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RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND INTERPRETATION : A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE*

The interpretation of ancient texts focuses on issues which can be common to several religious traditions.¹ Within the Jewish and Christian expressions of theology over the centuries, the task of relating the contents of earlier documents to different cultures and philosophies of life has been tackled from many angles. In recent years the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Paul Ricoeur has suggested new approaches to fundamental hermeneutical questions.² But how often do the

* Portions of this paper were presented orally in a lecture sponsored by the Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University, South Orange, N.J.

1. See Michael Pye and Robert Morgan (editors), *The Cardinal Meaning : Essays in Comparative Hermeneutics : Buddhism and Christianity* (The Hague : Mouton, 1973); Raimundo Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (New York : Paulist Press, 1980).
2. An introductory survey and application to the Book of Job is given by Robert Polzin, *Biblical Structuralism : Method and Subjectivity in the Study of Ancient Texts* (Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1977). The parables are studied in a Scholars Press (Missoula, Montana) publication called *Semeia* 1 (1974) and 2 (1974). *Semeia* 4 (1975) publishes an essay of Paul Ricoeur on "Biblical Hermeneutics" and a bibliographical survey of his work. Ricoeur's more recent study "Toward a hermeneutic of the idea of revelation" appeared in *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977) p. 1-37. Wide-ranging surveys are made by David Couzens Hoy, *The Critical Circle : Literature, History and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1978) and Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, *Varieties of Interpretation* (Notre Dame : University of Notre Dame Press, 1978). The work of Rudolf Bultmann and his disciples has created a virtual library. See Joseph Runzo, "Relativism and absolutism in Bultmann's demythologizing hermeneutic," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 32 (1979), p. 401-419.

Discussion of the person and teaching of Jesus : Réne Latourelle, *L'accès à Jésus par les Évangiles : Histoire et Herméneutique* (Montreal : Bellarmin, 1977) and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus : an Experiment in Christology* (New York : Seabury Press, 1979). More briefly, Sandra Schneiders, "Faith, hermeneutics and the literal sense of Scripture," *Theological Studies* 39 (1978) pp. 719-736.

scholars following these methods move from the text to the community of faith which produced it ?

We shall study themes relating to a basic aspect of the religious experience behind the Gospel record. A careful use of the critical tools for literary investigation and constant reference to the Jewish background from which the Gospel comes should permit us to place the use of some biblical and Jewish motifs within the life of the early Christian communities and the teaching of Jesus.

Objectivity in a scholarly discipline need not imply antiseptic neutrality, but should include a statement of one's definitions and presuppositions.³ First, in speaking of religious experience, I refer to the presence of God in the consciousness of individual and community. In the Hebrew and Jewish tradition, the basic conviction is that God is living and one. This affirmation that God lives is linked to the belief that he is the source of life, a life which culminates in a call for human beings to enter into intimate communion with him. The fulness of human existence is achieved in an orientation toward the Other, not as an object but as the Person "in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17 : 28).

The presupposition which follows my acceptance of a biblical view of God is that Jesus of Nazareth is a historical person. His reflections on God's Word and Israel's life of faith were conveyed to his contemporaries in oral teachings. Some accepted him as the awaited Messiah and as the Son of God. Within the limit of this paper, we cannot attempt a complete analysis of the Gospel passages studied. My conclusions do not represent the totality of my own understanding of Jesus, which depends on a personal faith and Christian community experience. Although the Gospel texts do not necessarily record the very words of Jesus, I maintain that the episodes studied do represent his teaching and attitude.

These two points concerning God and Jesus are fundamental for a specifically Christian interpretation of the Bible, for the Old and New Testaments as God's Word.

3. See the discussion of Graham N. Stanton, "Presuppositions in New Testament criticism," *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Method* (ed. I. Howard Marshall) (Grand Rapids : Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 60-71.

Central to Isreal's faith is the insight that the plenitude of life is communion with the living God. This life originates in a creative word of God, an invitation to share a new depth of human existence and to a dialogue wherein divine demands and promises evoke a response. The call is mediated through a community which bears the faith that issues from election and Covenant.

1. Life with God implies Covenant and Resurrection (Matt 22 : 23-33 and parallels)

Because the teachers in the Sadducee party resisted the "innovations" of later biblical and non-canonical works, they denied the doctrines of resurrection and angels (see Acts 23:8). In the conflict story recorded in Matt 22 : 23-33; Mark 12 : 18-27 and Luke 20:27-38, the Sadducees quoted the levirate law (Deut 25 : 5-6; see Gen 38 : 8) to present an extreme case (see Tobit 3 : 8). The implication is that the Torah teaches nothing about resurrection, but this precept shows that Moses would have rejected it.

Jesus made the initial comment that their view of the risen life is crude. Resurrection does not bring a simple continuation of *this life* but transposes man and woman to a new order of existence (see 1 Cor 15:35-50; 2 Cor 5:1-4).⁴ He attributed their error to an ignorance of the true meaning of God's Word (which points to the idea of resurrection) and to a failure to appreciate divine omnipotence. Why should the Creator not be able to introduce those whom he has chosen into dimensions of life beyond the present order ?

The biblical proof offered by Jesus is Exodus 3 : 6, chosen not only because the Sadducees held the Torah to be supremely authoritative, but also for profound theological reasons. The priests who constituted the leadership of the Sadducees claimed the prerogative of teaching the Scriptures. Let them savor the richness of the Word which they proclaim to Isreal ! Matthew emphasizes the actuality of God's Word most clearly : "Have you not read what was said *to you* by God . . ." (22 : 31).⁵

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4. Note, however, that Isaiah 65 : 17-23 considers procreation to be part of the "new heaven and new earth." Communion of the just with the angles is taguht in 1 Enoch 15 : 6-7; 104 : 4; 2 Baruch 51 : 10; IQS 11 : 7-8; IQH 3 : 21-23 and is presupposed in Matt 18 : 10; 25 : 31 and Luke 15 : 10.
 5. Mark (12 : 26) and Luke (20 : 37) indicate the liturgical context of the passage by this title. The quotation must not be abstracted from its context.

To understand Jesus' intention in quoting Exodus 3 : 6, we must note that he deliberately placed it within the context of the Sinai revelation. This is "the passage about the bush" (Mark 12 : 26; Luke 20 : 37), not merely a formula about God and the patriarchs.⁶ The phrase "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" in Exodus 3 : 6, 14-15 and 4 : 5 is related to the divine promise of deliverance and salvation. He has heard the plea wherein Isreal recognizes its need (Exod 2 : 23-25) and answers personally, relating his presence and power to the memory of his goodness to the patriarchs.

Mature reflection on Isreal's intimacy with God led later teachers to realize that he would not desert his faithful in the confrontation with death. The earliest references to the concept of resurrection are to a *communal* experience (Isa 51 : 17; Ezek 37 : 1-14; Hosea 6 : 1-3). Only later is it clear that the individual is the beneficiary of new life (Isa 25 : 7-8; 26 : 19; Ps 73 : 24-25; Dan 12 : 1-4; see 2 Macc 7 : 9; 12 : 43-44). When Jesus chose Exodus 3 : 6, it seems to indicate that his teaching of the resurrection on the individual plane was to be placed within the Covenant framework. The Greek philosophical proof that man's spiritual component is immortal has practical significance only within this perspective. The teaching that human beings are created in God's image and likeness implies a potential for intimate union with the living God, whose presence is a challenging moral force. Because this is a gift and call common to all, righteousness or integrity in one's relationship with God expresses itself in the way each treats his fellows.

According to Hebrew tradition the name manifests the person, so the revelation of God's name to Moses expresses both divine ineffability and closeness to his people. "YHWH, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob" (Exod 3 : 15) is present with his own as the guarantee of their life and future.

When a Jew of the Second Temple period alluded to the Scriptures, he evoked the echoes of an entire passage for his audience.

6. Following the psalm at the end of the Hebrew version of Sirs (after 51 : 12) and the "Eighteen Benedictions" of the Jewish Liturgy (anterior to New Testament times in their early form), the early Christian writers associate God with the three patriarchs (Acts 3 : 13; 7 : 32; Heb 11 : 8-16). The link stresses God's saving protection and guidance, and the worshipful obedience of the ancestors of Israel. In Acts 3 : 13 Peter teaches that Jesus' glorification is the consummation of the Covenant to which God called the patriarchs.

Jesus stressed that the resurrection is by the power of God (see Rom 6 : 4; Col 2 : 12) and then cited the text recording God's revelation of the Tetragrammaton. He seems to indicate that all other teaching are implicit in this appreciation of God's person and life. This revelation to Moses is followed later by the gift of Covenant and Torah (in the form of commandments) at the same place. God reveals himself to Moses for the benefit of the entire people (Exod 3 : 7-22). If they come to know him and accept his gift of life in deeds of loving service, the Covenant-situation he established includes a participation in his own unending life. No aspect of the initial gift of human life in the divine image is lost, but all is transformed so that God will become everything to everyone (1 Cor 15 : 28).

2. Life with God is under the Law (Matt 19 : 16-22; Mark 10 : 17-22 Luke 18 : 18-23).

The Hebrew term Torah means instruction and includes the guidance God offers his people in the commandments. As a teacher, Jesus continued the prophetic role within the community. The tendency has been to think of the prophet as a man apart, a critic of the norms and activities of his people. However, one must not consider the prophets of Israel as reformers or revolutionaries with no respect for the past. Theirs may have been a mission to tear down and destroy, but not without the responsibility of building and planting (see Jer 1 : 10). Jesus' teachings also follow this pattern. Continuity with the Torah and wisdom traditions of the Scriptures is clear, for example, from his use of the Decalogue in his ethical teachings. Both he and his contemporaries were concerned with life within a Covenant framework.

The rich young man asks : "Teacher, what good deed must I do in order to have eternal life ?" (Matt 19 : 16). The reply of Jesus testifies to his understanding of Covenant and Torah as fundamental to union with God. "If you would enter life, keep the commandments" (19 : 17). This statement draws on the Book of Leviticus. "You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances, by doing which a man shall live : I am the Lord" (18 : 5).

Scholars are uneasy about this passage of the Gospels. "The way to eternal life in the answer is the way of Jewish morality; there is no call to faith in Jesus nor to any new morality. There is more contrary to the proclamations that Jesus gives elsewhere in the Gospels

than most commentators have noticed; and the presentation must be meant to be pedagogical."⁷

The text obviously preserves the approach Jesus took during his ministry, building on the knowledge and practices of contemporary Judaism. In contrast to the way some scholars have presented Jesus' teaching, it is noteworthy that keeping the commandments as a response in faith to God's presence in the Covenant community leads to life eternal. The Wisdom of Solomon had already expressed this in the call to imitate God's righteousness, "for righteousness is immortal" (1:15). The fact that this has been preserved in the Gospel indicates that a person of good-will who had not heard the Christian message could find life by keeping the commandments.

But the narrative has a second part in which the person is challenged to seek perfection by disposing of his goods and following Jesus. Are there two levels of response, with only an elite following Jesus?⁸ This passage was among those used to distinguish between the commandments and the counsels in the Christian life, but this is not the point that Jesus was making.⁹ The context confirms what may be noted in the text itself. "Keeping the commandments" is the response of those adhering to the Sinai Covenant (see Luke 10:25-28). The two uses of "perfect" in Matthew (5:48; 19:21) relate directly to Jesus, following him into the new situation inaugurated by his total response to the Father's will.

Both prior to and after this pericope (19:14, 23-24), Jesus speaks of "the kingdom of heaven"; however, the disciples' question—"Who then can be saved?" (19:25)—shows that no complete distinction can be made between the kingdom and "eternal life," which Jesus promises to his followers (19:29). In the final analysis, the salvation of the individual cannot be separated from the community's progress into the last stage of God's plan. At the same time, however, the essence of life with God under the Sinai covenant (as understood at the time of Jesus) is the same as in the new age.

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7. J. L. McKenzie, "The Gospel according to Matthew," *Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy) (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), II, p. 97.
 8. G. Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Bornkamm, Barth, Held) (London: SCM, 1967), p. 96f.
 9. By definition, Christians are disciples of Jesus; relating to the Kingdom, all must respond in some way to the "counsels."

Jesus introduces an element of interpretation into his quotation from the Decalogue, according to Matthew (19:16-22). The commandments he cites are understood as manifestations of the general precept concerning love of neighbour.¹⁰

When Jesus focuses attention on "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev 19:18), he follows the school of Hillel. A pagan approached Shammai and Hillel with the request: "Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot." Shammai drove him away, but Hillel said to him: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor (*HaBeR*); that is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary to it: go and learn it" (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a). The golden rule in its negative formulation is found already in Tobit 4:15 and may be traced to Psalm 15:3.

The question "Who is my neighbor?" was discussed before the time of Jesus. In Lev 19:18 the Hebrew term *Rea* is parallel to "sons of the people" and therefore means "fellow countrymen," 19:34 explicitly mentions the *GeR* (stranger, resident alien).¹¹ In the talmudic passage, Hillel is quoted as using *HaBeR* (friend) but an early text attributed to him has the widest sense: "Be disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving one's fellow creatures and drawing them near to the Torah" (Mishnah, Pirquei Aboth 1:12).

The teaching that each human being is created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26f.) may lie behind the teaching in Jesus' parable of separating the sheep from the goats. "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers you do unto me" (Matt 25:40). Rather than turn to a non-legislative text in the Torah to overcome possible limitations in the interpretation of Lev 19:18, Luke records Jesus' use of the parable about the good Samaritan to link his instruction on "love of neighbour" with his command to love one's enemies.¹²

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10. See Romans 13:8-10; James 2:8-11 for its entry into the documents of Christian tradition.
 11. The Damascus Document of the Cairo Geniza (portions of which were found at Qumran), CD>6:20f., changes Lev 19:18 to "brother."
 12. About a century after Jesus, Rabbi Akiba pointed to Lev 19:18 as the great commandment. His contemporary Ben Azzai agreed on the importance of neighbourly love, but suggested that "as yourself" is not universal. A person in a despicable state might despise his neighbor. He stated that the greatest text of the Bible is Gen 5:1. "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God." This emphasizes the solidarity of the human race because

At this point it must be noted that for Jesus the basic commandment is two-fold (Matt 22 : 34-40; Mark 12 : 28-34; Luke 10 : 25-28). Did anyone link Deut 6 : 5 (part of the daily prayer "Hear, O Israel") and Lev 19 : 18 before Jesus? Luke records that Jesus turned the lawyer's question back to him and receives the answer which he himself offers in the other two Gospels. Rather than an independent tradition, this is probably an editorial technique to prepare for the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Mark includes an elaboration not recorded elsewhere. The scribe comments on Jesus' answer, saying that love of God and neighbour "is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (12 : 32). This comparison recalls the prophetic insight that obedience is better than sacrifices (1 Sam 15 : 22; Hosea 6 : 6; Micah 6 : 6-8; see Prov 21 : 3 and 1QS 9 : 5). According to Matthew Jesus makes the same point in Hosea's words : "I desire mercy not sacrifice (9 : 13; 12 : 7).

Although the language is strong in its Semitic contrast (rather than the comparative), neither the prophets nor Jesus is anti-cultic. Worship in liturgical rite and symbol *is* meaningful when integrated into the total life-picture of a community whose members are intent on doing the divine will (see Matt 7 : 21-23). Even apart from the purification of the Temple to prepare it for its function announced by the prophets, Matthew records words showing that Jesus expected the Temple to be hallowed (23 : 16-22), and he never condemns sacrificial worship. As in the prophetic emphasis on mercy, the essential is a community whose members are instruments of reconciliation (5 : 23-24), whereby total dedication to service of God is possible.

3. The Essence of the Christian Response of Life (Matt 15 : 1-20; Mark 7 : 1-23)

Controversy is almost inevitable among groups holding profound convictions about life and society, especially when they have common origins and sacred texts. Within any religious or political party there is not only a tendency to reject the innovator, but also to quarrel

all are created in God's image. The moral claim is independent of how one regards himself and the human situation. Pirkei Abot 3 : 14 indicates that Akiba accepted this teaching. Later, the same concept became the basis for appreciating the unique value of every human life. "For this reason man was created one, to instruct us that whoever destroys one life, it is as if he destroyed the world" (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4 : 5).

among those closest to each other as they try to formulate positions. Such bickering among Jewish groups began long before the time of Jesus, as Josephus and the Qumran documents indicate.

The conflict story where Jesus focuses again on the order among Jewish practices concerns the washing of hands (Matt 15 : 1-20; Mark 7 : 1-23; see Luke 11 : 37-41).¹³ It is noteworthy that Jesus did not object to ceremonial ritual and symbols in themselves (see Luke 7 : 36-50; John 13 : 1-20) but when his disciples were accused of non-observance, he pointed to inconsistencies in the opponents' actions or attitudes. The counter-charge of Jesus is that these Pharisees twist a divine commandment by human connivance. "So, for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God" (Matt 15 : 5).¹⁴

After this accusation Jesus applies a harsh text of Isaiah to the interrogators. The text of Matthew and Mark follows the Septuagint of Isaiah. The Massoretic text of the Hebrew reads: "And their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote" (Isa 29 : 13). The Greek is rendered as follows: "In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." From the English, one would never realize that, apart from the gloss "as doctrines," the only difference in Hebrew is two small letters (*waw* and *yod*) which are often indistinguishable in the Qumran scrolls (slightly earlier than the written Gospels).¹⁵

Did the early community place the Greek text in the mouth of Jesus? Or could he have known a reading now preserved only in the Septuagint? Many scholars contend that the point is made only in Greek, seeing the text as part of the early community's arsenal of polemical material. It does occur in Colossians 2 : 22 with regard to dietary laws and also in 1 Clement 15 : 2; Justin's Dialogue with Trypho 78 : 11, etc. However, it should be noted that in later times

13. Developed from Lev. 15 : 11; 22 : 1-16.

14. *logon* occurs in Vaticans, Sinaiticus corr. and D., *nomon* in Sinaiticus *prima manu* and other texts; the Koine has *entelen*. G. Barth, *art. cit.*, p. 63 prefers *nomon*, taking *logon* to be an assimilation to Mark 7 : 13.

15. The Hebrew reads *why* and the Greek *matēn* translates *withw thw* occurs in Is 29 : 21; 40 : 23; 41 : 29; 44 : 9; 49 : 4; 59 : 4. The Septuagint uses the root *mat-* in 41 : 29; 44 : 9; 49 : 4; and 59 : 4. *why* is found in Is 5 : 25; 23 : 3; 29 : 11; 30 : 8; 37 : 26; 59 : 15 but is not "mistaken" for *withw* except in 29 : 13. In the final clause of the Qumran Isaiah scroll at 29 : 13, the possessive is dropped from *yr'tm* and *kaph* is added before *mswt*.

the Karaites used this text *in Hebrew* in similar polemic against the rabbinate.¹⁶ The sting is not restricted to the Greek translation.

In Matt 15 : 12–15 the attack on the Pharisees continues. “Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up” (15 : 13). In isolation this might be seen as a negative equivalent of Gamaleil’s statement (Acts 5 : 38–39). The image may be derived from Isaiah (60 : 21), as several Qumran texts are.¹⁷

The image of blind leaders (see Matt 23 : 16–19) occurs in a non-polemical context during the “sermon on the plain” (Luke 6 : 39). Here it is a reversal of the honorary title “leader of the blind” claimed by certain teachers (see Rom 2 : 19).¹⁸

The teaching concerning defilement in Matt 15 : 10–11 and Mark 7 : 15 has been interpreted in Mark’s editorial comment (7 : 19) to mean the abolition of the dietary laws. This goes beyond the limits of the controversy, and Matthew comes back to the point of hand-washing at the end of his version (15 : 20).

The account of Peter’s dream (Acts 10 : 9–16) indicates that the Jerusalem community had not understood that Jesus abolished the dietary laws. The declaration “What God has cleansed you must not call common” (10 : 15) is the basis for Peter’s realization that Gentiles could be admitted to the Christian community. The cleansing is evidently God’s redemptive work through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Remembering that Jesus had eaten with the tax collectors and sinners, Christian leaders concluded that the time had come for new openness.

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16. E. Wiesenberg points to the connection in his review of N. Wieder, *The Judean Scrolls and Karaism* (London : East and West Library, 1962; p. 259–63 discuss Is 29) in *J. of Semitics Studies* 11 (1966), p. 265. In *Jewish Quarterly Review* 59 (1968), p. 42 S. B. Hoenig suggests that the cryptic *w' 'm* in IQS 5 : 5 is an abbreviation that for *wmšwt 'nsym' sr mlndh*. His later suggestion that *waw aleph* be read *mem* is not supported by the photograph of IQS 5. See JQR 63 (1973), p. 267.
 17. See I. Brayley, “Yahweh is the Guardian of his Plantation”, *Biblica* 41 (1960) p. 275–85. The texts are IQS 8 : 5; 11 : 8; CD 1 : 7 (see IQH 6 : 15; 8 : 6, 9, 10). The idea is found in the Gospel of Thomas logion 40; Ignatius of Antioch to Trallians 11 : 1 and Philadelphians 3 : 1.
 18. See S. van Tilborg, *The Jewish leaders in Matthew* (Leiden : Brill, 1972), p. 104–106,

When was it first seen to imply a new attitude toward the dietary laws of the Torah? Paul testifies to Peter's original progressive position in Antioch (Gal 2:12). Dispensation from these precepts is taught in Rom 14:1-4, 14-20; Col 2:22; Titus 1:5; Heb 9:10.

Together with Peter's vision, this may be a case of practical development impelled by the logic that far more serious changes were resulting from Jesus' teaching and work. If the manifestation of God's Kingship removed barriers between Jew and Gentile (Matt 8:11-12) and if the authority of Jesus could be invoked for changes in regard to the law of divorce (Matt 5:31-32; 19:3-9), then the new community could set aside other practices which prepared for the coming of the Kingdom.¹⁹

In criticizing the position of some Pharisees (Matt 15:3-5; Mark 7:9-13), Jesus draws attention to failures in regard to the commandment of honoring one's parents. As word of God and as an expression of neighbourly love, this law is essential to people's life with God. Then Jesus stresses that external activities flow from the inner dimensions of this life.

The complete text of Isaiah 29:13 in both Hebrew and Greek reads:

Because this people draw near with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, while their heart is far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men....

Although the first stich is omitted in the Gospel citation, the teaching of Jesus in Matt 15:10-11, 15-20 seems to be structured in relation to Isaiah's reference to the mouth and the heart. "What comes out of the *mouth* proceeds from the *heart*, and this defiles a man" (15:18).

Some scholars have considered the thirteen forms of defilement from within given by Mark (7:21-22) to be a Hellenistic vice-list,²⁰

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19. One might refer to the Jewish tradition that the Leviathan will be killed and prepared as a banquet for the community in the Messianic age. In Lev. Rabba XIII (to Lev 11:1ff.), Behemoth and Leviathan will slaughter each other to provide a banquet for the righteous, who refrained from eating unclean meat in this life.
 20. C. Carlson, "The things that defile (Mark 7:15) and the Law in Matthew and Mark", *New Testament Studies* 15 (1968), p. 90.

but it can very well develop from texts like Proverbs 6 : 16–19.²¹ Like Mark, Matthew's list (15 : 18–20) begins with the general category "evil thoughts" but then gives six specifications in the order of the negative social commandments of the Decalogue. This reinforces the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (5 : 21–48) that a person's interior attitude must be controlled strictly if one is to keep the commandments.

Thus, what Jesus told the rich young man concerning the response to God's offer of eternal life within the Sinai Covenant remains the basic expression of moral integrity for those invited to follow him into the Kingdom. Of course, each of these commandments is part of the neighbourly love which is linked to love of God above all else.

4. The Favoured Beneficiaries of Life : the Poor, Blind, Maimed

A harsh criticism of one's opponents, even if they seem to deserve a prophetic castigation, is of no profit unless there is a corresponding sign of openness and hope. As in Jesus' use of Exodus (3 : 6), the quotation of Isaiah 29 : 13 must not be taken in isolation from its context.

On that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. (Isa 29 : 18–19).

Along with Isaiah chapters 35 and 61, this passage (29 : 9–24) provides the foundation for understanding Jesus' activity as teacher and healer (see Matt 11 : 2–5; Luke 7 : 18–23).

Sensitivity to God's presence led ancient Israel to demand physical as well as moral perfection of her people (Deut 23 : 2–9), especially those serving in the Temple (Lev 21 : 18–20) or even entering it (2 Sam 5 : 6, 8). Of course, physical afflictions were more difficult to conceal than some moral inadequacies.

After the Qumran community separated from Jerusalem, its theologians developed the doctrine that, in the present age, its members constitute the spiritual Temple of God. The perfection demanded by the Torah applied to them as warriors, the sons of light (1QM 7 : 4f.).

21. This point is made by Wilfried Paschen, *Rein und Unrein : Untersuchung zur biblischen Wortgeschichte* (Munich : Kösel, 1970), p. 187–194.

Exclusion of the blind and lame from the battle-field would be understandable, but the reason is that the holy ones (angels) are in the midst of the army (see 4Q Florilegium 1:4). Moreover, standards of priestly perfection were applied to leaders of the elect in the new age (1QSa 2:3-7; see Lev 21:18f.). Although Isaiah 54:4-6 has provided the eunuch with a place in the new community (see Acts 8:26-39), the Qumran people would exclude him, precisely because of the Temple service (4Q Flor 1:4-6; see Deut 23:2). Adhering always to the Torah over the other biblical writings and emphasizing the laws of purity, these theologians neglected the full implications of the prophetic theme of the new creation (mentioned in 1QS 4:25). Although they used Isaiah 60:21, they did not heed other Isaian themes and failed to consider the healing power of God (see Exod 4:11) in the new age. His presence is creative and healing, and will transform those who have faithfully responded to his will, while acknowledging their poverty and need.

The Gospels tell of Jesus' special association with social outcasts and of his great concern for the poor, infirm and afflicted (Matt 15:30-31; 21:14; Mark 7:31-37; Luke 14:12-24).²² The first lesson is that he came as God's agent to call those who recognized their need of a fuller life, precisely those more or less excluded from society. Secondly, he reintegrated many of these people into the community life of Israel (or the pagan society—see Mark 5:19) after they had been healed. They became personal signs of the fulfilment of the prophetic promises, of the irruption of God's reign upon the world. They proclaim that in the resurrection God's power will not only restore life, but will bring wholeness to each one who has believed and lived according to the Covenant and its demands.

Conclusion

The search for holiness which is found at every part of Israel's Scriptures comes not from the people themselves but from their relationship with God. He keeps demanding a deeper insight into the life and unity which is the manifestation of himself. This must develop the unity of the various aspects of human existence and implies continuity

22. The Qumaran categories of those unfit for service are related to the parable about those invited to the banquet (Luke 14:16-24). See James A. Sanders, "The ethic of election in Luke's great banquet parable", *Essays in Old Testament Ethics* (J. Philip Hyatt, in memoriam), (editors James L. Crenshaw and John T. Willis), (New York: Ktav, 1974), p. 247-271.

between prayer, worship and other activities, between what is directed toward God and how one deals with his or her fellow creatures.

The Gospel of Jesus presented a synthesis wherein this life and unity is expressed in dynamic openness to further marvels of the divine presence. He claimed to have authority to promulgate a teaching which renews creation, restores humanity to pristine oneness, not only in marriage (Matt 19 : 4-6; Mark 10 : 5-9) but throughout life. He manifested power which exemplified the inauguration of the Kingdom of God, but which must be lived first in faith. Faith in the God of Israel works through love (Gal 5 : 6) and should overcome barriers between Jew and Gentile, so that eventually all human beings may share fully in the harmony flowing from the inner life of God. Thus they will become dispensers of the riches of the divine presence and mediate creation's response in praise and thanks giving.²³

3. A theological discussion of some questions relating to this essay is offered by Karl Rahner, "The Old Testament and Christian dogmatic theology," *Theological Investigations* XVI (New York : Seabury, 1979), p. 177-190.