divine speaking, and where he can perceive intersections of the eternal and the temporal, true Being and mere existence.

If this claim cannot be sustained, then we must be honest and remove

[p.240]

the Bible from the special shelf which the Christian tradition has assigned to it, and place it beside the Rabbinic Literature and the other survivals of the literature of the ancient world.

But if the claim can be sustained, we must go on to draw up rules for its interpretation, by which the original word of God can become ever and again a contemporary word. If it is true that the faith was "once for all delivered to the saints," each new generation has a responsibility to see that it is delivered to the new saints. The word of God that came by Israel's prophets was directed to the situations and problems of ancient Israel. How far does that carry over into the modern world? How do we handle the ancient texts so that the temporary reference falls away and the permanent applicability shows clear? How do we separate eternal truth from historical presentation? Or do we say: What a nuisance this involvement in history is—let us turn from this historically conditioned Bible, and look for stable eternal truth in Plato's vigorous idealism, or the mythology of the Bhagavadgita, or the symbolism of Spenser and William Blake, or the speculations of ancient Gnostics and modern Existentialists?

The aim of biblical interpretation is the contemporizing of the divine revelation granted to people living in Palestine between 1000 B.C. and A.D. 100. They understood themselves to be in special relation to God, and to have received evidence of God's dealing with them in certain situations interpreted by prophets, apostles, and witnesses. What they received was not for their private edification, but to be held in trust for all mankind. Divine revelation is for universal benefit, even though its first recipients have to be hand-picked, because God is Lord of mankind, not of Israel only or of any one chosen people. And Christ is Saviour not of the church only, but of the world; not of the generation of Jesus of Nazareth only, but of all men to the end of time. He contained within himself the treasures of Israel's religious heritage, but reminted them so that they became common coin, no longer the monopoly of priests and prophets and wise men. He created a situation where this could happen. The church's hermeneutical responsibility, therefore, is to draw out, for all who wish to learn, the meaning of those divine self-disclosures; to broadcast the revelation concentrated in Christ into the totality of man's knowledge and culture; to bridge the gap between sacred and secular, faith and unfaith; in Amos Wilder's words, to bring about "a wedding of general human experience and revelation."<sup>1</sup>

The task of exegesis revolves around three evaluations of the Bible that are interrelated but need to be carefully distinguished. (I state them in terms of revelation in order to indicate what they have in common.)

1 *Revelation may be called the subject matter of the Bible.* All the Bible's variety of affirmation amounts quantitatively to the *What* of revelation: what God is like; what God has done and is ever doing. It is the

[p.241]

business of the expositor to communicate what we can learn about God. It is the "old, old story" of our salvation, and the Bible teacher has to tell it and make it real and believable; to point to the past events in which former generations discerned "the finger of God" (Exod. 8:19; Luke 11:20), i.e. divine saving action. The Bible is rooted in history, for there, in past events, chronicled and interpreted, is the evidence of God's action. God is not the God of the philosophers, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; yes, and of Moses and David and Isaiah and Jesus, historical characters who found God in their history, and "knew him for what He is by what He does."

Those who find this insistence on history uncongenial may find some relief in St. John's Gospel, which offers a more intellectualist presentation in terms of truth. But truth here is not the abstract truth of the philosopher, ultimate reality as knowable; it is concrete, "incarnate" truth, ultimate reality becoming knowable by entering into historic particularity, viz. thirty years of humble existence as a carpenter's son in an out-of-the-way Jewish village, and one year of hectic public activity terminating in a humiliating execution. The revelation became flesh, St. John says. (There is an important distinction between the truth *about* God and the truth *of* God to which we can only refer here.)

---

<sup>1</sup> Amos N. Wilder, *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric* (New York-Evanston: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 105.

This new incarnate truth—truth about God and truth of God—holds within itself the possibility of becoming actual for the modern reader in so far as the ancient revelation can become contemporary. I have in mind a deliberate distinction between what the Bible said, what the Bible meant, and what the Bible still says and means for today. It is fashionable to decry the first two as mere *Historismus*, but it is surely time to give up the pastime of blaming the old liberal critics for not being neo-orthodox. They were biblical theologians even if not in quite the sense in which the term Biblical Theology is now used. They maintained that the establishing of the original historical sense of a passage, i.e. what the Bible said and meant then, is the indispensable preliminary to the discerning of any continuing applicability or "theological" sense. St. Thomas Aquinas had affirmed this in his own way long before the days of "liberal" criticism. What I am here stating in speaking of what the Bible says in contrast to what it said is intended as a rough equivalent to what the Scholastics called the spiritual sense of Scripture, or to what Barth calls theological exegesis.

2. We move on to our second evaluation of the Bible as *the medium of the continued reception of revelation*. From this point of view the Bible offers not so much information about, as confrontation with, God. Through the Bible we encounter God, or feel ourselves addressed by him, as it were by a lightning flash illuminating our whole existence.

This view is too Lutheran, too Bultmannian, for most of us. It is determined largely by existentialist philosophy which agonizes over the problem of how life is to become meaningful and man fully personal. This handling of the Bible finds God addressing man and thereby standing him on his feet as a

[p.242]

responsible personality. Man is not simply "geworfen in das Dasein"; he exists in order to respond to God's call with an obedience which dignifies.

We need to be on our guard here lest in minimizing the content of the Bible we make it a mere stimulus. It may be asked: can God not use any book—even a newspaper—to awaken the conscience, create faith and response, etc.?

But there is an important emphasis here that must not be missed. We are dealing now with a conception of the nature of the Bible as not a text-book providing information, not even information about God, but rather as a kind of magnetic field which transmits power when the right kind of question is thrown into it. The questions, of course, arise out of the situation of the interpreter. Now this is no longer a situation of the nineteenth century—when modern biblical criticism was establishing itself—nor of the sixteenth century—when the Reformers were freeing the Bible from the entanglements of tradition and medieval scholasticism, so that it could function more directly as the basis of Christian theology and become the unobscured medium of the word. Manifestly the modern interpreter cannot assume that he has the ability, lacking in men of the nineteenth and sixteenth centuries, to put himself in the position of those who originally received the word from the glowing utterance of prophets and apostles. The "message" of the Bible is bound to vary according to the "life-situation" of its readers; their need is different, the questions they ask are different. They cannot be nourished on a meaning or teaching which was satisfactory for a previous generation. From this point of view the Bible is not a book of teachings to be learned and relearned. Its content is misunderstood if regarded simply as matter waiting to be translated into all the modern languages where

missionaries report there is a constituency of readers, and finally summarized as doctrine which can be taught. To quote a recent article by R. W. Funk: "The norm implicit in Scripture is self-evidently not something which can be laid hold of and reduced to a verbal formulation valid for all time.... Laying hold of the Word in an effort to fix it is precisely what robs it of its potential as the Word of grace."<sup>2</sup>

The Bible, in this light, is a generator rather than a text-book or storehouse. Those who come to it with the right questions (i.e. in faith) receive answers. But these answers will not be identical with what other questioners receive, and they may be very different from what was received by earlier inquirers who used the Bible for guidance at times of different existential involvement. The living God who is Author of Scripture causes it to yield light sufficient for the needs of successive generations. By the action of the illuminating Spirit the ancient word becomes a contemporary word. To quote again from the article by Funk just mentioned, the Word "functions hermeneutically."

This is the language which is now fashionable. A new technical term

[p.243]

(deriving from W. Dilthey) is "hermeneutical circle," which means the mutual relationship between reader and text, or more generally in epistemology, apart from interpretation of the Bible, the subject—object relationship. The new point here made is that the inquiring subject brings his own presuppositions and interests—he cannot leave them behind any more than he can step outside his skin—to his object (or text). They determine the kind of questions he puts. But the object studied may present something to him which will affect his presuppositions, and thus an interplay starts (*Wechselwirkung von Vorverständnis und Sache*). The inquirer must be patient. He must be involved in this kind of interrelationship or dialogue, rather than simply receive a straight answer to his question. When it is a biblical passage with which we are dealing, we start with an acceptance of Bible as Word of God (absolute truth, divine guidance), but we must be prepared for the particular passage to answer us back in ways that modify and develop that preliminary understanding. To quote Professor Funk once more : "The Word cannot be heard anew unless the questions brought to the text are submitted to the probing criticism of the text."

Some scholars speak of the "intentional fallacy," meaning thereby the mistake that arises from trying to take account of a writer's intention. The intention of the writer should be ignored. The text is all that matters; it should be read in and for itself and allowed to make its own impression. This is an extreme position, but much modern art seems to presuppose something like it. What the picture meant to the painter is not the main business of the observer. The painter may or may not have had a reason for putting an eye where an ordinary person would have expected to see an ear. But the observer need not bother about that; all he has to do is let the painting stimulate his own reactions and reflections. Reality is many-sided and makes different impressions on different people, and on the same person in different moods. A picture or a poem, then, may be expected to elicit varied interpretations. How far do we go along this line? We can be carried to a complete relativism. Our concern is with the Bible. Are we to say that everybody can make what he likes of it, Tyndale's ploughboy as well as bishop and theologian, unbeliever as well as believer? Is membership in the believing community not

---

<sup>2</sup> R. W. Funk, "Creating an Opening: Biblical Criticism and the Theological Curriculum," *Interpretation*, 18 (1964), 406.

necessary for understanding? Is what the church has learnt in the past no guide to the Bible's meaning in the present? Is there no need of "tradition" to keep interpretation on the right lines? Why cannot there be a stereotyped, orthodox interpretation "once for all delivered to the saints," like the faith itself, according to the Epistle of Jude? The hesitation of the Catholic Church to encourage private judgment and to allow the layman to have the Scriptures in a vernacular version for his own reading at home is understandable. But the right of private reading must be allowed, and the risk of private interpretation is one that must be taken (even though, as in the case of Luther, a reformation may result). What to the Catholic appears as division and schism appears to Protestant eyes as reformation and new life. In the words of the Puritan

[p.244]

John Robinson: "The Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his holy Word." We may be content to go on in that expectancy. The Bible renews its message in each generation to serious students, and there may be new insights yet to be disclosed to future generations. Elgar once remarked to a neighbour, after listening to a recital of some of his music: "I didn't know it had that in it." The Bible is like that music; it has a potency of continual new meaning. It "means what it *comes to mean*."

Is there nothing more to be said than that the Bible is the story of God's movement toward man, the record of saving acts? Alternatively—as in the second evaluation just described—is the Bible best handled not as historical or propositional material, but as experiential, as medium of the divine-human encounter? There is validity in both these views, and they are not mutually exclusive. The idea that the Bible has content that is permanently meaningful and relevant, as the record of God's mighty acts for man's salvation, must always take precedence. Those acts were real events, i.e. history, though, of course, the history is interpreted by faith; and faith is nourished and propagated as the story is told and retold. "We will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might and the wonders he has wrought, that the next generation may know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Ps. 78:4-7). Events have a particularity which controls the vagaries of interpretation and excessive conceptualization. The God of biblical faith is One who loves righteousness and hates iniquity—as witness the calamity of 586 B.C. in Jerusalem; who loves the world—as witness the doings and sufferings of Jesus of Nazareth; whose self-sacrifice is declared in the cross of Christ and whose triumph is declared in the Resurrection of Christ.

3. But there is something more to be said. I submit a third aspect of the Bible as revelation: its function as illuminator of the true situation of man, in his weakness and potentiality, tragedy and triumph. In all his fears and failures man is in touch with God, a sinner but still a child of God, because his creator is also his Redeemer. This view of the Bible puts the searchlight on man as recipient of revelation. It is not a new doctrine or anthropology, though it is strongly influenced by existentialism and has been advocated most forcibly by members of the school of R. Bultmann, who are philosophically in the line of Heidegger. It is difficult for those who do not draw from the same philosophical source to understand Bultmann properly. His ecclesiastical setting in German Lutheranism is also different from that of most of us. But his concern for the unique authority of the Bible—at least the New Testament—in relation to man's deepest need is as great as that of any living scholar, and we do well to learn from him.

He asserts that twentieth-century man, just as much as the contemporaries of Isaiah and Paul, has his inmost being exposed when the word comes to him. That exposure is deliverance, freedom, beginning of

[p.245]

true life, ability to face the future. In more biblical terms, it is the experience of forgiveness and redeeming grace. It is "eschatological" deliverance, an eschatology which happens now and is not postponed to an ultimate Judgment beyond history.

This is no mean interpretation of the Bible, even though it does leave many biblical affirmations unnoticed. I set it down as a third explanation beside my other two summaries of what the Bible essentially is. It involves us, when we come to deal with particular passages, in what Bultmann calls demythologizing. This means replacing the biblical myth-language with comparable terminology which is meaningful for the modern reader. And this means for Bultmann discerning the *Existenz-verständnis* of Biblical myths, and restating it in terms that are appropriate to the human condition as we in the twentieth century understand it, i.e. in terms of modern existentialism. Along these lines, according to Bultmann, we find a true *Selbstverständnis* which is our basic need. The preached word based on a text will again and again light up this self-understanding for us, and then, we are assured, we can face life again, make decisions, be free and responsible personalities—in spite of Hitler and all the powers who seem to control human destiny.

So far, so good. But how much more the Bible contains! Bultmann's existentialism is a reduction of what the Bible understands by salvation to the release of the individual believer. A. N. Wilder in his judicious criticism of Bultmann's demything speaks of its "forfeiture of meaning," which is really a misunderstanding of myth and of Christian imagery generally. The myth must be left in. Existentialism is about man's despair and obligation and need of freedom. The Bible has a wider concern. Its mythical language dares to assure us of a God who has a plan not for individuals but for society and for the universe, not for individual emancipation but for the redemption of mankind. If Bultmann had read the poets more and the philosophers less, he would have been more tolerant of myth. He might even have urged us to digest it instead of expunging it. The modern person who bothers to acquaint himself with technological or psychological know-how can be expected to learn that symbolism is not nonsense. The return of the prodigal is no less meaningful in reference to the destiny of man than the square root of minus one is in reference to the nature of the universe.

In the light of these alternative understandings of the nature of the Bible, the disciplines necessary for its proper interpretation may be considered. What should be included under critical introduction in our present approach to the Bible? Introduction involves the traditional disciplines of philology and history, textual and source criticism. This is so obvious as to require no more than a bare mention. What needs emphasis in addition is the need to develop ability to distinguish historical and factual narrative from imaginative narrative, and to recognize the object and value of each. We should not be hasty in assigning negative effect to one

[p.246]

or the other, or fall prey to a tendency to factualize material that is deliberately imaginative and symbolic. A much simpler distinction is that between prose and poetry; we can be impartial about this, and we all have preferences, but we do not rush in and say: poetry is better than prose. We recognize that each has its proper function. Unfortunately, too many Bible students are inclined to rank the historical-factual above the allusive and symbolical. Yet the latter may be a vehicle of truth just as much as plain description or strait commandment. It is a most pathetic illusion to suppose that we are not evaluating the Bible as truth unless we interpret every page as literal happening. The advocates of that view, well-meaning as they are, create far more difficulties than they realize for the unprejudiced reader, and really obscure the fundamental truth instead of bringing it to light. That illusion must go. We must be clear minded enough not to confuse truth with mere accuracy or "facticity." Those who do not avoid these confusions may end up by demanding a modern rendering of the Bible into mathematical figures and diagrams whose precision is undeniable. But that is to be in a different area of discourse. Not so have we learned Christ.

Myth in the Bible may be defined as imaginative descriptions of God's dealing with mankind, or of man's position vis-à-vis God. The details of the picture are invented, and never actually happened; nevertheless the description as a whole may be really true, because it deals with reality, a total reality which means the total setting of man's life, including God the Author of all. Wilder defines myth as "total world-representation, involving not only what we would call the external cosmos but man as well, and all *in the light of God*."<sup>3</sup> In biblical thought man cannot be defined apart from God. Thus myth deals with man's experience in relation to his Maker, even though not with particular events. It is a way of understanding this human being who individually and corporately is the actor on the stage of history (and does not cease to be in relation to his Maker when he is thus involved in historical happenings).<sup>4</sup>

Father R. A. F. MacKenzie has shown that there is also a sense in which a historical narrative may become myth, i.e. acquire an extra value or significance arising out of the importance of the events described, which come to have universal (rather than just local or temporal) applicability as later generations look back on them.<sup>5</sup> Take the Exodus, for example. MacKenzie points out that the Bible has two different ways of referring to it. The Exodus was an historical event. The Hebrews did escape from Egypt, even though no Egyptian records corroborate this. The Bible, however, is concerned to stress the Exodus not simply as a happening in the national annals of the Hebrew people, but much more as their outstanding

[p.247]

experience, interpreted by a prophetic leader, of the good purpose of God toward them; in other words, as a myth of redemption. Here myth is more important than history, but we note that the categories of myth and history are not as antithetical and mutually exclusive as is usually supposed.

---

<sup>3</sup> Wilder, *The Language of the Gospel*, p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> In a general sense we may say that myths are dealing with history; see, for example, Gen. 3 as contrasted with Gen. 1-2. But in this case we have to distinguish Gen. 3 from, say, 1-2 Sam., which is more definitely in the historical category.

<sup>5</sup> R. A. F. MacKenzie, *Faith and History in the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), ch. V.

We may perhaps regard George Washington and John Brown as offering some parallels in modern history. In English history John Bull is pure myth—but we may well find that by A.D. 2000 Winston Churchill has provided historical concreteness for this myth.

In view of all this a correct understanding of myth is essential in Bible reading. For a literal historicism in the interpretation of the Bible is no virtue, and symbolism in defence of truth is no vice!

Another element needing emphasis in our critical introduction is the distinction between ancient and modern mentality. This enables the reader to (1) handle miracle properly, allowing full distinctiveness to divine action as contrasted with human, but not getting involved in defence of impossible positions by unimaginative literalism; (2) understand how an individual figure can be understood as a representative figure or "type." This was self-explanatory to the ancient Hebrews, but requires an effort from the individualistic modern if he is to understand it. Adam in the Bible never means an individual who lived 930 years in a garden called Eden. He means mankind as a whole, or a typical man. Abraham has more historical individuality than Adam, but outside Genesis (e.g. Gal. 3; Rom. 4) Abraham means Israel. This kind of meaning caused no perplexity to the ancients. It makes literal understanding look absurd, but it is the true sense of such references. Readers of classical literature do not need to be reminded that such figures as Helen and Faust are types rather than individuals.

It is further necessary to note what is distinctive about biblical language—"the new language-impulse of emerging Christianity," to quote another of A. N. Wilder's perceptive phrases.<sup>6</sup> Among the many books and articles currently devoted to this subject, Wilder's *Language of the Gospel* is outstanding for its maturity of reflection and for its own beauty of language.

Critical introduction as just outlined is indispensable, if only as a clearing of the ground so that the proper reading of the Bible may begin.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, criticism as we have had it since c. 1800 has often taken the wrong turning (exposed notably in Schweitzer's *Quest*, and less negatively in S. Neill's lucid *History of New Testament Interpretation 1861-1961*). But abuse does not invalidate proper use, and we affirm the necessity of a proper critical approach. Nevertheless, criticism is not the chief dish on our menu. It corresponds to the appetizer or hors-d'oeuvres. Prepared by critical studies we settle down to enjoy the meal, to read and ponder and re-read. This is

[p.248]

the main dish, viz, exegesis: getting at the Bible's meaning, until it lays hold of mind and will and puts us in the presence of God; in other words, until what the Bible said in A.D. 30 distils into what it says for me today. Who can desire more? The appetite is satisfied and the body's nourishment secure for another day.

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Wilder, *The Language of the Gospel*, p. 126. "The fundamental renewal of existence brought forth a new fruit of the lips, new tongues and new rhetorical patterns."

<sup>7</sup> R. W. Funk, "Creating an Opening," p. 404, speaks of such a clearing of the ground as a cutting of the way through a "jungle of distortions," so that a hermeneutic process (*Wechselwirkung*) can work. His stimulating article deals with the relation of exegesis to the other disciplines of the theological curriculum.

There are theologians who conceive of a more extended meal, consisting not just of hors-d'oeuvres and main course, but of dessert and savoury as well, with coffee and port to follow. Some distinguish exegesis proper (what the Bible said in A.D. 30 or 730 B.C.) from exposition, i.e. the modern application. This pattern is familiar in the *Interpreter's Bible*. For the really mature theological gourmet there must be hermeneutics, a distinct course following exegesis. And for the most refined taste of all the meal is not complete without systematization, the statement of the biblically based faith as a rounded whole, which then passes into the hands of systematic or dogmatic theology and can be related to philosophy and other aspects of culture.

But by this time we have left the table and joined the ladies in the drawing-room, where the general discussion is like the passing of the port and the aroma of cigars. And the purists who do not smoke—who prefer Bible without Dogmatics and fear that System may swallow up Gospel<sup>8</sup>—will have excused themselves and gone home!

---

© 1965 E.C. Blackman, Reproduced by kind permission of Mr Chris Blackman.

Prepared for the Web in November 2008 by Robert I Bradshaw.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

---

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the pertinent criticism of Tillich in K. M. Hamilton, *The System and the Gospel* (London: S. C. M. Press, 1963).

