

THE LEGEND OF JONAH

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by

R. H. BOWERS



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*For
Curt F. Bühler*

Were not God's laws,
His gospel law, in olden times held forth
by types, shadows, and metaphors?

John Bunyan

Who kept Jonas in the fishes mawe
Til he was spouted up at Nynyvee?

Geoffrey Chaucer

AVANT-PROPOS

As we know only too well fashions in scholarship fluctuate (*sed littera manet*), yet not so rapidly that their course cannot be calibrated with some accuracy. In 1959 Robert E. Kaske called the exegetical approach to medieval literature, largely popularized in their commentary on *Piers Plowman* by D. W. Robertson Jr. and Bernard F. Huppé (1951), a “new line of scholarly inquiry.”¹ Actually the approach is of ancient lineage: if we can credit the vituperation of Ulrich von Hutten and Crotus Rubeanus in their *Letters of Obscure Men* (1515), it was the stock in trade of their ideological enemies, the Dominicans of Cologne.² Yet its revived popularity for the past two decades has been as obvious as a case of measles, despite the protests it has provoked. At times it has seemed reminiscent of the tenacity with which some Edwardians insisted on reading medieval or renaissance fiction as though it was a *roman à clef*; or the tenacity with which some Elizabethans insisted on following the same bent (according to Ben Jonson’s Induction to *Volpone*, 1606: “Application is now grown a trade with many . . .”). The difficulty seems to arise when the exegetical method, properly applied only to interpretation of the Bible (as in the case of Ezra: see Nehemiah 8: 5-9), is applied to secular medieval literature (as in the fantastic caudal moralizations stuck on the *Gesta Romanorum*), which may introduce some “radioactive” (Father Paul Beichner’s term³) biblical allusions or symbols, but which is not theological in total orientation or import. Miss Greta Hort, in her fundamental, and I fear, somewhat neglected dissertation on *Piers Plowman* (1938), laid down some clear guide-lines: when ME works such as *The Pricke of Conscience*,

¹ “Patristic Exegesis: The Defense,” in *Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature*, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (N.Y., 1960), p. 31.

² See *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*, ed. F. G. Stokes (London, 1925), esp. pp. 342-45; Hajo Holborn, *Ulrich von Hutten* (New Haven, 1937), pp. 60-64.

³ See Paul E. Beichner, C.S.C., “The Allegorical Interpretation of Medieval Literature,” *PMLA* 82 (1967), 38.

The Abbey of the Holy Ghost, or *Piers Plowman* cite and debate theological authorities in Latin, and not in the vernacular, we can be pretty sure that we are reading theological literature, and thence that exegetical knowledge can properly be applied, with the caution and care that respectful scholarship demands.

The exegetical tradition, in its various manifestations, forms a parcel of what I call the collision of, or competition between, different cultures, the collision of westward-moving Christian and secular or mythological Graeco-Roman traditions with the native, aboriginal Germanic traditions manifested, for instance, in the *Nibelungenlied* (c 1200). This westward movement of empire and civilization is a persistent topic: Cicero discusses it at length in the second of his *Tusculan Disputations*; Chrétien exploits it in an optimistic vein in the prologue to his *Cligés*; T. S. Eliot exploits it in a nostalgic vein in *The Waste Land*; the Texas historian Walter Prescott Webb made it a subject all his own. It has been called the *translatio imperii* and the *translatio studii*. Anthropologists have long been concerned with the collision of Western technology and political institutions with the native cultures of Africa or Asia. We sense the unmistakable collision of cultures in the Merovingian period, when, according to H. F. Muller, missionaries undertook:

Un travail herculéen de dépaganiser les croyances de l'homme, gallo-romain ou gallo-franc.⁴

The collision has bedevilled *Beowulf* scholarship: to what extent is the poem pagan or Christian? Scholars disagree. To what extent is the ethos of the *Song of Roland* Frankish? ⁵

A concern with collisions is demanding since it requires the historical orientation of a Henry Osborn Taylor, as well as a working familiarity with the Christian, the classical, and the native Germanic traditions. From one point of view this is an impossible requirement in an age when specialization rules the roost, and is explosive in its scholarly refinement and production. But a rigid corrective exists in an awareness that medieval literature as a whole is far too abundant, complex and variegated to be fruitfully approached from any specialized, reductive point of view. As a matter of fact, Western civilization is composite, a mixture beyond analysis of different cultures: perhaps only the ancient Greeks, as Santayana was fond of reminding us, were "uneducated," in the sense of not feeling com-

⁴ *L'Époque Mérovingienne* (Paris, 1945), p. 69.

⁵ See Charles Donohue, "Beowulf and Christian Tradition: A Reconsideration from a Celtic Stance," *Traditio* 21 (1965), 55-116; John Halverson, "Ganelon's Trial," *Speculum* 42 (1967), 661-69.

pelled to study and absorb alien tongues and philosophy as did Lucretius and other Roman intellectuals suffering from a colonial complex. Since the present monograph on Jonah is mainly concerned with exegesis and the retelling of an ancient legend, it is admittedly specialized, and I am well aware of its limitations, that one book cannot do everything. And since it must of sheer necessity traverse a worn Roman road it will relate matters familiar to specialists – the unavoidable fate of all historical writing. I am convinced, though, that the last word has not been pronounced on the characteristics of exegesis from Patristic times through the Renaissance, and I know that some of my views on this subject will be contradicted even as I have felt justified in contradicting some of the views of my predecessors. History allows no conclusions. Furthermore, a study such as the present one holds all manner of temptations to digress into considerations of, say, allegory or symbolism or epistemology, in fact, digressions into dangerous speculations about the working of the articulated pre-Newtonian mind. I cannot claim to have resisted all of these temptations; but I have attempted to keep them under reasonable control.

More years ago than I care to remember, I first read, haltingly, thumbing the glossary, two of the four remarkable Middle English poems (*Pearl*, *Purity*, *Patience* and *Sir Gawain*) preserved uniquely in British Museum MS Cotton Nero A.x., under the remarkable tutelage of Robert J. Menner at New Haven. I also once skimmed thru Greene and Lodge's *A Looking-Glass for London and England* (pub. 1594) while attending lectures on the Elizabethan drama by Tucker Brooke. So my acquaintance with Jonah and the much maligned whale that served as his three-day host has not been new to begin. Naturally I was delighted when Don Cameron Allen's *The Legend of Noah* appeared in 1949; and I recently wondered if similar genuflexion to Jonah should not be made. The present monograph is the result of that wonderment. Over the years too, many comparable monographs have appeared, such as Edna Purdie's *The Story of Judith in German and English Literature* (Paris, 1927); F. E. Faverty's "The Story of Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in Medieval Literature," *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, XIII (1931), 81-127; Arnold Williams' *The Common Expositor on Genesis* (Chapel Hill, 1948); and Esther Quinn's *The Quest of Seth* (Chicago, 1962), all of which could have suggested methodology or conceptual frameworks. But I soon found that my problems differed, so that I could only follow where the commentaries on Jonah led me.

Apart from some jejune encyclopaedia articles, the last century has seen the production of several commentaries on the Book of Jonah, none

of which attempt an historical survey of patristic or Renaissance commentaries and which accordingly do not compete with the present monograph: Patrick Fairbairn, *Jonah* (Edinburgh, 1849); Hugh Martin, *The Prophet Jonah* (London, 1866); J. Baum, *Jona, die biblische Fische sage und der israelitische Versöhnungstag* (Loebau West., 1879); F. B. Meyer, *Jonah* (London, 1889), a Baptist sermon for young people; David E. H. Davies, *Jonah* (London, 1925, 1931), an energetic effort to vindicate the historical character of Jonah and to negate all attempts to read allegory or myth into the story.

Biblical commentary – even on The Book of Jonah – is so voluminous that there is not world enough and time to do more than some representative sampling in the taxonomic *catalogue raisonné* fashion employed in a very fine book, *Adversus Judaeos, a bird's-eye view of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance*, by A. Lukyn Williams (Cambridge, 1935). After completing his survey of 47 tracts, Canon Williams had an errata slip inserted to face p. xi, listing eleven tracts which he had failed to consider. Some of them were by important writers, such as Alanus de Insulis, Richard of St. Victor, and Rupert of Deutz. I shall consider myself lucky if I, likewise, only miss a dozen significant sermons on Jonah. Yet I have not attempted to canvass French, German or Italian writers after the time of John XXII. No doubt this constitutes a fault; but I doubt if it would alter my findings one iota. The Western mind is the Western mind, despite the protests of patriots.

Because it often provides useful aid, iconography has become an integral part of earlier literary studies since the time of Napoléon Didron, and my generation, I feel sure, has been markedly influenced by such standard works as those of Émile Mâle or Raimond Van Marle. So at one time I envisaged assembling a representative collection of pictorial scenes from the Jonah legend. But a kind letter from Miss Rosalie B. Green, Director of the Princeton Index of Christian Art, informing me that the Index holds some 800 entries relating to Jonah, dampened such a project, since I knew that it would take several Guggenheims to facilitate my wandering through the galleries and catacombs of Western Europe. So I have relied for this aspect of my education on the material on Jonah presented by Louis Bréhier, *L'Art Chrétien* (Paris, 1928), by Dom Henri Leclercq in the Cabrol-Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne* (Paris, 1927), by Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'Art Chrétien* (Paris, 1956).

A monograph wants a thematic spinal column that can sustain both writer and reader. The commentaries on, and the allusions to, the legend of Jonah exhibit a dialogue between the hermeneutic of Judaic typology

or prefiguration ("The Old Testament darkly prophesies what the New Testament declares": cf. 2 Cor. 3:14), and Hellenistic allegory, both of which modes will be discussed in the pages which follow. At times I have been tempted to denigrate allegory as fanciful and undisciplined, and to laud typology as literal, historical and hence better disciplined.⁶ In fact this has been a common enough position: as Brother Bernard Lamy, the French Oratorian (1640-1715), once wrote:

Allegories indeed are always most easy. But it requires a great deal of study and labour, to master the literal sense of the sacred books.⁷

In 1930, M. L. W. Laistner, in a notice of Bede, wrote:

Allegorical interpretation, which is the leading purpose of all Bede's commentaries . . . is a form of spiritual and intellectual exercise for which modern readers have neither the taste nor the understanding. Its all but universal use by monastic teachers and commentators . . . forces one to realize how utterly alien to our own habits of thought, and how all but incomprehensible, were some of the workings of the medieval mind.⁸

But the matter is not always pellucid, and problems of classification can become irritating. Some control however is at hand if we can sense or discern the purpose, the agonistic, of the commentator, be it conative or probative, and the effect he wants to work on his auditor. Fortunately too, older writers usually respect and hence mirror the etiquette of public rather than idiolectal rhetoric, and regard their artifacts as metaphors for

⁶ I am aware that many distinguished authorities, notably Kirsopp Lake (*Landmarks in the History of Early Christianity*, London, 1920, p. 71), have felt that prophetic interpretations of the Old Testament by Christian exegetes obscured its essentially Jewish character.

⁷ *Apparatus Biblicus*, (London, 1723), ii. 363. The problem of just what constitutes a literal sense can be far more complex than an unwary student, habituated to univocity, may realize since it can involve at least three major considerations over and beyond reference to verifiable, concrete events or objects: (1) the interpretation of metaphor; (2) the question of whether Biblical revelation is propositional, as proclaiming doctrines necessary for salvation (in the Greek sense of eternal verities), or whether revelation is manifest through a series of theophanies (in the Judaic sense); (3) the question of whether revelation is articulated in human language (II Timothy 3:16: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine"), or whether revelation is God's own word spoken by a prophet almost as a ventriloquist (Ezekiel 2:7; cf. II Peter 1:20: "no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation"). For discussion see Anthony Nemetz, "Literalness and the *Sensus Litteralis*," *Speculum* 34, (1959), 76 ff.; Salvatore Battaglia, "Linguaggio reale e linguaggio figurato," *Filologia e Letterature* 8 (1962), 25 ff.; Victor Harris, "Allegory to Analogy in the Interpretation of Scripture," *Philological Quarterly* 45 (1966), 1-24; Marcia L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language* (New Haven, 1968).

⁸ *Thought & Letters in Western Europe: A.D. 500 to 900* (London, 1930), p. 160. No doubt Laistner was reflecting the "historical" attitudes of the 1920s.

common experience. Being primarily moralists, their vision is seldom stereoscopic. Nor do they regard ambiguity as a supreme virtue.

I have segmented the present monograph into five chapters: the first discusses the main features of Hebraic literature, and textual tradition; the second treats the Patristic period when the problem of Resurrection was urgent; the third considers the dreary Carolingian era when Greek allegory flourished; the fourth notices the late medieval period when Jonah is demoted to but one of the minor prophets; and the fifth chapter reviews the Tudor age when Londoners were often compared to the depraved denizens of Nineveh, who were promised salvation if they would repent, and mend their errant ways.

CRITICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

A

It may be both old-fashioned and pedantic to preface a monograph with citations – the practice certainly exasperated Mark Twain; but I know of no more efficient way to acquaint a reader with a writer's prejudices.

(1) "*Qua* work of art, the work of art cannot be interpreted; there is nothing to interpret; we can only criticise it according to standards, in comparison to other work of art; and for 'interpretation' the chief task is the presentation of relevant historical facts which the reader is not assumed to know." (T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems.")

(2) "Christian dogma is not the product of deliberate creation; it comes rather from a number and variety of attempts to meet problems, to exclude untenable theories which had been propounded, and in general to avoid error rather than to state and define truth." (Arthur Darby Nock, *Early Gentile Christianity* [New York, 1964], p. 47)

(3) *Ignotum per ignotius–seu–litem lite resolvere.* (proverbial)

(4) "Words, in general, by the very limitation of their nature, conceal one's thought as much as they reveal it; and the uttered words of philosophers, at their best and fullest, are nothing but floating buoys which signal the presence of submerged unuttered thoughts." (Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo* [Cambridge, Mass., 1947], I, 106-107)

(5) "Individual writers at a very early time altered the pure Vulgate; they replaced certain Jeromian readings by readings derived from other sources, because they desired to create a text that would be particularly apt to render useful service in a specific situation which called their own spirit of religious activity into action." (H. H. Glunz, *History of the Vulgate in England from Alcuin to Roger Bacon* [Cambridge, 1933], p. 13)

(6) *Nam sicut humana consuetudo verbis, ita divina potentia etiam*

factis loquitur (“Whereas human usage is expressed through words, divine potency speaks through deeds,” Augustine, *Sex Questiones Contra Paganos seu Epistola* 102, *Pat. Lat.* 33:383).

(7) “And it is argued that the procedure of the historian in retrodicting is exactly parallel to that of the scientist in predicting . . .” (W. H. Walsh, *Philosophy of History*, [London, 1958], p. 41)

B

According to Genesis (11:1) all men were once brothers, speaking the same language – presumably Hebrew, or Chinese according to many seventeenth century theorists.⁹ But presumptuous men, erecting a tower in the plain of Shinar that might reach into heaven, were punished for their presumption by the curse of tribalism; and the Lord decreed a babble of tongues so that they might not understand one another’s speech. This famous passage elicited an extended comment from St. Augustine (*Civ. Dei* XVI. iv-v), who deplored the confusion of tongues and the consequent loss of Christian universalism as much as any man of good will, and who went on to argue that difference of language divides man from man (XIX. vii). Although it provides a lucrative vocation for modern linguists, the confusion of tongues, and the imprecision of words, especially abstractions trying to abstract a quality from a quantity, has plagued man ever since. And writers anxious not to be misunderstood, still cannot escape reliance on the imprecision of metaphor. So some remarks on the terminology that will appear in the following pages are in order.

Commentaries on Jonah may be denominated in a number of ways: as apologues, expositions, sermons, praelectiones, homilies, glosses, parables, exempla, enarrationes, polemics, irenics, consolations, tracts, prayers, apologies, supplications, allegories, epistles, exegesis, midrash, haggada, and so forth. It seems impossible for pedants to agree on how a text should be classified so that a distinction might offer a useful difference. It is notable that disciples of the modern biblical “form criticism” school, vitally concerned with problems of literary genre, and associated with the names of Bultmann, Dibelius and Kindsin, cannot agree on problems of classification. From time to time, of course, writers have valiantly tried to lighten sail, and establish simplistic, reductive definitions, that appear most attractive but will not work in practice. For instance in 1577, Andreas Hyperius Gerardus, in his work, translated as *The Practice of*

⁹ E.g., John Webb, *An Historical Essay Endeavoring a Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language*, (London, 1669, Wing W-1202).

Preaching (STC 11758), distinguished sharply between two main types of sermons: (1) the scholastical, delivered to students in academic hall, stripped of eloquence, or efforts to move the affections of the audience, dealing mainly with the "subtle disputations of St. Paul in *Romans*"; (2) the popular sermon delivered to the "confused multitude," the "sluggish and dull," designed to move an illiterate audience to repent their horrible sins, drawing on the respected exemplars, available through the kindness of the printing-press, of Gregory, Bede, Bernard, Chrysostom, etc. (sig. B 1r - C 1r). Later on, however, Gerardus finds that this simple classification is wholly inadequate, so he devotes cap. xv to distinguishing to his own satisfaction between didascalick, redargutive, instructive, consolatory and corrective sermons. In this connection Peter Martyr Vermiglius might also be mentioned, since he evidently found it a very simple matter to distinguish between sacred and profane poetry, between Sion and Helicon. He states in his *Common Places* of 1583, that "humane poems" treat of "kings, princes, feeldes, cities, regions, castels, women, marriages, and sometimes of brute beasts," whereas divine poems "only sing of God" (III. 309a). If he had lived longer Martyr would probably have had no trouble in classifying *Paradise Lost*, but one wonders how he would classify the first book of the *Faerie Queene*. So I can only say to readers of this monograph: cave!

C

I am temperamentally incapable of discussing Jonah in the jungian archetypal manner popularized by Maud Bodkin, and evident in C. Kerényi's *Prometheus* (1963); and I do not command the background to speculate about the genesis of the Jonah myth during the dim period of history described by W. F. Albright in his *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (1940), nor to speculate about the folklore parallels recorded by Sir J. G. Frazer in his *Folklore in the Old Testament* (1919), III, 82-83. But it is worth mentioning that Jonah is referred to several times in the *Koran*. Furthermore, I have not been able to digest the exciting speculations of the past decade concerning the nature of oral, chirographic and typographic cultures set forth in the writings of Albert B. Lord, Eric A. Havelock, Walter J. Ong, S. J., and Marshall McLuhan.

D

Reprints of older and modern works of secondary scholarship have proved a mixed blessing. They perform a useful service in relieving the brutal

wear and tear on our college libraries by students and faculty alike; they can also perform a deplorable disservice in perpetuating error. As a sample of disservice let us consider a bald statement in Edwin Hatch's *Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*, first printed in 1888, recently reprinted in the Harper Torchbook series, that is demonstrably false, as this monograph will subsequently demonstrate: "The earliest methods of Christian exegesis were continuations of the methods which were common at the time to both Greek and Graeco-Judaean writers" (p. 69). Actually there is as much difference between Judaic typology and Greek allegory as there is between night and day. Perhaps St. Paul's unfortunate use of the term "allegory" when he was actually practising Judaic typology (Galatians 4:24) has caused no end of confusion, evident, for instance, in Magenot's otherwise admirable article "Allégories Bibliques," in the *Vacant Dictionnaire de la Théologie Catholique* (Paris, 1889-1950).

E

I am indebted to the Humanities Council of the University of Florida for a summer grant that facilitated the typing of this monograph; and I take this opportunity to thank my classmate, Dr. Curt F. Bühler, for facilitating the xeroxing of the relevant openings of the Pierpont Morgan copy of the *Postillae* of Nicholas of Lyra, and to thank both Yale and Harvard for xeroxing the Jonah commentary in their respective copies of the *Postillae* of Hugh of St. Cher. My profuse gratitude is also due the pages (now young ladies) of Duke Humphrey's Library at the Bodleian, and the pages (likewise young ladies) of Miss Laura Monti's quiet Special Collections section of the University of Florida library. But my greatest debt is to my fellow workers in the vineyard, Morton W. Bloomfield and John T. Algeo, who have made time in their busy schedules to read a preliminary draft of this monograph, and to rescue me from a number of lapses in both taste and accuracy. Needless to add, they are not responsible for the blemishes that still remain.

R. H. BOWERS

Gainesville, Florida
December, 1970

CHAPTER I

A

The Book of Jonah is a Hebrew book, composed of but 48 verses. For generations exegetes have tried to classify Old Testament literary forms under the major headings of history, prophecy, poetry and wisdom (or proverbs), although these forms are seldom mutually exclusive. How then should Jonah be classified? Under prophecy? But it has the fundamental poetic elements of semitic style – the parallelism, the repetitions, the symmetry of clauses designed to produce a rhetorical incantation and emphasis which are carried over – *mirabile dictu* – in the Authorized Version:

4:1 But it displeased Jonah, and he was very angry.

Or in the Clementine Vulgate:

4:1 Et afflictus est Jonas afflictione magna, et iratus est.

Or in the beautiful verse where the synonymous phrases circle about the central assertion, amplifying the topic and enriching the feeling of the narrative voice:

2:3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed me over.

Never absent is the profound conviction that all events are under God's control, and that the commission of the prophet (or in later times the priestly commission authorized by the Church) is the proclamation of God's word.¹ The formal structure, then, of prophecy differs from linear, chronological history: time is compenetrated; past, present and future merge; and structure is concentric,² with focus on the central mes-

¹ See Bonsirven, S.J., *Exégèse Rabbinique et Exégèse Paulinienne* (Paris, 1939), p. 350.

² See Rev. D. J. Leahy, art., "The Literary Characteristics of the Bible" in *Nelson's Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (London, 1953), pp. 40-44.

sage, while questions of where, how and why remain either irrelevant or as mysterious and as unsearchable as the will of a hidden God. It can be protested that the Book of Jonah has a simple, linear, anecdotal structure, leading up to the magnificent climactic proclamation of God's love for all His creatures. It does; but it also has the qualities listed above.

Another fundamental feature of Old Testament style is its laconic terseness, its compactness, its absence of explanation, or motivation, which has stimulated commentators over the centuries to endless speculation: Why did Jonah at first disobey his missionary order to preach repentance to the ethnic Ninevites? Why did Peter deny Our Lord? Out of fear? We are not told. The poet did not know: he only knew that Jonah was the man who "did the deed."³ The mystery of human motivation, or reaction, or impulse, is as mysterious to-day, despite the toil of modern psychologists, as it ever was, although we have a new term in physiology, the non-volitional or autonomic nervous system, for what St. Paul called his disobedient members (Romans 7:23). So semitic style often presents us with mystery, with puzzling gnomic assertions, with bare cataphatic or apophatic declarations, with riddling parables, that continuously challenge the exegete.⁴ The language of the Church, too, like the organic text of the Constitution of the United States, tends to: *brevis numero verborum, grandis pondere sententiarum.*

Spinoza, who infuriated many of his contemporaries by arguing that the Bible should be scrutinized only for its meaning and not for its truth, had the enormous advantage of being a Jew, hence he can alert us to another basic feature of semitic style (at the inception of his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* of 1670):

³ See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Berne, 1948: English trans., 1953, pp. 8-23), for his beautiful essay contrasting Homeric representation of reality with that of the Old Testament, using the examples of Ulysses and Abraham.

⁴ New Testament rather than Old Testament exegesis looms large in contemporary German hermeneutics, which has had marked influence among Protestants but not among conservative Catholics, who, clinging to the "inerrancy" position, feel that the "form-critics" entertain somewhat eccentric notions about the nature of the primitive church. A useful report on the German theologians is provided in Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God* (N.Y., 1966). Pius X, in his syllabus of July 3, 1907, condemned as error the view that the Bible is not an inspired text, but one written by human beings and hence not infallible (this view is perhaps older than Hobbes): *Exegeta, si velit utiliter studiis biblicis incumbere, inprimis quamlibet prae-conceptam opinionem de supernaturali origine Scripturae sacrae seponere debet, eamque non aliter interpretari quam cetera documenta mere humana* (Denzinger, H., *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 23rd ed. 1937, p. 565).

The Jews never make any mention or account of secondary or particular causes, but in a spirit of religion, piety, and what is commonly called godliness, refer all things directly to the Deity. For instance, if they make money by a transaction, they say God gave it to them; if they desire anything they say that God has disposed their hearts towards it; if they think anything, they say God told them. Hence we must not suppose that everything is prophecy or revelation which is described in Scripture as told by God to anyone.⁵

This is an interesting manifestation of seventeenth century rationalizing; but I doubt if many early rabbis would discount biblical prophecy as merely a way of speaking – to them it would have been actual history.

Semitic style, too, pays little attention to scenery, or sound or smell.⁶ Nor is physical appearance, or dress noted. The iconography of Jesus derives from the apocryphal (xiii cent.?) *Letter of Lentulus*. Everything is reduced to behavioral essentials.

It seems likely that readers of the Book of Jonah in The Authorized Version, Luther's German text, or even the Vulgate, rather than the Greek Septuagint or the Hebrew, may be unaware of other characteristic modes of Hebrew thinking – if it be legitimate to speculate about such matters on the basis of grammar or literary genre.⁷ So a few highly generalized generalizations, concerning which scholars may disagree, may be appropriate since there is a growing feeling among some modern biblical scholars that the New Testament, although written in Greek, may nevertheless reflect Hebraic thought patterns. Typical Hebraic genres are the historical narrative or the prophecy, in both of which the kinetic verb is paramount; contrasted is the late Greek philosophical dialogue in which the abstract, conceptual noun is paramount. This, of course, is a consideration of a literary preference, not a statement about grammar. It could be immediately objected that the Platonic dialogues are replete with anecdote and that Homer is certainly concrete. But the socratic insistence on analysis, on abstracting an ethical problem from social circumstance;

⁵ Cited in Robert M. Grant, *The Bible in the Church* (N.Y., 1948), p. 126.

⁶ This view may be overstated: Josiah H. Penniman, *A Book about the English Bible* (N.Y., 1919), writing about biblical imagery, documented the "great out-of-doors world so characteristic of the Bible" (pp. 98-100).

⁷ German scholars have been much given to this kind of speculation, which annoys linguists of the "generative grammar" school: see Oscar Weise, *Language and Character of the Roman People* (London, 1909); Karl Vossler, *The Spirit of Language in Civilization* (London, 1932); W. J. Entwistle, "Russian as an Art of Expression," *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 1 (1950), 16-24. I rely heavily in this section on James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford, 1961), esp. cap. ii. A related study, of terms in the King James' which have become obsolete, or badly misunderstood, is that of Luther A. Weigle, *Bible Words in Living Language* (N.Y., 1957).

or on the platonic preference for the essential as opposed to the existential, on the insistence on the superiority of the realm of ideas, of the changeless, to the realm of appearance, of meaningless flux, is so familiar that it demands no documentation. Ancient Hebraic expression does not draw this sharp distinction between the existential and the essential. Nor did it tend to separate an immortal soul from a mortal body: in Hebrew expression the soul is the living person in his vibrant flesh, which is the outer manifestation of the whole self. An opposing anthropology is the admittedly dualistic neoplatonic tradition (as in Plotinus), wherein the body and soul are but accidentally related, as the soul attempts to escape from the prison of the wicked body (as in Ficino), and ascend, or return, to its primal state. The position of St. Augustine, in his endless quarrel with the dualistic Manichees, is in the Hebraic tradition which insists on the unity of the body and the soul.

Another related contrast between Hellenistic and ancient Hebraic thought is simply that Greek philosophers were normally concerned, at least in their surviving written documents, with abstraction and analysis; but the Hebrews with concrete action, for to them what did not appear in action and motion could not be real – hence to them there was no sharp distinction between the phenomenal and ultimate reality. Their God was a God who acts, who speaks, who intervenes in time and history in a providential, or censorious, meaningful way (Exodus 14:21-31). Greek gods intervened too on behalf of favored mortals (as Poseidon befriended Cyclops, *Odyssey* ix. 526-35), and hence served both a rhetorical as well as a metaphysical role of amplifying human potentiality. But for the most part they were portrayed by the poets as indifferent, unconcerned, going their own obstinate way, reflecting the wholly impersonal forces of nature, or human nature writ large (*Iliad* xxiv. 527-34); and written Greek history tended to be cyclical, reflecting the impersonal rotation of the earth and seasons, being sadly optimistic only with the wry supposition that if winter came, spring could not be far behind.

These contrasts, then, between abstract and concrete thought have fundamental implications for our subsequent distinction between Hebraic biblical typology based on the concrete, and Greek allegory, which so often pirouettes off from the concrete into the realm of abstraction.

B

It may be useful to think of myth as something which is always happening, removed from the contingency of history which properly deals with what

happened rather than with what happens.⁸ Myth, then, is related to ecology, to the biological life cycle of man. Legend, too, often has a quality of fantasy or miracle which likewise divorces itself from the cross-purposes, confusions, and uncertainties of authentic history that can easily prevent a contrived, thematic narration from running an unimpeded course. And it may be useful to think of commentary as the reduction of myth, or legend, or fable to prose discourse, to what the Vanderbilt New Critics of the 1930's for their special purpose of protecting the integrity of poetry, used to call the "heresy of paraphrase." Commentary is relatively easy to perform: thousands of students type thousands of beltristic meditations on *Othello* every year: thousands of preachers can preach thousands of sermons on the "lessons" of the Jonah legend, or write plays on the Prodigal Son topic so dear to the hearts of Renaissance humanists,⁹ anxious to teach their charges "pure" Latin, and insulate them from naughty Plautus.¹⁰ One such preacher is Father Mapple, in chapter ix of Melville's novel, *Moby-Dick or The Whale* (1851), which many critics esteem the greatest American novel. The recent edition of this work by Charles Feidelson Jr. (1964) provides a mine of background information, especially about cetology, a subject of absorbing interest to Melville, an old salt himself.

To suit his homiletic purposes, a preacher can extract many themes from the Book of Jonah: Disobedience (especially the topic of the priest, who, like Jonah, disobeys his vocation); Predestination or Freewill; God's Justice and Mercy; the Universalism of God towards His errant children versus the narrow postexilic tribalism of Israel; God's Omnipotence, controlling flora and fauna and fish of the sea; the missionary charge on all Christians, and so on. Father Mapple's sermon is drenched in nautical metaphor befitting his former career as a harpooner, the apprehension of seamen in his congregation, as well as the very topic of Jonah itself. To a man of Mapple's sensibility the "world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow." He does not

⁸ See Lynn White Jr., "Christian Myth and Christian History," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3 (1942), 145-46.

⁹ See Johannes Müller, S.J., *Das Jesuitdrama in den Ländern deutscher Zunge von Anfang (1555) bis zum Hochbarock (1665)*, Augsburg, 1930. Müller records that there was a performance of a play entitled *Ninive Poenitens* at Regensburg in 1624; and of a play entitled *Der Prophet Jonas* at Koesfeld in 1650, the texts of which have apparently not survived.

¹⁰ For example, Cornelius Schonaeus (1540-1611), a Haarlem schoolmaster, wrote sacred plays for his charges to con about Susanna, Judith, Daniel, Ananias, Joseph, etc., collected in his *Terentius Christianus* (Amsterdam, 1595), the title of which is certainly misleading.