

# THE TWO-EDGED SWORD

John L. McKenzie Reprint Series  
*(in order of original publishing)*

*The Two-Edged Sword*

*Myths and Realities: Studies in Biblical Theology*

*The Power and the Wisdom*

*Mastering the Meaning of the Bible*

*Authority in the Church*

*Second Isaiah (Commentary)*

*The Gospel According to Matthew (Commentary)*

*Did I Say That?*

*Light on the Epistles*

*Light on the Gospels*

*Theology of the Old Testament*

*The Old Testament Without Illusions*

*Source (on contemporary issues)*

*How Relevant is the Bible?*

*The New Testament Without Illusions*

*The Civilization of Christianity*

# THE TWO-EDGED SWORD

---

AN INTERPRETATION OF  
THE OLD TESTAMENT

---

JOHN L. McKENZIE, S.J.

WIPF & STOCK • Eugene, Oregon

**IMPRIMI POTEST:**

GULIELMUS J. SCHMIDT, S.J.  
*Praepositus Provincialis*  
*Provinciae Chicagiensis, S.J.*

**NIHIL OBSTAT:**

JOSEPH G. KEMPF, PH.D.  
*Censor librorum*

**IMPRIMATUR:**

✠ PAUL C. SCHULTE, D.D.  
*Archbishop of Indianapolis*  
December 9, 1955

**TO MY MOTHER**

Wipf and Stock Publishers  
199 W 8th Ave, Suite 3  
Eugene, OR 97401

The Two-Edged Sword  
An Interpretation of the Old Testament  
By McKenzie, John L.  
Copyright©1956 by The Estate of John L. McKenzie  
ISBN 13: 978-1-60608-049-8  
Publication date 12/11/2008  
Previously published by The Bruce Publishing Company, 1956

## Series Foreword

MARK TWAIN ONCE RUMINATED, “It ain’t the parts of the Bible I can’t understand that bother me; it’s the parts I do.” John L. McKenzie, commenting on the same subject from another perspective, wrote, “The simple see at once that the way of Jesus is very hard to do, but easy to understand. It takes real cleverness and sophisticated intelligence to find ways to evade and distort the clear meaning of what Jesus said.”

But McKenzie, like Twain, was himself a person of exceedingly high intelligence, distinctively witty, with a double-edged sword’s incisiveness. As the first Catholic elected President of the Society of Biblical Literature, President of the Catholic Biblical Association, fluent in ten languages, sole author of a 900,000-word Bible dictionary, of over a dozen books and hundreds of essays, John McKenzie attained worldwide recognition as the dean of Catholic biblical scholars.

But again like Twain, McKenzie possessed a cultivated reservoir of abiding empathy—cognitive and emotional—for ordinary people and what they endure, millennia-in and millennia-out. He insisted: “I am a human being before I am a theologian.” Unlike many who become entrenched in a hermetic, scholarly world of ever-multiplying abstractions, McKenzie never permitted his God-given faculty of empathy to atrophy. To the contrary, he refused to leave his fellow human beings out in the cold on the doorstep of some empathically-defective theological house of cards. This refusal made all the difference. It also often cost him the support, or engendered the hostility, of his ecclesiastical and academic associates and institutional superiors—as so often happens in scholarly, commercial and governmental endeavors, when unwanted truth that is the fruit of unauthorized empathy is factored into the equation.

### *Series Foreword*

John McKenzie produced works of biblically “prophetic scholarship” unlike anything created in the twentieth century by any scholar of his stature. They validate, with fastidious erudition, what the “simple see at once” as the truth of Jesus—e.g., “No reader of the New Testament, simple or sophisticated, can retain any doubt of Jesus’ position toward violence directed to persons, individual or collective; he rejected it totally”—but which pastors and professors entrenched in ecclesiastical nationalism and/or organizational survivalism have chronically obscured or disparaged.

In literate societies, power-elites know that to preemptively or remedially justify the evil and cruelty they execute, their think-tanks must include theologians as part of their mercenary army of academics. These well-endowed, but empathically underdeveloped, theological hired guns then proselytize bishops, clergy, and Christians in general by gilding the illogical with coats of scholarly circumlocutions so thick that the opposite of what Jesus said appears to be Gospel truth. The intent of this learned legerdemain is the manufacturing of a faux consensus fidei to justify, in Jesus’ sacred name, everything necessary to protect and augment an odious—local, planetary and/or ecclesial—status quo.

John McKenzie is the antidote to such secular and ecclesial think-tank pseudo-evangelization. Truths Jesus taught—that the simple see at once and that Christian Churches and their leaders have long since abandoned, but must again come to see if they are to honestly proclaim and live the Gospel—are given superior scholarly exposition via McKenzie. This is what moved Dorothy Day to write in her diary on April 14, 1968, “Up at 5:00 and reading *The Power and the Wisdom*. I thank God for sending me men with such insights as Fr. McKenzie.”

For those familiar with McKenzie this re-publication of his writings offers an opportunity to encounter again a consistent scholarly-empathic frame of consciousness about Genesis through Revelation, whose major crux interpretum is the Servant of Yahweh (Isaiah 42). Ultimately embodied in the person of Jesus, the Servant is the revealer of Abba almighty—who is “on our side,” if our means each person and all humanity. For all Christians, John L. McKenzie’s prophetic scholarship offers a wellspring of Jesus-sourced truth about the life they have been

*Series Foreword*

chosen to live, the world in which they live, and the Christ in whom they  
“live and move and have their being.”

(Rev.) Emmanuel Charles McCarthy

September 2008

Brockton, Massachusetts



## PREFACE

THE past ten to fifteen years have witnessed a remarkable resurgence of interest in the Old Testament among both Catholics and Protestants. This interest has borne fruit not only in scholarly research and in new translations, but also in a wider presentation of the Old Testament to the general public in college courses, lectures, periodicals, books, and pamphlets. People have begun to ask questions about the place of the Old Testament in Catholic belief and Catholic life to which they do not find a full and satisfactory answer in their books and lectures. There must be few teachers of the subject who have not been asked by their friends why they do not write a book which would present the religious and spiritual values of the Old Testament in terms intelligible to the general reader. This book, probably, would never have been any more than such a casual conversation piece were it not for the courage of Mr. William Bruce. When, in the course of some correspondence on another subject, he indicated that his company would be glad to receive such a manuscript, the author was afraid he could not live with his conscience if he did not accept the challenge.

The book is addressed to the general public: to anyone who thinks himself interested enough in the Old Testament to read a book about it which is not too deep or too heavy or too advanced or too big. Consequently, the book has a few features which need some explanation, if not some indulgence. My professional colleagues will read the book, as they read all such popular presentations; but they will not be surprised if they find nothing here which they could not have done themselves, and done better. My excuse for doing it is that no one else has done it. Were the book written for them, it should have the bibliography and references which are demanded in scholarly work; but the general reader is discouraged

by the ponderous apparatus of learning, and I have omitted all footnotes.

As a Catholic priest and a teacher in a Catholic seminary, I write for my fellow Catholics in the first place. But I do not wish to exclude readers who are not members of the Catholic Church. There are no polemics in the work — not because I abstain from them on principle, but because they do not help to disclose those values of the Bible with which the book is concerned. But the reader, whatever his own religious belief, is entitled to know that I accept entirely the teaching of the Catholic Church, and that what I say here is as “Catholic” as I can make it, in the ordinary sense of the term. Readers, whether Catholic or not, may be surprised to learn how much freedom of opinion the Church wishes her members to enjoy. One need not surrender one’s intellectual liberty to write as a Catholic, although false ideas about this are current.

It would be presumption to think that this book is “a full and satisfactory answer” to the questions about the religious and spiritual values of the Old Testament. In the course of the book we meet some of the modern attempts at a “spiritual interpretation” of the Old Testament, and we see that they are not successful. Where others have failed, one must be very modest about one’s hope of success. Yet the task must be undertaken, and the duty lies first of all on those whose training and experience are in this field. One must hope that there will be some constructive work even in one’s failure. What is needed is a complete synthesis of the religious and spiritual values of the Old Testament; much as I should have liked to do this, I found that the task was beyond me. This book can be no more than a beginning of a “spiritual interpretation.” But it can be a beginning; the ideas which are discussed here are, in my judgment, of vital significance, and they have been little or not at all exploited in contemporary Catholic writing in English on the Old Testament.

It is no exaggeration to say that there has been, within the past fifty years, a revolution in the study of the Old Testament. This revolution is a consequence of the discovery and interpretation of the languages, history, art, and literature of the civilization of the

ancient Near East, in which the Old Testament was lived and written. It has been my intention to present not the "new learning" itself, on which excellent books have been written, but the religious beliefs of the Old Testament as they have been illuminated by the new learning. With a popular audience in view, it seemed best to omit technical arguments and to pass over erudite controversies. The expert will easily see that I have ruthlessly oversimplified some complicated questions and presented my conclusions without all the evidence upon which they rest. I should have been happy to find a way to avoid this and still reach the general reader; as it is, the material is as solidly founded as my own studies and the criticisms of several scholars who read the manuscript can make it.

There is a large admixture of the personal and the subjective in the book; I think there must be. The dead level of perfect objectivity is not always a good ideal, nor always possible. If we are to look for the spiritual significance of the Old Testament, we cannot but look within ourselves. For such a treatment touches the Bible as it has personal interest and personal appeal; unless one experienced this appeal in oneself, one could scarcely communicate it to others. But the reader has a right to know that he is reading a personal interpretation. When I say that I write a "Catholic" book, I do not mean that it is wholly and entirely a statement of Catholic doctrine; I mean that the Church has, as far as I know, said nothing which is contrary to what I say, that my personal interpretation is not out of harmony with her teaching. Except where I say so, I do not pretend to voice the teaching of the Church or the commonly accepted conclusions of scholars. An individual writer cannot speak with authority; he has no competence other than that which is presumed to come from his own reading, writing, and teaching. It is hardly necessary to add that I have never doubted that the Old Testament is a book of the highest spiritual value, second only to the New Testament into which it flowers; indeed, this conviction has grown deeper over the years of my professional work. If I do not communicate this conviction to those who read this book, it is owing to my personal failure to express my mind, not to the weakness of my conviction,

and still less to anything in the sacred books about which I write.

Two points of detail must be mentioned. The numbering of the Psalms, from 9 to 147, differs by one in the Douay and Knox Bibles from the numbering used in the King James and other Protestant Bibles. This difference goes back to the Greek and Latin Bibles for the first group and to the Hebrew Bible for the other group. This unnecessary confusion is beyond remedy; with the Confraternity Old Testament, we follow a common practice of giving two numbers for the Psalms, the first indicating its number in the Douay Bible, the second its number in the King James Bible, thus: Psalm 73 (74).

The second point deals with proper names, both personal and local. In many proper names the form used in the Douay, Knox, and Confraternity Bibles, which comes from the Greek Bible through the Latin, differs from the form used in the King James Bible, which is closer to the Hebrew. It is unfortunate that the editors of the Confraternity Old Testament have refused to recognize the fact that the names used in the King James Bible are in possession in the English-speaking world, even among Catholics. I employ the forms used in the King James Bible, as a growing number of Catholic writers do, both here and abroad.

There remains only the agreeable task of acknowledging assistance. I express my thanks to the following members of my own religious community: the Rev. William P. LeSaint, the Rev. William L. Moran, the Rev. Richard J. O'Brien, and some others who must remain anonymous for reading the manuscript and suggesting numerous improvements; to the Rev. P. Joseph Cahill and Brother Eugene J. Nevins for cheerfully undertaking the drudgery of typing the final copy. My thanks are due also to Mr. Aloysius Croft and Mr. Howard Smith of the Bruce Publishing Company; never was an author's path to publication made smoother and easier. I owe a special tribute to Miss Anne Ford of Brookline, Mass., for her wise counsel on preparing the book for publication. I am indebted to more friends than I can mention by name for encouragement given me in the three years which have elapsed since I wrote the first line; there were moments when, had it not been for this kindly encouragement, I might have

decided the effort was not worth sustaining. I must acknowledge the assistance given by the theological students of West Baden College since 1942. They have patiently permitted me to work out my ideas about the Old Testament in my classes; and since they are very quick to detect sham and to point out obscurity, their questions and objections are more responsible than I can tell for whatever form my ideas have taken in this book. My acknowledgment to my first and greatest teacher appears in the dedication.

JOHN L. MCKENZIE, S.J.

West Baden College

July 31, 1956

The Four Hundredth Anniversary of the  
Death of St. Ignatius Loyola



# CONTENTS

## PREFACE

v

## I.

### THE SACRED BOOKS

1

*The sacred books — contents and literary types — Jewish and Christian collections — inspiration of the Bible — divine and human authorship — inerrancy of the Bible — Hebrew thought-patterns — the Bible in Catholic life — modern “spiritual interpretation” of the Old Testament — spiritual values of the Old Testament.*

## II.

### GOD SPEAKS TO MAN

22

*Revelation in ancient religions — Hebrew belief in revelation — revelation to the patriarchs and to Moses — revelation to the prophets — Isaiah — Jeremiah — revelation and the priests — revelation and the Law — revelation and wisdom — the prophetic experience of revelation.*

## III.

### THE GODS OF THE SEMITES

45

*The Hebrews and ancient civilizations — Canaanite religion in the Old Testament — Canaanite mythology — nature-religions — magic and demonology — the cultic myth of fertility — philosophical implications of the myth — religion and society — the king and the god — character of the gods.*

## IV.

## THE HEBREW STORY

60

*Modern concept of history — ancient concept of history — the story — oral tradition — the story and historical criticism — religious character of the Hebrew story — origins of Hebrew story — revelation of God in history.*

## V.

## COSMIC ORIGINS

72

*Religious and scientific explanation of origins — ancient concept of the visible world — Mesopotamian myth of creation — Genesis and the six days — Genesis and dualism — biblical allusions to the creation myth — creation as a continuing process — creation from nothing — origins of biblical idea of creation — the biblical idea and modern philosophy of nature.*

## VI.

## HUMAN ORIGINS

90

*Human origins in mythology — allusions in the Old Testament to human origins — position of man in creation — Eden — the origin of sex — the fall and the fertility cult — the fall in modern theology — the biblical idea and evolution.*

## VII.

## NATIONAL ORIGINS

109

*Ancient civil societies — the state and the king — tribe and clan — ancestors as ideal figures — the covenant of the patriarchs — the covenant of Sinai — the covenant and the land of promise — the exodus — the moral obligations of the covenant — the covenant and the cult — imageless worship — the name of the God of Israel — the covenant and election.*

## VIII.

## KING AND PROPHET

132

*Kingship in Egypt and Mesopotamia — the charismatic leader — two views of Hebrew kingship — the ideal king — Samuel and Saul — Elijah, Elisha, and the kings of Israel — David and Nathan — Josiah and Deuteronomy — failure of the Hebrew monarchy.*

## IX.

## THE NATIONAL WELFARE

150

*The common good — religion and the common good — the Hebrew monarchy and the common good — integration of nature and the moral order — the prophetic concept of sin — Hosea and the spouse of Israel — the prophetic program of the common good — the prophetic judgment of the Hebrew state.*

## X.

## ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS

169

*The Hebrews and international relations — the states of Palestine and Syria — Assyria and the Hebrews — Assyria and the prophets — Isaiah — Jeremiah and Babylon — collapse of the Hebrew state — the significance of the history of the Hebrew state.*

## XI.

## THE HOPE OF THE FUTURE

189

*The Hebrew view of history — the patriarchs and the future — the eternal dynasty of David — the ideal ruler of the future kingdom — external features of the future kingdom — moral regeneration — the return of Paradise — the future kingdom and foreign nations — the inauguration of the future kingdom — the future kingdom and the Gospel — eschatology — salvation and the good life.*

## XII.

## THE WISDOM OF THE HEBREWS

211

*Personal religion in the Old Testament — ancient wisdom — the scribes — the wisdom of Egypt — Hebrew books of wisdom — the two ways — self-righteousness of the wise — virtue and wisdom — knowledge and wisdom — reward and punishment — the value of Hebrew wisdom.*

## XIII.

## THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY

227

*The prosperity of the wicked — the story of Job — Ecclesiastes — the problem of evil — the dialogue of Job — Jeremiah — the Servant of the Lord — the Servant in the New Testament.*

## XIV.

## LIFE AND DEATH

246

*Belief in afterlife — Egyptian ideas — Mesopotamian ideas — the Hebrew concept of human life — Sheol — intimations of afterlife in the Old Testament — the resurrection of the body — the significance of this belief.*

## XV.

## THE PRAYER OF THE HEBREWS

265

*The Psalms in the Church — types of psalms — hymns of praise — psalms of repentance — the Hebrew concept of guilt — petition — familiarity of Hebrew prayer — tone of complaint — self-righteousness — psalms of imprecation.*

## XVI.

## THE GOD OF THE HEBREWS

286

*Survey of opinion — the holy — the “wholly other” —*

*anthropomorphism — the divine personal will — the  
divine condescension and compassion — divine love.*

## XVII.

### THE OLD AND NEW

295

*The Jews and the Old Testament — Marcion — the  
interpretation of the Fathers: prediction, type and  
allegory, preparation — modern views — the Old Tes-  
tament a Christian book — the Old Testament a prep-  
aration for the New — the Old Testament in theology.*

### CONCLUSION

309

### A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

313

### INDEX

315



# THE TWO-EDGED SWORD





## THE SACRED BOOKS

THE Bible is "the Book"; this is what its name means, and this is what it has been for centuries to Jews and Christians. There is something that sets it apart from other books, whatever they may be; it is sacred—sacred in its origins, sacred in its contents, sacred in the reverence which it demands from those who approach it. In the Jewish synagogue, the text of the Torah is carried reverently from its container to the lectern in a little procession; in Protestant churches, the object which first strikes the eyes is the Book, seated in front center as upon a throne; in Catholic churches, the book is carried solemnly by the sub-deacon to the place where the deacon will read the Gospel, and before the deacon reads from the book he honors it by incense. The Bible is so treated because it is the traditional belief of these churches that it is the written word of God; many of the modern members of these churches may have modified this traditional belief, but they have retained the hallowed usages of older days—a liturgical profession of faith in the words of St. Paul: "The whole of Scripture is divinely inspired."

These external solemnities are impressive, as they are meant to be; more impressive is the witness of the past, the blood and the toil which have been dedicated to faith in the sacredness of the Bible. Roman Christians faced the beasts and the flames rather than deliver the sacred books to their enemies; Jewish fugitives have carried their sacred scrolls with them all over the world, clinging to their Bible even when they were stripped of all their worldly goods. That we can read the Bible at all we owe

to unnumbered scribes of centuries past, who patiently copied out the sacred text in unheated and poorly lighted rooms. Over one hundred editions of the Bible appeared in the fifty years which followed the invention of printing. Those who believe that the Bible is sacred have taken the Bible with them wherever they have gone in the world; it has been written in every language that man has learned to write. No book has been so widely possessed nor so widely read, and no book has sired so many other books; enter the library of any great center of learning, and try to comprehend, in one glance, the contents of the shelves on the Bible. One is appalled; it is a very mountain of learning and of labor. Surely the insatiable human genius has applied itself to nothing else with the same pertinacity. Is not the farmer's wife who reads her Testament by the kerosene lamp driven by the same urge which keeps the famous philologist at the exacting tasks of scholarship? "You search the Scriptures," Jesus said, "because you think you will find eternal life in them."

We are concerned here with only a part of this sacred book, the larger and the older part: the Old Testament. We cannot tell when the Old Testament was first acknowledged by its readers as sacred. In the Gospels, we find Jesus and His followers, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the common people all agreed that it is a sacred book: the court of final appeal which answers every question and ends every dispute, for no one will question the truth or the authority of the word of God. We find it two or three centuries earlier venerated as a sacred book by the Jews of Palestine and of the great Greek city of Alexandria in Egypt; but earlier than this we cannot trace surely anywhere in Jewish history the conscious possession of sacred books. About four hundred years before the Gospels, when Ezra and his scribes read the Law to the citizens of Jerusalem, who sat patiently shivering in the chill autumn rain, he read them the Law which the Lord had given through His servant Moses; the Law was the law of the Lord, but the book was the book of Moses.

We call the Bible a book; but, when we look at this sacred book, we see that it is really a collection of books: a collection so varied in content and in time and place of origin that we wonder

how it was ever assembled. The Old Testament is the collection of the sacred books of the Hebrews. The ancient Hebrew people were members of the great Semitic group of peoples which inhabited most of the Near East from the Mediterranean to the mountains which divide western Asia from central Asia and India. The Hebrew people lived in the country which we now call Palestine (where a new modern state has recently taken the ancient title of Israel), a coastal strip on the eastern Mediterranean between Syria and Egypt. The Hebrews, according to their own traditions, entered this territory twelve or thirteen hundred years before Christ, and there they maintained themselves as an independent political unit until the beginning of the sixth century B.C. They continued to dwell there as a subject people of the great empires of the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans, until the Romans, angered by their intractable and rebellious conduct, laid the land waste and scattered them through the world in the first century of our era, about forty years after the death of Jesus Christ. Not, indeed, that the Hebrews had not entered the great world earlier; for we find them moving into Egypt, Mesopotamia, and as far west as Rome by the beginning of our era. But until the legions of Titus leveled Jerusalem to the ground, Palestine was the homeland of the Hebrew people.

The sacred books come from almost every century of this long period; the oldest written parts antedate 1000 B.C., the latest books were written a century or less before the birth of Jesus. There is no book of importance whose literary origins are less well known than those of the Old Testament; it is largely anonymous. A few famous household names — Moses, David, Solomon, the prophets — bulk largely in the Bible and in popular recollection; but the larger portion of the book is of uncertain authorship and imprecise date. "It is a waste of time," said Gregory the Great, "to inquire about the author of the book of Job, since the Holy Spirit wrote it." We, unfortunately, are the children of a more sophisticated age, which will not tolerate Gregory's casual damnation of all literary criticism. When we write of the Bible, we must take some account of what can be discovered about the authorship of the sacred books and the time and place of their composition. But

we do not know the writers of the Old Testament as we know Shakespeare, Dante, Virgil; and we cannot foresee that we shall ever know them much better than we do now.

The contents of this collection of books are even more diversified than its origins. We open the Old Testament, and we plunge into an unassimilated mass of stories, speeches, poems, songs, wise sayings. This material is ineptly grouped under book titles which tell us little or nothing about the contents of the separate books, and divided into chapters and verses, handy for reference, which fail to define the character of the literature so divided — if, indeed, they do not mislead us. Out of this collection there has arisen a traditional threefold division into history, prophecy, wisdom; but modern learning has found many subdivisions under these three headings. It is not necessary, however, to study modern biblical science to see that a definition of “wisdom” which includes Proverbs and the Song of Solomon must be wide, or to see that one plays with words if one calls Genesis 2–3 and the story of David and Absalom in 2 Samuel 9–20 by the same name of “history.”

What we call the “historical books” of the Old Testament contain the traditions of the ancient Hebrews about themselves; some traditions are nearer to the events, some are more remote, but they are all “stories.” What we mean by “story” we shall explain in Chapter IV; it is an extremely important idea. Prophecy has this common element in all its forms, that it is the word which a man speaks in the name of the Lord. “Wisdom” is the fruit of the collective experience of the wise, handed on from father to son, proposing the practical way to manage one’s life and affairs so as to assure prosperity and avoid disaster; we can take this as a preliminary description, for we shall have to return to this type of literature. Within this threefold classification there is no room for hymns and prayers, such as we have in the Psalms, nor for the Song of Solomon, which stands by itself, nor really for Job and Ecclesiastes, who go far beyond the teaching of the sages, nor for Jonah, which is a moralizing romance. But we must have some easy classification of the books of the Old Testament, and the traditional threefold division, properly understood, will serve as well as any other.

These are the sacred books, accepted by Jews and Christians. Catholics, Protestants, and Jews have never reached an agreement on the exact number of books which are contained in this collection. From the very beginning of Christianity the followers of Jesus adopted the Bible of the Jews of Alexandria; the learned men of Alexandria — and it was a great center of learning — had added to the sacred books some compositions which were not found in the collection of Palestine. After the schism of Jews and Christians, Jews would never accept the Old Testament of the Christians, and many learned men of the early Church believed that the Jewish collection was the true word of God, and that such books as Judith, Tobias, Ecclesiasticus, the Wisdom of Solomon, the Maccabees should not be reckoned as sacred. An opinion which was maintained by men like Athanasius, Jerome, Hilary of Poitiers, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory the Great could not easily be called disrespectful. Yet the Church was not with them. When the Reformers of the sixteenth century, misled by the spurious learning of the Renaissance, wished to return to the “pure” Old Testament of the Jews, the Council of Trent, with all solemnity, declared for the tradition of the primitive Church, not for the spurious learning either of the Renaissance or of the biblical schools of the fourth century.

The divergence, however, is relatively slight, if one may make such comparisons; that is, the essential character of the collection is not altered by the presence or the absence of the disputed books. The disputed books, as a group, do not attain either the religious or the literary heights which are attained elsewhere in the Old Testament. This does not, in Catholic belief, lessen their sacredness. The Wisdom of Solomon is as much the word of God as the book of Job, although it is not nearly so profound or well written; Job has meant much more in the history of belief than the Wisdom of Solomon. The books of the Maccabees have the same claim upon faith as the books of Moses; but their religious significance is less. The Old Testament is substantially the same book in both the Jewish and the Catholic collections; more important than the divergence in its contents is the agreement that it is sacred.

Or can we really speak nowadays of an agreement that the

Old Testament is a sacred book? It is easier to say what "sacred" has meant to our fathers than to say what it means to us. From early Christianity until the nineteenth century, all who accepted the Bible had no dispute about what made it sacred. Catholics and Protestants and Jews quarreled about its meaning, but not about its authority. For all of them, the Bible was sacred because it was the word of God. It was the word of God because God wrote it. Nor had they any doubt concerning the manner in which God wrote it; He "inspired" its human authors by dictating to them the words which they should write. Many thus regarded the Bible as a stenographic report of what God said to certain men, or told them to say; they did not write, they transcribed. Consequently, to quote the Bible in any passage was to quote "the words of God," what He said to Moses or to Paul. It was truly a golden age of theology, for the primary source of theology was as readily available as the dictionary.

What has happened to this simple and consoling belief, by which any man could pick up his Bible in full confidence that God had left for him in writing the very words which He had spoken to man? Many have thought that to abandon this belief was to abandon faith in the word of God altogether, faith that God had ever spoken to man; and, unable to find any other way in which they can think of the Bible as a sacred book, they have ceased to regard it as sacred. The enthroned Bible, the incense burned before the book of the Gospels, they think idolatry. Educated men, they say, do not and cannot read the Bible on their knees. We deplore their defection; but let us see what compelling reasons there are for the abandonment of the early belief in the verbal dictation of the Bible.

In substance, the belief in verbal dictation has been abandoned because it deprives the Bible of any human character. The stenographer contributes nothing to the letter which is dictated; in the same way, the men who wrote the books of the Bible contributed nothing, if they wrote what God dictated. Was it necessary to wait until the nineteenth century to see that the human character of the Bible emerges starkly from every page, that its writers left the impress of their personality, their times,

their background, their limitations as much as any man who ever put pen to paper? Perhaps not, for there were learned men of centuries long past who perceived that the Bible is a human book; unfortunately, they did not carry their ideas to maturity, and they did not divert the course of scholarship. We cannot argue with an established fact.

Neither can we argue with the human character of the Bible; the most recent statement of the Holy See, in 1943, forbids us to do so, and imposes upon exegetes the task of studying the human character of the Bible: its authors, their times, the culture in which they lived, as a necessary step to the understanding of the Bible. The Holy See points out the truth of what has been taught in biblical schools for many years: that the Bible has many and close affinities with other literatures of the ancient Near East, and that to ignore these affinities is to close one's eyes to the meaning of the Bible. The Holy Father was not afraid to say that this knowledge of the Bible was impossible for men of earlier times; under such leadership, neither should we fear to say so.

When we thus affirm the human character of the Bible, we seem to make it more difficult for ourselves to understand its sacred character. For have not many religions their sacred books? The Vedas of India, the Avesta of Persia, the Sibylline books of Rome, and other such books of the ancient world were "sacred" in a way — although we must notice that we find no other book which claims to be the word of God; the Koran of Islam is an imitation of the Bible. Modern educated men, unable to accept the fairy tale of a divine book, have consoled themselves with the thought that the Bible is a "great" book, great in its content, great in its influence. They will not deny altogether that it is, in a manner, sacred; for they believe that it is the work of men of marvelous religious insight, men who were close to God and understood Him and His ways far better than does the ordinary mortal. The religious wisdom of these men, they say, deserves our veneration, and we should, even if less childishly than our forebears, humbly submit ourselves to their guidance in the way of God. The Bible speaks of God on every page, it views the world and man under the divine perspective; he who reads it feels

that he hears God speaking to him "the words which are spirit and life." Is not this a truly sacred book which God has given to men, even if our understanding of its sacredness is more mature and more scientific than the simplicity of past ages?

All this is pathetically beautiful; but it does not give us a sacred book. For such a book is not the word of God; and we must, with Jeremiah, separate the precious from the vile, the word of God from the word of man. The faith of ages is folly, not simplicity, if the two are the same. We cannot pretend that is as easy for us as it was for the past; but modern theology has struggled manfully with the problem, and it presents an explanation which affirms both the divine and the human character of the Bible. Theology takes its departure from the words of Leo XIII in 1893: that God is the Author of the Sacred Scriptures; that the Holy Spirit assumed men as the instruments of writing; that He so moved them to write and so assisted them in writing that they conceived in their minds and faithfully wrote and expressed aptly, and with infallible truth, all that He intended, and nothing else; "in no other way," said Leo, "would God be the author of the whole of Sacred Scripture."

Let us dwell for a few moments on the idea of "instrument," which Leo XIII proposed as the key to the understanding of the divine authorship of the Bible. An instrument is an extension of the human body; the pen is an elongated finger; the knife, a sharpened fingernail; the hammer, a metal fist. The peculiar structure of the instrument gives it qualities which the human member does not possess. Yet without the movement which the human member gives it, the instrument is incapable of the action for which it is employed. Does the pen write, or the man? Obviously, the man writes, and the pen writes; but the man uses the pen, not the pen the man. We cannot say that the words on the paper are from the man, the ink from the pen; for the words on the paper are nothing but ink scratches. The man cannot write without the pen, nor the pen without the man; the man has, for his writing, made the pen a part of himself, an extra finger with qualities which his own fingers lack.

This is analogy, example, comparison; and, like all comparisons, it will fail in details. The man, one thinks at once, is a living

instrument, capable of personal activity in which he is not an instrument; perhaps we should liken him to the ox which draws the plow rather than to the pen or the knife. But let us adhere to the likenesses. The ox cannot plow unless its strength be applied to the work by the man, and the man cannot draw the plow by his own strength. God cannot produce a human book without using a man; for a human book is, by definition, the work of a man. Nor can man produce a divine book; for this work, God makes the man a part of Himself, if the phrase be admitted. The man has a human mind, human sentiments, human experience, human language; these are the qualities which make it possible for him to produce a book. God takes the instrument, so endowed, and applies it to work, the work of writing; and by the use of this instrument He writes the book which He Himself wants written. He who puts his thoughts in written language is an author. But God submits Himself, so to speak, to the limitations of the instrument. One cannot carve with a brush, nor paint with a chisel. God cannot express thoughts which are beyond the mental capacity of the man who is His instrument; if He wishes to express other and more sublime thoughts, He must choose an instrument which is apt. He cannot express through the author of Wisdom the profundity of the book of Job, because the author of Wisdom is a less profound thinker. He cannot, through the author of Genesis, give a scientific account of the origins of the world, because the author of Genesis knew no science. He cannot write a fascinating story through the author of the books of Chronicles, because this dull author lacked both imagination and style. Yet God writes their books, for they are His instruments. The man writes, and God writes; but God uses the man. We cannot say that the thoughts are from God, the language from the man; for God uses both the thoughts and the language of the man through whom He writes.

This is not satisfactory in all details; for the idea of a human person as an instrument is unique, unparalleled, so that we might wonder whether the term is properly applied here. The use of the very human heart, of the mind and sentiments of an individual person, to express the thoughts of God seems a severe strain upon

our credulity; yet to one who admits the creative power of God it is not impossible, however difficult it may be to grasp. Is He who made the eye without vision? Is He who made the mouth without speech? The man who writes under divine inspiration is not a stenographer; he is a living instrument, whose entire personality and experience, with his own peculiar gifts of mind and heart, is applied by God to express that which God wishes to say. The book is divine and human; God externalizes His mind through human thought and expression.

But the inspired book, in one respect, escapes the taint of humanity. As the ancients questioned neither the truth nor the authority of the sacred book, so modern believers accept the word of God as free from error. When God speaks, He does not lie and He cannot be deceived. This is the ancient faith; and modern man, however sophisticated he has become, cannot say that the word of God is deceitful or deceived. But does not the divine authorship which we have just sketched leave room for this human trait? If God submits Himself to the limitations of the instrument, does He not also accept this limit of the human mind, that it cannot attain infallibility? And would not this concession make it easier for the educated man to accept the Bible as sacred?

We wish to be honest with ourselves, and so we ought to attend to some of the reasons why the educated man finds it so difficult to believe that the Bible is free from error. From the beginning of modern science, scientific learning, with the brashness of the high school sophomore, has gleefully pointed out "scientific errors" in the Bible: the creation of the world in six days, the age of 6000 years for man, the immediate creation of the human body, the flatness of the earth, and dozens of others. The rediscovery of the history of the ancient Near East within the past hundred years has given occasion to charge the Bible with a heavy load of "errors" in fact: the chronology of the Hebrew kings does not even agree with itself, still less with the fixed and sure dates of other peoples; the story of the passage of the Hebrews from Egypt into Canaan cannot be harmonized with the known course of events in this period; the men of patriarchal times lived no longer than other men — and, again, dozens of others. Some of these are points

of detail, perhaps, but where infallibility is in question, a single error in detail is one too many. These blasts have had a crushing effect upon many minds; for men are unwilling and unable to challenge the dogmatic assertions of those who show proved competence in their own fields. Scientific learning is terrifying to the layman; in its presence he is superstitiously aware of intellectual depths which the layman cannot penetrate. Now that the warfare of science and theology is several generations old, we can see that confidence in the Bible as a religious document does not long survive loss of confidence in the accuracy of the Bible in other respects.

We still wish to be honest with ourselves; and we know that the divine character of the Bible cannot be vindicated by denying the findings of modern science. The believer must be willing to admit the reality of the difficulties. At the same time, he must realize that error arises from misunderstanding; perhaps the Bible does not mean what we so easily think it means. St. Augustine advises us that we should rather admit that the text is not accurately preserved, or that we have not understood it, or anything, rather than admit that the word of God errs. The task of the interpreter who accepts the Bible as sacred is not rendered easier by his affirmation of its infallible veracity. He cannot hope that he will always reach an explanation of the Bible which will satisfy at once his faith and his honesty and his intelligence.

But he is encouraged in his task by the progress that has been made in the past hundred years. Many of the old heavy-handed assaults upon the Bible are now seen to be as ridiculous as the science which launched them. He knows that readers of the Bible, both believers and unbelievers, have often confused fiction and fact, imagination and vision, figure and reality, poetry and prose. He knows that the Bible speaks of natural phenomena in popular language, as all scientists do when they are "off duty," and that its accounts of past events are the artless and untutored stories of simple men, not the painstaking reconstruction of the modern historian. Because of these principles, to which an earlier age of theology paid less attention, he is not troubled when the Bible appears to be in error; and he does not create trouble for himself

by making the mistake which that age sometimes made of appealing to the Bible as an encyclopedia of wisdom human and divine, the last court of judgment for every problem which confronts the mind. Rather he does his best to understand the meaning of the Bible as accurately as he can, assured that its meaning, when ascertained, will not contradict the truth. If he fails to answer every question which arises, he is not vastly perturbed; his principles assure him that an answer can be found, and he does not feel that it is his responsibility or that of his generation to solve all biblical problems.

We approach the Bible as a sacred book with the same veneration which our ancestors gave it, although we are more aware of its human side than they were. God wrote through the ancient Hebrews; the more we know of their habits of mind and speech, the better we shall apprehend the full meaning of the word of God. It is not the purpose of this book to deal expressly with this subject; but we shall, in fact, touch it, for much of what we have to say consists in pointing out the peculiarly Hebrew ideas of the Old Testament, and their significance for us. But a few generalities by way of introduction will not be out of place; they may help us to define the human character of the Bible more closely.

Let us first recall that the Hebrews, at no stage of their history, reached a point of civilization, of material and intellectual culture, which approaches the civilization of the modern world. The wisest of the Hebrews was ignorant of many things which are familiar to any intelligent sixth grader. The Hebrews antedated the tremendous intellectual movements of the philosophy of Greece, the politics and law of Rome, the theology of the Middle Ages, the natural science of recent centuries. These great movements have formed the modern world; their words and their ideas shape the thought and the speech of modern men who have never heard of them. To say that we enter another world when we open the Old Testament is an exaggeration, but not a great exaggeration. One must, as well as one can, put aside one's mental baggage to read these ancient books with intelligence and sympathy.

"Thought patterns" suggest an extremely complex subject; yet