

which belongs to us as creatures made in his image. That can only be reached in the beatific vision; and then the strength of that vision will depend upon the degree of wisdom that we have attained in this world, that is, our understanding, our holiness. A life of prayer is a life to understand God, but just finding things out about God is not necessarily understanding God. If we are concerned in finding out about God in such a way that we receive him into us and let him grow in us, we ourselves changing so as to conform with him, then we are understanding, and wisdom is beginning. If we are busy taking into ourselves things and thoughts and knowledge from around us which are not directed towards God, then these things, by being received into us and our becoming like them, will fence out our understanding of God and our life will not be in him, but only in ourselves, and that life will be dead. Through our really receiving God and giving ourselves to God, we come to understand what he is to us and what we are to him. We recognize what he is; we recognize what we are. We then can pay to him the reverence and love that is due to him alone. If we are doing this we can be said to honour and fear him; and 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'.



THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE AND TRADITION

EDMUND HILL, O.P.

ORIGEN, the great Alexandrian theologian who died in A.D. 253, is a key figure in the Christian tradition of scriptural interpretation. Earlier this year a monumental book appeared on 'the sources and significance of Origen's interpretation of scripture'.¹ The author, Dr R. C. P. Hanson, D.D., is a senior lecturer in theology at Nottingham University. *Allegory and Event* is a sequel to *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition*, which appeared five years ago.

It is a book full of excellent qualities; great erudition, vigorous

¹ *Allegory and Event*, by R. C. P. Hanson. (S.C.M., 35s.)

style, acute judgments. Dr Hanson's over-all estimate of Origen as a 'prosaic rationalist', a theologian who seriously undervalued the significance of the saving event (*heilsgeschichte*) in Christian revelation, is probably to be preferred to the more favourable assessments of his thoughts made by the French Jesuits Frs de Lubac and Daniélou, who after Origen himself are the main targets of Dr Hanson's adverse criticisms.

But it is time to throw off the mask. My purpose in this article is not to praise Dr Hanson, but to bury him under my own criticisms on two points, inspiration and tradition, on which he makes a challenge to Catholic doctrine that cannot be ignored. At the end of his crucial chapter on inspiration he concludes his study of Origen's doctrine with the verdict that 'it is totally unscriptural, totally uncritical, totally unreal' (p. 209).

Now he has just said that Origen's doctrine is 'the starting point of the classical or traditional Christian doctrine of inspiration'; and at the beginning of the chapter he had quoted Zoellig (*Die inspirationslehre des Origenes*, 1902), without disputing him, as saying 'that we can find in Origen's doctrine of verbal inspiration all the elements which compose the modern Roman Catholic theory of inspiration' (p. 188). 'Verbal inspiration', be it noted in passing, has become sloganized into a term of abuse, like 'allegory' and 'fundamentalism'; you only have to label a theory as equivalent to verbal inspiration, and it stands condemned without the necessity of further argument.

Here then is the modern Roman Catholic theory of inspiration, as stated by the Vatican Council:

The Church holds all the books of the old and new testaments to be sacred and canonical, not because being composed by human efforts alone they were subsequently approved by her authority; nor simply because they contain revelation without error; but because being written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost they have God for author, and as such were delivered to the Church (Dz 1787).

They have God for their author, that is God takes full responsibility for them, so that if they contain mistakes or falsehood, it means that God has made the mistakes and has uttered the falsehood. I think Dr Hanson will allow that this 'theory' fairly represents Origen's doctrine. This then is what he scathingly rejects as totally unscriptural, totally uncritical, totally unreal.

Totally unscriptural. What can we do but refer to texts, which if they do nothing else, at least state a *prima facie* case which Dr Hanson should dispose of before delivering himself of so sweeping a judgment? Mark xiv, 27, 29; John v, 45-47, x, 35; I Cor. x, 11; 2 Tim. iii, 16; 2 Peter i, 19; really one might say 'See new testament *passim*'.

Totally uncritical. This is true, but not a fault. The 'theory' of inspiration is prior to biblical criticism. Like the sacred text itself it is part of the theologian's *data*, given in faith, which he has to exercise his critical faculties on in order to understand. It is thoroughly unjust to Origen to suppose 'that he resorted to this doctrine as an expedient to justify his particular oracular treatment of the Bible; and that it was made possible only by the unlimited use of allegory' (pp. 108-9). The doctrine, as Dr Hanson elsewhere acknowledges, was received by Origen in the Church's tradition. True, it was the doctrine of Philo, the *diabolus ex machina* of Christian biblical study. But it was also the doctrine of rabbinic Judaism, from which the Church received it as a legacy undiminished by any teaching or disposition of Christ. It is precisely this doctrine of full inspiration, with its corollary of the inerrancy of scripture, that sets the Christian exegete his peculiar problem. It is quite ridiculous to call it an expedient for solving a problem which it precisely creates.

Nor on the other hand can the doctrine itself be touched by even the most devastating criticism of the solutions offered to the problem it raises. Let us go all the way with Dr Hanson in rejecting many of the inferences Origen drew from his received doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy; they were largely the fruit of his philosophical presuppositions. Let us admit, for the sake of argument, that his allegorizing read neo-Platonic truth into the Bible more readily than it elicited divine truth from it. All we can conclude is that Origen failed to solve the problem set him by the doctrine of inspiration, not that the doctrine set the problem all wrong.

Failure to recognize that Origen's doctrine of inspiration is logically prior to his allegorical method, that it is something he received in faith, vitiates all Dr Hanson's strictures. Thus he accuses Origen of arguing in a circle in his 'proofs of this inspiration; for half the time he is saying that the scriptures are inspired, because they contain divine oracles of a wonderful sort; and

for the other half he is saying that because they are inspired they must contain divine oracles, even though they do not appear to' (p. 189). A neat circle indeed, but it is Dr Hanson's not Origen's. A reference to the *Peri Archon* IV, i, 6, 7, which he makes in the next sentence or two, amply clears Origen of the charge. 'He maintains that . . . the scriptures are inspired, because they are inspiring. . . . Thus he says, that he who reads the prophetic books "finds himself experiencing as he reads the phenomenon of inspiration". But immediately afterwards he adds that we cannot always see the inspiration of the Bible on the surface of the text, though we can be sure *in faith* that it is always there' (my italics). There you have the breach of the circle. Inspiration for Origen is a matter of faith. If therefore he sometimes maintains that the scriptures are inspired because they are inspiring, he is not really trying to *prove* inspiration, he is just suggesting a more or less persuasive, but definitely not demonstrative, apologetic argument in support of the faith. The occasional 'experience' of inspiration is no more than a possible, but by no means necessary, consequence of faith in it. So the first half of Origen's so-called circle is a procedure, apologetic or paraenetic, in support of but clearly not in proof of faith. The second half is an argument *from* faith, and granted the premise of inspiration it is a pretty powerful one—and a traditional one.

Finally, *totally unreal*. This is so imprecise a charge that it is hard to rebut. I suppose it means that the doctrine has absurd consequences, and makes genuine scriptural interpretation impossible. Here is the skeleton of a section which seems to exude Dr Hanson's conviction of the unreality of the doctrine:

Two theological convictions underlie this rigid theory of inerrancy. The first is that the Holy Spirit is ultimately the author of scripture, whatever other names may appear as the authors. . . . The other is that the incarnation of Jesus Christ the Word of God has a parallel in the indwelling of the Word of God in the scriptures. . . . Nothing could assure us more eloquently of Origen's conviction of the divine status and authorship of the Bible than this startling doctrine of the Bible as the extension of the incarnation.

One would expect that with such a doctrine of inspiration as this, Origen would have regarded the prophets and evangelists and other agents of the Holy Spirit speaking in the scriptures as

mere dictaphones. . . . This certainly is the doctrine of Philo. . . .

A few passages of Origen suggest that he too adopted this 'ecstatic' account of the method of the Holy Spirit's inspiring of his agents. . . .

But elsewhere Origen makes it perfectly clear that his considered opinion was that inspiration did not remove or paralyse the prophet's or evangelist's control of his rational faculties (p. 193-5).

This passage illustrates at once the sterling quality of Dr Hanson's academic honesty and the vast extent of his misapprehensions. He assumes that if you ascribe authorship to the Holy Ghost, you thereby render the authorship of the human writers merely nominal. Hence his surprise that Origen did not in fact regard them as mere dictaphones—or even as mere secretaries. But the Catholic doctrine, the formulation of which, we all agree, owes so much to Origen, holds that scripture has a dual real authorship, divine and human. The human authors are indeed the agents or instruments of the divine author, but the divine author uses them precisely as *human* agents, not as animated fountain-pens. In scholastic language, the first cause operates in all secondary causes, whether in an ordinary or, as here, in a special supernatural way, without diminishing their real causality or making it simply fictitious. So the Holy Ghost uses the rational faculties of the sacred writers, their literary abilities, their polish or their roughness, their imagination or their lack of it, their very thought-structures. Thus the human writers, source and compiler, J, E, P and D, Q and proto-Mark and all the rest of them, are as fully author of their writings as Virgil or Homer of theirs, and their writings are open to the same sort of textual, literary, and historical criticism. But in this unique case they are not the only authors; what they say, the Holy Ghost says through them, and so their writings, being also his writings, are further subject to a unique theological criticism, which must control the literary and historical.

Origen indeed, like all patristic theologians almost without exception, was interested in the divine authorship to the practical neglect of the human. Hence a great many of the inadequacies of patristic interpretations, though it should be realized in defence of the Fathers that they had none of our modern aids. It is unfair to judge them, as Dr Hanson tends to do, by modern standards.

Hence too the occasional rigidity of their notion of inerrancy, and the superficiality to our minds of their harmonizations of apparent inconsistencies. Their idea of truth was sometimes, though not always, too narrow to be able to take in such literary forms as fiction, fable, folklore, epic, or such figures of speech as hyperbole. The modern tendency on the other hand is to be interested in the human authorship to the practical exclusion of the divine, and this can be death to any valid theological understanding of scripture.

To conclude then about inspiration; we can grant Dr Hanson that many of the inferences which Origen drew from this doctrine, and which continued to be taken for granted for many a long century, were unscriptural, uncritical, and unreal; for example that the old testament is a sort of cryptic cypher, a dress-rehearsal Dr Hanson calls it, of the new, and that the *majores* of the old testament, patriarchs and prophets, had an explicit knowledge of the revelation which the old testament thus cryptically contained; or that the more baffling passages of scripture are best treated like the riddling utterances of the Delphic oracle. But we must insist, in the name of logic, that these inferences are not to be confused with and in no way prejudice the doctrine itself.

As for tradition, Dr Hanson scarcely touches on it in this book at all. It was the subject of the companion volume, *Origen's Doctrine of Tradition*, which I regret I have not read. But in this work he has one footnote, in which he makes an ironical attack on Fr Daniélou, that would be quite devastating did it not reveal a total misapprehension of the Catholic notion of tradition.

Daniélou, *Origène*, p. 142, notes this tendency in Origen to quote both the reading in his text and a variant reading, and to expound both. He comments: 'He allows a double authority, that of scripture and that of tradition. It is evident that this has remained the Church's position.' If this remark has any meaning, it seems to be that the tradition of the Church can supply acceptable readings which are not those of the original text—surely a very odd suggestion! (p. 176, n. 1).

What the remark actually means is this; both variants cannot indeed be inspired scripture. But in cases of doubt either might be, and even where the interpreter is reasonably certain which is the correct reading, the variant may still be of theological value as witnessing to the Church's tradition, that is to its traditional

belief, not to its traditional *text*. The Church can supply acceptable readings, not in the sense that they have any quality of scriptural inspiration, but in the sense that being contained in versions which the Church receives, they can be interpreted as acceptable statements of the Church's traditional and divinely guaranteed belief.



THE DEACON IN THE PARISH—I¹

JOSEPH HORNEF

IN Easter 1955 at Freiburg-Wallenried, Father Conrad Fischer, parish priest and general secretary of *Catholica Unio*, was suddenly snatched from the fruitful field of his activities by a malignant disease. One year before his death he wrote to me on the question of the revival of the diaconate in the following terms:

I personally am deeply pre-occupied with the question, more deeply, perhaps, even than yourself. In very truth it could be the source of a unique renewal of vitality within the Catholic Church. The presence of one or several deacons living with their families in a parish would bring the Church to the notice of many laymen. People would be compelled to a far greater extent to take 'churchfolk' into account. The concerns of the Church would be more deeply impressed on the minds of lay-people. . . . Through the diaconate something would come to life again in the Church; the layman's sense of responsibility towards his parish.

Do these words amount to no more than a kindly exaggeration, or are they the precious legacy of a wise and far-seeing priest, filled with love for the Church—the sort of message that we may not ignore? The discussion which follows will provide grounds for an unequivocal answer.

Efforts have been made in many different ways to re-vitalize the parish community. The specialized forms of the apostolate

¹ The original of this article was published in *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 1956 Heft 1/2. It is reprinted here by kind permission of the editor of that periodical, and is translated by Joseph Bourke, O.P.