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RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

A STUDY IN THE HISTORY OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

In a single compact volume Professor Fullerton gives us a sketch of the use of the Old Testament in the Christian church.¹ He shows that at the beginning of Christianity the question of the relation of the new religion to the Jewish Scriptures was fundamental. The church maintained against Jews, Gnostics, and Marcionites that the Old Testament was a Christian document. In order to establish this proposition the Old Testament was regarded chiefly as a prediction of the New Testament, and the New Testament was valued mainly as proof of the inspiration of the Old Testament by its minute and detailed fulfilment of the predictions of the prophets. The predictive character of the Old Testament could, however, be defended only by the surrender of the literal, historical meaning of its books and the substitution of an allegorical, unhistorical method of interpretation. History and ceremonial were made types of Christ, and the utterances of the prophets and psalmists were wrested out of their original signification and were turned into predictive programs of the life of Christ. The adoption of the method by the early Apologists and Church Fathers was due to the influence of Alexandria, where Homer had long since been allegorized by the Greeks to adapt him to the needs of neo-Platonic philosophy, and where the Old Testament had been allegorized in a similar fashion by the Jews to make it teach the same philosophy.

The peril of the allegorical method was that no two writers could agree as to the "spiritual" meaning of a passage in question. The Gnostics could use it to prove their heresies as well as the Church Fathers to prove their orthodoxy. Consequently, the early church was soon compelled to introduce the principle of ecclesiastical authority in the form of the unwritten tradition handed down by the bishops in order to determine which of the many allegorical interpretations of the Old Testament were correct. As a result the Bible soon became an enigmatic book whose interpretation was the exclusive right of the Holy Catholic

¹ *Prophecy and Authority, a Study of the History of the Doctrine and the Interpretation of Scripture.* By Kemper Fullerton. New York: Macmillan, 1919. xxi+214 pages. \$1.50.

church through its councils and its popes, who were assumed to hand down the primitive tradition of the apostolic church, or to be divinely inspired to illumine the mysteries of Scripture.

The Protestant Reformation in breaking with the authority of the church was compelled also to break with its doctrine of Scripture; and to affirm that, instead of being an enigma whose meaning can be penetrated only by the infallible church, its meaning is clear to any Christian who is willing to study it. Luther rejected the allegorical method of interpretation because it made the Bible obscure and necessitated the church as an interpreter, and affirmed that the Bible was the clear and infallible rule of faith that could be understood by every individual believer. From this followed the Reformation method of exegesis—the grammatico-historical method, that is, that Scripture has only one meaning which is determined by philology, grammar, and syntax, and by a study of the historical conditions under which any given author wrote. By this method halacha, haggada, allegory, and traditional interpretation are forever banished, and the one meaning of Scripture is its original, historical meaning. This was the theory of Luther and of Calvin, but in practice the power of ancient habit was still strong, and they frequently lapsed from the grammatico-historical exegesis into allegory like their predecessors. Later Protestantism through its development of the doctrine of the verbal inerrancy of the Bible in opposition to the infallibility of the church and of the pope brought a return to the ancient methods of interpretation, for the inerrancy of the Bible could be defended only by an allegorical treatment of its contents. The history of Protestantism has been a struggle for the maintenance of the fundamental principle of the Reformation that the only meaning of Scripture is its original, historical meaning as determined by a knowledge of the language and of the times of the various authors. In the course of the last century this has become the settled conviction of Protestant scholars and also of Modernists in the church of Rome. This means the final abandonment of the predictive theory of the Old Testament with its typology of history and ritual and its search for specific predictions of events in the life of Christ. Instead of this we now see that Christ “fulfils” the Old Testament by “filling it full” with a new and diviner meaning. “Fulfilment” is not the accomplishment of a program laid down in advance by the Old Testament, but is evolution of the truth that is germinal in the Old Testament. The ancient Alexandrine predictive theory of interpretation still lingers among the Adventists, Millenarians, and similar sectarian movements;

but these vagaries are doomed before the advance of knowledge of the historical meaning of the Bible.

This book is a clear and scholarly presentation of the subject that will do much to help clarify the thought of the modern church in regard to the legitimate use of its sacred writings.

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A STUDY OF THE QUR'ÂN

The need for a good book in English on the teaching of the Qur'ân has long been felt; missionaries, general historians, and especially students of the history of religions, most of whom know Arabic not at all or not enough, would all be grateful for such help. The writing of such a book, one that could safely and trustfully be used by non-Arabists, is not an easy matter. The study of Arabic, especially the Arabic of Qur'ânic times, of the Qur'ân as such, of the history of Mohammed and his time, of those phases of Judaism and Christianity with which he had contact—all these are not yet beyond the pioneer stage. And it would take a master of all these things to write such a book as might be wished for.

In the meantime, to bridge the gap, while we are waiting for this *ultima Thule*, a little volume has been issued by the Central Board of Missions and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.¹ The author, the Rev. Weitbrecht Stanton, is very modest in his claims and makes no pretension to having offered a perfect or very learned book. What he gives us shows clearly that he knows the Qur'ân itself and its traditional (orthodox Moslem) interpretation well and intimately. The bibliography at the end of the volume (pp. 135 f.) shows that he has also made himself acquainted with good Western books; more particularly those that deal professedly with the subject of his volume he has evidently studied with care, both in English and in German. The knowledge so acquired is in the main well presented; the little book is a pretty accurate measure of its author's studies.

It is no reflection on the author's ability to state, in this connection, that the compass of the volume is small, indeed, only 138 pages in all. The Qur'ân itself is not very large, and, its repetitions deducted, the

¹*The Teaching of the Qur'ân. With an Account of its Growth and a Subject Index.* By H. U. Weitbrecht Stanton. London: Macmillan, 1919, 136 pages. 7s.