

TWO (OR MORE) KINDS OF SCRIPTURE SCHOLARSHIP

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The serious and scholarly study of the Bible is of first importance for the Christian community. The roll call of those who have pursued this project is maximally impressive: Chrysostom, Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Jonathan Edwards and Karl Barth, just for starters. These people and their successors begin from the idea that Scripture is indeed divinely inspired (however exactly they understand this claim); they then try to ascertain the Lord's teaching in the whole of Scripture or (more likely) a given bit. Since the Enlightenment, however, another kind of Scripture scholarship has also come into view. Variouslly called "higher criticism", "historical criticism", "biblical criticism", or "historical critical scholarship", this variety of Scripture scholarship *brackets* or *prescinds from* what is known by faith and aims to proceed "scientifically", strictly on the basis of reason. I shall call it "Historical Biblical Criticism"—HBC for short. Scripture scholarship of this sort also brackets the belief that the Bible is a special word from the Lord, as well as any other belief accepted on the basis of faith rather than reason.

Now it often happens that the declarations of those who pursue this latter kind are in apparent conflict with the main lines of Christian thought; one who pursues this sort of scholarship is quite unlikely to conclude, for example, that Jesus was really the pre-existent second person of the divine trinity who was crucified, died, and then literally rose from the dead the third day. As Van Harvey says, "So far as the biblical historian is concerned, ... there is scarcely a popularly held traditional belief about Jesus that is not regarded with considerable skepticism."¹ I shall try to describe both of these kinds of Scripture scholarship. Then I shall ask the following question: how should a traditional Christian, one who accepts "the great things of the gospel", respond to the deflationary aspects of HBC? How should she think about its

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apparently corrosive results with respect to traditional Christian belief? I shall argue that she need not be disturbed by the conflict between alleged results of HBC and traditional Christian belief.² Indeed, that conflict should not defeat her acceptance of the great things of the gospel—nor, to the degree that those alleged results rest upon epistemological assumptions she does not share, of anything else she accepts on the basis of Biblical teaching.

I. Scripture Divinely Inspired

At millions of worship services every week Christians all over the world hear passages of Scripture and respond by saying, “This is the Word of the Lord.” Suppose we begin, therefore, by inquiring into the epistemology of the belief that the Bible is divinely inspired in a special way, and in such a way as to constitute divine discourse. How *does* a Christian come to believe that the gospel of Mark, or the book of Acts, or the entire New Testament is authoritative, because divinely inspired? What (if anything) is the source of its warrant?³ There are several possibilities. For many, it will be by way of ordinary teaching and testimony. Perhaps I am brought up to believe the Bible is indeed the Word of God (just as I am brought up thinking that thousands perished in the American Civil War), and I have never encountered any reason to doubt this. But an important feature of warrant is that if I accept a belief *B* just on testimony, then *B* has warrant for me only if it had warrant for the testifier as well: the warrant a belief has for the testifier is derivative from the warrant it has for the testifier.⁴ Our question, therefore, becomes this: what is the epistemological status of this belief for those members of the community who do not accept it on the testimony of other members? What is the source of the warrant (if any) this belief has for the Christian community? Well, perhaps a Christian might come to think something like the following:

Suppose the apostles were commissioned by God through Jesus Christ to be witnesses and representatives (deputies) of Jesus. Suppose that what emerged from their carrying out this commission was a body of apostolic teaching which incorporated what Jesus taught them and what they remembered of the goings-on surrounding Jesus, shaped under the guidance of the Spirit. And suppose that the New Testament books are all either apostolic writings, or formulations of apostolic teaching composed by close associates of one or another apostle. Then it would be correct to construe each book as a medium of divine discourse. And an eminently plausible construal of the process whereby these books found their way into a single canonical text, would be that by way of that process of canonization, God was authorizing these books as together constituting a single volume of divine discourse.⁵

So a Christian might come to think something like the above: she believes (1) that the apostles were commissioned by God through Jesus Christ to be witnesses and deputies,

(2) that they produced a body of apostolic teaching which incorporates what Jesus taught,

and

(3) that the New Testament books are all either apostolic writings or formulations of apostolic teaching composed by close associates of one or another apostle.

She also believes

(4) that the process whereby these books found their way into a single canon is a matter of God's authorizing these books as constituting a single volume of divine discourse.

She therefore concludes that indeed

(5) the New Testament is a single volume of divine discourse.

But of course our question then would be: how does she know, why does she believe each of (1)–(4)? What is the source of these beliefs?

Could it be, perhaps, by way of ordinary historical investigation? I doubt it. The problem is the Principle of Dwindling Probabilities. Suppose a Christian proposes to give a historical argument for the divine inspiration and consequent authority of the New Testament; and suppose we think of her as already knowing or believing the central truths of Christianity. She already knows that there is such a person as God, that the man Jesus is also the divine Son of God, that through his ministry, passion, death and resurrection we sinners can have life. These constitute part of her background information, and can be employed in the historical argument in question. Her body of background information *B* with respect to which she estimates the probability of (1)–(4), includes the main lines of Christian teaching. And of course she knows that the books of the New Testament—some of them, anyway—apparently teach or presuppose these things. With respect to *B*, therefore, perhaps each of (1)–(4) could be considered at least quite plausible and perhaps even likely to be true.

Still, each is only probable. Perhaps, indeed, each is *very* likely and has a probability as high as .9 with respect to that body of belief *B*.⁶ Even so, we can conclude only that the probability of their conjunction, on *B*, is somewhat more than .5. In that case, *belief* that the New Testament is the Word of God would not be appropriate; what would be appropriate is the belief that it is fairly *likely* that the New Testament is the Word of God. (The probability that the next throw of this die will not come up either 1 or 2 is greater than .5; that is nowhere nearly sufficient for my *believing* that it will not come up 1 or 2.) Of course, we could quibble about these probabilities—no doubt they could sensibly be thought to be greater than I suggested. No doubt; but they could also sensibly be thought to be less than I suggested. The historical argument for (1) to (4) will at best yield probabilities, and at best only a fairly insubstantial

probability of (5) itself. The estimates of the probabilities involved, furthermore, will be vague, variable and not really well founded. If the belief in question is to have *warrant* for Christians, its epistemic status for them must be something different from that of a conclusion of ordinary historical investigation.

Now, of course, most Christian communities have taught that the warrant enjoyed by this belief is *not* conferred on it just by way of ordinary historical investigation. The Belgic Confession, one of the most important confessions of the Reformed churches, gives a list (the Protestant list) of the canonical books of the Bible (Article 5); it then goes on:

And we believe without a doubt all things contained in them—not so much because the church receives them and approves them as such, but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they prove themselves to be from God.

There is a possible ambiguity here; “we believe all things contained in them not so much because the church receives them, but ...”—but to what does this last ‘them’ refer? The teachings contained in the books, or the books themselves? If the former, then what we have here is the claim that the Holy Spirit is leading us to see, not that a given *book* is from God, but that some *teaching*—e.g., that God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself—is indeed true. If the latter, however, what we would be led to believe is such propositions as *The gospel of John is from God*. I think it is at least fairly clear that the latter is what the Confession intends. According to the Confession, then, there are two sources for the belief that (e.g.) the gospel of John is from God. The first is that the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that this book is indeed from God; the Holy Spirit does not merely impel us to believe, with respect to a given teaching of the gospel of John, that it is from God, but also impels us to believe that the gospel of John itself is from God. The second is that the book “proves itself” to be from God. Perhaps here the idea is that the believer first comes to think, with respect to many of the specific teachings of that book, that they are indeed from God; that is, the Holy Spirit causes her to believe this with respect to many of the teachings of the book. She then infers (with the help of other premises) that the whole book has that same status.⁷

This is only *one* way in which this belief could have warrant; there are other possibilities. Perhaps the believer knows by way of the internal invitation of the Holy Spirit that the Holy Spirit has guided and preserved the Christian church, making sure that its teachings on important matters are in fact true; then the believer would be warranted in believing, at any rate of those books of the Bible endorsed by all or nearly all traditional Christian communities, that they are from God. Or perhaps, guided by the Holy Spirit, she recapitulates the process whereby the canon was originally formed, paying attention to the original criteria of apostolic authorship, consistency with

apostolic teaching, and the like, and relying on testimony for the propositions such and such books were indeed composed by apostles. There are also combinations of these ways. However precisely this belief receives its warrant, then, traditional Christians have accepted the belief that the Bible is indeed the Word of God and that in it the Lord intends to teach us truths.⁸

II. Traditional Christian Biblical Commentary

Of course, it is not always easy to tell what the Lord *is* teaching us in a given passage: what he teaches is indeed true, but sometimes it is not clear just what his teaching is. Part of the problem is the fact that the Bible contains material of so many different sorts; it is not in this respect like a contemporary book on theology or philosophy. It is not a book full of declarative sentences, with proper analysis and logical development and all the accoutrements academics have come to know and love and demand. The Bible does indeed contain sober assertion; but there is also exhortation, expression of praise, poetry, the telling of stories and parables, songs, devotional material, history, genealogies, lamentations, confession, prophecy, apocalyptic material, and much else besides. Some of these (apocalyptic, for example) present real problems of interpretation (for us, at present): what exactly is the Lord teaching in Daniel, or Revelation? That is not easy to say.

And even if we stick to straightforward assertion, there are a thousand questions of interpretation. Here are just a couple of examples. In Matthew 5:17–20, Jesus declares that not a jot or a tittle of the Law shall pass away and that "... unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven", but in Galatians Paul seems to say that observance of the Law does not count for much; how can we put these together? How do we understand Colossians 1:24: "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body which is the church"? Is Paul suggesting that Christ's sacrifice is incomplete, insufficient, that it requires additional suffering on the part of Paul and/or the rest of us? That seems unlikely. Is it that our suffering can be a *type* of Christ's, thus standing to the latter in the relation in which a type stands to the reality it typifies? Or shall we understand it like this: we must distinguish between two kinds of Christ's suffering, the redemptive suffering, the expiatory and vicarious atonement to which nothing can be added or taken away, on the one hand, and another kind, also "for the sake of his body", in which we human beings can genuinely participate? Perhaps it is suffering which can build up, edify the body of Christ, even as our response to Christ can be deepened by our meditating on Christ's sacrifice for us and the amazing selfless love displayed in it? Or what? Do Paul and James contradict each other on the relation between faith and works? Or rather, since God is the author of Scripture, is he proposing an inconsistent or

self-contradictory teaching for our belief? Well no, surely not, but then how shall we understand the two in relation to each other? More generally, given that God is the principal author of Scripture, how shall we think about the apparent tensions the latter displays?

Scripture, therefore, is indeed inspired: what it teaches is indeed true; but it is not always trivial to tell what it *does* teach. Indeed, many of the sermons and homilies preached in a million churches every Sunday morning are devoted in part to bringing out what might otherwise be obscure in Scriptural teaching. Given that the Bible is a communication from God to humankind, a divine revelation, there is much about it that requires deep and perceptive reflection, much that taxes our best scholarly and spiritual resources. Of course, this fact was not lost on, for example, Chrysostom, Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and the others I mentioned earlier on; between them they wrote an impressive number of volumes devoted to powerful reflection on the meaning and teachings of Scripture. (Calvin's commentaries alone run to some twenty-two volumes.) Their aim was to try to determine as accurately as possible just what the Lord proposes to teach us in the Bible. Call this enterprise 'traditional biblical commentary', and note that it displays at least the following three features.

First, Scripture itself is taken to be a wholly authoritative and trustworthy guide to faith and morals; it is authoritative and trustworthy, because it is a revelation from God, a matter of God's speaking to us. Once it is clear, therefore, what the teaching of a given bit of Scripture is, the question of the truth and acceptability of that teaching is settled. In a commentary on Plato, we might decide that what Plato really meant to say was XYZ; we might then go on to consider and evaluate XYZ in various ways, asking whether it is true, or close to the truth, or true in principle, or superseded by things we have learned since Plato wrote, and the like; we might also ask whether Plato's grounds or arguments for XYZ are slight, or acceptable, or substantial, or compelling. These questions are out of place in the kind of Scripture scholarship under consideration. Once convinced that God *is* proposing XYZ for our belief, we do not go on to ask whether it is true, or whether God has made a good case for it. God is not required to make a case.

Secondly, an assumption of the enterprise is that the principal author of the Bible—the entire Bible—is God himself. Of course, each of the books of the Bible has a human author or authors as well; but the principal author is God. This impels us to treat the whole more like a unified communication than a miscellany of ancient books. Scripture is not so much a library of independent books as itself a book with many subdivisions but a central theme: the message of the gospel. By virtue of this unity, furthermore (by virtue of the fact that there is just one principal author), it is possible to "interpret Scripture with Scripture". If a given passage from one of Paul's epistles is puzzling, it is perfectly proper to try to come to clarity as to what God's teaching in this passage is by appealing, not only to what Paul himself

says elsewhere in other epistles (his own or others), but also to what is taught elsewhere in Scripture (for example, the gospel of John⁹). Passages in Psalms or Isaiah can be interpreted in terms of the fuller, more explicit disclosure in the New Testament; the serpent elevated on a pole to save the Israelites from disaster can be seen as a type of Christ (and thus as getting some of its significance by way of an implicit reference to Christ, whose being raised on the cross averted a greater disaster for the whole human race). A further consequence: we can quite properly accept propositions that are inferred from premises coming from different parts of the Bible: once we see what God intends to teach in a given passage A and what he intends to teach in a given passage B, we can put the two together, and treat a consequence of these propositions as itself divine teaching.¹⁰

Thirdly (and connected with the second point), the fact that the principal author of the Bible is God himself means that one cannot always determine the meaning of a given passage by discovering what the human author had in mind. Of course, various post-modern hermeneuticists aim to amuse by telling us that in this case, as in all others, the author's intentions have nothing whatever to do with the meaning of a passage, that the reader herself confers upon it whatever meaning the passage has, or perhaps that even entertaining the idea of a text having meaning is to fall into "hermeneutical innocence"—innocence, oddly enough, which (as they insist) is ineradicably sullied by its inevitable association with oppressive, racist, sexist, homophobic and other offensive modes of thought. This is indeed amusing. Returning to serious business, however, it is obvious (given that the principal author of the Bible is God) that the meaning of a biblical passage will be given by what it is that the Lord intends to teach in that passage, and it is precisely this that biblical commentary tries to discern. Therefore, what the Lord intends to teach us is not identical with what the human author had in mind;¹¹ the latter may not so much as have thought of what is in fact the teaching of the passage in question. Thus, for example, Christians take the suffering servant passages in Isaiah to be references to Jesus; Jesus himself says (Luke 4:18–21) that the prophecy in Isaiah 61:1–2 is fulfilled in him; John (19:36) takes passages from Exodus, Numbers, Psalms and Zechariah to be references to Jesus and the events of his life and death; Matthew and John take it that Zechariah 9:9 is a reference to Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15); Hebrews 10 takes passages from Psalms, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk to be references to Christ and events in his career, as does Paul for passages from Psalms and Isaiah in his speech in Acts 13. Indeed, Paul refers to the Old Testament on nearly every page of Romans and both Corinthian epistles, and frequently in other epistles. There is no reason to suppose the human authors of Exodus, Numbers, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Habakkuk had in mind Jesus' triumphal entry, or his incarnation, or other events of Jesus' life and death, or indeed anything else explicitly about Jesus. But the fact that it is God who is the principal author

here makes it quite possible that what we are to learn from the text in question is something rather different from what the human author proposed to teach.

III. Historical Biblical Criticism

For at least the last couple of hundred years there has also been a quite different kind of Scripture scholarship variously called “higher criticism”, “historical criticism”, “biblical criticism”, or “historical critical scholarship”; I will call it “historical biblical criticism” (HBC). Clearly, we are indebted to HBC; it has enabled us to learn a great deal about the Bible we otherwise might not have known. Furthermore, some of the methods it has developed can be and have been employed to excellent effect in various studies of interest and importance, including traditional Biblical commentary. It differs importantly from the latter, however. HBC is fundamentally an enlightenment project; it is an effort to try to determine from the standpoint of reason alone what the Scriptural teachings are and whether they are true. Thus HBC eschews the authority and guidance of tradition, magisterium, creed, or any kind of ecclesial or “external” epistemic authority. The idea is to see what can be established (or at least made plausible) using only the light of what we could call “natural, empirical reason”. (So, of course, not everyone who uses the methods of textual criticism commonly employed in HBC is involved in the project of HBC as I am thinking of it; to take part in that project one must aim to discover the truth about Scripture and its teachings from the standpoint of reason alone.) The faculties or sources of belief invoked, therefore, would be those that are employed in ordinary history: perception, testimony, reason taken in the sense of *a priori* intuition together with deductive and probabilistic reasoning, Reid’s sympathy, by which we discern the thoughts and feelings of another, and so on—but bracketing any proposition one knows by faith or by way of the authority of the church. Spinoza (1632–1677) already lays down the charter for this enterprise: “The rule for [Biblical] interpretation should be nothing but the natural light of reason which is common to all—not any supernatural light nor any external authority.”¹²

This project or enterprise is often thought of as part and parcel of the development of modern empirical science, and indeed practitioners of HBC often drape about their shoulders the mantle of modern science. The attraction is not just that HBC can perhaps share in the prestige of modern science, but also that it can share in the obvious epistemic power and excellence of the latter.¹³ It is common to think of science itself as our best shot at getting to know what the world is really like; HBC is, among other things, an attempt to apply these widely approved methods to the study of Scripture and the origins of Christianity. Thus Raymond Brown, a Scripture scholar than whom none is more highly respected, believes that HBC is “scientific biblical criticism”;¹⁴ it yields “factual results” (p. 9); he intends his

own contributions to be “scientifically respectable” (p. 11): and practitioners of HBC investigate the Scriptures with “scientific exactitude” (pp. 18–19).¹⁵

But what is it, exactly, to study the Bible scientifically? As we will see below there is more than one answer to this question. One theme that seems to command nearly universal assent, however, is that in working at this scientific project (however exactly it is to be understood) you do not invoke or employ any theological assumptions or presuppositions. You do not assume, for example, that the Bible is inspired by God in any special way, or contains anything like specifically divine discourse. You do not assume that Jesus is the divine Son of God, or that he arose from the dead, or that his suffering and death is in some way a propitiatory atonement for human sin, making it possible for us to get once more in the right relationship to God. You do not assume any of these things because in pursuing science, one does not assume or employ any proposition which one knows by faith.¹⁶ (As a consequence, the meaning of a text will be what the human author intended to assert (if it is an assertive kind of text); divine intentions and teaching do not enter into the meaning.¹⁷) Thus the idea, says E. P. Sanders, is to rely only on “evidence on which everyone can agree”.¹⁸ According to Jon Levenson,

Historical critics thus rightly insist that the tribunal before which interpretations are argued cannot be confessional or ‘dogmatic’; the arguments offered must be historically valid, able, that is, to compel the assent of *historians* whatever their religion or lack thereof, whatever their backgrounds, spiritual experiences, or personal beliefs, and without privileging any claim of revelation.¹⁹

Barnabas Lindars explains that

There are in fact two reasons why many scholars are very cautious about miracle stories ... The second reason is historical. The religious literature of the ancient world is full of miracle stories, and we cannot believe them all. It is not open to a scholar to decide that, just because he is a believing Christian, he will accept all the Gospel miracles at their face value, but at the same time he will repudiate miracles attributed to Isis. All such accounts have to be scrutinized with equal detachment.²⁰

And even Luke Timothy Johnson, who is in general astutely critical of HBC:

It is obviously important to study Christian origins historically. And in such historical inquiry, faith commitments should play no role. Christianity is no more privileged for the historian than any other human phenomenon.²¹

In practice, this emphasis means that HBC tends to deal especially with questions of *composition* and *authorship*, these being the questions most easily addressed by the methods employed. When was the document in question

composed—or more exactly, since we cannot assume that we are dealing with a single unified document here, when were its various parts composed? How was the gospel of Luke, for example, composed? Was it written by one person, relying on his memory of Jesus and his words and deeds, or was it assembled from various reports, alleged quotations, songs, poems and the like in the oral tradition? Was it dependent on one or more earlier written or oral sources? Why did the editor or redactor put the book together in just the way he did—was it to make a theological point in a current controversy? Where traditional Biblical commentary assumes that the entire Bible is really one book with a single principal author, HBC tends to give us a collection of books by many authors. And even within the confines of a single book, it may give us a collection of discontinuous sayings and episodes (pericopes), these having been stitched together by one or more redactors. How much of what is reported as the sayings and discourse of Jesus really was said by Jesus? Can we discern various strata in the book—perhaps a bottom stratum, including the actual sayings of Jesus himself, and then successive overlaying strata? As Robert Alter says, scholarship of this kind tends to be “excavative”; the idea is to dig behind the document as we actually have it to see what can be determined of its history.²²

Of course, the idea is also to see, as far as this is possible, whether the events reported—in the gospels, for example—really happened, and whether the picture they give of Jesus is in fact historically accurate. Did he say the things they say he said, and do the things they say he did? Here the assumption is that we cannot simply take at face value the gospels as we now have them. There may have been all sorts of additions and subtractions and alterations made in the interest of advancing theological points. Further, the New Testament books are written from the standpoint of faith—faith that Jesus really was the Christ, did indeed suffer and die and rise from the dead, and did accomplish our salvation. From the standpoint of reason alone, however, this faith must be bracketed; hence (from that standpoint) the hermeneutics of suspicion is appropriate here. (This suspicion is sometimes carried so far that it reminds one of the way in which the CIA’s denial that Mr X is a spy is taken as powerful evidence that Mr X is indeed a spy.)

A. Varieties of HBC

Those who practice HBC, therefore, propose to proceed without employing theological assumptions or anything one knows by faith (if indeed there is anything one knows by faith); these things are to be bracketed. Instead, one proceeds scientifically, on the basis of reason alone. Beyond this, however, there is vastly less concord. What is to count as reason? Precisely what premises can be employed in an argument from reason alone? What exactly does it mean to proceed scientifically?

1. Troeltschian HBC

Here many contemporary biblical critics will appeal to the thought and teaching of Ernst Troeltsch.²³ Thus John Collins:

Among theologians these principles received their classic formulation from Ernst Troeltsch in 1898. Troeltsch sets out three principles ...: (1) The principle of criticism or methodological doubt: since any conclusion is subject to revision, historical inquiry can never attain absolute certainty but only relative degrees of probability. (2) The principle of analogy: historical knowledge is possible because all events are similar in principle. We must assume that the laws of nature in biblical times were the same as now. Troeltsch referred to this as 'the almighty power of analogy.' (3) The principle of correlation: the phenomena of history are inter-related and inter-dependent and no event can be isolated from the sequence of historical cause and effect.²⁴

Collins adds a fourth principle, this one taken from Van Harvey's *The Historian and the Believer*,²⁵ a more recent *locus classicus* for the proper method of historical criticism:

To these should be added the principle of autonomy, which is indispensable for any critical study. Neither church nor state can prescribe for the scholar which conclusions should be reached.²⁶

Now the first thing to note is that each of these principles is multiply ambiguous. In particular, each (except perhaps for the second) has a non-controversial, indeed, platitudinous interpretation. The first principle seems to be a *comment on* historical inquiry rather than a principle for its practice: historical inquiry can never attain absolutely certain results. (Perhaps the implied methodological principle is that in doing historical criticism, you should avoid claiming absolute certainty for your results.) Fair enough, I suppose nearly everyone would agree that few historical results of any significance are as certain as, say, that $2 + 1 = 3$, but if so, they do not achieve absolute certainty. (The only reasonably plausible candidates for historical events that *are* absolutely certain, I suppose, would be such 'historical' claims as that either Caesar crossed the Rubicon or else he did not.)

The third also has a platitudinous interpretation. What Troeltsch says is, "The sole task of history in its specifically theoretical aspect is to explain every movement, process, state and nexus of things by reference to the web of its causal relations."²⁷ This too can be seen as toothless if not platitudinous. Every event is to be explained by reference to the web of its causal relations—which of course would also include the intentions and actions of persons. Well then, consider even such an event as the resurrection of Jesus from the dead: according to the principle at hand, this event too would have to be explained by reference to the web of its causal relations. No problem; on the traditional view, this event was caused by God himself, who caused it in

order to achieve certain of his aims and ends, in particular making it possible for human beings to be reconciled with God. So taken, this principle would exclude very little.

I say the second principle is perhaps the exception to the claim that each has a banal, uncontroversial interpretation: that is because on any plausible interpretation the second principle seems to entail the existence of *natural laws*. That there *are* such things as natural laws was a staple of 17th and 18th century science and philosophy of science;²⁸ what science discovers (so they thought) is just these laws of nature.²⁹ Empiricists have always been dubious about natural laws, however, and at present the claim that there are any such things is at best extremely controversial.³⁰

So all but one of Troeltsch's principles have platitudinous interpretations; but these are not in fact the interpretations given to them in the community of HBC. Within that community those principles are understood in such a way as to preclude *direct divine action* in the world. Not that all in this community *accept* Troeltsch's principles in their nonplatitudinous interpretation; rather, those who think of themselves as accepting (or rejecting) those principles think of themselves as accepting or rejecting their nonplatitudinous versions. (Presumably *everyone* accepts them taken platitudinously.) So taken, these principles imply that God has not in fact specially inspired any human authors in such a way that what they write is really divine speech addressed to us; nor has he raised Jesus from the dead, or turned water into wine, or performed miracles of any other sorts.

Thus Rudolph Bultmann:

The historical method includes the presupposition that history is a unity in the sense of a closed continuum of effects in which individual events are connected by the succession of cause and effect.

This continuum, furthermore,

cannot be rent by the interference of supernatural, transcendent powers.³¹

Many other theologians, oddly enough, chime in with agreement: God cannot or at any rate would not and will not act directly in the world. Thus John Macquarrie:

The way of understanding miracles that appeals to breaks in the natural order and to supernatural intervention belongs to the mythological outlook and cannot commend itself in a post-mythological climate of thought ... The traditional conception of miracle is irreconcilable with our modern understanding of both science and history. Science proceeds on the assumption that whatever events occur in the world can be accounted for in terms of other events that also belong within the world; and if on some occasions we are unable to give a complete account of some happening ... the scientific conviction is that further research will bring to

light further factors in the situation, but factors that will turn out to be just as immanent and this-worldly as those already known.³²

And Langdon Gilkey:

... 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 the Enlightenment science and philosophy introduced into the Western mind ... 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 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 transpired and no divine voices were heard.³³

Gilkey says no divine wonders have transpired and no divine voices have been heard; Macquarrie adds that in this post-mythological age, we cannot brook the idea of "breaks in the natural order and supernatural intervention". Each, therefore, is ruling out the possibility of miracle, including the possibility of special divine action in inspiring human authors in such a way that what they write constitutes an authoritative communication from God. Now, of course, it is far from easy to say just what a miracle is; this topic is connected with deep and thorny questions about occasionalism, natural law, natural potentialities, and so on. We need not get into all that, however. The Troeltschian idea is that there is a certain way in which things ordinarily go; there are certain regularities, whether or not due to natural law, and God can be counted on to act in such a way as never to abrogate those regularities. Of course, God *could* if he chose abrogate those regularities (after all, even those natural laws, if there are any, are his creatures); but we can be sure, somehow, that God will not abrogate those regularities. Troeltschian Scripture scholarship, therefore, will proceed on the basis of the assumption that God never does anything specially; in particular, he neither raised Jesus from the dead nor specially inspired the Biblical authors.

2. Duhemian HBC

Not all who accept and practice HBC accept Troeltsch's principles, and we can see another variety of HBC by thinking about an important suggestion made by Pierre Duhem. Duhem was both a serious Catholic and a serious scientist; he was accused (as he thought) by Abel Rey³⁴ of allowing his religious

and metaphysical views as a Christian to enter his physics in an improper way. Duhem repudiated this suggestion, claiming that his Christianity did not enter his physics in any way at all and *a fortiori* did not enter it in an improper way.³⁵ Furthermore, the *correct* or *proper* way to pursue physical theory, he said, was the way in which he had in fact done it; physical theory should be completely independent of religious or metaphysical views or commitments.

Why did he think so? What did he have against metaphysics? Here he strikes a characteristic Enlightenment note: if you think of metaphysics as ingressing into physics, he says, then your estimate of the worth of a physical theory will depend upon the metaphysics you adopt. Physical theory will be dependent upon metaphysics in such a way that someone who does not accept the metaphysics involved in a given physical theory cannot accept the physical theory either. And the problem with *that* is that the disagreements that run riot in metaphysics will ingress into physics, so that the latter cannot be an activity we can all work at together, regardless of our metaphysical views:

Now to make physical theories depend on metaphysics is surely not the way to let them enjoy the privilege of universal consent ... If theoretical physics is subordinated to metaphysics, the divisions separating the diverse metaphysical systems will extend into the domain of physics. A physical theory reputed to be satisfactory by the sectarians of one metaphysical school will be rejected by the partisans of another school.³⁶

Duhem's main point, I think, is that if a physical theorist employs metaphysical assumptions or other notions that are not accepted by other workers in the field, and employs them in such a way that those who do not accept them cannot accept his physical theory, then to that extent his work cannot be accepted by those others; to that extent, furthermore, the cooperation important to science will be compromised. He therefore proposes a conception of science (or physics in particular) according to which the latter is independent of metaphysics:

... I have denied metaphysical doctrines the right to testify for or against any physical theory. ... Whatever I have said of the method by which physics proceeds, or the nature and scope that we must attribute to the theories it constructs, does not in any way prejudice either the metaphysical doctrines or religious beliefs of anyone who accepts my words. The believer and the nonbeliever may both work in common accord for the progress of physical science such as I have tried to define it.³⁷

Duhem's proposal, reduced to essentials, is that physicists should not make essential use of religious or metaphysical assumptions in doing their

physics: in that way lies chaos and cacophony, as each of the warring sects does things its own way. If we want to have the sort of commonality and genuine dialogue that promotes progress in physics, we should avoid assumptions—metaphysical, religious or otherwise—that are not accepted by all parties to the discussion.³⁸

Duhem's suggestion is interesting and important, and (although Duhem himself did not do so) can obviously be applied far beyond the confines of physical theory: for example, to Scripture scholarship. Suppose we say that *Duhemian* Scripture scholarship is Scripture scholarship that does not involve any theological, religious or metaphysical assumptions that are not accepted by everyone in the relevant community.³⁹ Thus the Duhemian Scripture scholar would not take for granted either that God is the principal author of the Bible or that the main lines of the Christian story are in fact true; these are not accepted by all who are party to the discussion. She would not take for granted that Jesus rose from the dead, or that any other miracle has occurred; she could not so much as take it for granted that miracles are possible, since these claims are rejected by many who are party to the discussion. On the other hand, of course, Duhemian Scripture scholarship cannot take it for granted that Christ did *not* rise from the dead or that *no* miracles have occurred, or that miracles are *impossible*. Nor, of course, could it employ Troeltsch's principles (taken non-platitudinously); not everyone accepts them. Duhemian Scripture scholarship fits well with Sanders' suggestion that "what is needed is more secure evidence, evidence on which everyone can agree" (above, p. 251). It also fits well with John Meier's fantasy of "an unapal conclave" of Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and agnostic scholars, locked in the basement of the Harvard Divinity School library until they come to consensus on what historical methods can show about the life and mission of Jesus.⁴⁰ Among the proposed benefits of Duhemian HBC, obviously, are just the benefits Duhem cites: people of very different religious and theological beliefs can cooperate in this enterprise. Furthermore, although in principle the traditional Biblical commentator and the Troeltschian Biblical scholar could discover whatever is unearthed by Duhemian means, it is in fact likely that much will be learned in this cooperative enterprise that would not be learned by either group working alone.

3. Spinozistic HBC

Troeltschian and Duhemian HBC do not exhaust HBC; one can be a practitioner of HBC and accept neither. You might propose to follow reason alone in Scripture scholarship, but think that the Troeltschian principles, taken in the strong version in which they imply that God never acts specially in the world, are not in fact deliverances of reason. Reason alone, you say, certainly cannot demonstrate that God never acts specially in the world, or that no miracles have ever occurred. If so, you would not be a Troeltschian. On the other hand, you might also reject Duhemianism as well: for you might think

that, as a matter of fact, there are deliverances of reason not accepted by everyone party to the project of Scripture scholarship. (The deliverances of reason are indeed *open* to all, but impeding factors of one kind or another can sometimes prevent someone from seeing the truth of one or another of them.) But then you might yourself employ those deliverances of reason in pursuing Scripture scholarship, thereby employing assumptions not accepted by everyone involved in the project, and thereby rejecting Duhemianism. You might therefore propose to follow reason alone, but be neither a Troeltschian nor a Duhemian. Suppose we use the term 'Spinozistic HBC'⁴¹ to denote this variety of HBC. The Spinozist concurs with the Troeltschian and Duhemian that no theological assumptions or beliefs are to be employed in HBC. She differs from the Troeltschian in paying the same compliment to Troeltsch's principles: they too are not deliverances of reason and hence are not to be employed in HBC. And she differs from the Duhemian in holding that there are some deliverances of reason not accepted by all who are party to the project of Scripture scholarship; hence, she proposes to employ some propositions or beliefs rejected by the Duhemian.

A final point: It is not of course accurate to suppose that all who practice HBC fall neatly into one or another of these categories. There are all sorts of half-way houses, lots of haltings between two opinions, many who fall partly into one and partly into another, and many who have never clearly seen that there *are* these categories. A real live Scripture scholar may be unlikely to have spent a great deal of thought on the epistemological foundations of his or her discipline and is likely to straddle one or more of the categories I mention.

B. Tensions with Traditional Christianity

There has been a history of substantial tension between HBC and traditional Christians. Thus David Friedrich Strauss⁴² in 1835: "Nay, if we would be candid with ourselves, that which was once sacred history for the Christian believer is, for the enlightened portion of our contemporaries, only fable." Of course, the unenlightened faithful were not so unenlightened that they failed to notice this feature of Biblical criticism. Writing ten years after the publication of Strauss's book, William Pringle complains that, "In Germany, Biblical criticism is almost a national pursuit ... Unhappily, [the critics] were but too frequently employed in maintaining the most dangerous errors, in opposing every inspired statement which the mind of man is unable fully to comprehend, in divesting religion of its spiritual and heavenly character, and in undermining the whole fabric of revealed truth."⁴³

Perhaps among Pringle's complaints were the following. First, practitioners of HBC tend to treat the Bible as a set of separate books rather than a unified communication from God. Thus, they tend to reject the idea that Old Testament passages can be properly understood as making reference to Jesus Christ, or to events in his life: "Critical scholars rule out clairvoyance

as an explanation axiomatically. Instead of holding that the Old Testament predicts events in the life of Jesus, critical scholars of the New Testament say that each Gospel writer sought to exploit Old Testament passages in order to bolster his case for the messianic and dominical claims of Jesus or of the church on his behalf.⁴⁴ More generally, Brevard Childs: "For many decades the usual way of initiating entering students in the Bible was slowly to dismantle the church's traditional teachings regarding scripture by applying the acids of criticism."⁴⁵

Second, following Ernst Troeltsch HBC tends to discount miracle stories, taking it as axiomatic that miracles do not and did not really happen, or at any rate claiming that the proper method for HBC cannot admit miracles either as evidence or conclusions. Perhaps Jesus effected cures of some psychosomatic disorders, but nothing that modern medical science cannot explain. Many employing this method propose that Jesus never thought of himself as divine, or as the Messiah, or as capable of forgiving sin⁴⁶—let alone as having died and then risen from the dead. "The Historical Jesus researchers," says Luke Timothy Johnson, "insist that the 'real Jesus' must be found in the facts of his life before his death. The resurrection is, when considered at all, seen in terms of visionary experience, or as a continuation of an 'empowerment' that began before Jesus' death. Whether made explicit or not, the operative premise is that there is no 'real Jesus' after his death" (Johnson, p. 144).

Those who follow these methods sometimes produce quite remarkable accounts—and accounts remarkably different from traditional Christian understanding. According to Barbara Thiering's *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls*,⁴⁷ for example, Jesus was buried in a cave; he did not actually die and was revived by the magician Simon Magus, whereupon he married Mary Magdalene, settled down, fathered three children, was divorced and finally died in Rome. According to Morton Smith, Jesus was a practicing homosexual and conjurer.⁴⁸ According to German Scripture scholar Gerd Ludemann: the Resurrection is "an empty formula that must be rejected by anyone holding a scientific world view".⁴⁹ G. A. Wells goes so far as to claim that our name 'Jesus', as it turns up in the Bible, is empty: like 'Santa Claus', it does not trace back to or denote anyone at all.⁵⁰ John Allegro apparently thinks there was no such person as Jesus of Nazareth; Christianity began as a hoax designed to fool the Romans, and preserve the cult of a certain hallucinogenic mushroom (*Amanita muscaria*). Still, the name 'Christ' is not empty: it is really a name of that mushroom.⁵¹ As engaging a claim as any is that Jesus, while neither merely legendary, nor actually a mushroom, was in fact an atheist, the first Christian atheist.⁵² And even if we set aside the lunatic fringe, Van Harvey is correct: "So far as the biblical historian is concerned, ... there is scarcely a popularly held traditional belief about Jesus that is not regarded with considerable skepticism" (NTS, p. 193).

IV. *Why Are Not Most Christians More Concerned?*

So HBC has not in general been sympathetic to traditional Christian belief; it has hardly been an encouragement to the faithful. But the faithful seem relatively unconcerned; of course, they find traditional biblical commentary of great interest and importance, but the beliefs and attitudes of HBC have not seemed to filter down to them, despite its dominance in mainline seminaries. According to Van Harvey, "Despite decades of research, the average person tends to think of the life of Jesus in much the same terms as Christians did three centuries ago ..." Harvey finds this puzzling: "Why is it that, in a culture so dominated by experts in every field, the opinion of New Testament historians has had so little influence on the public?"⁵³ Are traditional Christians just ignoring inconvenient evidence? In what follows I will try to answer these questions. Obviously, HBC has contributed greatly to our knowledge of the Bible, in particular the circumstances and conditions of its composition; it has given us new alternatives as to how to understand the human authors, and this has also given us new ideas as to how to understand the divine Author. Nevertheless, there are in fact excellent reasons for tending to ignore that "considerable skepticism", of which Harvey speaks. I do not mean to claim that the ordinary person in the pew ignores it because she has these reasons clearly in mind; no doubt she does not. I say only that these reasons are *good reasons* for a traditional Christian to ignore the deflationary results of HBC.

What might these reasons be? Well of course one thing is that skeptical Scripture scholars display vast disagreement among themselves.⁵⁴ There is also the fact that quite a number of the arguments they propose seem at best wholly inconclusive. Perhaps the endemic vice or at any rate the perennial temptation of HBC is what we might call the Fallacy of Creeping Certitude. To practice this fallacy, you note that some proposition A is probable (to .9, say) with respect to your background knowledge k (what you know to be true); you therefore annex it to k. Then you note that a proposition B is probable with respect to k&A; you therefore annex it too to k. Then you note that C is probable to .9 with respect to A&B&k, and also annex it to K; similarly for (say) D, E, F and G. You then pronounce A&B&C&D&E&F&G highly probable with respect to k, our evidence. But the fact is (as we learn from the probability calculus) that these probabilities must be *multiplied*—so that in fact the probability of A&B&C&D&E&F&G is .9 to the 7th power, i.e., less than .5! But suppose we look into reasons or arguments for preferring the results of HBC to those of traditional commentary. Why should we suppose that the former take us closer to the truth than the latter? Troeltsch's principles are particularly important here. As understood in the interpretative community of HBC, they preclude special divine action including special divine inspiration of Scripture and the occurrence of miracles. As Gilkey says, "Suddenly a vast panoply of divine deeds and events recorded in

scripture are no longer regarded as having actually happened" (above, p. 255). Many academic theologians and Scripture scholars appear to believe that Troeltschian HBC is *de rigueur*; it is often regarded as the only intellectually respectable variety of Scripture scholarship, or the only variety that has any claim to the mantle of science. (And many who arrive at relatively traditional conclusions in Scripture scholarship nevertheless pay at least lip service to the Troeltschian ideal, somehow feeling in a semi-confused way that this is the epistemically respectable or privileged way of proceeding.) But why think Scripture scholarship should proceed in this specific way—as opposed both to traditional biblical commentary and varieties of HBC that do not accept Troeltsch's principles? Are there any reasons or arguments for those principles?

A. Force Majeure

If so, they are extraordinarily well hidden. One common suggestion, however, seems to be a sort of appeal to *force majeure*: we simply cannot help it. Given our historical position, there is nothing else we can do; we are all in the grip of historical forces beyond our control (this thing is bigger than either one of us). This reaction is typified by those, who like Harvey, Macquarrie, Gilkey, and others claim that nowadays, given our cultural situation, we just do not have any options. There are potent historical forces that impose these ways of thinking upon us; like it or not, we are blown about by these powerful winds of doctrine. "The causal nexus in space and time which the Enlightenment science and philosophy introduced into the Western mind ... 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", says Gilkey (above, p. 255); another example is Bultmann's famous remark to the effect that "it is impossible to use electrical light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles."⁵⁵

But is not this view—that we are all compelled by contemporary historical forces to hold the sort of view in question—historically naive? First, why think we proceed together in lockstep through history, all at any given time perforce holding the same views and making the same assumptions? Clearly we do not do any such thing. The contemporary intellectual world is much more like a horse race (or perhaps a demolition derby) than a triumphal procession, more like a battleground than a Democratic Party fund-raiser, where everyone can be counted on to support the same slate. At present, for example, there are many like Macquarrie, Harvey and Gilkey who accept the semi-deistic view that God (if there is any such person) could not or would not act miraculously in history. But this is not, of course, the view of nearly everyone at present; hundreds of millions would reject it. The fact is that far more people reject this view than accept it. (So even if Gilkey, *et al.*, were

right about the inevitable dance of history, they would be wrong in their elitist notion to the effect that what *they* do is the current step.)

The utter obviousness of this fact suggests a second interpretation of this particular justification of Troeltschian HBC. Perhaps what the apologists really mean is not that *everyone* nowadays accepts this semi-deism (that is trivially false), but that *everyone in the know* does. Everyone who is properly educated and has read his Kant and Hume (and Troeltsch) and reflected on the meaning of the wireless and electric light knows these things; as for the rest of humanity (including, I suppose, those of us who have read our Kant and Hume but are unimpressed), their problem is simple ignorance. Perhaps people generally do not march lockstep through history, but those in the know do; and right now they all or nearly all reject special divine action.

But even if we chauvinistically stick to educated Westerners, this is still doubtful *in excelsis*. "The traditional conception of miracle", Macquarrie says, "is irreconcilable with *our* modern understanding of both science and history" (above, p. 254; emphasis added): to whom does this 'our', here refer? To those who have gone to university, are well-educated, know at least a little science, and have thought about the bearing of these matters on the possibility of miracles? If so, the claim is once more whoppingly false. Very many well-educated people (including even some theologians) understand science and history in a way that is entirely compatible both with the possibility and with the actuality of miracles. Many physicists and engineers understand "electrical light and the wireless" vastly better than Bultmann or his contemporary followers, but nonetheless hold precisely those New Testament beliefs Bultmann thinks incompatible with using electric lights and radios. There are large numbers of educated contemporaries (including even some with Ph.Ds!) who believe Jesus really and literally arose from the dead, that God performs miracles in the contemporary world, and even that there are both demons and spirits who are active in the contemporary world. As a matter of historical fact, there are any number of contemporaries, and contemporary intellectuals very well acquainted with science, who do not feel any problem at all in pursuing science and also believing in miracles, angels, Christ's resurrection, the lot.

Once more, however, Macquarrie, *et al.*, must know this as well as anyone else; so what do he and his friends really mean? How can they make these claims about what 'we'⁵⁶—we who use the products of science and know a bit about it—can and cannot believe? How can they blithely exclude or ignore the thousands, indeed millions of contemporary Christians who do not think as they do? The answer must be that they think those Christians somehow do not count. What they really mean to say, I fear, is that they and their friends think this way, and anyone who demurs is so ignorant as to be properly ignored. But that is at best a bit slim as a *reason* for accepting the Troeltschian view; it is more like a nasty little piece of arrogance. Nor is it any better for

being tucked away in the suggestion that somehow we just cannot help ourselves. Of course, it is possible that Gilkey and his friends cannot help themselves; in that case they can hardly be blamed for accepting the view in question.⁵⁷ This incapacity on their parts, however, is no recommendation of Troeltsch's principles.

So this is at best a poor reason for thinking serious Biblical scholarship must be Troeltschian. Is there a better reason? A second suggestion, perhaps connected with the plea of inability to do otherwise, is given by the suggestion that the very practice of science presupposes rejection of the idea of miracle or special divine action in the world. "Science proceeds on the assumption that whatever events occur in the world can be accounted for in terms of other events that also belong within the world", says Macquarrie (above, p. 254); perhaps he means to suggest that the very practice of science requires that one reject (e.g.) the idea of God's raising someone from the dead. Of course, the argument form

if X were true, it would be inconvenient for science; therefore, X is false is at best moderately compelling. We are not just given that the Lord has arranged the universe for the comfort and convenience of the American Academy of Science. To think otherwise is to be like the drunk who insisted on looking for his lost car keys under the streetlight, on the grounds that the light was better there. (In fact it would be to go the drunk one better: it would be to insist that since the keys would be hard to find in the dark, they must be under the light.)

But why think in the first place that we would have to embrace this semi-deism in order to do science?⁵⁸ Newton certainly did some sensible science, but he thought Jesus was raised from the dead, as do many contemporary physicists. But of course that is physics; perhaps the problem would be (as Bultmann suggests) with *medicine*. Is the idea that one could not do medical research, or prescribe medications, if one thought that God has done miracles in the past and might even occasionally do some nowadays? To put the suggestion explicitly is to refute it; there is not the faintest reason why I could not sensibly believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and also engage in medical research into, say, Usher's Syndrome or Multiple Sclerosis, or into ways of staving off the ravages of coronary disease. What would be the problem? That it is always *possible* that God should do something different, thus spoiling my experiment? But that *is* possible: God is omnipotent. (Or do we have here a new antitheistic argument? If God exists, he could spoil my experiment; but nothing can spoil my experiment; therefore ...) No doubt if I thought God *often* or *usually* did things in an idiosyncratic way, so that there really are not much by way of discoverable regularities to be found, *then* perhaps I could not sensibly engage in scientific research; the latter presupposes a certain regularity, predictability, stability in the world. But that is an entirely different matter. What I must assume in order to do science, is only that *ordinarily* and for the *most* part these regularities hold.⁵⁹ This reason, too, then,

is monumentally insufficient as a reason for holding that we are somehow obliged to accept the principles underlying Troeltschian Biblical scholarship.

It is therefore difficult indeed to see any reason for supposing that Troeltschian Scripture scholarship is somehow *de rigueur* or somehow forced upon us by our history.

B. A Moral Imperative?

Van Harvey proposes another reason for pursuing Troeltschian scholarship and preferring it to traditional Biblical commentary;⁶⁰ his reason is broadly *moral* or *ethical*. He begins⁶¹ by referring to a fascinating episode in Victorian intellectual history⁶² in which certain Victorian intellectuals found themselves wrestling with a serious problem of intellectual integrity. As Harvey sees it, they “believed that it was morally reprehensible to insist that these claims [Christian claims about the activities and teachings of Jesus] were true on faith while at the same time arguing that they were also the legitimate objects of historical inquiry”.⁶³ Now I think this is a tendentious account of the problem these intellectuals faced—tendentious, because it makes it look as if these intellectuals were endorsing, with unerring prescience, precisely the position Harvey himself proposes to argue for. The fact is, I think, their position was both less idiosyncratic and far more plausible. After all, why should anyone think it immoral to believe by faith what could also be investigated by other sources of belief or knowledge? I am curious about your whereabouts last Friday night: were you perhaps at The Linebacker’s Bar? Perhaps I could find out in three different ways: by asking you, by asking your wife, and by examining the bar for your fingerprints (fortunately the bar is never washed). Would there be something immoral in using one of these methods when in fact the others were also available? That is not easy to believe.

It was not just *that* that troubled the Victorians. Had they been confident that both faith and historical investigation were reliable avenues to the truths in question, they surely would not have thought it immoral to believe on the basis of one of these as opposed to the other or both. Their problem was deeper. They were troubled (among other things) by the German Scripture scholarship about which they knew relatively little; but they did know enough to think (rightly or wrongly) that it posed a real threat to the Christian beliefs that for many of them were in any event already shaky. They suspected or feared that this Scripture scholarship could show or would show or already had shown that essential elements of the Christian faith were just false. They were also troubled by what many saw as the anti-supernaturalistic and antitheistic bent of science: could one really believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles in the era of the steam engine and ocean liner? They were troubled by the advent of Darwinism, which seemed to many to contradict the Christian picture of human origins. They were convinced, following Locke and the whole classical foundationalist

tradition, that the right way to hold beliefs on these topics is by following the (propositional) evidence wherever it leads; and they were deeply worried about where this evidence was in fact leading. They were troubled, in short, by a variety of factors all of which seemed to suggest that traditional Christian belief was really no more than a beautiful story: inspiring, uplifting, perhaps necessary to public morality, but just a story. Given our scientific coming of age, they feared, informed people would regretfully have to jettison traditional Christian belief, perhaps (especially on ceremonial occasions) with an occasional nostalgic backward look.

But many of them also longed for the comfort and security of serious Christian belief; to lose it was like being thrown out of our Father's house into a hostile or indifferent world. And, of course, many of the Victorians had strong moral opinions and a highly developed moral sense. They thought it weak, spineless, cowardly to refuse to face these specters, to hide them from oneself, to engage in self-deception and double-think. All of this, they thought, is unworthy of a serious and upright person. They abhorred the weakness and moral softness of the sort of stance in which you suspect the bitter truth, but refuse to investigate the matter, preferring to hide the truth from yourself, perhaps hoping it will somehow go away. Many of them thought this was precisely what some of the clergy and other educators were doing, and despised them for it. Far better to face the sad truth with intellectual honesty, manly courage and a stiff upper lip. So it was not just that they thought it reprehensible to believe on faith what can also be addressed by reason or historical investigation. It was rather that they suspected and deeply feared that the latter (together with the other factors I mentioned) would undermine the former. And they scorned and detested a sort of willful head-in-the-sand attitude in which, out of timidity or fear or a desire for comfort, one refuses to face the facts. It is reasons such as these that account for the moral fervor (if not stridency) of W. K. Clifford's oft-anthologized "The Ethics of Belief".⁶⁴

However things may have stood with the Victorians, Harvey proposes the following bit of moral dogma:

The gulf separating the conservative Christian believer and the New Testament scholar can be seen as the conflict between two antithetical ethics of belief ... New Testament scholarship is now so specialized and requires so much preparation that the layperson has simply been disqualified from having any right to a judgment regarding the truth or falsity of certain historical claims. Insofar as the conservative Christian believer is a layperson who has no knowledge of the New Testament scholarship, he or she is simply not entitled to certain historical beliefs at all. Just as the average layperson is scarcely in a position to have an informed judgment about the seventh letter of Plato, the relationship of Montezuma to Cortez, or the authorship of the Donation of Constantine, so the average

layperson has no right to an opinion about the authorship of the Fourth Gospel or the trustworthiness of the synoptics.⁶⁵

“The layperson has simply been disqualified from having any right to a judgment regarding the truth or falsity of certain historical claims. ...” Strong words! In an earlier age, priests and ministers, often the only educated members of their congregations, would exercise a certain intellectual and spiritual leadership, hoping the flock would in fact come to see, appreciate, and of course believe the truth. On Harvey’s showing, the flock does not so much as have a right to an opinion on these points—not even an opinion purveyed by the experts! Harvey complains that many students seem unreceptive to the results of Scripture scholarship.⁶⁶ But of course if he is right, the students do not have a right to believe the results of Scripture scholarship; they are therefore doing no more than their simple duty in refusing to believe them. One hopes Harvey remembers, when teaching his classes, not to put his views on these matters in an attractive and winsome fashion—after all, if he did so, some of the students might *believe* them, in which case they would be sinning and he himself would be giving offense in the Pauline sense (Romans 14, not to mention I Cor. 8:9).

But suppose we sadly avert our gaze from this elitism run amok: why does Harvey think that only the historian has a right to hold an opinion on these matters? Clearly enough, because he thinks that the only way to achieve accurate and reliable information on these matters is by way of Troeltschian scholarship. And *that* opinion, obviously, presupposes the philosophical and theological opinion that there is not any *other* epistemic avenue to these matters; it presupposes that, for example, faith (and the internal instigation or testimony of the Holy Spirit) is not a source of warranted belief or knowledge on these topics. If the latter *were* a source of warranted belief, and if the “average layperson” had access to this source (if the “average layperson” could have faith), then presumably there would be nothing whatever wrong with her holding views on these matters on this basis. “Just as the average layperson is scarcely in a position to have an informed judgment about the seventh letter of Plato, the relationship of Montezuma to Cortez, or the authorship of the Donation of Constantine, so the average layperson has no right to an opinion about the authorship of the Fourth Gospel or the trustworthiness of the synoptics,” says Harvey. The only way to determine the truth about the seventh letter of Plato is by way of ordinary historical investigation; the same goes, Harvey assumes, for questions about the life and ministry of Christ, whether he rose from the dead, whether he thought of himself as a Messiah, and the like. What lies at the bottom of this moral claim is really a philosophical/theological judgment: that traditional Christian belief is completely mistaken in taking it that faith is in fact a reliable source of true and warranted belief on these topics.

This view is not, of course, a result of historical scholarship, Troeltschian or otherwise; nor is it supported by arguments that will appeal to anyone who does not already agree with him—or indeed by any arguments at all. Harvey's view is rather a *presupposition*, a methodological prescription of the pursuit of Troeltschian historical criticism and proscription of traditional Biblical commentary. So it can hardly be thought of as an independent good reason for preferring the former to the latter. What we have are different philosophical/theological positions that dictate different ways of pursuing Scripture scholarship. A way to show that the one really *is* superior to the other would be to give a good argument *for* the one philosophical/theological position, or *against* the other. Harvey does neither, simply assuming (uncritically, and without so much as mentioning the fact) the one position and rejecting the other. He assumes that there is no source of warrant or knowledge in addition to reason. This is not self-evident; millions, maybe billions of Christians and others reject it. Is it sensible, then, just to *assume* it, without so much as acknowledging this contrary opinion, without so much as a feeble gesture in the direction of argument or reason?

C. HBC more Inclusive?

John Collins recognizes that Troeltschian scholarship involves theological assumptions not nearly universally shared. He does not argue for the truth of these assumptions, but recommends them on a quite different basis. Criticizing Brevard Childs's proposal for a 'canonical' approach to Scripture scholarship,⁶⁷ he claims that the problem is that the former does not provide an *inclusive context* for the latter:

If biblical theology is to retain a place in serious scholarship, it must be ... conceived broadly enough to provide a context for debate between different viewpoints. Otherwise it is likely to become a sectarian reservation, of interest only to those who hold certain confessional tenets that are not shared by the discipline at large. Childs's dogmatic conception of the canon provides no basis for advancing dialogue. In my opinion historical criticism still provides the most satisfactory framework for discussion.⁶⁸

He adds that:

One criterion for the adequacy of presuppositions is the degree to which they allow dialogue between differing viewpoints and accommodate new insights.... Perhaps the outstanding achievement of historical criticism in this century is that it has provided a framework within which scholars of different prejudices and commitments have been able to debate in a constructive manner.⁶⁹

So why should we prefer Troeltschian Scripture scholarship over traditional Bible commentary? Because it offers a wider context, one in which people with conflicting theological opinions can all take part. We may be

conservative Christians, theological liberals, or people with no theological views whatever: we can all take part in Troeltschian Scripture scholarship, provided we acquiesce in its fundamental assumptions. This is why it is to be preferred to the more traditional sort.

Now this would perhaps be a reason for practicing *Duhemian* Scripture scholarship, but of course Troeltschian Scripture scholarship is not Duhemian: the principles upon which it proceeds are not accepted by nearly everyone. They would be accepted by only a tiny minority of contemporary Christians, for example. And this shows a fundamental confusion, so it seems to me, in Collins's defence of Troeltschian scholarship. The defense he offers is appropriate for *Duhemian* scholarship; it is not at all appropriate for *Troeltschian* scholarship. The principles of Troeltschian historical scholarship, so interpreted as to preclude miracle, direct divine action, and special divine inspiration of the Bible, are extremely controversial philosophical and theological assumptions. Those who do not accept these controversial assumptions will not be inclined to take part in Troeltschian HBC, just as those who do not accept traditional Christian philosophical and theological views will not be likely to engage in traditional Biblical commentary. (If you do not think the Lord speaks in Scripture, you will be unlikely to spend a great deal of your time trying to figure out what it is God says there.) As John Levenson puts it, historical criticism "does not facilitate communication with those outside its boundaries: it requires fundamentalists, for example, to be born again as liberals—or to stay out of the conversation altogether." He adds that "if inclusiveness is to be gauged quantitatively, then [Brevard] Childs would win the match hands down, for far more people with biblical interests share Christian faith than a thoroughgoing historicism. Were we historical critics to be classed as a religious body we should have to be judged a most minuscule sect indeed—and one with a pronounced difficulty relating to groups that do not accept our beliefs."⁷⁰

V. *Nothing to be Concerned About*

We are now prepared to return to Harvey's original question: why is it that the person in the pew pays little attention to the contemporary HBC, and, despite those decades of research, retains rather a traditional picture of the life and ministry of Jesus? As to why *in actual historical fact* this is the case, this is a job for an intellectual historian. What we have seen so far, however, is that there is no compelling or even reasonably decent argument for supposing that the procedures and assumptions of HBC are to be preferred to those of traditional Biblical commentary. A little epistemological reflection enables us to see something further: the traditional Christian (whether in the pew or not) has a good reason to reject the skeptical claims of HBC and continue to hold traditional Christian belief despite the allegedly corrosive acids of HBC.

A. Troeltschian HBC Again

As we have seen, there are substantially three types of HBC. For present purposes, however, we can consider Duhemian and Spinozistic HBC together. Let us say, therefore, that we have both Troeltschian and non-Troeltschian HBC. Consider the first. The Troeltschian Scripture scholar accepts Troeltsch's principles for historical research, under an interpretation according to which they rule out the occurrence of miracles and the divine inspiration of the Bible (along with the corollary that the latter enjoys the sort of unity accruing to a book that has one principal author). But then it is not at all surprising that the Troeltschian tends to come up with conclusions wildly at variance with those accepted by the traditional Christian. As Gilkey says, "Suddenly a vast panoply of divine deeds and events recorded in scripture are no longer regarded as having actually happened" (above, p. 255). Now if (instead of tendentious claims about our inability to do otherwise) the Troeltschian offered some good reasons to think that in fact these Troeltschian principles are *true*, then the traditional Christian would certainly have to pay attention; then she might be obliged to take the skeptical claims of historical critics seriously. But Troeltschians apparently do not offer any such good reasons. They simply declare that nowadays we cannot think in any other way, or (following Harvey) that it is immoral to believe in, e.g., Christ's resurrection on other than historical grounds.

Neither of these is remotely persuasive as a reason for modifying traditional Christian belief in the light of Troeltschian results. As for the first, of course, the traditional Christian knows that it is quite false: she herself and many of her friends nowadays (and hundreds of millions of others) do think in precisely that proscribed way. And as far as the implicit claims for the superiority of these Troeltschian ways of thinking go, she will not be impressed by them unless some decent arguments of one sort or another are forthcoming, or some other good reason for adopting that opinion. The mere claim that this is what many contemporary experts think will not and should not intimidate her. And the second proposed reason (Harvey's reason) seems to be itself dependent on the very claim at issue. Clearly the critic thinks it immoral to form beliefs about historical facts on grounds other than historical research because he believes that the only reliable grounds for beliefs of the former type is research of the latter type. Again, however, he offers no argument for this assumption, merely announcing it as what those in the know believe, and perhaps also adopting an air of injured puzzlement about the fact that the person in the pew does not seem to pay much attention.

To see the point here, consider an analogy: suppose your friend is accused and convicted of stealing an ancient and valuable Frisian vase from the local museum. As it happens, you remember clearly that at the time this vase was stolen, your friend was in your office defending his eccentric views about the gospel of John. You have testified to this in court, but to no avail. I come along and offer to do a scientific investigation to see whether your view here

is in fact correct. You are delighted, knowing as you think you do that your friend is innocent. When I explain my methods to you, however, your delight turns to dismay. For I refuse to accept the testimony of memory; I propose to ignore completely the fact that you *remember* your friend's being in your office. Further, my method precludes from the start the conclusion that your friend is innocent, even if he *is* innocent. Could I blame you for losing interest in my 'scientific' investigation? But the traditional Christian ought to view Troeltschian HBC with the same suspicion: it refuses to admit a source of warranted belief (the testimony of Scripture) the traditional Christian accepts, and is precluded in advance from coming to such conclusions as that Jesus really did arise from the dead and really is the divine Son of God.

B. Non-Troeltschian HBC

Troeltschian HBC, therefore, has no claim on a serious Christian; it is wholly reasonable for her to form and maintain her beliefs quite independently of it. How about non-Troeltschian (Duhemian and Spinozistic) HBC? This is, of course, a very different kettle of fish. The non-Troeltschian proposes to employ only assumptions that are clearly deliverances of reason (or accepted by everyone party to the project). She does not (for purposes of scholarship) accept the traditional Christian's views about the Bible or the life of Christ, but she also does not accept Troeltsch's principles. She does not assume that miracles did or could not happen; but of course that is quite different from assuming that they did not or could not, and she does not assume that either. She does not assume that the Bible is in fact a word from the Lord and hence authoritative and reliable; but she also does not assume that it is not.

Of course, that may not leave her a lot to go on. The non-Troeltschian is handicapped in this area in a way in which she is not in such areas as physics or chemistry. In the latter, there is little by way of theological controversy that seems relevant to the pursuit of the subject. Not so for Scripture scholarship; here the very foundations of the subject are deeply disputed. Does the Bible have one principal author, namely God himself? If not, then perhaps Jowett—"Scripture has one meaning—the meaning which it had to the mind of the prophet or evangelist who first uttered or wrote, to the hearers or readers who first received it"—is right; otherwise, he is wrong.⁷¹ Is it divinely inspired, so that what it teaches is both true and to be accepted? If it reports miraculous happenings—risings from the dead, a virgin birth, the changing of water into wine, healings of people blind or lame from birth—are these to be taken more or less at face value, or dismissed as contrary to "what we now know"? Is there an entry into the truth about these matters—faith or divine testimony by way of Scripture, for example—quite different from ordinary historical investigation? If we prescind from all these matters and proceed responsibly (remembering to shun the Fallacy of Creeping Certitude, for example), what we come up with is likely to be pretty slender.

A. E. Harvey, for example, proposes the following as beyond reasonable doubt from everyone's point of view, i.e., Duhemianly: "that Jesus was known in both Galilee and Jerusalem, that he was a teacher, that he carried out cures of various illnesses, particularly demon-possession and that these were widely regarded as miraculous; that he was involved in controversy with fellow Jews over questions of the law of Moses; and that he was crucified in the governorship of Pontius Pilate."⁷² It is not even clear whether Harvey means that the *conjunction* of these propositions is beyond reasonable doubt, or only each of the conjuncts;⁷³ in either case what we have is pretty slim.

Or consider John Meier's monumental *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*.⁷⁴ Meier aims to be Duhemian, or anyway Spinozistic: "My method follows a simple rule: it prescind from what Christian faith or later Church teaching says about Jesus, without either affirming or denying such claims".⁷⁵ (I think he also means to eschew assumptions incompatible with traditional Christian belief.) Meier's fantasy of "an unapal conclave" of Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and agnostic scholars, locked in the basement of the Harvard Divinity School library until they come to consensus on what historical methods can show about the life and mission of Jesus, is thoroughly Duhemian. This conclave, he says, would yield "... a rough draft of what that will-o'-the-wisp 'all reasonable people' could say about the historical Jesus."⁷⁶ Meier sets out, judiciously, objectively, carefully, to establish that consensus.⁷⁷ What is striking about his conclusions, however, is how slender they are, and how tentative—and this despite the fact that on occasion he cannot himself resist building occasional towers of probability. About all that emerges from Meier's painstaking work is that Jesus was a prophet, a proclaimer of an eschatological message from God, someone who performs powerful deeds, signs and wonders, that announce God's kingdom, and also ratify his message.⁷⁸ As Duhemian or Spinozist, of course, we cannot add that these signs and miracles involve special or direct divine action; nor can we say that they do not. We cannot say that Jesus rose from the dead, or that he did not; we cannot conclude that Scripture is specially inspired, or that it is not.

Now what is characteristic of non-Troeltschian HBC is just that it does not involve those Troeltschian principles: but of course it also rejects any alleged source of warranted belief in addition to reason (Spinozistic) and any theological assumptions not shared by everyone party to the discussion. Traditional Christians, rightly or wrongly, think they do have sources of warranted belief in addition to reason: faith and the work of the Holy Spirit, or divine testimony in Scripture, or the testimony of the Spirit-led church. They may of course be *mistaken* about that; but until someone gives a decent argument for the conclusion that they *are* mistaken, they need not be impressed by the result of scholarship that ignores this further source of belief. If you want to learn the truth about a given area, you should not restrict yourself to only

some of the sources of warranted belief (as does the Spinozist), or only to beliefs accepted by everyone else (with the Duhemian); maybe you know something some of the others do not. Perhaps you remember that your friend was in your office expostulating about the errors of postmodernism at the very time he is supposed to have been stealing that Frisian vase; if no one else was there, then you know something the rest do not.

So the traditional Christian need not be fazed by the fact that non-Troeltschian HBC does not support her views about what Jesus did and said. She thinks she knows some things by faith—that Jesus arose from the dead, for example. She may concede that if you leave out of account all that she knows in this way, then with respect to the remaining body of knowledge or belief the resurrection is not particularly probable. But that does not present her with an intellectual or spiritual crisis. We can imagine a renegade group of whimsical physicists proposing to reconstruct physics, refusing to use belief that comes from memory, say, or perhaps memory of anything more than one minute ago. Perhaps something could be done along these lines, but it would be a poor, paltry, truncated, trifling thing. And now suppose that, say, Newton's Laws or Special Relativity turned out to be dubious and unconfirmed from this point of view: that would presumably give little pause to the more traditional physicists. This truncated physics could hardly call into question physics of the fuller variety.

Similarly here. The traditional Christian thinks she knows *by faith* that Jesus was divine and that he rose from the dead. But then she will be unmoved by the fact that these truths are not especially probable on the evidence to which non-Troeltschian HBC limits itself. Why should that matter to her? So this is the rest of the answer to Harvey's question: if the HBC in question is non-Troeltschian, then the fact it does not verify traditional Christian beliefs is due to its limiting itself in the way it does, to its refusing to use all the data or evidence the Christian thinks he has in his possession. For a Christian to confine himself to the results of non-Troeltschian HBC would be a little like trying to mow your lawn with nail scissors or paint your house with a toothbrush; it might be an interesting experiment if you have time on your hands, but otherwise why limit yourself in this way?

More generally, then: HBC is either Troeltschian or non-Troeltschian. If the former, then it begins from assumptions entailing that much of what the traditional Christian believes is false; but then it is no surprise that its conclusions are at odds with traditional belief. It is also of little direct interest to the traditional Christian. It offers her no reason at all for rejecting or modifying her beliefs; it also offers little promise of enabling her to achieve better or deeper insight into what actually happened. As for non-Troeltschian HBC, on the other hand, this variety of historical criticism omits a great deal of what she sees as relevant evidence and relevant considerations. It is therefore left with little to go on. But again, the fact that it fails to support traditional belief will be of little direct interest to the traditional believer; that is only to be

expected, and casts no doubt at all upon that belief. Either way, therefore, the traditional Christian can rest easy with the claims of HBC; she need feel no obligation, intellectual or otherwise, to modify her beliefs in the light of its claims and alleged results.⁷⁹

Concluding Coda

But is not all of this just a bit too sunny? Is not it a recipe for avoiding hard questions, for hanging onto belief no matter what, for guaranteeing that you will never have to face negative results, even if there *are* some? "HBC is either Troeltschian or non-Troeltschian: in the first case it proceeds from assumptions I reject; in the second it fails to take account of all of what I take to be the evidence; either way, therefore, I need not pay attention to it." Could not I say this *a priori*, without even examining the results of HBC? But then there must be something defective in the line of thought in question. Is not it clearly *possible* that historians should discover facts that put Christian belief into serious question, count heavily against it? Well, maybe so. How could this happen? As follows. HBC limits itself to the deliverances of reason; it is possible, at any rate in the broadly logical sense, that just by following ordinary historical reason, using the methods of historical investigation endorsed or enjoined by the deliverances of reason, someone should find powerful evidence against central elements of the Christian faith;⁸⁰ if this happened, Christians would face a genuine faith-reason clash. A series of letters could be discovered, letters circulated among Peter, James, John and Paul, in which the necessity for the hoax and the means of its perpetration are carefully and seriously discussed; these letters might direct workers to archeological sites in which still more material of the same sort is discovered.⁸¹ The Christian faith is a *historical* faith, in the sense that it essentially depends upon what did in fact happen: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile" (I Cor. 15:17). It could certainly happen that by the exercise of reason we come up with powerful evidence⁸² against something we take or took to be deliverance of the faith.⁸³ It is conceivable that the assured results of HBC should include such evidence. Then Christians would have a problem, a sort of conflict between faith and reason.

But, of course, nothing at all like this has emerged from HBC, whether Troeltschian or non-Troeltschian; indeed, there is little of any kind that can be considered its 'assured results', if only because of the wide-ranging disagreement among those who practice HBC.⁸⁴ We do not have anything like assured results (or even reasonably well-attested results) that conflict with traditional Christian belief in such a way that belief of that sort can continue to be accepted only at considerable cost; nothing like this has happened. What would be the appropriate response if it *did* happen, or rather if I came to be convinced that it had happened? Would I have to give up Christian faith, or else give up the life of the mind? What would be the appropriate response?

Well, what would be the appropriate response if I came to be convinced that someone had given a wholly rigorous, ineluctable disproof of the existence of God, perhaps something along the lines of J. N. Findlay's alleged ontological disproof?⁸⁵ Or what if, with David Hume (at least as understood by Thomas Reid), I come to think that my cognitive faculties are probably not reliable, and go on to note that I form this very belief on the basis of the very faculties whose reliability this belief impugns? If I did, what would or should I do—stop thinking about these things, immerse myself in practical activity (maybe playing a lot of backgammon, maybe volunteering to help build houses for Habitat for Humanity), commit intellectual suicide? I do not know the answer to any of these questions. There is no need to borrow trouble, however: we can think about crossing these bridges when (more likely, if) we come to them.⁸⁶

NOTES

- 1 "New Testament Scholarship and Christian Belief" (hereafter 'NTS'), in *Jesus in History and Myth* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986), p. 193.
- 2 I therefore concur (for the most part) both with C. Stephen Evans in his excellent *The Historical Christ and the Jesus of Faith: the Incarnational Narrative as History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), and with Peter van Inwagen in "Critical Studies of the New Testament and the User of the New Testament", *God, Knowledge, and Mystery* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 163–190.
- 3 For an account of warrant, that property which distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief (a lucky guess, for example), see my *Warrant: The Current Debate* and *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- 4 See *Warrant and Proper Function*, pp. 34–35.
- 5 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 295.
- 6 More exactly, perhaps the probability of (1) on B is as high as .9, the probability of (2) on (1)&B as high as .9, and the same for $P((3)/(B\&(1)\&(2)))$ and $P((4)/(B\&(1)\&(2)\&(3)))$. For more on this form of argument, see *Warranted Christian Belief*, chapter 8, "The Extended A/C Model: Revealed to our Minds."
- 7 Jonathan Edwards: "And the opening to view with such clearness, such a world of wonderful and glorious truth in the gospel, that before was unknown, being quite above the view of a natural eye, but appearing so clear and bright, has a powerful and invincible influence on the soul to persuade of the divinity of the gospel." *The Religious Affections* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 303.
- 8 I do not for a moment mean to suggest that teaching us truths is *all* that the Lord intends in Scripture: there is also raising affection, teaching us how to praise, how to pray, how to see the depth of our own sin, how marvelous the gift of salvation is, and a thousand other things.
- 9 See, for example, Richard Swinburne (*Revelation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 192), who suggests that Paul's Christology at Romans 1:4 should be understood in terms of the 'high' Christology of the first chapter of John's gospel. We could say the same for Paul's Christology in his speech in Acts 13, where he seems to suggest that a special status was *conferred* on Jesus, as opposed to John 1, according to which Jesus is the incarnation of the preexistent Word. See also Raymond Brown, *New Testament Christology* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1994), pp. 133ff.
- 10 Of course this procedure, like most others, can be and has been abused; that possibility in itself, however, is nothing against it, though it should serve as a salutary caution.
- 11 A further complication: we cannot simply assume that there is some one thing, the same for everyone, that the Lord intends to teach in a given passage; perhaps what he intends to

teach me, or my relevant sociological group, is not the same as what he intended to teach a fifth century Christian.

- 12 *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, 14. Of course, this method does not preclude a rational argument (an argument from reason alone) for the proposition that indeed there has been a divine revelation, and that the Bible (or some part of it) is precisely that revelation: exactly this was John Locke's project.
- 13 To understand historical criticism and its dominance properly, says David Yeago, one must understand "the historic coupling of historical criticism with a 'project to the Enlightenment' aimed at liberating mind and heart from the shackles of ecclesiastical tradition. In the modern context, claims to 'Enlightenment' must be backed up with the claim to have achieved a proper *method*, capable of producing real knowledge to replace the pre-critical confusion and arbitrariness of tradition." "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma", *Pro Ecclesia* Vol. III, No. 2 (Spring, 1994), p. 162.
- 14 *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1973), p. 6.
- 15 See also John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991, two volumes), p. 1.
- 16 Nor can you employ a proposition which is such that the warrant it has for you comes from some proposition you know or believe by faith; we might put this by saying that in doing science you cannot employ any proposition whose epistemic provenance, for you, includes a proposition you know or believe by faith.
But is this really true? Why should we believe it? What is the status of the claim that if what you are doing is science, then you cannot employ, in your work, any proposition you believe or know by faith? Is this supposed to be true by definition? If so, whose definition? Is there a good argument for it? Or what? See my "Methodological Naturalism?", *Facets of Faith and Science*, ed. J. van der Meer (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996), pp. 177–222.
- 17 Thus Benjamin Jowett (the 19th century Master of Balliol College and eminent translator of Plato): "Scripture has one meaning—the meaning which it had to the mind of the prophet or evangelist who first uttered or wrote, to the hearers or readers who first received it." "On the Interpretation of Scripture", in *The Interpretation of Scripture and Other Essays* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1906), p. 36. Quoted in Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 78. Jowett was not a paragon of intellectual modesty, which may explain a poem composed and circulated by undergraduates at Balliol:
First come I, my name is Jowett.
There's no knowledge but I know it.
I am the master of the college.
What I don't know isn't knowledge.
- 18 E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 5.
- 19 Levenson, p. 109.
- 20 "Jesus Risen: Bodily Resurrection But No Empty Tomb", *Theology* Vol. 89 No. 728 (March, 1986), p. 91.
- 21 *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 172. The target of much of Johnson's criticism is the notorious 'Jesus Seminar'.
- 22 I do not mean to suggest, of course, that the traditional Biblical commentator cannot also investigate these questions; if she does, however, it will be in the ultimate service of an effort to discern what the Lord is teaching in the passages in question.
- 23 See especially his "Über historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie" in his *Gesammelte Schriften* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1913) Vol. 2, pp. 729–753, and his article "Historiography" in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* Vol. VI (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1925), pp. 716–723.
- 24 "Is Critical Biblical Theology Possible?" in *The Hebrew Bible and its Interpreters*, eds. William Henry Propp, Baruch Halpern and David Freedman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 2.
- 25 Subtitled *The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1966).

- 26 *loc. cit.*
- 27 "Historiography", p. 718.
- 28 Thus Descartes (part 2 of *Principles of Philosophy*) in stating something like a law of conservation of momentum:
xxvii. The first law of nature: that each thing as far as in it lies, continues always in the same state; and that which is once moved always continues so to move.
- 29 An opinion preserved among such contemporary philosophers as David Armstrong (see his *What is a Law of Nature?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984)) and David Lewis (see, e.g., his "New Work for a Theory of Universals", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 61 No. 4 (December 1983), pp. 343ff.).
- 30 See, in particular, Bas van Fraassen's *Laws and Symmetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) for an extended and powerful argument against the exercise of natural laws.
- 31 *Existence and Faith*, ed. Schubert Ogden (New York, NY: Meridian Books, 1960), pp. 291–292. Writing 50 years before Troeltsch, David Strauss concurs: "... all things are linked together by a chain of causes and effects, which suffers no interruption." *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1972), sec. 14. (Quoted in Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, p. 15.)
- 32 *Principles of Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), p. 248.
- 33 "Cosmology, Ontology and the Travail of Biblical Language", reprinted in Owen C. Thomas, ed., *God's Activity in the World: the Contemporary Problem* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), p. 31.
- 34 "La Philosophie scientifique de M. Duhem", *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, XII (July, 1904), pp. 699ff.
- 35 See the appendix to Duhem's *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, trans. Philip P. Wiener, foreword by Prince Louis de Broglie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954) (the book was first published in 1906). The appendix is entitled "Physics of a Believer" and is a reprint of Duhem's reply to Rey; it was originally in the *Annales de Philosophie chrétienne* Vol I (Oct. and Nov. 1905), pp. 44ff. and 133ff.
- 36 Duhem, p. 10.
- 37 *Ibid.*, pp. 274–275.
- 38 Of course, this proposal must be qualified, nuanced, sophisticated. It makes perfect sense for me to continue to work on a hypothesis after others have decided it is a dead end; science has often benefited from such disagreements.
- 39 To be sure, it may be difficult to specify the relevant community. Suppose I am a Scripture scholar at a denominational seminary: what is my relevant community? Scripture scholars of any sort, all over the world? Scripture scholars in my own denomination? In western academia? The people, academics or not, in my denomination? Christians generally? The first thing to see here is that our Scripture scholar clearly belongs to many different communities, and may accordingly be involved in several different scholarly projects.
- 40 *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, p. 1.
- 41 According to Spinoza, as we saw, "The rule for [Biblical] interpretation should be nothing but the natural light of reason ..." (above p. 250).
- 42 The author of *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (London: Sonnenschein, 1892), one of the earliest higher critical salvoes.
- 43 "Translator's Preface", *Calvin's Commentaries*, Vol. xvi, trans. the Rev. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), p. vi. Pringle's preface is dated at Auctherarder, Jan. 4, 1845.
- 44 John D. Levenson, "The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism" in *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism*, p. 9. (An earlier version of this essay was published under the same title in *Hebrew Bible or Old Testament? Studying the Bible in Judaism and Christianity*, eds. John Collins and Roger Brooks (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).) Of course, *clairvoyance* is not at issue at all: the question is really whether the Scripture has one principal author, namely God. If it does, then it does not require clairvoyance on the part of a human author for a passage from a given time to refer to something that happens much later. All that is required is God's omniscience.
- 45 *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1984, 1994), p. xvii.

- 46 "The crisis grows out of the fact now freely admitted by both Protestant and Catholic theologians and exegetes: that as far as can be discerned from the available historical data, Jesus of Nazareth did not think he was divine [and] did not assert any of the messianic claims that the New Testament attributes to him ..." Thomas Sheehan, *The First Coming* (New York, NY: Random House, 1986), p. 9.
- 47 San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.
- 48 *Jesus the Magician* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1978).
- 49 *What Really Happened to Jesus: A Historical Approach to the Resurrection* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).
- 50 "The Historicity of Jesus" in *Jesus in History and Myth*, eds., R. Joseph Hoffman and Gerald A. Larue (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986), pp. 27ff.
- 51 *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1970).
- 52 Sheehan, *op. cit.*
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 194.
- 54 As we have just seen. This lack of accord is especially well documented by Stephen Evans (*op. cit.*), pp. 322ff.
- 55 *Kerygma and Myth* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 5. Compare Marcus Borg's more recent comment: "... to a large extent, the defining characteristic of biblical scholarship in the modern period is the attempt to understand Scripture without reference to another world because in this period the visible world of space and time is the world we think of as 'real.'" ("Root Images and the Way We See", *Fragments of Infinity* (Dorset, UK, & Lindfield, Australia, 1991), p. 38. Quoted in Huston Smith's "Doing Theology in the Global Village", *Religious Studies and Theology*, Vol. 13/14, No. 2/3, (December, 1995), p. 12. On the other side, note Abraham Kuyper (*To Be Near Unto God*, trans. John Hendrik de Vries (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1918), pp. 50–51); writing not long after the invention of the "wireless", he saw it not as an obstacle to traditional faith but as a sort of electronic symbol of the way in which each of us can communicate instantaneously with God.
- 56 We might call this the preemptive 'we': those who do not agree with us on the point in question are (by comparison with us) so unenlightened that we can properly speak as if they do not so much as exist.
- 57 Some, however, might see here little more than an effort to gain standing and respectability in a largely secular academia by adopting a stance that is, so to say, more Catholic than the Pope.
- 58 Here I can be brief; William Alston has already proposed a compelling argument for the claim I propose to support, namely, that one can perfectly well do science even if one thinks God has done and even sometimes still does miracles. See his "Divine Action: Shadow or Substance?" in *The God Who Acts: Philosophical and Theological Explorations*, ed. Thomas F. Tracy (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1994), pp. 49–50.
- 59 As Alston argues.
- 60 I think the argument is intended to support Troeltschian HBC; it could also be used, however, to support Spinozistic or (less plausibly) Duhemian HBC.
- 61 NTS, pp. 194ff.; a fuller (if older) and influential presentation of his views is to be found in his *The Historian and the Believer*.
- 62 Described with insight and verve in James C. Livingston's monograph *The Ethics of Belief: An Essay on the Victorian Religious Conscience* in the American Academy of Religion's *Studies in Religion* (Tallahassee, FL, and Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978). I thank Martin Cook for calling my attention to this monograph.
- 63 Harvey, NTS, p. 195.
- 64 First published in *The Contemporary Review* (XXIX, 1877); reprinted in Clifford's *Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1879), pp. 354ff.
- 65 Harvey, NTS, p. 197.
- 66 Harvey, NTS, p. 193.
- 67 See, e.g., Childs's *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), pp. 3–53.
- 68 "Is a Critical Biblical Theology Possible?" in *The Hebrew Bible and its Interpreters*, pp. 6–7. Collins speaks here not of Troeltschian HBC but of HBC simpliciter; a couple of pages earlier, however, he identifies HBC with Troeltschian HBC.

- 69 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 70 Levenson, p. 120.
- 71 see note 17 above.
- 72 *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (London and Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), p. 6.
- 73 It could be that each of the conjuncts is beyond reasonable doubt but that their conjunction is not. Suppose (just to choose arbitrarily a number) what is probable to degree .95 or higher is beyond reasonable doubt. Then if each of the above is beyond reasonable doubt, their conjunction might still be little more than twice as probable as its denial.
- 74 New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991, 1994. The first volume has 484 pages; the second has 1,055 pages; a third volume is currently expected.
- 75 Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, p. 1.
- 76 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 77 "Meier's treatment, in short, is as solid and moderate and pious as Historical Jesus scholarship is ever likely to be. More important, Meier is a careful scholar. There is nothing hasty or slipshod in his analysis; he considers every opinion, weighs every option." Johnson, p. 128.
- 78 See Johnson, pp. 130–131.
- 79 *Alleged* results: because of the enormous controversy and disagreement among followers of HBC, it is very difficult to find anything one could sensibly call 'results' of this scholarship.
- 80 Or, less crucially, evidence against what appear to be the teaching of Scripture. For example, archeological evidence could undermine the traditional belief that there was such a city as Jericho.
- 81 See Bas van Fraassen, "Three-sided Scholarship: Comments on the Paper of John R. Donahue, S. J.", in *Hermes and Athena*, eds. Eleonore Stump and Thomas Flint (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), p. 322. "Finish it [the depressing scenario] yourself, if you have the heart to do it", says van Fraassen.
- 82 Or *think* we come up with it; even if we are mistaken about the evidence in question, it could still precipitate this sort of problem for us.
- 83 See my "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible" in *Christian Scholar's Review*, Vol. XXI No. 1 (September, 1991), pp. 9–15.
- 84 Thus Harold Attridge in "Calling Jesus Christ" in *Hermes and Athena*, p. 211.: "There remains enormous diversity among those who attempt to describe what Jesus really did, taught, and thought about himself. For some contemporary scholars he was a Hellenistic magician; for others, a Galilean charismatic or rabbi; for yet others, a prophetic reformer; for others, a sly teller of wry and engaging tales; for some he had grandiose ideas; for others he eschewed them. In general, the inquirer finds the Jesus that her historical method allows her to see. It is as true today as it was at the end of the liberal quest for the historical Jesus catalogued by Albert Schweitzer that we moderns tend to make Jesus in our own image and likeness." The Schweitzer reference is to his *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* (1906), translated by W. Montgomery under the title *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1956).
- 85 "Can God's Existence be Disproved?" *Mind* Vol. 57 No. 226 (April, 1948), pp. 176–183.
- 86 My thanks to Mike Bergmann, John Cooper, Kevin Corcoran, Ronald Feenstra, Marie Pannier, Neal Plantinga, Tapio Puolimatka, David Vanderlaan, James VanderKam, Calvin Van Reken, and Henry Zwaanstra. A longer version of this paper appears as chapter 12 of *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).