

Excerpts from

Do You Understand What You Are Reading?

The present book is the first of a series of four volumes dealing with the New Testament. The first volume presents a number of principles and guidelines to help ordinary lay Christians to a correct understanding of the text of the New Testament, while the volumes that follow will be concerned with some of the most basic teachings of our Christian Faith. The next three volumes will take up some of the most important highlights in the teaching of Jesus according to the synoptic Gospels, in the teaching of Paul and in the teaching of John. This will cover more than 70% of the text of the New Testament, and assuredly the most important writings of the New Testament.

These excerpts represent only a small portion of the contents of the book and are intended to give a sample of the topics that the book discusses. The excerpts are referred to by the section and chapter in which they are found.

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“The New Testament Is the Quintessence of Christianity”

(Ch. 1. *The Quintessence of the Christian Faith*)

Owing to the multiplicity of ‘Christian’ Churches, denominations, and groups, the modern attitude of tolerance as well as our pluralistic outlook, we often identify ‘Christian’ and ‘Christianity’ with a particular expression of it, it may be the Orthodox or the Catholic Church, or any Protestant denomination or even an odd group with its particularistic emphasis. Not only people without any connection with Christianity make this identification, but also professing believers speak of the Christian Faith as being one and the same with the various concrete Churches in history. For example, ‘Christian’ and ‘Christianity’ are used of the wars of the Western ‘Christians’ against the Arabs to free the ‘Christian holy land’, *sc.* Jerusalem, from their domination, or even of the capture of Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern ‘Christians’ by the Western ‘Christians’, accompanied by all sorts of atrocities. We also speak of the invasion and final subjugation of the various kingdoms of Central and South America by the ‘Christians’ (i.e. the Catholics).

This very careless way of using the NT name *Christian* (Acts 11:27) is both the cause and the result of a lot of confusion. As the Acts passage, above, makes plain, this name was applied to true, genuine, and earnest followers of Jesus. These disciples were fervent believers in Christ and sought to please Him in all they did! With what right, then, do we apply this sacred name – ‘follower of Christ’ – to the bloodthirsty, adventurous crusaders, or the *conquistadores* of Central and South America? What did they have in common with Jesus Christ? Nothing! They misused His name as

pretext for conquest and plunder, spurred on by the misguided Catholic Church of the time.

The Crusaders and Conquistadores are only two flagrant examples of misuse of the names 'Christian' and 'Christianity'. But the misuses of these terms today are legion. Not only the hostile secular press and TV, but also Christian believers themselves use these words in ways that have nothing in common with the idea of following Christ. Thus, today 'Christianity' is any of the various 'Christian' Churches. And, therefore, when a scandal is discovered, it becomes a 'Christian' scandal, since it occurred in the Lutheran or Anglican or Catholic or Baptist or Pentecostal Church. And thus, Christianity, that is, what Christianity really is, is identified with any particular Church that happens to be the target of criticism.

This is not only misleading but also actually perverse. The Christian Apostles left behind them a legacy in written form. This is the NT. The NT is the blueprint of Christianity. Christianity, in the sense of the true essence of Christianity, is the teaching of Jesus and of his Apostles, in other words, the NT. In it, you will not find the spirit of the crusaders or of the conquistadors; you will not find any encouragement to the abuse of children; fornication, adultery, incest and same-sex relations are all condemned. What you find, instead, is a self-giving love, a total dedication to God, purity and holiness. How different the NT is from what many 'Christians' and 'Christian Churches' practice today!

Naturally, a secular person, wanting to distinguish a Western group of people or a community from e.g. Moslems or Hindus, will find it simply expedient to refer to them as 'Christian' and 'Christianity'. There is also a partial justification for it from his perspective, in that this group or Church claims the identification. But Christian believers should be more careful how they use the name 'Christian'.

Only one whose life is in agreement with the teaching of the NT may be properly called 'Christian'. Of course, it will be difficult or quite impossible and at any rate undesirable for us to decide who is a real Christian and who is not. But when we are dealing with cases that flagrantly violate the true spirit of Christianity, we must protect the name, which, in the final analysis, reflects on the holy Faith with which Jesus Christ identifies Himself! We must be bold enough to point out the misuse.

Once again, it must be affirmed that Christianity is what the NT teaches, not what any or all Churches and denominations teach or practice. Our Churches are Christian to the extent to which they adhere to the teachings of the NT.

The NT exhibits a certain variety and this variety may legitimately be reflected in our Churches today. But this variety is concerned with non-essential, peripheral to the faith matters. And it is welcome, since the great variety of people in our Churches have different interests and needs; have different educational levels; different mental capacities and emotional expressions, different tastes, in short, different idiosyncrasies, and all have a right to be satisfied. But this does not mean that these different groups may have different theologies, different ways of salvation, a different standing before God – God is not partial to any, – different standards for Christian ethics. In all these respects the demands of the Gospel are the same upon all, irrespective of Church or denomination.

“The Uniqueness of Christianity” (Ch. 2. *The Uniqueness of Christianity*)

There is a lot of confusion today about how the Christian Faith relates to the Jewish Faith. The Jewish Faith is the religion that lies closest to Christianity. For one, the Christian Faith and the Jewish Faith share together the OT. In fact, both the Jewish faith and the Christian Faith, in a sense, derive from the OT. And both Christianity and the Jewish Faith have received elements from old Judaism: the Jewish faith is based on the Judaism as it was being formed in Jesus’ and Paul’s time, while Christianity has received a certain Jewish coloring through its Jewish authors. For example, the Apostle Paul, apart from an elementary Hellenic education,¹ had received also rabbinic training, hence some of his thinking is colored by Jewish tenets.

At all events, no other religion besides Judaism can be confused with Christianity and that includes Islam, too, which has in common with Christianity the belief in one God, while its sacred book, the Quran, retells many of the OT stories and even some of the Gospel stories in its own slanted way and for its own purposes.

Thus, because of the nearness of Judaism to Christianity, many Christians are confused and think that the Jews – okay, they do not believe in Jesus, but they believe in the same God as we and they *are* still God’s chosen people. Here, those who reason in this way seem to forget what God said when he made his ‘covenant’ with Moses: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession” (Ex 19:5)! Here, there are conditions! The promise of God to take up Israel as his

¹ Cf. M. HENGEL, *The Pre-Christian Paul*, London - Philadelphia: SCM Press 1991, e.g. pp. 29-39.

peculiar people was depended on Israel's obedience and fulfilling of the stipulated obligations that God laid on her. When Israel has broken faith with God and killed His Son, their Messiah, what happens, then?²

The above muddled thinking shows that the matter of the Jewish-Christian relation is very important. Misunderstanding the Biblical teaching has led many well-meaning Christians astray. For example, when they read in the OT that "I shall bless them who bless you" (spoken to Abraham, Gen 12:3; the thought recurring in Isaac's blessing to Jacob at 27:29), they interpret it as God's Word to them to take the side of Israel and support it uncritically, because in this way God will bless them! Apart from the questionable motive behind their "blessing" Israel, the meaning of the Genesis saying is here misinterpreted. We should certainly bless Israel, as we should bless all other nations. But we should not become guilty of discrimination, because God Himself is not partial.³

The creation of the State of Israel was certainly good news. This people, who had suffered so much for so long, being pushed around in the various lands in which they came to live as strangers, needed a home. And in the light of Paul's discussion, for example in Rom 9-11, it appears that God's dealings with Israel are not over yet; there seems to be a future. But while all this is true, it still does not give us the right to see through our fingers the much more serious matter: Israel's persistent unbelief and refusal to accept its Messiah. For Israel to recognize in Jesus Christ its Messiah means that they, too, must join the far greater company of

² It is no use here arguing from texts such as Rom 11:1 and 11:26 and 11:29. These texts must be exegeted within the entire context of Rom 9-11, and when this is done, it will become evident that Paul is speaking of a remnant of Israel, not the entire people.

³ A good, balanced article on this problem is the study by Prof JOHN HUBERS, «Christian Zionism: A Historical Analysis and Critique» 21 pp. (search in Google).

believers in Christ, which over the past two thousand years has been composed almost totally of Gentiles! But until that happens, it is our Christian duty of love and service to pray for Israel's return to the true faith in the Messiah, without compromising the demands of the Gospel. Like the Gentiles, Israel, too, must be saved through the narrow gate of repentance and faith in Christ. There is no other way (cf. Act 4:12: "there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" – spoken to the Jewish leaders).

In the following I want to show some of the great differences between the Christian Faith and the Jewish Faith. These two Faiths are not two sides of the same Faith, nor is Christianity an offshoot of Judaism, as some think. The differences between them are so great that it is not possible to bridge them by adopting a pious attitude toward the Jews and accepting their negative stance to the Gospel. The Gospel is also for them, just as it was for the first Christians, who were Jews.

My discussion will concentrate on a number of NT texts, in which the relation between the Christian Faith and the Jewish Faith is defined. Here, we will see the differences as a good representative of Judaism, the Apostle Paul, saw and described them. And if anyone wishes to go to the Gospels, he will find there, too, the evaluations of Jesus himself, which are not very flattering for the Jews.

“Excursus: Genesis 1 and modern Science” (Ch. 3. *The New Testament Cultural Gap*)

On the other hand, by way of parenthesis, this is the proper place to make a much-needed clarification. It is

natural that the Christian Church (speaking generally) should be concerned about the teachings received by its members. And history is full of false teachings that have been purposely propagated in order to undermine the Christian Faith. When, therefore, a scientist comes up with revolutionary ideas, which turn upside down the known and accepted parameters, it is natural and human that Church leaders should react. Such reactions, however, should never come to the point of condemning people to death, as has sometimes been the case. Such actions are contrary to the teachings of our Lord and his apostles in the NT. The Christian Church can never be the persecutor! Moreover, Christian leaders have often misunderstood the statements of the Bible and tried sometimes to extract from it scientific positions. A notorious example of this were the chronological calculations of Archbishop James Ussher (1581-1656) of Ireland, which led him in 1654 to conclude that the creation of the world took place in 4004 B.C. The amazing and at the same time pathetic thing is that there are still publishers who print these dates on their Bibles!

Throughout the history of Christianity, well meaning but uninformed Christians have taken it upon themselves to pronounce on scientific matters. And their pronouncements have invariably proven wrong. In this way, these Christians, though unintentionally, become the ground for the ridicule with which the Bible is held among unbelievers. Here, I cannot help recalling the words of St Paul in Rom 2:24: "As it is written, it is because of you that the name of God is blasphemed among the nations".

The Bible teaches neither astronomy, nor biology, nor physics, nor any other science. It confronts man with his Creator, Savior, and eschatological Judge! In a simple, poetic way, it says that in the beginning God created the universe. But it does not tell us when, how, or how long it took.

Neither modern astronomy, nor physics have disproved God's existence or creation. They may speak of the age of the universe as being 13,7 billion years old, but should this prove correct, it would not falsify the Biblical statement of creation. It would not detract a whit from our God. It would only make our God still greater in our eyes – so to speak.

That the creation of the world did not take place in six twenty-four hour days is fairly clear in the Bible. The story of creation in Genesis 1 has a broad accuracy with respect to the order of the various things created. The first verse is a summary of the entire creation. Then, verse 2 speaks of the creation of light on the first day. This is, however, not the sun (for the sun is created on the fourth day and there is as yet no sky); it is not a particular source of light. This is light in its most absolute sense. It is light as a category, light that transcends all sources of light. On the second day the sky is created. The third day sees the separation of land from water (sea) and the growth of vegetation.⁴ It is first on the fourth day that the sun and the moon are created.⁵ Day five brings forth fish in the waters as well as birds flying in the sky. Man is the youngest inhabitant of the earth, being created on the sixth day, when all else is in place, for an uninhibited existence.

The interesting thing from the order of creation for our present discussion is that one could not speak of day and night before the sun was created. And yet the account in Genesis speaks of becoming evening and morning also of the

⁴ Here, we might wonder how vegetation, in the absence of the sun, was possible, but we are probably meant to take into consideration the existence of light from the first day. We have an analogous situation in ch. 2:5-6, where there were no shrubs because it had not rained, but "streams came up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground". The question is whether it was not an analogous situation that was responsible for this vegetation, too.

⁵ There is a problem of order here in that the sun is created *after* the earth, which seems to be explained by the geocentric view that Near Eastern people held.

first three ‘days’, when obviously in the absence of the sun, it was impossible to mark an evening and a morning. That the author, in spite of it all, still speaks of evening and morning and counts days, it must be his anthropomorphic way of trying to make sense for ordinary people (accustomed to counting days) in setting breaks between the various acts of creation, i.e. in separating one act of creation from another.

Moreover, in this scheme he bases the week of six days of work with the seventh day of rest – which was of great significance to the Israelites, – as mentioned in Ex 20:11: “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy”.

This way of thinking on the part of the author of Genesis is corroborated by the Biblical awareness that the day of God and the day of man do not have the same length. In Psalm 90:4, presented as a prayer of Moses, we read: “For a thousand years in Thy sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night”. This text is alluded to in 1 Pt 3:8: “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day”. Of course, we should not take the figure “a thousand years” literally. As often in the Bible, such figures are meant to express the idea of many years or a very long or infinite time.⁶ Moreover, the literal under-

⁶ This usage of giving a large figure to express an indefinite number of times, etc. occurs frequently in the Bible, in Hellenic literature, and in other languages. In English, for example, we may say irritably: “I told you one thousand times!” For Biblical occurrences see Dan 7:10: “Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him”, on which see C. C. CARAGOUNIS, “The Interpretation of the Ten Horns of Dan 7” in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 1987, p. 110. Further 1 Enoch 1:9 (quoted by Jude 14): “Because he [the Lord] comes with his myriads [= tens of thousands] of his saints to hold judgment”. See also Gen 31:7; Num 14:22; Job 19:3; Dan 1:20. For Hellenic examples, see e.g. Diogenes Laertios, II, 55.

standing of 1,000 years is disproved by the very text in Ps 90:4: “or like a watch in the night”.

In other words, the author first says that 1,000 years with us are equal to one day with the Lord, and then, finding that this comparison does not sufficiently show the difference between our day and God’s day, he goes on to add “or like a watch in the night”. Now, a “watch in the night” was probably one third of the duration of the night, which was twelve hours long.⁷ This would imply that 1,000 years with us, which is like one day with the Lord, means that God’s day is really 365,000 times longer than our days. And when we compare our 1,000 years with one watch of the night with the Lord, then his day becomes 2,190,000 times longer than our days. Now, these figures are not to be taken literally; they only show the infinite difference between our time and God’s time.

The above is not an attempt to reconcile Genesis with scientific positions today, but an attempt to make sense on the basis of the Biblical way of thinking. There is no problem at all in conceiving of a God who could perform the work of creation not in six days, but in one single day! The God who can say “Let there be light” and there was light is not limited by anything! The question is, whether He chose to do it in that period. The Bible cannot help us further. If science succeeds in discovering unshakeable proof that these ‘days’ were very long periods of time, what about it? There is no theological problem at all. There is a theological problem to those who go beyond the evidence of the Bible and put their own interpretation on the words of Scripture. We need not be afraid or disturbed by what scientists discover. Truth can

⁷ In ancient times the twelve hours of the night were divided variously. A “watch in the night” was the duration of a watchman’s night duty. Among the Hellēnes the night was divided to 3 or 4 watches while in the OT there were probably 3 watches to a night. During NT times the night appears to have been divided into four watches.

never hurt the Word of God, since his “Word is Truth”! (Jn 17:17).

On the other hand, should we kick against what science discovers, and are these discoveries proven correct, then we turn out to be the falsifiers of God’s workings, on account of our blind and obscurantist fanaticism. Time will show if their teachings are correct – just as it has shown many (though not all!) older positions to have been mistaken. Christianity is not concerned with science but with faith: “we walk by faith, not by sight”, says Paul (2 Cor 5:7).

The task of the Christian Church is to confront man with the Word of God, not to quarrel with scientists, whether they are believing or unbelieving. Hopefully, this explanation clarifies what the Christian position ought to be. With this I return to the main concerns of this section.

[“The True World-View of the New Testament”](#) [\(Ch. 3. *The New Testament and the Cultural Gap*\)](#)

We saw above that some people argue that the NT is irrelevant today, because it was written two thousand years ago and in a culture that was very different to Western culture. It is claimed that there is an unbridgeable gulf between the worldview of the NT and our own worldview. Being such a primitive book, evincing a very different spirit to the spirit of our times, it cannot possibly have anything of value to say to us, moderns.

Now, it is true that there is a cultural issue between the atmosphere of the NT and the one we breathe today. How could it have been otherwise – if the NT was to be a genuinely historical book, reflecting the spirit of its own time? Would it not have appeared uncanny if the NT

conveyed its message in the jargon of the twenty-first century? And if by some miraculous intervention it did, how would its original recipients have understood its message? There is, therefore, nothing strange or inappropriate that the NT would be written in the language and expression of the first century. This makes it a genuinely historical book.

But that that gulf is unbridgeable is a gross exaggeration. Those who argue for such a vast gulf separating the NT from our current scientific outlook usually imagine that the world view of the NT is one in which man believed that the universe consisted of three flat discs, heaven, earth and the underworld. In this universe, the disc of the sun revolved around the earth, which was the center of the universe. The stars, above, were inhabited by various spirits, normally evil, which could harm man. Hence astrology was the means by which to avert such bad influences. Men lived in fear and gross superstition, and undertook ritual actions, such as sacrifices, even human sacrifices, to avert the wrath of the gods.

With such a primitive, almost cave-like view of man, it is easy to argue that the NT is an outmoded book, written for primitive people and without any relevance for us moderns, in other words, to disqualify it. However, the above description does not represent the outlook of the NT! Such was the worldview of Egypt and Mesopotamia two thousand years B.C. The worldview current at the time of the NT was the Hellenic worldview, and this was very different from the ancient worldview of the Near East.

Here, one may ask: How did the Hellenic worldview come to be the worldview of the authors of the NT? The answer to this question is simple. Palestine was one of the regions that were incorporated in Alexander's Empire in 322 B.C. Together with the other Near Eastern nations, Palestine came under the suzerainty of Hellenic power, becoming the

object of Alexander's cultural campaign to civilize the barbarians, that is, to bring to the nations conquered the Hellenic civilization and culture. We know that in his campaign Alexander had taken with him not only his well-trained Macedonian army⁸, but also a large retinue of architects, engineers, teachers, educationists, physicians, historians, scientists, philosophers, in short, all kinds of intellectual persons. Everywhere he went, he established Hellenic cities, with theaters, gymnasia, hippodromes, and other Hellenic institutions, that became *centra* for spreading the Hellenic culture. As Jewish scholar, Victor Tcherikover⁹ expresses it, "The most important channel through which Hellenism penetrated into Palestine was furnished by the Greek cities".

During his brief lifetime, Alexander founded some seventy cities, while his successors, especially the Ptolemies in Egypt and even more so the Seleukids in Syria, filled their dominions with new Hellenic cities. This was the greatest campaign the world has ever known that consciously tried to impose a new culture on other nations. The nations affected in this way were the various peoples living all the way from the frontiers of Hellas to Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Egypt.

In Palestine itself many cities were founded or re-founded under the more than 300-year Hellenic rule, and the ten cities (i.e. Dekapolis) of which we read in the Gospels (Mt 4:25; Mk 5:20; 7:31) were Hellenistic cities built or rebuilt for the purpose. The plan was so successful that even Jerusalem with its High Priest at the head took the initiative to apply to the

⁸ Unfortunately, because of the present international confusion, it becomes necessary to explain that the Macedonians were one of the Hellenic tribes, mentioned already in Homēros (800 B.C.), which have no relation to the Slavic population that came to inhabit the area in and around Skopje in the VI-VIII centuries A.D. Thus, Macedonia should not be confused with what might be termed «Skopjeland».

⁹ TCHERIKOVER, V., *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, p. 91

Hellenic king of Syria, Antiochos IV Epiphanes, to grant it the right to make Jerusalem a Hellenic city with theaters, palaestrae, and hippodromes, and to open a register of Jews who had obtained Hellenic citizenship.¹⁰

It was against this background that the Maccabean revolt took place, and it turned not only against the Hellēnes of Syria but also against those Jews who had embraced the Hellenic culture and lived like the Hellēnes. In fact, of the three main groups or sects within Judaism at the time of Jesus, the Sadducees, from among whom the High Priest was chosen, were completely Hellenized: they accepted the lifestyle of the Hellēnes and even preferred to speak Hellenic rather than the language of their own people, Aramaic¹¹.

By the time the NT was being composed, the Jews had lived under Hellenic influence for almost four centuries. Paul himself was citizen of the Hellenistic city, Tarsus, where he had learned to speak Hellenic and received the usual Hellenic education as a young boy. Luke, who is the most voluminous author of the NT, had studied Hellenic medicine. Thus, there is no historical ground for doubting that the worldview of the NT authors, particularly that of Paul and Luke (without denying it to the other authors), who together comprise 50% of the bulk of the NT, was Hellenic.

But what was the Hellenic worldview that the NT authors shared? To deal adequately with this subject would necessitate writing a whole volume and a large one at that. Such a project should address existential, philosophical, ethical, social, and scientific questions. It should seek to elucidate how the Hellēne perceived existence, the cosmos round about him, his own place in the universe, as well as the

¹⁰ These things are related in the First Book of Maccabees 1:11-15 and in the Second Book of Maccabees 4:7-15.

¹¹ On these questions, the interested reader is directed to M. HENGEL, *Judaism and Hellenism*, Vol. I, pp. 58-106.

meaning of this life and what happens after death. Also, how he reacted to natural phenomena as well as psychological. Then, the various philosophers, who were the first scientists and who treated natural phenomena and drew up hypotheses and theories, should parade in the pages of such a book. Finally, the purely empirical scientists of the classical and Hellenistic Age in the many and varied fields of science and technology should conclude such an investigation.

It is obvious that it is not possible to address all these questions within the limits of this section. Here only a brief summary of Hellenic science will be presented without the interesting but very complex reasoning and argumentation behind the various positions adopted and the general background that made those positions possible.¹²

He who thinks that science started two or three centuries ago, or even five centuries ago, in order to include Galileo and Copernicus, is greatly mistaken. In no area of science did the Renaissance and later scientists start from scratch; in each case they built on the findings of Hellenic scientists. For example, the first of the Renaissance scientists, Copernicus, who was proficient in the Hellenic language, was an avid reader of Hellenic literature. This literature, already before Copernicus's birth, was being made available to Europeans through Johannes Gutenberg's discovery of typography.

Astronomer E. M. Antoniadis, Director of the department of Martial research of the British Astronomical Society, in his article on Copernicus in the *Great Hellenic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 14, folio pages 848-849, presents a long list of Copernicus' scientific positions, which are borrowings from Hellenic scientists without acknowledgement. These borrowings include also the discovery for which Copernicus became famous: the heliocentric system. The heliocentric

¹² The interested reader may turn with profit to the book by G.E.R. LLOYD, *Greek Science*, London, 2012, though in certain respects I consider it unsatisfactory.

system, which means that the earth in one year makes a revolution around the sun, was one of the two Hellenic explanations of the movements of heavenly bodies. The other was the geocentric system, that is, that the sun in one year makes a revolution around the earth.

Since it was more in line with very old and sacred traditions and it appeared to explain better the phenomena (that is, as things appeared to the ordinary observer), the geocentric system prevailed over the heliocentric. In fact, some philosophers and scientists were prosecuted for advancing theories contrary to those generally accepted, that is, they explained things contrary to the phenomena. There was, in fact, a special phrase created for this: “saving the phenomena” (σώζειν τὰ φαινόμενα), that is giving an explanation that accounted for how an ordinary observer perceived things.¹³ This is still in use today (even though we are unaware of it), in spite of our scientific outlook. Thus, for example, we still speak of the sun *rising* (or sunrise) or of the sun *setting* (or sunset), rather than specify how much the earth has turned around its axis. When we do that, we are, in fact, “saving the phenomena”!

This fear of prosecution may explain why scientists holding the heliocentric view were careful in propounding it, or why the writings containing heliocentric theories were not more numerous or better preserved than they are. Here and there, there are hints of the heliocentric system, but they remain almost hints. At all events, it appears from those hints that the heliocentric scientists were not few. Thus, to self-complacently dismiss ancient man as holding to the

¹³ This whole problem of the heliocentric view, saving the phenomena, and prosecuting scientists who advanced the heliocentric view, is ably discussed in “Ancient Greek Heliocentric Views Hidden from Prevailing Beliefs”, by I. LIRITSIS and Alexandra COUCOUZELI, *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* 11 (2008), pp. 39-49.

geocentric view without qualification is a misrepresentation of the facts.

In what follows, I shall briefly touch upon some of the positions of Hellenic philosophers and astronomers concerning the universe, the earth, and materia. A few brief words on medicine will complete this section.

“Is the New Testament Still Valid”? (Ch. 4. *Is the New Testament Still Valid?*)

In the previous chapter we saw that it is not possible to declare the NT irrelevant on scientific grounds. It was shown that the two assumptions – namely, that faith in God and science are irreconcilable and that the NT exhibits a primitive and pre-critical understanding of the world – are without foundation. But quite apart from that, it must be underlined that the greatest difference between the world of the NT and our modern world lies in the sphere of technology.

This implies the implementation of scientific progress, such as the harnessing of energy, the practical application of modern scientific discoveries to produce various articles for a more comfortable life, and generally the many modern amenities and electronic gadgets put at the disposal of modern man. Naturally, this was done also in ancient times, to the extent to which it was feasible, as, for example, when Archimēdēs applied his scientific findings in the construction of machines by which he was able for a considerable time to successfully thwart the siege of his native Syracuse by the Romans.

But in this connection, the most important consideration lies elsewhere. In matters of intellect and thought, much of the thinking and insights of ancient times is still important

and valid. For instance, ancient philosophy raised perennial existential and ontological questions, which have never been answered. Not only have these questions not lost their relevance today, but they are ever discussed in relevant investigations. And though the conclusions of the ancient philosophers and even their reasoning cannot always be accepted, they are considered not only serious partners in debate, but more than that, they are looked upon as those who first thought out and formulated these perennial problems.

In this chapter I wish to go a little further and show why the NT has not lost its relevance. The core of NT teaching has nothing to do with scientific discoveries and theories about the formation of the universe, evolution, or the technological applications to modern life. The NT is concerned with the two most perennial problems of all: the problem of Man and the problem of God. These were the problems that formed the core of ancient Hellenic philosophy (e.g. Platōn's) and have ever since been at the center of the discussion. To explain man as the final stage of the evolution of monkeys or in parallel with monkeys or of even lower forms of life, to explain the ordered universe as the result of a chance Big Bang – the explosion of that original concentrated bit of matter, which after 13,7 billion years is still expanding with stars, galaxies, nebulae, quasars, and black holes – does not answer the preeminent questions of “Who is man? Why is he here? Where is he going?” In a sense, then, when ancient man placed the earth at the center of the universe, he was essentially giving expression to an existential truth: Man is at the center of interest and importance.

*What a piece of work is Man!
How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties!
in form and moving, how express and admirable!
in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how
like a god!*¹⁴

Or, to use the Biblical author:

When I consider Thy heavens, the works of Thy fingers

...

*What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?
And the son of man, that Thou visitest him?
For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels,
and hast crowned him with glory and honour*¹⁵

Until now we know of no other beings in other planets, and the Martians exist only in science-fiction movies. According to the NT, God sent his Son only to this earth for the redemption of man. In fact, we are given to understand that the sacrifice of the Son of God is unique, without the possibility of recurrence or repetition for other eventual inhabitants of the celestial sphere. And his sacrifice on earth had cosmic significance, as Col 1:20 makes clear. It did not only affect man's relation to God but also the relation to God of the denizens of heaven. No more sacrifices are to be expected (Heb 9:26-28). Does this not make man a unique creature of God?

The NT recognizes the uniqueness of man and consequently addresses this question. So, has the NT really lost its relevance for today? Only those who have taken the a priori position that man has no need of God, of forgiveness, and of salvation, can consider the message of the NT as irrelevant.

Regretfully, the validity and authority of the NT has been impugned or questioned also by some within the Church. Confronted with the NT call to follow Jesus, and finding his

¹⁴ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act II, scene 2.

¹⁵ Psalm 8:3-5.

demands too exacting, they decide that either the NT teaching is not for our time or that it need not be heeded. I have heard 'Christian' people say "The NT teaches this or that, but this is not in agreement with our practice. So, the NT cannot be right on this point"! "Thus, you nullify the Word of God by your tradition" says Jesus (Mk 7:13; Mt 15:3).

Accordingly, many Christians live in open disregard of the teaching of Jesus and his Apostles. For example, our churches today are full of divorcees, of those who live together without being married, of those who engage in sexual relations before and outside marriage, of those whose business transactions are shady, of those who put Mammon before Christ, etc. etc. All these act as if the NT teaching was of no consequence for their life and behavior. They may have an outward form of religiosity, they may appear as God-fearing to outsiders, but in reality they deny the power of the Christian spirit (2 Tim 3:5).

Now, the engaging question here is: since when has the NT lost its relevance? There was no question of its relevance at the time of its writing. It was given as the Word of God and it was accepted as such: "When you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God" (1 Th 2:13).

Throughout history thousands upon thousands of men and women have accepted the validity of the NT and have staked their lives on it: they submitted to torture and death rather than deny their Lord. The Church has traditionally upheld – at least in word, if not in deed – the validity and authority of the NT for its life and conduct, as it is shown by the great historic Churches, whose foundation goes back to Apostolic times.

So, what is it that has made the NT irrelevant in our time? Is it the 2000-year passage of time, perhaps? But Time in itself does not change anything. It is the developments that take place within that time that make older expressions appear as old-fashioned. What people seem to claim today is that the passage of two thousand years and the changed cultural situation with our modern scientific outlook has gradually made the NT *passé* and irrelevant.

But in the above reasoning there is a logical blunder. If the NT was the Word of God at the time of its writing but it is no longer such today, somewhere along the way its character as the Word of God must have changed, and as a result it has lost its validity. When did this happen? The answer to this question normally is that our modern worldview and our consciousness that we now live in the age of science and humanism makes the NT appear as *passé* and invalid. Now, here is the problem with this thinking. The changed cultural situation cannot change the character of the NT, any more than our opinion of Platōn can change the character and contents of his works. What has changed is *only* our viewpoint! The NT either is and has always been the Word of God or it is not and has never been the Word of God. It cannot be the Word of God at one time and not be it at another time!

If the NT has not changed but what has actually changed is *our* viewpoint, then we must arrive at one of two conclusions: (a) The first Christians, because of their ignorance of our modern scientific and humanistic viewpoint regarded the NT as the Word of God. But they were wrong! We have, finally, found out the truth and now we know that it has never been the Word of God. (b) The second conclusion at which we may arrive must be: The early Christians were right in regarding the NT as the Word of

God. It has always been that. The modern viewpoint, which refuses to accept the NT as the Word of God, is *wrong*!

It must be one of these two conclusions, but not part of both. We cannot eat the cake and have it! Is it the first position that the Christian Church today would like to take? In that case, the Church has lost its *raison d'être* – there is no reason for its continued existence. We had better shut the Church doors and stop deceiving people.

However, if the NT was the Word of God objectively and apart from people's subjective opinions at some time in the past, then it cannot have lost its relevance, because today we have entered the age of satellites and computers and I-phones. If the NT is the Word of God objectively, then our present experience cannot invalidate it, because its being or not being the Word of God is not depended on what we think or feel.

Or, we may look at it this way. If the NT once was the Word of God, but it is no longer that, then something quite dramatic must have taken place at some point in history. This something must have changed the divine character of the NT and made it simply the opinions of some early Christians.

In his book on *Historik*, p. 100, Droysen lays down the scientific demands in offering unshakeable proof of inauthenticity (of a writing or statement): “the full proof of inauthenticity demands that the real origin of the *falsarium*, the time, and the purpose for making the forgery must be demonstrated”.¹⁶

Applying this criterion to the problem at hand, it means that we must ask the question: what, where, and when did something happen that rendered the NT irrelevant for the

¹⁶ J.G. DROYSEN, *Historik, Vorlesungen über Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der Geschichte*, München – Berlin 1965⁵ p. 100: “Zum vollen Beweis der Unechtheit gehört, dass der wirkliche Ursprung des Gefälschten, die Zeit, der Zweck der Fälschung nachgewiesen wird”.

Church of God today? Such an event must be a clearly ascertainable event in History, in precisely the same way as the death of Jesus on the cross, made the Jewish temple and its sacrifices in Jerusalem superfluous (cf. e.g. Heb 9:23-26; 10:12). The fact is that History knows of no such event – an event that changed the character of the NT from being the Word of God to becoming the opinions of men.

There is also this to consider: if the NT ever was the expression of the will of God, God’s will for mankind does not change with the passage of time or with the change of circumstances.

“Historical Exegesis or Interpretation” (Ch. 5. *Principles of Interpretation*)

When we wish to interpret a text – any text – of the NT, we must never begin with the question “What does this text mean for me in my present situation?” If we do that, we may be applying to ourselves a text that was not meant for us or we may give the text an interpretation, which it never had. Proper, historical exegesis or interpretation places the text on the objective, historical plane, asking the question: “What did the author mean by this text?” “What was the meaning he wanted to convey to the original readers of this text?”

When we put the question in this way, we eliminate the likelihood that we interpret the text subjectively, and we make a real effort to interpret the text on its own terms. Whether we shall fully succeed in interpreting the text correctly will depend on other considerations, for example, how well we are equipped linguistically, historically, etc. to understand the message of the text. But in principle, we will have started with the right approach.

Only when we have discovered the original meaning of the text, can we go on to ask whether this text is relevant or irrelevant today and to seek to discover its message and meaning for our time and for ourselves, in particular.¹⁷

Take, for instance, 1 Tim 5:23: “Do not any more drink (only) water, but use a little wine on account of your stomach and your frequent ailments”. An American preacher, who was a committed teetotalist, once was arguing against using this verse to justify drinking wine, by asking the questions: “Is your name Timothy?” “Is it the Apostle Paul who is telling you this?”, “Do you suffer from your stomach?” The first two questions were irrelevant. A person can be in Timothy’s shoes (with stomach problems and ailments) without being called Timothy. Nor is it necessary for the Apostle Paul to write to each one of us the recipe he sent to Timothy.

The right approach is this: as this verse was written to Timothy in a particular historical situation, addressing Timothy’s personal health problem, it is not a general injunction of Scripture, and therefore, cannot be used to justify the drinking of wine in an absolute sense. Nor, on the other hand, can it be used to forbid the drinking of wine, as the preacher in question wished to do. The preacher simply did not understand the principles of sound interpretation. This text has nothing to do with drinking or not drinking

¹⁷ When I say “relevant or irrelevant today”, some readers may be offended, since they believe that the whole Bible is God’s message to the Church. Here, we must remember, for example, that much of the Bible is concerned with the history of Israel, not with *our* history. Of this history, some things can instruct us indirectly. The Apostle Paul expresses this whole problematic well. Using Israel’s behavior as an example to be avoided, he says “these things happened to them by way of an example, and have been written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages has come” (1 Cor 10:11). By the same token, much of that history has no relation to us (e.g. the cultic regulations in Leviticus). It is important for us only as background material in order for us to understand the things that have an abiding message.

wine. There are other texts in the NT that deal with that problem.

A more pertinent text here would be 1 Cor 10:25 f.: “Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without raising any questions on the ground of conscience”. The reason why “conscience” is brought into play here is that the “meat market” – the *macellum*, as the original has it – was the Roman market, where meat of animals sacrificed to idols was sold. Many Christians, therefore, were afraid that by eating such meat, they might become polluted, i.e. participate in idol worship.

Now we no longer have such meat markets in our Western world. Does this not mean, then, that the incident described by this text is inapplicable and that this text has nothing to say to us? The answer is: “Not quite”. Although we no longer have any *macella*, and therefore the question of eating meat offered to idols does not arise for us, out of this incident St Paul derives a very important principle, the principle of love for our Christian brother. “If anyone”, he says, “informs you that this meat has been offered to idols, then, do not eat it for his sake” (vs. 28).

Thus, although it is in itself permissible to eat meat sold in the *macellum* – for to us who believe that there are no other gods but One, and the earth and its fullness are His – Christian love lays an obligation on us to forego our rights and not do anything whereby our brother or sister in Christ is likely to be offended. This leads to the enunciation of a beautiful sentiment: “Whether you eat or drink or do anything else, do all things to the glory of God” (10:31), he says. Now, this rule applies also to us today, although we do not have any *macella* at which to buy our meat.

According to this principle, then, we begin with historical exegesis, and when we have established the meaning of the text in its original context and setting, we go on from there to

inquire whether the text has a bearing for our time, and whether our situation is similar, so that the text applies equally to us today.

“The Importance of Context”
(Ch. 6. *The Importance of Context*)

One of the most basic principles in interpreting a text – any text – is never to take a word, a verse or a longer passage out of its context and interpret it without reference to its surrounding text. This principle is so important and so pervasive in the interpretation of any text or speech, that it is recognized by all writers and public speakers. It is the easiest thing in the world to pick up a meaning-unit (a word, a phrase or a sentence), to take it out of the context in which it was originally written or spoken and to place it in a different context. The entire meaning changes, and the words cited sometimes may receive a diametrically different meaning to the one intended in their original setting.

This problem pops up constantly in the daily and weekly press; it has become the practice of the gossip magazines and of scandal-hungry papers. Politicians and other public persons dread as their worst nightmare that something they have said may be misconstrued or misrepresented in such a way that it may have serious repercussions for their political career.

What has happened in every case of misrepresentation is that someone’s words have been torn away from the context in which they were originally written or uttered, and by being placed in a new context, have been twisted to such an extent as to acquire a different meaning – sometimes so different as

to be the exact opposite of what was originally intended. And no doubt, society has always had an ample supply of people who thrive in twisting the words of others.

Now, because the business of interpreting the New (as well as the Old) Testament is a serious business, aiming at bringing out the truth, that is, the real import of a passage, exegeting or interpreting a text within its context is the only proper way to go about.¹⁸ When a text is interpreted in its context, its meaning will appear natural and reasonable rather than forced and unnatural. This does not mean that we shall necessarily like what is being said. It only means that the author will be represented correctly, whether what he says pleases us or not.

Particularly in the past, but to some extent also at present, Christian people often have approached the question of spiritual sustenance for their daily life in a way that is not recommended. For example, sometime back enterprising Christians produced small boxes for sale, called “promise boxes”, in which were placed small rolls of paper each containing usually just one verse – invariably a promise for blessing – as if commandments, challenges, rebukes, etc. are no part of the Word of God. So, on rising up in the morning, these good people went straight to the box, saying to themselves: “Let me see what promise and blessing God has in store for me today” and picked up a small scroll at random. Here, no consideration was paid to context. When, how, and to whom these Bible verses had been spoken originally was of no significance whatsoever. Promises that were uttered to Israel in concrete circumstances and under certain conditions, were appropriated by these Christians

¹⁸ Unfortunately, there are also those who seek to pervert the meaning of the New Testament in order to besmear the Christian Faith. These are not serious scientific interpretations, but conscious perversions. We will not concern ourselves with such.

through a process of spiritualization, as if these utterances were written just for them!

Others used to close their eyes, turn their Bible open and put their finger on its text. Then, they opened their eyes and read the text on which their finger happened to be. That was God's word to them that day.

This is certainly not the way either to read the Bible or to seek guidance from God. It is related that one of those who looked for God's will in this way, did just that one day and on opening his eyes, he saw his finger placed on Mt 27:5: "[Judas] went and hanged himself". "This cannot be God's guidance for me", he muttered to himself, and decided to try again. This time his finger fell on Lk 10:37: "Go, and do likewise"! Hopefully, this experience healed that person from treating the Word of God as a magic book that strews God's blessings and guidance in this whimsical way. But even if this story does not represent a factual occurrence, its value is not diminished: it shows the kind of thing that a Christian opens himself to, when approaching the Word of God in this way.

Although the above statement about reading and understanding in context is the rule, it is important to underline at this juncture that God is not limited by our methodological rules and exegetical guidelines. He does surprise us at times. As many a great Christian can testify, God can use the most unlikely ways to speak to His people as, for example, when they are in need or in despair, and to make a way out of darkness.

This, however, relates to personal guidance, to encouragement in straitened circumstances, to deliverance out of uncertainty and anxiety and *it comes unexpectedly*; we do not seek it and we do not work it up. It has nothing to do with the normal study of the Word of God to discover what the NT teaches on this or that question, and generally to

understand the teaching of Jesus, or of Paul or of Peter or the basics of our Christian Faith. For this we must go the way of careful, methodical study.

Out of many stories about personal guidance I can mention the following amusing example. There was a Christian person, who finding himself in straits, promised to God that if he were delivered, he would sell one of his calves and give the money to the Lord's work. In due time he was delivered but he forgot all about selling the calf. One day in a meeting they were singing a song containing the line «The half has never been told» (an allusion to the Queen of Sheba's words to Solomon, 1 Kin 10:7), but the guilty conscience of the man made him hear, instead, «The calf has never been sold»! At once he got the message, and directly after the meeting went and sold the calf.

Indeed, there are many stories of this kind, when Christians out of the blue, as it were, have received the message they needed at the critical moment: a text, a verse, a word is suddenly lit up and enlivened by the Holy Spirit and it hits you with unspeakable force. This chapter, however, is not concerned with such messages, but with the consecutive study of the Word of God. And here, there is no shortcut; the Scriptures yield their meaning only to meticulous, diligent study.

In this chapter, I shall try to illustrate how the statements of the NT can be interpreted in a natural way when interpreted within their context. We shall consider the question of context under three headings:

1. Texts that mean nothing in particular apart from their original context
2. Texts are misconstrued, if torn away from their original context
3. Texts are interpreted correctly and naturally, if interpreted in their original context.

“Introductory”
(Ch.7. *The Necessary Equipment*)

In this chapter we shall look into the question of what is involved in interpreting the NT (and by extension, the whole Bible). The task of interpretation is basically the same when a lay Christian reads and tries to understand his NT on the personal, devotional level and when an expert exegete applies all his technical apparatus in order to interpret the NT. The ordinary Christian will not have the expert exegete's knowledge of the various methods and disciplines nor the background linguistic, philological, historical, cultural, archeological and other data needed, but both of them are essentially after the same end: to understand the text of the NT. Nor does the fact that the Christian believer is interested only in the personal application of Scriptures to his own life make any difference. The believer should not be less interested in factual truth than the scientist. The ordinary believer may not be interested in or be able to understand all the technical problems in which the exegete often delves, but on the pragmatic level, he cannot be satisfied with anything less than the full truth. This is so, because any application of the NT teaching to one's personal life, must be based on sound exegesis. If we misinterpret the Word of God and we apply the result of our misinterpretation, then we are not applying the Word of God as it was intended but our own misinterpretations.

Thus, in the application of Scripture on the exercise of his Christian faith and life, the ordinary believer needs the guidance of the expert exegete. Here theology and practice meet. Practice must follow theology. This is the general recommendation. We see it, for example, in the epistles of St Paul. They generally divide into two parts: the first part is the

theological or doctrinal part, that is, it explains what God has undertaken on our behalf, while the second part is practical or admonitory, telling the Christian believers how they ought to live in view of Christ's sacrifice for them.

Alas, however, theology has not always placed itself at the service of the Church. In particular, in the centuries following the Enlightenment, theology has often gone its own way and its own errand. Thus, there arose a gap between "town and gown" – a mistrust on the part of the Church toward the university and its theology. And this was not infrequently justified. However, the matter was liable to be and was actually often taken too far. Believers shut themselves up into intellectual ghettos, rejecting all that smacked of theology and expert knowledge, priding themselves of their simple faith – and ignorance!

The Scriptures discourage slothfulness (e.g. Prov 22:13; 24:30-31; 26:13-16) and prompt us, instead, to be diligent and hard-working in the study of it: "Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, interpreting correctly the Word of God" (2 Tim 2:15). If the Word of God means so much to us, believers, as we claim, then it is difficult to explain the fact that we do not take more time and make greater efforts to acquaint ourselves with it and to find out God's will for our lives. To be satisfied with a cursory reading of a passage, which we half-understand half-misinterpret, does not commend us as serious students of the Bible or as giving a dime for our Christian Faith and Hope.

The argument has often been put forward that believers are interested in what aims at their heart, not their head. This is, unfortunately, a fallacy that is not only shared by many well-meaning Christians, but is even preached by ignorant preachers. This unhappy distinction between 'heart' and 'head' (i.e. 'mind' or 'intellect') has its source in the fact that

the OT often speaks of the ‘heart’ as the center of emotions, such as love and kindness (cf. for example Prov 423: “With all diligence keep your heart, because out of it are the issues of life”, i.e. everything that shapes life, including desires, thoughts, and decisions come from the heart).

This terminology entered the NT through quotes from the OT. Thus, for example, in 1 Cor 2:9 we read: “Eye has not seen and ear has not heard, nor have come up into the heart of man the things that God has in store for those who love him”. The expression “nor have *come up into the heart* of man” is a Hebrew expression for what in Hellenic and all European languages would be expressed by “nor has *the mind* of man *thought of*”. The reason for this difference is simply that the Hebrews thought with their ‘heart’, whereas the Hellēnes thought with their head!

Or we may put it another way: the Hebrew for ‘heart’ (*lev*) was not limited to the organ that pumps the blood into circulation, but extended to cover the faculty of emotions and thoughts, representing also the intellect. The Hellēnes, on the other hand, who already before Platōn’s time had discovered the circulation of the blood through the pumping of the heart, were also aware that man thought and decided with his mind/intellect (νοῦς, *nous*). That is the reason why St Paul speaks so much of the life of the mind or intellect (*nous*), a word that occurs in St Paul no fewer than twenty-one times. Here are a few specimen: 1 Cor 2:16: “We have the mind (*nous*) of Christ”; 14:15: I shall pray with my spirit and I shall pray with my mind (*nous*); 14:19: “In the Church I want to speak five words with my mind (*nous*) ... rather than a myriad word in tongues”; Eph 4:23: “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind (*nous*)”.

In all of these cases, the ‘mind’ or ‘intellect’ does not stand in opposition to the things of the spirit – as many Christians have misunderstood it – but is precisely the God-

given faculty with which we grasp spiritual things, we decide for spiritual things, and we perform spiritual actions. It is with our mind (*nous*) that we love, just as it is with our mind that we hate, and our mind has its physical seat in our brain (head)! The physical heart is merely a pump.

Thus, we see that the Apostle Paul in every way encourages our intellectual life. In fact, all of the emotions of man are understood as being activities of the mind. To this the entire chapter of Rom 7 bears witness (through the use of verbs denoting intellectual-activity), cf. e.g. 7:23: “I see another law working in my members which wars against the law of my mind (*nous*!) and makes me a captive to the law of sin that works in my members”. Note well, the word ‘heart’ (καρδία, *kardia*) is never used in this chapter.

The distinction between ‘heart’ and ‘mind’ is consequently a false distinction, which has confused rather than enlightened Christian believers. We must put that behind us and move forward.

The task of interpreting the NT is a very complex one. I say this not in order to discourage the ordinary Christian, but because this is the truth. The Hellenic term *exegesis* (ἐξήγησις, cf. ἐξηγητική = *exēgētikē* ‘the science of exegesis’) is the technical name for “Interpretation” or “Exposition”. It denotes the practical discipline that is concerned with the actual, concrete interpretation of texts. As such, Exegesis is distinguished from *Hermeneutics*, which is theoretical and is concerned with the principles that govern the exegesis or interpretation of texts.

The science of Exegesis utilizes many auxiliary disciplines, whose task is to supply relevant information in order to interpret the text correctly. Each and every one of these disciplines offers its particular results, and together they contribute toward reaching sound exegetical judgments. Undoubtedly, the most important discipline of Exegesis, the

discipline *par excellence*, is the science of language. This may be divided into several branches: *grammar*, *lexicography*, and *philology*.

In more recent times there have developed the branches of *linguistics* and *semantics*, which show the logical relation of the different members of a clause, sentence or paragraph and may also be subsumed under the science of language.

In addition, over the past two-hundred years or so NT exegesis has developed a number of special approaches, which, despite their shortcomings and misuses in the past, have sometimes offered valuable insights in the interpretation of the NT. But as these approaches are more suited to University level work, they shall not be taken up here.

To the above linguistic equipment may be added also Hebrew and to a lesser extent Aramaic, owing to the impingement of the OT on the NT (on this see more below).

Now, in addition to the above equipment, NT Exegesis demands knowledge of ancient literature, particularly Hellenic; history, archeology, mythology, history of ideas, philosophical trends, insight into ancient mentality, their aesthetic values, ancient rhetoric, while the peripheral sciences of sociology and anthropology occasionally may contribute valuable viewpoints.

It is obvious that the science of NT exegesis engages many other disciplines in order to draw information for its task, and has traditionally been the most demanding subject in theological training.

Naturally, no one expects lay Christians to master and apply these disciplines or areas of study in their daily reading. Then, why do I mention them here? Firstly, by becoming aware of what is ideally necessary in order to interpret the NT correctly, lay people will hopefully become more interested in reading helpful literature to increase their understanding and insight into its text; secondly, their respect

for the task of interpreting the Word of God will be enhanced, and thirdly, they will be more careful in presenting their own interpretations dogmatically.

At this point I need to make an important clarification. Everyone of the above-named areas of study, e.g. the Hellenic language and literature, archeology, rhetoric, the Hebrew and Aramaic languages, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and the Dead Sea Scrolls (to be treated below), constitute scholarly pursuits in their own right, and the literature published in each of these areas is immense. Scholars treat these areas of study without regard to the NT. In the present context, however, our interest in them is more limited. We are interested in them *only* in so far as they have any bearing on the interpretation of the NT. Thus, my evaluations of them are made from the standpoint of the NT. This does not mean that the facts are distorted, but that here *only* matters of relevance for the NT are taken up.



Chapter 8 takes up three texts, one from Matthew, one from John and one from Paul in order to exemplify the principles at work and how to use the insights gained from this book in reading and understanding the New Testament.