

**EDITORS**

L. Brent Bozell  
Michael Lawrence  
Gary K. Potter  
Frederick Wilhelmsen

**Associate Editor**  
Robert W. Fox

**Assistant Editor**  
Lorenzo Albacete

**Managing Editor**  
Patricia B. Bozell

**Contributors**

Robert Beum  
Lawrence R. Brown  
F. R. Buckley  
Phillip Burnham  
Colin Clark  
Farley Clinton  
Christopher Dawson  
Christopher Derrick  
William J. Fitzpatrick  
Otto von Habsburg  
Jeffrey Hart  
Dietrich von Hildebrand  
Charles Cardinal Journet  
Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn  
Sir Arnold Lunn  
William Oliver Martin  
Vincent Miceli, S.J.  
John Wisner

**Publisher**  
Donald McClane

**Circulation Manager**  
David Ramsey

**Promotion Manager**  
Joseph Silva

**CHRISTENDOM COLLEGE  
LIBRARY**

# Triumph

April 1970

Vol. V. No. 4

## Contents

<b>Editorials</b>	
Present Imperfect .....	7
Liberty I .....	10
Liberty II.....	41
Agriculture is not a Plastic Bag.....	Thomas A. Montgomery 11
Creation, Drugs and Politics .....	Lorenzo Albacete 15
The Scripture Game .....	W. H. Marshner 19
Are the Great Books Enough? .....	Frederick D. Wilhelmsen 24
A Meditation for April 24, 1970. ....	Farley Clinton 25

### DEPARTMENTS

Reactions .....	3
Potter's Field . . . . .	39
Classified .....	40

### ARTS AND THE AGE

War and Refuge	
..... Jeffrey Hart	28
The Irrelevant Critic	
..... Thomas A. Kuhlman	34
..... Shall Profit by the Sword	
..... Laurence M. Janifer	36

TRIUMPH is published monthly by TRIUMPH Magazine, Inc. at 927 15th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, under the patronage of St. Athanasius. Tel. (202) 737-7101. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C.

**SUBSCRIPTION PRICE:** \$7.50 a year, two years, \$14.00, three years, \$20.00; single copy, 75¢. Add 50¢ a year for Canadian, \$1.50 for all other foreign postage. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions and all other correspondence should be sent to TRIUMPH, 927 15th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005. Please allow one month's notice for changes of address; mailing label from magazine should be sent with notice of change, but always send both old and new addresses, including ZIP code.

Copyright © 1970 by TRIUMPH Magazine, Inc. All rights reserved.

Microfilm copies of current as well as of back issues of TRIUMPH may be purchased from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106.



No Christian can object to increasing the knowledge or the influence of Sacred Scripture. Yet the wide diversity of benefits that are expected to flow from the current "progress" in biblical studies suggests anything but unanimity as to how the subject ought to be approached. On the one hand, it is said that the biblical "revival" will lead to greater scriptural piety among the faithful; or to the development of a stronger bulwark against the attenuation of the Faith wrought by secularism—to fortifying the Magisterium; or to the improvement of the vernacular texts and a proper exegesis of difficult passages. But we also hear much talk of liberating scholars from the "narrow" or "cautious" norms set by the Church, of rediscovering "theological options" ignored or suppressed by traditional exegesis, of enabling the laity to receive Magisterial teachings "critically," of improving "ecumenical relations."

Clearly, there are some severely conflicting interests at work here, and it would seem to be of the highest importance to find out what the *Catholic* interest is. Probably the best way of proceeding is to get at the question negatively—to see first what is wrong with the entire modern approach to the study of Scripture.

That approach germinated with the presumptuous philology of the Renais-

sance, but the leaf was not seen until the Reformation took a bold step: the proclamation of the *sola scriptura* doctrine. Though formally in the province of the dogmatic theologian, the doctrine had its real impact in the domain of the biblical exegete. Throughout the patristic and medieval periods, the exegete had gone at his text with the support of a vast body of para-biblical literature and tradition. The movement of the mind from the more certain to the less certain had been a movement from those things sanctioned by immemorial tradition or hierarchical action—the liturgy, sacraments, the preaching of the Fathers, conciliar decisions—to the enigmatic or ambiguous pages of canonical Scripture. Now the movement was to be reversed. By the light of Scripture, all other things which had shaped Christian existence up till then were to be tested. The means by which the task could be carried out—by which the Bible could suddenly cease to be problem and become, by *fiat*, solution—were the principle of self-interpretation and the science of philology.

It was argued that the reason Scripture seemed obscure was that the Catholic interpreters had asked the wrong questions. Moreover, what besides compounded confusion could result from the attempt to reconcile

# The Scripture Game

W. H. MARSHNER

Scripture with accumulated superstition and scholastic mumbo-jumbo? So ask first what the Bible itself says, speaking with its own voice. Let the more difficult passages be compared to the clear, let the secondary teachings be duly subordinated to the primary (such as justification by faith or the divine sovereignty), and without fail there would emerge a perspicuous whole, self-interpreting and adequate to the solution of every question which truly pertains to our salvation.

But if self-interpretability depended upon the perspicuity of at least the more important passages, how assure perspicuity? This would be guaranteed by an exact and historical understanding of the biblical languages, by philology.

### **Philological Hang-up**

Now philology, unfortunately, is a science. I say unfortunately because, as a science, it could not be invoked forever without being practiced; and once practiced, it imposed conclusions dictated by the relentless internal logic proper to a science. Philology is the science that seeks to discover that meaning which emerges most naturally from the historical investigation of words and their syntax. From this principle it follows that, in the absence of contrary indication, a text has one meaning and only one. Thence springs the incompatibility between philological method and allegorical interpretation. Inevitably, therefore, the churches of the Reformation repudiated the allegorical senses, and with them the homilies and commentaries of the Fathers.

Nevertheless, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, Protestants sought to exploit the youthful estate of the linguistic and historical sciences in the interests of Reformation theology. Whatever success they achieved survives in our day as the essence of conservative, fundamentalist Protestantism. The Reformation theologians had a serious problem. On the one hand, they were committed to uncovering the grammatical or literal sense of the text, also called the "plain" sense. This sense was supposed to be identical to the one intended by the ancient author when he penned the passage in question. Thus there was room for investigation of the historical context of each book, the situation in which the author

found himself, the concrete problems which he sought to address, etc. On the other hand, they were committed to the belief that every canonical text is ultimately authored by God, and thus that any "supernatural" data (miracles, healings, prophecies) must be taken at full value.

The difficulty here is that theological data cannot be imposed upon the philologist simply as a matter of faith—as the resurrection, for example, is imposed upon the Christian biologist. Rather, the historical-philological exegete must *incorporate these data into the very principles of his science*. And the biblical conservatism of the Protestant world stands or falls by this shotgun marriage of heterogeneous principles.

The point bears elaboration. Every science has as its object being (or some portion of being) viewed under some specific aspect. The biologist, for example, studies living beings *qua* living beings, and the scope of the statements which he can make *qua* biologist is limited strictly to the laws of those beings as such. When he is confronted, let us say, with data suggesting that all species now living have as ancestors simpler species, he attempts to discover the biological laws by which the indicated transformations could have taken place. If he can do so, his science will have explained the data under the aspect within which it is competent to explain them. If he cannot, he is no more at liberty to fetch in God as a hypothesis of biological science than he is to engage in science fiction. He must say simply that the data are not explicable by the laws governing those phenomena with which his science deals. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same limitation *ought* to hold for the philologist. The proper object of his science is confined to the text viewed under a specific aspect.

Yet the Protestant exegete has consistently ignored this quite obvious limitation. If, for example, his linguistic and historical data suggest that Moses could not have been the author of the five books ascribed to him, he will reply calmly that it is also a fact that God's Word cannot lie and that it says plainly that Moses wrote. Thus, since theological data are intrinsically more certain than the results of empirical science, any conflicting linguistic and historical data are known *a priori* to lack all force, even

if one cannot explain them away at the present time *a posteriori*. What the fundamentalist does not pause to notice is that if a theological conclusion may set at naught philological data on one occasion, there is nothing to prevent its doing so on every occasion. In order to be consistent, therefore, he must be prepared to defend all sorts of theses—for example, that the apparent tenor of Scripture cannot be called into question by any source external to itself; or that the authentic rules of grammar and syntax of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek biblical texts can be known only from the Bible; or that despite all pretended discoveries, the oldest extant text of the New Testament must be the original and inerrant text; any other assumption calls into question either the inerrancy of Scripture or the ability of the Divine Providence to preserve the sacred original.

In short, the confessional Protestant exegete, if he troubles to be consistent, ceases to be a philologist in any reputable sense of the term and becomes a prisoner of an all-inclusive aprioristic system. In practice, of course, he does not trouble but rather survives as an opportunist, "holding the line" wherever his mixed bag of principles will yield conclusions not too noticeably out of line with reality and prudently retreating elsewhere.

### **Theology Dumped**

The retreat eventually led to the next phase of the doleful history of modern exegesis which found the vast majority of Protestants flinging themselves on the opposite horn of the dilemma mentioned above, and into which today the Catholic Church appears to be moving headlong in anxious pursuit of its "biblical revival." If fundamentalism sought to resolve the internal contradictions of the traditional Protestant position by short-circuiting philological rigor, contemporary biblical criticism has, in turn, excluded theology. The philologist has declared himself free to work on the biblical text without check or hindrance in accordance with the principles of his discipline. Where once the sacraments and creeds of Christendom rendered assistance, one has come to find Ugaritic epics, cuneiform law, Dead Sea Scrolls, and Kenoboskion Fragments.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, descriptive grammar, lexicography, epigraphy, textual criticism, literary criticism, and ancient historiography had attained solidly scientific credentials, while archeology and form-criticism were not far in the future. As the twentieth century began, the once full warehouse of Divine Revelation yawned emptily, its stores having been relabeled and deposited elsewhere. Genesis had been handed over to Near Eastern mythology and tribal lore; the law of Moses had been caught owing more to Hammurabi than to the storm god or the volcanic divinity at Sinai; the historical books were political apologia for the favorites of the Jerusalem clergy; the prophets had written a mere fraction of the books bearing their names; Daniel, a contemporary of the Maccabees, had witnessed the events he pretended to prophesy and had slipped up badly in his depiction of the exilic period; synoptic research had left precious little of the historical Jesus (who was either a liberal or a maniac); John's gospel had disappeared down the sinkhole of Gnosticism, and Hellenistic mystery cults took possession of the theology of Paul. It was small wonder that the theologians attempting to make do with the sweepings that remained died of a starvation called Modernism.

### The Post-Heroic Age

To be sure, in 1970 every competent scholar recognizes that many of the above conclusions, the work of criticism's Heroic Age, were tendentious, overblown, or sometimes wholly false; but few are prepared to acknowledge the real reasons for this embarrassment. At one level the trouble could be accounted for by errors of fact and hasty surmises from insufficient evidence. But at a second level the "religion" of Modernism played a role. The expulsion of inspiration, inerrancy, prophecy and miracles from the philologists' tool-kit did not mean really that the science had achieved a mature self-awareness of its own limitations. It meant that scientism and progressivism had replaced the Gospel as the framework of interpretation, posing anew the menace of apriorism.

There remains a third level. Most profoundly, the trouble lies in the nature of criticism itself, as a philological-historical method. As to the

philological component, the whole content of the science consists of linguistic facts manipulated in accordance with the laws of linguistic causality and probability. Therefore, divine causality as such is outside the limits of the scientific discipline and the linguistic effects of divine causality (e.g. an inspired text, a prophecy) cannot be ordered by the science. The science either will be unable to explain the data at all (passing them on to the theologian as mystery); or, misled by certain linguistic accidents, will order the effects falsely to a natural cause within its scope. Needless to say, even a philologist of the purest intentions and most ardent faith is likely to err in the latter respect.

For the historical component, the argument is analogous in every respect. As a science of human actions and experiences under a particular (rather difficult to define) aspect, it too is unable to rise to the divine causality. An event like the call of Abraham would be an effect of God in the historical order. If the historian is compelled by his evidence to admit that the effect occurred, he too either will leave it unexplained; or, misled by accidentals, assign a false cause proper to his science. Most often, however, guided by the principles of historical probability, he will dismiss the evidence itself. Thus it is doubly unlikely that the historian as such will practice his science authentically in the presence of a divine effect.

In a word, since neither the philological nor historical discipline is capable of dealing with divine things, any particular meaning which the critical method may discover in the Bible can only be the meaning of an ancient Near Eastern book no different in kind from any other ancient Near Eastern book. So viewed, the Bible is not the Holy Scripture of Christians and Jews but a collection of arcana of interest only to the small club of specialized orientologists.

### A Non-Biblical God

How, then, fares exegesis today? After World War I, with the waning of scientific liberalism, scholars became more willing to let theologians be theologians. But two things could not change. The critical method of exegesis could not change its own nature, and Protestantism could not change its commitment to the literal

sense. Hence, it makes very little difference that the critic of today, disciplined by the rigorous problematic of *Traditionsgeschichte*, rarely attempts to invent rationalistic explanations for biblical events. It matters little that he admits that those events belong ultimately to an order outside his competence. For even though the philologist confines himself to the literary materials and putative oral traditions *occasioned* by the events, and though the historian benevolently concedes that he can get no closer to the events than the texts will bring him, nevertheless a curious situation arises. It is this: when everyone is sticking to his business and not grinding axes for volcanoes, bug secretions, and psychosomatic diseases, the theologian still has a province; but the province is precisely not in *Scripture* but outside it in the God who acts. Whence, then, the theologian will secure any information about this God is a very nice question.

### Doctrinal Chaos

In any case the curtain has come down at last on Protestantism in its formal aspect. With *Scripture* securely in the hands of those who tolerate God precisely because He is none of their business, the very foundation of Protestant theology has been dug out from under it. Far from guaranteeing a theologically useful perspicuity, philology has made the study of *Scripture* a fiendishly difficult operation, requiring the mastery of a dozen languages and years of specialized training, all of which produce, of themselves, no theologically useful meaning whatsoever. Far from using the Bible to measure and test the validity of all things, the exegetes have subjected the Book to cross-examination from every antique text and potsherd. If Protestant theologians still have a doctrine, they have it from the Reformers, or Kierkegaard, or Rauschenbusch, or, indeed, from the Church itself, but not from *Scripture*.

Of course this situation is intolerable for Protestants, and if Catholics continue to follow the same path, they will soon be in the same *cul de sac*. Unless there is some alternative—some approach to Sacred *Scripture* which is both rigorous and non-philological—the grounds for any Catholic interest in biblical revival will disappear faster than Presbyterian tenets under Eugene Carson Blake.

(To be continued)