



# **Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Collection**

J. Oliver Buswell Jr. Library  
12330 Conway Road  
Saint Louis, MO 63141

[library.covenantseminary.edu](http://library.covenantseminary.edu)

This document is distributed by Covenant Seminary under agreement with the author, who retains the copyright. Permission to further reproduce or distribute this document is not provided, except as permitted under fair use or other statutory exception.

The views presented in this document are solely the author's.

# The Hermeneutics of Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg: Edifying Value as Exegetical Standard

INAUGURAL-DISSERTATION  
zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades  
der Hohen Theologischen Fakultät  
der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

vorgelegt von  
Daniel Clair Davis  
aus Washington, Iowa, USA

Göttingen 1960

Berichterstatter: Prof. D. Otto Weber  
Mitberichterstatter: Prof. D. Ernst Wolf  
Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 3. Juni 1960

## Table of Contents

I. Introduction	4
A. Hengtenberg's Contemporary Significance	4
B. Life and Background	5
C. Hengstenberg and Pietism	6
D. Pietist Hermeneutics	7
II. Edification as Exegetical Motivation	10
A. Revelation Given for Edification	10
B. Edification Presupposed Understandability	10
1. In General	10
2. For the First Audience	11
3. For the Present	13
4. For All Time	14
C. Edification and Inspiration	15
III. Reason and Faith in Interpretation	16
A. The Place of Reason	16
1. Scientific Exegesis	16
2. Historical Exegesis	17
a. Accommodation	20
b. "Unhistorical" nature of Scripture	22
c. The audiences of the Bible	24
d. Poetry, prophecy, Church's mood	26
e. The role of experience	27
B. The Place of Faith	29
1. The Use and Limitations of Reason	29
2. Christian and non-Christian experience	31
a. Hermeneutical circle	33
b. Definitive experience	34
3. The Holy Spirit as Interpreter	34
4. The Interpretation of Faith	36
a. Unbelief also dogmatic	37
b. "Openness" in Scripture	39
IV. Methodology of Edifying Interpretation	41
A. Rejecting Allegorical and Literal Interpretation	41

1. The Allegorical Interpretation	41
a. Allegory and allegorization	43
b. Edification determinant of allegory	44
2. The Literal Interpretation	44
a. Rejected as yielding impossibilities	44
b. Rejected as anti-Christian	45
B. The Intent of the Theological Interpretation	47
1. Differentiating thought and wording	47
2. Differentiating idea and realization	49
a. Realweissagung	51
b. History also prophetic	54
c. Typical character of history	57
C. Advantages of Hengstenberg's Interpretation	57
1. Edifying quality	57
2. Lack of arbitrariness	59
3. Biblical style	61
4. "Double reference" avoided	61
D. Differentiating Pictorial and Essential	65
1. Comparison of prophecy and fulfillment	65
2. Continuity of past and future	73
3. Harmonization of authors	73
4. Analogy of Scripture	74
a. "Ergänzung"	75
b. Development	77
5. Analogy of Faith	81
V. Conclusion and Evaluation	83

## I. Introduction

### A. Hengstenberg's Contemporary Significance

In our age in which theological scholarship is so extremely productive, it is of real surprise to discover a contemporary reprint of a work written a century before, and at that reprinted in translation some 4000 miles from where it was originally published! Such is however the case with Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg's *Christologie des alten Testament* and its 1956 republication in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Merrill F. Unger, the writer of the preface to the reprint, explains this phenomenon on the ground that while "philosophies, critical theories and human opinions contrary or hostile to revealed truth" have had their day and have been replaced by others, the *Christologie* illustrates how "the result of scholarly research based upon the integrity and authenticity of the Holy Scriptures lives on and has a message for men of any age."<sup>2</sup>

It is plain that it is by no means necessary to attempt in this thesis to "reawaken interest" in Hengstenberg and his works, at least not among American Reformed orthodoxy. To explain this interest is not so easy, from an historical point of view; perhaps we should be content with Unger's statement. But it is probably correct to say, that just as Germany has provided the world with stimuli to all sorts of Protestant theological thinking, it is not so surprising that this should be the case in the sort of thought represented by Hengstenberg. If Andover Seminary could import the 19th century German "liberal" approach to the Bible, is it so surprising that Princeton Seminary, perhaps stimulated by Andover, should import a German *answer* to it? We do know that Charles Hodge, professor at Princeton from almost its beginning, studied with Hengstenberg at Berlin in 1826, and that J. A. Alexander, Hodge's successor in exegesis a few years later, published commentaries which were his own reworkings of Hengstenberg's own, although often with drastic

---

1. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, trans. Theod Meyer and James Martin (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1956).

2. *Ibid.*, I, 5.

alterations. Although the Hengstenbergian influence cannot be confined to Princeton, it is worth noting that his influence in the United States has been certainly more dominant in conservative Reformed circles than in the equivalent Lutheran groups. With his name in his native Germany not only of historic influence (and as ecclesiastical politician!), the Lutheran exegete lives on with Reformed readers in America!

## **B. Life and Background**

This paper is not as such concerned with the life of its subject, and those with this interest should consult Bachmann's most thorough, if uncritical, biography. But one can hardly understand the man without some glimpse of his life. Born on October 20, 1802 at Fröndenberg, he was so thoroughly educated at home by his father, the Reformed pastor Karl Hengstenberg, that he could enter the university of Bonn in 1819. His main interests were in Aristotelian philosophy (at this time a German translation of his of the *Metaphysics* was published), and in Arabic, in which field he received his doctorate under Professor Freytag on January 18, 1823. Desiring to begin theological training immediately in Berlin, he was hindered by lack of funds, and accordingly decided to accept the position of private instructor in Arabic in Basel. While there he also did some teaching in the Missionshaus, instructing future missionaries to the Near East. There he came in touch with Pietistic circles and their emphasis on decision for Christ in personal conversion. His mother's death at this time, coupled with his own severe physical sufferings, also led him to a more personal faith, and to confidence in the Lutheran confessions; from henceforth he was always more Lutheran than Reformed. There are those who assert that at this time in Basel he experienced a typical Pietistic conversion. If one may grant the comprehensiveness of Bachmann's report of this time, there is no definite reason for believing that he underwent one; for our purposes it is sufficient to note that he gained at least an appreciation of Pietist viewpoints then.

In 1824 he went as Privatdozent in Arabic to the University of Berlin, where he was to remain the rest of his life. In 1825 he received his doctorate in theology (with theses against rationalism),

and began his career in theology, in which field he was named full professor in 1828. He considered himself the successor to the task which Tholuck had performed until the latter's transfer from Berlin to the University of Halle. This consisted in being the theological advisor to the Prussian revival movement, and its representative at the university. The group's trust in him was shown by its naming him the first editor of the *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*, founded in 1827. The movement had as its practical program foreign missions support and the circulation of the Scriptures, as well as its devotional and evangelistic gatherings in Berlin; all these causes were vigorously promoted by Hengstenberg in the paper, as well as more scholarly aims. While the *EKZ* at first supported the Union, when Hengstenberg saw that a confessionalism with strictly applied ordination vows was the only way to save a conservative theology in the church, he went over to a vigorous Lutheran standpoint and defended it in the paper. There his primary target was what he termed rationalism, really a catchall term for all of the new liberal movements, "the theology of the natural man." This he attacked not only politely and generally, but also bluntly and specifically enough to draw the ire not only of his opponents, but also of many of his either gentlemanly or pacific supporters. Just as completely as he attacked the Hegelianism and Schleiermacherian theologies, mysticism and Pietism, could he argue for the truth of the Confessions and their interpretation by orthodoxy as the proper one. This transplanting of orthodoxy into the 19th century setting came to be known as confessionalism or *Repristinationaltheologie* and the *EKZ* and its editor were its champions.

In 1829 Hengstenberg had married Theresa von Quast, daughter of one of the noblemen sponsoring the revival movement. She and all their children died before him. Till the end he remained active with the paper, editing it for 42 years, almost to his death May 28, 1869.

### **C. Hengstenberg and Pietism**

Miss Kriege's opinion concerning the depth of his acceptance of Pietism is certainly worth mentioning. After a lengthy survey of the available evidence, she can but conclude, "Er kam sicher nicht mehr

as 'zwischen den Parteien' stehend in Herbst 1824 nach Berlin."<sup>3</sup> But for the most exhaustive study concerning the extent of his Pietism one must certainly turn to Fagerberg.<sup>4</sup> His general conclusion is that while Hengstenberg early in his career was quite enthusiastic about certain of the Pietist leaders (Spener and Francke in particular), as early as 1840 he could be found attacking its theology in no uncertain terms, accusing it of subjectivism. The main reason for this change appears to be his conviction that Pietism had opened the door for Rationalism.<sup>5</sup>

But the purpose of this paper does not so much concern Hengstenberg's theology in general as his theory of interpretation. He certainly was not a systematic theologian, but rather an exegete. One would hardly expect from him a complete theological foundation for his hermeneutic, except the general one of anti-rationalism. Our question is not, therefore, whether it can be shown that Hengstenberg consciously took over the methodology of Pietist interpretation, but rather whether it is possible to understand him within a general Pietist setting.

## **D. Pietist Hermeneutics**

An independent study of Pietist interpretation is of course also beyond the scope of this study, and it is perhaps best to refer to the work already done in this field by Emmanuel Hirsch.<sup>6</sup> He centers

---

3. Anneliese Kriege, *Geschichte der Evangelischen Kirchen-Zeitung unter der Redaktion Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg vom 1. Juli 1827 bis zum 1. Juni 1869* (Bonn: Diss. theol., 1958), 18.

4. Holsten Fagerberg, *Bekenntnis, Kirche und Amt in der deutschen konfessionellen Theologie des 19. Jahrhundert*, trans. Robert Braun (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB, 1952).

5. *Ibid.*, 43-45. To this last point, the *EKZ* of 1840, Sp. 9, is quoted at length: "Es scheint ihm [Hengstenberg] jetzt als vollkommen begreiflich, daß der Rationalismus so eifrig ist in dem Lobe des Pietismus; die Brücke, die von dem letzteren zu den ersteren hinüberführt, ist ihm sichtbar geworden; das Räthsel wie das scheinbar Entgegengesetztteste so schnell und unmittelbar aufeinander folgen, wie gerade der Hauptsitz des Pietismus [Halle] auch der Hauptsitz des Rationalismus werden konnte, ist ihm klar geworden."

6. Emmanuel Hirsch, *Geschichte der neueren evangelischen Theologie* (Gütersloh: G. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1951). Page numbers given in the following are all from Vol. II.



discussion about the thought of A. H. Francke, who as leader of the Pietist educational and therefore theological effort, had occasion to devote the most thought to the problem. He had at the center of exegesis the distinction between husk and kernel (*Schale und Kern*) in Scripture. To the husk of the truth of Scripture must be applied the full range of what is very close to modern grammatical-historical exegesis, with all its variations. Both comparative language study and historical research are requisite. The Scriptural books must be seen in their logical construction, and must be arranged according to their central thoughts. Such activity is however only preliminary in the great task of Bible interpretation, but without it can there be no *theological* understanding of the Bible either (170). His theological presupposition behind the entire process is that the Bible is a unified body of instruction, a context of sayings which complement each other (171).

Individual statements of Scripture must be interpreted by means of the analogy of faith; this is not the systematic theology which the orthodox have built up out of the Bible, but rather the main thrust of Scripture itself. The analogy of faith may be traced back to the living *ordo salutis*, which is open to experience; every interpretation in harmony with this *ordo salutis* is conformable to the analogy of faith. The pious interpreter has accordingly in his own experience of the essential content of Scripture a norm for the interpretation of dark and uncertain places (172). Built upon the theological interpretation must be the practical application of that truth, its translation into the personal life (173).

We have seen how basic to Francke the unity of Scripture is. This includes the basic unity of OT and NT, ultimately possible only through the assumption of a double sense of Scripture (*Doppelsinn*), that of the literal and that of the mystical meaning. The latter is most often brought out by means of a typical interpretation (173-174). Similar to this duplicity is that of the literal and spiritual meanings, another of his distinctions; the first is that which the unconverted out of their limited experience of spiritual things can understand of the Scripture, the second what only Christians under the illumination of the Spirit can comprehend (175). The obvious problem is how these two doublets are related; are they identical or not? While it must be affirmed that there is a difference in

understanding of spiritual values between Christian and non-Christian, it is also obvious that even the spiritual interpretation must be objective, based on systematic rules of interpretation; if that be the case, the rules must be just as capable of application by unbeliever as by believer (176). One must maintain, however, that is the case where the spiritual meaning which makes up the portion of Scripture in question is not to be separated from the words, then there is a formal identity of the two doublets.

It is our belief that the next pages will amply demonstrate the existence of more than a historical connection between Pietism and Hengstenberg, in so far as exegetical theory is concerned. The thought is strange when first encountered, but there appear to be striking resemblances between the hermeneutic of the orthodox (against which the Pietists reacted) and that of the "rationalists" (against which Hengstenberg polemicized). Of the two could it be said that they hardly fostered an attitude of devotional expectancy to the reading of the Bible, but rather one of matter of fact scholarship. If either the early Pietists or Hengstenberg lived today, someone would be certain to apply to their attitude to Scripture the adjective "existential"; no less than in usage of terminology and technique should one recognize in this attitude Hengstenberg's Pietist inheritance.

The thesis proper has been divided into three major sections. Initially is discussed what we believe to be the guiding theme of his entire approach to the interpretation of the Bible, what is termed in the title "edifying value", which to provide is the "purpose" of revelation. The next section explores more closely the fact that, obviously enough, a certain "will to edification" is involved thereby: that, and in how far, a vital, experiential relation, in faith, to the truths of God's revelation is involved in the proper understanding and appreciation of them. Finally is considered more of the methodology of interpretation itself, the technique of deriving from the Bible, which was, after all, addressed to other peoples at other times, those edifying values which the Church at the present needs; thereby is the Bible saved from being regarded as a book belonging either to past or future, but rather as one which in every detail is of the utmost devotional and practical value to present day believers who seek such benefits from it.

## **II. Edification as Exegetical Motivation**

### **A. Revelation Given for Edification**

What this writer regards as the very core of Hengstenberg's approach to Biblical interpretation is to be found in his emphasis on the *purpose* of revelation, that of usefulness to the Church. He states that every revelation and prophecy is conditioned through "die veranlassenden Zeitumstände"; none "schwebt in der Luft", but "überall ist Gegenstand der Offenbarung an die Propheten nur das was unter gegebenen Zeitverhältnissen geeignet ist zur Ermahnung, zur Warnung, zum Troste".<sup>7</sup> Speaking concerning the attempt to justify the content of Psalm 109, he states that "er ist entweder erbaulich od. ärgerlich, entweder heilig oder gräulich".<sup>8</sup> Here the edifying quality of a passage is identified with its "holiness"! One does not find in the Psalms "die absichtslosen und unvorsichtigen Ergüsse subjectiver Empfindungen . . . sondern sie sind sämtlich von vorn herein bestimmt zum Gebrauche im Heiligthum".<sup>9</sup> This edifying quality of the Bible is not confined alone to the contents, but the very "Darstellungsmittel sind diejenigen, welche am geeignetesten waren die Wahrheit dem . . . Volke nahe zu bringen und sie seinem Gemüthe tief einzuprägen."<sup>10</sup>

### **B. Edification Presupposes Understandability**

1. *In General.* Of course for a passage to be edifying, it must also be understandable; elsewhere in the first passage quoted, and certainly in the same context, it is stated that prophecy is kept from entering the field of poetry through "die Rücksicht auf die Gemeinde und ihr Verständniss. Sie darf den Flug nicht höher nehmen, als bis wohin die Gemeinde ihr folgen kann".<sup>11</sup> In the

---

7. *Offenbarung*, I, 54.

8. *Psalmen*, IV, 1; 210.

9. *Ibid.*, 2; 301.

10. *Ezechiel*, II, 301.

11. *Offenbarung*, I, 53.

revelation of Jesus Christ it is impossible that one should have to depend upon "ein bloßes Rathen" for its understanding; when this seems to be the case, it is always a matter of the ignorance of the interpreter.<sup>12</sup> Because the prophets were speakers to the people, they were "verpflichtet, überall den Schlüssel des Verständnisses darzureichen."<sup>13</sup> A certain interpretation is rejected because it would then be based "auf das schlüpfrige Gebiet des Rathens".<sup>14</sup> The conditions for "Sicherheit der Auslegung" are guaranteed, for this is "ein nothwendiger Ausfluß der Göttlichkeit" of the passage; indeed, "eine wahrhaft göttliche Weissagung kann unmöglich in der Luft schweben, die Kirche kann in Auslegung der heiligen Schriften, die ihr als eine Leuchte auf ihren dunklen Wegen mitgegeben sind, nimmer auf's Rathen angewiesen seyn."<sup>15</sup> The Church needs the Scripture; therefore it should be confident that it need not try to interpret the contents through guess-work, for the writers must have given keys to the understanding of their books, and one needs only to overcome one's ignorance in order to be able to interpret the Bible so that it answers one's needs.

**2. For the First Audience.** But it is imperative that one remember that Scripture was immediately intended to satisfy the needs of the people of God at another period in history, the people contemporaneous to the writer and whom he was addressing. Although "die Offenbarung Jesu Christi ist nicht bloß für die Gegenwart, sie ist für die Kirche aller Zeiten bestimmt", it is also true that "überall wird bei den Propheten zunächst für die Bedürfnisse der Gegenwart gesorgt". The crucial point here concerns the details of the passage; it is not enough that it be interpreted so that it only in general refers to the situation contemporaneous to the prophet, but every detail must also be so understood. An interpretation which contains details that one at that time could not have known of, and which are essentially different than those of the situation confronting the people at that time, can

---

12. *Ibid.*, II, 1; 25.

13. *Ezechiel*, II, 126.

14. *Johannes*, I, 409.

15. *Offenbarung*, I, 536.

only be false.<sup>16</sup> It is useful once more to remember that the writer's purpose must have been one of edification: "der Vr. will bekümmerte Seelen aufrichten und trösten, nicht durch detaillirte Aufschlüsse über die Zukunft der krankhaften eschatologischen Neugier eine Befriedigung gewähren".<sup>17</sup> More positively, Hengstenberg can interpret a passage on the grounds, "so mußte sie jedermann unter ihren ersten Hörern und Lesern verstehen".<sup>18</sup> Of course it is not enough to consider what would have been understandable for the first audience; just as important is thinking on what would have been edifying for them!<sup>19</sup> Even for what is probably the central problem in the interpretation of prophecy is this helpful: in distinguishing between "Wahrheit und Dichtung", between "Gedanken und ihrer Einkleidung", "diese Scheidung wird leicht werden, wenn man sich nur die ersten Leser und Hörer Ezechiels recht vor Augen stellt, sich die Wunden recht zu vergegenwärtigen weiß, für die hier das heilenden Pflaster geboten wird, zugleich auch die Gedankenwelt Ezechiels des Priesters, die Verhältnisse, unter denen er aufgewachsen war, and die in ihnen gegebenen Stoffe zur Einkleidung der hohen Wahrheiten, welche er dem Volkes Gottes zu verkündigen hatte."<sup>20</sup>

Hengstenberg is prepared to carry this point to the extent of denying the validity of the traditional orthodox exegesis, which had referred, for example, many OT prophecies exclusively to the Christian Church, denying any application to (or value for) the immediate audience. But it must have understood everything quite literally, taking "Jordan" to mean their own Jordan etc. If it were possible to interpret this passage as having its object entirely in the future, "so würde die Weissagung überhaupt vergeblich seyn. Das Volk könnte dann auch die früheren Drohungen des Vr. abschütteln, indem es sie auf ein Volk der Zukunft bezog." It is plain that if the

---

16. *Ibid.*, II, 1; 73.

17. *Ezechiel*, II, 257.

18. *Ibid.*, 161.

19. *Ibid.*, 273; here an interpretation is rejected which for the first hearers "weder verständlich noch erbaulich seyn könnte".

20. *Ibid.*, 162.

writer had wanted the passages so understood, he would have had to declare his intention very clearly. While some argue that the immediate interpretation is impossible, this is only because they do not recognize the distinction between "Gedanken" and "Einkleidung", and therefore expect that if everything is this passage is not fulfilled in the immediate future, one must apply it for the far distant future.<sup>21</sup> In other words, while *something* in the passage must be of use to the prophet's contemporaries (and a warning can also be edifying!), it does not follow that every detail therein qua concept must be so; some details qua "Einkleidung" may also be recognized through the historical approach, but to the *author's* circumstances and personality.

**3. For the Present.** Hengstenberg's emphasis on edification's being the purpose of revelation is not confined, however, to insisting that the proper interpretation must be one which allows for the edification of the immediate audience. Of course the Scripture must as well have significance for the Church of the present day, with all its needs. In defending Keil from an attack on his exegesis, Hengstenberg declares "daß der Inhalt, den diese in der bezeichneten Stelle findet, ein durchaus schriftmässiger, daß die Stelle nach dieser Auslegung einen erbaulichen Charakter trägt und daß sie es nicht scheuen darf, mit dem apostolischen Maaßstabe gemessen zu werden: eine jede Schrift von Gott eingegeben ist auch nützlich u. s. w. liegt ganz am Tage".<sup>22</sup>

It is not enough for an interpretation to be edifying for a small circle of scholars, as is the case, for example, when the "historisirende" interpretation of the Revelation is accepted; no, the entire Church must have something from the Bible. And such an interpretation is not really suited even for scholars, "denn was dem Buche für die ungebildeten Christen die Verständlichkeit, das raubt ihm für die Gebildeten die Erbaulichkeit".<sup>23</sup> Speaking in another place over the same interpretation of the Revelation he virtually

---

21. *Ibid.*, 165.

22. "Die Söhne Gottes und die Töchter der Menschen", EKZ, LXII, #29, 10. April, 1858; 320.

23. *Offenbarung*, I, 326.

identifies the "erbauliche Bedeutung" of the book and its divine character!<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere we refer to Hengstenberg's evaluation of the fact that the Song of Songs is included in the OT Canon: in order for it to have been divine, it must have been intended to be interpreted edifyingly (allegorically!). Another example where an interpretation is chosen on the very, and only, ground of superior edifying quality is found in the consideration of Micah 5: 1, where the question is whether it refers to the Messiah's descent from the ancient family of David, or to his pre-existence; for Hengstenberg the answer is obvious: "Was hat man aber wohl für Grund, diese so unnatürliche Erklärung jener so natürlichen, sich so von selbst darbietenden, einen so trefflichen Gegensatz gewährenden, eine so reiche Quelle des Trostes für das Bundesvolk eröffnenden vorzuziehen?"<sup>25</sup>

**4. For All Time.** The burden of proof is not with those who prefer the edifying interpretation, but with their opponents. As has already been implied, whether or not an interpretation is correct can be determined by what is sometimes also termed "die praktische Bedeutung der Stelle für die Kirche aller Zeiten". In the case of the interpretation of the "sons of God" in Genesis 6 as angels, this view is rejected precisely because it fails when it is called upon to show the practical significance of the passage, while "dagegen bei der kirchlichen Auffassung leuchtet der ewige Gehalt der Stelle sofort entgegen".<sup>26</sup> Here one sees the other side of the picture, where "der ewige Gehalt" for "die Kirche aller Zeiten" is emphasized. While, as has been seen, the immediate significance of a Scripture passage was for the speaker's contemporaries, it must also have a meaning beneficial and edifying in every age. An interpretation is surely false if it makes the passage unedifying in its original setting, but it is just as certainly false if it denies utility for it to any period of the Church. In other words while in its very detail it must have had meaning at the time of composition, throughout all ages its *general* meaning must be of use. Indeed, this making generalities of detail

---

24. *Ibid.*, 462.

25. *Christologie*, I, 569.

26. "Die Söhne Gottes und die Töchter der Menschen", *EKZ*, LXII, #37, 8. Mai, 1858, 421-422.

is of the very essence of piety as it approaches the Scripture today: "es liegt in dem Wesen der Frömmigkeit, aus dem Besonderen das Allgemeine zu entnehmen, sich aus den Thatsachen Leitern zu bereiten, auf denen sie zu den erbaulichen, tröstlichen, erwecklichen Wahrheiten emporsteigt".<sup>27</sup>

### **C. Edification and Inspiration.**

There is, in conclusion, still further significance for the edification concept in Hengstenberg's thinking, affecting the very foundation of "orthodoxy", the nature of the inspiration of Scripture. Discussing the historical sources in the OT, he states that the entire Synagogue and Church has accredited them not only with human trustworthiness, but also with divine origin, "von der letzteren besonders auf Grund der bestimmten und sich des Wortes selbst bedienenden Erklärung des Paulus in 2 Tim. 3, 14ff., durch die freilich manche spätere Übertreibungen des Inspirationsbegriffes nicht gerechtfertigt sind."<sup>28</sup>

But as far as this writer has been able to learn, this is the only reference to the relation between the inspiration concept and the principle that Scripture must be "practical" and edifying. Are the exaggerations to which he refers only the ones to which later "orthodoxy" itself came to take a condemnatory attitude? Or does he perhaps consider the crux of the orthodox doctrine, the lack of error in the Bible, to be itself an exaggeration? At any rate, it is evident that the core of his inspiration concept is that all Scripture must be edifying, and that this quality presupposes a high degree of reliability on the part of the Bible; he is able to affirm that the OT is historically reliable on the ground that it is edifying! This side of the above must not be forgotten either.

## **III. Reason and Faith in Interpretation**

---

27. *Offenbarung*, II, 1; 309.

28. *Geschichte des Reiches Gottes im Alten Bund*, 25.



## **A. The Place of Reason.**

**I. Scientific Exegesis.** The problem of faith and reason is one of the perennial themes of Christian philosophy, and therefore also of Biblical hermeneutics. One would expect, therefore, that the claims of the two realms would form a large part of the basis of Hengstenberg's thought on interpretation, even before one finds that he was just as much scientific exegete as he was concerned with the growth of the Church. It is certainly not accidental that, even after his conversion, he continued to devote so much time and energy to the mastering of the Near-eastern languages, history and archaeology as preparation for his exegetical labors. Here is no mystic who opens his Bible and trusts solely in the guidance of the Spirit for its understanding! In the face of the troubles of his day, when he cannot tell whether the end of the race approaches, or just another time of testing for the Church, he can say: "in jedem Falle muß der Entscheidungskampf vorhergehen. Die Wissenschaft, die uns für diesem Kampf geschickt machen soll, verdient wol vor Allem die Palme".<sup>29</sup> Even in the act of criticizing much of the scientific Biblical study of the time, asking "ob alle diese Untersuchungen stets so vorurtheilsfrei, so wahrheitsliebend, so absichtslos unternommen worden, als es eben schon die Wissenschaft, und vorzüglich bei so wichtigen, für das Wohl der Menschheit so entscheidend Schriften verlangt", he can only conclude, "eben auch diese Frage kann durch wiederum nur von der Wissenschaft Kundigen gelöst werden".

Indeed, this scientific activity is one of the most important tasks of the Church, as it can be used for the strengthening of the faith and assurance of its members, when through it they learn "daß eine Zeit, die allen Scharfsinn und alle Kenntniss aufbietet, um die biblischen Bücher unsicheren Ursprungs zu machen, und ihre Geschichten und Lehren unrichtig und mit sich selbst in vielfachem Widerspruch zu finden, doch dies vergeblich zu beweisen suchte, vielmehr die gemisbrauchte Wissenschaft sie selbst Lügen straft . . .

---

29. "Dr. Niemann und Dr. Uhlhorn", *EKZ*, LXXVIII, #44, 2. Juni, 1866; 528.

Jemehr man wahrhaft demüthigen Geistes ist, um so weniger wird man irgend eine wissenschaftliche Richtung ganz verachten. Ja diese wahre Kenntniss wird am sichersten vor mancher neuen Scholastik und Tradition bewahren. Frei und ungescheut kann die Kirche die Wissenschaft in allen Beziehungen gebrauchen und anwenden, nur eben recht gelehrt . . .<sup>30</sup>

A practical application of such devotion to the scientific approach can even go so far as to justify the rejection of a far-fetched interpretation on the grounds, "Der heil. S. hat uns keinen Grund gegeben, ihm den gesunden Menschenverstand abzusprechen";<sup>31</sup> on occasion such a rationalistic sounding criterion as "sound reason" may be definitive.

**2. Historical Exegesis.** "Science" for Hengstenberg is almost synonymous with "history", and the thorough examination of the historical setting of the Bible is certainly for him the most important part of his scientific approach. Something of the reasons for this attitude are expressed in a very early letter (12. Februar, 1823), where he indicates his intention to concentrate on the historical side of theology, it being the most important; "denn die Dogmatik verwickelt sich um so mehr in dieselben unauflösliche Widersprüche, je consequenter man sie durchführt".<sup>32</sup> He finds ground to reject Wichelhaus's *Leidensgeschichte*, in spite of the author's regard for the divinity of Scripture and his opposition to rationalistic interpretation, on the basis of his forced exegesis: "der geschichtlichen Sinn wird durch dogmatische und ascetische Tendenzen überwuchert".<sup>33</sup>

Elsewhere in discussing the interpretation of Revelation, he compares its interpretation with the interpretation of OT prophecy, where it is impossible to bring about any well-founded interpretation "ohne das Wesen und die Beschaffenheit der Weissagung klar

---

30. "Was ist der Kirche des Herrn in unserem Tagen Noth?", *EKZ*, II, #31, 16. April, 1828: 243.

31. *Psalmen*, IV, 2: 22.

32. *Bachmann*, I, 107.

33. *Leidensgeschichte*, 3.

erkannt, psychologisch and historisch aus den prophetischen Dokumenten entwickelt . . . werden". It must be exactly the same with the understanding of The Revelation: "Auch sie muß misverstanden werden, wenn die Befangenheit der Rationalisten von der einen Seite, oder die sinnliche, rohe, falsch buchstäbliche Auslegung auf der anderen an ihre Erklärung geht. In beiden Fällen tritt die eigene Subjectivität an die Stelle des objectiven Gehalten, den in seiner Ursprunglichkeit zu begreifen und wiederzugeben, erstes Prinzip der Hermeneutik ist."<sup>34</sup>

While it is certainly true that "die Weissagung wurzelt nicht in der Geschichte, wie sehr sie auch mit dieser in Beziehung und Zusammenhang steht, sondern in Gott, dem Herrn der Geschichte und der Zeit", because it is not dependent upon history but on the contrary determines it, prophecy still has connection with time, and as well "noch eine selbstständige Geschichte in sich selber, seiner eigenen unabhängigen, freien Entwicklung".<sup>35</sup> With such a view of prophecy it is not surprising that Hengstenberg considers precisely its historical interpretation so important.

Considering the argument that Jonah cannot be historic because of its didactic purpose, he replies "Daß Wahrheiten in der Geschichte, daß die größten and tiefsten in der heiligen Geschichte enthalten seyen, wer vermöchte das, wenn anders Gottes Wort ihm lieb und theuer ist, zu läugnen? Aber wir finden sie eben in der Geschichte, und sie ist uns Wahrheit, weil sie historisch ist, wir opfern aber nicht um ihrentwillen die Geschichte auf, die mit ihr vielmehr im innigsten Zusammenhang steht".<sup>36</sup>

But one dare not take the statement, "sie ist uns Wahrheit, weil sie historisch ist", too literally; Hengstenberg is quite capable of seeing the truth of passages for which there is limited historical application. He states of Psalm 85, "Der. Ps. ver trägt gar keine geschichtlichen Erkl. Die Schilderung der Noth, aus der das Volk befreit worden, hält sich ganz in Allgemeinen, ebenso fehlt jede

---

34. "Über die neueste Behandlung und Auslegung der Apokalypse", *EKZ*, XV, #88, 1. November, 1834; 699.

35. "Kritische Übersicht der wichtigsten neueren Leistungen auf dem Gebiete der exegetischen Literatur", *EKZ*, #44, 3. Juni, 1843, 347.

36. "Über das Buch Jonas", *EKZ*, XIV, #27, 2. April, 1834; 217.

individuelle Beziehung, in der Darlegung der Verhältnisse der Gegenwart".<sup>37</sup> The resolution of this apparent contradiction is simply that, although didactic purpose or content in itself is not sufficient to determine the non-historical character of a passage, a complete generality in content without apparent reference to any context, may very well be a sign of it. Besides, the two passages in question here have quite different contents; it is theoretically possible to take a *story* such as found in Jonah to be historic or not, while a *description* of suffering is quite another matter.

So all in all, it is really not so surprising to hear the supernaturalist interpreter Hengstenberg avow, "Der wirklich berechtigten geschichtlichen Auffassung hat der Verf. stets mit Eifer nachgestrebt". But the three qualifying adjectives in this statement will lead us to expect something different than what is generally termed "historical". He gives as examples of his attention to historical interpretation his reference to the fittingness of the suffering David's being the first to introduce to the Church the idea of the suffering Messiah, his having seen Messianic prophecy involvement with the prophecy of the coming catastrophe through the surrounding nations, and his recognition that the Messiah was immediately promised for the consolation and strengthening of the contemporaries of the prophets. He even attacks the failing of the orthodox interpretation which has preceded him; its error was in the field of historical interpretation, and to overcome this weakness is precisely what it must learn from Rationalism. But Rationalism has gone too far, and must not be slavishly followed. One should be careful when tracing the organic development of the Messianic proclamation, for example, that he not lose sight of its peculiar character. In short, one must not bind and chain the prophetic Word on history, but be content "daß man ihm soweit es angeht, einen geschichtlichen Anknüpfungspunct nachweist, wobei man auch sich in bescheidenen Gränzen zu halten hat. Warum z. B. grade Micha die Geburt Christi in Bethlehem ankündigt, dafür wird man schwerlich einen Grund aus den geschichtlichen Verhältnisse beibringen können".<sup>38</sup>

**(a. Accomodation).** It is not going too far, even from what

---

37. *Psalmen*, III, 459.

38. *Christologie*, III, 2; 148-149.

little has already been seen, to say that his historical exegesis consists primarily in determining the needs of the Church which gave rise to any particular Biblical passage. Further, not only the content, but also the form of Scripture is determined by these needs. As an example, the Lord warns of his judgment in such terms as to make it appear that it is immediately coming; this is, however, by no means the case, but the "massive Ausdrucksweise" was chosen to wake the "fleischliche Sicherheit aus ihrem trägen Schlafe".<sup>39</sup>

Elsewhere he enumerates the reasons for God's having given this form to his revelation. In his revelation God has had regard not to his own character, but to the needs of fallen mankind. In order to bring man back to himself, he has concealed his infinite majesty, and has accommodated himself to man.<sup>40</sup>

Man can understand and love only that which is related to his nature, and accordingly the divine character has been shown to him

---

39. *Offenbarung*, I, 197.

40. "Accommodation" as an hermeneutical concept dates back to Calvin (in turn influenced by Erasmus: "who is so devoid of intellect as not to understand that God, in so speaking [in anthropomorphisms], lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children? Such modes of expression, therefore, do not so much express what kind of a being God is, as accommodate the knowledge of him to our feebleness. In doing so, he must of course stoop far below his proper height." (*Institutes*, I, xiii, 1). He can also use it to mean the NT use of an OT passage, as in the case of the use of Jer. 9: 24 in I Cor. 1:29 (*Institutes*, III, xiii, 1).

Sponsored by J. S. Semler, the term received a drastically new meaning in the Enlightenment; in an attempt to protect the authority of Jesus (in spite of the fact that he appeared to share certain erroneous popular concepts of his day), it was stated that he did not really believe them, but only used them in his teaching as a pedagogical device. Otto Weber describes this use of the accommodation concept as having the purpose, "die Subjectivität jeder Aussage über Gott zu begründen. Die Selbstakkommodation Gottes in seiner Offenbarung ist in den Hintergrund getreten," (*Grundlagen der Dogmatik* [Neukirchen: 1955] I, 458). It could be said that Calvin regarded the incomprehensibility of God (the other side of accommodation) as something basic, grounded in the very nature of God and his creature man, whereas the Enlightenment saw it as rooted only in the lack of sufficient information on the part of pre-Enlightenment man; the concept was not one to produce humility before God's revelation, but rather the opposite.

Hengstenberg's concept is certainly nearer the classical one, but with the "development" idea an important part (*infra*); whereas for the Enlightenment the progression in understanding God lies in the post-Biblical period as well, in philosophy as well as in revelation, for him it lies within the Bible itself alone. Calvin could hardly have affirmed that the NT revelation was "perfectly developed and certain", i. e. free from accommodation; true, this is not explicitly stated, but Hengstenberg's thought is in this direction.

as just, merciful and loving. In order to bring fully into men's consciousness these different relationships, God has used pictures and expressions taken from human conditions.<sup>41</sup> It is necessary to remember, though, that the truly divine accommodation touches not only the form of the truth, but also its essence. This true accommodation runs through all deeds and words of God from Paradise to Christ. This must be the case; would we rather that God keep the truth from us entirely, because it would be in its true form entirely incomprehensible to us?<sup>42</sup> "Erst in ein menschliches Gemüth versetzt, wird der himmlische Stoff verständlich",<sup>43</sup> appears to be an excellent summary of this viewpoint. It must also be remembered that different audiences have different needs, particularly when they stem from different points in history. Since the entrance of sin into the world, the need of this accommodation is greatly increased; exactly proportional to the depth to which man sinks is God's accommodation to him the greater, and the cruder the language of the revelation to him. The purpose of this crude revelation, however, is to lead man back to higher planes of communion with God, where God's revelation can become more and more spiritual, again proportional to man's capability to receive it. In other words, divine accommodation is the real reason for development in Scripture. Older interpreters have seen that God may not contradict himself, but have not recognized that his revelations may be different, depending upon the various needs of the Church at different times. Earlier must much be revealed only in germ, which later could be communicated perfectly developed and certain.<sup>44</sup>

But this is only one side of the picture, that of the receivers of revelation. It must also be remembered that the human authors of Scripture were also figures in history, and presumably as much

---

41. "Über das hohe Lied", EKZ, I, #23, 19. September, 1827; 178. Similar is this statement, "Die abstracte dogmatische Wahrheit wird in Fleisch und Blut gekleidet. Der Stoff zu dieser Bekleidung wird aus den irdischen Verhältnissen entnommen (*Hiob*, 73).

42. *Christologie*, III, 1; 235.

43. "Über Daniel's Controverses", EKZ, XXXVI, #13, 12. Februar, 1845; 111.

44. *Geschichte des Reiches Gottes im Alten Bund*, I, 20.

involved in the Fall and its consequences. If this be true, would not their writings contain some evidence of their erring and sinful humanity? No, replies Hengstenberg; this is to fail to see that if Scripture is to be capable of meeting need, it must stand above man. One must see that "die frei, Übernatürlichkeit der göttlichen Offenbarung der freien Unnatürlichkeit oder Ungesetzlichkeit den Sünde entgegensteht, daß ferner die Offenbarung nicht supra naturam lapsam et corruption erhaben ist, die sie heben und heilen soll, and daher nothwendig über ihr stehen muß unabhängig von dem Zusammenhang ihres Verderbens, daß endlich die Idee der Erlösung nothwendig die Lösung jener unzerreißbaren Kette endlicher Ursachen, insonderheit der Sünde and ihrer Folgen, involvirt."<sup>45</sup>

In the light of the above it is not surprising to hear concerning the human authors of Scripture, that God exercised for them a "besondere Erweisung seiner Gnade, daß in den Stunden der Begeisterung ihr menschlichen Bewußtsein ganz aufging in den göttlichen Geist, daß sie ihn schaueten wie er ist und in ihm die ewigen göttlichen Wahrheiten ohne Beimischung menschlicher Irrthums."<sup>46</sup> This does not, however, oppose the fact that the divine truth in Scripture is expressed in accordance with the human peculiarities of the authors.<sup>47</sup>

**(b. The "unhistorical nature of Scripture).** However valuable this position may be for Hengstenberg's inspiration doctrine it would seem ultimately to lead to difficulties, even to difficulties for his own historical interpretation. For how is our appreciation of the circumstances under which the authors of Scripture wrote valuable, when the ecstatic condition in which they wrote precludes the possibility of our ever having similar experiences whereby we can

---

45. "Kritische Bemerkungen über die unkritische Bearbeitung des Lebens Jesu von Strauss", *EKZ*, XX, #37, 10. Mai, 1837; 295.

46. "Einige Worte über die Nothwendigkeit der Überordnung des äusseren Wortes über das inner, nebst Stellen aus Luther's Schriften", I, 339. It is only fair to point out that this was the very first of Hengstenberg's public writings, and that to this writer's knowledge, such an extreme statement never appears again in his writings; probably one should not hang too much of his evaluation of Hengstenberg's position from this statement.

47. *Ibid.*, 340.

judge the effect theirs had upon their writings? It is all too plain what Hengstenberg has here in mind, as he states that "in dem Zustande der Verzückung die heiligen Männer seit über sich selbst erhoben würden und nicht nach einem Maßstab gemessen werden dürfen, der von dem gewöhnlichen Zustande entnommen wird. Denn erscheint manches uns als Kunst oder gar unnatürliche Künstelei, was den heiligen Dichtern und Sehern durchaus natürlich und geläufig war, wie die Anordnung nach bedeutsamen Zahlen.<sup>48</sup> This goes so far, that it has made impossible to compare the Scriptures with the classical writings of the time,<sup>49</sup> with the normal sympathies of the writer, common to his background,<sup>50</sup> and with his emotions, common to all men.<sup>51</sup> One might reply, even if the unregenerate could not share the background of the Biblical writers, they cannot understand the Scripture anyway, and certainly the regenerate could sympathize with the feelings of the writers, and could use this sympathy and appreciation for the better understanding of their writings. In this regard one must consider that Hengstenberg feels that "Gott hob bei ihnen das ordentliche Verhältniss zwischen Heiligkeit und Erleuchtung auf, und ertheilte ihnen neben den ihnen uns uns gemeinsamen Gaben des Geistes durch ein besonderes Wunder seiner Allmacht noch eine andere Gabe, die uns versagt ist, die Irrthumsfreiheit im Lehren."<sup>52</sup>

It is probably impossible to determine just under which category the various historical background materials fall, under those of the "common gifts of the Holy Spirit" or that of the "still other gift", and probably Hengstenberg should be given here the benefit of the doubt. After all, the above quotations are from passages where he is defending the Scripture against misunderstanding of its nature, and to do that implies it can be

---

48. *Offenbarung*, I, 118.

49. "Sie ist dazu zu ernst und zu wahrhaftig", *Johannes*, III, 407.

50. *Offenbarung*, I, 558, where it is stated that the Seer "in dem Blute des Lammes mit den übrigen Befleckungen seines alten Menschen auch die ordinären Jüdischen Sympathien abgewaschen hatte".

51. *Psalmen*, III, 351.

52. "Einige Worte , , ,", *Bachmann*, I, 340.



understood, and just out of its historical background. If one were to point out this problem to Hengstenberg, he would probably cheerfully admit that we cannot have the same intimate knowledge of God that the writers of Scripture were given, but that what we have is adequate for our needs. After all, we are in a less advanced stage of spiritual development, and our needs are less.

**(c. The audiences of the Bible).** One of the axioms of historical exegesis has been that one must take into consideration to whom a passage is addressed, for whom it is meant, in order to understand it. This has ordinarily meant the audience which were in the temporal and local vicinity of the writer involved. With this in mind, it is surprising to hear Hengstenberg remarking "daß in der ganzen Schrift die cura posteritatis waltet, daß nie bloß für die Zeitgenossen und unter Voraussetzung von Kenntnissen geredet wird, die nur ihnen zugänglich waren."<sup>53</sup> Speaking of Isaiah 40-66, he feels "so wird man es ganz natürlich finden, daß der Pr. hier mehr wie anderwärts in der Zukunft, für die er vorwiegend schreibt, auch seinen Standpunkt nimmt".<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, another prophetic work, "die Apokalypse, ist kein Wahrsagungs-, sie ist ein Trostbuch. Sie soll zunächst die, welche zur Zeit ihrer Abfassung unter der Römischen Verfolgung seufzten, trösten und mit unüberwindlicher Stärke aufrüsten".<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the two audiences, contemporary or future, need not be mutually exclusive: "Obgleich diese Weissagung [Isaiah 13 and 14] keineswegs allein für die Zeitgenossen bestimmt war, wie ja überall die Prophetie für alle Zeiten der Kirche bestimmt, so hatte doch auch für die Zeitgenossen jeder Buchstabe Bedeutung. Gehörten die Hauptfeinde Israels der Zukunft an, so war von den gegenwärtigen wenig zu fürchten."<sup>56</sup>

In order to understand Hengstenberg's intent, one must distinguish in his thought between the significance that Scripture, simply because it is Scripture, must have for all the ages of the

---

53. *Christologie*, I, 442.

54. *Ibid.*, II, 199.

55. "Das sogen. tausendjährige Reich", *EKZ*, LXVI, #20,

56. *Christologie*, II, 156.

existence of the Church (and not just for the contemporaries of the writer), and the importance of understanding the immediate occasion of the writing as an aid to its interpretation for our own time. The first point is made in a discussion of the prophetic viewpoint of the Revelation, where we learn "daß der Verf. nur zunächst und nicht ausschließlich die Leser und Hörer der Gegenwart ins Auge fasste. Mit der klaren Erkenntniss der Zukunft geht die Mitbestimmung für diesselbe, für die Kirche aller Zeiten bis zum Ende der Welt Hand in Hand. Vor wem die Nöthe und Ängste der Zukunft aufgedeckt liegen, dem muß auch das Streben einwohnen in ihnen Rath und Trost zu geben . . . Auch die tief Überzeugung von der hohen Bedeutung des Buches, die in demselben ausgesprochen wird, zeigt, daß es nicht bloß für die Gegenwart bestimmt seyn kann. Es ist Offenbarung Jesu Christi, die Gott ihm gegeben hat. Die Inspiration im vollem Sinne schließt jede räumliche und zeitliche Beschränkung aus."<sup>57</sup>

This fact must necessarily influence the interpretation of the passage; as Hengstenberg elsewhere states, where he asserts that it is false to judge the sayings of Christ according to the "augenblicklichen Verständlichkeit" of the apostles. This is the case not only because these sayings contain much which could be understandable only after the completed redemption and the pouring out of the Spirit, but also because they are intended not only for the apostles, but for the Church of all time. Instead, in this special instance, it was the whole purpose of Jesus to begin with "kurzen und räthselhaften Andeutungen" in order to stimulate the spiritual sense of the disciples in order to prepare them for the more thorough teaching to follow.<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, he rejects the interpretation of the AntiChrist as being the papacy because it had no roots in the time of the writing of the Revelation; this interpretation arose only because it was not realized "daß die Weissagung, obgleich nicht an die Gegenwart gebunden, doch einem lebendigen Ausgangspunct in der

---

57. *Offenbarung*, II, 2; 85.

58. "Das Evangelium des heligen Matthaeus und die moderne Kritik", *EKZ*, LXXVII, #59, 26. Juli, 1865; 701.

Gegenwart haben, überall sich an ihre Bedürfnisse, an ihre Fragen und Klagen anschließen muß, nirgends in der Luft schweben darf." <sup>59</sup> Similarly, when Jesus spoke of his preexistence, "setzt er das Verhandenseyn der Doctrin von dem Engel des Herrn nach der kirchlichen Fassung voraus. Diese Aussprüche hätten ohne dem jedes Anknüpfungspunctes bei den Hörern entbehrt".<sup>60</sup> These practical illustrations show why it is necessary to achieve "die anschaulichste Erkenntniss der Verhältnisse . . . auf welche jede Schrift zunächst berechnet war. Nur auf diese Weise wird man vollständig gewinnen, was die Schrift an Lehre und Erbauung für alle Zeiten and speciell für die Gegenwart darbietet".<sup>61</sup> It is not at all surprising to see in this context that Hengstenberg's devotion to the historical approach is centered about the practical "erbaulich" results it brings about. Elsewhere he states, "je geschichtlicher und individueller wir die Psalmen auffassen, desto mehr werden sie erbauliche Bedeutung gewinnen. Denn nur so lernen wir ihnen recht ins Herz sehen". <sup>62</sup> Taking another example, the denial of the historical in the Song of Songs is precisely what has led to its disappearance from the practical use of the Church.<sup>63</sup>

**(d. Prophecy, poetry, and the mood of the Church).** We have seen how for Hengstenberg historical exegesis includes taking account of both the audience and the human writers, and determining to just which audience or audiences both the divine and the human author had directed their message. This is all within the context of the particular needs of the people in question. But it is immediately plain that while the receivers of revelation had many needs which were only too obvious to them (and it is these with which one is primarily concerned in his attempt to probe the background and content of revelation), there are also other needs with which the recipients are not acquainted, at least not

---

59. *Offenbarung*, II, 1; 74. Cf. *Psalmen*, IV, 2; 158.

60. *Christologie*, III, 2; 68.

61. "Der Prediger Salomo", *EKZ*, LXIII, #19, 6. März, 1858; 197.

62. *Geschichte des Reiches Gottes in Alten Bund*, I, 17-18.

63. *Hohelied*, iii.

consciously. Hengstenberg considers this difference as expressed in the difference between Biblical lyric and prophecy. In the first, which is composed predominantly during a time of great present deliverance, the believing spirit sees in that deliverance a promise of the greater deliverance to come, and is raised through it to a powerful hope in that future salvation; in the second, during a time of great misery the believer sees a balancing of the accounts in the future (the hope for Messianic deliverance arose in the face of the exile). In short, "das Lied ist von der Stimmung des Volkes abhängig und wird von ihr getragen, während die Prophetie als Correctiv ders. dient".<sup>64</sup> This is seen more clearly in the discussion of the fact that both the writers of Messianic Psalms and those of Messianic prophecy present only certain sides of their subject. Whereas "die Verfasser der Messianischen Psalmen erfassen diejenigen Seiten, welche mit ihrem eignen Leben, ihren eignen Erfahrungen, oder doch den Verhältnissen ihrer Zeit Berührungen darbieten, wie dies dem mehr subjectiven Ursprung der Psalm poesie angemessen ist" (such as when David portrays the Messiah as suffering and surrounded by his enemies, but Solomon pictures him as the ruler of a peaceful empire), on the other hand "werden die Propheten bei der Hervorhebung dieser oder jener Seite nicht so sehr durch eigene Erfahrungen, Stimmungen und Verhältnisse geleitet, als vielmehr durch die Bedürfnisse derer, zu denen sie reden, und durch den Effect, den sie bei ihnen hervorbringen wollen . . . Man darf nicht verkennen, daß jedem Propheten immer unmittelbar das Seinige von oben gegeben wurde, and daß es dabei theils auf das Maaß seiner Receptivität ankam, welches bei den frühren Propheten größer seyn konnte als bei den späteren, theils auf die Bedürfnisse und die Fassungskraft derer, welchen dies Weissagung bestimmt war".<sup>65</sup>

**(e. The Role of Experience).** Enough has been said over the manner in which historical interpretation functions in the understanding of prophecy, where the emphasis is on determining the needs of the Church, in the light of God's accommodation and

---

64. *Psalmen*, III, 475.

65. *Christologie*, I, 180-182.

the subsequent theological development in revelation. This is where Hengstenberg's main interest lies, as it is closer to the central needs of the Church and God's answer to them in deliverance in the Messiah Jesus Christ. But one must also pay attention to his approach to the Psalms and similar lyric Biblical literature, where, as has already been noted, the accent is with "experience".<sup>66</sup>

In the case of the book of Job, for example, we read "Der Verf. muß selbst ein Kreuzträger gewesen sein, muß selbst mit der Verzweiflung gerungen haben, muß selbst mit dem Troste getröstet worden sein, mit dem er Andere tröstet, muß selbst in Sack und Asche Bussegethan haben. Denn nur die eigne Erfahrung befähigt, so über ein Geheimniss Gottes zu schreiben, wie diess hier geschieht".<sup>67</sup> Even prophets have experiential foundation for their sayings: "Wenn dem Propheten offenbart wird, daß der Knecht Gottes durch Verfolgung, Schmach und Schande gehen wird, so hat er in seinen eigenen and seiner Genossen Erfahrungen das natürliche Substrat für solche Erkenntniss". But this case, there is

---

66. In considering the role of experience in theology in Hengstenberg's day, one must first think of Schleiermacher, who sought to base religion upon the absolute feeling of dependence. "Für ihn gründet die Dogmatik nicht nur in Erfahrung, sondern sie ist auch nichts anderes als Reflexion auf diese. Seine Christologie setzt ein als Rückschluß von einer erfahrenen Wirkung neuen Lebens auf den Wirker Christus" (Paul Althaus, "Erfahrungstheologie", *RGG3*, [Tübingen, 1958], II, Sp. 533). Later in the 19th century, the Erlangen School (Harleß, von Hofmann, Frank) expressed similar thoughts, although with the emphasis laid on a theology arising out of the experience of conversion and its harmony with the theologies of the Bible and the Confessions. "Der Unterschied ist aber, daß Schleiermacher in der christlich-frommen Erfahrung die Vollmacht findet, aus den Teilhaben am Geist Christi heraus sich frei und kritisch fortbildend zu den geschichtlich gegebenen Lehraussagen der christlichen Religion zu verhalten, die Erlanger hingegen die Schrift- und Bekenntnisaussagen als so selbstverständliches 'objektives Korrelat' zur subjectiven Erfahrung ansehen, daß jede kritische Operation gegenstandslos ist" (Emmanuel Hirsch, *Geschichte der Neuern Evangelischen Theologie* [Gütersloh, 1954], V, 416-417).

While Hengstenberg's thought has resemblance to that of Erlangen, still, to say that faith and Christian experience are necessary to the understanding of the Bible is something quite different from using experience as a sort of support for its truth; exegesis is different from apologetics. For Hengstenberg the truth of the Bible may well be confirmed by the "experience of its divinity in one's own heart" (*infra*, 41), but this is certainly a more direct testimony than that via the conversion experience. At any rate, the Erlangen theory seems to this writer to be much too philosophical to have had appeal for "historian" Hengstenberg. For him "experience" permits one to accept the Biblical accounts for face value (historically), and with that his interest in it is complete.

67. *Hiob*, 44. Cf. "Über das Buch Hiob", *EKZ*, LVIII, #17, 27. Februar, 1856; 170.

added the thought, presumably because befitting the nature of a prophet and his work, that "was die Propheten an sich selbst erfahren mußten, war eine factische Weissagung des Leidens Christi".<sup>68</sup>

There is, moreover, still another place where experience is a necessity. Not only the human author of the Scripture, but also the interpreter, from the disciples to the present day, cannot dispense with it: "Die Schrift bezeugte zwar laut die Auferstehung, aber sie wurde von den in ihrer Subjectivität befangenen Jungern nicht verstanden, wie ja noch heutiges Tages die Christ so manches bezeugt, klar enthält, was nicht aber erkannt und verstanden wird, bis Lebensführungen, Erfahrungen, oft sehr schmerzliche, die Erkenntnis und das Verständniss öffnen".<sup>69</sup>

## **B. The Place of Faith.**

**1. The Use and Limitations of Reason.** "Um der Offenbarung willen auf den Gebrauch der Vernunft verzichten, was heißt das anders, als darum weil man bei'm hellen Sonnenlichte sehen kann, seine Augen nicht mehr brauchen wollen?"<sup>70</sup> With these words Hengstenberg once more affirms his dedication to the use of reason, and specifically in the historical approach; he does not wish to be beaten by the rationalists in the understanding of Scripture in the "Ermittelung der aus Gesetzen der Sprachen- und Alterthums-kunde sich ergebenden eigenthümlichen Bedeutung ihrer Wörter und Redeweisen, zur logischen Aufklärung ihrer Gedanken, zur rhetorischen Erläuterung ihrer Tropen, zur physikalischen, geographischen, historischen Auffassung ihres Inhalts." Indeed, one must consider it only foolish, if anyone were to deny this use of

---

68. *Christologie*, II, 278.

69. *Leidensgeschichte*, 286-287. Hengstenberg testified to this also on the basis of his own experience, in a letter of 15. Mai, 1827 (*Bachmann*, II, 160): "Manches, was mir jetzt klar aufgegangen ist, würde ich vor einem Jahre noch nicht so verstanden haben. Das Schriftverständniss ist bedingt durch die Selbsterkenntniss; diese ist bei mir aber gründlicher geworden."

70. "Die alte Lehre der Evangelischen Kirche und die neue Orthodoxie", *EKZ*, X, #10, 4. Februar, 1832; 76.

reason.<sup>71</sup> While it may be true that the reason for this particular enumeration of proper uses of reason may be due to the fact that they are all relatively objective in nature, it is still worth emphasizing that precisely this objectivity is the essence of the historical approach, at least as Hengstenberg understood it. It must be remembered that one of his prime objections to an interpretation is that it is not absolutely removed from the realm of arbitrariness. Quoting from this very article, "Aber könnten sie es im Ernste läugnen, daß sie in der Schrift doch nur das finden, was ihrer sogenannten gesunden Vernunft in ihr zu finden beliebt?"<sup>72</sup>

However, there are limitations to the use of reason, beyond which it has no validity. Firstly, though reason may be capable of cause-effect reasoning within the realm of time and space, it does not follow that it is capable of drawing the proper conclusions in the realm of infinity. Secondly, although a truly sound reason can and does receive the divine revelation, this does not mean that an unsound, an unhealthy reason can do the same without the help of the Spirit. "Kurz, wir läugnen die Zulässigkeit der normativen oder richterlichen Gebrauchs der menschlichen Vernunft in Sachen des göttlichen Wortes".<sup>73</sup> This illegitimate use of reason is most readily to be found in philosophy, and it must be denied that its principles provide a standard for the testing of the contents and the divinity of the Scriptures; also unacceptable is the contention that natural reason is competent to interpret the Bible because the laws of interpretation are simply expressions of human reason.

"Dies Letztere ist, auf Gottes Wort angewendet, nur halb wahr, und wird von uns nur hinsichtlich des organischen Gebrauchs der Vernunft zugestanden. Mit dem ist so aber zum wahren Auslegen des göttlichen Wortes noch lange nicht getan. 'Philologen,' sagen wir mit Spener, 'haben wir wohl nicht wenig und nicht ungelehrte, aber das ist noch weit entfernt von der prophetischen oder hermeneutische Gabe.' Um die zu besitzen, muß man nothwendig erst durch die Kraft des heiligen Geistes ein Wiedergeborener

---

71. *Ibid.*, 77.

72. *Ibid.*, 75.

73. *Ibid.*, 77.

geworden seyn."<sup>74</sup>

So it is hardly surprising that for Hengstenberg more than correct scholarly procedure is necessary for the proper understanding and interpretation of the Bible. Indeed, he is even ready to reject an interpretation just because a non-Christian would be capable of it! "Gegen die weitverbreitete Annahme, daß die Zahl 666 addirt sey uns dem Zahlenwerthe der Buchstaben eines Names, sprechen u. a. folgende Gründe: Zur Enträthselung eines solchen gemeinen Räthsels gehört keine Weisheit und kein Verstand. Ein pfiffiger Jude ist dazu ebenso im Stande wie ein erleuchteter Christ."<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, "die Auslegung welcher wir als die allein richtige behaupten, so gefasst, wie wir es gethan, wird wahrscheinlich Niemand ohne Glauben üben können."<sup>76</sup> The fault of modern study is, as has already been suggested, that it relies solely upon the grammatical-historical theory of interpretation and rejects the subjective principle, "ohne welches doch eine genuine und wahrheitsgemässe Auslegung and Anwendung der Heiligen Schrift, ob auch sonst aller gelehrte Apparat dem Exegeten noch so reichlich zu Hand wäre" is impossible."<sup>77</sup>

**2. Christian and non-Christian Experience.** We have already discussed briefly the role of experience in interpretation, but more particularly in relation to the understanding of the Biblical lyricists, who can be said to have written out of their experience. It is well that it be considered here to greater extent, as a part of the side of interpretation that is by faith. Firstly, the absence of the experience of God and his work is bound to lead to rationalistic interpretation: "Jeder, der selbst nicht die Erfahrung von Gottes specieller Vorsehung gemacht hat, eben dadurch genöthigt is, alle

---

74. *Ibid*, 76.

75. *Offenbarung*, II, 1: 68.

76. "Auslegung der Propheten", *EKZ*, XII, #24, 23. März, 1833; 190.

77. "Die alte Lehre der Evangelischen Kirche und die neue Orthodoxie", *EKZ*, X, #10, 4. Februar, 1832: 75. While the subjective principle here referred to is defined in this context as consisting of 'verstärkten Gewissen, Heiligungseifer, und Freiheit der Meinung, der Gesinnung, und der That' (X, #9, 1. Februar 1832: 71), it seems certain to this writer that it also includes the other elements that we are about to discuss.



Spuren derselben aus der Geschichte zu verwischen."<sup>78</sup> More positively, orientation in religious matters is necessary in order that one may be able to recognize "Gleiches durch Gleiches".<sup>79</sup> Referring to the Psalms, he states that they are "Erzeugnisse heiliger Empfindung, die nur von denjenigen verstanden werden können, in denen dieselbe Empfindung lebendig wird".<sup>80</sup> Christian experience is needed, further, not only for the correct understanding of the Scripture, but also for the proper appreciation of what Scripture is (which perhaps is for Hengstenberg a prerequisite for its understanding). He can speak of the "Erfahrung der Göttlichkeit der Schrift an dem eignen Herzen", which is impossible to separate from the conviction "daß sie auch in dem Teilen, die nicht unmittelbar solches Zeugnis für sich haben, nichts enthalten kann was anstößig und Gottes unwürdig wäre. Denn Gott kann nimmer seine Wahrheit in trüber Vermischung mit menschlichen Irrtum der Kirche übergeben haben." Colenso, for example, does not show in his treatment of the Bible an inner humility before the Word of God, but rather he makes a forced interpretation of it to bring it into harmony with his own ideas. "Seine damalige Exegese" has as its source the fact "daß er nie wirklich das gute Wort Gottes geschmeckt hat und die in ihm dargereichten Kräfte der zukünftigen Welt".<sup>81</sup> Not only a miraculous Bible, but miracle in general is attested by the witness of God in the heart. It is argued that miracle is impossible because of its absence in the present; while this argument is compelling for those, "die in die Gränzen ihrer Natur festgebant, die Wunderkraft Gottes nie an ihrem Herzen erfahren haben" because they cannot recognize miracle outside themselves, yet those who do experience, in the present, this miraculous power, can also admit it in the past; who "nichts von diesen gegenbildlichen Wundern weiß, der muß nothwendig auch an den vorbildlichen irre werden, in welche sich zu finden dem unendlich leicht wird, der selbst durch die Kraft Christi

---

78. *Geschichte des Reiches Gottes im Alten Bund*, II, 1: 58.

79. *Psalmen*, II, 55.

80. *Ibid.*, I, ii.

81. "Vorwort", *EKZ*, LXXIV, #5, 16. Januar, 1864; 50.

aus einem Todten ein lebendiger geworden".<sup>82</sup>

**(a. Hermeneutical circle).** Indeed, it is in this context that Hengstenberg handles the problem of the hermeneutical circle, stating it in these words, "Durch welches Mittel nun wirkt die erleuchtende Gnade auf uns ein? Durch das Wort Gottes. Was macht uns aber gewiß, daß das Wort Gottes wirklich das Wort Gottes sey? Die unsere Vernunft erleuchtende Gnade . . . Durch das Wort Gottes fließt uns die erleuchtende Gnade an, und wiederum erst durch die erleuchtende Gnade werden wir über das Wort Gottes gewiß." While of course natural reason can see here only "a wonderful circle", we cannot answer them with any arguments sufficient for them until through regeneration they enter our sphere and "nun mit uns aus ihrer inneren Erfahrung heraus bekennen, daß wir in unserer natürlichen Verfassung eben so unvermögend sind, das Göttliche wahrhaft zu erkennen, als es wahrhaft zu lieben und zu wollen".<sup>83</sup> Not only in his virtually stating that regeneration is the presupposition of the requisite inner knowledge and experience, but also in his equation of true knowledge of the divine and true love and desire of it, does Hengstenberg indicate that this experience, so necessary for the proper evaluation and understanding of God's revelation in Bible and act, is the prerogative of the Christian alone.

**(b. Definitive experience).** Of course experience in general is not confined only to the Christian: "Der natürliche Mensch wird immer nur das glauben, was er erfahren hat. Naturgesetzte nennt er die Ordnungen, die er an den Dingen wahrzunehmen gewohnt ist. Was dawider streitet, erklärt er für nicht geschehen. Wir wissen aber, daß der lebendige Gott thut, was er will, und der die Erde gegründet hat, verleiht Lebenskraft für 1000 Jahre ebenso gut wie für 40."<sup>84</sup> However, as this quotation indicates, the natural man's experience is a limited one, and does not include the knowledge of a God who has created the earth (more accurately, *that* God created

---

82. "Vorwort", *EKZ*, LXXIV, #3, 9. Januar, 1864; 26.

83. "Die alte Lehre der Evangelischen Kirche und die neue Orthodoxie", *EKZ*, X, #10, 4. Februar, 1832; 77.

84. "Die manethonischen Königsreihen und die heilige Schrift", *EKZ*, LXIV, #17, 26. Februar, 1859; 177.

the earth). If this were a part of his experience, he would not find it hard to believe in a life-span of a millennium. Hengstenberg seems to hold that it is not his empirical principle which is the error of the unbeliever, but rather the limited material at the disposal of that principle which leads to mistakes.

**(c. Definitive experience).** There is more at stake, though, than mere quantity of experience. What might be termed definitive experience is the experience of Jesus Christ the Messiah. It is upon his relation to the Christ that one must base his view of the OT passages which refer to him as Messiah, and indeed, of any reference in the Bible to miracle.

"Wer selbst die Wunderkraft Christi an seinem Herzen nicht erfahren hat, der kann sie auch in ihren äusseren Wirkungen nicht erkennen, und sie ihm beweisen wollen ist ebenso vergeblich, als wenn man den Blinden in der Farbenlehre unterweisen wollte. Wie sie einmal sind, haben sie Recht, und man muß es gar nicht versuchen, ihnen aufdringen zu wollen, was sie nicht annehmen können".<sup>85</sup> As to Messianic prophecy, "nur diejenigen, welche den Löwen aus der Stamme Juda nicht kennen, haben Grund, die leise Hindeutung auf eine übermenschliche Würde des Stammes Juda gewaltsam zu beseitigen".<sup>86</sup>

**3. The Holy Spirit as Interpreter.** The recognition of Christ in the Scriptures depends however in turn upon the testimony of the Holy Spirit to him.<sup>87</sup> This work of the Spirit is not confined only to the proper understanding of Messianic passages, but extends to the correct interpretation of the entire Bible. Hengstenberg quotes with approval Flacius's maxim, "Spiritus Sanctus est autor simul et explicator scripturae",<sup>88</sup> and expresses it elsewhere in his own words, desiring that in the understanding of prophecy we do not have to rely upon ourselves, but are confident "daß der Heilige Geist

---

85. "Die Sieben Gleichnisse vom Reiche Gottes", *EKZ*, LXXIX, #78, 29. September, 1866; 933.

86. *Christologie*, I, 55; cf. III, 375-376.

87. "Wort oder Geist", *EKZ*, XXXVI, #3, 9. Januar, 1864; 30.

88. "Vorwort", *EKZ*, LXXIV, #3, 9. Januar, 1864; 30.

seine lehrende Thätigkeit in der Auslegung derselben fortsetzen wird".<sup>89</sup> Indeed, only the spiritual one is able to judge spiritual things.<sup>90</sup> In contrast to those who in their spiritual exegesis are able to make everything out of everything in the arbitrariness of their own spirit, one should follow the canon of interpretation which reads: "Niemand kann zur wahren Einsicht in dem Sinn der heiligen Schrift gelangen, es seyn denn, daß er bei'm Lichte desselbigen Geistes sehe, der sie eingegeben hat".<sup>91</sup> Interpreting through one's own spirit is simply not seeing the text through the eyes of the author, the Spirit who gave it.

Even the proper sort of interpretation, supported by massive knowledge, is insufficient when the interpreter is not possessed by this Spirit: "Dies grammatisch-historische Auslegungsart ist zwar gewiß die einzige richtige, aber es kommt darauf an, wie sie ausgeübt wird". The Scripture cannot be interpreted like the heathen authors, "denn ohne selbst vom christlichen Geiste besselt zu sein, wird kein Exeget etwas leisten, und seien seine grammatisch-historischen Kenntnisse noch so groß".<sup>92</sup> We even find him stating, that if he ever did retreat to a country parish, he would certainly take only those books, "deren Verfasser vom Geiste Gottes geleitet wurden", then "wozu die übrigen, wenn man nicht um Anderer willen sie lesen muß?"<sup>93</sup>

In this context, as might be expected, there is contrasted with the one who is led in his interpretation by the Spirit, the "selischer Mensch, der nichts vernimmt von dem Geiste Gottes";<sup>94</sup> He would seem to be identical with the "Juden und Judengenossen" with their

---

89. *Johannesevangelium*, III, 59.

90. *Hohelied*, 248.

91. "Die alte Lehre der Evangelischen Kirche und die neue Orthodoxie", *EKZ*, X, #10, 4. Februar, 1832; 75.

92. *Bachmann*, I, 159 (letter to his father).

93. *Ibid.*, II, 51 (letter to his fiancée Therese).

94. "Vorwort", *EKZ*, LXXIV, #3, 9. Januar 1864; 30. Cf. the following: "Wer könnte es wol ertragen, sich Colenso in aller Breite über den Unterschied der Gottesnamen Elohim und Jehova aussprechen zu hören, ein Unterschied, der in die Tiefe der Gotteserkenntnis einführt und von dem dein bloß selischer Mensch gerade so wenig versteht, wie die Kuh vom Sonntage," (*Ibid.*, #5, 16, Januar, 1864; 53).

"Fleischlichkeit" mentioned elsewhere.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, Hengstenberg believes to have found a great affinity between Jewish and rationalistic interpreters precisely in this point, that of the attitude toward Messianic passages. In his discussion of Zechariah, he states "Je vorwiegender . . . die Beziehung auf Christum ist, desto undurchdringlicher muß sein Dunkelheit für diejenigen seyn, welche sich selbst des Lichtes der Erfüllung berauben. . . Die rationalistischen Ausleger theilen diesen subjectiven Grund der Dunkelheit insofern mit den Juden, als auch sie ängstlich streben müssen keine so genaue Übereinstimmung der Weissagung mit der Erfüllung, nichts von ihr aufzufinden, was sich, wie der niedrige, von dem Bundesvolke verworfene, sterbende Messias, nicht aus menschlicher Vorahnung erklären läßt."<sup>96</sup> He goes even further, explaining that when the rationalists were confronted with the fact that if certain passages were taken as Messianic, their contents would correspond too closely to the life of Christ to be explained naturalistically, that they then took over the old Jewish interpretations, giving them "den Schein der Gründlichkeit durch gelehrte Ausstattung".<sup>97</sup> One should not conclude, however, that the lack of the proper attitude to Christ affects the interpretation of only the OT: "Diejenigen, welche die deutlichsten Stellen des A. T. lieber auf jedes andere Subject als auf ihren Herrn und Heiland beziehen, zeigen sich auch beim N. T. einer verwässernden und verflachenden, einer ausleerenden und geistlosen Erklärung zugethan und man thut gewiß nicht Unrecht, wenn man beides aus derselben Quelle ableitet".<sup>98</sup>

**4. The Interpretation of Faith.** The entire problem may be stated in terms of faith, or of the lack of it. While he mentions faith on the Word of God,<sup>99</sup> it seems to this writer that Hengstenberg's

---

95. "Zu dem Streit über das letzte Mahl der Herrn", *EKZ*, XXIII, #98, 8. Dezember, 1838; 777.

96. *Christologie*, III, 251. Cf. s. 373, where the two groups are again linked although here "dogmatische Befangenheit" is mentioned instead of "Dunkelheit."

97. *Ibid.*, III, 2; 125.

98. *Ibid.*, 125-126.

99. *Ibid.*, I, 430. Cf. also "Das tausendjährige Reich", *EKZ*, XLII, #29, 8. April, 1848; 258, where the context is that of living faith in "die Göttlichkeit der Schrift and an die herrliche

primary meaning is the more general understanding of faith, that of faith in the Christian message. While one of Ewald's false interpretations is said to be due to his inability to find himself in "das Schauen des Glaubens",<sup>100</sup> on the other hand the revived faith of the time has led to the general triumph of the Messianic interpretation.<sup>101</sup> In the case of Bengel is it evident that living faith can open up to the reader the "erbauliche Kraft" which a book contains even through the "unvollkommenste Verständnis". Indeed, Bengel "hat fast in allen Hauptpunkten das Rechte verfehlt, und doch welche reiche Nahrung hat es selbst aus diesem Buche für seinen inneren Menschen entnommen und eben so vielen Tausenden gewährt".<sup>102</sup> Here Hengstenberg appears to say that not only is historical understanding of a passage insufficient, but that in the presence of faith it is virtually superfluous! But that is hardly true to his most basic ideas.

At any rate, lack of faith must lead to a false interpretation, and restored faith must lead to the correct one. Indeed, the Scriptures are so designed, with both believers and unbelievers in mind: "Es ist aber die allgemeine Weise Gottes in der Schrift soviel Klarheit zu geben, daß der Glaube, dem allein die heil. Schrift bestimmt ist, sich orientieren und so viel Dunkelheit, daß der Unglaube sich verirren kann, wie ja auch in der Natur Gott sich nicht bloß offenbart, sondern auch sich verbirgt, damit er nur von den Suchenden gefunden werde . . . Es sollen eben nicht alle die Schrift verstehen. Der Apostel redet von solchen, welche dazu gesetzt sind oder von Gott verordnet die Schrift nicht zu verstehen".<sup>103</sup>

**(a. Unbelief also dogmatic).** Those who come to false views of the contents of Scripture do so not through a lack of faith, strictly speaking, but because through a lack of the *Christian* faith. For they have their own dogmatic system which determines their exegesis;

---

Vollendung des Reiches Christ".

100. *Ibid.*, II, 71.

101. *Ibid.*, 218.

102. "Das tausendjährige Reich", *EKZ*, XLII, #29, 8. April, 1848; 258.

103. *Christologie*, III, 2; 131.

one such scholar shows "daß er ächt wissenschaftlichen Interesses baar, in der Knechtschaft dogmatischer Voraussetzungen ist und nicht durch Thatsachen bestimmt wird, sondern durch Neigungen".<sup>104</sup>

Hengstenberg is convinced that "die Dogmatik dieser Liberalen ist ebenso strenge, wie die eines orthodox Lutheraners im 17. Jahrhundert", and is grateful that he has survived his "philosophical fever" and has directed his attention to history instead; this is the reason he cannot share the liberal optimism concerning the future.<sup>105</sup> In other words, the liberals' optimism is, he is sure, a product of their philosophizing; his approach, the historical, is much more open. The rationalist, he claims elsewhere, is "überall wenig fähig sich in das Gegebene zu versenken und immer bereit von der eignen anschauungslosen und ordinären Weise den Maaßstab zu nehmen". It is because of this that rationalism has formulated the two-Isaiah theory, since it could not admit the possibility of such long-range predictions. This opinion has so established itself that it has become axiomatic to the scholar "und durch der Macht der Tradition auch solche gefangen nimmt, die nicht daran denken würden sich ihr hinzugeben, wenn sie unabhängig in die Untersuchung eingingen".<sup>106</sup>

Still another example of a dogmatic presupposition which can determine an interpretation is seen in the fact that it is only the miracles in the book of Jonah which have led to its being interpreted as mythical.<sup>107</sup> Similar in effect is the sort of interpretation which is dependent upon the subjective frame of mind of the interpreter, as when one reads into the book of Job one's own skepticism and blind resignation.<sup>108</sup> One may even go so far as to accuse the rationalist exegete of not seriously desiring to find the key to a passage, because that would lead to an interpretation against his natural

---

104. *Ezechiel*, II, 2; 32.

105. *Bachmann*, I, 157, in a letter to Keetmann.

106. *Christologie*, II, 195.

107. "Über das Buch Jonas", *EKZ*, XIV, #27, 2. April, 1834; 212.

108. *Hiob*, 67.

inclinations.<sup>109</sup> After discussing the literary argument for Deutero-Isaiah, Hengstenberg can only conclude, "Wie soll man es bezeichnen, wenn nun gleichwohl der Verf. so redet, als ob von jener Harmonie des ächten Jesias mit dem (angeblich) unächten gar keine Spur aufzutreiben und wahrzunehmen sey?"<sup>110</sup> For Hengstenberg the unwillingness of the rationalist to believe, to open his mind from his own dogmatism and subjectivity to the clear facts, has led to complete intellectual dishonesty. It is useful that believers be led by a knowledge of their opponents to a stronger faith, which will happen when they realize "daß die Macht [which opposes them] . . . nicht die Wissenschaft ist, sondern die Willkühr, nicht die Kritik, sondern der unkritische, in den Dienst der Neigung verkaufte Unglaube".<sup>111</sup> It is therefore the task of orthodox interpretation to expose "solchen Befangenheiten" and remove from them all excuse, "dahin zu wirken, daß sie fernerhin nur als Product der Neigung und Willkühr sich darstellen kann".<sup>112</sup> This, however, must be done "in der Hauptsache auf dem Gebiete der Auslegung". Hengstenberg believes that the decision will then have to be given to the spiritual interpretation, since the alternative will have been proven false "für jeden Unbefangenen".<sup>113</sup> In other words, while such a demonstration is really only for those who can see it (no argument could convince the "Befangenen"), it is really an objective proof, and does not consist in appealing to their piety.

**(b. "Openness" to Scripture).** Obviously enough, the attitude of the true exegete is in exactly the opposite direction to that of the rationalists. "Den Eindruck aber sollten jedenfalls die Aussprüche des Herrn und seiner Apostel machen, daß man nicht von vornherein sich abschließt gegen die Verkündungen des leidenden Christus im A. T., daß man willig und bereit ist, sie

---

109. *Christologie*, II, 195.

110. "Kritische Übersicht der wichtigsten neueren Leistungen auf dem Gebiete der exegetischen Literatur", *EKZ*, XXXII, #42, 31. Mai, 1843; 344.

111. "Die angebliche Widersprüche in den Berichten über die Auferstehung Jesu", *EKZ*, XXIX, #66, 18. August, 1841; 523.

112. *Hohelied*, 264.

113. *Ibid.*, 249.



anzuerkennen, wo sie dem unbefangenen Sinn sich darbieten, daß man dem Gedanken völlig entsagt, als seyen sie von vornherein unmöglich oder auch nur irgend unwahrscheinlich".<sup>114</sup>

Of course such an open attitude will be rewarded by proper understanding of the Scriptures, whose understanding is by faith; indeed, such an attitude of openness to the truth is virtually the definition of belief. It is obvious from the above quotation that faith does not bring with it an almost automatic understanding; the difficulties in the Bible have purpose for the believer (and not for the rationalist!). Just as it is in providence, where "Der nur Rechten des Vaters sitzt, führt seine Gewalt gar heimlich, damit sie nur im Glauben erkannt werde. Das geschieht, damit die Gläubigen im Glauben geübt werden, u. damit die Welt zur gerechten Strafe ihres Unglaubens wider ihn anlaufe zu ihrem eignen Verderben."<sup>115</sup> So is it with the Scripture, which is "durchgängig für geübte geistliche Sinne geschrieben oder so eingerichtet, daß sie geübt werden sollen. . . Das Verständniss und rechte Urtheil wird nicht aufgezwungen, es wird nicht darauf angelegt um jeden Preis Mißverständnisse zu vermeiden, sondern auf Gefahr der Mißverständnisse wird die geistliche Beurtheilung herausgefordert."<sup>116</sup>

Just precisely how this is to be done is described elsewhere where it is stated that one's approach to the difficulties in the Bible should be exactly the same as the Christian attitude to the providence of God; there, instead of just doubting, "mit Hülfe der Klarheiten überwindet man die Dunkelheiten", that is, one illuminates the difficulties there with appeal to the unchanging character of God. Further, one believes the cause of the difficulty not to be in God, but in one's own ignorance. One's attitude is throughout one of fighting against the difficulties. Exactly a parallel

---

114. *Christologie*, III, 2; 91.

115. *Psalmen*, IV, 1; 230.

116. *Geschichte des Reiches Gottes im Alten Bund*, 23. Similar thoughts are expressed in a discussion of the Sermon on the Mount, where it is stated that it was not the Savior's purpose "den Jüngern alles so plan und fasslich als möglich zu machen, sondern vielmehr ihnen Veranlassung zur Übung ihrer geistlichen Sinne zu geben, daß er auf die Gefahr eines augenblicklichen Mißverständnissen hin sie im tieferen Verständniss zu fördern suchte, was nur gewonnen werden kann, wenn die Schwierigkeit des Gegenstandes die geistige Kräfte in Anspruch nimmt", (*Leidensgeschichte*, 122).

procedure should be applied to the apparent contradictions and other difficulties in the Bible. In this context Hengstenberg specifically states that the difficulties are there for the exercise of faith.<sup>117</sup>

#### **IV. Methodology of Edifying Interpretation.**

##### **A. The Rejection of Allegorical and Literal Interpretation.**

###### **1. The Allegorical Interpretation.**

"Ich habe kürzlich ein Buch von ihm [Rud. Stier] gelesen, das mir gar nicht gefallen hat. Er verfolgt ganz die mit Recht verrufene allegorische Erklärungsart, die eigentlich nur aus einem unbewußten Rationalismus hervorgehen kann, die den ganzen Boden der heiligen Schrift erschüttert und sie zu einem Spiele der zügellosen Phantasie macht. Ich sage mit Luther: 'sensus literalis der thuts, da ist Leben, Kraft und Wahrheit drin.'<sup>118</sup>

One could hardly imagine a clearer statement as to Hengstenberg's position concerning the allegorical interpretation. But, as shall be seen, he sees quite a distinction between allegory and allegorizing. So it is not so surprising to find in his writings not only the above, but also a defense. He declares that the usual objection to allegory, the great difference of interpretation which it brings forth, no one agreeing with the other, is not to be attributed to the passage, but to the interpreters. This variety has arisen because they "den bildlichen Charakter des A. T. verkennend und des poetischen Sinnes ermangelnd, ohne festes Princip jedes einzelne Bild deuten . . . Man darf nicht für jedes einzelne Bild etwas entsprechendes aufsuchen, sondern man muß vorher die einzelnen Bilder in ein Gesamtbild vereinigen und dann wird sich das entsprechende mit Leichtigkeit auffinden lassen . . . Sobald man von

---

117. "wozu sie da sind, zur Übung des Glaubens". From "Zu dem Streite über das letzte Mahl des Herrn, *EKZ*, XXIII, #98, 8. Dezember, 1838; 815.

118. Letter of 8. Juli 1824, from *Bachmann*, I, 163.

diesem Grundsatz ausgeht, so wird man die Willkür vermeiden . . . und die Verschiedenheit der Erklärung, die man so oft als Beweis gegen die allegorische Erklärungsart angeführt hat, wird dann ganz wegfallen."<sup>119</sup> But Hengstenberg can also be positive in his defense. He brings to his support the collectors of the OT canon, who, he claims, were not interested merely in making a collection of national literature, but who had always the theocratic purpose in view "und nahmen nur das auf, was in Bezug auf das Verhältniss Gottes zum Israelitischen Volks stand, was . . . zur Beförderung eines gottseligen Lebens geeignet war".<sup>120</sup> If they, therefore with this purpose in mind included the Song of Songs in the canon, they cannot have held that it represented "gemeine sinnliche Liebe", but that it extolled the love of Jehovah to his people, *i. e.* they must have interpreted it allegorically.

This argument, however, is much more than a precedent for the allegorical interpretation. Not only does he hold that the modern interpreter should also employ the method, but much, much more: he should use it for the very same reason as the OT collectors of the canon! Namely, that of seeking an interpretation which is suited for "Beförderung eines gottseligen Lebens". This becomes clear from the only other argument he presents: "Wir geben nur eine Sammlung von Stellen, die nach der sinnlichen Erklärung entweder ganz sinnlos sind, oder einer höchst gezwungenen Erklärung bedürfen, die hingegen nach der allegorischen Erklärung den schönsten und leichtesten Sinn geben".<sup>121</sup>

This sounds harmless enough in itself, and one might very easily come to believe that it referred only to such impossibilities (if regarded literally) as the dimensions of Ezekiel's temple. But it goes much further, as may be seen from his commentary of the 21st chapter of John. There, in discussing the incident of the disciples going fishing after the crucifixion receiving a miraculous catch after following Jesus's instructions, he declares that if one denies its spiritual meaning, it takes on a "ziemlich seltsames Ansehen". His

---

119. "Über das hohe Lied", *EKZ*, I, #24, 22. September, 1827; 188.

120. *Ibid.*, 185.

121. *Ibid.*, 186.

interpretation, one which yields a "bedeutsam" result, is, because Peter here takes the lead, but yet waits for the agreement of the others, that therefore "auch auf dem geistlichen Gebiete sein Primat nicht eine Tyrannei seyn wird". Over the passage as a whole he says, "Der Hauptbeweis aber dafür, daß wir hier eine thatsächliche Allegorie vor uns haben, liegt darin, daß die Erzählung nur wenn sie so angesehen wird, in jedem ihrer Momente klar, durchsichtig, und bedeutsam is."<sup>122</sup>

Another example, although not as typical, of his allegorical interpretation is found in his treatment of Psalm 68: "Die Sänger gehen nach V. 26 voran bei der Musik, die Spielleute folgen ihnen, wiewohl in der geistesklaren wahren Religion das Wort überall die erste Stelle einnimmt".<sup>123</sup>

**(a. Allegory and Allegorization).** But to return to Hengstenberg's distinction between allegory and allegorization, "Erklärung einer Allegorie ist weit verschieden von allegorischer Erklärung",<sup>124</sup> he states, and his distinction between the two is a very scientific and exact one, one with which in principle every follower of the grammatical-historical approach would agree. It is a matter of the intent of the author, whether he intend his work to be understood "historically", or whether he wants to present a "geistiges Verhältniss nur unter sinnlicher Hülle". While when the allegorical interpretation is applied to the first, it does not deserve the name of an interpretation, "so bald sich das letztere nachweisen lässt, so ist die allegorische Erklärung der Absicht des Schriftstellers angemessen und daher die einzige richtige".<sup>125</sup> In other words, the allegory is not applied by a later interpretation, but is an integral part, is the real meaning of the passage.<sup>126</sup>

---

122. *Johannes*, III, 329. But to be "bedeutsam" in "jedem ihrer Momente" is practically to give the definition of allegory!

123. *Psalmen*, III, 232.

124. *Johannes*, I, 263.

125. "Über das hohe Lied", *EKZ*, I, #23, 19. September, 1827; 178.

126. "Die großartige reale Allegorie des Gesetzes", *Psalmen*, III, 27. Cf. *Christologie*, I, 369, where the allegorical real meaning is said to be "in, mit und unter" the words.

**(b. Edification as determinant of allegory).** It remains only to determine just how this all-important intent of the writer is to be established. It is not a matter for guess-work; rather, in the field of Biblical symbolic are there always given "die Mittel zu einer soliden Auslegung."<sup>127</sup> The allegorical interpretation of the snake in the Garden of Eden story is to be rejected by the interpreters, while "der wesentliche Charakter einer Allegorie ihre Durchsichtigkeit ist".<sup>128</sup> What are, then, those means whereby an allegory so transparently reveals itself as such? Writing over the interpretation of the locust plague in the book of Joel, Hengstenberg declares: "Die Entscheidung hängt also von der inneren Beschaffenheit der Schilderung selbst ab. Eine Allegorie muß sich durch bedeutsame Winke als solche zu erkennen geben. Wo diese fehlen, da ist ihre Annahme willkürlich".<sup>129</sup> In the case of a whole book, as the Song of Songs, where so many sections can be explained only allegorically, it is better to explain the remaining also that way, even if the possibility of the "sinnlichen Erklärungsart" is present; when nothing speaks against it, "verdient die geistige den Vorzug".<sup>130</sup>

But has anything really been added, by this talk of "Winke" and the "inneren Beschaffenheit der Schilderung"? The only "Wink" this writer is able to detect which Hengstenberg employs is simply the one of whether or the message is "bedeutsam" in the producing of a "gottseligen Leben".

## **2. The Literal Interpretation.**

### **(a. Rejected because yielding impossible results).**

No less than the allegorical is also the literal interpretation to be rejected. Hengstenberg's basic reason for refusing to permit the literal meaning of a passage in all cases to receive the preference, is simply that he considers it leads in many instances to impossible results. For example, the locust plague of Joel must be a poetic, not a scientific description, because of the place names there listed;

---

127. *Christologie*, II, 599.

128. *Ibid*, I, 5.

129. *Ibid.*, I, 352. Cf. II, 369, where "Fingerzeige" instead of "Winke" are mentioned.

130. "Über das hohe Lied", *EKZ*, I, #24, 22. September, 1827; 187.

"daß dies physisch unmöglich ist, da entgegengesetzte Winde ja nicht zu gleicher Zeit wehen können, begreift jeder leicht".<sup>131</sup> Impossibilities need not, however be as obvious or confined only to the physical realm. One of the reasons why the literal interpretation of the Song of Songs "richtet sich selbst" is found in the praise offered to the bride, for "die hier anerkannte Verbindung von Lieblichkeit und majestätischer Hoheit paßt nicht auf das 'Landmädchen' der buchstäblichen Erklärung". The comparisons used in her description are so phantastic and exaggerated as to indicate that an interpretation which produces such results cannot be the correct one.<sup>132</sup> Also in the Song is to be found, according to Hengstenberg, a foolish question of the bride, comparing the king to a shepherd, and the meaningless answer of the woman (if the literal interpretation is to be followed). Such an interpretation is obviously contrary to the whole character of the Word of God: "ein Buch, das solche thörichte Fragen und nichtssagende Antworten enthält, soll ein würdiger Bestandtheil des Wortes des lebendigen Gottes seyn!"<sup>133</sup> Not only from the nature of the entire Bible, but also from that of a specific passage may such impossibilities be seen. In John 21, the figure 153, the number of the caught fish, must have a deeper significance because of the symbolic character of the entire preliminary account. "Die Genauigkeit in der Angabe der Zahl würde auch sonst etwas Kleinliches haben".<sup>134</sup>

### **(b. Rejected because yielding anti-Christian results).**

It is particularly decisive for Hengstenberg when the literal interpretation would yield results contrary to Christian morals or faith. The Song, if so interpreted, presents a concept of marriage which does not belong in the Canon, for there is given a picture which emphasized not only physical stimulation, not even mentioning the blessing of children or describing the qualities of the

---

131. *Christologie*, I, 364.

132. *Hohelied*, 95 (on 4: 1-7).

133. *Ibid.*, 21.

134. *Johannesevangelium*, III, 337.

bride as housewife. In short, "das Ganze ist eine Ansammlung theils anmuthiger, theils geschmackloser Tändeleien". If one declares this literal interpretation still worthy of a place in the Canon, he has completely destroyed the distinction between Holy Scripture and worldly literature.<sup>135</sup> There is the possibility here of a double standard between the realm of the "lower relationships" and that of the spiritual realm; "so ist ein sanctum artificium, was in dem niederen Verhältnisse unwürdige Tändelei ist, auf geistliche Gebiet zu übertragen, wo es Wahrheit und Würde erhält."<sup>136</sup> In the similar passage in Psalm 45, it is interpreted literally to mean that the joy of the king is simply in the possession of the bride: "der Besitz eines zahlreichen Harems ist ein seltsamer Lohn für die Liebe der Gerechtigkeit und den Haß der Bosheit". On the other hand, the picture is entirely different if one assumes the Messianic interpretation, in which the brides portray nations.<sup>137</sup> Discussing Ezekiel 39, Hengstenberg declares that if one were here to apply only the so-called "Biblical realism", he would come into a 'Labyrinth von Unmöglichkeiten'; one must rather recognize how much play Ezekiel gives himself for figurative language, how intent he is on filling the imagination of his hearers with sacred pictures, and therefore how important it is that one carefully differentiate in his writing between "Gedanken und seiner Einkleidung".<sup>138</sup> In chapter 40 the standard is that of theological impossibility in the differentiation between thought and wording. If one denies that much in this chapter can only be considered under the category of "Ausmalung", one is forced to have the chapter read in favor of the restoration of the OT cult, which of course can be done only at the expense of denying the nature of Christ and his Church.<sup>139</sup> Obviously enough, use of this standard will entail that whatever in the passage is consistent with the NT revelation will be regarded as the real

---

135. *Hohelied*, 256.

136. *Ibid.*, 194.

137. *Psalmen*, II, 419.

138. *Ezechiel*, II, 140.

139. *Ibid.*, 165.

thought of the passage, which that which, if literally taken, would be contradictory with the NT's essence of Christ and his Church is relegated to "wording".

## **B. The Intent of the Theological Interpretation.**

### **1. Differentiation between Thought and Wording.**

With the distinction between thought and wording (Gedanken und Einkleidung) we have reached the threshold of Hengstenberg's own method of interpretation, termed by himself the theological interpretation. First, however, it will be necessary to clarify terminology. Consider another passage, where "thought and wording" are again mentioned: "Die falsch buchstäbliche Auslegung, die es nicht versteht, den Gedanken von seiner Einkleidung, das Wesentliche vom Zufälligen zu sondern, ist mit der allegorischen grade in dem Hauptpunkt darin eine, daß sie statt auszulegen, einlegt". In the same passage, however, he speaks of "Form und Wesen"; the message of the prophet Hosea is in its form in the NT entirely different, while the essence remains the same; indeed, what the prophet himself has in mind is not this form, but the essence or nature, in this case of the divine inheritance.<sup>140</sup> It is plain from this passage that the thought/wording concept is identical with the nature/form idea. This relationship may be in yet other ways formulated. Speaking of the Mosaic law, Hengstenberg insists that while the entirety thereof is still valid, one must understand this validity correctly. On the one hand, the law is the expression of God's holiness, and therefore eternal; but on the other hand, it was given in answer to the needs and condition of a particular people and age (once again reference to the character of God and his accommodation in its expression in revelation). It is therefore obvious that this law includes both an eternal seed and its husk, and "es its Aufgabe der theologischen Auslegung, zu bestimmen, was den ewigen Gehalt bildet und was der zeitlichen Form angehört".<sup>141</sup>

---

140. *Christologie*, I, 258.

141. "Das Evangelium des heiligen Matthäus und die moderne Kritik", *EKZ*, LXXVII, #60, 29. Juli, 1865; 710.



It shall soon be seen that this "task of theological interpretation" is also really what Hengstenberg regards as his own task! The distinction between essential and accidental has already been noted; this is of the very essence of this interpretation. In a discussion of Psalm 6, it is noted "Es versteht sich von selbst, daß, was hier zunächst in Bezug auf feindliche Bedrängung gesagt wird, der Sache nach sich ebenso gut auch auf jedes andere Kreuz bezieht. Das Besondere ist das Zufällige, was von der Art, gilt von der Gattung und jeder andern Art derselben." A similar explanation of the psalm from another author is proper only when it is asserted qua theological interpretation, with no pretense being made that such a meaning is the result of the grammatical-historical method."<sup>142</sup>

Again, in the interpretation of Psalm 23:1 which Luther presented, that the verse speaks not only of the supplying of physical needs, but also "von dem geistlichen Gütern and Gaben, die Gottes Wort mit sich bringt", only the first part of the exegesis (the meeting of material needs) is correct from the grammatical-historical viewpoint. In other words, the grammatical-historical method limits the application of the verse. However, "durch die theologische Interpretation freilich wird die Schranke, welche die grammatisch-historische aufgerichtet, wieder hinweggeräumt". Again Hengstenberg emphasized that one dare not mingle the results of the two interpretative methods, but here he gives the reason: "man verschließt sich sonst die Einsicht in den Gedanken-gang und Organismus des Ps., und nimmt ihm somit auch von seinem erbaulichen Charakter, in dessen falsch verstandenem Interesse dergleichen Versuche unternommen werden." In spite of the fact, there, that "das Besonders . . . ruht auf dem Allgemeinen, denn Gott, der für das Niedere sorgt, kann auch das höhere Bedürfniss nicht unbefriedigt lassen".<sup>143</sup> It is precisely this "Besondere" that must be thoroughly probed by means of the grammatical-historical method, and for the reason dearest to Hengstenberg's heart, that of capturing the devotional value of the

---

142. *Psalmen*, I, 124.

143. *Ibid.* II, 60-61.

passage. It is only when the particular is understood that the general truth behind it can be fully utilized and applied.

## 2. Differentiation between Idea and Realization.

It is however in a periodical article which appeared in 1833, entitled "Zur Auslegung der Propheten", where one finds the most complete development of this interpretative method. He states there that the principal mistake in the interpretation of prophecy is that the main idea is not separated from its temporal realization. It must be remembered that the prophets are not fortune-tellers; they do not proclaim future events as such without reference to the character of God. They make predictions in relationship to it and to God's eternal laws. In short, prophecy is based on an underlying idea; it is entirely false and ruins exegesis when one, "ohne die Idee in's Auge zu fassen, ein abgerissen Thatsachen der Geschichte kleben bleibt".<sup>144</sup> Hengstenberg has elsewhere emphasized that poetry is just as worthy of a place in Scripture as history. For this reason it is false to interpret the book of Job strictly historically. "In einem Buche, wo Alles so durchaus auf den Gedanken ankommt, der in der Gemeinde Gottes eingebürgert werden soll, ist die Frage nach dem geschichtlichen Character eine sehr untergeordnete, den Glauben gar nicht berührende".<sup>145</sup>

At any rate, confining oneself to the facts of history without regarding the idea behind them is false simply because one does not thereby take into account that history is vitally related to God's character; the only correct view is that "Gottes Handlungen sind ein Ausfluß seines Wesens". Because this is so, none of God's acts are accidental, but are expressions of his character, and "so ist jede seiner Thaten zugleich eine Realweissagung".<sup>146</sup>

**(a. Realweissagung).** Before progressing, it is well to examine more closely this concept of "Realweissagung", which seems to be peculiar to Hengstenberg. It is perhaps best translated

---

144. "Zur Auslegung der Propheten", *EKZ*, XII, #23, 20. März, 1833; 182.

145. *Hiob*, 35-36.

146. "Zur Auslegung der Propheten", *EKZ*, XII, #23, 20. März, 1833; 184.

by the expression "factual prophecy", in comparison with ordinary prophecy, prophecy expressed in words, "Wortweissagung". Commenting on the prophecy in the third chapter of Joel, he can affirm that one is not to see its final fulfillment only in Pentecost, except insofar as Pentecost is the pledge of that final fulfillment; in Pentecost is "Joel's Wortweissagung nun in eine unendlich kräftiger Realweissagung verwandelt".<sup>147</sup>

However, perhaps only the expression is new, for Hengstenberg seems to understand under it very much the same as what others have mentioned under the expression "type".<sup>148</sup> Indeed, there are several instances in which he seems to use the two expressions interchangeably. Concerning the Micah quotation in Matthew 2:6, he states that inasmuch as Israel was called to proclaim the divine truth in the midst of the heathen, in this respect Israel was "ein Typos des Messias, dieser ein concentrirtes gesteigertes Israel". If this is the case, if there exists between Israel and the Messiah "ein solches nicht zufälliges, sondern von Gott beabsichtigtes Verhältniss des Vorbildes und des Gegenbildes", then one must assume some relation between their stays in Egypt. "Diese Voraussetzung beruht auf der Wahrnehmung der merkwürdigen Übereinstimmung, welcher durch göttliche Führung zwischen den Schicksalen der vorbildlichen Personen und des Gegenbildes stattfindet, so daß die ersteren als Realweissagung der letzteren zu betrachten sind".<sup>149</sup>

The obvious question presents itself: in the classical "type" theory, was there not always "merkwürdige Übereinstimmung" between the type and the antitype? Is not this the very definition of

---

147. *Christologie*, I, 381.

148. While typology is, as O. Weber has stated, concerned with the problem "ob und in welchem Sinne at-liche Aussagen für die Gemeinde Jesu Christi zugleich Aussagen über Jesus Christus und die seinigen sind" (O. Weber, "Typologie", *Evangelisches Kirchenlexicon, Kirchlich-theologisches Handwörterbuch* [Göttingen, 1959], III, 1523-1526), it must also be remembered that the OT statements involved were statements concerning OT persons or events, i. e., OT history was in some sense prophetic of NT history. For Hengstenberg the concept is not confined to events prophesying Christ alone, and he allows for such prophecy within a Covenant, not just from OT to NT, but the basic principle seems to be the same as in typology, that event as well as word can be prophetic of event.

149. *Ibid.*, 582.

type? Or does Hengstenberg mean that a "Realweissagung" is a special sort of type in which the correspondence between type and antitype (prophecy and fulfillment!) is essentially full?

This writer cannot see that Hengstenberg makes any real distinction between the two. At first glance, his emphasis that factual prophecy is a prophecy which continually repeats itself seems to set it apart. Commenting on Psalm 11:6, he sees in the reference to the rain of fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrha a hope of the psalmist "daß diese Begebenheit sich wiederholen werde, wie ja jede göttliche That eine Realweissagung auf die Zukunft ist, sich unter gleichen Umständen nothwendig wiederholen muß".<sup>150</sup> Another example is of course the Exodus and the entry into Canaan, but this is spoken of as "eine große, sich stets wiederholende Weissagung, ein Typos".<sup>151</sup> Here as well are the terms interchangeable.

What is, however, the real relationship of factual prophecy and its fulfillment? Which can be considered primary, through which the other is to be understood? The answer is, neither, that they are both to be understood as expressions of the same divine nature: "Hieraus geht hervor, daß alttestamentliche Begebenheit, auf die sich der Prophet zunächst bezieht, die Wegführung in das Exil und die Befreiung aus demselben, eine Realweissagung auf jene neutestamentlichen Verhältnisse war [the sending of the Messiah, but only to those who recognized that work of God's mercy] . . . daß beide unter denselben Gesetzen standen, beide sind nothwendiger Ausfluss desselben göttlichen Wesens waren, ein Ausspruch also, der sich zunächst auf die erste bezog, zugleich sie Weissagung auf die zweite betrachtet werden konnte".<sup>152</sup>

This argument here is reminiscent of the discussion of the "ideal unity", which lies behind the several references or applications of a passage.<sup>153</sup> This unity may be observed also from another standpoint. In a commentary on Isaiah 53, Hengstenberg

---

150. *Psalmen*, I, 243.

151. *Geschichte des Reiches Gottes im Alten Bund*, II, 1; 15.

152. *Christologie*, I, 583 (on Micah 5).

153. *Infra*, 81.

observes that it is impossible that the idea of the suffering Messiah not be present in the OT: there righteousness and suffering are throughout so integrally bound together, that the Messiah as the absolutely righteous one must also undergo the deepest suffering. "Wäre diese nicht, so würde der Messiah sich völlig von allen seinen Vorbildern losgerissen werden, namentlich einem David, der durch die schwersten Leiden hindurch zur Herrlichkeit gelangte".<sup>154</sup>

While it is necessary to understand that factual prophecy may be in certain situations entwined with word prophecy,<sup>155</sup> its primary emphasis is on God's revelation in history; he can even say, in reference to Herod's decree to slay the children, that what God "damals durch Herodes that, ist weil Geschichte, auch Symbol, Realweissagung".<sup>156</sup> While the intent of the argument is to demonstrate that the Dragon of the Revelation is the antitype of Herod, and not itself a prophecy of something else yet to come, surely here is a clear-cut statement that all of God's actions in history are revelatory of him. A similar thought appears to be expressed in a commentary on Psalm 65:6, "*Eben weil das Seyn vorhanden ist, kann die Erkenntnis nicht für immer fehlen. Was der lebendige Gott für die ganze Erde schon damals war, als seine Erkenntnisse sich noch auf den engen Winkel Canaans beschränkte, das war eine Weissagung der dereinstigen Ausbreitung derselben über die ganze Erde*".<sup>157</sup>

Here not an act of God, but the very being of God, in his relationship to the earth, is as such a prophecy of the coming knowledge of that being. Indeed, every mention of the past by a prophet must be taken in this way. This is so because "die Prophetie es mit dem rein Vergangenen nicht zu thun hat", and therefore one must seek a reason for its use in prophecy. "So wird man annehmen müssen, daß der Vr. jene Thatsachen der Vergangenheit als

---

154. *Christologie*, II, 364.

155. *Ezechiel*, II, 104, where the word prophecy, "Siehe da bin ich" of Ezekiel 34: 11, is said to have found most glorious fulfillment at the appearance of Christ, but that even before that God's "Hirtensorge" expressed itself in the return from the exile and other acts of mercy, "die aber all vorwärts wiesen auf wahrhaftige Erfüllung".

156. *Offenbarung*, I, 605.

157. *Psalmen*, III, 181.

Vorbilder desjenigen ins Auge fasst, was dem jetzigen Könige Zedekias begegnet wird". This usage in Ezekiel 5 has analogy in chapter 31, "wo der Sturz des Königes von Assur als Vorbild des Sturzes von Aegyptens Könige sich darstellt: die Geschichte ist auch da eine verhüllte Weissagung".<sup>158</sup> One can observe here once more the interweaving of factual and word prophecy.

It is also true, however that there appear to be objects which only factual prophecy can "predict", whose mention in word prophecy would not necessarily imply their factual existence. In speaking of the great divine judgments of the book of Revelation, Hengstenberg points out, "in diesem großen Denkmal des gerechten Gerichtes Gottes liegt eine factische Weissagung von desjenigen, was hier verkündet wird. Die Hölle wäre eine Fabel, wenn sie nicht solche irdische Vorbilder hätte".<sup>159</sup>

Not only historical event or situation, but also the imperfection or lack of them have revelatory and prophetic character. It is true, "der Vorzug des A. B. war zugleich sein Mangel", and the imperfection of the OT's representation of God's fellowship with his people, as expressed in the temple, is shown by the strength of the Messianic hope. "Jede Messianische Weissagung ist ein Armuthszeugniss für den Tempel. Weil aber im Reiche Gottes das Unvollkommene überall Weissagung des Vollkommenen ist, so deutete der Tempel vorwärts auf eine realere Verbindung Gottes mit seinem Volke. Diese erfolgt in Christo".<sup>160</sup> A further example, this time not only imperfection, but complete absence, is significant in a discussion of Jeremiah 3: 16, where "Freilich war das Fehlen der Bundeslade auch eine Realweissagung traurigen Inhaltes. Es verkündete denen, welche an der Form festhielten, ohne das Wesen lebendig ergriffen zu haben, und die daher nicht fähig waren zur Theilnahme an der herrlicheren Entfaltung dieses Wesens, daß die Zeit herannahte, wo die Form, an die sie mit ihrer ganzen Existenz sich gekettet hatten, zerbrochen werden sollte".<sup>161</sup> This is a sphere

---

158. *Ezechiel*, I, 189.

159. *Offenbarung*, II, 1; 152.

160. *Ibid.*, 2; 42-43.

161. *Christologie*, II, 436.

of factual prophecy where word prophecy has hardly anything analogous.

We have seen the basis of the "Realweissagung" concept to lie in the recognition that the acts of God are expressions of his character; Hengstenberg however goes yet further, and asserts that because that character is an eternal one, these acts must continually rejuvenate (*verjüngen*) themselves. If this is the case, "so müssen auch seine Worte, in denen er diese Handlungen ankündigt, nicht vergehen, sondern alle einzelnen Erfüllungen überdauern".<sup>162</sup>

The non-accidental character, the theocentric nature of history involves that the descriptions of, or the predictions over, these acts must also take on that non-accidental, *idealistic* character, and an idea cannot be exhausted in any expression of it in history; so runs in broad outline Hengstenberg's argument. This thought is otherwise expressed where the emphasis is not upon the character of God in the abstract which is seen behind both prophecy and its fulfillment in history, but upon the necessity of eternal truth (which has its foundation in the divine character, to be sure): it is this truth which simultaneously (*zugleich*) evokes both prophecy and history. While it is true that "wäre der Tod des Heilands nicht an sich nothwendig, so würde er nicht vorhergesagt sein", still the Savior bases his argument in Matthew 5:24 upon the idea as it is expressed in prophecy, because it is precisely in this expression that the validity of the idea is illuminated: "Die Weissagung ohne Idee wäre eine bloße Wahrsagung; die Idee ohne Weissagung würde der göttlichen Bezeugung ihrer Wahrheit entbehren. Der Heiland mußte leiden und sterben, weil dies in den Weissagungen des A. T. vorher-verkündet worden; es war vorher vergekündet worden, weil er leiden und sterben mußte".<sup>163</sup>

**(b. All history also prophetic).** But in a sense there is no real distinction between prophecy and history; it may be said (as Hengstenberg interprets Psalm 78) "daß die ganze heilige Geschichte eine fortlaufende Weissagung ist". The logical effect of this attitude

---

162. "Zur Auslegung der Propheten", *EKZ*, XII, #23, 20. März, 1833; 184.

163. *Leidensgeschichte*, 77-78.

is the transferring of the past and present to the future; the future is only in accidentals different from the past and is in its nature the same. This is of course because of the relationship that both past and future of the people of God bear to the underlying divine character. When the prophet talks of the return of rejected Israel in terms of a return to Canaan, he presents with his prophecy simultaneously its guarantee; that God previously brought his loyal people into Canaan is the pledge that he will again receive them when they turn back to him. As another example, the using of the very names of Egypt and Edom for the enemies of God is in itself an expression of judgment upon them.<sup>164</sup>

From the above would one perhaps be inclined to question the importance of historical exegesis for Hengstenberg? If temporal distinctions have no significance whatsoever (at most only in "accidentals"), and the central meaning which God wishes to communicate to his people is the same throughout all ages, why should it be useful to investigate the particular significance this message had at a particular time? The answer to this question is best presented by a discussion concerning the justification of a Messianic interpretation. (This sort of interpreting is only a special case of Hengstenberg's search after the idea or essence behind particular expressions, although the idea of the Messiah is certainly the most central of all). In speaking of Psalm 2, he declares "Die mess. Erkl. eines Psalmes ist daher erst dann vollständig gerechtfertigt, wenn wir theils eine Offenbarungsthatsache angeben können, wodurch der Sänger die Anregung zu der subjectiven Darstellung ihrer Inhaltes erhielt, theils das Substrat zu seiner Schilderung in den Verhältnissen des Sängers, oder in den seiner Zeit". In this case, it is the promise to David of an eternal dynasty (which he necessarily understood upon reflection as referring to Christ) which is the stimulus to the content of the prophecy, and experiences out of David's own life aid its presentation.<sup>165</sup>

It is certainly highly probable that the distinction here between content and presentation is none other than that of essence and

---

164. "Zur Auslegung der Propheten", *EKZ*, XII, #24, 23. März, 1833; 129.

165. *Psalmen*, I, 49-50.



form, idea and expression, which has been shown to be so important in exegesis for Hengstenberg. In spite of the fact, therefore, that history may be regarded as one continuous prophecy, it is still necessary to examine that history, not only as touching the light it may cast upon the temporally conditioned presentation of the main concept of that prophecy, but also as concerning its very content.

In connection with the relation of the investigation of history to the ideas which can run throughout it, and which cannot be limited to any one fulfillment or expression, it is further worth noting that such investigation may go toward keeping the idea in mind, as well as providing a further guarantee of its realization. Speaking of sections of the Revelation, Hengstenberg asserts that we understand more from them than the author's contemporaries just as they understood more of certain OT prophecies than the original audience. "Die beseelende Idee bleibt stets lebendig und kräftig, und sie hat durch den bereits erfolgten Untergang des heidnischen Roms eine neue Gewähr ihrer bevorstehende Realisirung erhalten". Comparing prophecy and history in reference to pagan Rome shows us that the fire from heaven which chapter 20 speaks of is no empty imagination; the thought is that history (the burning of Rome) has shown us the import of prophecy (the prediction of fire) and can continue to reveal its meaning for yet unfulfilled predictions".<sup>166</sup> Elsewhere it is also stated, "was etwa von Dunkelheit übrig blieb, wurde durch die Erfüllung gehoben" (speaking of the interpretation of Daniel's weeks as weeks of years). This is a discussion of the more particular problem of "veiled preciseness" (*verhüllter Bestimmtheit*), the *preciseness* of which (in prophecy) is necessary in order that the divine character of the prophecy may be obvious (in that its interpretation does not depend entirely upon the fulfillment), and the *veiled* character of which is necessary to preserve the distinction between prophecy and history, in that it allows the addition of history to prophecy to still have significance (fulfillment).<sup>167</sup>

---

166. *Offenbarung*, II, 1: 277-278).

167. *Christologie*, III, 27-28.

**(c. Typical character of history).** But we must return to the main stream of thought. It has been seen that for Hengstenberg the idea is much more important than any of the "accidental expressions in history", that because sacred history is throughout prophetic in nature, the significance of the past and present must be carried over in the future. The conclusion is obvious: "keine Weissagung kann nach dem Bemerkten sich allein auf ein individuell Bestimmtes bestehen". The problem is simply, is the individual circumstance to which the prophecy most obviously refers purely typical, or does "die Idee sich zunächst wirklich an diesem bestimmten Objekte realisieren?". In the case of the prophecies' return of Israel to Canaan, the answer is to be found in whether this return belongs to the times of the OT or of the NT; if the first is true, then the prophecy must be taken literally, but under the new covenant Canaan is no longer Canaan, and if Israel were to be really returned thereto, it would be religiously entirely indifferent".<sup>168</sup> It is stated in reference to the Messianic interpretation of Psalm 41 that while in the case of direct Messianic prophecies the thought concerning the Messiah has already in the prophecy itself been particularly applied to him, in the case of typical Messianic prophecies "ist die Idee entweder in specieller Anwendung auf ein anderes Subject, oder im Allgemeinen ausgesprochen". In this case, although the Psalm may refer to individual experiences of David, there still lies within it the idea that when the Divine enters the world of sin, he will be hated by it. It is this "beseelende Gedanke" which determines the admissability of any particular application, here the Messianic interpretation, and which permits the use of the following exegetical process, the idea must be "zugleich von ihrer individuellen Bestimmtheit befreit und dann wieder dem Individuo angepasst werden."<sup>169</sup>

## **C. The Advantages of Hengstenberg's Interpretation.**

### **1. Edifying Quality.** The most instructive section of the

---

168. "Zur Auslegung der Propheten, *EKZ*, XII, #24, 23. März, 1833; 189.

169. *Leidensgeschichte*, 69.

article is probably the discussion of the advantages of his own interpretation. The first, most thoroughly discussed and most basic of all the suggested advantages, is that of the edification which the interpretation affords. Only this method brings about that every bit of prophecy qualifies for the apostolic criterion as given in 1 Tim. 3:16. The interpretation which pays attention only to the letter, which is entirely empty of the spirit, refers the content of prophecy in part to the absolute past, in part to the absolute future, "und wir, die wir in der Mitte stehen, gehen leer aus". If we regard the sacred thusly, the acts of God in the past can only appear to us as isolated arbitrary actions. It is only when one traces every prophecy back to its basic concept, which is based on the divine character, that the past can take on new life. Then "jedes Wort ist zur Kirche unserer Zeit, zu uns gesprochen. In uns und außer uns finden wir Israel, Edom und Babel wieder. Wir lernen die Wege Gottes mit den Völkern, den Kirchen unserer Tage und mit uns selbst verstehen". Then nothing appears purely past or purely future, but everything is simultaneously past, present and future, as indeed it must be in the Word of him who was, who is, and who shall be.<sup>170</sup> As might be expected, this method provides not only for every age of the Church's history, but also for every individual within the Church. The 22nd Psalm, for example, is written out of David's own experiences, but written expressly by him for the use of the Church; the main thought is that the righteous must suffer in the world of sin, but that this suffering serves, through the unfolding of the divine revelation, to the glory of God. Therefore "jeder einzelne Gerechte konnte auch den Trost des Ps. insofern aneignen, die Realisierung der in ihm ausgesprochenen Hoffnungen in seinen Führung insofern erwarten, als die Wirklichkeit bei ihm der Idee entsprach, als er das Ideal des Gerechten persönlich darstellte".

While it is true that the only perfect fulfillment of such a prophecy could only be in Christ, and that until his coming it has basically the character of an unfulfilled prophecy, this too is edifying to the members of his Church; it is only natural that those who had a living hope in the Messiah could see a perfect fulfillment only in

---

170. *Ibid.*, 187.

him; they must regard such preliminary fulfillment as a prediction of the future perfect one.<sup>171</sup> In this context Hengstenberg speaks of "das exegetische Gefühl" as that which leads him to deny an exclusively Messianic interpretation of the psalm. This would exclude the other realizations of the idea, which in their own way cannot be surpassed in their glorification of God; there is nothing which can "kräftiger die Gemüther zu seinem Dienste erwecke und antriebe".<sup>172</sup> While Hengstenberg regards fulfillment in Christ as the central sources of edification of the people of God from any prophecy, other fulfillments, "realizations", are not to be ignored, as they are also edifying.

**2. Lack of arbitrariness.** The second advantage given for this exegetical approach is that it "allein vermag es, der Willkühr ein Ziel zu setzen". Other methods lead only to a bare "Herumrathen"; one needs only to examine the great variety of illustrations which they have produced. In the case of the prophecy of Joel concerning the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, some apply it to the time of Joel, others to Pentecost, still others to the last days. The proper interpretation does not need to reject any of the reasons which are given for these various interpretations, for it includes them all, and rejects none of them as absolutely false, but only shows them to be limited.<sup>173</sup> The error here lies in the denial of the relationship of the prophecy to its animating thought, which has led to the false assumption that the fulfillment must lie in a particular span of time. The error of these interpretations is only in their one-sidedness and exclusiveness.<sup>174</sup> Yet, elsewhere Hengstenberg states that although no single limited interpretation is correct, one can differentiate between those that are absolutely false (those that refer to situations which cannot be subsumed under the governing idea) and those which are only limited in their presentation of the truth.<sup>175</sup>

---

171. *Psalmen*, II, 10.

172. *Ibid.*, 9.

173. "Zur Auslegung der Propheten", *EKZ*, XII, 23. März 1833; 187.

174. *Christologie*, I, 381.

175. *Ibid.*, 396.

One may not conclude that this approach gives carte blanche to any possible interpretation; there must be a real relation to the basic idea.

It is possible to understand the great importance which Hengstenberg lays upon unity of interpretation only when one examines the charges he levels against the divergences of interpretation of his day. He states that the proponents of the non-Messianic interpretations can find no unity among themselves, and that they only replace one opinion with another; this he believes to be always an indication of error.<sup>176</sup> This multiplicity reveals that the interpretations were simply products of the author's inclinations.<sup>177</sup> They are united only in their purpose to put out of the way that which is to them uncomfortable (here the authorship by John of the fourth gospel), but by this means they cannot maintain that unity.<sup>178</sup> The critics are united only in their opposition to the orthodox exegesis but cannot attain any positive unity. One must therefore conclude that the basis of this opposition does not lie in any real weakness in the orthodox case, but in the arbitrariness of the critics.<sup>179</sup> They are not able to replace that which they have arbitrarily rejected with anything that can stand.<sup>180</sup>

We have mingled purposely in this discussion two sorts of attack on multiplicity of interpretation which may not at first glance appear to belong together. One does not need to be a critic (here one critical of certain orthodox views of the Bible is meant) to deny Hengstenberg's concept of one basic idea in a prophecy which is realized at many different moments in history. But the emphasis here is really an arbitrariness, and how it can never lead to a correct interpretation. Whether that arbitrariness is malignant (as Hengstenberg would certainly claim is the case with the critics) or not is really beside the point; what is really important here is that

---

176. *Ibid.*, 82.

177. *Psalmen*, IV, 1; 241.

178. *Johannesevangelium*, I, 298.

179. *Psalmen*, IV, 2; 240.

180. *Ibid.*, III, 532.

he felt that it was only through his method that arbitrariness could be avoided. One cannot debate with malignancy, but that does not mean that presenting a method which avoids one of the out-workings of that malignancy is indifferent.

**3. Biblical Style.** The third ground for preferring his method is concerned with Biblical style. The proper interpretation calls attention to "wie schon die Form der Weissagung, wonach also in der Gegenwart gegeben würde, auf dies ihr Wesen hinweist". If one assumes the "ideelose" interpretation, this form would certainly be the most unfitting of all. If every interpretation had as its object a single, isolated historical fact, then the most fitting presentation would be one of the sharpest differentiation, entirely without animation and color.<sup>181</sup> That the form must fit the character of the Biblical passage is for Hengstenberg self-evident; therefore the only way to account for the nonscientific in the prophets is to admit for them a nonscientific content (in the sense of not being confined to any one particularly temporal fulfillment).

**4. "Double Reference" Avoided.** The last of the advantages of his interpretation is again concerned with arbitrariness, but with that especially connected with what he terms "the unnatural assumption of a double reference" (Doppelsinn).<sup>182</sup> This concept is one often discussed by him, as, for example, in the interpretation of 2 Samuel 7, where interpreters from Augustine to the present have assumed "eine doppelte Beziehung zugleich auf Salomo und seine irdischen Nachfolger und auf Christus". He holds that while *what* they say is correct, *how* they say it is erroneous. The prophecy does not refer to a double object, but brings together David's line as an ideal unity.<sup>183</sup> This "ideale Einheit" concept is elsewhere described as the "Grundidee"; there we read that as long as the passage itself (here Micah 2:13) does not contain any reference to a limitation of its application, one is perfectly justified in referring it to the entire

---

181. "Zur Auslegung der Propheten", *EKZ*, XII, #24, 23. März, 1833; 188.

182. *Ibid.*

183. *Christologie*, I, 164.

complex of the salvation intended for the people of the covenant, and in seeking its fulfillment in any past or future event in the same measure as therein the "Grundidee" of God's grace for his people reveals itself. Those who limit the passage to a reference to Christ are not far from the truth, but only if they recognize that God was not finished with his people when the first of them were converted to Christ.<sup>184</sup> So although a passage may have a number of references, strictly speaking there is a unifying concept, a basic idea, behind them all; another way of saying this is that, although the *events* to which a passage may refer are many, it can refer to only one *idea*, which is expressed in these different events.

This is, however, almost an academic way of treating the problem. Hengstenberg believes that it is in Christ that the ideas are personified, as in Psalm 60, even when the reference is to the suffering righteous, because it is still a prophecy of Christ, in whom the ideal of righteousness becomes personal.<sup>185</sup> As might be expected, he does not agree with the older interpretation which held that Christ was just one among the many references of a prophecy. Not only does this smack of the multiple reference theory, but it denies that Christ, as personification of the idea, is indeed the unifying factor of all references. His line of thought may best be seen in his consideration of the prophecy of the prophet to come (Deuteronomy 18). There he states that the multiplicity of the prophets is brought together by Moses into an ideal unity because through the illumination of the Spirit he recognized that one day prophets would one day culminate in one real person, in Christ. He uses as argument the statement of I Peter 1, that the Spirit of Christ spoke in the prophets: in a certain sense therefore, Christ is the only prophet.<sup>186</sup> It must be remembered that Hengstenberg will not attempt to escape from the problem by championing an exclusively Messianic interpretation when one is not justified. Speaking of Psalm 21, he declares that the interpretation which refers it to Christ is only permitted insofar "als in ihm, in dem der Davidische

---

184. *Ibid.*, 504-505.

185. *Psalmen*, III, 242.

186. *Christologie*, I, 124.

Königthum gipfelte, die Verheissung ihre letzte und höchste Erfüllung fand, verlangt aber auch zugleich gebieterisch die Beziehung auf Christum in diesem Sinne".<sup>187</sup> That is, the Messianic interpretation is justified as it is the culmination of all the other interpretations!

Elsewhere is the problem of the NT interpretation of an OT passage discussed. There is also to be found the problem of double interpretation, as the NT interpretation is not always that which the OT passage itself would suggest. But there the thought was that the obvious OT interpretation of itself was really the "true" one; in the NT are to be found "permitted" applications of the OT, and it is for us to understand that the Lord and his apostles exercised a "spiritual" approach to the OT.<sup>188</sup>

Here the problem is different. The consideration now is the concept of basic ideas which underlie many different manifestations of themselves in events in history. Obviously it is not only a matter of degree how well the various events reflect the idea behind them; one could hardly speak of its being permissible to take an event as reflecting the idea, or of using a spiritual interpretation in order to see the main idea in the event, at least not in order to see the main idea in the event. An example of the latter point is seen in the interpretation of the Song of Songs. It is obvious to Hengstenberg that the events portrayed therein (unhistorical, but still events!) picture the relation of Jehovah to the Jewish people; but do they also represent the relation of Christ to his Church? If it is meant that it depicts the NT relationship alone, then the Song is taken out of its historical context, so "no" must be the answer. An affirmative answer must be given, however, if one means that Jehovah is no other than the Christ, and that the Churches of OT and NT are in basically the same relationship to Christ. As far as the relationship of Christ to the individual soul is concerned, the Song can be applied only insofar as the history of the people of Israel is the same as the history of every individual; in other words, the Song can only be

---

187. *Psalmen*, I, 468.

188. *Infra*, 94.



*applied* to the relationship of the individual soul to Christ.<sup>189</sup> The idea of the relation of Jehovah and his people is the same as that of Christ and his people: as long as one recognizes just that, and does not insist that the NT relationship is a different one, of course the Song pictures Christ and his Church. The case is different, however, when one tries to derive the relation to a individual for the relation to the people of God. Here the rule is the same as in the case of the NT interpretation of the OT: only when what is true of the one is also true of the other can it be so used.

The central point here must be sought in the relevance a non-double-reference exegesis has to the satisfaction of the needs of the Church (once again Hengstenberg applies the standard of 2 Tim. 3:16), and in how that unnatural, arbitrary *Doppelsinn* assumption is only a poor substitute for answering those same needs. Speaking over the Messianic interpretation of Psalm 2, he emphasized that he could have no reason for denying the immediate reference of it to its own day, for even if this were the case, the Messianic heart of the Psalm and its significance for the present day would remain untouched. What was the guarantee to David for his intimacy to God must have the same meaning in still higher degree in its application to Christ.<sup>190</sup> Here can be noted not only that for Hengstenberg the great importance of the Messianic interpretation is that the passage retains its significance for the Church up to the present (*Geltung für die Gegenwart*), but also that by implication this significance is precisely the same meaning which the immediate interpretation had, but accentuated. In "Zur Auslegung der Propheten" he emphasizes that this interpretation answers the need which is only poorly met in the rival mystical and allegorical interpretations. Those who have clung to such interpretations are of course not at all satisfied by the "rough" literal interpretation either. His interpretation is not one which is concerned with "die nach festen Grundsätzen angestellte, die Gewähr ihrer Richtigkeit in sich tragende Lösung des Kernes aus der Schale".<sup>191</sup> His interpretation is

---

189. "Über das hohe Lied", *EKZ*, I, #24, 22 September, 1827; 189.

190. *Psalmen*, I, 25.

191. "Zur Auslegung der Propheten", *EKZ*, XIII, #24, 23. März, 1833; 188.

therefore not an arbitrary one, even though it has as its announced end the satisfaction of the needs of the people of God. Though pragmatic, it is not subjective; one certainly is not to twist the Scripture to satisfy one's needs, but is to discover the laws which enable the release of the kernel from the husk. This does not by any means mean that this process is an abstract "scientific" one; as has been mentioned, it is precisely this process which cannot be utilized without faith,<sup>192</sup> as is not surprising, for one must penetrate to the very essence of God, to the laws by which he governs the universe, thinking the thoughts of the prophets after them. But it does not mean that this process is not an arbitrary or forced one; in spite of the fact that the exegetical "feeling" plays an important part, it is just as much against it to use an unnatural method, which could yield practically any desired result, as it is to so interpret Scripture so that it is of no immediate edifying use to the Church.

#### **D. Method of Differentiating Pictorial and Essential.**

**1. Comparison of Prophecy and Fulfillment.** While it is important that this purpose be understood, that does not imply that Hengstenberg is without precise means for carrying it out. He declares that it is first necessary to establish the "pictorial" character of prophecy in general as to its nature, but once that has been done it is also necessary to find hard and fast rules for determining the dividing line between thought and wording, nature and expression revelation (Sache und Bild).<sup>193</sup>

The first of these rules is concerned with the comparison of prophecy and its fulfillment. This is not as easy as might appear at first glance, owing to the fact that very often the prophets portray as uninterrupted continuum of

a collection of events which are in reality wide apart in time, as in the weak beginning of the kingdom of Christ and its glorious end.<sup>194</sup> In the case of Isaiah, he states that the prophet's eye is not

---

192. *Ibid.*, 190.

193. *Christologie*, III, 2; 203.

194. *Ibid.*

alone on the very next developments, but in his ecstatic and elevated condition looks into the furthest distance, coupling with the deliverance of Israel out of the exile the coming Deliverer of the world.<sup>195</sup> The writer of Psalm 96 praises God for a deliverance which must belong in the distant future, as during the entire OT period no such comprehensive rule of the Lord had taken place. Further, if it be true in this case that the Psalmist was "in die Zukunft versetzt", one cannot deny the genuineness of the second part of Isaiah on the ground that the author's standpoint is not of the time of Isaiah, as it is even more fitting for prophecy than for poetry to see the future as present.<sup>196</sup> Hengstenberg is even able to provide a reason for this phenomenon; the Messianic expression so filled the soul of the prophet, that he was able to pass from any lower deliverance to the final and greatest, not being concerned with still other demonstrations of grace by God to his own people which might occur in the meantime. The pictures of the final deliverance are so irresistible that occasionally they are mixed in with those of the more immediate deliverances.<sup>197</sup> One must recognize that the events of centuries are in a prophecy compressed together into one scene. The error of seeking one single moment instead of the entire historical scene<sup>198</sup> is of course identical with the general error of seeking a single historical fulfillment instead of several, forgetting that the idea can express itself *throughout* history.

Because of this "long view" which the prophets enjoy, one must very carefully investigate if a prophecy has been at all fulfilled, or how completely it has been. The best method is examination of the testimony of the NT concerning the future development of the kingdom of God. The Revelation is particularly important, inasmuch as it takes up the unfulfilled part of OT prophecies and shows how their fulfillment belongs still to the future.<sup>199</sup> It is hardly surprising

---

195. *Ibid.*, II; 3.

196. *Psalmen*, IV, 1; 44-45.

197. *Christologie*, III, 1; 381.

198. *Offenbarung*, II, 1; 315.

199. *Christologie*, III, 2; 203.

that the NT should serve as key to the interpretation of the OT, since its revelation is naturally fuller and more advanced in the scheme of development than that of the OT; this is particularly natural when one considers that the New makes explicit statements concerning the Old. This is even more likely since it is the Lord Christ himself and his apostles who speak in the NT; coupled to the natural domination of a more advanced writing is the authority of God himself. This authority extends to settling the authorship of a Psalm,<sup>200</sup> establishing the divine co-operation in the writing of all the Psalms,<sup>201</sup> and also fixing the proper interpretation of a book.<sup>202</sup> When such assertions are explained away by claiming that Christ made them "nach damaliger Auslegung", Hengstenberg is quick to reply that when Christ based his entire argument upon the point involved (for example, that a certain prophecy had reference to himself), then such an "explanation" is in reality "ein indirecter Angriff gegen seine Gottheit" and endangers his honor.<sup>203</sup> However, when a quotation from the second part of Isaiah is casually attributed to Isaiah by one of the holy writers of the NT, he feels that here they could have adopted the prevailing method of quotation, without by any means putting their seal of approval upon the false presuppositions behind it. A simple quotation by the NT, regardless of the manner or of its content, is not at all relevant to the question of genuineness. But when Christ himself calls a liar a prophet, that is something quite different! This is the case when he recommends the writer of Isaiah's second part to the Church, refers to his *post eventum* prophecy as a true prophecy, with reference to the future, which can only be interpreted by the aid of the Spirit;

---

200. *Psalmen*, IV, 1; 238, on Psalm 110: "Die Abfassung des Ps. durch David wird bezeugt . . . von dem Herrn, dessen ganze auf unseren Ps. gegründete Argumentation . . . auf der Thatsache seiner Abfassung von David fußt".

201. *Ibid.*, 2; 205. "Der Gebrauche, den der Herr nach der Auferstehung von den Psalmen macht . . . beruht auf der Voraussetzung, daß sie . . . unter göttlicher Mitwirkung verfasst worden".

202. *Hohelied*, 253; "für die allegorische Erklärung des Hohenliedes spricht die höchste unter allen Autoritäten, die des Herrn und seiner Apostel. Das N. T. ist mit Beziehung auf das Hohelied, die sämtlich auf der Voraussetzung seines geistlichen Sinnes ruhen, durchgezogen"

203. *Christologie*, I, 116.

this is however precisely what they do who deny the Isaianic authorship of the entire book. "Derjenige aber, welcher durch Gottes Gnade die fest Überzeugung von der Gottheit Christi gewonnen hat, kann bei einiger begrifflichen Consensus . . . eine solche Behauptung nicht anders, als auf tiefste verabschauen".<sup>204</sup>

Such questions, which may appear to some as only of "scientific" concern, are for Hengstenberg touchstones for one's attitude to the person of Jesus Christ. Of course if even matters of interpretation can be so decided, as in the case of the Song of Songs, then so can matters of Biblical content, for what use is a method of interpretation except for deciding the content of a certain passage? This is the case when Hengstenberg rejects the doctrine, based on a literal exegesis of the OT, of a literal return of the Jews to Canaan, because the NT "von einer solchen nichts weiß."<sup>205</sup> Indeed, when all is said and done, the authority of Christ and his apostles practically makes scientific investigation of Biblical questions superfluous; speaking of the question of the date of Job, Hengstenberg states that we can be glad "daß von dieser Untersuchung, die freilich ein nicht geringes geschichtliches, archaeologisches und sprachliches Interesse hat, die kirchliche Bedeutung des Buches wesentlich unabhängig ist. Sie beruht auf den Zeugnissen welche der Herr und sein Apostel für die göttliche Eingebung des ganzen alttestamentlichen Canons ablegen, auf der speciellen Anführung unseres Buches als heilige Schrift . . . und aus der Bestätigung welche diese äusseren göttlichen Zeugnisse durch dainnere bei den Gläubigen aller Zeiten erhalten hat und noch erhält."<sup>206</sup>

Of course the "kirchliche Bedeutung" of a book is the only really important one, and to be able to rest it entirely upon the NT record of Christ's witness to it is a real gain for Hengstenberg, since the foundation is thus made just as secure as the Church requires for her source of doctrine and hope. The quotation adds the inner witness to the outer witness of Christ and the NT. There is no

---

204. *Einleitung*, I, 269-270.

205. *Ibid.*, II, 603.

206. *Hiob*, 64.

reason, however, for seeing anything mystical in this; surely he would say that the inner witness must agree with the outer, and is actually but a substantiation of it.

Another aspect of the role which the NT may play in the interpretation is to be seen in the relation between OT prophecy and NT fulfillment. Under our discussion of the place which foundational portions of Scripture have in the interpretation of later and more dependent portions, the reverse of them, how fulfillment explains prophecy, is discussed.<sup>207</sup> As an additional example, one may note how this process is used in explaining Malachi's prophecy concerning the predecessor of the Messiah by means of the history of John the Baptist.<sup>208</sup> The situation becomes more complicated, however, when it appears that Jesus on occasion arranged all the incidents in a situation (as in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, according to Hengstenberg) in order to make them correspond to the details of a prophecy. Important here is the recognition "daß bei der Handlungen Umstände vorkommen, die nicht an sich Bedeutung haben, sondern sie nur durch die Beziehung auf die Weissagung erhalten, namentlich das Mitgehen der Eselin".<sup>209</sup> It is obvious, he is sure, that the fulfillment of prophecy is one of the purposes of the events of the NT, but certainly not the only one, and that even apart from the prophecy involved, each one has its own significance, and "daß von dieser Bedeutung Weissagung und Geschichte auf gleiche Weise beherrscht wird". This may be seen from the following example: "Die Geburt Christi zu Bethlehem zeugte auf der einen Seite für den göttlichen Ursprung der Weissagung des A. B., auf der andern für die Thatsache, daß Jesus sey der Christ. Ihr davon unabhängiger Hauptzweck aber war der, die Abstammung Christi von David auch äusserlich abzubilden".<sup>210</sup>

Occasionally, however, the NT fulfillment is not the obvious fulfillment of the OT prophecy, or, putting it another way, the OT prophecy has a more immediate reference than its fulfillment in the

---

207. *Infra*, 104ff.

208. *Christologie*, III, 1; 662.

209. *Ibid.*, III, 2; 7.

210. *Ibid.*, I, 590.

NT. Hengstenberg is ready to accept this and even to use it as a rule for interpreting NT prophecy: "Die Herübernahme alttestamentlicher Weissagungen, die zunächst ein anderes Object haben . . . zeigt recht deutlich, wie unzulässig es ist, bei den Weissagungen des N. T. bei ihrem nächsten Gegenstände stehen zu bleiben, und gibt uns einen Fingerzweig, wie wir sie zu behandeln haben".<sup>211</sup>

An example of how a NT writer has treated a most indirect reference from the OT can be seen in the use in Matthew 13: 34-35 of Psalm 78: 2. Matthew sees here that the prophet makes use of parables, "und also diese Lehrweise als eine zweckmässige legitimirt", therein he discovers a prophecy of Christ, who, as the best teacher of all, *must* "alle zweckmässigen Lehrmittel vollständig benutzen".<sup>212</sup> A more indirect prophecy could hardly be imagined, but still for Matthew, and also for Hengstenberg, it really speaks of Christ. In still another example, Paul's emphasis in Galatians 3: 16 of the singular number of "seed" is not to be understood, as many of Hengstenberg's predecessors had understood it, to mean that *only* an individual could be thereby meant; rather Paul is saying "daß der Herr, der bei der Gebung der Verheissung ja schon die von ihm selbst herbeizuführende Erfüllung vor Augen hatte, nicht ohne Absicht einen Ausdruck gewählt habe, der neben der weiteren Auffassung, wie sie den Patriarchen am nächsten lag, auch die engere Auffassung zuließ, wie sie durch die Erfüllung bestätigt wurde".<sup>213</sup>

This is certainly one instance where the prophecy must be interpreted through its fulfillment, as is indeed here suggested; only thereby could one know the intention of the divine author who issued it. From the point of view of the human author (which is, after all, the only point of view possible without having the fulfillment in view), the interpretation which holds to object of the prophecy being a single individual is not what one could call "am nächsten" (the real goal of exegesis), but one which the words of

---

211. *Offenbarung*, 372.

212. *Psalmen*, III, 353.

213. *Christologie*, I, 51.

the prophecy can "permit."

Bluntly speaking, the NT usage of an OT passage is by no means determinative of its meaning or reference. In speaking of "viele ältere Ausl.", Hengstenberg observes that their only reason for believing that a passage refers "direkt und ausschließlich auf Christum", that of the witness of the NT, is convincing only when the NT reference is regarded by itself; "anders aber wir derjenige urtheilen, der mit offenem Sinne das ganze Verhältniss, in das sich das N. T. zum A. T. stellt, in sich aufgenommen, sich eines Totalanschauung von der geistvollen Weise gebildet hat, in welcher der Herr und seine Apostel den Weissagungsbeweis handhaben".<sup>214</sup> In other words, when one understands the spiritual fashion with which the NT speakers handle the OT in their quotations from it, then one will not expect that they are referring to the most direct reference of the OT passage. It is true, for example, that in spite of the reference to it in Hebrews 10: 5ff., Psalm 40:7-9 is not directly Messianic (although Hengstenberg himself, he says, only held this view at the beginning of his career). This is so because the OT offerings had a subjective and a objective side; the Psalm has in view the subjective side and Hebrews certainly the objective side as well. But what is stated in the Psalm concerning this subjective side applies also to the objective aspect. It is for this reason that the writer of Hebrews dare use the Psalm for his purpose.<sup>215</sup> In this case it was the fact that the OT reference could be applied to the NT situation that was decisive, and which enabled the NT writer to make use of the OT passage without implying thereby that he was doing anything more than making an application. This sort of justification is, however useful it may have been for Hengstenberg, at the very edge of his thought. An explanation of such NT quotation which is much more basic to him is found in his discussion of Psalm 8 and its quotation in Hebrews 2: 6-9. As might be expected, he explains that only because of this quotation would one not be compelled "den Psalm seinem ersten und eigentlichen Sinne auf Christum zu beziehen". David is here obviously speaking of the

---

214. *Psalmen*, I, 338-339.

215. *Ibid.*, II, 323-324.



human race; however, because of its fallen state, humanity hardly fits the picture of man in his glory as given here. This picture can be seen now only in Christ, although its real reference is to the eschatological glorification of man. "Nun kann der Inhalt dieses Psalmes seine volle Wahrheit erst in Zukunft finden, für jetzt aber hat er sie nur in Christo, in dem die menschliche Natur die in Adam verloren Würde und Herrschaft über das Geschaffene schon wieder besitzt."<sup>216</sup> Once more can one see something of Hengstenberg's concept of progressive revelation, that accommodation of God in revelation to the weakness of fallen man, with the revelation becoming clearer and clearer as man's capacity to receive it increases. Yet more revealing is the statement that the content of the Psalm has its truth *now* in Christ. It has been seen how the accommodation theory is coupled with the demand that all of revelation be here and now useful to the Church, so must it be here as well. Among his other purposes in quoting this passage, the writer of Hebrews was concerned with bringing home to his audience the truth of a text whose full truth could be known only in the future; but every truth of Scripture must be true here and now, and in Christ.

It is obvious to Hengstenberg that when one has taken note of the carefulness with which the OT prophecies are taken up in the NT then he cannot assume a prophecy to be yet unfulfilled only upon the basis of the OT. As has already been pointed out, the NT teaches only the conversion of Israel, not its restoration as a nation. This silence is of the utmost significance.<sup>217</sup>

To continue, in those cases in which one may establish a prophecy as already fulfilled, partly through the simple comparison of the prophecy with history, and partly through the statements of Christ and his apostles, then is one perfectly justified in employing history for separating the pictorial and the essential (Bildlichen und Sachlichen). The thing of importance then becomes the differentiation between two questions: the question, what was the meaning which the prophets saw in their own prophecies, and the question,

---

216. *Ibid.*, I, 167-169.

217. *Christologie*, III, 2: 203, footnote.

what did God intend thereby? These questions are plainly different ones, for the prophets spoke in the Spirit, in ecstasy. Through this method it is impossible to obtain the answer to the first question, and for Hengstenberg its answer is not so important; but the second can be so answered. The same God who opened for the prophets a view into the future beyond their understanding and comprehension also brought about the fulfillments to their prophecies. He emphasizes that he has not done violence to the hermeneutical aim of determining the author's intent. The difference between himself and his opponents is just in the question of whom one should regard as the real author. While his opponents stop with the human instrument, he looks to the divine author.<sup>218</sup>

**2. Continuity of Past and Future.** The second method of determining which descriptions are pictorial is in the assumption that those are such which are plainly references to earlier occurrences in the history of Israel. There one must take only the general thought, that which connects the events of the past and of the future as "essential".<sup>219</sup>

**3. Harmonization of Authors.** Thirdly, one is forced to the pictorial interpretation if one will prevent the prophets from contradicting each other. For example, if one interprets literally the passages where the Messiah is called King David, and concludes that David must be resurrected and again assume dominion, then one is in the position of contradicting the passages that refer to the Messiah as the seed or son of David.<sup>220</sup> Hengstenberg quite frequently expresses similar hermeneutical principles, which help to illustrate his meaning here. He says he is true to the principle that the more certain and clearer statements of an author must be used to explain the less certain.<sup>221</sup> One must make the point which seems the most certain to the foundation of one's investigation, and then

---

218. *Ibid.*, 203-204.

219. *Ibid.*, 204.

220. *Ibid.*, 205.

221. "Übersicht der neuesten bedeutenderen Leistungen für die exegetische Theologie", *EKZ*, XXXII, #19, 8. März, 1843; 144.

bring the other data in line with that point, being certain that only that can be true which is both in itself and in context possible, if the opposite in itself were not unthinkable.<sup>222</sup> A further rule is that "die Exegese hat erst dann ihr Ziel erreicht, wenn sie bei einem Subjecte angelangt ist, bei dem alle in den einzelnen zusammengehörigen Weiss. vorkommenden Züge sich zugleich vorfinden".<sup>223</sup> It is of course not enough to say that the prophets must not contradict each other; one must have some sort of standard for establishing which prophecies must be brought into line with the others. One must not be content with eliminating internal contradiction, but must be convinced of the possibility of an entire context free of contradiction, and must strive to that end, seeking for that subject of exegesis which combines all the strains of the individual prophecies.

**4. The Analogy of Scripture.** The next method of differentiation is that through the analogy of Scripture. For example, even if one chose to ignore history and the testimony of Christ, he dare not identify the Elijah of the future whom Malachi prophesied with the real Elijah, but must rather understand thereby a prophet in the spirit and power of Elijah. One dare attribute to a prophet such an extreme interpretation (that the historical Elijah would come again upon the scene), only when there are not the most secure analogies for the pictorial interpretation.<sup>224</sup> Once again is it imperative that we consider what Hengstenberg has elsewhere stated concerning the role Scripture has to play in its own interpretation.

The relation of the two Testaments to each other, and of the individual portions within the Testaments to each other, can be readily seen to be of the utmost importance for interpretation. Possible positions concerning this relation range all the way from identity to contradiction. Hengstenberg denies the latter quite curtly in his discussion of the absence of the doctrine of immortality in the Psalter: "sie haben nicht etwa Irriges ausgesagt, sondern sie haben

---

222. "Der Brief Jakobi", *EKZ*, XV, #95, 26. November, 1834; 754.

223. *Christologie*, II, 277.

224. *Ibid.*, III, 2; 207.

nur die ganze Wahrheit nicht gewußt . . . Nur der Irrthum aber schließt die göttliche Eingebung, nicht die Mangelhaftigkeit und Unvollkommenheit der Erkenntniss".<sup>225</sup>

Our discussion of Hengstenberg's concept of accomodation shows one side of his emphasis on development in Scripture; in this context one can see another side, as he compares his view of the development process with that of the rationalists. The difference is just that, while he can combine imperfection with absence from error, "daß sie in Gesetz und Propheten neben richtigen Ideen viele unrichtige und beschränkte Vorstellungen annehmen zu müssen glauben". The testimony of the Lord, as well as that of the Church throughout the centuries, is on his side, for the OT could never have taken its place in the Church as the codex of divine revelation and "für die ganze Gemeinde bestimmt" if it had first been necessary "durch theologische Operationen erst die Spreu von dem Waizen zu sondern".<sup>226</sup> If one may paraphrase, the Scripture is for the whole Church (is to too much to add, for the *needs* of the whole Church?), and must therefore have a meaning accessible to all; consequently, the concept of development which best allows for this is the proper and true one. Rationalism's does not; his own does.

**(a. "Ergänzung").** But the concept of development is, after all, only an aid for the better understanding of the relation different parts of Scripture have to one another. What must next be asked is, how can the different sections or passages help in the understanding and interpretation of each other? Probably the most basic way is through completing and supplementing one another. Isaiah 53 is one of the very few passages, according to Hengstenberg, which does not need such an "Ergänzung"; one may see the all-embracing application he makes of the method. He finds the chapter "so eigentlich dogmatisch und abweichend von der gewöhnlichen der Ergänzung bedürftigen gelegentlichen Behandlung, daß die Kirche an dieser einen Darstellung . . . völlig genug hat".<sup>227</sup> But in order for the Church to have "völlig genug" (one assumes, enough for its

---

225. *Psalmen*, IV, 2; 320, 322.

226. *Geschichte des Reiches Gottes im Alten Bund*, I, 22.

227. *Christologie*, II, 363.

needs), it is ordinarily necessary for the reciprocal supplementing process to take place, as in the case of the Messianic prophecies, which should be regarded as "Fragmente . . . die sich gegenseitig ergänzen, indem gewöhnlich sich nur einige Seiten des Gegenstandes dem geistigen Auge des Pr. darbieten".<sup>228</sup> This is possible because of the "kettenartigen Ineinandergreifen der Prophetie", which is a "nothwendige Folge der göttlichen Mission".<sup>229</sup> It is because the individual prophecies were occasioned by circumstances of the time that they bear a one-sided character; it is only through their "Zusammenreihung" that they present the perfect picture of their subject.<sup>230</sup> Only when one forgets this, does it become possible for him to imagine contradictions in prophecy; he assumes falsely that each Messianic prophecy must present the entire Messianic picture, "während in der That die Messianische Verkündungen durchaus einseitigen, gelegentlichen Character tragen, wie da ja überhaupt die vorwiegende Weise der vorwiegende Weise der Schrift ist".<sup>231</sup> But "Ergänzung" is not limited to OT prophecy. It can be applied to the NT where the circumstances are the same, namely in the case of the "kettenartige Zusammenhang der späteren Schriften des N. T. mit dem früheren, wie man ihn schon nach dem Vorbilde des A. T. erwarten muß".<sup>232</sup> Indeed, even on this level, can the OT help in pointing the way to interpretation of the NT; in reference to the Revelation, it is affirmed, "einem prophetischen Buche wie das unsrige ist es von vorn herein das Wahrscheinliche, daß an sich an den prophetischen Gebrauch des Bildes anschließen wird".<sup>233</sup>

One more step is possible, in that one portion of Scripture may explicitly interpret another, and thereby show the method of interpretation which must be here applied: "für die allegorische

---

228. *Ibid.*, 30.

229. *Ibid.*, 571.

230. *Ibid.*, 352.

231. *Ibid.*, 362.

232. *Offenbarung*, I, 103.

233. *Ibid.*, II, 2; 164.

Erklärung [of the Song of Songs] spricht, daß die Stellen der Propheten, welche auf das Hohelied anspielenn, überall die allegorische Auslegung desselben zu Grundlage haben".<sup>234</sup>

**(b. Development).** The relation of Scripture to Scripture can be more than simply the relation of one passage to another. There is order, unity and development in the Bible. It is possible, from the unity or development which have been concluded from a group of passages, to make inferences concerning another passage by reasoning from the place it must have in the scheme. In his discussion of the interpretation of Micah 5:1, Hengstenberg points out that the interpretation which takes it as indicating the place of birth of the Messiah deserves first choice because it even fills a "Lücke in der Messianische Weissagung, welche sich nach der allgemeinen Analogie nicht erwarten lässt. Sollte das Geschlecht, von dem Christus abstammen, die Zeit, zu der er erscheinen, die Landschaft, die sich vorzugsweise seiner Segnungen erfreuen sollte, sollte noch so vieles andere ihn Betreffende genau bestimmt seyn, der Ort seiner Geburt aber nicht?"<sup>235</sup>

One is not always in need of the "allgemeinen Analogie", however; reasoning from effect to cause is also possible, when one holds to a theory of orderly, systematic development in the Scripture. It is unthinkable, "daß eine Lehre, die später in der Offenbarung so bedeutungsvoll hervortritt, dort nicht schon wenigstens dem Kaime nach vorhanden seyn sollte".<sup>236</sup> To such reasoning also belongs consideration of the role which each sort of revelation has to play in the whole plan. In the consideration of the Shiloh prophecy, the whole argument hangs from the purposes of poetry and prophecy respectively: "Bessitigt man aus unsere Stelle den persönliche Erlöser, so weiß man gar nicht, die Grundweissagung eines solchen suchen soll. Man ist dann zunächst auf die Davidischen Messianischen Psalmen hingewiesen, Ps. 2 u. 110. Es heißt aber das ganze Verhältniss der Psalmpoesie zur Prophetie verrücken, welcher letzteren es allein angehört, absolut neue

---

234. *Hohelied*, 252.

235. *Christologie*, I, 573.

236. *Ibid.*, 14.

Wahrheiten in das Bewußtseyn der Gemeinde einzuführen, wenn man in diesen Psalmen der Ursprung der persönlich Messianischen Erwartung suchen will".<sup>237</sup>

Not only prophecy and poetry, but also the books of Moses have special significance in this regard; they are no less than "grundlegend", and everything which later unfolds is to found in them in kernel. Indeed, the more definitive the significance of a concept in a later book, the more certain it is to be present in the Pentateuch.<sup>238</sup> Not to be forgotten is the importance of the "Zusammenhang des Vorbildes und das Gegenbildes", where the meaning of the latter must be the meaning of the former. For example, "ist Christus das wahre Passalamm, insofern er für uns geopfert wurde, so muß auch des vorbildliche Passalamm ein Opfer, und zwar ein Versöhnopfer gewesen sein".<sup>239</sup>

But what is specifically the scheme of development in Scripture that Hengstenberg finds? It has already been noted that the Pentateuch enjoys a very special position in the OT, as a general foundation for all that succeeds it. More particularly, however, we find its being described (under the word *law*) as having its very "Wesen und Bedeutung" as the basis of the prophets.<sup>240</sup> Under his historical method is mentioned the distinction between song and prophecy, of the first being dependent upon the mood of the people, while the second serves as a corrective to it.<sup>241</sup>

From this it would appear that song is basic to prophecy. But from whence does the mood of the people of God arise? Certainly prophecy is not intended as a corrective for the *proper* mood of the Church, but only against a sinful mood. Prophecy is basic to song, as God's revelation is basic to the answer his people make to it. This is illustrated by the discussion of the doctrine of eternal life in the Psalter, where it is stated that the Psalms reproduce what lay "in

---

237. *Ibid.*, 78.

238. *Ibid.*, 76.

239. *Leidensgeschichte*, 28; cf. *Geschichte des Reiches Gottes im Alten Bund*, II, 1; 131.

240. "Kritische Übersicht der wichtigsten neueren Leistungen auf dem Gebiete der exegetischen Literatur", *EKZ*, XXXII, #42, 27. Mai, 1843; 330.

241. *Psalmen*, III, 475.

dem Bewußtseyn der ganzen Gemeinde . . . Das aber war bei der Lehre vom ewigen Leben noch nicht der Fall. Es dauerte ziemlich lange bis der Sauerteig der prophetischen Verkündung die ganze Masse durchdrang".<sup>242</sup> One might say that even though song at times did not appear to be based upon prophecy or proclamation, it was potentially so. We have seen it argued that it is impossible that anything taught in the Psalter be absolutely new; on the other hand, it is equally as misleading to regard a passage in a prophet as "bloß eine poetische Ausmalung des Gedankens".<sup>243</sup> Apparently everything in a prophecy must be of a teaching or proclaiming nature, just as everything in a Psalm must be in the nature of a heart response to a truth already elsewhere proclaimed.

It has been seen how law is basic to the prophets, and the prophets basic to song. Of course they all, as making up the OT, must be basic to the NT. As illustration, "so oft Jesus von seinem vormenschlichen oder vorweltlichen Seyn bei Gott redet, setzt er das Vorhandenseyn der Doctrin von dem Engel des Herrn . . . aus".<sup>244</sup>

Within the NT itself is also a similar scheme. The teaching of Jesus served as "die Grundlage der Ausführung des Apostels" and therefore provides "den Maßstab für ihre Auslegung". This is carried through in this instance to prove that Paul could not have spoken of a "leibhaftigen Antichrist", because Jesus had not spoken of such a one.<sup>245</sup> It is probably not going too far to infer that in every case it is true that "die Grundlage" gives "den Maßstab für die Auslegung" for the dependent sort of writing. This is certainly the case for the OT as the foundation for understanding the NT, but there is also a sense in which it functions reversed. This is the case when the fulfillment of prophecy can cast light on the prophecy itself, either in showing it to be only one side of the subject,<sup>246</sup> or in exposing apparent contradictions.<sup>247</sup>

---

242. *Psalmen*, IV, 2; 320.

243. *Christologie*, II, 138.

244. *Christologie*, III, 2; 68.

245. "Der Antichrist", *EKZ*, LXXVI, #19, 8. März, 1865; 221.

246. *Christologie*, II, 352.

247. *Ibid.*, 363; "ein Schein des Widerspruches . . . würde doch jetzt durch die Erfüllung



In closing it is worth noting that Hengstenberg does not always seem to have been too certain how far to let the development scheme go. His biographer Bachmann has pointed out that his opposition to rationalism led him to minimize any thought of progressive revelation, and to cause him to affirm that the entire content of revelation, at least in some form, was already given in the OT.<sup>248</sup> Even within the Pentateuch, he insists that one cannot say that Messianic expectations would be too early: "Will man . . . Gott Weisheit lehren? Die Weissagung in solcher Weise an die Geschichte binden, heißt sie vernichten".<sup>249</sup>

But in a discussion of the protoevangelium, he argues against the Messianic interpretation on the grounds that even in the promises to the patriarchs the person of the Messiah does not appear, and "daß durch diese Erkl. der offen vorliegende Stufengang der Mess. Verkündung in der Genesis zerstört wird"; the protoevangelium therefore speaks only of the victory of the kingdom of light over the kingdom of darkness, and not of the person of the Deliverer, "aber mehr dürfen wir auch in jenen Anfängen des Menschengeschlechtes nicht erwarten. Ein stufenweises Fortschreiten ist in dem Reiche der Gnade sowohl wie in dem Reiche der Natur bemerklich".<sup>250</sup> One might say in reply to this apparent contradiction in his thought that it is one thing to deny detailed prophecy at an early date (even though that detail be as important as that deliverance be personal), but quite another to deny all prophecy of the subject or topic. But to this writer the problem is not so easy to solve; indeed, it seems to him that Hengstenberg did not attempt its resolution. One might summarize his attitude in saying that for him God was absolutely sovereign, in his revelation in history, and could reveal anything at any time; on the other hand, He has as a matter of fact given his revelation in very orderly manner, regarding as he does the progressively increasing understanding of men. But how can there be any thought of conflict between God and *his*

---

längst beseitigt seyn".

248. *Bachmann*, II, 412-414.

249. *Christologie*, I, 80.

250. *Ibid.*, 21.

history? History is, after all, also the history of revelation; it makes no sense to protest against revelation's being bound to the history of itself. It is regrettable that this point is not better developed by Hengstenberg himself; as it stands, one cannot be sure whether he has simply missed his point.

**5. The Analogy of Faith.** It is plain that there are cases where the fulfillment is still to come, and in such cases the analogy of faith is indispensable. On the basis that the Church has such things behind it, it is possible to reject the false literal understanding of the prophets, which would lead to the teaching of future prerogatives of the Jewish people, of the future reconstruction of the temple, and the reestablishment of the Levitical priesthood.<sup>251</sup> It is not plain to this writer what the difference between the two analogies is, particularly when it is recalled that Hengstenberg would surely insist that the content of faith is wholly dependent upon the Scriptures. Perhaps using the analogy of Scripture is equivalent to analyzing a passage in relation to its place in the development within Scripture (the method of Biblical theology), and using the analogy of faith consists more in interpreting a passage in the light of a more systematic foundation of Scriptural truth.

Finally, one must admit that just as the prophets were by no means always capable of differentiating between essential and pictorial, neither are we, particularly in the case of those prophecies that are still unfulfilled. It has been the case that much that appeared in the prophecy to be only pictorial, has been demonstrated by history to be essential, and vice versa; for this reason must we also in many cases reserve our decision until history shows it to us.<sup>252</sup> In speaking of the 110th Psalm, Hengstenberg states that David can not have entirely misunderstood the nature of the Messianic task, even though Messiah is here portrayed as victor over his enemies. Because Messiah is also pictured here as performing the functions of a priest, he can be no ordinary warrior. For David more exact details would be necessary; "so genügte zunächst das Dass; das Wie konnte der Geschichte

---

251. *Christologie*, III, 2; 209.

252. *Ibid.*, 210-211.

überlassen werden".<sup>253</sup> It is also an important point to Hengstenberg that history in one sense must be the standard for the nature of prophecy generally. Against the view that the prophecy of Daniel concludes on the pessimistic note, and that the interpretation that produces this result cannot be correct, he argues that what is not absurd in history cannot be in prophecy.<sup>254</sup> What God has given to his faithful people in the midst of disaster can certainly serve as the norm for what he can promise them for the future.

One must recognize that the rationalistic interpreters ridicule this comparison of fulfillment with prophecy. They thereby take the standpoint of those who lived before the fulfillment, and make out of the continuing darkness of the prophecy, which they have themselves insisted upon, an argument against its divinity.<sup>255</sup> There are also those who because of their ungodly viewpoint find it impossible to compare fulfillment with prophecy without bias, and who therefore deny its meaning.<sup>256</sup> In short, one must recognize that God does not compel men to faith. In prophecy is enough clarity so that those whose hearts have been prepared for its truth, so important for their souls, may recognize that truth; on the other hand it contains so much darkness, that those who are opposed to the truth are not compelled to see it therein.<sup>257</sup> Even here, where so many ways can be seen for help in most crucial phase of interpretation, in the final analysis success or failure depends upon the attitude of the heart, whether or not it is opposed to the truth, whether or not it seeks in Scripture what for it is essential and important for it,<sup>258</sup> that edification that proper interpretation always finds, and what is therefore the test of interpretation.

---

253. *Psalmen*, IV, 1; 227.

254. *Christologie*, III, 1; 135.

255. *Ibid.*, II, 2; 213.

256. *Ibid.*, 6.

257. *Ibid.*, 214.

258. *Ibid.*, "*den wesentlich and für sie wichtigen Inhalt derselben*" (italics mine).

## V. Conclusion and Evaluation.

We have indicated at the beginning of this study that one cannot regard Hengstenberg's theory of interpretation as only of historical interest, that there is still a very widespread use of his exegetical works. It is for this reason that it is more imperative for him than for the majority of his contemporaries that even today some word of criticism be given, not only as to his place in the history of theology and exegesis, but also as to the accuracy of his interpretation as seen from a "modern" viewpoint. It is furthermore almost inevitable that we criticize not only his own theories, but also the attempts of others to evaluate him. Let us consider once more the opinions of Hirsch.<sup>259</sup> While his primary criticism is directed against the disservice he feels Hengstenberg did the Church by making access to it for liberal elements impossible (130), for our purpose his most significant criticism concerns the fact that his exegesis was not without its presuppositions, which for truly scientific study cannot be permitted (125). His entire interpretation can be accepted only by one who has already, on the basis of other factors, accepted his conclusions, and has succeeded in suppressing his reason (129). Hirsch gives the impression that Hengstenberg has added the insult of a scientific cloaking of his opinions to the injury of the opinions themselves.

It is somewhat surprising to discover in the present day a champion of "presupposition-free science." As long ago as 1931 Heinrich Scholz could recognize that while "wir fordern also nicht ein voraussetzungslosen Denken für die Gewinnung einer Folge von Sätzen, die den Charakter einer Wissenschaft tragen soll", but what must be insisted upon is "die Unabhängigkeit von jenem unzulässigen Denkvoraussetzungen, die wir da, wo sie uns begegnen, als Vorurteile zu bezeichnen pflegen".<sup>260</sup> In the discussion of much the same problem by H. E. Weber, concerning the scientific historical method, we find the whole question so summarized: "Die Frage

---

259. Emanuel Hirsch, *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1954), Band V, pp. 118-130.

260. Heinrich Scholz, "Wie ist eine Theologie als Wissenschaft möglich?", *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 1931; 21.

kann nur die sein, welche Voraussetzungen berechtigt sind".<sup>261</sup> It is apparent that one must more and more recognize that it is naive to speak of a science *entirely* without presuppositions, that indeed science is not possible without axioms, and that it can only lead to confusion when it is asserted that this is not the case.

It is hardly within the province of this paper to attempt a general discussion of the principles that should serve as basis for the selection of first principles ("presuppositions"). Our question must be, rather, are the principles selected by Hengstenberg to be permitted? Not of course, to be permitted or not to be permitted on the basis of whether or not they unduly influence the conclusions arising from them--certainly conclusions are based on axioms-- but rather simply whether or not his particular principles are permissible.

But first, just what are those principles in question, his axioms? Certainly those to which Hirsch refers, as removing his work from the realm of "scientific" endeavor, concern his attitude toward the Bible. It will also be remembered that such attitudes were precisely what Hengstenberg himself had in mind in his own discussion of presuppositions; there he concluded that an attitude to the Bible not arising out of faith is much more dogmatic than his own. Indeed, the opponents of the "believing" position, he feels, are not at all "scientific" or "critical", but rather proceed to their interpretation of Scripture with arbitrary notions of what is and what is not possible; only a "believing" approach can result in the requisite "open" attitude, that can accept in the Bible all that it contains, and can accordingly really understand it.<sup>262</sup>

It seems to this writer that this is just another way of saying that the Bible is not to be interpreted by any "outside" authority, but rather is to be the standard for "science", for example, in the matter of what is and what is not possible. Scripture is to be permitted to speak for itself, and is to be taken at face value; it is not only the standard and source of other Christian dogmas, but

---

261. H. E. Weber, *Historisch-kritische Schriftforschung und Bibelglaube, Ein Versuch zur theologischen Wissenschaftslehre*, 1914, 2; 185.

262. *Supra*, 37ff.

also of the dogma concerning itself. When all this has been said, however, it must at the same time be remembered that Hengstenberg had no intention of rejecting the grammatical-historical method (the "scientific" approach to the Bible!), but was concerned only that it be properly exercised.<sup>263</sup> We recall how insistent he was that the "believing" exegete be acquainted with all the philological and archaeological tools necessary for accurate interpretation.<sup>264</sup> This of course involves some sort of external standard being applied to the Bible; indeed, one might say that the very use of a Bible atlas already in some sense is a departure from the "let the Scripture speak for itself" principle. Is there really such a great difference between the use of the "external" atlas and, for example, the postulation of a Deutero-Isaiah? Once one has admitted the value of the grammatical-historical method, dare one arrest its application where its results become unpleasant? Must not the method also be allowed to speak for itself? Is Hengstenberg guilty of inconsistency in interpretation, in that he applies "scientific" principles when they can be used to establish conclusions which he already (for other reasons) accepts, but rejects their use when they would give results contrary to such preconceived "conclusions"?

To some extent it must be admitted that such a charge is not entirely without foundation. One remembers how he admits that many books are worth reading only for the sake of others.<sup>265</sup> His meaning here is not likely not only that certain books must be read only in order that they may be refuted, in order that the faith of simpler "believers" not be destroyed, but also that what they have to say is really irrelevant to the conclusions that "faith" will draw concerning the Bible. To leave the matter there, however, is most certainly an oversimplification. One recalls that Hengstenberg felt (perhaps naively, for the modern thinker) that there was such a thing as "objective" history, a history without a philosophy of history behind it, that if only the philosophical distortions of the obvious historical record could be removed, there could hardly be doubt over

---

263. *Supra*, 32.

264. *Supra*, 38.

265. *Supra*, 27.

its meaning. With this concept guiding his exegesis, it is hardly surprising that he could feel "faith" could be secure in the hands of history and that nothing could be better than a consistent grammatical-*historical* exegesis.<sup>266</sup> It must also be remembered that Hengstenberg could be quite as scathing in his attacks upon the "orthodox" interpreters (in spite of their conclusions which must have been generally acceptable to him) as upon his "rationalist" contemporaries, and for precisely the same reason, that of failing to take seriously the historical nature of the Bible.<sup>267</sup>

Historical exegesis is then for Hengstenberg just another way of affirming that Scripture must speak for itself; Scripture is historical in character, and must be so understood. "Rationalist" philosophies intrude, in that they attempt to superimpose upon the Biblical record their own notions, declaring that these notions are entitled to be the measure of Biblical historicity. It is worth noting that much the same objection that Hengstenberg makes has also been expressed more in the terms of systematic theology, in that it is affirmed that just as the Scripture is the only proper source material for all other Christian doctrines, so is it also the only legitimate source for the doctrine concerning itself: Bibliology must be based on the Bible!

We have already noted in some detail the various individual conclusions that Hengstenberg believes may be drawn *concerning* the Bible *from* the Bible. He considers it possible to infer from NT usage, for example, the Davidic authorship of certain controversial psalms and also the unity of the book of Isaiah.<sup>268</sup> It is, however, more profitable to examine the more general attitude to the Bible that he himself expounds in detail than to attempt to formulate from such isolated statements the general principles which one may feel must lie behind such statements. Let us allow the principle that he himself had at the core of his attitude to the Bible be the object of our investigations. It is hardly surprising that this will be found in the concept of the edifying quality of the Scriptures, as set forth in 2

---

266. *Supra*, 32.

267. *Supra*, 27.

268. *Supra*, 32.

Tim. 3: 14-16. It has been seen that while he rejects later exaggerations of "inspiration" concept, he still finds enough in these verses to support the divine origin and consequent historical trustworthiness of the OT. We have there concluded that the belief in the edifying quality presupposes for him trust in its reliability.<sup>269</sup>

It appears to this writer that here is the heart of the problem of the interpretation of this aspect of Hengstenberg's thought. Is for him the definitive basis for the acceptance of the Bible as historically reliable (that is, accurate in its treatments of *events* as well as of *doctrines*) its testimony to itself, or rather its edifying quality?<sup>270</sup> While the first would be the traditional way of orthodoxy, the second would be something essentially different, perhaps even akin to some contemporary approaches to the problem of maintaining the authority of the Bible for the doctrine of the Church. Is he saying that the Bible is to be accepted because it is useful to the soul, that the needs of the Christian heart have priority over the abstract principles of the grammatical-historical method (that is, does he essentially admit a paradox between the needs of the heart and the needs of science)? Or is he saying that the experience of Christian heart is superior to the proofs of science?

It must once more be emphasized that one is certain to be disappointed if he seeks in Hengstenberg systematic theology, or indeed, any orderly statement of rather abstract problems; when he left philosophy for history, he did so with a vengeance! However, it seems to this writer possible to understand his thought in a fashion which to some degree relates the various elements. At any rate, there is no place in his thinking for paradox, or for any concept of any possible conflict between "historical reality" and the experience of the Christian; indeed, the Christian's experience is superior just in that it is so all-embracing, in that it is so much more complete than that of the natural man.<sup>271</sup> And certainly one dare not forget in this connection the lengthy discussion of the relation of the outer

---

269. *Supra*, 15.

270. Some might say, is the emphasis in 2 Tim. 3: 14-16 primarily upon the God-breathed or the edifying character of Scripture?

271. *Supra*, 15.



and inner Word, where the whole point is that the outer (the Bible) is to interpret the inner, not vice versa.<sup>272</sup> Certainly this must also be the case where the testimony of the two Words concerns the Bible. Any statements that seem to indicate the contrary, for example that only from the inner experience resulting from regeneration can the divine be recognized as such,<sup>273</sup> must be understood in the context of Hengstenberg's version of the hermeneutical circle.<sup>274</sup> Such statements are psychological, descriptive of the manner in which one comes to see, simultaneously with his conversion, the truth of the Word; that is certainly something entirely different from the normative place which the Bible has over even Christian experience. And if this is all true, there can hardly be further question as to the place the edifying quality of the Bible has in its accreditation. Either the recognition of *what* is edifying arises directly from the Bible itself, or from Christian experience (which can never stand alone, but only with the support of the Biblical word). In either case, it is obvious that edification is for Hengstenberg's thought a category for Biblical interpretation, not for determining just what the Bible is. Edification or its lack is not a standard to which revelation must conform in order to be, and be recognized as revelation; rather, revelation (known by other criteria to be such) must be so interpreted as to be edifying (the purpose of revelation). A Luther could define the canon in terms of what he considered the core of the Christian faith (*was Christum treibet*); Hengstenberg feels it his responsibility to so interpret the *given* canon so that it does contain and further that core.

It is, however, disappointing to discover that he himself does not appear to have been so entirely open to the Bible as far as his doctrine of *it* was concerned; his stiff mechanical view of inspiration most certainly was not derived solely from the Bible, at least if one considers it to refer to all Biblical writings.<sup>275</sup> At any rate, even if one

---

272. "Einige Worte über die Nothwendigkeit der Überordnung des äusseren Wortes über das innere, nebst Stellen aus Luther's Schriften, *Bachmann*, I, 334-354.

273. *Supra*, 63.

274. *Supra*, 13.

275. *Supra*, 31.

were prepared to grant the authority of the Bible in the matter of its own understanding, it does not follow necessarily that he has interpreted it correctly in this regard. Much contemporary theology, for example, is quite convinced that one has misunderstood the Scripture when one derives from it a doctrine of the infallible Bible. Indeed, such a concept is regarded as detrimental to the understanding of God's revelation in general. While there are those who still find proclaimed in Scripture a testimony to its own freedom from error, just as Hengstenberg found it, others are convinced that the Christianity of the Bible demands a Scripture just as human as the Word of God in Jesus Christ and therefore containing human finitude and error. It is too far from the theme of this study to attempt anything like a complete analysis of what Scripture has to say concerning itself. It seems however to this writer that to date the "incarnation" concept of revelation is far from proven. Abraham Kuyper's discussion of the Horeb revelation is still to the point. He notes that this is the basic form of revelation, where God himself writes his message, without human mediation, and concludes that "het volstrekt niet Gods onwaardig ware geweest de Schrift mechanisch to stand to brengen"; however, as a matter of fact "dit is niet Gods weg geweest; Hij heeft slechts voor een deel den transcendenten, meest den immanenten weg gevolgd".<sup>276</sup> Further, even the incarnation analogy does not appear to be a telling argument for necessary presence of error in Scripture. As P. K. Jewett has said, "now if God can reveal Himself in a man who never sinned, and yet is truly human, why could He not reveal himself in an infallible book which would yet be human?"<sup>277</sup>

The objections which H. J. Kraus<sup>278</sup> brings against the interpretations of Hengstenberg are not only more detailed, and

---

276. Abraham Kuyper, *Locus de Sacra Scriptura*, 79, as quoted by G. C. Berkouwer in *Het Probleem der Schriftkritiek* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, n. d.), 360.

277. P. K. Jewett, "Emil Brunner's Doctrine of Scripture", in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. J. F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), 230.

278. *Geschichte der historischen-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart* (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1956)

therefore demanding a closer examination, but are indeed closer to the sort of criticism which this writer has to make. The are centered about his ignoring of the true *historical* content of Scripture; the best that Hengstenberg has to offer is a pseudo-historical presentation of the OT "überschaubares Lehrgebäude" (204). This Kraus finds most objectionable in his presentation of the prophets, who are not messengers of God bringing his message to his people at various points in history, but are rather seers, who look only to the prophetic and high-priestly offices of Christ (according to Hengstenberg). The christological theme brings with it an "Ausschaltung jeglicher Distanz", as exemplified in the "zeitraffende Auslegung" which Hengstenberg applies throughout, the interpretation which has the prophets intermingle through their statements concerning the present or near future other predictions concerning the most distant deliverances by God of his people (205). The results are not only allegorical, but in consequence of his denial of all historical study, "highly mythological". He offers the classic example, "daß eine Abwendung von der Realität der Geschichte notwendig eine Mythisierung des Alten Testaments--und des Christus-ereignisses mit sich bringt" (206).

It is of course not so easy to know what Kraus has precisely in mind when he speaks of Hengstenberg's pseudo-historical approach; perhaps all that could be said in support of his interest in historical exegesis would still come under the anathema of "pseudo-history". It is however worth repeating what we have already discovered in his remarks over grammatical-historical exegesis: such exegesis is absolutely necessary in order to gain insight into the thought pattern of a passage, which is in turn necessary to its devotional character. Only when this particular is understood (through the grammatical-historical method) can the general truth behind it be fully utilized and applied.<sup>279</sup>

It is therefore this writer's opinion that Kraus is not fully justified when he accuses Hengstenberg of a rejection of the historical character of Scripture. Just as we saw in our discussion of Francke, an interest in the devotional, personal character of the

---

279. *Supra*, 31.

Bible is by no means opposed to a careful (and scientific) examination of its historical setting and development. Indeed, one could make quite a good case for the position that it is precisely Pietism that has done so much to introduce the great interest in the historical nature of the Bible into modern exegesis. As far as the objection to the christological tendency is concerned, it is very likely that Hengstenberg went too far in this direction. But one must also remember that he himself at least opposed *exclusively* Messianic readings when they were to his mind unjustified.<sup>280</sup>

Kraus's underlying objection is however that such interpretations rob the prophet of his role as messenger to his contemporaries. He does recognize that Hengstenberg is capable of such a view of the prophet because of his belief that much of the prophet's message was received by him while in a state of ecstasy, i. e., passivity as far as the content of his message was concerned, and of its relevance to problems of the day. If one recognizes the existence of this phenomenon in OT prophecy, it is not too difficult to imagine the reason for it, if one is of the opinion that the word which the prophets proclaimed was really one from God. In only such a passive state could the prophet be elevated above concern for contemporary problems, and it is not surprising that there indeed be room in the divine economy of revelation for such an office and for such sorts of revelation.

The very idea of a "zeitraffende" interpretation of course demands that what the prophet has to say indeed spans several periods of time, and is not only concerned with the future. A closer examination of Hengstenberg surely reveals that the word which the prophet brings is at least partly directly and immediately concerned with the contemporary situation of the people of God; it is within the context of contemporary problems and God's answer to them that the prophet refers to similar future problems and God's final judgment and deliverance. And even God's future answer is certainly of interest in the present; if Hengstenberg can show how prophecy is useful to the Church of his own day, he could surely have shown how it was of use at the time of its composition. Not all

---

280. *Supra*, 20.

prophecy is yet fulfilled; indeed one could even say that for him is no prophecy completely fulfilled! Consequently we stand in much the same relation to the words of the seer as did Israel then.

To turn to our own evaluation, we would say that the error that Hengstenberg is the most liable is indeed in his attitude toward history, but not in that he fails to regard it. It is, rather, in that he fails to see its *ultimacy*. Perhaps his concept of "Realweissagung" was a needed one, at least in his day, to bring home the fact that the historical events of Scripture were not there primarily for disinterested scientific examination, but were first of all addressed to the Church and intended to be of value to her. But when he affirms that every act of God is also a prophecy,<sup>281</sup> then something has been said that goes far beyond a useful corrective to over-objective or rationalist exegesis. Let us consider for example the great acts of God that make up the very heart of Christianity, those centered about the life of Jesus Christ upon earth: his birth, his crucifixion, his resurrection, his ascension. Although they are all themselves objects of other factual prophecies, this hardly removes them from Hengstenberg's blanket statement, that they too much bear a prophetic reference to some future work of God. The very crucifixion is not only the culmination of centuries of prophecy and expectation, but must itself look forward to something still yet to come!

His emphasis on the great ideas which go throughout history can surely be useful, as a reminder of the non-arbitrary God that stands behind history, true to his promises and to his character. But if the rationalists limited God to their own concepts of what God is and can do, does not Hengstenberg make much the same mistake? There is certainly present for him the temptation to oversimplify the character and activity of God in order to bring "order" into history. The unspeakable thing that God has done in Jesus Christ, while one might say remaining perfectly in harmony with earlier deliverances of the Lord is the freedom and fullness of his grace, is yet hardly capable of being subsumed under a scheme of development in revelation! Even when one remembers that for Hengstenberg later

---

281. *Supra*, 52.

revelation more narrowly defines earlier, and consequently a later event shows the true intent of one preceding, there is still an uniqueness in revelation, particularly as it encounters us in Jesus Christ, which will not be held by any schematization. To be convinced that Christ is the center of all of God's revelation is not to say that the Son of God is in any sense to be interpreted or understood in the light of the place his revealing has in the entire series of divine revelation. God in Christ is the interpretation of all other revelation, not vice versa; and God in Christ provides the means of understanding all revelation, what comes after his appearing as well as what came before.

Our final criticism is even more fundamental; we do not see that Hengstenberg, at least in principle, approaches his exegetical task with that attitude which is the most basic of all, not only to proper interpretation, but also to Christian living: that of *submission* to the Word of God. One recalls the solution that Luther found for those Biblical books which were opposed to his theological scheme: he simply relegated them to a position of inferior authority for Christian doctrine and life. Hengstenberg however is committed to advance acceptance of all the books that the Church and Synagogue has received as binding. Nevertheless can he mitigate this seeming submissiveness by maintaining that the basis for the Canonical acceptance is identical with his own standard of edification. He does not reject the Song of Songs because it teaches a different attitude to marriage than is his own concept of the Christian ideal; rather he states that the original accreditors of the book must have accepted it because they put upon it a meaning in harmony with piety.

Let us put it another way. The primary objection to the allegorical interpretation, for example, is simply that one must *first* know what one should find in the particular passage before one can find it there; the Scripture does not serve as the source of religion, but as a means of expressing the religion derived beforehand from some other source. It is not too much to say that this is exactly of what Hengstenberg is also guilty. To be sure, he has formulated an exegetical procedure with very many practical applications. Indeed, one can hardly quarrel with his final, most basic standard for its expression, that of the analogy of Scripture (that the principle of interpreting Scripture through Scripture belongs to the stock-in-

trade of all reputable exegetes does not detract from its value). But it appears to this writer that entirely too few exegetical decisions remain by the time this standard has been reached, and too many have already been decided beforehand in the basis of edification. Or, put another way, his concept of edification has not been derived from the whole of Scripture, from the Song of Songs as well as from Paul, but from certain portions that have been superimposed by him upon all others. That is of course the problem involved in the analogy of Scripture: *which* Scripture must have some part to play in the process should be used to explain the remainder? But all Scripture must have some part to play in the process, and if one discovers that the teaching of some part appears to him to be irrevocably opposed to the rest, he should be as honest as Luther and apply his method. In short, the principle of obedience to the Scripture demands not only that the Christian be ready to accept the teaching and help of the Bible to answer his needs and to build him up in the faith, but also that he recognize that it is only from the Bible that he can know what his true needs really are; to know one's needs is also a need! This is probably no more than the logical extension of Hengstenberg's own teaching of the dominance that the outer Word should have over the inner, but this writer cannot admit that he has carried it through in his exegetical practice.

It is well indeed that the Scripture's own testimony to itself be taken as possessing more weight than human philosophies. Not only Hengstenberg's opponents, but much of Christian theology needs to recall the emphasis of Christ's "it is written". Even such an attitude toward the Bible may well be the correct presupposition for the scientific (and edifying!) study of the Bible. But not until defenders of such a position are ready to take that very "it is written" more seriously, refusing at every point to substitute their own piety for the teaching of Scripture, is there likely for such an attitude to have much opportunity to prevail. The choice dare not be between "science" and "piety", but must always be between the "closed" attitude of the unregenerate, and that of those whose minds and hearts have been opened to the understanding of the Scripture by the Holy Spirit. They have been freed from philosophy and bear no allegiance any more to either the faith of "science" nor to that of "piety".

## Bibliography

### I. Primary Sources

#### A. Books

Hengstenberg, Ernst Wilhelm. *Beiträge zur Einleitung ins Alte Testament*, Berlin: 1831-1839. (abbr. Einleitung)

\_\_\_\_\_. *Das Buch Hiob*. Leipzig: 1875. (abbr. Hiob)

\_\_\_\_\_. *Christologie des Alten Testamentes und Commentar über die Messianischen Weissagungen*. 2. Ausg. Berlin: 1854-1857. (abbr. Christologie)

\_\_\_\_\_. *Commentar über die Psalmen*. Berlin: 1842-1847. (abbr. Psalmen)

\_\_\_\_\_. *Das Evangelium des heiligen Johannes*. Berlin: 1861-1863 (abbr. Johannesevangelium)

\_\_\_\_\_. *Geschichte des Reiches Gottes im Alten Bund*. Berlin: 1869-1871.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Das Hohelied Salomonis*. Berlin: 1853 (abbr. Hohelied)

\_\_\_\_\_. *Die Juden und die christliche Kirche. s. Die Opfer der heiligen Schrift*.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Die Offenbarung des heiligen Johannes für solche die in der Schrift forschen*. Berlin: 1849-1851. (abbr. Offenbarung).

\_\_\_\_\_. *Die Opfer der heiligen Schrift. Die Juden und die christliche Kirche*. 2. Aufl. Berlin: 1859.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Vorlesungen über die Leidensgeschichte*. Leipzig: 1875. (abbr. Leidensgeschichte)

\_\_\_\_\_. *Die Weissagungen des Propheten Ezechiel erläutert*. Berlin: 1867-1868. (abbr. Ezechiel)

#### B. Articles in the *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung* (abbr. EKZ)

Hengstenberg, Ernst Wilhelm. Die alte Lehre der Evangelischen Kirche and die neue Orthodoxie. (X, 1832; 65-71, 73-80, 177-183, 169-175 [sic! false pagination])



- \_\_\_\_\_. Zur Auslegung der Propheten. (XII, 1833; 182-191).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Der Brief Jacobi. (XV, 1834; 753-765, 769-774, 777-780, 785-787, 793-796).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Über das Buch Hiob. (LVIII, 1856; 183-159, 169-172, 177-192).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Über das Buch Jonas (XIV, 1834; 209-213, 217-228).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Über Daniel's Controversen. (XXXVI, 1845; 89-92, 97-99, 110-117, 129-131, 137-141, 145-150)
- \_\_\_\_\_. Das Evangelium des heiligen Matthäus und die moderne Kritik. (LXXVI, 1865; 337-347, 361-372; LXXVII, 1865; 673-684, 697-711, 721-732).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Über das hohe Lied. (I, 1827; 177-180, 185-189).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Kritische Bemerkungen über die unkritische Bearbeitung des Lebens Jesu von Strauss. (XX, 1837; 292-296).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Kritische Übersicht der wichtigsten neueren Leistungen auf dem Gebiete der exegetischen Literatur. (XXXII, 1843; 329-336; 344-352, 355-360).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Die manethonischen Königsreihe und die heilige Schrift. (LXIV, 1859; 169-174, 177-185).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Über die neueste Behandlung und Auslegung der Apokalypse. (XV, 1834; 697-701, 705-711, 713-717, 721-726).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Dr. Niemann und Dr. Uhlhorn. (LXXVIII, 1866; 489-495, 525-527).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Der Prediger Salomo. (LXII, 1858; 193-199, 209-214, 217-223, 233-240).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Die sieben Gleichnisse vom Reiche Gottes. (LXXIX, 1866; 857-862, 881-887, 905-914, 929-936, 953-956).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Die Söhne Gottes und die Töchter der Menschen. (LXII, 1858; 313-330, 399-400, 407-414, 415-422).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Das (sogen.) tausendjährige Reich (LXVI, 1860; 217-232, 241-258, 265-271).
- \_\_\_\_\_. Zu dem Streite über das letzte Mahl den Herrn. (XXIII, 1838; 777-782, 785-790, 793-795, 801-808,

813-816).

\_\_\_\_\_. Übersicht der neuesten bedeutenderen Leistungen für die exegetische Theologie. (XXXII, 1843; 116-118, 121-126, 129-132, 137-150, 159-160).

\_\_\_\_\_. Vorwort (for the year 1864). (LXXIV, 1864; 1-81)

\_\_\_\_\_. Was ist der Kirche des Herrn in unseren Tagen Noth? (II, 1828; 225-228, 233-237, 241-245, 249-253, 257-261, 265-270, 273-276).

\_\_\_\_\_. Wort oder Geist. (XXXVI, 1845; 193-196, 209-213).

## II. Secondary Sources

Althaus, Paul. *Erfahrungstheologie, from Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Vol. II, Tübingen, 1958.

Bachmann, Johannes. *Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg. Sein Leben und Wirken nach gedruckten und ungedruckten Quellen*. Gütersloh: 1876-1878.

Barth, Karl. *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert. Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte*. Zürich: 1947.

Baur, Ferdinand Christian. *Geschichte der christliche Kirche*, Vol. 3. *Kirchengeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Tübingen: 1862.

Berkouwer, Gerrit Cornelius. *Het Probleem der Schriftkritiek*. Kampen: n. d.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Tr. Henry Beveridge. London: 1949.

Fagerberg, Holsten. *Bekennntnis, Kirche und Amt in der deutschen konfessionellen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Tr. Robert Braun. Uppsala: 1952.

Grant, Robert M. *The Bible in the Church*. New York: 1954.

Greijdanus, S. *Schriftbeginnselen ter Schriftverklaring*. Kampen: 1946.

Hermelink, Heinrich. *Das Christentum in der Menschheitsgeschichte von der Französichen Revolution bis zur Gegenwart*. Vols. I and II. Tübingen: 1951-1953.

Hirsch, Emanuel. *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie*. Vols. II and V. Gütersloh: 1951, 1954.

- Kraeling, Emil G. *The Old Testament since the Reformation*. London: 1965.
- Kraus, Hans-Joachim. *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung der Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*. Neukirchen Kreis Moers: 1956.
- Kriege, Anneliese. *Geschichte der Evangelischen Kirchen-Zeitung unter der Redaktion Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg vom 1. Juli 1827 bis zum 1. Juni 1869*. Bonn: Diss. theol., 1958.
- Scholz, Heinrich. *Wie ist eine Theologie als Wissenschaft möglich?*, from *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 1931.
- Seeberg, Reinhold. *Die Kirche Deutschlands im 19. Jahrhundert. Eine Einführung in die religiösen, theologischen und kirchlichen Fragen der Gegenwart*. 4. Aufl. Leipzig: 1903.
- Wach, Joachim. *Das Verstehen*. Tübingen: 1926-1933.
- Walvoord, John W. (ed.) *Inspiration and Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: 1957.
- Weber, H. E. *Historisch-kritische Schriftforschung und Bibelglaube. Ein Versuch zur theologischen Wissenschaftslehre*. 2. Aufl. Gütersloh: 1914.
- Weber, Otto. *Grundlagen der Dogmatik*. Neukirchen Kreis Moers: 1955.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Typologie, from *Evangelischen Kirchenlexicon, Kirchlich-theologisches Handwörterbuch*. Göttingen, 1959.

## LEBENS LAUF

Als Sohn des Farmers Harvey Davis und seiner Ehefrau Kathryne, geb. Daniel, wurde ich, Daniel Clair Davis, am 25. März 1933 in Washington, Staat Iowa, U. S. A. geboren. Ich kam in Wyman, Iowa im Herbst 1938 zur Grundschule und beendete meine Schulzeit in Washington mit dem "High School Diploma" im Jahre 1950. Mein Fach in Wheaton College zu Wheaton, Illinois war Philosophie; nebenbei arbeitete ich in Vorbereitungsfächern für die Theologie. Die dortige Ausbildung beendete ich im August 1933 mit dem B. A. mit der Zensur "magna cum laude". Im folgende Jahr war ich als Assistent für Neues Testament in dem College tätig, und gleichzeitig setze ich mein Studium als M. A.-Kandidat fort in der Wheaton Graduate School of Theology. Die nächsten zwei Jahre verbrachte ich im Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, wo ich 1956 meinen B. D. bekam. Für meinen M. A. kehrte ich zurück nach Wheaton; meine Arbeit hierfür bestand in Studien über biblische Literatur, meine Dissertation gab ich den Titel, "The New Testament Concept of the Assurance of Salvation". Mein mündliches Examen machte ich in September 1956. Dann verließ ich die Vereinigten Staaten and ging nach Edinburgh, wo ich mich im New College einschrieb. Nach einem Semester entschloß ich mich aber, nach Göttingen zu kommen. Hier hörte ich Vorlesungen bei den Herrn Professoren O. Weber, Jeremias, Dörries, Wolf, Gogarten, Käsemann, Zimmerli, und Trillhaas. Mein besonderer Dank gilt Herrn Professor Otto Weber für seine freundliche Förderung meiner Arbeit. Im Sommer 1956 kehrte ich für zwei Monate nach den U. S. A. zurück, um vor dem für mich zuständigen Presbyterium (Presbytery of Wisconsin, Orthodox Presbyterian Church) mein "licensure examination" abzulegen. Sowohl in dem Vereinigten Staaten als auch in Schottland hatte ich mehrmals die Gelegenheit zu predigen. Für das Jahr 1959/60 erhielt ich ein Stipendium von der Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung in Bonn; dafür bin ich sehr dankbar. Ich beabsichtige, für das Herbst-Semester in Amerika eine Dozentenstelle anzunehmen.

