The Fitness of Scripture: Richard Chenevix Trench and Victorian Doctrines of Scripture

by

Cole William Hartin

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Cole William Hartin
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Abstract

This thesis outlines Archbishop Richard Chenevix Trench’s theology of Scripture, showing that he reads the Bible distinctively by situating him within the broader Victorian Church of England. Furthermore, it argues that because of the clarity with which Trench apprehends the character of Scripture and the interpretive implications of this, he offers a comprehensive paradigm from which one can articulate a coherent understanding of “the fitness of Holy Scripture for unfolding the spiritual life of men.” I examine Trench’s theology of Scripture by way of comparison with other prominent thinkers in the Church of England during his time. First, Charles Simeon’s devout but unidimensional interpretation, which aims to discover the full range of biblical teaching, is set beside Trench’s layered Christological reading of the text. The next chapter discusses Benjamin Jowett’s attempts to uncover the original meaning and context of each passage of Scripture. Trench’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit’s authorship juxtaposes with Jowett, opening room for a further future unfolding of the meaning inherent in Scripture. Trench’s doctrine of Scripture comes into closer focus against the relatively similar exegesis of John Keble on the Parable of the Good Samaritan; one finds Trench has a looser view of ecclesial authority, opting instead for scripturally grounded authority. The previous findings are synthesized in the following chapter, which outlines Trench’s character as an Orthodox interpreter with special focus on his conservatism, traditionalism, and cohesiveness. This is
contrasted with F.D. Maurice, who engages Scripture very differently, despite a shared history with Trench. In conclusion, this thesis suggests that Trench’s vision of Scripture is sufficiently comprehensive and concrete to serve as a basis for further understanding the current divisions in the Anglican Communion surrounding the interpretation of Scripture. Though Trench’s theology is unlikely to provide any constructive answers, it is useful for laying the common ground for such constructive discussion.
Acknowledgments

Having the opportunity to spend the past few years working on this essay has been nothing less than a gift of God’s grace. There have been pockets of frustration and monotony, but I’ve been overwhelmed by the constant sense that I don’t deserve to do something so wonderful. So I am thankful to God in Christ for these years spent reading and thinking about his Word in his Church.

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know that I speak for many of my peers in saying that he has served as a faithful witness in life and godliness.

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It’s been somewhat embarrassing explaining to my sons that I still have to go to school, even though I’m an adult. I’m thankful, at least, I’ve managed to finish this before they started kindergarten, so they don’t tell all of their classmates that their dad is still a student. I’m grateful for both of them, for their happy interruptions, the sound of their pattering feet, and their squirmy hugs. And last of all, I’m thankful for my wife, Amy. Doing a PhD never really felt like a sacrifice to me, and I think this was solely because of her love and support. In fact, spending four expensive years reading and writing was a sacrifice, one that I fear she felt more than anyone, and still happily accepted. Her love is an anchor to our whole family.

All of the errors here belong to me.
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Introduction

Background: The Interpretation of Scripture and Richard Chenevix Trench

Over the last decade or so there has been a steady stream of scholarly interest in the interpretation of Scripture throughout Church history, much of it drawing from the patristic period, but also from other epochs, including the Victorian.1 This interest has been mirrored in another burgeoning area of academic study, that of interpreting Scripture theologically. This movement was predated by work from theologians such as Brevard Childs and George Lindbeck, including his seminal work *The Nature of Doctrine*, which sets out to show that, more than being statements of doctrinal fact or traces of a deeper universal experience, doctrine and also Scripture are languages of their own, and need to be understood in this light.2 Furthermore, scholars from different intellectual traditions have noted the importance of taking Scripture seriously in its theological or dogmatic capacity.3 This dissertation bridges these two movements in academic


study by adding insight into biblical interpretation in the Victorian period more generally, and also by tying it back to its patristic roots, especially to Augustine. I will do so by looking primarily at Richard Chenevix Trench amongst his contemporary interpreters, and by so doing will bring greater scholarly attention to his important theological and interpretive work, especially as it focuses on Scripture. Moreover, because Trench is chiefly concerned with the doctrine of Scripture, and how it ought to be read theologically, my historical research into the Victorian period dovetails nicely with my intent to further scholarship in the area of the theological interpretation of Scripture.

Before outlining my argument in more detail, I wish to introduce Trench and those whom I will be looking at alongside him. Archbishop Richard Chenevix Trench led a full life. He is perhaps best known for his work leading up to the creation of the Oxford English Dictionary, or perhaps for his late role as Archbishop of Dublin. Trench’s name appears in scholarship in philology, biblical studies, history, and theology; in each of these instances he is usually mentioned with brevity. His influence is scattered across many waters, and though the implications of his work are so widespread, he is seldom given direct focus.

Trench lived during a vivacious time in the life of the Church of England. The nineteenth century was a period of great cultural change, with vying parties within the Church of England. The Evangelical movement had come into full bloom, and the effects of this were felt throughout the Church. In 1860, in the middle of Trench’s life, Essays and Reviews was published, creating a furor within the Church of England around questions of biblical interpretation, science, and

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historical work that traces the movement away from theological readings and their replacement with critical biblical study, see Michael Legaspi, The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies (Oxford University Press, 2010). Finally, for a more practical outworking of theological interpretation in recent publications, one might look at the Brazos Theological Commentary of the Bible series or standalone volumes such as Stephen B. Chapman, 1 Samuel as Christian Scripture: A Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

4 For instance, in her survey of F.D. Maurice’s contemporaries, Mary Louise McIntyre notes Trench, but points out, “His social and political views during his ecclesiastical career have not been studied. Nor have his views on theology and on questions of ecclesiastical politics been studied adequately.” Later she notes again, “Richard Trench, country parson, Dean of Westminster, Archbishop of Dublin, poet, educator, and philologist, has not received the scholarly attention he deserves.” This was over twenty years ago, but McIntyre’s assessment stands largely intact. Mary Louise McIntyre, Theology and Politics in F.D. Maurice’s Early Thought, 1825-1846 (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1995), 9, 145.
rationalism, bringing to the fore all of the convulsions of modernity.\(^5\) This is not to mention the
catholic revival within the Church of England known as the Oxford Movement, the beginning of
which is traditionally linked with what is known as John Keble’s “Assize Sermon” preached in
1833.\(^6\) Keble preached because he was concerned by the power the State was exercising over the
Church, especially in the governance of the Church of Ireland. Later turmoil over the same issue
would absorb much of Trench’s attention, with the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland
under his archbishopric.\(^7\) This is to say nothing of the advances in medicine, technology, and
science that changed the way Victorians lived.

While I am concerned primarily with Richard Trench and his reading of Scripture, this backdrop
in the Church and the world is especially important, because many of the innovations and
changes shaped the faith of Victorians, including how they read the Bible. The reverberations of
these changes in interpretative dynamics had far-reaching consequences in the next generations
of the English-speaking world.\(^8\)

Born in 1807 into a cultured, ecclesial family, Trench was a bookish boy with a penchant for
reading from a very early age.\(^9\) This interest stayed with him throughout his life and developed

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\(^5\) The tumult of this period is nicely outlined in Herbert Schlossberg, *Conflict and Crisis in the Religious Life of Late Victorian England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2009).


\(^7\) For a treatment of the disestablishment, see P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London: S.P.C.K. for the Church Historical Society, 1969).

\(^8\) See, for example, Farrar’s history of interpretation, wherein he traces a movement of “progress” from the fanciful and naïve interpretations of Scripture in the early Church, which are slowly but increasingly eradicated as one moves throughout the subsequent ages of history until the present. Ephraim Radner notes that many still suffer from Farrar’s myopia 140 years later. Radner, *Time and the Word*, 46. For Farrar’s history of interpretation, see F.W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation: Eight Lectures Preached before the University of Oxford in the Year MDCCCLXXV on the Foundation of the Late Rev. John Bampton* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1886). Even in a more general sense, the Victorian understanding of history as having a *telos*, though rooted in Scripture, continued to function as a normative belief despite the agnosticism and atheism of many in the next century. Even when belief in God was abandoned, many continued to hold to the Christian vision of history as purposeful. See Vernon White, *Purpose and Providence: Taking Soundings in Western Thought, Literature and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 16-7.

\(^9\) On his mother’s side, Trench was of Huguenot descent. In fact, Trench’s maternal great-grandfather, Richard Chenevix, was the Church of Ireland bishop of Waterford and Lismore. His mother was well read and had a literary background. For her poetry see Melesina Chenevix St. George Trench, *Campaspe: An Historical Tale: And Other Poems* (Southampton: Printed by T. Baker, 1815); for her letters, see Melesina (Chenevix) St. George Trench, *The Remains of the Late Mrs. Richard Trench: Being Selections from Her Journals, Letters. & Other Papers* (London:
into serious scholarship, especially in the fields of philology and biblical studies. Some of Trench’s works are still in use today. Trench was educated at Harrow School, eventually graduating from Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was made a member of the famous Cambridge Apostles, along with his friend F.D. Maurice. After some time abroad, Trench trained as a curate under the forbear of the Oxford Movement, Hugh James Rose, eventually continuing to a second curacy with Samuel Wilberforce at Alverstoke. In 1844 he took up the post as rector of Itchenstoke, during which time he gave the Hulsean Lectures in 1845 and 1846 on the topics of the fitness of Holy Scripture for the spiritual life of humanity, and the unconscious prophecies heathendom about Christ, respectively. In these lectures, especially his lectures on Scripture, can be found some of Trench’s richest and clearest discussions on the nature of Scripture and how one ought to interpret it. A few years after the lectures were published, Trench’s On the Study of Words, a philological work, garnered him quite a bit of attention, and he produced several other works on the subject throughout the next decade. He Parker and Bourn, 1862). On his father’s side was Power Le Poer Trench, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Tuam. In addition to this, Richard Chenevix Trench’s brother Francis Chenevix Trench was an Anglican clergyman as well. For a more thorough treatment of Trench’s life, see his biography in John Bromley, The Man of Ten Talents: A Portrait of Richard Chenevix Trench, 1807-86, Philologist, Theologian, Archbishop (London: S.P.C.K., 1959). The entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography is also helpful for its thoroughness despite its brevity: Kenneth Milne, “Trench, Richard Chenevix (1807-1886), Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin,” in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 2010, http://www.oxforddnb.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27702. Trench’s letters also shed light on his life: Maria Trench and Richard Chenevix Trench, Richard Chenevix Trench, Archbishop, Letters and Memorials, Vols. 1-2 (London, Kegan Paul, 1888). Interestingly, a short account of his life is found in the following popular collection: Warren Wiersbe, 50 People Every Christian Should Know: Learning from Spiritual Giants of the Faith, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2009), 67-73.


11 Chandler notes that Trench was present for at least some, and potentially all, of the famous Hadleigh meetings while he was curate for Rose. See Michael Chandler, An Introduction to the Oxford Movement (New York: Church Pub., 2003), 21.


13 See Richard Chenevix Trench, On the Study of Words; English Past and Present (London: J.M. Dent, 1927). Some of the other philological publications from the 1850s are as follows: Richard Chenevix Trench, English, Past and Present (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1871); Richard Chenevix Trench, A Select Glossary of English Words Used Formerly in Senses Different from Their Present (New York: Redfield, 1859); Richard
became dean of Westminster before succeeding Richard Whately as archbishop of Dublin in 1863. He died in 1886 after a period of failing health. While it is probably time for a new biography of Trench, if only to bring more attention to the importance of his work, this will not be my task at present. I am concerned chiefly with his theological contributions, especially to the realm of the doctrine and interpretation of Scripture.

This thesis outlines Archbishop Richard Chenevix Trench’s theology of Scripture, showing that he reads the Bible distinctively by situating him within the broader Victorian Church of England. Furthermore, I suggest that because of the clarity with which Trench apprehends the character of Scripture and the interpretive implications of this, he offers a comprehensive paradigm from which one can articulate a coherent understanding of “the fitness of Holy Scripture for unfolding the spiritual life of men.”

While Trench’s literary work and his biblical hermeneutics have been the subject of some scholarship, his theology and especially his theology of Scripture has neither been explored extensively nor examined in light of the former two areas of his work. I propose to further the scholarship on Victorian theories of the interpretation of Scripture by discussing Trench’s work,


14 During his time as dean of Westminster, Trench published the aptly titled *Sermons Preached in Westminster Abbey* (London: J.W. Parker, 1860).

15 This is in fact the title given to the whole series of lectures presented by Trench in his 1845 Hulsean Lectures.

16 Besides treatment of his philological work, Trench figures into accounts of the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland; for example, see P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales*. Finally, Trench’s exegetical work has been discussed at some length by Michael Wheeler. Though Trench’s theology comes to the fore in his interpretation of the Gospel miracles, Wheeler’s focus is on his exegesis rather than Trench’s constructive theology of Scripture. See Michael Wheeler, *St. John and the Victorians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), especially chapter four.
in which he synthesizes modern critical method with patristic figural readings. Susy Anger divides Victorian interpretation of Scripture into two broad categories: “The first holds that meaning is found in the past, either in the original meaning of the text itself or in the intentions of the author. The second maintains that meaning is always found in the present; it changes in history.” While I think this may be generally true, my concern is to delve more deeply into the nuances of a handful of interpretive theories. I will begin with Charles Simeon, who locates the meaning of the text in the mind of the divinely inspired human author of Scripture; next I will move to Benjamin Jowett, who locates meaning in the single intent of the human author; and finally, I will end with John Keble, who looks to the ancient receptions of a text of Scripture to discover its meaning.

**Thesis in Outline: Trench, Simeon, Jowett, and Keble**

One way of looking at the Victorian period, and the Church of England in particular, is to examine the various movements and currents of thought through the lens of scriptural interpretation. The ways in which Victorians read the Bible – with all of their clashing perspectives of liberal versus conservative, high church versus low, etc. – indicate broader disparities in thought. This is the line I have taken in order to better understand the theology of some key thinkers in the nineteenth century, their theology of Scripture, and their practice in applying it. I should note too that I have restricted myself to figures who were within the fold of the Church of England. This methodological decision narrows my focus to something more manageable within the constraints of this dissertation; I have opted for a more thorough analysis

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18 My goal here is not to dwell too much on the actual relationship between various approaches to biblical interpretation and other intellectual trends, whether they be innovative scientific views or philosophical theories. I am not suggesting that specific ways of reading the Bible cause other ways of thinking or vice versa, though that there may be a correlation between these. In literature, for example, take the novels *The Way of All Flesh* by Butler and *Silas Marner* by George Eliot; in each instance one can see within the protagonist’s intellectual movement (the terms “progression” or “regression” could be applied depending on how one evaluates the direction of this movement) a correlate to some extent with the way he reads the Bible. These are, of course, only two examples, but I think they are representative of the deeply biblicocentric culture of Victorian England. As Timothy Larsen notes, a strong attachment to the Bible was commonplace, even amongst those on the fringes of – or those actively assaulting – mainstream Christianity. Exploring a causal relationship between the reading of the Bible and various intellectual positions would be an interesting study, though I doubt the results would be conclusive in any generalizable way; there is likely a whole legion of factors, some conscious and some not, that lead one to take up a particular view. My point here is modest: one’s understanding of the nature of Scripture and how it ought to be read plays a role in all of this.
of the streams within the river that was the nineteenth-century Church of England, rather than hopping around only to sketch various other important ecclesial traditions.

I have chosen to examine Trench’s work in light of three figures who have become associated with theological traditions that are now viewed as standard models for understanding the Church of England in the nineteenth century. These three figures are Charles Simeon, Benjamin Jowett, and John Keble.

I have structured this engagement around the chronology of Trench’s life. First, I discuss Charles Simeon, whom Trench first encountered at Cambridge, and who was the great figurehead in the Evangelical stream of the Church. Then I discuss Benjamin Jowett, the celebrated and notorious essayist of Essays and Reviews who has since become viewed as a prominent figure in the Broad Church stream. Finally, we turn to John Keble, the eminent Tractarian clergyman whose 1833 “Assize sermon” is often identified as the beginning of the Oxford Movement.¹⁹

After this introduction, my first chapter outlines Trench’s understanding of the unity and multivalency of Scripture. I compare his vision of the Christological centre of Scripture to that of Simeon, who, though seeing Christ to be a touchpoint of interpretation, refrains from such figural readings that put him in the centre of texts written by authors who were not intending to refer to him. I use examples from both Trench and Simeon to draw this out, as well as to further bring attention to the possibilities of multiple meanings in a given text of Scripture, which possibilities Trench favours and Simeon does not.

The second chapter moves to a discussion of Trench and Jowett, centering around the future development of Scripture, specifically the doctrine of inexhaustibility and its significance in time. Using Trench’s The Fitness of Holy Scripture for Unfolding the Spiritual Life of Men and his Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, I outline his theory of the unfolding of Scripture. Essentially, he argues that God, in his providence, has placed within Scripture the resources to

¹⁹ In the chapter devoted to each figure I will explore with more nuance how typical they are or are not of the respective theological tradition with which they are customarily associated. I have chosen to represent them in this way in hope that it will be useful to the reader in cases where the theological views of each figure are not so much personal idiosyncrasies but can be extrapolated to show something more of the given theological tradition.
meet the needs of each generation indefinitely. I compare this with Jowett, who argues that Scripture’s meaning is located in the temporal intent and reception associated with its original authorship. Drawing from a wide range of Jowett’s writings, I sympathetically but critically note some of the nuances in his thinking, showing that he is radically different from Trench on the themes of Scripture’s ontology, providence, biblical authorship, and history.

I move, in the third chapter, to deal with Trench in relation to John Keble, with whom he shares the most commonalities. This chapter explores the way that each figure locates authority in scriptural interpretation, and how they see divine providence to be at work in Scripture. I use their respective work exegeting the Parable of the Good Samaritan to draw out noteworthy similarities, as well as points of divergence affected by their differing understanding of authority. I also discuss each theologian’s use of the Church Fathers, and the role that they play in their understanding of theological authority.

The fourth chapter synthesizes the discussions of Trench’s theology of Scripture in previous chapters and offers a sketch of Trench’s role as a theologian of Scripture. To keep with the symmetry of previous chapters, I have chosen to discuss Trench in light of his designation as an “Orthodox” churchman (a technical term in his context). I note how his orthodoxy is reflected in his conservatism, traditionalism, and the cohesiveness of his scriptural vision. I describe each of these characteristics more fully by drawing attention to their presence in his work, as well as F.D. Maurice’s. Like Trench, Maurice did not fit easily into the main three categories of churchmanship in his day, though his unique character took him in very different directions from Trench, despite their both sharing a Coleridgean heritage. Throughout this section I link Trench with interpreters of the past, especially St. Augustine.

Finally, I conclude by suggesting some of the ways the preceding study may be useful, not just for its historical value, but as a tool for furthering modern discussions on the nature of Scripture in the Anglican Communion and beyond. More to the point, I suggest that Trench’s theology of Scripture is a sufficiently clear starting point for understanding the current divisions over

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20 The term “Orthodox” here is not meant in a general or even personal way, but is a term his contemporaries applied to Trench and those with similar traditional theological views who were not associated with the popular parties in the Church of England.
Scripture in the Anglican Communion as they have been discussed in forums like “The Bible in the Life of the Church” project.

In summary, because of Trench’s attention to the multiplicity of meaning within Scripture, his acceptance of providence both in the Bible and history, and his recognition of scriptural authority, he offers a comprehensive and clear vision of Scripture. Further, Trench’s exegesis – conservative, traditional, but comprehensive – clothes this vision with concrete, practical application. In light of this, Trench offers a clear account of the Bible and its reading that is useful as a touchpoint in any discussion of the same.
Chapter 1
Trench and the Evangelicals

1 Trench on the Unity and Multivalence of Scripture

This chapter will look specifically at the centre of Scripture for Trench and, more fully, the way his Christological emphasis figures into his exegesis. I will compare Trench to the zealous Evangelical Charles Simeon.¹ Both thinkers were passionately devoted to Scripture, and both viewed it very highly. My aim here is to show the significant contrast that comes from their approaching the centre and unifying principle of Scripture differently. Moreover, I will discuss how each figure locates the meaning in each given passage of Scripture. Does each text of Scripture have a static, one-dimensional meaning that can then be applied in multiple – even unlimited – ways? Or is each text of Scripture multivalent, with always deeper layers of meaning that are woven together throughout the whole of the canon? Trench and Simeon have their own competing answers to these questions. Finally, though it is not a primary matter for either of them, I will discuss the role that the Church Fathers play in scriptural interpretation. I will explore this more fully in chapter three, “Trench and the Tractarians,” where especially in the writing of Keble the role of the Church Fathers becomes more explicit. However, I do want to say something in this present chapter because I must address the glaring lack of reference to Church Fathers in Simeon’s work, and offer a possible explanation for this.

Essentially, my argument in this chapter is that for Trench, Jesus Christ is the spiritual centre of Scripture. I will look at the three points he makes to this effect – namely, that all of Scripture

¹ The connection between Trench and Simeon is significant. Though Simeon was much older than Trench, Trench encountered him at Cambridge in 1832; he notes that Simeon appeared to be “worn out, and, moreover, spoiled by being at the head of a set who have fed him with that religious adulation which is the least suspected, and yet most puffing up of all kinds of flattery. Besides, his doctrine is low, compared with that of men who have recovered so much from oblivion that goes to the fulness and completion of the Church.” Moreover, Trench was familiar with Horae Homileticae, noting in his journal that while in France he found a volume by a Jesuit, Aide Aux Predicateurs, that appeared to be “better” than Simeon’s work. Maria Trench and Richard Chenevix Trench, Richard Chenevix Trench, Archbishop, Letters and Memorials, vol. 1 (London: Kegan, 1888), 114, 170.
points to him, is inspired by his Spirit, and as it spreads out to its manifold witness, is bounded by the evangelical purpose of showing the centrality of Jesus from a variety of perspectives. This point is buttressed by Trench’s easy assumption of the common patristic arguments for the same. I will contrast this with Simeon, who, though he believes Scripture bears witness to Christ, does not think he is the centre to which it all points. Moreover, Simeon argues for the integrity of Scripture as revelation in itself that points to various truths, including, but not everywhere pointing to, Christ. His general disregard for patristic tradition seems a side-stepping of traditional Christological readings. I will draw primarily from Trench’s Hulsean Lectures, The Fitness of Holy Scripture for Unfolding the Spiritual Life of Men, especially his lectures on the unity and manifold nature of Scripture; and I will supplement this with illustrations from his sermons and commentaries. With respect to Simeon, I will refer to his Horae Homileticae, most notably his introduction, and also to various sermons throughout that touch on the texts engaged by Trench. In each of these works, both figures address questions of Christology and the centre of Scripture head on, and so they prove fruitful locales for exploring the question.

Aside from their time at Cambridge, both Trench and Simeon also have in common an exceptional reverence for Scripture, and yet come to very different conclusions about how it should be read. Furthermore, while both Simeon and Jowett have a high view of Scripture in their own way, Simeon’s commitment to a more traditional understanding of inspiration marks him as an important point of comparison for Trench. Simeon retains a high view of Scripture and inspiration – much like Trench – but he refuses the kind of Christological reading of Scripture that Trench carries on from the Church Fathers. Because of this, there are interesting discrepancies in their thought that are not present in a comparison with Jowett, for instance, who has more radical views, or with Keble, who is much friendlier to the catholic tradition of

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2 There has been surprisingly little sustained scholarly work on Charles Simeon in the past couple of decades, with the exception of Atherstone’s critical commentary on the Excellency of the Liturgy, but even this is quite brief. Andrew Atherstone, Charles Simeon on the Excellency of the Liturgy, Alcuin/GROW liturgical study 72 (Norwich, UK: Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2011). Those who want a more detailed treatment of Simeon’s life can see the classic collection of his memoirs, William Carus, Memoirs of the Life of Charles Simeon: With a Selection from His Writings and Correspondence (London: Hatchard and Son, 1847), or for a somewhat more recent volume see Handley Carr Glyn Moule, Charles Simeon (London: Methuen & Co., 1892). Finally, for an especially lucid and crisp account of Simeon’s life, see Hugh Evan Hopkins, Charles Simeon of Cambridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977). For a brief overview that touches specifically on Simeon’s doctrine of Scripture, see Alexander C. Zabriskie, “Charles Simeon: Anglican Evangelical,” Church History 9, no. 2 (1940): 103–119.
interpretation. While other Evangelical thinkers are interesting, I am restricting myself here to discussions within the Church of England, and Simeon represents a certain kind of Evangelical who was committed to the institutional church.

For Trench, Jesus Christ is the centre and unity of the whole of Scripture – both Old and New Testaments. In fact, though Trench masterfully argues in his lecture “The Unity of Scripture” that the Bible is all about one idea – that it has one central point – he is at pains to prove that there is nothing external to which one can attribute this unity; it is not a common language, genre, age, authorship, or class of author that unites the Bible. Rather, Trench asks:

3 With respect to scriptural interpretation, Simeon was not one of the Evangelicals whom some feared were bibliolaters. Though having a strong view of inspiration, he was open to the possibility that Scripture had various minor errors (in transmission, science), while it remained doctrinally sound. Martin Wellings, Evangelicals Embattled: Responses of Evangelicals in the Church of England to Ritualism, Darwinism, and Theological Liberalism 1890-1930 (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003), 16; David Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 86; Nigel Scotland, Evangelical Anglicans in a Revolutionary Age, 1789-1901 (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2004), 130.

4 Though Simeon was a key figure in the Church of England more generally, his influence was nowhere more pronounced than in Cambridge, the town and the university, where he was the greatest Evangelical force. L.E. Elliott-Binns The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study (London: Lutterworth Press, 1953), 285-6.

5 Richard Chenevix Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture for Unfolding the Spiritual Life of Men (Cambridge: Macmillan, Barclay and Macmillan, 1847), 19-21. In fact, Trench goes on to argue that the “Romish controversialists” (his decidedly derogatory term for Roman Catholics) were so stuck on the external edges of the Bible that they were unable to see their inner unity; they were looking at it outside-in rather than inside-out. He continues about them: “They are fond of bringing out how much there is of accident in the structure, nay, even in the existence, of Scripture. – that we have one Gospel (the third) written at a private man's request, – another, (the fourth) because heresies had risen up which needed to be checked – epistles owing their origin to causes equally fortuitous – one, because temporary disorders had manifested themselves at Corinth, – another, because an Apostle, having promised to visit a city, from some unexpected cause was hindered – a third, to secure the favourable reception of a fugitive slave by his master – that of the New Testament at least, the chiefest part is thus made up of occasional documents called forth by emergent needs. And the purpose of this slight on Scripture is evident, the conclusion near at hand – which is this, How little likely it is that a book so formed, so growing, should contain an absolute and sufficient guide of life and rule of doctrine – how needful some supplementary teaching.” Ibid., 33. What Trench is putting his finger on is that those who would denigrate the unity and integrity of Scripture have not fully realized that Scripture has an ontological status that is the grounds upon which all of these external factors rest. Though these are not his words, I would argue that what Trench is suggesting is that Scripture has a being – or a form – that transcends the accidental qualities of human authorship, however important they are. If one misses this, then, one’s doctrine of Scripture implodes because there is no central substance by which the whole hangs together, no nucleus around which each piece orbits. What is more, for Trench this is not a theory or an idea, but a reality that one learns to recognize. “When once this inner unity of God’s Word has been revealed to us, when our eye has learned to recognize not merely the marks and signs of a higher wisdom, guiding and inspiring each several part, but also the relations each part to the whole; when it has risen up before us, not as aggregated from without, but as unfolded from within, in obedience to an inner law, then we shall feel that, however accidental may appear the circumstances of its growth… was no more than the accident which God is ever weaving into the woof of his providence, and not merely weaving into it, but which is the staple out of which its whole web is woven.”
But this unity of Scripture, where is it? From what point shall we behold and recognize it? Surely from that in which those verses which I have taken from the Epistle to the Ephesians will place us; when we regard it as the story of the knitting anew the broken relations between the Lord God and the race of man; of the bringing the First-begotten into the world, for the gathering together all the scattered and the sundered in Him; when we regard it as the true *Paradise Regained* - the true *De Civitate Dei*, - even by a better title than those noble books which bear these names - the record of that mystery of God’s will which was working from the first, to the end “that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ.”

In other words, Trench sees the unity of Scripture to be a spiritual unity; there is an undercurrent from Genesis to Revelation that points to Jesus Christ and his redemption of humanity. Simeon, on the other hand, as we shall see below, is more concerned with upholding the integrity of Scripture as revelation in itself, rather than as something that exudes Jesus Christ throughout.

Trench goes on to argue that Scripture as such is not merely a history of the world or of humanity’s feeling or striving after God. Rather, it is a scandalously particular history of the Kingdom of God. This begins with Israel. While Trench concedes that there are in all cultures intimations of the Gospel, and they thus prepare people for its coming, he goes on to say that “Heathen philosophy might indeed be a preparation for Christianity – heathen mythology, upon its better side, an unconscious prophecy of Christ; yet were they only the negative preparation and witness; Jewish religion was the positive; and it is with the positive alone that a Scripture

6 Trench, *The Fitness of Holy Scripture*, 22. It is not that this is a novel understanding of Scripture; in fact I maintain that it is at once deeply scriptural and deeply traditional. I will comment on more of the trajectory which Trench is following in the chapter entitled “Trench the Orthodox.”

7 Ibid., 25.
can have to do.”

It was through the Jews that Christ came, and with him Scripture ceased to grow and expand because humanity had reached the fullness of life with Christ. In parallel with this deep Christological unity, Scripture is also united because it is all inspired by the same Spirit. Trench picks up this traditional Christian belief, noting that Scripture “is everywhere the utterance of one Spirit,” and further avers that the Holy Spirit is not only the giver of Scripture, but its author as well. For example, commenting on the possibility of reading too much into Scripture, Trench notes “that there is a temptation to make Scripture mean more than in the intention of the Author of it, the Holy Ghost, it does mean.” In another place, while writing on the panharmonic nature of Scripture, Trench suggests that “self-contradiction, which is possible for man, is impossible for that Holy Spirit who is the author of this Book.” This is

8 Trench, _The Fitness of Holy Scripture_, 30-1.

9 That Christianity was the fulfilment of heathen philosophy is a very old idea, but Trench’s portrayal here, coupled with his notion that Scripture has an ontological or spiritual centre in Christianity, is reminiscent of Origen’s approach to Scripture from the latter’s Platonic vantage point. Trench refers to Origen in his writing on Scripture and he also quotes from Plato often and extensively in his work. I explore the Platonic influences on Trench’s thought in chapter three, “Trench and the Tractarians,” but for now I will only mention that there is precedent for this. Ramelli notes, for instance, “For Origen, theology was the culmination of philosophical investigation, based on Scripture and Plato, because Plato was inspired by Scripture or by the Logos that is also ‘incarnate’ in Scripture. He divided philosophy into ethics, physics, epoptics, and logic (the Stoic tripartition plus _epoptica_), identifying the crowning of philosophy with epoptics, i.e., theology (_de divinis et caelestibus_)—a term already used by Clement and the Eleusinian mysteries. Theology is part and parcel of philosophy and cannot be studied without philosophical foundations (_C.Cant. _prol. 3.1–3). Since Christ is Logos, faith and reason cannot conflict.” Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, “Origen and the Platonic Tradition,” _Religions_ 8, no. 2 (February 1, 2017), 2. Ramelli’s description of Origen as one for whom Christianity is the culmination of pagan philosophy, since the latter has been inspired by the same Logos, could indeed be applied to Trench. For Trench too Christianity is the ocean to which all of the purest streams of pagan philosophy flow and find their home. For him Christ is “incarnate” within Scripture; in fact, this Platonic way of describing Scripture maps well onto Trench’s more general scriptural ontology.

10 Trench, _The Fitness of Holy Scripture_, 37.

11 Richard Chenevix Trench, _Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia_ (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Co., 1886), 233

12 Richard Chenevix Trench, _Sermons Preached in Westminster Abbey_ (London: J.W. Parker, 1860), 189. This theologically established principle of non-contradiction is crucial for understanding Trench’s exegesis more fully as well. When one encounters turbulence within texts of Scripture, then, one is to trust that the seeming incongruities are not in fact contradictions, for it is impossible for the Holy Spirit to contradict himself. Of course, this principle was contested by some in Trench’s time. Timothy Larsen offers an insightful overview of the famous Victorian freethinker, Charles Bradlaugh, who, when only sixteen years old, wrote what came to be a popular attack on the Bible that consisted of pointing out many biblical contradictions. See Timothy Larsen, “The Bible and Belief in Victorian Britain,” _Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens: Revue du Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches Victoriennes et Edouardiennes de l’Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier_ 76 (2012), 16.

Interestingly, for one to think of Scripture as non-contradictory, one does not need to follow Trench’s line on inspiration. Merely assuming the author of the text is wise may be sufficient, as Mark Randall James points out: “When the interpreter attributes greater wisdom and knowledge to the speaker, this principle of informativeness
important to recognize alongside the Christological centre of Scripture, because one is reminded that Scripture not only is about God but ultimately comes from God, through the pen of human authors. Scripture both originates and is brought to completion in God the Son by the Holy Spirit. Like Trench, Simeon too is committed to the inspiration of Scripture and notes that Scripture is absolutely authored by the Spirit, though human style is present. Furthermore, Simeon writes not only of the Spirit’s inspiration, but the presence of Jesus as the soul of the entire Bible. I will discuss this in more detail in following sections.

One of the implications of this Christological unity of Scripture for Trench is the analogical weight it gives to understanding human life: Even as Christ is the centre of Scripture, so he is the centre of each individual’s life. Moreover, just as the Bible appears to be fragmented and disjointed until one grasps the fundamental centre in Christ, so one’s very life is disjointed and fragmented, according to Trench; only when one recognizes that the centre of her life is God in Christ can she be one with herself:

And whence shall this oneness come? Where shall we find, amid all the chances and changes of the world, this law of our life, this centre of our being, this key-note to which setting our lives, their seeming discords shall reveal themselves as their deepest harmonies? Only in God, only in the Son of God - only in the faith that what Scripture makes the end and purpose of God's dealing with our race, is also the end and purpose of his dealing with each one of us, namely, that his Son may be manifested in us - that we, vastly expands the range of legitimate implicatures. If wisdom includes speaking in conformity with rational norms and possessing superior knowledge, then the more one attributes wisdom to a speaker, the more difficult it becomes to establish limits to the inferences one may legitimately draw, other than the limits intrinsic to inferential reasoning itself.” Mark Randall James, “The Beginning of Wisdom: On the Postliberal Interpretation of Scripture,” Modern Theology 33, no. 1 (January 1, 2017), 27. James goes on to give the concrete example of Proverbs 26:4-5 in which there is an overt contradiction; he argues that the effect is to invite the reader to use wisdom in the application of the two seemingly contradictory suggestions in the text (“Do not answer a fool,” versus “do answer a fool”). Ibid., 28. There really is a logical contradiction here if these two statements are taken at face value as abstract commands. However, as James argues, this is not in fact a contradiction because they are simply meant to be applied in different situations. While it is true that a robust theory of scriptural interpretation that admits the Holy Spirit’s authorship will resolve seemingly conflicting passages, simply assuming the human author is a coherent thinker will resolve many of the same issues. Of course, one could take the stronger route with the Holy Spirit’s authorship, and doing so would also raise the question of the analogical use of language when talking about “contradictions” in God’s self-revelation. While two statements might seem to be contradictory to a finite, broken human mind, to say the same about God’s utterances would require one to talk only analogically, considering that he is infinite, perfect, etc.
with all things which are in heaven and all things which are in earth, may be gathered
together in Christ, even in Him.\textsuperscript{13}

The above is an example of Trench’s deeply pastoral concern coming to the surface. Talking
rightly about Scripture is not some academic quibble, some arcane arbitration, but rather for
Trench it is the way that humans come to understand who God really is and what the Bible is
really about. Further, it is how human beings come to understand themselves rightly. This
pastoral note adds to the explanatory power of Trench’s theology of Scripture. The more that
Trench is able to make sense of the world and the existential questions of human life, the more
his theology proves to be substantial.

It is significant that Trench begins his discussion with the unity of Scripture before moving on in
his next lecture to establish, and to grant, that though it is unified at its core, Scripture is also
manifold. Because Christ is the centre of Scripture by which one can make sense of the whole,
he provides a centre of gravity around which pluralities of other meaning – multitudes of
meaning – can exist. And furthermore, just as these meanings orbit around Christ, they also exist
for him, and return to him, “for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things
visible and invisible…. All things have been created through him and for him” (Colossians 1:16).
More specifically, the purpose of the multiple meanings of Scripture is to draw as many people
as possible to its unity, which is Christ. Another way of saying this is that, for Trench, the logic
of the manifold nature of Scripture is evangelical. Scripture has continually deeper layers and
provides the truth from a variety of angles, for the purpose of increasingly reaching different
people. Each person notices truth and beauty with their own peculiar gaze, and thus Scripture in
its manifold witness appeals to that longing in each heart with special particularity. It is as if
Scripture emerges from Christ and moves out in a plurality of directions, so that, in returning to
him, it might bring as many people as possible with it. This again is a point of departure from
Simeon, as we shall see more below. To a vision such as this, Simeon would be more concerned
to safeguard the integrity of the many meanings of Scripture apart from Christ, because they
serve as important lessons for the Christian life, or the nature of God more broadly speaking.

\textsuperscript{13} Trench, \textit{The Fitness of Holy Scripture}, 36.
Trench’s entry point into the discussion of the manifold nature of Scripture is through the four Gospels. He notes:

It is a fact which would at once excite every man’s most thoughtful attention, were it not that familiarity had blunted us to its significance, that we should have, not one history only, but four parallel histories, of the life of Christ – a fact which indeed finds a slight anticipation in the parallel records which the Old Testament has preserved of some portions of Jewish history. None will call this an accident, or count that the Providence which watches over the fall of a sparrow, or any slightest incident of the world, was not itself the bringer about of a circumstance which should have so mighty an influence on all the future unfolding of the Church. It is part, no doubt, of this spreading of a table for the spiritual needs of all, that we have thus not one Gospel, but four; which yet in their higher unity, may be styled, according to that word of Origen’s, rather a four-sided Gospel than four Gospels, even as out of the same instinctive sense of its unity, the whole Instrument, which contained the four, was entitled *Evangelium* in the early Church.\(^{14}\)

One sees here the way that the doctrine of providence is the deep ground for Trench’s doctrine of Scripture. If God orders all things according to his providence, then how much more so would he order Holy Writ according to his will? It is no accident that there are four distinct Gospels; this itself testifies to the lavishness of God’s provision for all people. This has always been part of God’s self-disclosure, and the great thinkers of the early Church discerned this purpose in the four-sided Gospel.\(^{15}\) Moreover, Trench proceeds to comment on the efficacy of each Gospel for

\(^{14}\) Trench, *The Fitness of Holy Scripture*, 40.

\(^{15}\) On a more historical note, Margaret Mitchell responds to Richard Bauckham’s suggestion that scholars should be careful with redaction criticism when it comes to the Gospels. Bauckham’s reasoning here is that the Gospels were not, in fact, written to specific local communities (he thinks this idea a nineteenth-century invention), but rather should be interpreted more broadly as part of a widespread and well-connected early Christian movement. Mitchell appeals to patristic testimony to show that many early authors did believe the Gospels to be written to specific communities, though this did not negate the unity of the Gospels. She sums up her argument: “The pervasiveness of localizing traditions (including audience request legends), to which we have sought to give due emphasis here, shows that it was not modern redaction critics who first introduced the alien idea of ‘gospel communities’ or ‘a specific Christian community’ as an audience, but that, in line with both ancient literary criticism and their own apologetic purposes, patristic interpreters of the gospels thought it important to ask where, when and to whom each of the four gospels was originally written. There are various reasons why they do this – their rhetorical training which assumed that texts were designed to persuade in suitable ways their intended readers, and, of course, the fact that for the fathers the authority of these documents depended upon the biographical pedigree of the author as either an apostle (Matthew and John) or a sub-apostolic deputy (Mark and Luke). Such paradoxes of patristic thinking –
reaching specific people groups – Matthew for the “pious Israelites,” Mark for the Romans, and Luke for everyone, as it focuses on the universal draw of the Gospel. One can see the synthesis in Trench’s reasoning here, which is characteristic of so much of his theological work. He begins with two premises. First, Trench is keenly aware of the variable paths on which the truth of Christ treads its way into the hearts of individuals; second, Trench trusts in the sufficiency of Scripture to penetrate the hearts of all people. Beginning with these two premises, Trench then moves toward an explanation for the shape of Scripture that lends credence to both: the Bible and the various individual dispositions have been ordered by God so that they “fit” together in some sense. God has placed both the human longing and the divine answer in Scripture so that the two may meet in each heart.

Trench’s argument for the manifold nature of Scriptures is particularly powerful in his discussions of the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of St. John. Trench is aware of the critical evaluation of their differences, which evaluation posits that it is impossible for all four Gospels to be accurate in their presentations of Jesus. Rather than diminish these differences or argue maintaining simultaneously and wholeheartedly these texts’ local origins and yet their timeless truth, both their human and their divine authorship – are not well served by the dichotomy inherent to ‘For Whom Were Gospels Written?’” Margaret M. Mitchell, “Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim That ‘The Gospels Were Written for All Christians,’” New Testament Studies 51, no. 1 (2005), 77. Mitchell’s argument brackets the questions of scriptural inspiration and divine providence, but remains helpful as a “bottom-up” explanation for the distinctive appeal of each Gospel, first to their original audiences, and secondly to later hearers/readers. Intriguingly, as she picks up on the historical fortuitousness of the four Gospels, she writes, “But the fourfold gospel was by no means a predicted, predictable, or even likely outcome. It needed an Irenaeus to provide it with its justification – cosmological, scriptural and theological. To presume that feat had already been successfully attempted by the earliest evangelists themselves seems to attribute too much of the results to the causes.” Ibid., 79. In short, the shape of the canon, in this case with respect to the Gospels, is not a human contrivance, and in my judgement, is a theological reality that is noticed by Irenaeus, rather than invented by him. While Mitchell’s theory may be correct, it is entirely besides the point. Unless she expects the Gospels to emerge out of thin air if one is to consider their number and order providential, their historical contingencies are completely irrelevant. Irenaeus, and Trench, for that matter, are simply trying to discern why providence has allowed the Gospels to be shaped as they have, given that they exist as they do. Of course the justification is going to come after the historical event. It was the same with Jesus’ resurrection. The key point is not that they could have looked otherwise, or that there are not historical reasons for their existence as such, but rather, given that the Gospels had been received in just this form, and given that God orders the world, there is a theological explanation that complements, instead of compromising, their historical origin.

Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 41-3.

Trust in divine providence is one of the key differences between Trench and those who would suggest that the multiple Gospel accounts render one or the other less than truthful. Both Trench and the critics to whom he is referring are dealing with the same scriptural data, looking at the same biblical passages, noticing the same “discrepancies.” The difference is the interpretive frameworks in which such discrepancies are evaluated. For
for uniformity (for Trench has already made the case for unity), Trench instead flatly asserts that precisely in these differences one sees clearly the full person of Christ. After all, it is only fitting that Jesus the Christ could not be contained in a mere single account, given that he is “very God, of very God.” Trench notes, “How inevitable was it that He, the Sun of the spiritual heaven, should find no single mirror large enough to take in all his beams - should only be adequately presented to the world, when many from many sides did, under the direct teaching of God’s Spirit, undertake to set him forth.” One wonders why anyone would expect anything different, in light of such a glorious task; the more voices used to lift up the song of Christ, the more sonorous.

It is not only the evangelical aim of Scripture that sheds light on the suitability of the manifold nature of the Gospels, but this manifold nature is underwritten in the whole of the Bible. Trench notes that the four Gospels are prefigured by the four rivers of Paradise in Genesis and the four living creatures in Ezekiel. This is a further sign that the fourfold Gospel account is indeed providential, not mere happenstance, because this four-sidedness is not a New Testament development, but it is pressed into the whole canon of Scripture.

Trench, these biblical findings are a cause for praise; but for the others, they are stumbling blocks. In short, prior philosophical and theological commitments admittedly informed by Scripture to some extent, rather than the discovery of “troublesome” passages therein, are responsible for the way one deals with seeming “contradictions” within the Bible. Every exegete that engages “discrepancies” in Scripture approaches them deductively from certain first principles rather than inductively. Scholarship on the way that our preconceptions, biases, and prior commitments shape the way we experience and interpret the world is vast, but Joel B. Green does an excellent job of rounding up salient work that touches on the interpretation of Scripture, especially the narrative and significance of Jesus’ ascension, in Joel B. Green, “What You See Depends on What You Are Looking For: Jesus’s Ascension as a Test Case for Thinking about Biblical Theology and Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” Interpretation: A Journal of Biblical and Theological Interpretation 70, no. 4 (October 1, 2016): 445–457.

18 Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 46.

19 Though he does not follow him slavishly on his use of numbers at all points, Trench is very attuned to the way Augustine picks up on the significance of numbers in Scripture, noting especially their theological value. For instance, when Trench is commenting on the Lord’s Prayer, he writes, “In one place he [Augustine] makes seven petitions, and finds a meaning and mystery in the number, drawing a parallel between the seven and the seven beatitudes, out of which the whole discourse unfolds itself; … And seeing that throughout all Scripture seven is the covenant number, the number of sacrifice and the number of prayer, the signature of all meetings between God and man, there can be no doubt that the number of petitions here is seven and not six. Yet he himself sometimes departs from this truer view, and expressly unites these two last as forming parts of the same petition.” Richard Chenevix Trench, Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, Drawn from the Writings of St. Augustine, with an Introductory Essay on Augustine as an Interpreter of Scripture (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1886), 268–9. While Trench’s tally of the beatitudes is baffling, I think this passage illustrates the importance of numbers not just with reference to the
After explaining the purpose of the four-sided Gospel, Trench takes up the twofold development of doctrine in the New Testament. He uses St. Paul and St. John to typify these two streams, both of which ultimately show forth Christ. According to Trench, St. Paul begins his theology with humanity and the need for redemption, while St. John begins with Divine Love – with God himself – and works from there: “Thus we have man delivered in St. Paul, God delivering in St. John; man rising in the one, God stooping in the other; and thus each travels over an hemisphere in the great orb of Christian Truth, and they, not each singly, but between them, embrace and encircle it all.”

Paul is also more analytical and intellectually driven, whereas John is more mystical and intuitive theologically. Very broadly speaking, Trench sees these respective emphases or foci in Paul and John to be providentially suited toward the Gospel’s acceptance in the whole world; Paul is the natural evangelist to the West and John to the East. Furthermore, the Book of Psalms plays a pivotal role in reaching the hearts of many people, for it not only encapsulates and gives voice to every human sentiment, but furthermore, because this is the subject of all human anxieties, this book has been that in which living and suffering men in all ages have a found a language, which they have felt to be a mysterious anticipation of, and provision for, their own especial wants, and in which they have gradually understood that the Divine voice is never so truly and distinctly heard, as when it speaks through human experience and sympathies.

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20 Trench, _The Fitness of Holy Scripture_, 49.

21 Ibid., 50-1. This is quite a generalization on Trench’s part, and relies heavily on gross stereotypes of both Western and Eastern ways of thinking, so I do not think Trench’s point is sufficiently supported here, though I think it does indeed stand. At its most essential, Trench’s point is convincing. Given that part of the task of Scripture is to draw all people to Christ, and given that various parts of Scripture have a distinctive character that some people find more compelling than others, it follows that part of the providential arrangement of Scripture is to reach across various boundaries. One can leave the stereotypes behind and make the same claim, or an even stronger one, that these various portions of Scripture have enough distinctive force to compel a range of individuals, rather than groups of various sorts. Even having said all this, there is some historical weight to Trench’s argument, and one only need look to the various lectionaries and/or biblical canons in particular churches, each of which have their own emphases. While there are various reasons for these differences, one factor is that (for whatever reason) churches find particular texts to merit special prominence.

22 Trench, _The Fitness of Holy Scripture_, 53. That the Book of Psalms was central to worship was especially true in the Victorian period, according to Emma Mason, who notes, “Together with the Book of Job, Psalms was the most significant of Old Testament books for the Victorians, as much for aesthetic as theological reasons. Psalms were
The psalms provide a vehicle by which the reader may express his or her own thoughts to God; this is an emotionally engaging method of drawing in those who may be experiencing any one of the many situations of which the psalmist is speaking. This engagement is only intensified when one realizes the presence of “the Divine voice” mingled with the voice of the Psalmist, which is then taken up by the reader with all of her own hopes, fears, and anxieties. There is in this a harmony in the reading of Scripture. The manifold nature of Scripture is not only evident

sung after the litany and before the sermon in most parish churches and were preferred to even the most popular of Victorian hymns…. the Psalms’ strong metrical beat and musical history appealed to readers and worshippers. As E. Warwick Slinn argues, David’s resolve to sing his emotional experience of faith ‘embeds a close relation between brain and tongue, body and language, physical action and speech,’ an embodying of poetry that speaks to both a long tradition of memorizing the Psalms and the Victorians’ propensity for internalizing verse through recitation. The Psalms also comprised a short handbook, for Christians and Jews alike, on how to approach God…. The debate on how to translate, interpret, and annotate the Psalms in relation to issues of national identity, kingship, community, and belonging, as well as ecclesiological meanings of forgiveness, penitence, prophecy, and love, climaxed in the nineteenth century in part because their poetic and aesthetic value exempted them from disputes on the historical authenticity of the Bible.” In Emma Mason, “‘Hear My Voice’: Rhythmic Forgiveness and Psalm 130,” Victorian Review 37, no. 2 (May 24, 2014): 27.

23 This is similar to the truth that St. Athanasius puts his finger on in his letter to Marcellinus; he notes that the Book of Psalms “contains even the emotions of each soul, and it has the changes and rectifications of these delineated and regulated in itself. Therefore anyone who wishes boundlessly to receive and understand from it, so as to mold himself, it is written there. For in the other books one hears only what one must do and what one must not do. And one listens to the Prophets so as solely to have knowledge of the coming of the Savior. One turns his attention to the histories, on the basis of which he can know the deeds of the kings and saints. But in the Book of Psalms, the one who hears, in addition to learning these things, also comprehends and is taught in it the emotions of the soul, and, consequently, on the basis of that which affects him and by which he is constrained, he also is enabled by this book to possess the image deriving from the words.” Athanasius extends the point that Trench makes even further. While Trench sees that the Psalms give voice to human yearning, and as such show humanity that it is in fact the Divine’s voice speaking through the human experience, Athanasius notes that the Divine’s voice also informs, and more importantly forms, the human speaker by its divine character. See Athanasius, “A Letter to of Athanasius, Our Holy Father, Archbishop of Alexandria, to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms,” in The Life of Antony and The Letter To Marcellinus (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 108.

24 Rowan Williams’ work on Augustine’s treatment of the Psalms is helpful here because Trench’s approach to the Psalms is so resonant of Augustine’s. In his discussion of Augustine’s take on Psalm 140, Williams notes, “Jesus speaks in the voice of the suffering Christian. This principle is of particular significance where texts in the Psalter express spiritual desolation and struggle: the Psalms are the words of Jesus, the Word who speaks in all scripture. But how can we understand words that imply alienation from God when they occur on the lips of Jesus? Only by reading them as spoken by the whole Christ, that is Christ with all the members of his Body. He speaks for us, makes his own the protesting or troubled cry of the human being, so that his own proper and perfect prayer to the Father may become ours.” In Rowan Williams, “Augustine and the Psalms,” Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology 58, no. 1 (January 1, 2004), 19. Or in another passage, Williams writes, “The meaning of our salvation is that we are included in [Christ’s] life, given the right to speak with his divine voice, reassured that what our human voices say out of darkness and suffering has been owned by him as his voice, so that it may in some way be opened to the life of God for healing or forgiveness.” Ibid., 20. Drawing from Augustine in both of these eloquent passages, Williams is expressing a reality similar to which Trench was pointing: In Scripture (in this case, the Psalms), there are multiple layers of meaning: Scripture is at once the voice of Christ, the body of Christ (Christians), and the individual human voice all being raised to God. Furthermore, only by recognizing this manifold character of Scripture can one make sense of difficulties such as the voice of the divine Christ in the psalm expressing his alienation from God, for instance. And for Trench, when the individual human voice is raised to God in the Psalms,
in its varied articulation and perspectival imaging of the truth, but even in the layered meaning of each given passage.

As the quotation above illustrates, for Trench, the psalms are at one level about the psalmist’s experience. This has been providentially ordered so that psalms in all of their depth and variety resound and resonate so deeply with each human reader that they are really about every man and woman. Yet the reader will come to see that the psalms are not only about her or the psalmist but about Christ himself as he speaks through the psalms.

To sum up Trench’s position then, three points become clear. First, Trench argues for the unity of Scripture in Christ. This is not an external, visible unity, but a deeper underlying unity; Christ is the nucleus of the whole Bible. Second, from this vantage point one sees the manifold nature of Scripture – that it can be all things to all people so that all the more might find spiritual nourishment. Third, though the scope of Scripture’s effect is then so vast and broad, it is also deep, for within it are many layers of meaning. Trench really only begins to wade into the multivalence of Scripture at this point by looking at the Psalms, but it is enough to establish the importance of the doctrine. This contrasts with Simeon’s vision of scriptural unity, as we shall see more below, which is that Scripture is united as God’s communication, not focused in Christ. Moreover, there are not many layers of meaning, but rather disparate lessons about God and the Christian life.

Here too we begin to see the full explanatory power that Trench’s understanding of Scripture lends to the interpreter. By laying out these principles, one learns how to read Scripture appropriately. Scriptural types are not arbitrary, strung together by happenstance, without meaning; rather, they are indeed marks of a providence that moves over all of the sociological, cultural, literary, and spiritual experiences of the very real human authors, to subtly smooth them all into this vision of God in Christ.

One may ask if Trench is simply a fideist, asserting many principles about Scripture and providence without any warrant for doing so. This is a legitimate question, but ultimately, one which are also the words of Christ, Christ’s voice is “truly and distinctly heard.” While it is true that Trench is more focused on the impact reading the Psalms has on the human, I think his premises allow for it to be extended Godward in the way that Williams reads Augustine.
that is wrongheaded. Rather, one should be attuned to the various principles asserted by those such as Jowett, as we shall soon see in the next chapter, or others who interpret Scripture radically differently from Trench. Before one approaches Scripture, for instance, one assumes that it should be read as if it were simply another book, or one assumes that it is somehow privileged or unique. These sorts of assumption are unavoidable, but are present in any interpreter. Trench, along with Simeon, is forthright about his theological principles, and he does not defend them by attempting to argue from the ground up. Rather, one sees their veracity through his display of their explanatory power.25

2 Trench on the Church Fathers

Trench does not merely fabricate or innovate in this reading of Scripture. If it seems novel, it is only because the strand of figural interpretation and the presumption of providence had been lost to some extent at the time Trench was writing.26 Trench is following the lead of many of the interpreters of the early Church, unlike Simeon, whose writing does not suggest they are important at all. While the chapter entitled “Trench the Orthodox” will explore this in more detail, the point is worth making now: Trench is not a rogue exegete, forging a new path. He is, in a tempered way, continuing down an old path. For instance, in his discussion on the fourfold Gospel accounts, Trench draws from Scripture itself to point out that God’s providential ordering of creation (“Providence watches over the fall of a sparrow”) applies all the more to God’s ordering of Scripture.27 After making his theological and pragmatic points, Trench refers to the

25 This calls to mind George Lindbeck’s work, among others, and I would hold that rather than evaluating Trench’s approach to Scripture by treating it as discreet propositional statements that are either true or false, it would be better to deal with it in terms of Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic framework, seeing Trench’s underlying principles as akin to grammatical rules that make sense of the faith. I would venture to say that it has far more explanatory power of the types of Scripture than does any other approach. For more on this see George A. Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

26 For example, Timothy Ward argues that by the time the Victorian period emerged, the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture had been in a long decline. Since the first centuries after Christ until the post-Reformation period, there had always been in the Church a mainstream belief “that Scripture contains everything a person needs to know to be saved and to live in a way which pleases God.” Timothy Ward, Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21. The reason for the decline in the belief of Scripture’s sufficiency, according to Ward, is twofold: “First, there is a growing historical awareness, especially of the original historical locatedness of biblical texts and of the history of their redaction, canonical compilation, and transmission. Second, there is a rejection of history as the locus of divine revelation—what Eberhard Jüngel characterizes as ‘the prevailing interest in the unhistoricity of God.’” Ibid., 64-5.

27 Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 40.
early Church – Origen, Augustine, and the early practice of calling all four Gospels together the *Evangelium* – to corroborate his point.\(^{28}\) It is important to note here that Trench is not referring to the Fathers or the witness of the early Church as a basis for his positions on Scripture, but rather, having offered his position, he refers to them and offers his arguments in view of their testimony.

It could be said that Trench has a classically Protestant notion of the authority of Scripture. Take Timothy Ward’s description of the traditional Reformation view of Scripture, for instance:

> Although there are of course differences in detail between, say, Lutheran and Reformed writers, there emerged what might be called the classical doctrine of Scripture. The Bible was identified directly with the Word of God. It was asserted to be the supreme source of faith and practice, which needs no authoritative interpreter external to itself. That is, the Word needs no material supplementation from another supposed authoritative source of faith and practice, and no interpretative supplementation by the teaching office of the church or the supposed individual testimony of the Holy Spirit. This core view of the Bible was expressed in the fundamental principle of *sola Scriptura*, in the assertion of the Bible as inspired by God in its writing, and in the delineation of various attributes of the Bible—predominantly necessity, perfection, clarity, and sufficiency.\(^{29}\)

The point here is that for Trench, the Church Fathers do not have a veto on the correct way to interpret the Bible. Rather, Trench, along with the Reformers, holds to *sola Scriptura*, at least how it is described by Ward. Trench’s approach to Scripture begins, as I noted, with some dogmatic presumptions about the sufficiency of Scripture and the workings of providence, but then too these presumptions are cemented within Scripture, and supported by it. The witness of the early Church is merely that of a faithful signpost pointing to these realities with which it has been entrusted.\(^{30}\)


\(^{30}\) Ibid., 2.
Trench’s overall approach to Scripture thus presumes a certain level of faith not only in the existence of God but in God’s activity. Furthermore, it requires the interpreter to trust that God’s purposes for Scripture have not been thwarted or buried by human meddling, but rather that providence is at work shaping all of the good and ill that human author, editor, redactor, or scribe may do for the purpose of showing forth Christ to the world. Church Fathers and primitive witness provide insight as to whether one is walking along the same interpretive path as the Church universal, though these voices do not have the final words. For Trench, the final Word always belongs to God.

3 Charles Simeon on the Nature of Scripture

Though Simeon has an exceptionally high view of Scripture, and in many ways gave his life to the study of the Sacred Oracles, he has a very different understanding than Trench’s of both Scripture’s unity and its manifold nature. I suggest this is in part because Simeon is far more focused on the integrity of the voices of the human authors of Scripture, and also because Simeon does not have the basic theological assumptions or starting points as Trench when he turns to the Bible. For Simeon, the Bible does not have a Christological centre, but rather is a body that is animated by Christ. Further, as Robert Dell notes, Simeon thinks Scripture has the

31 John Webster’s description of Scripture is elucidating on this score; for him, before one can speak rightly about the texts of the Bible, one must recognize the overarching communicative act of God that lies behind Scripture and indeed calls it forth. He notes, “Holy Scripture is not a single or simple entity. The term ‘Holy Scripture’ refers primarily to a set of texts, but importantly and secondarily to its divine origin and its use by the church. Thus the content of the term can only be thoroughly mapped by seeing this set of texts in connection with purposive divine action in its interaction with an assemblage of creaturely events, communities, agents, practices and attitudes.” And further, “Most of all, both the texts and the processes surrounding their reception are subservient to the self-presentation of the triune God, of which the text is a servant and by which readers are accosted, as by a word of supreme dignity, legitimacy and effectiveness. This order is critically important because, unless their strict subservience to communicative divine activity is stated with some firmness, both text and practices of reading and reception may break loose and become matters for independent or quasi-independent investigation and explanation. When that is allowed to take place, the result is a disorderly ontology of Holy Scripture.” John Webster, Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.6. This is in fact the reality that Trench so wisely avoids, and why at least to my ear, his voice sounds so fresh. Trench is able to recognize the “creaturely events, communities, agents, and practices and attitudes” in connection with Scripture, but he is also able to recognize that Scripture does not stand independent of God. Rather, while Trench recognizes the “purposive divine action” of God’s “self-presentation” along with the “creaturely events, communities” etc. behind Scripture, for him Scripture is the “action” and “self-presentation” as well. God’s purpose both precedes and is expressed in and by Scripture. And though Webster’s words are useful in bringing further clarity here, Trench expresses this with a reference to “Divine Providence.” In short, Trench’s trust in the expansiveness of providence is such that it is able to accommodate within it - for God’s purposes – the full extent of free creaturely action throughout the entire communicative event of Scripture and its reception.
common goal that Christians might be convinced by it, so that it might shape their lives. And, for Simeon, if the Bible is to be read Christologically, it must be based on New Testament precedent or striking parallels between Old and New Testaments.

Since the substance of my argument depends on a comparison of Trench with Simeon, I will focus on three exegetical loci that Trench brought to bear for his arguments on the unity and manifold nature of Scripture. First, I will look at Simeon’s introduction to his whole commentary, which lays out some important methodological principles. From here, I will move to a discussion of Ezekiel, especially the significance of the four living creatures. Then I will look briefly at Simeon on the Psalms, finally concluding with a discussion of the Gospels. What is more, I want to draw attention to the way that Trench’s reading is shaped not only by Scripture itself, but by the tradition of the Church stretched out in history, a history to which Simeon does not refer in his drive to get to the inspired human author’s intent.

Simeon’s interpretation of Scripture is presented in his massive *Horae Homileticae*. This extremely biblicist work is meant to be used as an aid for preachers preparing their sermons. It is therefore more of a specialist work in this regard. It is not too different from Trench’s commentaries, which were certainly useful aids for preachers, but were far more expansive in their scope and research. From the very outset of his *Horae Homileticae*, in the dedication to

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33 While this discussion fairly represents Simeon’s perspective on Scripture in a general sense, for the purpose of this thesis, I have been selective so the texts relate to those that Trench engaged and that I have thus discussed above.

34 It is important to recognize that Simeon is writing *Horae Homileticae* as an instruction manual for preachers rather than as a devotional, constructive, or apologetic work. This is in contrast with Trench, who is writing constructive lectures on theology to be presented in the university; it is also in contrast with both Keble and Jowett who are writing for apologetic or polemical purposes. All of this is to say that Simeon’s work is unique insofar as it is practical rather than theoretical, aimed more at vocational training than theological acuity. In light of all of this, Simeon still makes theological arguments and exegetical moves that are comparable to Trench’s. Russell Levenson Jr. provides a helpful reminder about the homiletical nature of Simeon’s whole ministry, writing “First and foremost, Simeon’s preaching was grounded in a humble submission to the authority of Holy Scripture. He did not take the task of preaching lightly, and undergirding most of his sermons was a minimum of twelve hours of study and preparation. The primacy of his efforts centered not on stories from personal experience or allusions from literature, but the truth of God’s Word as revealed in the scripture itself.” Levenson continues to focus on *Horae Homileticae* more specifically, “Simeon believed the chief task of expounding scripture was to let the Bible say what it was intended to say. *Horae Homileticae* is Simeon’s most exhaustive published work. In the preface of this 21 Volume
the Archbishop of Canterbury (William Howley), Simeon extolls the divinity of Holy Scripture, referring to it as “Holy Writ,” “the Inspired Volume,” and “the mind of the Spirit of God.”

Simeon thinks very highly of Scripture, and like Trench takes seriously that providence has orchestrated it to be as it was received by the Church. While I have argued above that Trench has rejected an external systematization of Scripture as a locus for unity, so Simeon makes a similar rejection, but he notes that there is indeed a system within Scripture, even if no one party can claim ownership of it. He argues further that “as wheels in a complicated machine may move in opposite directions and yet subserve one common end, so may truths apparently opposite be perfectly reconcilable with each other, and equally subserve the purposes of God in the accomplishment of man’s salvation.”

Letting passages of Scripture speak for themselves with full force, even if it is not always clear how they fit together, is deeply important for Simeon. Though Simeon’s sentiments here are laudable, if only because he has such a deep reverence and respect for Scripture, he has detached Scripture from its theological moorings. What I am suggesting is that in his zeal for upholding the whole Word of God in every portion, Simeon neglects to see that heart at the centre of it. While for Trench Scripture is united by its centre in collection of 2,556 sermon outlines, Simeon writes that a preacher should give a text ‘its just meaning, its natural bearing, and its legitimate use.’” Russell Jones Levenson Jr., “‘To Humble the Sinner, to Exalt the Saviour, to Promote Holiness’: Reflections on the Life, Ministry, and Legacy of Charles Simeon,” Sewanee Theological Review 42, no. 1 (December 1, 1998), 56. William Weaver notes that in his sermon outlines, Simeon was primarily striving for clarity and simplicity. “Charles Simeon was committed to the exposition and application of the Scriptures. As Hopkins points out, Simeon wanted to explain a text of Scripture so that the hearer would be left in no doubt of its meaning and application. Simeon encouraged his students to write sermons that gave the whole sense of the text, that were simple in diction, and that provided instruction or exhortation for the Christian to live out.” William Daniel Weaver, “John Stott’s Christological Preaching from Genesis” (Ph.D., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 58, accessed January 28, 2018, https://search-proquest.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/pqdtglobal/docview/1908491980/abstract/FAABDE1CBFA54590PQ/9. From Horae Homileticae it is difficult to determine how widely Simeon read in the tradition of the Church. In any case, while someone like Trench documented his sources for those using his commentaries, Simeon’s citations are restricted to biblical cross-references; Weaver’s comments might point to one of the reasons for this.

35 Charles Simeon, Horae Homileticae: Or Discourses, Now First Digested into One Continued Series, and Forming a Commentary upon Every Book of the Old and New Testament, to Which is Annexed an Improved Edition of a Translation of Claude’s Essay on the Composition of a Sermon, vol. 1 (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1832-33), i, iii, and iv. In the same paragraphs, Simeon notes his disdain for “peculiarities of human systems, and all unprofitable controversies.” Ibid., iii. This is a common theme that will arise repeatedly in Simeon’s work. I am not convinced that Simeon, or anyone else, for that matter, can extricate Scripture from all human systems and controversies. Furthermore, it is not entirely clear what this would even entail given histories of redaction, copying, translation, canonization, etc. This is not to say that these human actions do not fall under the purview of providence, but they are no less human actions for falling so.

36 Simeon, Horae Homileticae, vol.1, xxiii.
Christ Jesus, for Simeon Scripture is united as a whole bound together, but without distinction, even if salvation is its goal.\textsuperscript{37} To be fair to Simeon, the system within Scripture is inherent within it, rather than something forced upon it from the outside, but it remains the case that this system is undifferentiated. Every part is important and provides lateral support to the other, but without any keystone anchoring them all together. Simeon’s own imagery here is industrial in the quote above. Scripture is a “complicated machine” wherein opposite truths move in opposite directions like “wheels.” This is in contrast with Trench who, when talking about the same seemingly opposite truths in Scripture, uses agricultural imagery, likening it to a “field” or to woven “fabric.”\textsuperscript{38} At the risk of developing these disparate similes too far, I do think it is striking that Simeon’s mechanistic image brings to mind the task for which a machine is created, and I think this parallels the task of Scripture for him, that it would lead the believer to the godly life. For Simeon Scripture is utilitarian, whereas for Trench, the field or the woven product is not necessarily for particular tasks, but rather exists more for beauty’s sake. For Trench Scripture has a right to exist before it becomes useful. This fits with his understanding of Scripture as a reflection of Christ rather than a means to accomplish some task.

To understand the way that Simeon interprets Scripture, it is helpful first to see his views about the character of Scripture more generally. For Simeon, the character of Scripture is linked with its inspiration; he suggests that the Scriptures

\textsuperscript{37} The debate between Calvinists and Arminians on the subject of human freedom in response to God is one fruitful place to see Simeon’s desire for the whole of Scripture be held together without privileging any of its parts. Alexander Zabriskie notes that for Simeon, “The primary point in his Christianity is that he tried to derive all his views and practices from the Bible and to be faithful to the whole Bible. This was the main reason why he sedulously abstained from Calvinist-Arminian controversies.” Further, “Truth, he held, is not to be found in any one view, however logical; for truth exceeds logic, even as God’s revelation in the Bible exceeds man’s ability to comprehend. It is to be found by holding to all the aspects of it which God has revealed, however unreconcilable logically and however great the tension the effort creates in the mind. ‘The truth is not in the middle, nor in one extreme, but in both extremes,’ he wrote to a friend.” Zabriskie, “Charles Simeon: Anglican Evangelical,” 105-6. The quote that Zabriskie is drawing from here comes via his reading of Handley Moule’s use of Simeon’s letters collected by William Carus. Simeon’s discussion of the “extremes” of the Bible is part of a preface of a letter to a mysterious “Mr. T.–” about individual missionaries, missionary societies, and how the former two are both necessary. Carus, \textit{Memoirs of the Life of Charles Simeon}, 599-601. The image here is that in the Bible, and in theology, there appear to be competing truths that must be held in tension as they butt up against one another, like shifting tectonic plates. The truths of the Bible must remain ever juxta posed, never slipping one over the other, maximizing one aspect at the expense of the other.

\textsuperscript{38} Trench, \textit{The Fitness of Holy Scripture}, 92, 100.
are called with great propriety, “the word of God”; first, *because they were inspired by him*. They were indeed written by men; but men were only the agents and instruments that God made use of: they wrote only what God by his Spirit dictated to them: so that, in reality the whole Scripture was as much written by the finger of God, as the laws were, which he inscribed on two tables of stone, and delivered to his servant Moses. And to this the Scriptures themselves bear witness; for in them it is said, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God”; and again, “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

In this passage we see that Simeon draws a theory of inspiration from the text itself; one might even say that Simeon has refrained from adopting a *theory* at all, and instead has simply reiterated Scripture’s own witness about itself. Evidently, Simeon’s understanding of Scripture’s testimony and its inspiration is symbiotic, as he assumes that Scripture is true in its affirmation of its own inspiration, and he assumes such inspiration would be sufficient to make such an affirmation reliable. Though Simeon does not lay out a doctrine of inspiration in full, it appears that from these passages he understands inspiration to mean something like a dictational theory, wherein the human author is analogous to “the finger of God” that carved into stone the commandments. However, in a later sermon Simeon offers a softer perspective on inspiration, noting that the human authors of Scripture

expressed themselves, each in his own peculiar style, as any other writers would have done: but in *the matter* of what they wrote, they were inspired of God; and in *the manner* of expressing it they were preserved by the same Spirit from any error or mistake. So that of the whole Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, we may affirm, that God is the Author of them, and that every part of them has been “given by inspiration from him.”

These comments from Simeon arise from his reading of 2 Timothy 3:16, and he continues to exegete this passage to show the various uses of Scripture outlined within it. While Simeon in

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40 Ibid., vol. 19, 72.
other passages affirms a near dictation theory of inspiration, in this case he both affirms God’s superintendence of the content and manner of Scripture and leaves room for the various styles of the human authors. It is difficult to know how Simeon would distinguish between “manner” and “style” especially, but at its broadest, his point affirms Scripture’s truthfulness and protection from error while also affirming some human element in the tone with which it is conveyed, even if this human element is shielded from waywardness by the Holy Spirit. In the next section, as we look to actual examples of Simeon’s exegesis, I will evaluate his theoretical position on inspiration.

Inspiration is not the only important element for understanding Scripture’s character. For Simeon, it is important to see Scripture as revelation as well. He notes that the Scriptures are not only inspired but are God’s

revelation of his mind and will to man. In them his eternal counsels are opened to the world. In them he has declared what way he will be reconciled to his offending creatures. In them he has displayed all the riches of his grace; and exhibited all his perfections as united and glorified in the person of Christ. In short, whatever could lead to the establishment of truth, or the refutation of error, to the correction of sin, or the promotion of righteousness, all is contained in the inspired volume, in which there is nothing superfluous, nothing defective: which therefore may be wholly, and exclusively, called, “the word of God.”

Here Simeon delineates several facets of the content of revelation, including God’s “eternal counsels,” “the riches of his grace,” his perfections in Christ, and broader uses of Scripture in the Christian life. Simeon insists on the wholeness of Scripture, which is perfectly suited to express God’s mind and will. Simeon leaves no room for doubt about certain portions of Scripture, and

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41 While Simeon is quick to point out the inerrancy of the human authors of Scripture, he does make accommodation for the finitude of human language more generally. Simeon asserts that language about God is not univocal but rather analogical, because God is so transcendent. For instance, see Simeon, Horae Homileticae, vol. 7, 154.

42 Simeon, Horae Homileticae, vol. 17, 497. At first glance it may seem that Simeon is affirming a Christological centre to Scripture. On closer inspection, however, one sees that Christ is the person in whom God’s perfections are “united and glorified.” It is true that Scripture testifies to Christ, and he plays an important role within it, but for Simeon, as we shall see in the next section, Scripture does not wholly point to Christ. Rather, Scripture itself in its totality is the revelation and word of God.
in a general and decisive manner affirms the truth of every part of it. He takes this up elsewhere, noting that human teachers are the ones who obscure Scripture because of their unwillingness to pay attention to the whole of it. Simeon credits the reformers of the Church of England as some who were willing to exegete fully the whole of Scripture. In Simeon’s discussion on the inspiration of Scripture, and Scripture as revelation, his emphasis on the wholeness of the Bible resounds. This leaves the reader with the impression that for Simeon, Scripture is an undifferentiated mass that must be held together simultaneously. Though Simeon’s views are in fact more subtle, and point to a Christological understanding of Scripture, they are quite different from Trench’s theory of a Christological centre.

Another fruitful way of examining this distinction between Trench and Simeon on the unity of the Scripture comes from looking at their respective doctrines of unity in light of the personhood of Christ. For Trench, the person of Jesus is the key to Scripture. Each part of Scripture individually and as a whole together witnesses to his person and his work. Trench brings Jesus to bear upon the whole of Scripture to make sense of it in light of him; only through Jesus and the redemption he works in the world does Scripture become perspicuous. Simeon’s notion of the unity of Scripture is less personal and more formal; Scripture is itself a divine communication detached from any particular persons, all of its various parts making sense by their relation to the other parts making up the whole. Simeon differs from Trench because his principles of interpretation do not rely on the person of Jesus to make sense of something like the sacrifice of Isaac, for instance, for this would be to import one important lesson of Scripture onto another, and would obscure the integrity of each. Interestingly, Simeon titles his discussion on the sacrifice of Isaac, “Isaac a Type of Christ.” After introducing the historical narrative in its Old Testament context, Simeon continues to describe the way that Isaac’s sacrifice resembles Christ’s. He does this by way of comparison and contrast; he does not dwell on the theological

43 Writing of the importance of upholding the totality of Scripture, unlike so many of his contemporaries, Simeon notes, “The pious reformers of the established Church were of a different mind; they have faithfully declared to us the whole counsel of God: but amongst their degenerate children there are few who follow their example; almost all having ranged themselves as partisans of opposite and contending opinions, instead of conforming themselves simply to the declarations of Holy Writ. But I hope the time is not far distant, when ALL the articles of our Church will be equally esteemed, and EVERY truth of Scripture be impartially brought forward to the public ministrations.” Simeon, Horae Homileticae, vol. 21, 281. This passage illustrates Simeon’s commitment to the established Church in a time where many with biblicist views were ready to jettison the Church of England because they perceived it unfriendly to Evangelical emphases.
significance of such typology, but rather exploits the Isaac narrative for its illustrative purposes, noting, for example, “Isaac bore the wood on which he was afterwards to be lifted up; and voluntarily yielded up his body to be bound, and his life to be destroyed in God’s appointed way. Thus did Jesus bear his cross to the place of his crucifixion; and, having been bound, was lifted up upon it.” The point here is not that Simeon saw a reflection in the two narratives and was able to draw them out, but rather that he did not explain why such a reflection was significant, or what it signified.

This methodological difference for finding the centre of Scripture is more readily stated in Simeon’s negation of a centre. He warns of “not so perverting the Scripture as to make it refer to Christ and his salvation, when no such object appears to have been in the contemplation of the inspired writer,” as some do who have “an ultra-Evangelical taste; which overlooks in many passages the practical lessons… and detects in them only the leading doctrines of the Gospel.”

One easily sees that Simeon is not just rejecting figural interpretation in general, but Christological readings specifically. But even this rejection is not wholesale; in other passages of the Horae Homileticae, Simeon amends his position to allow for some Christological readings as long as they fall within the scope of those figural readings that are already present in the New Testament. For example, at the beginning of his commentary on Ezra, he writes,

To put a fanciful interpretation on any part of God’s blessed word is highly inexpedient; and to found a doctrine upon any such interpretation would be injudicious in the extreme. But certain it is, that, there are many explanations given us by the Apostles, which we should in no wise have admitted, if given by uninspired men; such as the termination of

44 Simeon, Horae Homileticae, vol. 1, 178.

45 Simeon, Horae Homileticae, vol.1, xxv. Christological readings are not, purely speaking, exegetical, but rather are figured into the text in a way that would obscure or even superimposed themselves over the texts that have alternate moral lessons. This is because Simeon places a very high value on the “contemplation of the inspired writer,” and thus their intentionality and mindfulness while writing. Also noteworthy is Simeon’s appeal to the exegetical practice of the Reformers rather than Trench or Keble’s appeal to the authority of the patristic writers, alongside of others in the tradition. With all of this being said, there is one contextual point that assuages some of Simeon’s animosity toward Christological readings – namely, that Simeon is writing a commentary that provides sermon outlines for the whole scope of Scripture. It may be the case that Simeon views the prospect of a detailed treatment of all four Gospels reason to expunge the overtly Christological readings of Old Testament texts, for instance, because these same Christological lessons will be the subject of his focus in later volumes.
the Levitical priesthood, as deduced from Abraham’s giving to Melchizedec tenth of the spoils which he had taken; and the reservation of God’s inheritance to regenerate persons only, as deduced from Abraham’s repudiation of Hagar and her son Ishmael. Where these things are explained by the inspired writers, we may follow without fear but in any interpretations of our own, the utmost diffidence becomes us.46

Here Simeon notes not only the falsity of digging for figural interpretation where there is no biblical precedent, but also the actual danger of doing so, that one might dishonour the Word of God. Moreover, Simeon also suggests that it would be even worse to use such a reading for doctrinal purposes. This may explain his hesitancy to draw doctrinal implications from figural correlations such as that of Isaac and Christ, and his acceptance of their use for illustrating lessons instead. Notably, Simeon does not think that figural readings, even those explicitly present in the New Testament, are readily apparent. Rather, seeing these connections requires divine revelation. With all of this being said, it seems that though Simeon is against figural reading in principle – at least where there is not biblical precedent – he is willing to venture some tentative conclusions about passages that strike him as obvious parallels to other passages of Scripture, despite the absence of warrant in other parts of the Bible.47

I will explore this in more detail as we examine several concrete passages of Scripture below, but the point here is that from the outset Simeon is making clear that the purpose of exegesis is to determine what was “intended” by the inspired human authors of Scripture rather than find intimations of “doctrines.” It is difficult to know exactly what Simeon means by “ultra-Evangelical,” especially since those known for their Christological interpretations tend to be those most influenced by the historically catholic tradition of the Church.48


47 Simeon ventures these conclusions in other places as well. For instance, in his discussion of the life of Joseph, Simeon is unwilling to venture with any confidence that Joseph is a type of Christ. Still, he finds the lure irresistible, and so goes on to assert his own opinions (noting they are in line with mysterious “judicious commentators” and are convincing to his own mind), finding some real resemblances between Joseph and Christ. Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, vol. 1, 309.

suggests that, when writing of “Ultra-Evangelicals,” Simeon had in mind “more recently emerged evangelical groups, often with roots in Scotland, who embraced a more literalist approach to the Bible, novel modes of interpreting prophecy, virulent anti-Catholicism, and charismatic ministries.”\footnote{Frank M. Turner, \textit{John Henry Newman: The Challenge to Evangelical Religion} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 25. Turner goes on to cite David Bebbington’s description of this new wave of Evangelicals in Bebbington, \textit{Evangelicalism in Modern Britain}, 75-104. Intriguingly, Bebbington presents these Evangelicals as having more literalist interpretations of the Old Testament, not more Christological ones. For instance, he suggests that instead of interpreting the chariots of Ezekiel to be figural, they thought them to be literal representations of railroads. Ibid., 88.} I think Turner is correct in identifying these “Ultra-Evangelicals,” though calling their approach to the Bible “literalist” may be misleading. There are many examples to choose from, but if we look at the writing of the Scottish evangelist Henry Drummond, we see an illustration of the complexity of exegesis that cannot merely be described as “literalist” or “figural.” For instance, in Drummond’s discussion of Ezekiel 37:24-28, he suggests that in the future Israel will literally have a Davidic King to rule over them as a nation under God; Drummond even says he sees “nothing absurd in supposing, that David the son of Jesse should be raised for this purpose.”\footnote{Henry Drummond, \textit{A Defence of the Students of Prophecy, in Answer to the Attack of Dr. Hamilton of Statthblane}, (London: James Nisbet, Berners Street, 1828), 29.} This is certainly a literalistic reading of the Bible. As Drummond continues, however, he suggests that “it appears to me more consonant with other Scriptures, to believe that it is the true David, the only Beloved one, who is the person intended,” and goes on to argue from the New Testament that Christ is to be the Davidic ruler of the nation of Israel. This is the kind of Christological reading that Simeon wants to avoid, because it obscures the meaning of the text of Scripture in itself. At the same time, this is much closer to the Christological reading by Trench, except that for Trench the fact that Scripture points to Christ does not always mean that its fulfillment will be literally played out in history.

And this raises another point about Simeon’s resistance to Christological readings. If one simply assumes that the author of Leviticus, or the Psalmist, is referring to Christ, then how does the reader apply the moral injunctions of Scripture? Moreover, if Scripture is meant to not only inform Christians about Christ, but to give instruction about how they ought to live, then should one not pay closer attention to the commands that it lays out? Evangelicals, including Simeon,
had the reputation of being particularly concerned with personal holiness.\(^{51}\) Simeon is concerned that tropological readings will be overshadowed by too strong a Christological focus. If this focus is the primary meaning of the text, then Simeon is happy to learn from it and then to apply the secondary moral lesson. This is the angle he takes in a part of his discussion of Psalm 45, where he applies the moral descriptions to the Christian in a secondary sense, after applying them first to Christ as a model.\(^{52}\) On the other hand, however, as Simeon notes in his preface to *Horae Homileticae*, if the passage is not plainly Christological, reading it in this way will actually obscure the practical tropological reading.\(^{53}\) Simeon is concerned not only with doctrine, but the Christian life, and if all of Scripture is used for doctrinal ends, then one misses the rich instructive character of the Bible that is so helpful for a life of holiness.

In any case, Simeon is not alone in his suspicion of the forced typological readings that have no warrant in Scripture, nor in the tradition of the Church, for these are surely fanciful.\(^{54}\) Ultimately, for Simeon, the danger in such Christological reading is that it brings “distraction” and “incoherence” to the minds of the readers, thus making it less conducive to edification. Part of the reason for this, as I noted above, is that Simeon is primarily concerned with the preaching of Scripture, and thus clarity trumps depth to a certain degree.\(^{55}\) Furthermore, Simeon suggests that

\(^{51}\) Kelvin Randall notes, for instance, that Evangelicals' “particular concern and the focus of much of their teaching was holiness. Even when narrow in their theology and illiberal in their ideas they always kept their eyes and the eyes of their audience firmly fixed on the ideal of the child of God unsoiled by the world and at the service of God. Religion was not about feelings but about enthusiastic action, directed to the saving of souls.” Kelvin Randall, *Evangelicals Etcetera: Conflict and Conviction in the Church of England’s Parties* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005), 8. For another take, Frederick Borsch writes, “The reform centered upon a revival in the Church of England and the English nation of the quest for perfection and holiness in life according to biblical precepts. This was the quest for ‘real Christianity’ as Wilberforce was wont to say. It is the quest for holiness in personal and corporate life, not unlike the quest at the heart of earlier Puritan and High Church piety.” Frederick Houk Borsch, *Anglicanism and the Bible*, The Anglican Studies Series (Wilton, Conn: Morehouse Barlow, 1984), 121-2.

\(^{52}\) Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, vol. 5, 346-8.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., vol.1, xxv.

\(^{54}\) For instance, Trench, in his comments on the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matthew 21:33-45, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9-19) notes that while some Church Fathers have tried to determine the theological significance of the wine-press and the tower, their attempts have been for the most part merely fanciful and arbitrary. One test for the legitimacy of these interpretations, according to Trench, is whether or not they have received universal assent. Also of some importance is the significance of the figures that are being interpreted, which in this case are minor details of the parable rather than central pieces. See Trench, *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord*, 204.

\(^{55}\) Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, vol. 1, xxv-xxvi.
if preaching is straightforward and unambiguous, it will have a more profound effect upon the listener and will encourage her to take and read the Bible for herself.\textsuperscript{56}

While Simeon is clear in his introduction to \textit{Horae Homileticae} that Christological reading is off-limits for the most part, he does offer some exceptions to his rule in other passages. Interestingly, Simeon speaks of Christ as the “soul” of Scripture. He writes,

\begin{quote}
The Scriptures are not sufficiently viewed as a \textit{whole}. We are apt to take detached parts only, and to form opinions from them, when we ought rather to regard every part in its connexion with the rest and so to get a comprehensive view of religion, in all its parts, and in all its bearings. The truth is, that revelation is the same from the beginning, and constitutes one great whole; it is a body having many parts that are visible and tangible: but it is penetrated by a soul, which, though invisible, really pervades every part; and that soul is Christ.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

This passage by Simeon provides another instance of his emphasis on the wholeness of Scripture, which he likens to a body. It is paramount for him that all of Scripture connects within itself, and yet it sets forth one single revelation in all of its parts. Intriguingly, Simeon does not suggest that Christ is that revelation, but rather he is the soul animating it. This matches his bodily metaphor for Scripture. Simeon would not say, as would Trench, that the whole Bible points to Jesus and is summed up in him, but rather that Jesus infuses all of it, in its various parts. In addition, Simeon notes the essential point that to understand Scripture rightly requires one to take a step back to see the forest for the trees.

Not only is a comprehensive view of the Bible necessary for the reader to understand it, but the reader must have the proper attitude in her approach. Simeon exhorts, “study [the Scriptures],

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\item \textsuperscript{56} Simeon’s pastoral sensitivity on this score is commendable, but he has not really said anything of worth about the legitimacy of Christological readings. Rather, Simeon is (perhaps rightly) denigrating typological readings because they can be cumbersome for parishioners and thus deter them from turning to Scripture for themselves. It would be interesting to know, if setting aside these prudential concerns, Simeon would be more open to Christological readings.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Simeon, \textit{Horae Homileticae}, vol. 16, 477. Simeon goes on a few pages later to say that Christ is exhibited in the Old Testament, and he is the substance of various part of it; furthermore, he suggests again that Christ is the soul animating the whole body of the Bible. Ibid., 478-9.
\end{itemize}
then, with prayer. Nothing will be gained from them without prayer. From human compositions, you may acquire all that they contain by the mere force of intellectual exertion: but the Scriptures are “a sealed book,” till God himself shall open them to your minds.” Simeon encourages the reader to approach the Bible with prayer if he is to see Christ within it. While intellectual prowess may be enough to understand human works, it is not sufficient to understand Scripture. This contradicts the idea suggested by Benjamin Jowett that Scripture should and can be read like any other book. In Simeon’s view, proper understanding requires humility in prayer, and also divine illumination of the text; this is the way that one sees “views of Christ” throughout. This reading, moreover, is not only informative but transformative, as Simeon notes, changing the reader into “The Divine image.” Indeed, prayer is necessary, but so is a hermeneutic of childlike trust. This is Simeon’s solution to the perceived contradictions one may encounter in Scripture. The fact that God has allowed both apparent competing truths to flourish within the canon of the Bible means that they are not contradictory. One must only trust that all doctrine in Scripture is harmonious because God would have it so, and if it appears otherwise to our finite human minds, we must simply accept that God is wiser than we are.

How does one get glimpses of Christ from portions of Scripture that are not focused on him? Simeon has a few different answers to this question. On the one hand, one can see Christ in certain Old Testament passages, for instance, where the New Testament itself makes such a connection explicit, as I mentioned above. There is more, however. Simeon also sees particular sections of the Old Testament to contain the “substance” of Christ, in the moral law, for instance, though Simeon does not think it refers to Christ in any direct sense. Rather, Simeon suggest that the moral law shows the human deficiency that would move us to see our need for Christ. He writes:

The moral law may seem to consist only of prohibitions and injunctions; enforced with promises to obedience, and threatenings to disobedience. But it is, in fact, a revelation of Christ, inasmuch as it “shuts us up to Christ, and is a schoolmaster to bring us to him”: for, in reality, every command, whilst it shews us how defective our obedience is, directs

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58 Simeon, Horae Homileticae, vol. 20, 547.
59 Ibid., vol. 18, 67-8.
us to Christ; who has fulfilled it in its utmost extent, and has thereby wrought out a perfect righteousness for his believing people.\textsuperscript{60}

The glaring sinfulness that the moral law reveals refers the reader to Christ, the one who has fulfilled the law. Simeon treats the ceremonial law differently, however, suggesting that the various laws “represent” Christ, so that within them the Gospel is preached. They were only shadowy representations of Christ, but they still represented him. Simeon is here referring to the ceremonial law, and all of the sacrifices associated with it, as illustrations useful for depicting with rich imagery the reality of Christ. The ceremonial law was pedagogical in this sense. Simeon goes on in the next passages to say that even the Prophets, in their own unique way, speak of Christ. Here again, however Simeon does not suggest that they were writing about Christ in some clear manner, but rather their prophecies obscurely predict the actual life and ministry of Jesus.\textsuperscript{61} If one is unable to see the Christological thrust of passages such as these, Simeon thinks it is because of the reader’s own pride. Simeon suggests that passages on the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, for instance, clearly apply to Jesus’s own suffering; and the import of passages such as these can only be missed if the reader is “blinded by prejudice” or has been “perverted.”\textsuperscript{62}

Even if the reader of Scripture approaches it with a due humility and trust, Simeon cautions him to beware of an important pitfall. Excess figural reading, including Christological readings, can do damage to the Word of God. Simeon allows for passages to have a secondary application as long as one does not claim it to be the primary aim of a given passage. Simeon notes examples where the Gospels apply passages in the Old Testament as if they were meant to describe instances in the Gospels. Because of examples such as these, Simeon suggests that they justify a considerably greater latitude of observation than we propose to adopt on the present occasion. In considering this portion of sacred history, we do not found upon it any doctrine relating to the Gospel: we do not even insinuate that it was originally

\textsuperscript{60} Simeon, \textit{Horae Homileticae}, vol. 16, 478.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 479.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., vol. 8, 353.
intended to illustrate any of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity: we shall merely take occasion from it to introduce to your notice some useful observations, with which indeed it has no immediate connexion, but with which it has a very striking correspondence.63

This is a very clear presentation of Simeon’s view on figural reading: it is acceptable under limited circumstances, but it can establish no doctrine. Furthermore, the reader must admit that the figural reading was not the original intent of the passage (it is not clear specifically whose intent Simeon has in mind). For Simeon, it is enough that two passages have a “striking correspondence”; because of this, they might be useful for illustrating one another, but this is as far as the reader should go.

By way of summary, we see that in order to understand Simeon as an interpreter of Scripture, we must first glimpse his views on the nature of Scripture. Simeon has a very “high” view of the Bible; he believes it to be inspired by God and to consist of God’s revelation. The style of the human author is present in the biblical text, but ultimately the manner in which it was written and the content within Scripture is from God. With regard to interpretation, Simeon lays out a general rule that figural readings are to be avoided, but he makes exceptions for those based on precedents in the New Testament, and those Old Testament passages that maintain a striking resemblance to those in the New. Furthermore, while Christological readings of certain passages are appropriate because Christ is the soul of the Bible, it is important that no doctrine is founded upon these readings, and that the interpreter does not assume that their secondary application was their intent. Finally, for one to understand Scripture at all requires humility and trust in God.

4 Charles Simeon’s Exegesis

Having looked at Simeon’s theoretical rules for reading Scripture, let us turn to how Simeon actually took these into mind in his reading of the Bible. Moving to the texts that demonstrate Trench’s figural exegesis, one sees that Simeon has a different angle. He has a collection of sermons on the book of Ezekiel, though he does not engage directly with the images of the vision in which the four living creatures appear. It appears that Simeon’s reason for doing so is not that he has an alternate interpretation for these creatures than does Trench, who sees them as

typologically bound up with Christ and his four Gospels, which are prefigured in the four rivers of Paradise. Rather, the meaning of the passage is difficult. Simeon notes that the four beasts are not really the main point of this passage:

The general import of this vision we apprehend to be, that the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, by the ministration of angels and holy men devoted to his service, manages every thing for the good of his Church. But from the eighth chapter God shews, that when his people shall provoke him by their impieties, he will withdraw from them, and give them up to all those judgments which their iniquities have deserved.64

Simeon is less interested in picking out the symbols in Ezekiel than in the main points of his vision: Jesus manages everything for the good of the Church, and those who sin will be judged. In one sense this is a Christological reading, and thus contravenes Simeon’s rules set out in his introduction to his commentary series and elsewhere. Simeon does not appeal to a New Testament precedent for such a reading,65 and it is very evident that according to Simeon’s logic in his introduction, the author of Ezekiel does not likely intend to talk about Jesus or the Church.66 Further, this kind of Christological reading does not take into consideration the figures or types within Scripture, but rather imports theological truths from the New Testament and brings them into harmony with those in the Old. Simeon does not seem to be doing this to make a tropological point either. Rather, Simeon takes as given the truths about God in Christ in the New Testament, and then he reads the truths about God’s providence in Ezekiel, and he sews the two truths together into a whole. What is unclear is the thread that Simeon is using to draw them toward one another.

64 Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, vol. 9, 362.

65 Simeon does not appeal to the parallels of the four living creatures in Revelation 4, nor does he point this reading out as being a particularly striking (though scripturally unfounded) illustration of some facet of the life of Christ.

66 It is not a surprise that Simeon is inconsistent between what he lays out theoretically and what he does in practice. To read him charitably, along with any interpreter of Scripture, is to assume that exegetical “rules” must be vague and rather abstract when they are rattled off without context, but when the interpreter engages in exegesis, he or she must use a certain amount of nuance and finesse.
Though one can see that Simeon is open to a Christological reading, his attempts are quite different from those of Trench. Simeon’s interpretation of Ezekiel’s vision is Christological only in the broadest sense. Simeon’s logic seems to be something along the lines of this:

1. Ezekiel’s vision is a reminder of God’s oversight, which is ordered to the common good of his people.
2. Jesus is God.
3. Those who are a part of the Church are God’s people.
4. Therefore, Ezekiel’s vision is a reminder of Christ’s oversight, which is ordered toward the good of the Church.

Put this way, one can see that Simeon is not reading Ezekiel’s vision as if it were inherently about Christ or the Gospel, but rather as one part in a much larger “body,” to use Simeon’s corporeal metaphor. It is therefore distinct from other parts of the body of Scripture, and has a unique role to play. It is not “about” Christ, but as part of the scriptural body of which Christ is the soul, it is animated by him. This is in contrast with Trench’s Christological reading of the text wherein the four living Scriptures refer to the expansiveness of the Gospel of Christ; for him, this passage is “about” Christ. Simeon’s Christological reading here seems to come from a theological apparatus applied to the text rather than from a true figural reading; the passage from Ezekiel illustrates the New Testament truth of Christ’s governance, but it does not establish or refer to it. For Trench the four living creatures are placed in Ezekiel by the Holy Spirit and point to the four Gospels; they are akin to one another in a deep sense, and so the Christological reading is for him more of a discovery of what has always been there. For Simeon, a Christological reading involves using pre-Christian Ezekiel within a Christian framework for Christian ends. If Scripture were a cultivated wheat field, Trench would liken the sprouting wheat to the presence of Christ; all throughout the field of Scripture Christ is springing up and visible. For Simeon, on the other hand, the wheat would be various passages of Scripture – all important, and all relating to one another, but each sui generis. Christ could be said to be the force of life that makes the wheat grow, animating it; but the plants remain plants.

In his treatment of other parts of the Old Testament, such as the ceremonial sacrifices in Leviticus, Simeon distinguishes between types and metaphors. He notes that when St. Paul writes about being “poured out like a drink offering,” we are not to see the drink offering as a
type of martyrdom.\textsuperscript{67} On the other hand, there are types that can be explained more expansively in relation to the things they typify in the New Testament. Pointing out the method by which one distinguishes Old Testament metaphors from types, Simeon states, “The rule then that we would lay down is this; to follow strictly the apostolic explanations as far as we have them; and, where we have them not, to proceed with extreme caution; adhering rigidly to the analogy of faith, and standing as remote as possible from any thing which may appear fanciful, or give occasion to cavillers to discard typical expositions altogether.”\textsuperscript{68} He goes on to explain the danger in being fanciful, even suggesting that if anything is doubtful in expounding a passage typologically, it is better to leave it aside. That being said, Simeon writes

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Whatever we see burnt upon the brasen altar, we may be sure was typical of the atonement of Christ: whether it were the flesh of beasts, or the fruits of the earth, there was no difference in this respect: it equally typified his sacrifice. This appears not only from the meat-offering being frequently mentioned together with the burnt-offering in this very view but from its being expressly referred to as a means of expiating moral guilt. It is on this account that we number it among the propitiatory sacrifices, notwithstanding its use in other respects was widely different. There is indeed, in the mode of treating this fine flour, something well suited to shadow forth the sufferings of Christ: it was baked (in a pan or oven) or fried, and, when formed into a cake, was broken and burnt upon the altar. Who can contemplate this, and not see in it the temptations, conflicts, and agonies of the Son of God? We cannot but recognise in these things, him, “who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities”; who himself tells us, that “He was the true bread, of which whosoever ate, should live for ever.”\textsuperscript{69}
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This is one of the more ambiguous moves Simeon makes, keeping in view his rules for figural reading, and his more usual approach in practice. Simeon does not offer an explicit rationale for taking all sacrifices to be types, though he does footnote Hebrews 10:5-8 for New Testament precedent. It is possible that Simeon may simply be exegeting the text in ways that are not

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{67} Simeon, \textit{Horae Homileticae}, vol. 1, 571.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Ibid., vol. 1, 571.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid., vol. 1, 572-3.
\end{itemize}
consistent with his rules. It is not clear whether these types are merely illustrative for Simeon, or if they really do refer to Christ in some meaningful way. It is not clear, in other words, whether Simeon is looking for ways to illustrate New Testament themes by way of his preaching the Old Testament, and thus he finds the sacrificial cult to provide particularly poignant images, or, alternatively, whether Simeon thinks that these sacrifices are actually connected to the sacrifice of Christ so that he might also illustrate the reason for them.

Simeon’s treatment of the psalms follows this same pattern of Christological reading as a theological imposition from without. This is evident immediately in the first psalm. This psalm has traditionally been read to be about Jesus Christ – that he is indeed the “blessed man” of whom the psalm speaks. It is fascinating that Simeon makes mention of this but goes on to talk about the moral cultivation of the righteous life, using the arboreal imagery. Simeon notes, “The godly are ‘trees of righteousness, of the Lord’s planting’: their roots are constantly watered by that ‘river which makes glad the city of God’: and by the fertilizing influences of the Spirit of God they bring forth in rich abundance ‘the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and Glory of God.’” Here he is freely playing with images and themes from different parts of Scripture, drawing images from here and there to apply to the interpretation of the first psalm. Furthermore, he suggests that the behaviour of the righteous comes from Jesus Christ.

Simeon is thus willing to import Christian themes into the text of the Old Testament, without seeing these texts as essentially about Christ, or linking them through the types and figures of Scripture in the way that Trench or the Church Fathers were willing to. It is curious that Simeon does not make the more traditional interpretation, since he imports Christ in other ways to the

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70 If Simeon is being inconsistent, one possible explanation for this discrepancy could be Simeon’s aversion to systematicity. In the introduction to *Horae Homileticae*, for instance, he suggests that rather than synthesizing texts that favour a Calvinist or Arminian view of providence in an attempt to make them more logically coherent, the task of the preacher is instead to proclaim boldly God’s sovereignty over human action on the one hand, and then just as strongly to proclaim human freedom on the other. There is no need to tie up loose ends, or to make the Bible intelligible by smoothing over theological ambiguity, but one should rather set it forth as it is written. See Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, vol. 1, xxiii. If this is the case, it is not that Simeon does not subscribe to general principles for interpretation, but that he may find reason now and then to set them aside in order to be true to the text.

71 This was Augustine’s initial take on the psalm, for instance, though he seems to alter his view later in life with his retractions. See Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, vol. 1 (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1960), 21.

moral lessons within the psalm. It may be that Simeon is only being consistent with his principle to refrain from Christological readings that do not have New Testament precedents. In the preamble to the larger section on the Book of Psalms, Simeon writes that “they are quoted continually in the New Testament as inspired of God: and so fully do they speak of Christ, that an account of his life and death, his work and offices, might be compiled from them almost as clearly as from the Gospels themselves.”

Just as Simeon refrains from a Christological reading of Psalm 1, he embraces other psalms that are quoted as referring to Christ in the New Testament. In his discussion of Psalm 36, Simeon notes,

> It is in Christ only that the perfections mentioned in the foregoing verses are combined. It is in him only that God unites justice with mercy, or adheres, in faithfulness, to his covenant engagements. Besides, it is in this view that Christ is set forth throughout all the sacred oracles, by prophets, by Apostles, and more especially by himself - - - We may well therefore apply to him the comparison before us: and we shall find it admirably descriptive of his real character.

The fact that Psalm 36 is applied to him elsewhere in Scripture seems to be a safeguard for Simeon. Throughout his commentary on the Psalms, Simeon confidently alludes to Christological readings when there is precedent in the New Testament. And in other places, where he does allow for Christological readings of the text, such as in his discussion of “the Law of the Lord” in Psalm 19, Simeon does not say that the text is about Christ. Rather, Simeon allows the truth of the New Testament to be illustrated by parts of the Old. He does not say that it refers to Christ, but instead he uses it as an illustration or outline that gives occasion to say something about the New Testament. The “testimony of the Lord” points to the way God testifies

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73 Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, vol. 5, 1.
74 Ibid., vol. 5, 285-6.
75 For instance, Simeon reads Psalm 45 as a “nuptial song; wherein Christ, as the heavenly Bridegroom, is celebrated by his Bride, the Church.” He goes on to say that the psalm must be read this way because the book of Hebrews says its words were addressed to Christ. Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, vol. 5, 345. In his discussion of Psalm 22, Simeon notes that though much of the Psalm refers to David, the parts that are inapplicable to him apply to Christ. The real warrant for reading Christologically again comes from New Testament precedent: “The writers of the New Testament quote many parts of [the psalm] as literally fulfilled in Christ; in whom alone indeed the words which I have read had any appearance of accomplishment.” Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, vol. 5, 130.
of his Son, and the Law of the Lord is “sure” because one can rely on God, being sure that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. It is as if Simeon is using the psalm’s structure to build his sermon about God in Christ; the emphasis of the sermon is not on the meaning of the psalm, but rather on more general truths about God in Christ that the psalm usefully brings to mind.

With respect to the four Gospels, Simeon does not refer to any of the biblical figures that Trench presented to point to the manifold nature of Scripture. While Trench made much of the four rivers of Paradise, the four living creatures of Ezekiel, and the four Gospel accounts, Simeon does not focus on the significance of this at all. Interestingly, however, in a manner similar to Trench’s suggestion that the Gospel provides the maximum impact for the most people, Simeon points out that prophetic books of the Old Testament teach about Jesus sufficiently. It may not be significant that there are four Gospels, but it is significant that Jesus’ life is portrayed clearly in the prophets. Simeon notes:

The declarations of the prophets were so numerous and minute, that a history of our Lord might be compiled from them, fuller, in many respects, than is contained in any one of the Evangelists. The person that betrayed him, the manner in which his trial should be conducted, the sufferings he should undergo previous to the final execution of his sentence, the death to which he should be doomed, the persons in whose company he should suffer, the manner in which his clothes should be disposed of, the very taunts with which he should be insulted in his dying hour, were all fulfilled as exactly, as if the agents in this bloody tragedy had designed to accomplish the predictions concerning him.

Simeon suggests that the prophets shed more light on the particularities of Christ’s death than do the Gospel accounts. Here again Simeon seems to go beyond the intent of the authors to point out that indeed their prophetic speech increases the breadth of the biblical testimony to Christ. This is not so much figural Christological reading as it is a predictive reading of the Old Testament. It

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76 Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, vol. 5, 106.
77 Ibid., vol. 14, 189.
is not a multilayered figuralism, but rather a one-to-one correspondence between the prophecies of the Old Testament and events in Jesus’ life in the New Testament.

All of this is not to say that Simeon did not value the four Gospels as such. He was aware of the same criticism that Trench addressed, which suggested the varied points of view to be problematic. While Trench’s response was to point to God’s providence using these four perspectives to speak to more people, Simeon is more attuned to their testimony to the truth of the Gospel accounts. He argues that though some view the discrepancies in the accounts of Christ’s appearance after the resurrection to lessen the credibility of the Gospels, in fact, it confirms rather than lessens, the credibility of their testimony; since it proves to a demonstration, that there was no concert between them, but that they related in the simplicity of their minds what they knew to be true, without inquiring whether, in recording a fact, the omission of a trifling circumstance might occasion some obscurity respecting the order or manner of its accomplishment.  

Without recourse to divine providence, to the theological weight of the Gospels, to the ordering of the canon, Simeon makes a more common-sense observation: One would expect several eye witnesses to see an event’s details slightly differently, and if they all saw exactly the same details from various vantage points, it would be cause for suspicion rather than credulity. This same logic applies to the life of Christ. It is more likely that the four Gospel authors should portray him from their own perspectives, rather than giving a unanimous account.


79 Thus, in an analysis of the Gospel traditions, Robert McIver can, without recourse to the doctrine of providence, suggest that the Gospels as we have them are probably historically accurate, despite an expected twenty percent error rate at the level of secondary details: “What would have been remembered are those incidents and sayings of most relevance to the present circumstances of the community of believers. But outright fabrication of collective memory is rare indeed. One cannot rule out such a possibility in the gospel traditions beyond all shadow of doubt, but this is true of just about any historical reconstruction. The historian must make an assessment of the evidence informed by considering as much relevant data as possible, and with the greatest possible understanding of social and historical processes. But that errors are possible in the collective memories of Jesus, and that fabrication occasionally happens in other collective memories, should not prevent a balanced historical evaluation of the Jesus traditions. Outright fabrications in collective memory may be possible, but they are rare. Thus, the balance of probability is that they are unlikely to be found in the gospel traditions. Collective memory is selective, it exaggerates and embellishes and is shaped by the present concerns of the community in which it is preserved. But it almost always has a strong tie to what actually happened in the past. Why should the collective memories represented in the gospel traditions be different from almost all other collective memories?” Robert K. McIver,
One final point I wish to make is with respect to the importance of the Church Fathers and their interpretative practices as they appear in Trench and Simeon. I have noted above that Trench refers often to the Fathers in his work; it will strike anyone immediately upon reading Simeon that he does not often at all refer to the Fathers. In fact, Simeon’s footnotes are much more restrained than Trench’s in general and are primarily used to cross reference various biblical passages. In this respect one can certainly say that Simeon is immersed in Scripture, but he does little grappling with the tradition of the Church. Simeon may simply be unaware of much of the patristic commentary, or he may dismiss it as unimportant. Given Simeon’s strong biblicism and his opposition to controversy, Simeon’s commentary unsurprisingly focuses solely on Scripture; he provides a comprehensive set of sermon outlines that set forth a straightforward reading of the Bible. My theory is that in quoting later authorities, Simeon would only give opportunity for controversy, instead of appealing solely to the Word of God. Whether he valued the tradition or not is impossible to say, but it is certain that it has less of a visible impact on his exegetical work than the massive force it brought to Trench’s.

The practical implications of these differences are that Trench’s approach to Scripture has far more explanatory power of the types of Scripture, as well as the texture and shape of the canon. According to Simeon’s view, one might be led to think that Scripture is a collection of truthful parts, like the parts of a body, that say something about God and the Christian life while they are all animated by the life of Christ. While Trench would no doubt accept that Scripture does speak about God and the Christian life, his understanding of the unity of Scripture demands that the reader see this within a larger Christological matrix. For Trench, then, Scripture has a reason and shape; it has a logical coherence and story. This is something carved out within Scripture with intricate detail and complexity by the providence of God. Trench’s view of the unity of Scripture then is a more detailed map and ensures that various features within Scripture’s landscape have names, significance, and relation to the whole. Simeon, on the other hand, leaves

―Eyewitnesses as Guarantors of the Accuracy of the Gospel Traditions in the Light of Psychological Research,” Journal of Biblical Literature 131, no. 3 (October 12, 2012), 546. In other words, in line with Simeon’s thinking on the further historical legitimacy given to the Gospels because of their four unique perspectives on Jesus, McIver is saying that if the Gospel accounts are treated as if they were any other piece of historical literature, one can be reasonably sure they are not collective fabrications.
many of the key types and figures unexamined, and so they seem to be arbitrary symbols that add nothing to the more general lessons in the Bible.

Trench’s view of Scripture also has more explanatory power with respect to the tradition of the Church; it is not simply something to be written off as irrelevant or ignored as fanciful. Rather, it ought to be subsumed into the wider interpretive enterprise as a leading light, fallible as it is. Even if tradition could give rise to controversy, it is better to engage it, rather than to leave it out of the equation. Though I suspect Simeon’s motives were to preserve the focus on the Bible, leaving aside tradition entirely leaves him open to the charge of simply offering his own private interpretation, unmoored from the communion of the saints.

As we shall see in the next chapter, while Jowett is perhaps more different from Trench in his approach to Scripture than was Simeon, he quite positively vituperates that which he leaves behind.
Chapter 2
Trench and the Broad Churchmen

1 From Scripture to Text: Shifts in Anglo-European Scriptural Interpretation

Trench’s interpretive practices clash violently with modern assumptions about scriptural meaning and proper exegetical practices. This is most evident as one compares Trench’s thought with that of Benjamin Jowett, the renowned classicist, biblical scholar, and Oxford Regius Professor of Greek.¹ This chapter will cover Trench’s understanding of the future development of Scripture, namely, the way that providence has arranged it so that Scripture is always able to meet the needs of every generation of Christians. Further, this chapter will continue to investigate the subject of Trench’s understanding of the inexhaustibility of Scripture, focusing especially on the multiplicity of meanings of any given text. Before turning to Trench’s work in any detail I will trace some of the historical lines that have led to such a radical disjunction. My argument can be summed up in this chapter as follows: As scriptural interpretation became less theologically focused (as in the work of Jowett), it lost both its richness and cohesiveness (as it was present in the work of Trench).

I will begin with a heuristic description of Broad Church theology and scriptural interpretation, situating it within the cultural scene in England that fostered the novel turn in scriptural exegesis exemplified by Benjamin Jowett. After giving this history, I will offer a survey of Trench’s lecture on the future unfolding of Scripture in *The Fitness of Holy Scripture for Unfolding the Spiritual Life of Men*, noting especially the way he understands the meanings of Scripture to

¹ I am comparing the work of Trench and Jowett in this section because they both substantively engaged questions of the nature and interpretation of Scripture in their work, both in very different ways. I think it profitable that the dissonance between their views can bring further clarity to each. The standard Jowett biography remains Geoffrey Cust Faber, *Jowett: A Portrait with Background* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957). For a more personal reflection on Jowett from one of his pupils, see Lionel A. Tollemache, *Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol* (London: Edward Arnold, 1895). Finally, for a more thorough treatment of Jowett and his theological thought, see Peter Bingham Hinchliff, *Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).
unveil themselves over the course of human history and on into the distant future. I will then turn to one of the questions that this naturally raises: How can Scripture convey more than one meaning in a given text? I will address this by continuing to draw from the aforementioned The Fitness of Holy Scripture and also from Trench’s Notes on the Parables of Our Lord to illustrate how Trench draws out multiple meanings from the texts of Scripture. From here, I will turn to Jowett, first giving an overview of his infamous theoretical essay, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” to show the theological framework within which Jowett is working. This work is garnered Jowett the most attention and so deserves a full treatment. To supplement all of this, I will consult Jowett’s lesser known theological works, including his sermons, to show how he actually engaged with Scripture in practice. I will compare Trench’s approach to the Bible with Jowett’s by focusing on four points of difference in their views of Scripture, namely, Scripture’s ontology, providence, biblical authorship, and history. I will finish this chapter with F.W. Farrar’s account of the history of interpretation because it mirrors Jowett’s perception of “progress” and the evolutions of reading Scripture in the Church.

The English scene of scriptural interpretation in the nineteenth century was the result of a complex host of factors, and it represents wider theological shifts in Western Europe. Michael Legaspi traces the broader trend, noting that “for over a millennium, Western Christians read and revered the Christian Bible as Scripture, as an authoritative anthology of unified, authoritative writings belonging to the Church.” Furthermore, the Bible served as a cultural touchstone that at once shaped and projected a vision of life for Christian Europe. This was all about to change. Beginning with the Reformation, and the back and forth between Protestants and Catholics about what exactly constituted the Bible and how it should be read, the Bible showed itself to be a contested legacy for Western Christians, ultimately devolving into a multiplicity of bibles with distinct canons, separate ecclesial contexts, and prolific theological superstructures. What had functioned centrally in the life of the Church became, in the early modern period, a kind of textual proving ground for the legitimacy of extrascriptural theoretical understandings: at first theological and polemical and then, over time, literary, philosophical, and cultural. As a text, an object of critical

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analysis, the Bible came into clearer focus; however, as Scripture, the Bible became increasingly opaque.\(^3\)

This only served as the start of a much longer process of the disentanglement of the Bible into a plurality of biblical texts, differing not only in content but in function. The unity of the Bible, once divided, has continued to unwind.

One significant contribution to this shift in thought about Scripture was the changing winds of biblical studies that came to England from Germany. Michael Legaspi traces this quite convincingly, suggesting that the Bible that was studied during the Reformation was not the same as that studied in eighteenth-century Germany; furthermore, this later “academic Bible” had increasing influence in England as well.\(^4\) Legaspi is not the only one to note this trend, and scholars have unanimously pointed to this Westward drift in opinion from Germany to England.\(^5\)

This shift was the cause of a significant debate between Edward Pusey and Hugh James Rose; Rose vehemently opposed the innovative scholarship in German theological circles, while Pusey, offering in his earlier career a sympathetic synthesis of German thought, came under attack from Rose. Both men were associated with the Oxford Movement, and later Pusey came to quietly


\(^4\) Legaspi eloquently and precisely describes this: “the academic Bible did not come into being until the eighteenth century, when biblical criticism took shape at the modern university as a post-confessional enterprise. The academic Bible was created by scholars who saw that the scriptural Bible, embedded as it was in confessional particularities, was inimical to the sociopolitical project from which Enlightenment universities drew their purpose and support. Given the choice between the scriptural Bible and something else, university men, the fathers of modern criticism, chose something else.” He goes on to suggest that a key figure in the creation of the academic Bible was Johann David Michaelis. Ibid., viii.

\(^5\) It would be tedious to go through all of the secondary literature on the transfer of the work of German theologians and biblical scholars to England in the nineteenth century, so I will only point to a few noteworthy sources. For a wider overview of Scripture in the nineteenth century, see William J. Abraham, “Scripture,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth Century Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 628–42; Herbert Schlossberg, *Conflict and Crisis in the Religious Life of Late Victorian England* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2009), 22; Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Biblical Higher Criticism and the Defense of Infallibilism in 19th Century Britain* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 1987), 69. Though it restricts itself to Old Testament scholarship, another important work on this subject is J. W. Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* (London: SPCK, 1984). Rogerson draws attention to the important historical reality that in England in the early nineteenth century there were no real theological faculties in either of the only two universities (Oxford and Cambridge), while Germany had Old Testament professors in seventeen Protestant faculties between 1800 and 1860. Ibid., 138. Moreover, Rogerson is quick to suggest the conservative influence of the Evangelical and Methodist revivals as one reason for the resistance to German scholarship in England. Ibid., 250.
repudiate his earlier writings. Interestingly, John Davis argues quite convincingly that, in view of Pusey’s earlier writing, the Tractarian push to return to more traditional worship was itself simply another manifestation of the same romanticism that founded liberal Protestant attempts to return to the original meaning and reception of Scripture. This will become more evident in the next chapter in my discussion of Keble, so it will suffice to say now that in their own way, Simeon, Jowett, and Keble are all attempting to return to what they perceived to be the more correct interpretation of Scripture.

This is not to say liberalizing attitudes toward Scripture were solely the result of the English reception of German thought. For there was a whole party, or at least a movement, within the Church of England that was associated with critical approaches to Scripture as well as reading the same by the light of recent historical and scientific discoveries. The movement came to be associated with the title “the Broad Church” and its members, “Broad Churchmen.”

2 The Broad Church and Scripture

While a definitive description of the Broad Church does not exist, historically the term has been linked unambiguously with the publication of Essays and Reviews, and so the opinions expressed therein are taken to be symbolic of the whole movement. In the words of Tod E. Jones,

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7 Davis, The Victorians and Germany, 121.

as a lexical item, “Broad Church,” although used as early as the late 1840s, had not, before 1860, entered into common parlance… It was, as yet, a term in search of its meaning. Before the end of 1860, Essays and Reviews was heralded as the representation of Broad Church views on various subjects, and consequently, “Broad-Churchism” became, in popular usage, synonymous with Oxford liberalism.9

While this singular description of the movement is contestable, and does not do justice to the full scope of the views held by those who have been associated with the Broad Church, it is useful as a heuristic in my discussion of Jowett here. Furthermore, the fact that in 1860 there was a clear link between the authors of Essays and Reviews such as Jowett and Broad Church theology is a strong enough connection for him to function as the type in this chapter. Of course, the reality is more complex; Charles Sanders offers a careful outline of two streams within the Broad Church. One stream emerged from Cambridge and was associated with Coleridge, while another was based out of Oxford. Jowett belonged to this second group. Sanders notes,

the Oxford school was predominantly Aristotelian and displayed a faith in formal logic, while the Cambridge school was predominantly Platonic and Kantian…. Both groups welcomed the progress of science and of textual criticism of the Bible, but the Oxford school tended to exalt the intellect, while the Cambridge group insisted that the intellect could not of itself create truth, which God must reveal, and that the only sure evidence of truth was in the testimony of the whole man, not merely that of the understanding.10

Sanders’s categorization is very useful here, and his suggestion that the Oxford school has a more exalted view of the intellect is indeed applicable to Jowett. Sanders’s description of the qualitative differences between those most influenced by Coleridge, especially F.D. Maurice, and someone like Jowett, is also useful. Interestingly, even Trench himself has been lumped with these Cambridge Broad Churchmen.11 While there is some Coleridgean influence in Trench’s

9 Jones, The Broad Church, 201. However, Jones goes on to say that no modern historian claims that Essays and Reviews is representative of the movement. Ibid., 202.
10 Sanders, Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement, 14.
11 For instance Trench went along with John Sterling to visit Coleridge; and Sanders, after situating Trench as a Broad Churchman, calls for further study of his contributions to the movement. Jones, The Broad Church, 138; Sanders, Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement, 264. Jeremy Morris also treats Trench alongside Broad
thought, and the outward events of his life call for him to be associated with this brand of the Broad Church, his theology is quite distinct. Jeremy Morris writes, for instance, “Biblically conservative, and arguably ‘High’ rather than ‘Broad,’ Trench placed more emphasis on the divine creation of language according to Genesis than did the rest of the group.” Given that even Maurice’s theology does not sit well with the general descriptions of Broad Church beliefs, Trench’s is even further afield.

Broad Church approaches to Scripture were not only influenced by German theology but by thinkers closer to home as well, especially by the “sage of Highgate,” the poet-theologian Samuel Taylor Coleridge. As Tod E. Jones writes, “… the Broad Church movement may, as a generalization, be called ‘the Coleridgean movement.’ And Coleridge is justly given the paternal status of ‘Father of the Broad Church movement.’” This is not to say that German philosophy and theology did not play a part in Coleridge’s own thought, but he was drawing from other sources as well, like the seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonists and, as Douglas Hedley notes, the Lockean tradition that came via William Paley. This latter philosophy left a critical impression on Coleridge, and he often criticized it in his later work. There are certainly

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12 Besides visiting with Coleridge, Trench read and appreciated his work, though ultimately he diverged from others under Coleridge’s influence, such as F.D. Maurice. I will discuss these connections in more depth in section 4.2.

13 Morris, “Text as Sacrament,” 368.

14 Many have noted how Maurice intentionally distanced himself from the idea of the Broad Church, that he was in many senses more conservative than its other prominent thinkers, and so was perhaps uncomfortably associated with it. See Jones, The Broad Church, 205-7; Wigmore-Beddoes, Yesterday’s Radicals, 27-8; Knight, “Anglicanism,” The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought, 525; Sanders, Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement, 7. While it is true Maurice was heavily influenced by Coleridge’s romanticism, he had a less exalted view of the intellect and readily more accepted the received beliefs of the Church of England than did someone like Jowett. In other words, though Maurice travelled in more liberal company, he often came to comparatively conservative conclusions. In light of this, I have chosen to assess Maurice’s theology of Scripture in a different light in chapter four, “Trench the Orthodox.”

15 Jones, The Broad Church, 43.

resonances of Coleridge in Benjamin Jowett’s work. Like Jowett, Coleridge insisted that the Bible should be read like any other book. Like Jowett, he focused significant energy on exegeting the Bible and evidently had a very high view of it. For both thinkers, this approach to the Bible was not meant to downplay its significance (and it is arguable whether or not it did) but rather to allow the Bible to shine with all its splendor as the interpreter strips away his false preconceptions about what the Bible ought to be. The Bible should be read like any other book in order that one may see its divinity. Though Jowett’s thought heads in different directions, as typical of the Oxford branch of the Broad Church, there are notable marks of Coleridge’s thought in his own writing. I will explore other dimensions to Coleridge’s thought in more detail in chapter four, “Trench the Orthodox.”

To bring further clarity to Trench’s approach to Scripture, I will compare it to Jowett’s under four categories. Although they overlap, they are helpful for designating the contours of each thinker’s understanding of Scripture. The first of these is the ontology of Scripture. For Trench, Scripture is a multilayered, inexhaustible divine revelation, while for Jowett, Scripture is an inspired message that has been tarnished with time. Related to the role of Scripture’s ontology is divine providence. For Trench this is key to understanding the very character of Scripture itself, as something that is ordered by providence. For Jowett and F.W. Farrar, an appeal to providence is necessary to show the chronological progression of the apprehension of truth, from its dull impressions in the Old Testament to its brighter illuminations in the New, to its final crystalized appearance in the modern period. Each thinker also approaches the authorship of Scripture with a different paradigm. For Trench, meaning resides in the intentions of God, and this transcends but includes human authorship in a compatibilist conception of divine and human agency. This is in contrast with Jowett’s apprehension of the meaning of Scripture as being indistinguishable from the inspired human author’s intent. Finally, for Trench, history continually opens

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18 Barbeau, *Coleridge, the Bible, and Religion*, 2.
19 Ibid., 42. Note that for Coleridge and Jowett, saying that Scripture ought to be read like any other book is not tantamount to saying it is like any other book.
20 One might trace other lines to Jowett’s brand of Broad Church theology, such as its affinities with Unitarian descriptions of scriptural inspiration; for a discussion of this see Wigmore-Beddoes, *Yesterday’s Radicals*, 58-78.
additional windows onto the inherent meaning of Scripture, meaning that it transcends the historical situation in which it was written, while for Jowett, and also for Farrar, history is a problem — an agent of decay — that obscures the meaning of Scripture as time passes. Each of these four categories will be treated with more detail in the following sections.

3 Trench and the Future Unfolding of Scripture: Ontology and Providence

On the subject of Scripture’s ontology, we see that one of the most striking strands of thought in Trench’s theology of Scripture is his notion that the Word of God has a life of its own. He is thus able to talk about Scripture vindicating itself to be all that it claimed to be, shewing itself mighty, through God, for doing its appointed work; how like the personal Word, it had ridden forth, and was riding yet, a victorious conqueror over the earth. It remains to consider, and with this consideration we shall fitly conclude our subject, in what way it is likely to approve itself a conqueror to the end; what preparations we can trace in it for meeting the future evils of the world, the future needs of the Church; how far we may suppose that this Book, which has revealed so much, may yet have much more to reveal.21

In his personification of Scripture, Trench notes that not only does it have a history of action, of opening itself, “shewing itself,” and “doing its appointed work,” but it remains still partly folded, partly muted, with so much still to reveal. Scripture has not yet been mastered, and in this passage Trench argues that not only are there deeper layers that one must mine, but some elements are hidden within Scripture that will only be revealed in their proper time, like unripe fruit that appears dull and useless but given enough time to mature will radiate with colour and sweetness. Or in his words, “as Scripture has sufficed for the past, so it will suffice for the time to come… it has resources adequate to meet all demands which may be made on it.”22 One sees, then, that Trench treats Scripture as if it were different from any other book. In the chapter from which I quoted above, Trench is focused more on discussing Scripture’s ontology rather than

21 Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 123.
22 Ibid.
specific exegetical maneuvers. Scripture’s nature is complex and layered; it is *sui generis* in its ultimate sufficiency to meet all situations, speaking to them. But by taking a step back from the specific contextual questions of interpretation, Trench is able to intimate something of his theory of scriptural interpretation, which is deeply related to the doctrine of divine providence.

Trench could have gone in two directions with his description of the inspiration of Scripture. One direction would have been the more one-to-one approach taken by Simeon, wherein the Bible means what the human author intended, as the human author was being influenced by the leading of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, and this will be elucidated more fully below, Trench could have taken the path of Jowett to find the “original” meaning, which he believed to be the one true meaning of the text. Rather than taking either of these approaches, however, Trench has a compatibilist notion of scriptural inspiration. He suggests that Scripture contains weapons for the Church, and “they who were employed by God to forge them, while they knew that they would serve present needs, yet hardly knew, perhaps not at all, to what remote purposes they should one day be turned.”

For example, it is clear that Paul is addressing local problems in Corinth when he rebukes certain people in all of their particularity. However, there is more at work here than he intends; for the Spirit speaks, animating the language of human authors without decimating it, so that their intended meanings stand but are extended in content and further into time. In Trench’s words,

> For just as in works of man’s mind, *talent* knows which it means, but *genius*, which is near akin to inspiration, means much more than it consciously knows; even so wise men and prophets and evangelists, who were used for the uttering of this Word, knowing much of that which they spake and recorded, yet meant still more than they knew – the

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24 Vernon White touches on this in an elucidating discussion of God’s radical transcendence and the doctrine of providence, which discussion is useful for illuminating Trench’s doctrine of inspiration. Essentially, for White, the doctrine of transcendence safeguards the integrity of the human intention while allowing God freedom to bring alternate meaning through such an intention. He notes, “God is in a position always to re-frame temporal events to give them new (redemptive) meaning. It is a construal which means we are conceiving a dimension in which events in history can always be brought into new relations with other events (historical and eternal) to give them such meaning. In particular, it means that all events could be redeemed by being brought into a new relation specifically with the event of Christ (which is itself conceived as an eternal as well as historical event, and can therefore be recapitulated in all other events – this transcendent status of the Christ event being of course one of the most distinctive soteriology claims of the tradition).” White, *Purpose and Providence*, 132.
Holy Ghost guiding and shaping their utterances, and causing them oftentimes to declare deeper things, and things of wider reach and of more manifold utility, than even they themselves, enlarged and enlightened by the Spirit as they were, were conscious of the while.  

Trench always keeps in view an element of mystery behind and around the human words of Scripture. This is not to say that the interpreter of Scripture can see rightly what the Spirit is doing in all ages, or even in the present. Trench makes clear that we cannot predict the future of the Church or of the world, the present calamitous state of either, nor how Scripture will unveil itself to be sufficient for each. That being said, one can note that the Scripture will provide all that is necessary for addressing every situation with which the Church has to deal. However alluring and seductive falsity may be, Scripture will ultimately prevail.

This deep richness that is prepared for the future is not merely for the defense of the Church, nor is it even a deposit of truth that the Church is meant to guard. More than this, the fullness of Scripture that is ever waiting to be revealed has a missiological end. Trench notes that Scripture contains within it all truth necessary for the spiritual life, and so all other religions that have part of this truth – the oneness of God in Islam, for example – are completed in and by Scripture:

These, brethren, are the great rival religions to Christianity, which yet contend with it for the possession of the world - each of them, as you see, presenting points of contact for the

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25 Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 124. It interesting that a vision of scriptural inspiration very similar to that of Trench is described by Harkins in her observations on the significance of the pluriformity of the Dead Sea Scrolls. She notes: “It seems clear that the authority of the text in premodern communities came not from its fixed form but from the recognition of that text as a divinely inspired work whose divine authorship transcended the multiple human agents responsible for the production of multiple texts. In the case of the scriptural text, the community’s recognition of the divine authorship of the written text conferred authority on what had been written and transformed it from human writing to divine revelation, that is, Scripture. The divine author’s role differed from the human writer’s; the former gave the text its authority, the latter played a part in the actual production of the physical object.” In Angela Kim Harkins, “Theological Attitudes toward the Scriptural Text: Lessons from the Qumran and Syriac Exegetical Traditions,” Theological Studies 67, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 498. I must note some key differences in intent here: Trench puts his vision of scriptural authority and meaning to use in order to show the Bible’s continued relevance for the Church throughout time and into the future. Harkins sees the significance of this theory of inspiration to be in part a window into the function of specific scriptural texts. Harkin argues that it is not so important which specific form the text takes, but rather the divine communicative act that stands behind it.

26 Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 129.
absolute Truth; and at the same time all presenting points of weakness - sides upon which they dumbly crave to be fulfilled by this Truth, even while they are striving the most fiercely against it; the Truth in Holy Scripture being at once the antagonist and the complement of them all.  

Trench’s understanding of divine providence comes to the fore once again. Scripture is ordered by God and contains the truth about God, but the world, even other religious traditions, flourish as God allows so that their partial truth might lead adherents to the fullness of the Gospel in Scripture. This is a very hopeful picture of the world and of human history. The erroneous beliefs of many are not merely tragic errors, or inventions by demons or deluded tyrants; rather, they are given rein in a particular realm only so some of those who hold them might ascertain enough of the truth to realize there are still undiscovered pieces in the puzzle. In a world such as this, all that is left for these people is to see that these pieces do exist. They fit perfectly in other religions as they banish the erroneous beliefs and complete the partially true with the fullness of the Gospel. Providence is always active in such a view, always working with what is and pressing the disparate fragments of philosophy and religious thought toward their centre in Christ.

While Trench’s sketch of the world here is hopeful, it is not saccharine. He recognizes too that even Christian theology rooted in Scripture does not have the ability to smooth out every intellectual or existential wrinkle one might encounter. Mysteries remain, and at times Scripture can feel more like a stumbling block than the perspicuous truth-teller some Christians might have it be. Trench notes, “This is our sole security to have tasted the good Word, to have known the powers of the world to come. And what if Theology may not be able, on the instant, to solve every difficulty, yet Faith will not therefore abandon one jot or tittle of that which she holds, for she has it on another and a surer tenure, she holds it directly from her God.”  

Though Scripture contains the fullness of truth, ultimately this fullness is eschatological, and thus at some points our apprehension of truth is more of a foretaste than the feast to come. Trench’s point is

27 Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 134.

essentially a reminder for the interpreter to entertain a healthy scepticism when it is appropriate. Not everything can be known from Scripture, and theology is not a science that has the resources to explain everything. The incompleteness here is not from any lack in Scripture, but rather the finitude of human existence, whether of the individual or in the Church. All human interpretation is limited. The interpreter ought to humbly remain sceptical about pat answers, knowing that not everything is clear now, but that one can trust that Scripture is true. This requires a basic orientation of “faith” (as Trench put it) or trust. The same scepticism without the requisite humility and trust will take offense at every mystery, seeing it rather as a deficiency in revelation.

4 Trench on the Multiplicity of Meaning: Authorship and History

For Trench, the issues of scriptural authorship and history are deeply entwined. This is because Trench sees the author of Scripture to be God in an ultimate sense. This does not mean that there are no human authors, or that they do not have a role in shaping the text, but rather even their secondary agency is included in the scope of God’s willing. Because the meaning of Scripture is intended by God, its author, Scripture has limitless depths of meaning. History comes into play here as the phenomenon by which different layers and shades of Scripture’s meaning come into greater focus. As Scripture is interpreted within historical moments, unique facets of its beauty gleam that would be less visible by other historical lights.

In The Fitness of Holy Scripture, Trench makes his case for the several layers of meaning by appealing to the providence of the Holy Spirit in the writing of Scripture, and its future unfolding. In his Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, however, Trench puts his theories into exegetical practice. In this work Trench makes the case for the multiplicity of meanings from patristic sources. I have looked at some of the ways that Trench digs into the vast mines of scriptural meaning in the previous chapter when I compared him with Simeon; I want to further nuance this here by bringing to the fore not only the Christological interpretations of given passages, but the way in which more than one interpretation of a text can be in play.

One example of the way that Trench allows several interpretations of a passage to coexist is in his discussion of the parable of the hidden treasure beginning in Matthew 13:44. After pointing out some of the theologically significant differences between this parable and that of the pearl of
great price, and after offering some background to the historical likelihood of stumbling across treasure in a field, Trench begins to work through the theological weight of the passage. Before wagering his own opinion on the meaning of the passage, Trench points to the important insights of the Church Fathers. In a footnote, he refers to Jerome’s suggestion that the treasure in the parable represents Scripture itself, in which Christ can be found. Trench also notes Augustine’s interpretation that the field is “the two Testaments of the Law in the Church,” and for the man to “sell all that he has” involves giving up his worldly preoccupations for enough free time to study the Scriptures, so he can “become rich by the knowledge of God.” Furthermore, on the same page Trench appeals to Origen, noting that for him, the field in this parable is “the letter” and the treasure is “the spiritual or allegorical meaning.” This attention to select ancient sources is evidence of Trench’s roots in patristic (not to mention scholastic and Reformed) texts. In chapter four I will discuss Trench’s appeal to patristic sources in more detail, but for now, I wish to point out that his starting point for so much discussion on the multiplicity of meanings relies on the precedent of ancient theologians. This is not to say that Trench always follows their views, as is the case here, but that he does begin with them.

After introducing these patristic interpretations, Trench moves forward with his own take on the parable, and it is a departure from those whom he has listed. He suggests, “Yet to me ‘the field’ rather represents the outer visible Church, as contradistinguished from the inward spiritual, with which ‘the treasure’ will then agree.” Interestingly, Trench here does not repudiate the interpretations that he first set out by Augustine, Jerome, and Origen; he does not suggest that they were incorrect or incoherent. Still, Trench has his own take that he argues to be particularly fitting. One may find any one of these interpretations more convincing than the others, or perhaps one might not find any of them convincing at all. In any case, Trench here exemplifies

29 Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, 122-7.
30 Ibid., 127.
31 Ibid. It is fascinating that for so many of these early thinkers Scripture is self-referential. In this case, Augustine and Jerome are suggesting that Scripture itself can appear as one of the figures within Scripture. This is a very subtle point, but I think it reveals how these fathers thought of Scripture as something more or less definitive and whole. Not that they have to define it as such, but the very fact that the field can be “Scripture” in some sense shows that for these Church fathers, at least, Scripture is a self-contained divine entity in its own right.
the kind of exegesis that one would expect given his understanding of the multiplicity of meanings of Scripture. He writes,

As the man who before looked on the field with careless eyes, prized it but as another field, now sees in it a new worth, resolves that nothing shall separate him from it, so he who recognizes the Church, not as a human institute, but a divine, as a dispenser, not of earthly gifts, but of heavenly - who has learned that God is in the midst of it - sees now that it is something different from, and something more than, all earthly societies, with which hitherto he has confounded it: and henceforth it is precious in his sight, even to its outermost skirts, for the sake of that inward glory which revealed to his eyes.32

Trench goes on to note that just as the man in the parable cannot have the treasure without the field, the Christian cannot have Christ without his Church. He eloquently makes his central point, that to have Christ as one’s treasure, one must also willingly “buy” the whole fallible Church. Trench furthers his interpretation by illustrating the kind of joy that would compel a person to give up everything of value to have just one thing, Christ. It is in these later reflections that Trench’s interpretations come back into harmony with the Church Fathers he quoted earlier. Whether the field is the Church, or the Scriptures, or their letter, the treasure remains Christ himself.33 This is a helpful illustration of the ultimate Christological end of exegesis described in chapter one. Though various interpretations diverge and bring to the fore different truths within the text, and though they legitimately arrive at distinct meanings, all of these differences coalesce around the centre which is Christ, and thus bring into unity a plurality of interpretations that lend richness and depth to a given passage of Scripture.

5 Benjamin Jowett: Broad Church Interpreter

It is natural to compare Trench and Jowett because of the extensive thought each brought to their vision of Scripture and how it ought to be read. Though Trench and Jowett did not engage one another substantively in print, they were acquaintances. Jowett complained of Trench in his

33 The one difficulty here is Origen’s suggestion that the field is the letter and the treasure is Christ. Though his proposal does not track as neatly as the others, at least in Trench’s view it is “only a modification of the same [view as theirs].” Ibid., 127.
private letters to Arthur P. Stanley; some of the correspondence is published in *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett*, in which, after noting how he had been reading Trench’s 1846 Hulsean Lectures, Jowett went on to lament, “Is there one theological writer of the present day who can be said to be morally and intellectually truthful? And if so, the mournful fact forces itself upon one that there is no elder person in whose footsteps one can tread, however little or nothing it is possible for us to do.”  

34 Clearly Jowett had a low view of Trench and his work. Jowett was not the only one with these views; Stanley was also critical of Trench’s Hulsean Lectures, in this case because of their negative portrayal of German theology.  

35 And if Trench and Samuel Wilberforce were really as well allied as Jowett seemed to think, one might assume that Trench had an equal disdain for Jowett’s “On the Interpretation of Scripture” as had Wilberforce, whose verdict was that “the theory of Mr. Jowett and his fellows is as false to philosophy as to the Church of England.”  

36 As they expressed their views in private correspondence, Jowett and Trench worked from theologically disparate vantages. Jowett was a contentious voice in the nineteenth-century Church of England for his controversial essay “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” which now might seem banal, at least on the surface.  

37 As noted above, Jowett has become a convenient touchpoint or symbol for discussing...
changes in scriptural interpretation in the English-speaking world. It is very easy to champion him as one of the forerunners to all that is best of modern exegesis and interpretation, or on the other hand to vilify him as a figure that cast traditional exegesis as outmoded or passé. Either of these reactions is an oversimplification of a much broader international trend that appears also in the writing of the other authors in Essays and Reviews, and also in F.W. Farrar, who will be treated in more detail below.

Certain recurring themes set Jowett apart from Trench on the points of comparison, namely Scripture’s ontology, the role of providence, scriptural authorship and history. Very generally, it might be said that Jowett is concerned with the human end of Scripture, from the intentions of the human authors to Scripture’s reception in human communities. This is not to say that Jowett does not recognize God’s role in the shaping of Scripture, but rather this role is limited by human weakness rather than making use of it, as Trench suggests. With respect to Scripture’s ontology, Jowett sees Scripture as a divine message; but its voice is always singular, and its meaning is bound by the intent of the human author. Providence plays a role in Scripture as being an agent

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38 As David Lincicum points out, Jowett’s essay, though it made the biggest splash, was not even original within the English-speaking world, for the American Moses Stuart had similar views. See David Lincicum, “Criticism and Authority” in The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth Century Christian Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 80. Lincicum may be right in his general assessment of the differences between English and American interpreters, that Americans found “common-sense realism” more “attractive” and had a deep “underlying confidence” in “historical research,” though it would be impossible to know this with any certainty. There are a host of other factors to consider, such as foci of American authors at the time versus the English, or the audience to whom Stuart was writing versus the audience to whom Jowett was writing. In any case, Lincicum is correct in pointing out the disjunction between each thinker’s reception, and asking why this was the case.

39 I should note that even Farrar’s work is closely related to Jowett’s. After all, his History of Interpretation is dedicated to Jowett, “with sincere respect for the services which he has rendered to the cause of education, theology, and literature, and in grateful acknowledgement of many years of personal kindness.” Farrar, History of Interpretation, v. Richard S. Briggs also comments on Farrar’s work being an extension of Jowett’s; he writes, “The rude and primitive response that greeted Jowett persuaded him to turn his hand to other things, but a champion of his cause was Frederic Farrar, who in the spring of 1885 gave the eight Bampton lectures in the University of Oxford, subsequently published as History of Interpretation – probably the most consistently Whiggish reading of that subject ever set forth. It is an extraordinary book, governed by an understanding of the onward march of human thought through dark ages past and on into new vistas of reason and insight.” In Richard S. Briggs, “The Eclipse of Daniel’s Narrative: The Limits of Historical Knowledge in the Theological Reading of Daniel,” Scottish Journal of Theology 70, no. 3 (August 2017), 267.
of progress, moving from the more arcane and flat depictions of God in the Old Testament to the more mature in the New. The moment of greatest clarity was in the apostolic times, as the Gospel was first preached and heard; thanks to the role of providence, those in Jowett’s generation were able to strip away the layers of sediment left by the passing of time in an effort to return to this original moment of inspiration. This, in part, is an exercise in discerning the mind of the human authors of the New Testament, freeing them from the obscuring clouds of dogma and cultural change that have dulled their witness, making the Bible seem at best familiar, and at worst uninteresting. The task of the interpreter, for Jowett, is to help others rediscover the latent beauty in Scripture that has only been hidden but never obliterated. Finally, history is clearly the enemy in any such task of recovery. Historic insights into the meaning of the Bible, while perhaps helpful or inspiring as applications, are in fact barriers to the freshness of the inspired human author’s meaning. Thus, Scripture should be read like any other book, not through a lens laden with generations of religious history, to capture its essence once more.

6 An Exposition of Jowett’s “On the Interpretation of Scripture”

To trace Jowett’s views on the four points of difference he has with Trench (Scripture’s ontology, providence, scriptural authorship, and history), one must look to his most noteworthy work, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” which appears in the volume Essays and Reviews. Ieuan Ellis claims that “The story of Essays and Reviews is the story of the greatest religious crisis of the Victorian age. The Archbishop of Canterbury said in 1864 that no graver matter since the Reformation or in the next 200 or 300 years could be imagined.” The response to Essays and Reviews was mixed, and while it had both proponents and detractors, it goes without saying that the publication was controversial both within and outside the Church of England.

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40 Benjamin Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” in Essays and Reviews (London: Longman, 1861). For a brief and wholly uncritical summary of Jowett’s argument, see Rowan A. Greer, Anglican Approaches to Scripture: From the Reformation to the Present (New York: Crossroad, 2006), 109-15. Though Jowett is best known for “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” at least when it comes to theological circles, I will also be appealing to the posthumously published collection of his work on Scripture in Benjamin Jowett, Scripture and Truth: Dissertations (London: Henry Frowde, 1907), the content of which is drawn mostly from his Pauline commentary, and then finally the commentary itself in Benjamin Jowett, The Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans (London : J. Murray, 1859).

41 Ieuan Ellis, Seven against Christ: A Study of “Essays and Reviews” (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980).
Schlossberg notes that “Essays and Reviews was controversial for exactly the same reason the whole movement of theological liberalism was controversial: it struck the orthodox as making Christian faith seem doubtful.” Moreover, Schlossberg goes on to warn, the arguments of Essays and Reviews were particularly biting because they came from within, not outside the Church, raising suspicion and scepticism about the same clergy that had vowed to uphold the doctrine of the Church of England.42 Interestingly, now a century and a half or so later, if anyone were to write an essay making the same points as Jowett, it would likely meet nothing but yawns. His perspective went from being that of a revolutionary to something that is unexceptional, and even a kind of baseline for the interpretation of Scripture across theological divides.43

Essays and Reviews was a collection of topical essays that, roughly speaking, sought to reinterpret the Christian faith given the advances in scholarship (particularly in natural science and biblical studies) in the modern world. There is no common theme to the essays, and they vary widely in subject matter and length, ranging from topics such as natural theology to religious thought in England.44 Further, there was no editorial policy and each contributor chose his own topic. Jowett’s essay in particular elicited significant attention because of its attack on traditional interpretations of Scripture and his suggestion that the Bible be read like any other book. While it is debatable whether or not the backlash it received was warranted, it certainly captured the attention of many.

Jowett begins his famous essay by pointing to a problem that surely any reflective Christian must encounter at some point or another: Though “all Christians receive the Old and New Testament

42 Schlossberg, Conflict and Crisis in the Religious Life of Late Victorian England, 25.

43 You can see Jowett’s once revolutionary argument that Scripture’s meaning is located in the original intention and reception of a given text at play in recent works like the translation of the New Testament by Eastern Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart, The New Testament: A Translation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); in the somewhat dated but official Vatican II document, Pope Paul VI, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Dei Verbum” (Rome: Vatican, November 18, 1965), accessed January 9, 2018, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html; or in the classic Evangelical text on interpretation, Gordon Fee, How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Carr, 2003). I do need to qualify that while all of these sources reference the importance of authorial intent and the historical context of the texts’ reception, they do not insist, as Jowett does, that meaning is found only here; one might say Jowett’s zealous arguments have become more balanced as they found reception in the Churches.

44 For a brief introduction see N.A.D. Scotland, “‘Essays and Reviews’ (1860) and the Reaction of Victorian Churches and Churchmen,” The Downside Review 108, no. 371 (April 1, 1990), 147-9.
as sacred writings, …they are not agreed about the meaning which they attribute to them.”

This is a problem for Jowett because everyone is approaching the text with their own biases and prior theological commitments. After some historical grounding, Jowett verbosely make his first point:

…what may be termed the externals of interpretation, that is to say, the meaning of words, the connexion of sentences, the settlement of the text, the evidence of facts, the same rules apply to the Old and New Testaments as to other books. And the figure is no exaggeration of the erring fancy of men in the use of Scripture, or of the tenacity with which they cling to the interpretations of other times, or of the arguments by which they maintain them. All the resources of knowledge may be turned into a means not of discovering the true rendering, but of upholding a received one… Learning obscures as well as illustrates; it heaps up chaff when there is no more wheat. These are some of the ways in which the sense of Scripture has become confused, by the help of tradition, in the course of ages, under a load of commentators.

Jowett finds the various interpretations of Scripture to be troublesome because he sees that many of these interpretations are distortions of the text. He is rightly concerned by the way that even basic grammatical points are twisted to prove certain dogmas. After all, behind Jowett’s concern is a desire to keep intact the meaning of Scripture. And while he is not in principle opposed to tradition, he is concerned when that tradition obscures the meaning of a passage for some ulterior end. In this respect he is very much like Simeon in his desire to defend the purity of Scripture.

46 Ibid., 337.
47 Putting his finger on Jowett’s desire to free Scripture from the constraints of its dogmatic imprisonment, Ellis notes, “Scripture, in Jowett’s eyes, had a life of its own, detached from the use of it made by the Church, and the task of the modern interpreter was to discover this. In so doing he found the original meaning of the text and its permanent value for humanity, whereas the commentators ‘seem rather to reflect the changing atmosphere of the world or the Church.’ As time passed commentary and bible had become so firmly connected that it required an effort of thought to appreciate the extraordinary nature of the phenomenon. The history of interpretation would indicate ‘the causes which have darkened the meaning of words in the course of ages; it would clear away the remains of dogmas, systems, controversies, which are encrusted upon them.’” Ellis, Seven against Christ. Another way of saying this is that Jowett’s approach to Scripture in “On the Interpretation of Scripture” is an archeological one. He first wants to unearth Scripture as something in its own right, untouched by ecclesial and doctrinal claims; having done this, Jowett wants Scripture to be able to stand and speak for itself independent of other influences.
of the Bible. Jowett’s solution for this problem, as he notes in the above paragraph, is to apply the same basic interpretive rules to Scripture as one applies to any other book.

In contrast to Trench, who sees Scripture’s multiple senses as stemming from its divine ontology, Jowett focuses more on the singular meaning of Scripture as essential to its being. For Jowett it is clear that Scripture does have an objective meaning, and it is important to recognize that. He notes, “The [Bible] itself remains as at the first unchanged amid the changing interpretations of it. The office of the interpreter is not to add another, but to recover the original one; the meaning, that is, of the words as they struck on the ears or flashed before the eyes of those who first heard and read them.”

Meaning, then, for Jowett, resides in the impression that the text had upon its original audience, along with the human author’s intent. There are no further layers of meaning that God has placed within the text, save this original meaning that is the essence of Scripture. Jowett recommends the best way to determine Scripture’s meaning: strive to inhabit that initial age of the Church, and to shed the layers of interpretation that have grown up since then. Jowett suggests that the interpreter hold “no theory of interpretation; a few rules guarding against common errors are enough for him. His object is to read Scripture like any other book, with a real interest and not merely a conventional one. He wants to be able to open his eyes and see or imagine things as they truly are.”

Under Jowett’s writing here is a very high view of biblical ontology. He is not sloughing off a more traditional, figural reading of the Bible because he feels that the Bible is less important than patristic authors would make it, but rather because he thinks that the Bible as a static piece of literature has enough force on its own, without having to be overlaid with any interpretative or theological ciphers. By treating the Bible as a book that has

48 Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” 337-8. Hinchliff provides a useful insight on this theme in Jowett’s work; he first notes (echoing James Barr) that Jowett has a very biblicist approach to Scripture and that he is not very concerned with the technicalities of biblical criticism. He continues, “For Jowett history was a way back to the text: it was not a tool for the internal analysis of it. Historical enquiry, he believed, could play an important part in arriving at the text itself, behind the centuries of comment and interpretation which had come to be inextricably associated with it.” Hinchliff, Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion, 74-5. Though Jowett is concerned with history, it was never for its own sake, nor was it for sifting the various layers of composition that make up a text, but as a way to arrive at the text itself. James Barr is even more elucidating on this score: “It is difficult to believe, however, that Jowett, when he spoke of ‘recovering the original’ meaning, intended any such process of historical research. His essay says very little about historical criticism, and it presents no guidance to the reader about a historical process by which the ‘original’ might be recovered...” James Barr, “Jowett and the ‘Original Meaning’ of Scripture,” Religious Studies 18, no. 4 (December 1, 1982): 433–437.

49 Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” 338
precise, specific meaning, one reverences it rightly and allows it to speak the truth. Jowett has a high view of Scripture, but his views on what exactly Scripture is set him apart from more traditional interpreters.

While Jowett’s vision of the ontology of Scripture differs from Trench’s, so does his understanding of authorship, which is very much related to this. Trench emphasizes God’s intent; Jowett is more concerned with uncovering the human context of Scripture’s writing and reception. For Jowett, one finds true meaning not merely in the way that Scripture was first heard or read, but also in uncovering the intention of the human author. He comments on the importance of the critical spirit in the Reformation and his own time, which spirit opened the happy reality that

Educated persons are beginning to ask, not what Scripture may be made to mean, but what it does. And it is no exaggeration to say that he who in the present state of knowledge will confine himself to the plain meaning of words and the study of their context may know more of the original spirit and intention of the authors of the New Testament than all the controversial writers of former ages put together.\(^5\)

On the role of providence in understanding Scripture, Jowett is quick to point out the progressive trajectory of history, as it moves both the human authors of Scripture and their interpreters from obscurity to clarity with the advance of time. This movement is a result of God guiding his people from error into truth, a truth that is ever gleaming brighter. In the second part of “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” Jowett tackles the issues of providence as he deals with the question

\(^5\) Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” 340-1. In his reading of Jowett, Barr concludes that for him, “The ‘original’ meaning is the meaning of the text itself. The way to understand Plato is to read the text of Plato; the way to enjoy a play of Shakespeare’s is to see and hear that play. The approach is built not upon a historical, but upon a static, view of literature. The ‘original’ that Plato wrote is the text which we can still take up and read today. A great and classic work is thus timeless and remains permanently directly accessible. So also the Bible: ‘the Book itself remains as at the first unchangeable amid the changing interpretations of it.’” Barr, “Jowett and the ‘Original Meaning’ of Scripture,” 434. I think there is some truth to Barr’s suggestion here, and he is right to point out the literary features of Jowett’s life that might influence his reading of the Bible. However, I do not think Barr is taking the psychological dimension of the human authors’ “intentions” as seriously as he should in the work of Jowett. To keep with Barr’s illustration, it may be possible to thoroughly enjoy a Shakespearean play without grasping an essential point in the dialogue. In contrast to mere engagement with or enjoyment of a text of Scripture, Jowett wants the reader to grasp the central point of the passage, which is located in the author’s intentions and the audience’s reception.
of the inspiration of Scripture. He once again points to the problem that there are many different takes on the nature of scriptural inspiration and so this requires a twofold remedy. First, one must look only to Scripture (rather than an external authority) to understand inspiration inductively; and second, any theory of inspiration must conform to the facts of history and science. Jowett’s thoughts are then that scriptural revelation – like its interpretation – is progressive, starting off muddily and moving into clarity throughout the chronological development within the canon, and also that biblical ideas need to be reinterpreted in light of scientific discovery.

Interestingly, however, Jowett suggests that “the interpretation of Scripture has nothing to do with any opinion respecting its origin. The meaning of Scripture is one thing; the inspiration of Scripture is another.” Jowett thinks that theories of inspiration are irrelevant in understanding the text. This is again another way of making his major point that Scripture is to be treated as other books.

Jowett distinguishes then between the meaning of a text and its application, allowing more freedom with the latter, though he notes that some passages are difficult to apply. Another problem relates to this. For just as some texts seem arcane or difficult to apply because of cultural differences, so interpreters run the risk of ignoring certain passages because they seem irrelevant, or do not fit with their vision of what Scripture should be. In other words, personal

51 Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” 348
52 Jowett suggests that the chronologically older parts of the Bible are more imperfect than those written later on, and thus parts of the Old Testament, for instance, though God has allowed them to stand in the canon, are not as pure in their revelatory capacity as those in the New. Ibid. 347-78.
53 Ibid., 350-1.
54 Jowett brings further clarity to his take on the immateriality of inspiration in his commentaries. He suggests that any doctrine of inspiration ought to be nothing more than what arises out of the actual, concrete shape of the Bible. He writes, “The books of Scripture were written by different authors, and in different ages of the world; we cannot, therefore, apply them with the minuteness and precision of a legal treatise. The Old Testament is not on all points the same with the New; for ‘Moses allowed of some things for the hardness of their hearts’; nor the Law and the Prophets, for there were ‘proverbs in the house of Israel’ that were reversed…. No theory of inspiration can obliterate these differences; or rather none can be true which does not admit them. The neglect of them reduces the books of Scripture to an unmeaning unity, and effectually seals up their true sense.” Jowett, The Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, vol. 2, 548.
55 For instance, in his brief discussion on the marriage of a wife’s sister, he notes the difficulties in applying this text given the historical changes since the writing of Leviticus. Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” 359-60. The point is not that the meaning is unclear, but only that this text is difficult to apply in a modern culture.
and ecclesial preconceptions about the message of Scripture, or even how it ought to be applied, can obscure what it means.\textsuperscript{56} Jowett notes, “the truth is, that in seeking to prove our own opinions out of Scripture, we are constantly falling into the common fallacy of opening our eyes to one class of facts and closing them to another. The favourite verses shine like stars, while the rest of the page is thrown into the shade.”\textsuperscript{57} The problem is not only that interpreters ignore parts of Scripture but also that they fixate on others that seem particularly relevant. Doctrinal commitments can automatically cue the interpreter to look in the text for certain concepts or dogmatic systems that are simply not present in its original meaning, as Jowett understand it.

History, for Jowett, is a problem. This is in contrast to Trench, who thought that various moments in history brought out the translucence of different texts of the Bible, revealing meanings that were more readily visible during certain periods. For Trench, history enhanced and deepened the interpreter’s understanding of the Bible. But for Jowett, history not only took the interpreters further away from the worlds of the biblical authors, but it also heaped doctrinal or cultural sediment onto the text with years of interpretive history. To get at the meaning of Scripture, the interpreter needs to cut through these encumbrances. In light of this it behooves the interpreter to distances herself from these doctrinal commitments as much as possible as she attempts to understand first what Scripture means and then how it can be applied. Jowett is concerned about the interpreter’s ethics and intellectual integrity more than he is in arriving at

\textsuperscript{56} It is worth noting here that for Jowett, interpreters run the risk of selectively reading Scripture to fit within not only their doctrinal framework but their moral framework as well. Scripture is misinterpreted when we use it to justify not only our beliefs but also our moral actions. Jowett discusses this in his commentaries on Paul’s letters, writing, “It is unfortunate that the desire to find a sanction for the observance of Sunday in the words of Scripture, has tended to draw away the minds of Christians from the warnings which, in the New Testament, are continually repeated against Judaical reverence for days. The observance of days, or the existence of rites and ceremonies, in our own Church and country, are a reason for remembering, and not for forgetting, that there is a use of days and ceremonies which the Scripture everywhere condemns, even though conventional among ourselves.” Jowett, \textit{The Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans}, vol. 2, 340. Jowett’s comment here has some bite; he points out the hypocrisy of justifying the received practice of Sunday observance with the overall neglect of Scripture’s warnings about Pharisaical devotion to some commands at the expense of others. I include this not only to suggest that Jowett is making a fair point (which I think he is), but to show there is a moral seriousness to his biblical work. He is not merely defending a theoretical viewpoint, but he is concerned with the lived aspects of the Christian faith.

\textsuperscript{57} Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” 366.
particular theological destinations when reading the Bible, even if these destinations are in the realm of specific orthodoxies. For instance, he notes,

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Justification and inspiration are derived from verbs which occur in Scripture, and the later substantive has clearly affected the meaning of the original verb or verbal in the places where they occur. The remark might be further illustrated by the use of Scriptural language respecting the Sacraments, which has also had a reflex influence on its interpretation in many passages of Scripture, especially in the Gospel of St. John.... Minds which are familiar with the mystical doctrine of the Sacraments seem to see a reference to them in almost every place in the Old Testament as well as in the New, in which the words “water,” or “bread and wine” may happen to occur.
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It is evident, then, that Jowett was aware of the kind of figural reading that is employed for dogmatic readings of Scripture, but he rejects it on the grounds of anachronism. How can the interpreter project meanings from the New Testament onto the Old? It would be like trying to understand an earlier author’s terms by their use by a later writer. Jowett shows the supposed absurdity of this kind of move by suggesting it would be analogous to trying to understand Plato through the lens of Polybius, though a more modern example might be understanding a term used by Charles Dickens by looking at how it was used by J.K. Rowling. Jowett’s logic is sound if one is dealing with writing that follows the natural bounds of time and human authorship.

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58 Once again, James Barr shows that he is an insightful reader of Jowett, observing, “Jowett’s negative attitude towards traditional interpretations of the Bible is easily misunderstood. The effect that disturbed him was a semantic one. It derived not from the rise of interpretative traditions but from their effect once they had been long established. Words of the Bible then came to be read as if the meanings of these same words, as they were used within later, theologically defined, usage, were the meanings within the Bible itself. To Jowett this was absurd: it destroyed the character of the Bible as a literary work, just as the literary character of a Platonic dialogue would be destroyed if words within it were read in the senses taken as definitions in later Greek philosophy. It was therefore essential to distinguish the many interpretations from the one sense of scripture itself.” Barr, “Jowett and the ‘Original Meaning’ of Scripture.” 434. Viewed this way, one sees that Jowett is not only concerned with the “proper” reading of Scripture, but also preserving an intellectual integrity within the interpreter, as she realizes that the specifications of theological concepts from the Reformation or the Modern period cannot be forced into the scriptural text any more than a square peg can fit into a round whole.


60 Of course, there have been developments in thought about authorial intention since Jowett wrote, many of which are not from a theological angle. For instance, scholars note that there is a difference between the author of the text
However, his point here only proves that if one accepts the premise that Scripture is like any other book, it logically follows that it ought to be read like any other book. He does not argue for the truth of such a premise, however.

Jowett provocatively continues to raise questions about the way interpreters approach Scripture, not just the outcomes of their approaches. He points out that the varying interpretations of texts are problematic for coming down with a definitive meaning, and he also points out the problematic nature of the very methods that exegetes have passively assumed, even if they have smoothed out the rougher edges of figuralism over time. Jowett’s explanation eloquently raises his concerns, and so is worth quoting:

No one will now seek to find hidden meanings in the scarlet thread of Rahab, or the number of Abraham's followers, or in the little circumstance mentioned after the resurrection of the Saviour that St. Peter was the first to enter the sepulchre. To most educated persons in the nineteenth century, these applications of Scripture appear foolish. Yet it is rather the excess of the method which provokes a smile than the method itself. For many remains of the mystical interpretation exist among ourselves; it is not the early fathers only who have read the Bible crosswise, or deciphered it as a book of symbols.


61 In his commentaries, Jowett offers a concrete illustration of the dangers of figural readings. In a section of his discussion on Paul’s intention, he notes, “it may be asked whether St. Paul regarded these texts of Scripture as prophecies or accommodations, as illustrations or arguments, as types or figures of speech, as designed or undesigned coincidences? The answer is, that such distinctions had no place in his mind; to attribute them to him is a logical anachronism. He did not say to himself: This was designed, that undersigned, this is an illustration, that an argument. He adopted what appeared to his own mind a natural form of expression, what he conceived would convey his meaning to others.” Jowett, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans*, vol. 1, 416. With this passage Jowett explicitly questions the legitimacy of figural readings in light of what the human author, in this case St. Paul, intended. He seems to know (somehow) that Paul did not intend to quote the Old Testament because it had an expansive range of meaning placed within it by the Holy Spirit, but rather he quoted it simply because he knew it well and it helped to convey his point. It is obviously questionable how Jowett might be able to prove that he knew what St. Paul had in mind, but even given that Jowett could prove this, it goes to show that for him Scripture means what Paul intended it to mean. It does not seem to occur to Jowett that perhaps Paul might have one thing in mind, but the text that he pens may have another meaning entirely. For example, a ten-year-old might write a little vignette about a superhero that he believes to be entirely serious, and yet any mature reader may find his telling quite comical. David Bentley Hart’s delightful little essay on Amanda McKittrick Ros’s work is evidence that though an author like Ros seeks to convey something entirely serious, her work has remained an object of interest precisely because so many find it so laughably weird and silly. David Bentley Hart, “Brilliant Bad Books,” in *The Dream-Child’s Progress & Other Essays* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2017), 221-5.
And the uncertainty is the same in any part of Scripture if there is a departure from the plain and obvious meaning.\(^{62}\)

Here it is clear that Jowett is calling for a full retreat from any kind of figural reading. With some rhetorical force he concedes that though modern interpreters have restrained their readings to seems less “foolish,” they have not thought twice about their overall approach, which is where the root of the error lies. Though one may excuse Jowett’s dismissal of the significance of the scarlet thread, for example, on the grounds that he is simply trying to make a point, it is worth noting the exaggeration of his claims, for many educated nineteenth-century thinkers did not find such an interpretation untenable. Jowett does attempt to show some level of sympathy for the errors of the past, writing,

> It will make us more lenient, both towards Philo and the Fathers, to remember, that the method which they employ has not ceased to be practised by ourselves. It cannot be said that we have left off interpreting Scripture, by what we have brought to the text, not by what we have found there; or that we have not assumed double senses, types, allegories, either to avoid difficulties, or to adapt the Old Testament to the New, and, in general, the meaning of Scripture to the opinions of our own time; or that in portions of Scripture, such as the book of Daniel and the Apocalypse, we have not run into excesses about numbers, colours, and animals, as great as those of Philo in the book of Genesis; or that we have not argued from separate verse of Scripture detached from their connexion; or that we have not invented a system where there was no system, and asked for reasons where there were no reasons; or that we have not perverted analogies in the application of Scripture; or that we have not blended Aristotelian logic of Platonic fancies with the words of our Lord or St. Paul; or that we have not transfigured the characters of Scripture until they have become ideas rather than living persons…\(^{63}\)

Jowett continues to list ways his contemporaries fall into the old, superstitious figural readings. This may seem to be a rather modest concession on his part, but considering his view of past

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\(^{63}\) Jowett, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans*, vol. 1, 472.
generations of interpreters, and in light of work like Farrar’s history of interpretation, such a recognition that even enlightened moderns continue to be duped represents a significant admission.

In the third section of Jowett’s treatise, he wishes to meet the criticisms of Scripture head on, with a willingness to “disengage Christianity from all suspicion of disguise or unfairness,” or in other words, to strip biblical interpretation of all the weeds that have grown up and choked the intrinsic vitality of Scripture.64 The way to do this, according to Jowett, is to shed all presuppositions, commitments, and pretense as far as one is able, because

When interpreted like any other book, by the same rules of evidence and the same canons of criticism, the Bible will still remain unlike any other book; its beauty will be freshly seen, as of a picture which is restored after many ages to its original state; it will create a new interest and make for itself a new kind of authority by the life which is in it. It will be a spirit and not a letter; as it was in the beginning, having an influence like that of the spoken word, or the book newly found.65

It might be said that Jowett is looking for a religionless Bible—a Bible free from Christianity—allowed to stand on its own, allowed to speak for itself, not subject to any one interpretation or authority or manner of reading.66 By tearing away all of this excess the Bible can speak, and in speaking it will be salvific, as it draws the “weary world” home to itself. Again, one sees Jowett’s extremely high view of the power and beauty of the Bible, and at the same time his desire to emancipate it from all the decay of history.


65 Ibid., 375.

66 Jowett puts this much more succinctly in the second volume of his commentaries, exhorting, “it is necessary for ourselves also to return from theology to Scripture; to seek a truth to live and die in, not to be the subject of verbal disputes, which entangle the religious sense in scholastic refinements. The words of eternal life are few and simple, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.’” Jowett, The Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, vol. 2, 537. This is an unusually compact statement of one of Jowett’s central theses, that interpreters are to eschew the clutter of tradition to arrive at the truth of Scripture.
In the fourth section of his essay, Jowett makes some more concrete parameters for reading Scripture, and also more thorough responses to the questions that his theory may provoke. Furthermore, in the fourth section, Jowett deals mostly with the idiosyncrasies of biblical languages. Jowett notes that if one is to look at the examples of exegesis within the Bible—for example, the way the Old Testament is interpreted in the New—one sees the kind of reading that would violate the original authors’ intentions. This is another example of the way Jowett holds up human authorship while bracketing divine intent, revealing once more his view of scriptural ontology that derives from the meaning of the text in the mind of its authors. There are plenty of examples of this, but one has to look no further than the book of Hebrews to see a rereading of Jewish tradition in the Old Testament through a Christological lens. But even here, at the end the fourth section of Jowett’s essay, he anticipates these objections, noting,

Many by whom considerations of this sort will be little understood, may, nevertheless, recognise the use made of the Old Testament in the New. The religion of Christ was first taught by an application of the words of the Psalms and the Prophets. Our Lord Himself sanctions this application. “Can there be a better use of Scripture than that which is made by Scripture?” “Or any more likely method of teaching the truths of Christianity than that by which they were first taught?” 67

Jowett here is attentive to the criticisms that must inevitably arise from his ideas. He is sympathetic too, and he takes these criticisms seriously. It is right to ask why one should interpret Scripture as Jowett suggests, rather than as Scripture interprets itself and as Jesus interprets the Old Testament. In the latter case especially, Jesus’ interpretations seem to do violence to the original intention of the human author of the Old Testament and the way these words were originally received. Jowett answers these criticisms in two ways. First, he admits that the way the Old Testament is used in the New does not fit with his suggested interpretive methods. But Jesus, for instance, is not suggesting the Old Testament \textit{means} something different than it originally did. Rather he is \textit{applying} this static meaning in a novel context. This is not off limits for Jowett. The game of application has different rules than the game of interpretation. But more to the point, Jowett’s response to this kind of reading is that though one can see Jesus using

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it, we should not follow his lead because it is dangerous; in reading Scripture figuratively we risk imputing our own meaning and our own ends to words that have nothing to do with either. This is less of a problem when Christians simply apply the Old Testament figuratively, but when they interpret it to mean something figurative, they obscure it. Jowett points to the wars of the Old Testament, and notes that while we might make use of these commands to Israel to destroy the occupants of the land, applying them to our spiritual lives, there is a real danger that, in reading them figuratively, we believe that they call us to actually kill our enemies.\textsuperscript{68}

The fifth section of “On the Interpretation of Scripture” is a summary in which Jowett notes the problematic nature of replacing true interpretation with application, by mixing up what Scripture means in itself with what it means to one individual. Jowett manifests this point in several other parts of his argument, but here the most concisely:

[It has been a principal aim of the preceding pages to distinguish the interpretation from the application of Scripture. Many of the errors alluded to, arise out of a confusion of the two. The present is nearer to us than the past; the circumstances which surround us pre-occupy our thoughts; it is only by an effort that we reproduce the ideas, or events, or persons of other ages. And thus, quite naturally, almost by a law of the human mind, the application of Scripture takes the place of its original meaning. And the question is, not how to get rid of this natural tendency, but how we may have the true use of it.\textsuperscript{69}]

Again, it is not the case that Jowett is opposed to various applications of Scripture, but he is clear that the task of interpretation (as opposed to preaching) is to uncover the original meaning of the text.\textsuperscript{70} A metaphor might help to illustrate this: For Jowett, Scripture is a tool, and he is adamant

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 404.
\textsuperscript{70} Peter Hinchliff’s observation is important here: “Jowett seems hardly to have been aware how easy it would be, with such an approach, to misread the original. There is an implicit inconsistency in his approach which he does not seem to have recognised and which he was to build into his whole Christology. He complained of the way in which earlier generations had imposed interpretations upon the text: he does not seem to have feared that he might himself be doing the same thing. Moreover, he believed that understanding the scriptures required ‘a vision and faculty divine.’ What this meant is not quite clear. If it meant something like an inspired intuition, then this, also, might only too easily have led him to read into, rather than out of, the text. He had, in fact, fallen into precisely the error of which he complained so bitterly when he encountered it in others—the temptation to find what one wanted to find in the text of the Bible.” Hinchliff, Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion, 75.
that those who use that tool recognize the purpose for which it was designed. In a similar way, the designer of the screwdriver intends that it be used for driving screws, but one might extend its use by applying it in other circumstances—for instance, using it to pry open a cupboard door. Jowett would allow this, as long as the user does not suggest that it is what the tool’s designer intended. To sum up, Jowett was open to various applications because of their utility, but an application’s usefulness or benefit to the hearer does not make it true.

In the sixth and final section of “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” Jowett shows how one can apply his theory of interpretation. Jowett notes that the old ways of thinking about Scripture have passed and a new era has dawned:

From the circumstance that in former ages there has been a four-fold or a seven-fold Interpretation of Scripture, we cannot argue to the possibility of up holding any other than the original one in our own. The mystical explanations of Origen or Philo were not seen to be mystical; the reasonings of Aquinas and Calvin were not supposed to go beyond the letter of the text. They have now become the subject of apology; it is justly said that we should not judge the greatness of the Fathers or the Reformers by their suitableness to our own day.71

Figural readings of Scripture are nothing more than one instantiation of a broader (and now defunct) cultural perspective. Mystical readings were simply another feature of life in the patristic period, or the Middle Ages, and so leaving them behind is as natural as leaving behind medieval methods of torture. While Jowett is correct in noting that these readings of Scripture were common and largely uncontroversial, I do not think he represents thinkers such as Origen or Calvin well in saying that in their mystical readings they thought they were keeping to the letter of the text. In both cases, the thinkers differentiated between spiritual readings and literal readings. In any case, this is in essence what Jowett wanted to avoid, and he is able to do so by making figural readings look like nothing more than outdated cultural vestiges that can be shed and left behind.

7 Frederic William Farrar: Providence and Progress in History

Though published after Essays and Reviews in 1886, F.W. Farrar’s history of interpretation is an excellent aid to understanding Jowett’s work in context, for it provides a Victorian picture of the vision of progress that Jowett found congenial. Frederic William Farrar was dean of Canterbury, and his History of Interpretation was simply the publication of his Bampton Lectures of the same name. Farrar was known as a Broad Churchman, popular preacher, and an accomplished novelist. His comprehensive treatment of the history of interpretation is masterful on some levels. He covers a sweeping array of interpretative literature and satisfyingly divides the history of interpretation into seven memorable epochs, each edging its way closer to the ready apprehension of a true form of exegesis that only moderns have achieved. Farrar goes on to offer a more detailed, yet still succinct, commentary that is worth reproducing here:

Of the methods adopted in these epochs some had their roots in Judaism, which led to the worst developments of a fantastic letter worship; others in a Pagan gnosticism, which revelled in the extravagances of allegorical perversion; others again in the one-sided abuse of principles in themselves admissible. In the Patristic and Scholastic epochs respect for a supposed tradition was made the basis for ecclesiastical usurpation, and the symbolism of parts of Scripture served as a pretext for spiritualizing the whole. In the Post-Reformation epoch the misapplied expression “analogy of faith” was used as an engine of slavery to Confessions and Articles. Happily, however, in the Providence of God, the knowledge of Scripture was advanced not only in spite of these aberrations but even by means of them. The disputes with heretics in the first four centuries secured the authority of a pure canon. The attention paid to separate phrases led to textual criticism. The arbitrariness of allegory served to establish the importance of the historic sense. The tyranny of hierarchic tradition necessitated the Reformation. The half-Pagan Renaissance brought in its train the thorough mastery of the original languages. The unprogressive deadness of Protestant Scholasticism ended in the overthrow of an unnatural hypothesis.

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72 Farrar characterizes these epochs in chronological steps: Rabbinic, Alexandrian, Patristic, Scholastic, Reformers, Post-Reformation, and Modern. For a brief, one-page overview, see Farrar, History of Interpretation, 12.
of verbal dictation. And when the reaction had gone too far – when nothing was left but a cold and unspiritual rationalism to meet the unbelief caused by idealising philosophies – there occurred the great revivals of deep faith and spiritual feeling, of Christian philanthropy and evangelic truth.\textsuperscript{73}

Farrar’s appeal to providence as a sure foundation for his belief in the progression toward exegetical acuity.\textsuperscript{74} Farrar’s theory of history as a progression from darkness to light—from muddled, outrageous beliefs to pristine, coherent principles—is necessary for his whole project. This is a more radicalized vision of historical progress than Jowett holds. For Jowett, older texts and theories are simply imperfections, rather than “fantastic.” Both thinkers can be set against the vision of history propounded by Trench.

Their belief that history, and with it the interpretation of Scripture, is always coming nearer to perfection certainly raises the question of how one can test such a theory. Furthermore, it causes one to wonder how to assess the interpretative activity of moderns, since as far as one knows, there are yet to be many transformative and paradigm-shifting refinements in coming ages. But providence also comes into play on another score, for just as by providence the passage of time sifts out erroneous thinking, so by providence even those interpretations that Farrar views to be perversions can be used for the sake of the truth. He picks out a few examples of this above, such as the tightening of Roman Catholic hierarchy, which God mercifully used to spur the Reformation.

There is one more important point to note in Farrar’s line of thinking. He draws attention to both the negative and positive attributes of each epoch of interpretation and their accompanying practices. This is significant because he does not simply write off vast swaths of Christian engagement with Scripture, even if he is critical of general trends. This means that historical interpreters for Farrar, as well as for Jowett, are not to be slavishly followed, but they may be

\textsuperscript{73} Farrar, \textit{History of Interpretation}, 13.

\textsuperscript{74} To be fair to Farrar, he admits that this progression is not necessarily inevitable. He goes on to write that, “We study the past not to denounce it, not to set ourselves above it, not to dissever ourselves from its continuity, but to learn from it, and to avoid its failures… If we dwell upon its mistakes it is only that we may have grace to avoid them, and to be on our guard against similar tendencies… Unless we constantly break up our fallow ground, the scattered seeds and fibres of bitterness will germinate again and again in the teeming soil.” Ibid., 14.
rehabilitated if one can strain out their errors. Trench, on the other hand, gives a venerable place to the interpretations of greater thinkers of the past. It goes without saying that a certain smugness is prevalent in Farrar’s thinking, especially in the way he relegates certain generations to the muddied ages of ignorance, while heralding his contemporaries, as well as himself, as model interpreters in many ways. In some senses, this is not too different from Keble’s privileging of the past, but reversed; a given interpretive epoch is superior for him as well, though rather than being the most recent, he opts for the most ancient. The commonality to both thinkers such as Keble and Farrar is a privileging of a particular era in interpretation, for which they each have their various reasons, and a striving to evaluate the rest of history by the light of this one era.

Farrar’s work serves as one vision of the kind of history of interpretation that Jowett called for in the discussion above. Jowett felt that such a history would bring the reader face to face with the reality that the Bible remains a book hidden under layers of ecclesial maneuvering, scholastic obscurcation, and plain old politicking. He thought that such a work would blow away all of the excess that has piled onto the Bible, so that a reader might appreciate for the first time what is underneath.\textsuperscript{75} Jowett writes

> Such a history would be of great value to philosophy as well as theology. It would be the history of the human mind in one of its most remarkable manifestations. For ages which are not original show their character in the interpretation of ancient writings. Creating nothing, and incapable of the effort of imagination which is required in a true criticism of the past, they read and explain the thoughts of former times by the conventional modes of their own. Such a history would form a kind of preface or prolegomena to the study of Scripture.\textsuperscript{76}

For Jowett just such an explanation of the way that various thinkers left the sediment of their own time to obscure and cover the witness of Scripture would be enough to open the eyes of the student of the Bible to the scandalous reality. Understanding that such false interpretations have

\textsuperscript{75} Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” 338-40.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 341.
a history and come from a certain locale would give the reader the tools to exactingly remove them, so that the words of Scripture might be clearer. Both Jowett and Farrar were united in their common cause to expose the errors of tradition in order to arrive at the true interpretation of a passage. This is important. Both felt that there was one correct interpretation, and that it was indeed possible to reach it. Given this context, we can now return to exploring Jowett’s specific understanding of the meaning of Scripture.

8 From Interpretation to Application: Jowett on Scriptural Meaning

In conclusion I want to offer a condensed vision of Jowett’s understanding of what exactly Scripture is. His unsystematic theoretical work and inconsistent practice are difficult to reconcile into a holistic vision. For just as Jowett is adamant that the task of the interpreter is to return to the “original” meaning of the text, this is not always so straightforward.

Jowett is concerned with retrieving or revitalizing the original meaning of Scripture, he does leave room for a further application, and perhaps secondary levels of meaning, in a subjective sense. That Jowett holds these views is unsurprising when one considers the fact that he is part of the Broad Church movement, and that he is a liberal thinker. As Barr notes,

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77 So Nancy Klancher suggests on this score that “both Tholuck and Farrar felt authorized to historically contextualize earlier biblical exegetes and their interpretations, to qualify established exegetical methods, and often to emphasize the associated limitations and errors of the Church Fathers. Biased findings of (wrongly) interested methods figured largely in their work. Yet in this they also continued in the tradition of ancient disputations on the correct reading of Scripture, as much as they typified the rationalism and scientism of the higher critical thought of their time. Their exposure of errors and their historical qualifications remained in the resolute service of the sure establishment of the semantic text, that is, upon arriving at a correct exegesis of whatever text was before them.” Nancy Klancher, “A Genealogy for Reception History,” Biblical Interpretation 21, no. 1 (2013), 114.

78 For example see Rogerson, Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century, 216. This point is again reiterated by Peter Hinchliff, as he notes, “But Rogerson is right in asserting that Jowett did not limit the meaning of the Bible solely to what the authors initially intended: he recognised that its meaning is, in a sense, inexhaustible. But the only way to avoid fanciful or idiosyncratic exegesis was to place each writer in the context of the continuum that makes up the Bible as a whole. And this is where the idea of a progressive revelation was important to Jowett. The controlling sense of continuity lay in the unfolding knowledge of God, reaching its climax in Christ.” Hinchliff, Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion.

79 Though both Rogerson and Hinchliff suggest Jowett affirms inexhaustibility, Barr is more concerned to point out that Jowett is not limiting Scripture to the “historical” meaning when he limits it to the “original.” The former two thinkers want to say something positive about Jowett, while Barr is only wanting to specify more clearly what Jowett is not doing. Barr, “Jowett and the Reading of the Bible,” 25.
Jowett was certainly a biblical critic, as the term is usually understood, and he was a liberal theologian. He well represented the alliance between biblical criticism and liberal theology which was to be influential for decades. But he was not primarily a historical critic, or a historian of any sort at all. His position depended on a few gross historical perceptions: the difference between the New Testament and the Fathers, the difference between classical and New Testament Greek. But the idea of solving exegetical problems through close historical decisions worked out with detailed evidence, or through the increasingly rigorous pursuit of historical-critical methods, is markedly lacking in his work. “

Barr is right to point to Jowett’s liberal theological tradition, a tradition that was both a reaction against the Oxford Movement, including its exegesis, as well as generally more rationalistic and less mystical. However, I do not think Rogerson, Hinchliff, and Barr are correct in their assessment of Jowett’s willingness to concede to the doctrine of inexhaustibility. As I noted above, Jowett would admit that Scripture can have any number of applications – an inexhaustible number perhaps – but these applications are not what the text means, only what the interpreter can do with that static, singular meaning. This distinction between a text’s meaning and its application is important. Conflating these two distinct realities is what has caused otherwise attentive Jowett scholars such as Rogerson, Hinchliff, and Barr to suggest Jowett accepted the doctrine of inexhaustibility when this is clearly not the case. Even with his theory of progressive revelation, Jowett does not suggest more than one meaning, but rather a progression from muddled – though culturally fitting – articulations of truth in chronologically earlier parts of Scripture, to more refined articulations of the same in the Gospels.

9 Jowett on Language and Concluding Reflections

The one place that Jowett allows some ambiguity to flourish is in his discussion of words themselves. In his piece “Essay on the Abstract Ideas of the New Testament,” Jowett begins with a discussion of the way “all language has been originally a reflection of the world of sense; the

80 Barr, “Jowett and the Reading of the Bible”, 25.
81 Jones, The Broad Church, 201.
words which describe the faculties have once referred to the parts of the body; the name of God himself has been derived in most languages from the sun or the powers of nature.” This is to say that for Jowett, even biblical language is tied to human grasping after the invisible through means of the visible. All attempts to describe the divine are sullied with the inexactness that comes from trying to describe a reality that is “other,” using only earthy language. Interestingly, however, Jowett does think that even this language is capable of conveying something of the divine when it is used in Scripture; he writes,

Yet, on the other hand, it must be remembered, that neither this nor any of the other peculiarities here spoken of, is a mere form of speech, but enters deeply into the nature of the Gospel. For the Gospel has necessarily its mixed modes, not merely because it is preached to the poor, and therefore adopts the expressions of ordinary life; nor because its language is incrusted with the phraseology of the Alexandrian writers; but because its subject is mixed, and, as it were, intermediate between God and man. Natural theology speaks clearly, but it is of God only; moral philosophy speaks clearly, but it is of man only: but the Gospel is, as it were, the communion of God and man, and its ideas are in a state of transition or oscillation, having two aspects towards God and man, which it is hard to keep in view at once.

For Jowett, there is the human element, the bottom-up, trying to describe the heavenly from an earthly vantage, but there is also the heavenly idea to which it points. In any situations like this it is possible to parse the divine core or reality that is referenced in the human language from the fallible language itself. Two meanings are at work: the divine idea, and the frustrated human intention. One can never fully separate them when it comes to Scripture, because “Scripture language may thus be truly said to belong to an intermediate world, different at once both from the visible and invisible world, yet partaking of the nature of both.” Scripture straddles the line

83 Ibid., 125-6.
between the heavenly and the earthly and so there can be more than one “original” meaning, at least in theory. One can separate the meaning constituted by human feelings and strivings, and also the elevated, heavenly ideal that this human meaning does not fully articulate, but gestures towards. Though Jowett in theory and often in practice points to one singular “original meaning,” in some works he seems to allow for a twofold “original meaning.” The first is the divine intent (not the intention of the divine, but rather the human intent to point to the divine), and then the actual meaning of the human words in their inability to fully disclose that divinity. This is not to suggest, as Barr does, that Jowett is open to the doctrine of inexhaustibility, but only in a minor, chastened, and ultimately negative sense is he open to the fact that there are two possible meanings and intents. This is negative because the double meaning is the result of the frailty of human language and ultimately is an “uncertainty” that in effect can “cloud truth with metaphysics” and thus ought to be overcome.

For Trench, Scripture is something very different than for Jowett. He sees Scripture to be the expression of God pointing to Christ, and thus it has multiple meanings, some which have been revealed and others which have yet to be. Jowett sees the essence of Scripture to reside in the inspired human author’s intentions. With respect to providence, Trench sees the whole of the Bible to be the result of God’s ordering just as it is, while Jowett traces providence in the clarifying of revelation over time until the Gospel events, and then in the stripping away of the later residues that sully these events. Trench sees the author of Scripture to be the Holy Spirit, and thus the intent(s) of the Holy Spirit is (are) significant, rather than, though not excluding, the intention of the human author, while Jowett focuses on the latter. When it comes to history, finally, Trench reads Scripture with a critical reverence for the interpreters of the past. Trench does not see a movement of unbridled progress from one generation of readers to another that eventually limits the meaning of the text to the “original.” Jowett is concerned with these

85 Jowett’s essay on prophecy in the same collection helps to bring further clarity to this idea. Writing of the nature of prophecy, he suggests, “The truth of God comes into contact with the world, clothing itself in human feelings, revealing the lessons of historical events. But human feelings and the lessons of events vary, and in this sense the prophetic lesson varies too.” Jowett, Scriptur e and Truth, Dissertations, 141. God’s truth, for Jowett, is really lurking somewhere in prophecy, and in Scripture, but it is always coloured (to put it positively) or obscured (to put it negatively) by human involvement. Thus, Scripture can be said to have two levels of meaning – the divine and the human.

86 Ibid., 129.
historical lenses because they can easily overshadow the passages of Scripture they mean to elucidate.

In comparing these two thinkers, I do not mean to disparage the helpful insights that each bring to the table. However, I do think that though Jowett’s method has become the most familiar to many, and probably the most widely adopted in guides to interpretation, it does not have the same explanatory or theological power that Trench’s approach does. Logically speaking, if the words of Scripture are the kind of words they claim to be in their own self-referentiality, and if they are the same kind of Words that the Church claims for them to be, then it creates fewer problems – especially theological problems – by leaving some mystery to the exact location of meaning, and thereby putting fewer limits on the scope of possibility for Scripture.

87 I have in mind here the way the Old Testament is used in the New – for instance, St. Paul’s suggestion that the Jews were given the “oracles of God” (Romans 3:2).

88 In the service of the Word, in many ecclesial traditions, the congregation responds after the Scripture reading by saying, “The Word of the Lord.”
Chapter 3
Trench and the Tractarians

1 Authority and Primitivism in Trench and Keble

As I noted in my introduction, Trench’s distinctive approach to Scripture stands out starkly against the work of Simeon and Jowett, both of whom begin from radically different presuppositions and so approach the interpretation of Scripture in ways that vary greatly from Trench’s starting points. Keble is of interest at this point precisely because he shares many of the basic assumptions held by Trench; and furthermore, his interpretation is more akin to Trench’s than it is to either Simeon’s or Jowett’s. John Keble was one of the central figures of the Oxford Movement and in many ways typifies many of the Movement’s commonly held beliefs.¹ There are important differences between Trench and Keble, however, and by juxtaposing these subtler distinctions I give a more detailed account of Trench’s theological genius.

As I noted in my introduction, although Keble is classed among the Tractarians as a, if not the, key voice within the Oxford Movement, his views are not “representative” of the “mind” of the

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movement in any concrete way.² Having noted this, however, it is important to understand Keble within the broader context of the Oxford Movement and the projects associated with it.³

Though the Oxford Movement was an ecclesio-theological movement, because it was associated (rightly or wrongly) with a whole swath of theological ideas (for example, the doctrine of reserve, articulations of the doctrine of real presence, apostolic succession, etc.) and their outworking (the use of vestments, adoration of the sacrament, fasting, etc.), the interpretation of Scripture is only one section in its much wider tapestry.⁴ Though it may be controversial, I would argue that Scripture is a central locus for understanding the Oxford Movement. The popular perception is that the Movement was a catholic renewal, or an anti-Protestant “protest”. One reason for this may be the vast array of scholarship on the Movement, and on Keble more

² Owen Chadwick is helpful here in his introduction to Keble: “In trying to represent the mind of a movement, we are faced with the difficulty that movements have no mind…. If we try to illustrate the mind of the Oxford Movement, we are not portraying the individual minds of its authors. But if we are not describing individual minds, it is doubtful whether anything else is describable, or, at least, worth describing.” Owen Chadwick, The Mind of the Oxford Movement (London: Black, 1960), 30. It is important to note the role that Keble played within the Oxford Movement, and the truth that many of his views are consonant with the overall emphases that it is known for, while at the same time not conflating Keble’s positions with the spirit of something that is really a collective vision.


⁴ Though the Oxford Movement is popularly (and rightly) connected with the liturgical reforms, it is important to remember that these were peripheral to Keble and were not a highly significant factor within this thinking. After pointing out that Keble never wore vestments, was opposed to non-communicating mass and fasting before reception, John Shelton Reed notes, “It would be wrong to say that Keble saw the usages for which the Ritualists were to fight as unimportant, but he did not see them as important enough to fight for, or about.” Reed, Glorious Battle, 18-19. Reed’s is an important reminder that in its earliest form, the Oxford Movement was not concerned with liturgical fussiness, and to associate it with gaudy vesture is anachronistic.
particularly, that focuses on various sociological, political, and personal reasons as to why the Oxford Movement sparked and flamed so successfully. On the one hand, this is to be expected: There are many angles from which the Oxford Movement should be viewed, interesting historical personalities are involved, each of whom has particular political, social, and personal motivations coming to the fore. However, these approaches miss the importance of the role Scripture played in the theological reasoning behind many of the beliefs associated with the Oxford Movement.

I make this argument about the centrality of the interpretation of Scripture knowing that it may be contentious. However, the evidence points to the importance of Scripture. For example, Georgina Battiscombe notes with reference to Keble’s poetry, “for inspiration he turned first to the Bible and Prayer Book that were his daily reading, then, since Wordsworth had taught him that nature is the poet’s best master, to the country scenes around him.”

Keble turned to the Scripture daily for inspiration, and this was clearly a central element in his life and thought. This was of course the prescribed practice for those in Holy Orders, and while it is impossible to know with any certitude whether or not it was practiced, it at least hung over the minds of all those ordained. Further, because the Movement did not take place in a vacuum, there are some family resemblances to other movements with respect to how Tractarians interpret Scripture. Yngve Brilioth draws attention to the Evangelical heritage of many in the Movement, and suggests that Evangelicals and Tractarians approached Scripture in essentially the same way, perhaps with some tradition tacked on for Oxford Movement types.

On the other hand, one must read this in view of the more recent scholarship of Peter Nockles, which touches on the

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6 Brilioth writes, “Against the principle of the Bible as the only source of religious knowledge, the Tractarians brought forward the doctrine of Church tradition. It was not their invention – it had been formulated before them by Bishop Jebb, and Hawkins, the Provost of Oriel. But it was never opposed to the authority of the Bible: it was there that the proofs were to be found of the doctrines that were received from tradition. The Tractarians certainly did not commit themselves to any idolatry of the Sacred Book, and they gradually came to know and see the devotional treasures of the Church besides the Bible. But in their fundamental attitude to Scripture they hardly differed from the Evangelicals. It was not until a much later period that a new generation was to discover in the living tradition of the Church a way of escape from literal Biblicism. In so far as that means a new grasp of the living Gospel in our Lord’s person, it opened the way to a truer Evangelicalism than the legal interpretation of the Bible, which the old Evangelicalism had inherited from Calvinism.” Yngve Brilioth, *Three Lectures on Evangelicalism and the Oxford Movement: Together with a Lecture on the Theological Aspect of the Oxford Movement, and a Sermon Preached in Fairford Church on 11 July 1933* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 45.
complicated relationship between the High Church tradition and the Tractarians, noting that the latter is not merely the descendant of the former. With respect to biblical interpretation, however, there is some continuity: The Oxford Movement’s progenitors usually came from Evangelical or High Church backgrounds, and so exegetical techniques at play within each of these traditions filtered through into the Movement itself.\(^7\) In short, Tractarians had a very high view of Scripture, in accordance with Article 6, but thought it needed to be interpreted with an appeal to the catholic past.\(^8\) This included patristic precedent, but more than this, in the vein of St. Vincent of Lerins, it included an appeal to the Fathers when they were at unity on a given subject in a sustained manner. While I suggest this is generally true of the Movement, it is equally true of Keble’s work as an individual. Scripture is authoritative, contains “all things necessary for salvation,” and yet the Fathers – in matters where there is consensus among them – provide an important testimony to the authority of Scripture and also to the way in which it out to be read.\(^9\)

Moving back to Trench, one sees that one of the points that sets him apart from the other figures so far discussed is his understanding of scriptural authority: Where does it originate and where

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\(^7\) Nockles notes, “One facet of the High Church tradition on which the Tractarians drew was an appeal to the teaching of the primitive church exemplified in the writings of the early Fathers. High Churchmen did not deny that Holy Scripture, in the words of Article 6, ‘contained all things necessary unto salvation,’ and that it was entirely sufficient as the rule or basis of faith. High Churchmen tended to argue that Scripture needed to be understood in light of antiquity, properly understood. The documents of early Councils and the writings of the Fathers were generally regarded reverentially as testimonies to the ‘Faith once delivered unto the Saints.’” Peter Benedict Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760-1857* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 104.

\(^8\) An early naysayer of the Oxford Movement, Rev. George Scott, rector at Banagher, criticizes the Tractarians for just this appeal to the consensus of antiquity as an authority; his thought is that this is nothing short of a departure from the traditional teaching of the Church of England. Scott goes on to argue that Scripture is received as authoritative because its effects – its light – are encountered experientially, rather than through the testimony of the Fathers. George Scott, *A Protest against Tractarianism: Being an Explanation and Defence of an Address Delivered at a Missionary Meeting in Londonderry, Dec. 4, 1842* (Dublin: Curry, 1843), 13. My own evaluation is that Scott is being too reactionary rather than offering a charitable critique, but I think his perception is telling: The Tractarians appeal to the Church Fathers as authorities, and this is one of the distinctives of the Movement, at least in the view of some of its opponents.

\(^9\) For instance, in one of his sermons on the parable of the good Samaritan, Keble notes regarding the Christological interpretation of the narrative, “The interpretation is as plain as it is affecting; and were it less so, the voice of our undoubted guide to the meaning of Scripture – God’s own ancient, undivided Church – has spoken too clearly for a dutiful mind to question it.” John Keble, “The Danger of Passing by Christ,” in *Sermons Preached at St. Barnabas, Pimlico* (London, 1850), 102-3. On another note, I believe Ephraim Radner is right here to point out the underlying importance of the doctrine of divine providence. Scripture, in all of its texture, is sufficient; the early Fathers in their consensus are trustworthy lights; this is all true only insofar as human subjectivity, frailty, are encompassed round about with God’s providence. Radner, *Hope among the Fragments*, 83.
does it reside? Both Simeon and Jowett, in attempting to understand a text’s meaning, drive toward certain primitivisms within the text of Scripture itself (both keeping in mind that divine inspiration is somehow lurking behind each of these). For both of these figures, the human authorial intention and the original context into which the passage of Scripture was written are of great importance. By “primitivism,” I simply mean that Simeon and Jowett are both intent on returning to the state of events extant while the words of Scripture were first penned; for them history, and the subsequent layers of interpretation that have accompanied it, only obscure the initial, pure meaning of Scripture. Both Simeon and Jowett are struggling to arrive at what they believe to be the correct meaning of Scripture, whether their focus is on the interpretation of discreet textual units or broader movements within the Bible, by reaching back with the historical method to understand the historical particularities in the actual writing of the text.  

For Trench, it is not that this historical work is unimportant – indeed, as we shall see below, he places it first to set the stage for his spiritual interpretation. However, what sets Trench apart from Jowett and Simeon in this respect is that the historical questions are not the telos of his

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10 While there are significant problems with the application of the historical method more generally, as well as with discerning how it might be usefully applied in a given context, my goal is not to offer a thorough critique here. From a purely literary perspective, Jerome McGann, talking about the study of poetry, notes one of the problems: “[the] historical method is also a problem for scholars and critics in any of the array of extrinsic criticism: in bibliography and textual criticism, in philology, in biography and literary history, and so forth. In this case, the difficulty is that the scholar’s work so often does seem irrelevant to the understanding and appreciation of poetry. What is most appalling, not to say shameful, about this situation is that so few scholars of this sort even acknowledge that their methods involve serious and fundamental critical problems.” Jerome J. McGann, “The Text, the Poem, and the Problem of Historical Method,” *New Literary History* (1981), 269. It is not only possible, but rather common, for scholars to bracket the meaning of a poem while they analyze its textual integrity or historical usages of a given word. For instance, it is possible for one to analyze George Herbert’s moving poem “The Sacrifice” by comparing textual variants, by studying the significance of the word “grief” in contemporary literature, or even by searching for the author’s state of mind while he was writing, without actually digging into the meaning of the text. McGann is dealing with poetry, but his description of this problem stands for all literary productions when it comes to historical critical questions. There are elements within a text (verbal structure, for example) that one can analyze without reference to their historical genus or intended meaning. McGann goes on to offer a more nuanced reflection on historical method and in the end argues that it is in fact more integral than his first paragraphs allow, but he does this only after noting the connection between the flowering of critical studies in poetry and the nineteenth century development in classical and biblical studies that mostly reached England via Germany. Ibid., 270. I draw attention to all of this only to say that the historical method is complicated and its usefulness for interpreting texts is not always self-evident. This is potentially complicated further when the focus of interpretation is Holy Scripture. Save for Benjamin Jowett, the figures that I have examined thus far believed that the Bible was different from other books and thus should be read differently, though they each have their respective positions on this score. I merely want to note that just as McGann argues that the historical method may be inadequate in itself for appreciating the meaning(s) of a poem, so I am suggesting that the historical method is all the more inadequate for dealing with what Christians believe to be divinely inspired Scripture as such.
exegesis but only one step along the way. For both Trench and Keble as well, there is a kind of primitivism, of reaching back into history, but not by using the historical method and not by aiming at the historical contexts of Scripture itself. Rather, both Trench and Keble reach back to the Church Fathers as examples when it comes to scriptural interpretation. Moreover, they both take it for granted that Scripture ought to be read figurally.\(^\text{11}\) Though they each refer to the Church Fathers of the first few centuries to corroborate their exegesis, only Keble gives an explicit rationale for why he does so.\(^\text{12}\)

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\(^\text{11}\) What exactly one means when one speaks of reading Scripture “figurally” is open to dispute. At its broadest this serves as a rough demarcation of the kind of reading that was practiced in New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament, later taken up by the Church Fathers. For instance, if one looks at the actual exegesis of early Christian thinkers, one can get a sense of what this means. Peter Martens, commenting on Origen, for example, notes, “at least some of the Scriptures for Origen were composed as a twofold communication: words had their basic referent, but they were also symbolic of some other referent. This twofold compositional character corresponded to literal and allegorical interpretation, both of which were responsible for these respective communications. The task of literal exegesis was to identify the basic (‘immediate,’ ‘at hand,’ ‘obvious’) referent, whereas allegorical exegesis identified this other (‘lofty,’ ‘deeper’) referent. Philologists, the students of words, sought after the referents of words, be they literal or allegorical.” Martens goes on to quote Origen, “‘Seek you also every sign in the Old Scriptures as a figure of something in the New Scripture, and that which is named a sign in the New Testament as indicative of something either in the future age, or even in the subsequent generations after the sign has taken place.’” Ibid., 66. On a more general note about the patristic exegetical tradition, Thomas Scheck notes in his introduction to Jerome’s commentary on Matthew, “essentially patristic exegesis endeavors to be a perpetuation of the interpretive methods and principles that are established or implicit in the writings of the New Testament itself. Paul in particular and the author of Hebrews give clear examples of allegorical interpretation of the OT, as do the Gospels, Revelation, and the Catholic Epistles. The early Christian Fathers were devoted pupils of such masters. Unfortunately, the fidelity of ancient Christian exegesis to these NT patterns of interpretation has been largely ignored in scholarship until recently. Instead, patristic exegesis is often depicted as ‘arbitrary’ or as a Hellenistic corruption. The sources of patristic exegesis are more readily traced to Philo, the Mishnah, or Neo-platonic allegory of Homer than to Paul. While these links undoubtedly exist, they are not as fundamental as the NT practice, and it would be negligent to ignore the NT as the principal paradigm for the Fathers.” Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* ed. Thomas P. Scheck (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 24. I think Scheck is essentially right here in his reminder that patristic exegesis is primarily akin to New Testament exegesis, and only secondarily to other sources. Of course it would be difficult to prove definitively that patristic exegesis was inspired by the New Testament, but all of the internal evidence seems to suggest that, generally speaking, the Church Fathers were most interested in reading and interpreting Scripture. I will do more to root this figural reading, at least as it is practiced by Trench, in the Church Fathers in a later chapter. At this point, I only want to point out the way in which the reading typified by both Keble and Trench is akin to the practices by the Fathers, which again are akin to the practices of the New Testament authors. Although perhaps not any more concrete, Ephraim Radner offers a theoretical definition of this kind of figural reading: “‘Figural,’…finally refers to the ‘everything’ of God’s act in creation, as it is ‘all’ given in the Scriptures. And ‘figural reading’ of the Bible is that reading that receives this divinely-given ‘allness’ – who is the Christ ‘through whom are all things and through whom we exist’ (1 Cor. 8:6), who ‘is before all things, and in [whom] all things hold together’ (Col. 1:17) – from within the breadth of the Word written.” In Ephraim Radner, *Time and the Word: Figural Reading of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 7.

\(^\text{12}\) He does this in Keble, *Primitive Tradition Recognised in Holy Scripture*, which I will explore in more detail later.
In the present chapter I begin by using the example of the Parable of the Good Samaritan to examine Trench’s “plain sense” reading of the Bible, as well as some theoretical points that arise from this. Following this, I look at Trench’s understanding of the inexhaustibility of Scripture and show how his reading of Scripture is guided by his Christological focus. I follow this with a more detailed account of Trench’s figural reading of the same parable, comparing it to Keble’s. Pointing to the major differences in the views of each surrounding authority and the doctrine of providence, I note how Trench’s understanding of authority relies on his view of God’s providential ordering of language itself, while Keble follows more scrupulously what he perceives to be the tradition of the Church. I conclude by noting their similarities as interpreters, and also the striking difference in the weight each gives to the testimony of the Church.

At the outset, it is important to note Trench’s connections with Keble and other Tractarians. It is clear from their correspondence that Trench was on friendly terms with both Pusey and Keble, seeing himself their ally, at least with respect to certain theological disputes. Trench shared the convictions of many in the Oxford Movement about the separation of Church and State and was opposed more broadly to revisionist pressures. He enjoyed a lengthy exchange of letters with E.B. Pusey surrounding the motion forwarded in the 1875 General Synod of the Church of Ireland about whether or not to omit certain parts of the Athanasian Creed from the prayer book, among other things. Trench solicited advice from Pusey and Liddon about how best to oppose such a revision. With respect to Keble specifically, Trench expresses regret that there are not those such as Keble and Newman at Cambridge to encourage the younger generations the way that they have at Oxford. Furthermore, in 1840 it appears Keble visited Trench in Ireland. In 1847, Keble wrote to Trench asking about his particular interpretation of Butler’s Analogy. And further, not only was Trench friendly with the Tractarians, but they also shared many a common cause. For example, Mary Louise McIntyre suggests that as an “Orthodox

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16 In Trench and Trench, Letters and Memorials, vol. 1, 286.
Churchman,” Trench shared many views with Tractarians. On the other hand, Jeremy Morris suggests that Trench, as a “strategic” Liberal Protestant of the Coleridgean school, was sympathetic to the earliest ideas of the Oxford Movement. Though I have said more about Keble’s relationship to Trench in the introductory chapter, a comparison between their views is all the more natural in light of their relationship.

2 Trench’s Exegesis: The Parable of the Good Samaritan

In his Notes on the Parables, Trench offers a masterful interpretation of the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). Trench spends the first section of his discussion by opening up the parable in its historical context, situating it within the geography and literature of the period. In other words, Trench begins with a literal reading. More specifically, Trench describes the way in which the “certain man” was “going down” from Jerusalem to Jericho, noting that of course the man was going “down” in this case first because Jerusalem stood at a higher elevation than Jericho, and second because Jerusalem was a metropolis so the common sentiment at the time was that one “went up” to such a bustling place. Further along, Trench notes that the “certain man” was first stripped before being beaten so that his blood would not stain his clothes, and so

17 For example, their high views of Scripture and the episcopacy, and their close reading of the Fathers. Mary Louise McIntyre, “Julius Charles Hare on the Catholic Revival: ‘Signs of Hope,’” in Anglican and Episcopal History 75, no. 2 (2006), 235.

18 See Jeremy Morris, “Liberalism Protestant and Catholic” in The Oxford Handbook of the Oxford Movement (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 593-4. Morris’s use of the term “liberal” here needs to be understood in context. He suggests that liberal Anglicans in the “Coleridgean school” follow “the position adopted in his mature religious thought by Samuel Taylor Coleridge” and “for the most part sought to defend the traditional formularies and to interpret them inclusively, seeing them as vital historical boundary-markers for the national Church. They were doctrinally conservative in general, sharing the Tractarians’ antipathy to rationalism and to radical and Utilitarian criticisms of the Established Church.” Ibid., 593. Moreover, Trench and his companions are described by Morris to be “strategic” in a sense “which was prepared to countenance reform in the interests of preservation, and which concealed but also conveyed a fierce adherence to the traditions and doctrine of the Church of England.” Ibid., 594. Ultimately this “proved to be no ally to Tractarian political and ecclesiastical goals.” Ibid. In short, Trench was sympathetic to much Tractarian doctrine, but had to depart from the movement over specific, practical ecclesial matters. This brings more clarity to Richard Foulkes’s suggestion that Trench, among many of his contemporaries at Cambridge, “fell under the influences of Coleridge,” especially in relation to Catholic Emancipation. Coleridge and those to follow him were concerned with the positive and cohesive effect the Protestant Church of England had upon the whole country. Richard Foulkes, “William Shakespeare: The Model Victorian Protestant,” Shakespeare 5, no. 1 (2009), 71. This is no doubt in large part the reason that Trench was not swayed by the Tractarian wariness of the intimate link between Church and State.


20 Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, 314.
they would retain their value for those who would take them. Trench here is reading Scripture literally according to its plain or straightforward sense, situating it historically, and trying to grasp what the human author – in this case the evangelist recounting Jesus’ words – could have meant when he laid out the details this way or that. He pays attention to philological issues, biblical geography, and the logic of the passage’s language. The assumption is that these technical details are important and that they bring clarity to the text; this is why Trench seeks to uncover the reasoning behind the man being stripped first before being beaten, for instance.

Having pointed this out, however, one should note that to read Scripture in this way is to read it as one would read any other text. This is not sensational or controversial, and at this level of reading Trench brings to mind the principles of interpretation that were exemplified by Jowett which I discussed in preceding chapters. Trench is willing to accept the historical situatedness of this narrative told by Jesus as it is recounted by the evangelist; Trench quotes ancient and contemporary authorities to support his interpretive moves. This is where Trench begins, but it is not where he ends.

Trench goes on to say:

> Beautiful as is this parable when thus taken simply in the letter, inviting us to “put on bowels of mercies,” to shrink from no offices of love, even though they should be painful and perilous; yet how much fairer still, how much more mightily provoking to love and good works, when, with most of the Fathers, and with many of the Reformers, we trace in it a deeper meaning still, and see the work of Christ, of the merciful Son of man Himself, portrayed to us here.

Two important elements are in Trench’s transition. On the one hand, his previous literal reading, as described above, is moralistic; it is meant to teach the reader a lesson about being merciful and loving. There is a “lesson” to Scripture when it is read in this way, or a “moral” to be discovered. More deeply, however, there is a Christological dimension to this parable. Trench points this out not least because this is a parable told by Christ himself. Even here, Trench,

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22 Ibid., 321.
following in the steps of the Church Fathers and many Reformers, finds Christ figured into his own parables.23

Before I offer a sketch of the exegetical moves employed by Trench in this passage, I want to point out his appeal to the Fathers, medieval theologians, and Reformers. He does not explicitly say that he is driving home the Christological interpretation because there is such a precedent in the Church, but rather Trench simply follows their lead.24 One can say that Trench presumes the truth and authority of tradition in this case, rather than vigorously defending it. However, Trench is not uncritical in his work; he is not content, for example, to give a definitive interpretation of the “two pence” that were given to the “certain man” by the Samaritan:

It would be an entering into curious minutiae, one tending to bring discredit on this scheme of interpretation, to affirm decidedly of the two pence, that they mean either the two Sacraments, or the two Testaments, or the Word and the Sacraments, or unreservedly to accede to any one of the ingenious explanations which have been offered for them. They do better who content themselves with saying that these include all gifts and graces, sacraments, powers of healing, of remission of sins, or other powers which the Lord has left with his Church, that it may keep house for Him till his return.25

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23 For example, Norbert Brox points out Irenaeus’s allegorical interpretation of Jesus’ parables, including that of the good Samaritan. The important point for Brox is that for Irenaeus it was not only the Old Testament that could be interpreted typologically but the new as well. Norbert Brox, “Irenaeus and the Bible,” in Charles Kannengiesser, ed. *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 491. Looking more to the Reformers, Rudolf Stier argues about the parable, “It is true that an attempt to interpret allegorically the individual details,—as, for example, the difference between oil and wine, the beast, the inn, the host, the two pence,—may easily degenerate into trifling; but spiritual Christians of all times have not been able to resist seeing in the whole parable a picture of man lying in sin and misery, whom neither law nor Levitical institutions can help, and to whom the mercy of Christ comes—Whom they angrily called a Samaritan. Luther and Melanchthon cannot refrain from such a view; the former goes even into details, contrary to his usual principle.” Rudolph Stier, *The Words of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Smith, 1859), 514. Though there might be dispute as to how far one should draw out the details of the parable, it is fair to say that there is a precedent for interpreting it beyond the mere letter. It says something more than that one ought lend a helping hand, and it refers to the mystery of salvation in Christ.

24 For instance, in his discussion on the typological significance of the parable of the good Samaritan more specifically, Trench alludes to Hugh of Saint Victor, Augustine (frequently), Ambrose, Jerome’s translation of Origen, Bernard, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory the Great, Cyprian, Melanchthon, Chrysostom, Maldonatus, and Johann Albrecht Bengel. There is no doubt that Trench had long inhabited the tradition, pulling from across temporal and ecclesial boundaries. While it would be impossible in nearly any work to give an exhaustive list of quotations from the ages of the Church, Trench offers a commendably expansive swath for such a short piece as this.

It is significant here that Trench does not explicitly and concretely point to what is signified in his figural exegesis of the parable. In this sense, it may be that he is unwilling to go so far as some of the Church Fathers, though he certainly engages many of them, along with later thinkers in the Christian tradition. On the other hand, there is precedent in someone like Augustine, for instance, to venture a series of hypotheses about the meaning of a given figure in Scripture, without necessarily coming down with any determinative answer.\textsuperscript{26}

It is no surprise that Trench does not strain to give a definitive interpretation of the two pence in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, if only because Trench has a certain view of the inexhaustibility of Scripture. Because Scripture is inexhaustible, there are many layers of meaning that can never be fully expounded. To be definitive about a seemingly minor point would be to undercut some of the scope that such inexhaustibility entails. One should note that Trench is not averse to positing several interpretations, for in the quotation above he mentions that the two pence could represent the two sacraments, the two testaments, or the Word and sacraments, but he thinks it better to rather encompass all of these possibilities by an appeal to something more general. To choose one interpretation or the other does not greatly alter the general drift of the parable, and fastening upon one interpretation needlessly limits others, especially where there is diverse opinion in the Church. Furthermore, this diversity could be preserved while also allowing for the particularity of other interpretations, never definitively pronouncing one to the exclusion of others.

\section*{3 Trench on the Inexhaustibility of Scripture}

The exegesis above is really one example of the concrete outworking of the similar but more theoretical work that Trench does in his lecture on the inexhaustibility of Scripture in the Hulsean Lectures, \textit{The Fitness of Holy Scripture for Unfolding the Spiritual Life of Men}.\textsuperscript{27}

Trench notes,

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\item \textsuperscript{26} For example, when deliberating about the significance of the “streams of water” in Psalm 1, Augustine offers a couple of possibilities. He notes that the water here may be a type for the Holy Ghost, but it also may refer to men’s sins. \textit{See} Augustine, \textit{St. Augustine on the Psalms}, trans. Felicitas Corrigan (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960), par. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Trench, \textit{The Fitness of Holy Scripture}, 90-106.
\end{itemize}
no doubt all of us must often have felt, the way in which it has been ordained that the treasures of Holy Scripture should for the individual believer be inexhaustible also, should be quarries in which he may always dig, yet which he never can dig out, a world of wisdom in which the most zealous and successful searcher shall ever be the readiest to acknowledge that what remains to know is far more than what yet he has known.  

The notion here is not merely that there are many legitimate interpretations to be applied to a given text of Scripture, but that Scripture actually is inexhaustible. To illustrate this further by using the image of digging, it is not the case that there are innumerable uses for the truth quarried from Scripture – though there may be – but rather that the truths themselves are innumerable, hidden continually deeper. To see the distinction between interpretative strategies and the ontology of Scripture is imperative. What is more, the immensity of truth that remains hidden within Scripture, that has not yet been exposed by digging, is much greater than that which has been so far discovered. The reason for this is “that no man should ever come to its end, himself containing it, instead of being contained by it, as by something far larger than himself.” Scripture, for Trench, is never to be conquered, but it is always just above and beyond any attempt to master it. Scriptural interpretation must be always tentative, always incomplete. This does not preclude the interpreter gleaning palpable truth from the text, nor does it render such truth malleable, but rather, this truth must always be held lightly with the knowledge that there is more to discover further down, later on. To be more general about some of the secondary features of a parable, then, is to safeguard oneself from overreaching by allowing a greater breadth of possibility to flourish for the time being.

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29 Ibid., 91. For Trench, the inexhaustibility of Scripture is not something that is generally given for the whole Church in some abstract way, but rather Scripture’s inexhaustibility extends to individuals in baptism, and they slowly uncover further truth as they mature. It is not to say that the Church as a whole is not given access to deeper truth; it is, but Trench deals with this in his work on the development of Scripture. See Trench, *The Fitness of Holy Scripture*, 91-2. I argue that the individuality of each person is addressed in Scripture’s inexhaustibility because the same God who is able to invest a passage of Scripture with limitless truth is able to direct it to speak to myriads of people time and time again. This is not to say, I must note, that a passage of Scripture can mean anything or everything, but rather the meaning it does contain is vast and boundless.

30 When I am parsing parables into primary and secondary features in the former section, I only mean to point out that some details are more central to a given text. For instance, to keep with the parable of the good Samaritan, different views on the identity of the good Samaritan transform the meaning of the parable far more than the
The shape of the inexhaustibility that Trench envisions means that Scripture is not systematic. Well aware of the way that this same reality has been the source of criticism by sceptics, Trench compares the nature and arrangement of Scripture to the order of nature rather than a human system. There is an order to be sure, there are patterns, but they are not rigid. He likens Scripture to a garden, “a wilderness, if men choose to call it so, but a wilderness of sweets, with its flowers upon their stalks - its plants freshly growing, the dew upon their leaves, the mould about their roots - with its lowly hyssops and its cedars of God.”

The idea here is that it is fitting that Scripture should be so; God made Scripture like a wild field, free and ranging, so that it may delight many.

I have noted several times at this point the way that Trench talks of the “fitness” of Scripture. Indeed, the title for his Hulsean Lectures tells the reader that they are about the “fitness of Holy Scripture for unfolding the spiritual life of men.” There are two senses in which Scripture is fitting, one anthropocentric and one theocentric. One can think of the notion of “fitness” in two respects by asking “in light of what is x fitting?” In Trench’s thought the first answer to this question it that Scripture is fitting in its role for humanity; Scripture has all that is appropriate for the development of the spiritual lives of men and women. This is related to, but ultimately distinct from, the second way that Scripture is “fitting.” This is the more crucial point – namely meaning of the two pence. To illustrate this one needs only to imagine the parable without the character of the Samaritan (in which case it would become unintelligible) versus the parable without the two pence. The former would drastically change the meaning of the parable, while the latter would leave it fairly intact.

31 Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 92.

32 This calls to mind Joseph Butler’s argument in his Analogy, that it is probable for there to be parallels between spiritual realities as they are passed on in the Christian faith with the natural shape of the world. See Joseph Butler, The Analogy of Religion: Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature (Dublin: Jones, 1736). There is some likelihood that this is the work that Trench had in mind while writing; in 1847, for instance, in this same series of Hulsean Lectures, Trench quotes Butler’s suggestion that just as new natural knowledge is continually being discovered in scientific enquiry, so too it is logical to assume that humanity may continually discover new truth in Scripture. Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 128. Further, Trench received a letter from John Keble asking about his view on the applicability of Butler’s principles. Keble wanted to know if the analogical reasoning used to determine the truthfulness of Christianity based on its correspondence with nature could be extended to determine truth within inter-Church controversies. Keble had been told that Trench did not think it could. Trench and Trench, Richard Chenevix Trench, Archbishop, Letters and Memorials, vol.1, 286. On a different note, this is not the only work in which Trench likens the Scripture to something wild; in a letter to his son Richard, Trench compares another writer to Augustine: “He, like Augustine, finds the prophetic Scriptures as the thick and shady mountain from which the Saviour came forth…” Trench and Trench, Letters and Memorials, vol 1, 286. In this case again, there is not a systematic arrangement of Scripture that yields Christ; rather he “came forth” from the wilds.
that Scripture is fitting in light of its status as a communicative act of the triune God. Part of the reason that Scripture can be fitting in the former sense, in relation to its usefulness for humanity, is that it is imbued with the kind of ontological status one might expect from such a divinely inspired Word. In short, Scripture can be fitting for the lives of men and women only because it discloses something of God in Christ.

When writing about the fitness of Scripture in this theocentric sense, Trench is pointing out that if one takes into consideration the character of God (as it is known in Scripture and in nature), one would expect his character to be reflected to some extent in Scripture. For example, in his comments on the images brought to bear in the parables to illuminate spiritual truths, Trench notes:

For it is an entire misunderstanding of the matter to regard these as happily, but arbitrarily, chosen illustrations, skilfully selected out of the great stock and storehouse of unappropriated images; from whence the same skill might have selected others as good, or nearly as good. Rather they belong to one another, the type and the thing typified, by an inward necessity; they were linked together long before by the law of a secret affinity.\(^{33}\)

This is to say that for Trench, there is in fact a connection between the natural images employed in Scripture and the truths they are meant to illustrate; they are “fitting” in this sense. In the footnote of this passage Trench refers back to Joseph Butler, from whom he is drawing in this passage. But Butler himself is drawing from a theological tradition of much older pedigree, one that is present in Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo*, or Thomas Aquinas’ reflection on the atonement, for example.\(^{34}\) The idea behind Trench’s retrieval of the notion of “fittingness” within the


\(^{34}\) For a recent critical engagement with Anselm’s work on fittingness, see Thomas Flint, “Fittingness and Divine Action in *Cur Deus Homo,*” in *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Eleonore Stump, Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Religion 7 (New York: Routledge, 2009), 97-111. Flint points out some of the difficulties in associating fittingness too closely with truthfulness. For a discussion on fittingness with respect to Thomas, see Adam Johnson, “A Fuller Account: The Role of ‘Fittingness’ in Thomas Aquinas’ Development of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 3 (2010): 302–318. In the latter Johnson draws together both Thomas and Anselm on fittingness, noting where they diverge, “Thus, when Anselm speaks of fittingness, he looks back from the act to the agent, to see whether the act is appropriate for the agent (“agential” fittingness). He frequently uses this concept when considering what God could
parables is that the same God who authored Scripture by the Holy Spirit is the one who creates all things visible and invisible, such that the images employed within the divinely inspired Scripture actually have an inherent and divinely given purpose for illustrating all that they do. All of this points to the doctrine of providence – that God has and is continuing to order both the world and Scripture – so that they reflect one another because of this common origin.

In many ways, to deny Scripture has a systematic layout is hardly controversial. Many – Trench points specifically to Strauss – note this as a kind of “defect.” Trench argues that Scripture does not have a system, but it has a method. To the criticism that Scripture is merely a patchwork sewn together in seemingly arbitrary fashion, he is quick to point out that

when men say there is want of method in [Scripture], they would speak more accurately if they said there was want of system; for the highest method, even the method of the Spirit, may reign where system there is none. Method is divine, is inseparable from the ideas of God and of order: but system is of man, is an help to the weakness of his faculties, is the artificial arrangement by which he brings within his limited ken that which in no other way he would be able to grasp as an whole. That there should be books of systematic Theology, – books with their plan and scheme thus lying on their very surface, and meeting us at once, – this is most needful; but most needful also that Scripture should not be such a book. The dearest interests of all, of wise men equally of women and children, demand this.

Trench is with critics of Scripture insofar as they are ready to dismiss the claims that it has some kind of external arrangement; but rather than seeing this as a weakness, Trench points to the deeper method in the Bible, a method that is divine and pneumatically infused. To try to make sense of Scripture apart from this is to miss its richness altogether.
Trench moves to a different image to drive home his point; Scripture is not only akin to ecological phenomena – a wild field or a garden – but to a life, a person. However elusive a systematic reduction of Scripture must be, it continually points us back to Jesus Christ:

An Abraham, a David, a Paul, there is always something incomplete in the way in which we have hitherto realized their characters; they always abide greater than our conception of them, and at the same time always ready to reveal themselves in some new features to the loving and studious eye. Beheld in some new combination, in some new grouping with those by whom they are surrounded, they will yield some lesson of instruction which they have never yielded before. And if they, how much more He, whom we are bidden above all to consider, looking unto whom we are to run our course, and whose every turn and gesture and tone and word are significant for us.\(^{35}\)

One can see that Trench is not only appealing to the human element within Scripture – that it deals with the histories of individuals rather than abstract philosophical principles or technical doctrinal formulation – to underline his emphasis on the living and unconquerable nature of the text. In light of this, perhaps it would be more congenial to speak of growing in intimacy with Scripture, rather than studying it, if this draws out the personal dimensions more fully.

This discussion of the persons within Scripture remains but an entry point to the person, Christ Jesus. Trench notes that everything about Christ is of central importance to the reader, for everything he does is meaningful. This is the centrepiece of authority within Scripture because Christ is the truth, he does not merely give it. Thus, the apparent contradictions within Scripture only serve to draw the reader further into the mystery of Christ, “‘Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me,’ finds as true an application to Christ’s Word as to his person. For that Word goes on its way, not obviating every possible misconception, not giving anxious pains to shew how this statement which it makes and that agree. It is satisfied that they do agree, and lets those that are watching for an offence take it.”\(^{36}\) In identifying Scripture here as Christ’s Word,

\(^{35}\) Trench, *The Fitness of Holy Scripture*, 95.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 97. Trench’s claim may seem counterintuitive to some, that there exist in Scripture apparent contradictions that are not glossed or explained. Commenting on this set of Hulsean Lectures as a whole, Trench’s biographer John Bromley notes, “This type of apologetic is not likely to convince the avowed sceptic, who demands that specific difficulties by clearly solved and discrepancies harmonized before he gives the Bible any credence; but for the
Trench is able to apply descriptions of Christ’s person to it, only furthering the emphasis on the Christological authority of Scripture. There is no accident, then, when Scripture is silent, say about the secret years of Jesus’ adolescence, for even this very silence is woven into the fabric of Scripture so that it might have meaning and substance. This facet of Scripture is but another aspect of its fitness; to understand that Scripture is an act of communication by the triune God is to know that it is likely to point to the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, God-become-man. This brings to mind a note from Cyril of Alexandria, that it is fitting, proper, and probable that Christ will appear in this divine communication in ways that defy customs of time and space because Scripture is just such a communication of that Christ who is beyond time and yet enters into it.

perplexed Christian or half-believer it has a steadying and heartening effect, offering him an anchor amid the cross currents of negative criticism and rationalistic speculation.” It does not seem likely that Trench was targeting the staunch sceptic, though Bromley’s assessment stands. It is more likely, in view of Trench’s writing on the nature of Scripture as well as his heavy debt to Augustine, that Trench accepts these surface discrepancies rather to be a part of what inexhaustibility and Scripture’s manifold nature entail. Discussing a similar criticism in De Doctrina Christiana, Augustine notes, “But casual readers are misled by problems and ambiguities of many kinds, mistaking one thing for another. In some passages they find no meaning at all that they can grasp at, even falsely, so thick is the fog created by some obscure phrases. I have no doubt that this is all divinely predetermined, so that pride may be subdued by hard work and intellects which tend to despise things that are easily discovered may be rescued from boredom and reinvigorated.” Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana, ed. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 2.6.10. Though Augustine’s explanation for contradiction is quite different than Trench’s (for example, Trench suggests that Scripture’s multiplicity of voices are meant to draw in more people than would otherwise listen), they are similar in their commitment to understand Scripture as something primarily theological, and thus purposeful. What seem to be discrepancies are placed within the text by God, in his providence.

37 Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 100.

38 Commenting on the Christological types of the parable of the good Samaritan, for example, Cyril of Alexandria notes: “But any one who thoroughly understands the mystery of the Incarnation may well say to him, If you had been skilful in the law, and in the meaning of its hidden teaching, it would not have escaped you Who He is you venture to tempt. For you thought that He was a mere man, and that only; and not rather God, Who appeared in human likeness, and Who knows what is secret, and can look into the hearts of those who approach Him. In manifold ways is the Emmanuel depicted to you by the shadowing of Moses. You saw Him there sacrificed as a lamb, yet vanquishing the destroyer, and abolishing death by His blood. You saw Him in the arrangement of the ark, in which was deposited the divine law: for He was in His holy flesh like as in an ark, being the Word of the Father, the Son that was fathered of Him by nature. You saw Him as the mercy-seat in the holy tabernacle, around which stood the Seraphim [Cherubim]: for He is our mercy-seat for pardon of our sins. Yes! and just like man, He is glorified by the Seraphim, who are the intelligent and holy powers above; for they stand around His divine and exalted throne. You saw Him as the candlestick with seven lamps in the Holy of Holies: for abundant is the Saviour’s light to those who hurry into the inner tabernacle. You saw Him as the bread placed upon the table: for He is the living bread, that came down from heaven, and gives life to the world. You saw Him as the brazen serpent that was raised on high as a sign, and being looked upon healed the bites of the serpents: for though He was like us, in the form therefore of that which is evil, as being in our form, nevertheless He is by nature good, and continues to be that which He was. For the serpent is the type of wickedness; but yet, by being lifted up, and enduring the cross for us, He rendered powerless the bites of those rational serpents, who are no other than Satan, and the wicked powers
Moving from these more general remarks about Trench’s approach to Scripture, we can return to his exegesis of the good Samaritan. The parable is not merely a lesson told by Jesus to instruct the inquisitive lawyer. More deeply, “lurking behind” the literal meaning is a “latent” interpretation that gives it “more enduring charm” and that “shadows forth the Son of man’s crowing act of love to the whole race of mankind.”\(^{39}\) This is a natural connection to the literal sense of the parable for Trench, because Christ himself best fulfilled the role of the good Samaritan by illustrating with his life what it means to love the perishing.\(^{40}\) Trench goes on in his mystical interpretation to note that the man who was left beaten at the side of the road is no other than humanity, departed from the Holy City, attacked by the devil and his angels (Trench refers to John 8:44), and thus is waylaid, “half-dead.”\(^{41}\) Only because the Samaritan is figurally Christ, the great physician, can he bring healing to humanity on the edge of death, a precarious state caused partly through their own wandering, and partly through the assaults of the evil one.

The priest and Levite, Trench likens to the patriarchs and the prophets; neither Abraham, nor Moses and his Law, nor the Aaronic priesthood were able to help the destitute man, and these are under his command.” Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary upon the Gospel according to St. Luke: Now First Translated into English from an Ancient Syriac Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859), 312-3. In this exegetical passage Cyril, for example, does not give much attention to the more secondary details such as the significance of the oil for the wounds or the two pence given to innkeeper. However, for Cyril in this case there is a push to say that the Old Testament does contain types of Christ, and the lawyer in this passage is failing to take notice of this, the true meaning of the law. Furthermore, Cyril is touching one crucial point that Trench takes for granted, that is, that Jesus Christ – as the Incarnate Lord – is himself figured within the Scriptures that he himself has given to Israel, however mysterious this may be. For instance, on the subject of the unfolding of truth in Scripture, Trench notes, “Thus was it good that before the appearing of the Son of God in the flesh, there should be, in the language of Bishop Bull, ‘preludings of the Incarnation,’ transient apparitions of Him in a human form, though not in the verity of our human nature. Thus was it ordered that each one of the mighty acts of our Lord’s life should not stand wholly apart, and without analogy in anything which had gone before, but ever find in something earlier its lineaments and its outlines. Weak and faint these lineaments may have been, weak and faint they must have been, when compared with the glory that excelleth; yet sketches and outlines and foreshadowings still of the glory to be revealed.” Richard Chenevix Trench, *The Fitness of Holy Scripture*, 67. Cyril conveys this so beautifully in the above paragraph, bringing to light in many general instances (without paying much attention to secondary details) the way that Scripture at once refers beyond its literal reading to Jesus Christ.

\(^{39}\) Trench, *Notes on the Parables*, 322.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 321.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 322-3.
not able to bring healing to a faltering humanity. Only the good Samaritan, Jesus himself, with the “oil” of the Holy Spirit and the “wine” as the blood of his passion, can bind up the wounds of the traveler. This is not all, however: “The Samaritan setting the wounded man on his own beast, himself therefore pacing on foot by his side, reminds us of Him, who though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich, – and who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.” The inn represents the Church, and the Samaritan gives the innkeeper charge over the traveler just as he gives the Church charge over the care of souls until he returns to repay what is due, just as Jesus will return for his Church.

It is not difficult to see, as Trench progresses through his exquisitely detailed reading, that all the images and words in the passage matter and correlate to the spiritual truth in Christ. Furthermore, Trench’s interpretation of the parable serves as a practical outworking of his more theoretical hermeneutic that I have outlined above. And though it is only one example, it serves to illustrate the full explanatory power of Trench’s approach to Scripture in its local application. The texts of Scripture are to be read literally, so that one might see the plain meaning, before one plumbs their depths which speak of Christ even when spoken by him. Each image and detail of the parable refers to something significant within its enclosed narrative, nothing seems out of place or “thrown in,” as if it were forced into an otherwise believably story so that it might be later exploited for some moralizing end. However, in Trench’s work, these very details are – in all of their narratival integrity – also signs that point beyond themselves to spiritual truths.

It is essential to note here that Trench is not merely playing a game of free association with these biblical figures, but rather they point beyond themselves as they are woven into the texture of the wider biblical story. “Wine” immediately calls to mind the Spirit’s utterance of the same figure as it variously appears throughout the Bible. Trench notes the “blood” of Christ, so near at hand to this parable, as it appears in the same Gospel: “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). And even here Trench is not simply cherry-picking biblical

42 Trench, Notes on the Parables, 323-4.
43 Ibid., 325.
44 Ibid., 326.
figures according to his whims, but according to an ecclesial tradition that is well-embedded in
time and space and logically follows from the theological convictions about the nature of
Scripture itself.

5 Keble on the Parable of the Good Samaritan

Keble’s exegesis shows a depth very similar to Trench’s; we can see part of this in his more
theoretical work, *On the Mysticism Attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church*, which serves
as an apology for figural reading more generally (i.e., not solely a figural reading of Scripture,
but of nature as well), with a foray into the principles of reading in this tradition. More directly,
one observes Keble’s exegesis in his sermons, and I will be looking at two in particular that deal
with the same text that I examined with Trench (the parable of the good Samaritan).

Like Trench, Keble is aware that his interpretive strategies contrast with the common interpretive
practice of his time, and so he notes, “we must not be startled, though we find ourselves
compelled to own, that modern and ancient theology are to a great extent irreconcilable; that if
popular notions are right, the Fathers are indeed ‘mystical’ in a bad sense, and that, in all the
several departments mentioned.” It is not insignificant that Tract 89 is apologetic; Keble is not
simply going about interpreting Scripture here, but is giving a rationale for patristic practice. In
part this is why Keble is more focused on situating his case oppositionally.

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46 Keble, *On the Mysticism Attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church*, 9. Of the movement surrounding *Essays and Reviews* more specifically, Battiscombe quotes Keble as saying, “I can compare it to nothing but the reputed action of a rattle-snake; the sound of the rattle is heard and understood, and yet the fascination continues, and it is doubly grievous to think that humanly speaking, it is mainly traceable to our poor dear friend at Rugby.” Battiscombe, *John Keble*, 326. What Keble is referring to in this passage is the more liberal views of Scripture propagated at Rugby due to the influence of his friend Thomas Arnold. This is only to say that Keble thought that the theory of Scripture underlying *Essays and Reviews* was not only in a negative tension with the ancient Christian tradition, but it proved to be decisively dangerous and personal.

47 As John Shelton Reed has argued, Anglo-Catholicism was a countercultural movement; if this is the case, then the *Tracts for the Times* are meant to upset the status quo, to be polemical and grate against popular Christian sentiment in the Church of England and beyond. See Reed, *Glorious Battle*, xxiv. This is in contrast to Trench, who does not take up his work from such an angle of opposition. His Hulsean Lectures, *The Fitness of Scripture*, are the closest parallel to Keble’s Tract 89, simply because both works are constructive and outline a particular approach to the interpretation of Scripture in a discursive manner; they are not simply examples of exegesis in action, as are many of Keble’s sermons and Trench’s commentaries. Trench’s constructive work is from the position of an invited lecturer and Keble’s is from the margins of the revival movement within the Church, which had met with opposition and so must give a defense of itself.
Middleton’s historiography is questionable overall, his reading of Keble is quite accurate, especially when he notes, drawing on the work of Owen Chadwick, that the Tractarians generally and Keble specifically appealed to the Fathers not only in order to corroborate and preserve the theological heritage of the Church of England, but to reform it as well. According to Middleton’s view, the Tractarian project involves a return to the Fathers, to ancient practice, as a retrieval or ressourcement. Keble does not simply assume the weight of tradition and the authority of the Fathers as Trench does. For instance, Keble is very careful in his introduction to Tract 89 to articulate what he sees as the distinctive spirituality of the Fathers, especially with respect to their interpretation of Scripture. Keble outlines this in order to defend it, because he sees this patristic approach to Scripture and nature to be worth emulating. For Keble, patristic authority had to be both defended and defined.

Not to be neglected in this respect is Keble’s sermon “Primitive Tradition.” Here Keble offers a thorough defense of Church tradition as something distinct from Scripture. Commenting on the distinction between the two, Keble notes,

We are naturally, if not reasonably, jealous of the word Tradition, associated as it is in our minds with the undue claims and pernicious errors of Rome. Yet must it not be owned, on fair consideration, that Timothy’s deposit did comprise matter, independent of,

\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{48}}\]

For a critique of Middleton see Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17th Century*, Oxford-Warburg Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7. Clearly, Quantin has some sharp criticisms for Tractarian historiography, much of which Keble would have bought into wholesale. I do not think that Quantin’s critiques apply to Trench, however, in large part because of Trench’s reticence to define the nature of patristic authority so singly and explicitly. Ultimately, I think Quantin’s appraisal of the Tractarians’ reading of “the Fathers” as a monolithic unit is correct and should serve as a caution for any invocation of the “patristic mind,” at least on historical grounds. This being said, the same critique could be applied to notions about the unity of Scripture, such as that propounded by Trench; historically speaking, to think this way is to fail to take into account the ambiguity and multiplicity of Scripture. I wonder then if Keble’s appeal to the consensus of the Fathers might be rehabilitated on more theological rather than historical lines, though I cannot here begin to map out how exactly that might look.

\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{49}}\]


\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{50}}\]

Though I think it is overstated, and perhaps fails to take into account the full nuance of the Tractarian approach to the Fathers, I think C. Brad Faught’s sentiments are in the right direction; he notes, “For the Tractarians, antiquity became bedrock, the unquestioned locus of authority within the Church. By the late 1830s, this fundamentalist stance gradually became stronger, diverging clearly from that held by old High Churchmen, whose own view of antiquity was a more limited one.” C. Brad Faught, *The Oxford Movement: A Thematic History of the Tractarians and Their Times* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).
and distinct from, the truths which are directly Scriptural? That it contained, besides the
substance of Christian doctrine, a certain form, arrangement, selection, methodizing the
whole, and distinguishing fundamentals; and also a certain system of church practice,
both in government, discipline, and worship; of which whatever portion we can prove to
be still remaining, ought to be religiously guarded by us, even for the same reason that we
reverence and retain that which is more properly scriptural, both being portions of the
same divine treasure.\textsuperscript{51}

Keble is not suggesting here that Scripture and Tradition are in conflict. This is an impossibility
for him, because they are both given by the same God, they both exist as his Word – one written,
and the other unwritten. This is significant because, unlike Trench, Keble is careful to articulate
a theory of authority that ought to be assigned to Tradition.\textsuperscript{52}

Keble’s interpretative theory in the abstract is not sufficient to capture the spirit of his
interpretive practice. For that we must turn to his actual exegesis. Keble takes up the parable of
the good Samaritan in two noteworthy places, both of which are sermons.\textsuperscript{53} The first I will
examine is one that Keble preached at St. Barnabas, Pimlico, the thrust of which was at once a
defense of sacramentalism while at the same time a warning against missing Christ because of
preoccupation with good works in his name.\textsuperscript{54} Like Trench, Keble begins this sermon with an

\textsuperscript{51} Keble, \textit{Primitive Tradition}, 21.

\textsuperscript{52} Keble gives a scriptural rationale for his argument. In one sense, this is quite ironic: Keble wants to establish that
apart from Scripture, there is an authoritative divine Tradition that ought to be guarded by the saints, but to establish
this, Keble appeals to the authority of Scripture. He notes, “To these conclusions we are led by the consideration,
first, that the truths and rules committed to Timothy’s charge were at the time almost wholly unwritten. This is clear
from the very date of the Epistles which mention that charge: the latest of which must have been composed many
years before St. John’s gospel, and in the first of them the deposit in question is spoken of, not as an incomplete
thing on its progress toward perfection, but as something so wholly sufficient, so unexceptionably accurate, as to
require nothing but fidelity in its transmitters. The holy writings themselves intimate that the persons to whom they
were addressed were in possession of a body of truth and duty, totally distinct from themselves and independent of
them,” Ibid., 21-2. Keble then has two voices – Scripture and unwritten tradition – that are complementary and refer
to one another.

\textsuperscript{53} It is significant that though Keble’s exegesis is very close to Trench’s in the following paragraphs, he is working
with a different genre than Trench. Trench was addressing divinity students, and as such used the parable of the
good Samaritan for illustrative purposes. In Keble’s case, though he is making a distinct point in each respective
sermon, the parable is more central to his sermon than it is to Trench’s work, where it serves as a concrete example
of a larger theological point.

\textsuperscript{54} See Keble, “The Danger of Passing by Christ.”
introduction to the plain sense of the text, before noting that in a deeper sense Jesus is the sick traveler, and we are the ones that so often pass him by as he appears to us in the face of broken humans.\textsuperscript{55} Keble digs down another level, however, and notes:

It does not now occur to us for the first time, how exactly the Priest and the Levite, coming to the place, represent the Old Law of God, with its sacerdotal and charitable appointments, applying itself to man’s lost condition; surveying it, as it were, and drawing attention to it, yet after all passing it by, and leaving it for another remedy. The good Samaritan, as he draws near on their retiring, presents to us a clear type of Him, concerning Whom it is written: “What the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{56}

In contrast to Trench, here, Keble allows for three layers of interpretation. He begins with the moral lesson given to the lawyer about caring for those in need, before moving to an individualized spiritual interpretation, where the listener is the one who passes by the suffering Christ. Finally he moves to this typological interpretation, akin to Trench’s, that Christ is the good Samaritan who does what the Law cannot. In the next pages Keble identifies the inn as the Church, and points to the sacramental symbolism inherent in the oil and the wine.

In a second sermon Keble engages the parable in a similar figural fashion that calls to mind Trench’s exegesis, and the more Christological tones of the above sermon. Keble’s interpretation has much in common with Trench’s, though it is filled out in more detail. Not only is Jesus identified as the good Samaritan and humanity as the ailing poor man, but the robbers are identified with evil spirits, the priest and Levite represent the Old Testament, and the inn the Church.\textsuperscript{57} Keble here offers a very elaborate and compact key to the parable, noting all of the significant parties. He is less exploratory than Trench in linking signs to signified, but this may

\textsuperscript{55} Keble, “The Danger of Passing by Christ.” 99.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 101.
\textsuperscript{57} Keble, \textit{Sermons for the Christian Year}, Part 2, 22.
be an accident of genre rather than an intentional difference. Further, the differences between Trench and Keble so far tend to be on emphases rather than content, confidence in expression rather than subject matter.

Where Keble takes a different path is in his reading of the innkeeper, who represents “all Christians in their measure and place, but most especially Christian ministers.” He notes that humanity fits two places within this parable, at once as the poor battered man and as the inn keeper. This does not radically alter the interpretation of the parable but builds upon the common themes and images that both Trench and Keble have identified.

A hallmark of Keble’s exegesis in this parable is to downplay the complexity of the text for the sake of specificity. For instance, when dealing with the two pence, Trench notes the various patristic interpretations, and then avers to what the two coins represent most generally. On the other hand, Keble – following his notion of patristic consensus – speaks more authoritatively about what they might be. He notes,

Ancient writers say that these two pence mean the two great laws of charity; to love God with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourself. They are God’s treasure, with which He furnishes us, pouring the true love of Him and of our neighbour into our hearts by His Holy Spirit; whereby we are made able and willing to do His work; and they are as it were His coin, for they have His mark upon them, they are stamped with His image and superscription.

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58 Keble, in writing a sermon for the benefit of the congregation, might smooth over ambiguity and alternative textual interpretations for the sake of clarity. Trench, on the other hand, is writing university lectures that may allow more room for flourishes and questions.

59 Keble, Sermons for the Christian Year, Part 2, 23.

60 With respect to patristic consensus, Keble is certainly representative of Tractarianism, while Trench fits more with Quantin’s description of the Protestant understanding of the Fathers, which was “not the consensum Patrum of Tridentine theology. Protestant authors maintained that, on most of all questions in dispute, it was impossible to determine a consensus in accord with the Vincentian rules, and that anyway, even if it were possible, this consensus would not be binding.” Quantin, The Church of England and Christian Antiquity, 55.

61 Keble, Sermons for the Christian Year, Part 2, 26-7.
In this case, Keble is content to identify what the “ancient writers” said of the two pence (it is not entirely clear exactly which writers he had in mind), going even so far as to comment on the inscription on them and the significance this has. There is something to be said about simplifying historical nuance to preserve the flow and force of a sermon, but in this case Keble’s “simplifying” is more like an obscuring of the witness of the early Church because his statement is just too bald. One should notice too, that Keble is not only commenting on the significance of the parable’s details that are given in Scripture, but also on extra-scriptural features: He is not just interested in the significance of two pence, but also in the inscription they both presumably bear. In short, Keble appeals to the authority of tradition and draws from other passages of Scripture to uncover the meaning of this image within the parable.

6 Trench on Authority and the Nature of Words

When it comes to authority, Trench sees it to reside within the inherent meaning of words rather than the intent of the human author, or even the direction of faithful interpreters such as the Fathers of the Church, whom Keble takes up so readily. For instance, in his introduction to On the Study of Words, Trench notes that

I am sure, at least, that for many a young man his first discovery of the fact that words are living powers, are the vesture, yea, even the body, which thoughts weave for themselves, has been like the dropping of scales from his eyes, like the acquiring of another sense, or the introduction into a new world; he is never able to cease wondering at the moral marvels that surround him on every side and ever reveal themselves more and more to his gaze.

62 The Greek word translated “pence” in Trench’s text is δηνάρια, in contrast to the δραχμὴν of Luke 15, of which Trench notes, “it must not be forgotten that the Greek drachma, the coin here named, had not, like the Latin denarius (Matt. xxii. 20), the emperor’s image and superscription upon it, but some device, as of an owl, a tortoise, or a head of Minerva.” Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, 387. Keble must know from Matthew 22 and the question about taxes that there is an inscription on the denarius. Here is a case then where he is using intertextuality to determine the subtleties of an image in Scripture before then proceeding to determine its meaning from that discovery.

63 Richard Chenevix Trench, On the Study of Words; English Past and Present (London: Dent, 1927), 1, 2.
Within the words themselves lurk truth and an introduction to a “new world” that is hidden in plain sight. Trench goes on, “But it is said just now that words often contain a witness for great moral truths – God having impressed such a seal of truth upon language, that men are continually uttering deeper things than they know, asserting mighty principles, it may be asserting them against themselves, in words that to them may seem nothing more than the current coin of society.” Not only do words take on a life of their own for Trench, not only do they have an inherent, objective meaning that may even thwart the intentions of those who are using them, but words are “sealed” by God in some sense. Tony Crowley’s assessment of Trench’s theory of language is that

For this theologian [Trench] language was to be the medium by which the original perfection and consequent debasement of humanity could be proved…. And given the further point that “we can always reduce the different meanings which a word has to some point from which they all immediately or mediately, proceed, [as] no word has primarily more than one meaning,” then it follows that it is possible to dig deeply into the history of a word to discover its original truth (as sealed by God) and the path of its consequent degeneration (as caused by the post-lapsarian imperfection of humanity).

Words, according to Trench, are providentially ordered – though their outer forms remain malleable – and this is vitally important to understand when approaching the Scripture, the Word. So it is true for Trench that God has given language – indeed particular words – and in

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64 For some more background see Tony Crowley, “Archbishop Trench’s Theory of Language: the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,” Standard English and the Politics of Language, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 43–76. After noting the distinctive British approach to linguistic study that focused on history, as opposed to the continental approach that favoured comparative philology, Crowley notes also that the British linguists in Trench’s time were primarily interested in words rather than syntax or sentence structure. Ibid., 51.

65 Trench, On the Study of Words, 6.

66 Crowley, Standard English and the Politics of Language, 52.

67 This is not to say that all words contain great moral truths, for just as language has the capacity to encapsulate something of the truth, it can also be perverted, as Crowley noted. Trench notes that this was the case in the way the adjective “religious” went from a reference to those in general who had their hearts turned toward God, to those who had taken vows in religious orders. This is fascinating because it shows that for Trench, word meaning is not dependent on usage but is inherent in the words themselves, even as they may be distorted. Trench, On the Study of Words, 8, 9. At first glance this may seem to contradict the deeper truths that are preserved in language, but Trench goes on to make clear, as humanity (man) has fallen from the “heights of original creation,” that “we need no more than his language to prove it. Like everything else about him, it bears at once the stamp of his greatness and of his
his providence he has given them a core meaning or truth. But that core – though solid and intact – is surrounded by a layer of supple, pliable material that can be formed for good or ill. It is a strange image; something like an avocado comes to mind, with its hard, resilient pit, surrounded by the soft fruit that can be pressed and bruised. So it is with Trench’s understanding of words, that they had been perverted and crushed in their outer layer by human perversity, but they never lose that God-given meaning at their core, for one can always rediscover this. On the other hand, the pliable aspects of words can be used to enhance and beautify that goodness which they already exhibit. Indeed, ordinary words are elevated and imbued with more significance when they are taken up in Christianity:

Nothing, I am persuaded, would more strongly bring before us what a new power Christianity was in the world than to compare the meaning which so many words possessed before its rise, and the deeper meaning which they obtained, so soon as they were assumed by it as the vehicles of its life, the new thought and feeling enlarging, purifying, and ennobling the very words which they employed.

68 According to Crowley, Trench’s theory of language is truly Platonic, and can be traced back to his Cratylus. The task for someone like Trench is then to uncover what the truth of a word is by stripping it of its history if that history has so corrupted it. What Crowley does not point out, however, is that Trench’s understanding of language, though influenced by Plato, was also indebted in large part to the Anglican poet and theologian Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Crowley, Standard English and the Politics of Language, 53-4. James C. McKusick notes that “As a member of the Coleridge circle, Trench was fully conversant with [Coleridge’s] works and deeply influenced by his ideas on the history of language. The Coleridgean view of words as ‘living powers’ runs as a leitmotif through Trench’s writing on language, particularly his book entitled On the Study of Words. This enormously popular work, which went through fourteen editions by 1872, consists mainly of examples of the knowledge and instruction contained in the history of individual words…. Trench also relies on Coleridge in his discussion of specific etymologies.” Further, McKusick goes on to write that, “Like Coleridge, Trench reveals a moralizing tendency in his etymological analyses, a tendency that, for better or worse, would later prove congenial to the compilers of the OED, despite their avowed scientific objectives.” James C. McKusick, “Coleridge and Language Theory,” Frederick Burwick, ed., The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Oxford Handbooks Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 584. Even the Platonic resonances in Trench’s theory of language are present in Coleridge’s work. For a general overview of this Platonic influence on Coleridge, see Douglas Hedley, “Coleridge as a Theologian,” 476-8, 481-3 in the above volume, or Douglas Hedley, Coleridge, Philosophy, and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 33-40. For a treatment of Trench that presents him in some contrast with Coleridge, where some connections are drawn between Max Müller and Trench, see Randall Craig, Promising Language: Betrothal in Victorian Law and Fiction (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 37-43.

69 Trench, On the Study of Words, 8.
What Trench is suggesting here is that Christian faith as it is given in Scripture has a creative thrust to it, one that deepens and broadens – transfigures even – the ordinary natural words that have already been given as gifts from God to all people. He notes in his discussion on Scripture that “we soon perceive how, by the Providence of God, a written word, be it of man’s truth or of God’s Truth, should have been charged with such important functions to fulfil,” as it is used by God in Scripture.\(^70\) Words are all divine because they originate from God, having been given to humanity by him. These same words however can become marred or tainted by human sinfulness; some words maintain their celestial glow more than others. Yet these words that simultaneously bear the marks of the divine and human sinfulness are actually ennobled as they are used in Scripture, so that an even deeper meaning is unleashed. For Trench, there is a distinction between words as such and scriptural words; both are divine, though that divinity is fully manifest in scriptural words in a manner in which it is not within other words.

Though Trench does not employ this image, perhaps it is useful to think of words in light of human bodies and the incarnation. All human bodies are divine insofar as they are created and sustained by God, bearing his image.\(^71\) These divine human bodies are also subject to the stains of sin, sickness, and death. Bodies can be twisted, bent, and disfigured, but despite their gnarled state they still maintain this original divinity. And in this respect Christ’s incarnate body is divine in the same way. Yet by taking on human flesh and bringing the fullness of God to dwell within this one body, Christ elevates the human body with his body into a sphere of holiness and nearness to God that would not have been possible save for Christ’s very life. I hope the analogy to Trench’s understanding of the role of words and their elevation within Scripture is obvious. For Trench words are all divine in their origin, but as they are employed within the Christian faith they enter a special sphere of holiness.

One further area of Trench’s thought that is worth noting is his ecclesiology. I have pointed out throughout this chapter the significant role that the Church Fathers play for both Keble and Trench, and also the way they have a normative influence for Keble only. In this respect, Keble

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\(^{70}\) Trench, *The Fitness of Holy Scripture*, 12.

\(^{71}\) I do not mean to wade into the discussion on the capacity for and the precise ways that humans do bear the image of God, but here I assume only that created bodies are relevant to understanding what “image bearing” is to some extent or another.
has a very high view of the Church, and sees its teaching to have more theological weight than does Trench. So how does Trench understand the Church? For Trench, the Church is tied inextricably up with the providence of God; indeed, he asserts that the main periods of Church history should be divided to “represent a different act in the solemn drama of divine Providence which is being enacted on the world’s stage.” Or, as he explains more fully that history is the record of the carrying out in time of a divine purpose for the knitting anew into one fellowship, under the headship of the Son of God, of all those who, receiving Him, do themselves become also sons of God. What other purposes beyond these the Church may exist to fulfil are only obscurely hinted in the Scriptures; and such, while we would not exclude, we as little dare to urge.

Trench views the Church primarily as an instrument or instantiation of the outworking of God’s will in the world. This is rooted in Scripture for Trench, and he is reticent about other purposes of the Church because of their comparably weak treatment in the Bible. Interestingly, Trench does not treat the Church as something that has an essence of its own, but rather as an expression of the Kingdom of God, or rather, the life of Christ in the world. But this does not mean it always teaches the truth. He writes,

The history of the Church is the history of the life of Christ in his members, not indeed without infinite faults, infirmities, shortcomings, sins, cleaving to those in whom that life is working; but, despite of all these, a prolongation of the life which He began upon earth, the history of a divine Society by Him founded, and which, strange to say, like an inverted tree, has its roots above and not below, in heaven and not on earth.

From here we can see that for Trench, even though he has a quite high view of the Church as it exists as the body of Christ, he recognizes too that it is flawed, not because of any lack in Christ, but because of human sinfulness. He does not have the same trust in the consensus of the Church

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73 Trench, *Lectures on Medieval Church History*, 8, 9.

74 Ibid., 10.
that Keble has, but rather Trench is concerned with the message and mission that God has entrusted to the Church; however the Church might fail, this divine prerogative remains intact. Because of this, Trench is able to rightly appreciate the gifts the Church brings to the world, while also remaining critical of the Church to some extent. In an insightful reflection on the Church, Trench writes,

Accept then, I would say in conclusion, with all reverence the fact that the Church militant, if in all ages a success, is also in all ages a failure. The success may be more evident in one age and in one land, the failure may be more marked in another; but tokens of this and of that will never be wanting... For us who believe the Church to be a divine foundation in the world, it must be a success, even as it shows itself to be such by many infallible proofs. For us who know that the treasure of God’s grace is contained in earthen vessels, it must be a failure no less, and imperfect embodiment of a divine idea. Let us boldly face this side of the truth no less than the other.  

For Trench, understanding the Church requires a balance; one must be open to its successes and failures, without minimizing one of these at the expense of the other. This recognition of the Church’s divine task and its broken witness is an essential feature in Trench’s ecclesiology. This is likely connected to his assumption of many of the insights from scriptural interpreters of the past, but also to his willingness to critique them for their extravagance. Compared to Keble, who is friendlier to his perceived universal consensus of the Church, Trench is readier to point out the wonderful strengths of the Church in dialectic with its constant failure. In any case, the purposes of God march on and are not thwarted.

7 Trench and Keble on Providence and Authority

In all of the preceding discussion on the interpretation of Scripture by the Church Fathers and the nature of words, one can see questions about providence emerging. For Trench, language and

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75 Trench, Lectures on Medieval Church History, 12-3.
words, especially the words of Scripture, are to be respected because of their status as gifts of providence. However, Trench also sees providence to be intimately woven into the most mundane events, and thus one can be sure, on Trench’s view, that providence is working out more crucial matters such as the formation of the canon. Trench also sees providence to be leading the Anglican Church toward its peculiarly evangelical vocation, and to be instrumental in the preparation of the heathen world for the Gospel. While providence necessarily remains mysterious, in Trench’s work it appears to reflect the reality of God’s activity in history – both in seemingly insignificant events and the more significant – leading humanity back to God in Christ. For Trench, then, providence is not only about God’s governance of the world, or his sustaining of creation, but his pull of all creation to Christ and his Gospel. The doctrine of providence is key to understanding Trench’s theory of Scripture, but it remains in the background of more precise theological discussions.

Keble’s understanding of providence appears very similar to Trench’s, though Keble differs in his willingness to read the providential significance of the events of history with more acuity. For Keble, to talk of God’s providence is to talk about anything God does at all. For instance, in just one book of sermons, Keble writes of providence as the force active in reminding the penitent of their past sins, situating certain people under the care of a given cleric, “placing” specific books in the Christian’s way, making the events recounted in the Old Testament have significance for the Church, restraining the violence of persecution, and providing both physical and spiritual nourishment to humankind. One can see that while Trench primarily thinks of providence in direct relation to the spread of the Gospel, Keble sees everything that happens to be an action or allowance of providence.

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77 Though I quoted Trench on this in the first chapter, “Trench and the Evangelicals,” it is worth noting again his discussion on the significance of the fourfold Gospels: “None will call this an accident, or count that the Providence which watches over the fall of a sparrow, or any slightest incident of the world, was not itself the bringer about of a circumstance which should have so mighty an influence on all the future unfolding of the Church.” Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 40.
78 Ibid., 130, 192.
The above discussion of providence is related to authority with respect to the interpretation of Scripture. Keble emphasizes patristic witness because it is part of God’s providential design, and while it is assumed by Trench, for him the focus is on the words of Scripture themselves. This is because in Trench’s view, the fulfillment of the purpose of a given word or words is when they are used in service of the Word. Trench speaks of “the attestations to God’s truth, the fallings in of our words with his unchangeable Word: for these, as the true uses of the word, while the other are only its abuses, have a prior claim to be considered.”

Another way of understanding Trench’s notion of authority versus Keble’s is by describing Trench’s understanding of language in Platonic terms. Trench is certainly no nominalist, because for him words participate in a deeper reality – they reflect more objective “forms” and thus derive their significance from this ontological relationship. For Trench – as for many nineteenth-century thinkers in England – language and words are given by God in an original language that then morphs, changes, and evolves over time. Part of this change is for the better and some is for the worse. Even without turning to a specific definition of the inspiration of Scripture, we can see that the words of Scripture – words elevated to the Truth of the Word – call for a certain kind of reading and special interpretive treatment. Trench sees that the Fathers recognize this, but for him they are unnecessary to establish it, only useful as venerable elder brothers in the exegetical tradition. For Trench, Scripture ought to be interpreted figurally because of the ontological status of its words, which are transfigured as they become part of the Word. To interpret in this way is only to carry his premises about Scripture to their logical ends.

8 Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, we can see that Trench’s exegetical practice converges with Keble’s to a considerable extent: they both refer to the Fathers functionally as a kind of authority. The difference between the two is that for Keble the Fathers are – in their consensus – a kind of lesser light to the authority of Scripture; they have some kind of substantive authority in their testimony independent of Scripture. For Trench, however, the words of Scripture themselves have

80 Trench, On the Study of Words, 60.
81 This is not to say that Keble is a nominalist, but Trench’s explicit outworking of his theory of language is enough to rule out nominalism and gesture toward something more “realistically” metaphysical.
authority that needs to be discovered. The Fathers are helpful guides here, skillful practitioners of reading Scripture rightly, but they do not have any sort of inherent authority of their own, only insofar as they offer directions to the truth that is present in the Bible. This along with the portrait of Trench’s work alongside Jowett and Simeon in the previous chapters is helpful in elucidating more fully his distinctive theology of Scripture and the way it ought to be interpreted.
Chapter 4
Trench the Orthodox

1 Orthodox Movement in the Nineteenth Century

In this chapter I synthesize what I have argued about Trench in the previous three chapters, narrowing in on his character as an interpreter of Scripture, and situating him both historically and theologically in a venerable tradition of interpretation. There are several ways to approach this, and the angle I will take is the conception of Trench as an “orthodox” thinker by his contemporaries.¹ Picking up on a cue given by a biographer of Trench, Bromley, about the designation given to Trench by his friends, that he was a “sound” or “orthodox” theologian, I will develop further his distinctive theological vision by outlining more fully how this applies to Trench’s doctrine of Scripture, especially in light of the previous chapters.² In this chapter I will also discuss the dogmatic presuppositions that at once inform and are informed by Trench’s reading of Scripture. Essentially, my argument is that what is unique to Trench is an amalgam of received beliefs about Scripture, a close reading of the Bible, and finally a deep knowledge of Church tradition, especially the ancient Fathers. It is not that these elements are missing from the Evangelical, Broad Church, and Tractarian streams of the Church, but they coalesce and hold together in Trench in a manner that sets him apart from each of these. In short, Trench has a comprehensive and coherent vision of Scripture and how it is to be read. I’ve used Bromley’s term “Orthodox” here simply as a moniker to capture something of this.³

¹ Although it ought to be clear from context, and from the fact that Trench lived in a time much less affected by globalization, that “Orthodox” does not here refer to the Churches of the Christian East but rather to a movement or collective within the Church of England.

² John Bromley notes, “As the friendship with Wilberforce grew Trench would come to be labelled a ‘sound’ or ‘orthodox’ churchman, a sad declension in the eyes of the more adventurous-minded ‘Apostles.’ Yet his intellectual interests were not shrinking into any narrow groove: the study of language and literature, and devotion to poetry, remained throughout his life a ruling passion, entitling him to a place among those distinguished clerics who formed a link during that century between the Church and the Humanities.” John Bromley, The Man of Ten Talents: A Portrait of Richard Chenevix Trench, 1807-86, Philologist, Theologian, Archbishop (London: S.P.C.K., 1959), 62. In this passage, the term “Apostles” refers to the Cambridge Apostles, a sort of intellectual club of students at Cambridge, of which Trench was a member. For more information on the Apostles see the introductory chapter.

³ There is some inconsistency in the capitalization of the term “Orthodox” in Trench’s time; indeed, it is not always clear in which sense the word is being used, whether to describe someone who holds beliefs consonant with the official doctrine of the Church of England, or to refer to the theological stream or movement of thinkers that were
In his introductory lecture on *The Fitness of Holy Scripture for Unfolding the Spiritual Life of Men*, Trench positions the work as an apologetic for the truth, which “will *always* be a sign which shall be spoken against. The forms of enmity may change; the coarser and more brutal accusations of one age may give place to subtler charges of another; but so long as an ungodly world exists, the enmity itself will remain, and will find utterance.”

Trench sees an influx of opposition against the truth in his time, specifically against the truth of Scripture. The heart of this attack is to treat Scripture like any other book, a book that might be discredited because there is insufficient historical evidence for one passage or another. What this attack misses, however, according to Trench, is the central question “whether the Christ whom the Church believes, whom not any one passage alone, but the collective sum of the Scriptures has delivered to us, be not the highest conceivable revelation of the Invisible God.”

To ask this is to point to the more fundamental question about the Scripture’s own witness: “we must pass into and unite ourselves with that which we would know, ere we can know it more than in name.” Trench’s rationale here for his defense of Scripture is one of the characteristics of an Orthodox view of Scripture. The Bible is naturally read Christologically, as a whole, and to understand it rightly requires one to give oneself up to it. In the following paragraphs I will offer some historical context for the Orthodox movement before placing Trench with it.

What exactly was an Orthodox churchman in Victorian England? Peter Nockles is the most helpful here for a generally accepted overview. He writes:

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deeply traditional. There is certainly some overlap between the two designations, but I will follow the pattern of capitalizing the “O” in “Orthodox” when it refers to the movement or is ambiguous, and use the lowercase when it is used as a standard adjective. Even more confusing, perhaps, is that both senses of the word can be applied to Trench.


5 Ibid., 8-9.

6 Ibid., 8.

7 Ibid., 15.

8 It almost goes without saying that before being High Church or Low Church, or even a member of the Church of England, to be a Victorian meant to grapple intimately with Scripture. Timothy Larsen points this out, writing that “the Scriptures were… a preoccupation in the other varieties of belief and unbelief, and thus across the whole range of Victorian thought. Victorian atheists gave their best and most sustained labours to wrestling with Scripture; Victorian Unitarians commended their faith as more biblical than orthodox; Victorian Quakers experienced the inner light as a text prompter; Victorian liberal Anglicans weakened their doctrine of Scripture without loosening their grip on it; and so one could go on. This study will also bring back into view the Bible’s place in marking the rhythm
Contemporary churchmen, then, came to see the label “Orthodox” as less indicative of a particular sub-division or “party” within the Church than was “High Church.” Many historians have taken up this usage, the phrase “Orthodox party” being most widely employed to denote adherents of a particular religious tradition in the pre-Tractarian Church of England. Some rightly use the two terms interchangeably, but others have given it their own, often partial and misleading, gloss, sometimes too rigidly separating the two.¹⁹

The idea here is that if classifying groups as part of the Tractarian or “High Church” party is problematic, it is even more so to class someone as belonging to the “Orthodox party.”¹⁰ Still, there is a spectrum and it serves a useful heuristic. Nockles goes on to say that “the Orthodox position was bounded by certain parameters and there was unity on certain essentials of the faith, but otherwise, there was no single, monolithic viewpoint.”¹¹ I am interested in addressing these “parameters” and “essentials of the faith” when it comes specifically to the place held by Scripture.

Beginning more broadly, one may look at the general shape of High Church approaches to Scripture, before moving to the more specific approaches identified with the moniker Orthodox. Stewart J. Brown writes helpfully of some of these general trends; he is writing of the religiously tumultuous period between 1859 and 1876, but I think his description is useful for the decades

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immediately prior as well. In his discussion of the encroaching liberalism that rejected the authority of Scripture, as well as new advances in biblical criticism and science, Brown notes:

Within the Church of England, with its claims to represent the spiritual aspect of national life, there was consternation over the widening gap between orthodox Christianity and these intellectual developments. The two main parties within the church – the High Church party and the Evangelical party – both seemed powerless to bridge this gap. The High Church party was firmly committed to the absolute authority of both the ancient apostolic church and of the Bible. The Evangelical, or Low Church party (as it was becoming known), while less committed to the authority of the church, was zealous in defence of the authority of Scripture as the infallible word of God. Both ecclesiastical parties were appalled by the sceptical spirit of the higher criticism, by the ethical questioning of Christian doctrines, by the rejection of eternal punishment (which seemed to threaten the foundations of morality), by the new developments in natural science, and by the calls for unrestricted intellectual freedom. Despite their differences on some issues, the High and Low Church parties shared a consensus that Scriptural authority was absolute, and that there could be no dialogue with those who rejected this authority.12

In this short passage Brown makes several insightful points about the culture of the Church of England in the Victorian period. One of the most obvious features is that regardless of which party one is thinking of, the Church of England was by and large biblicist in its outlook. The party divisions can be viewed as different paths to nuancing such biblicism. And just as both parties were united in their elevation of Scripture, so they were opposed to the societal influences that pushed the public toward scepticism, especially if these pushes were coming from rogue clergyman such as those involved with the publication of Essays and Reviews. The real distinction between High Church and Evangelical parties, according to Brown – and I think this generally is true in the writings of those who identify with one or the other – is that High Churchmen put more stock in the authority of the ancient Church than did Evangelicals, at least

in an explicit and tangible way. High Church theologians tended more to read Scripture through the Fathers, whereas Evangelicals sought to read Scripture more directly, rather than reading it through the mediation of the ancient Church. It is arguable whether or not they were successful, but this marks one significant, if general, difference.

If one presses more specifically for the Orthodox approaches to Scripture, one sees a continuation of this High Church theme. In many ways, the Orthodox understanding of Scripture, especially the way Trench expresses it in his work, is the standard approach that had taken root in the Church of England in previous generations. It is not that it was unanimously accepted – look only to the Deists of the eighteenth century – but despite those on the periphery who held more radical beliefs, there was a common usage of Scripture in the kind of parameters suggested by Nockles. Gerald Parsons paints with a broad brush in his analysis of the evolution of biblical criticism in the nineteenth century, noting,

The conventional account of the development of biblical criticism in Victorian Britain encompasses three principal stages. In the first, running from the 1830s to the mid-1850s, traditional belief in the authority, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Bible is challenged by early Victorian science – especially developments in geology – and by increasing interest in the knowledge of the work of German biblical scholars. In the second stage of the conventional account, lasting roughly from the Davidson case of the mid-50s to the Robertson Smith case of 1876-81, traditional belief and biblical criticism confront each other within the churches and the classic confrontation of “criticism versus faith” occurs. In the third stage, lasting from 1881 to the end of the century, as a result of the traumas of confrontation, and crucially as a result of the work of a later generation of more moderate critics, biblical criticism is “accepted by the churches.”

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13 M.A. Crowther offers some further detail. He writes, comparing High Churchmen and Evangelicals, “The High Church was equally insistent on the authority of Bible and Prayer Book, but relied on the authority of the Church to interpret them…. Both the old High Church and the Tractarians emphasised the authority of the Church, but whereas the old High Church tended to look no further back than the English Reformation, the Tractarians revived interest in the medieval Church. Both were more interested in Church organisation than the Evangelicals, who were more concerned with societies for practical and social ends.” M.A. Crowther, “Church Problems and Church Parties,” in Religion in Victorian Britain: IV Interpretations, ed. Gerald Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 1988), 13.

While I think that Parsons is correct in his description of the changing attitudes toward biblical criticism, the language he uses to describe it may be misleading. The truth is that to try to understand shifting Victorian attitudes about the integrity of Scripture by the lens of “infallibility” or “inerrancy” is to miss the point. The conventional understanding and use of Scripture was not based on some technical doctrine, but rather grew organically out of the theological meaning of the text itself. For example, when Trench is writing on Scripture, he is not setting out to defend a notion of inerrancy. Rather, he, along with many others, is interested in what the text means rather than a theory of its integrity. Since questions of inerrancy are not what Trench is seeking to answer, to try to understand him or many other Victorians by this lens is to obscure what they are actually writing about.

As an alternative to Parsons’s suggestion that the standard or conventional approach to the Bible was highlighted by these several doctrinal markers (authority, infallibility, etc.), I argue that it is more fitting to look at Victorian uses of Scripture, and in my study this is most notably Trench’s use of Scripture. Trench is not so concerned with discovering what really happened in a given narrative historically speaking, but with the theological significance of such a narrative. He reads Scripture theologically. Consider the parable of the good Samaritan. While it is true that Trench fills out the historical background of the narrative, it only serves as a canvas for his real work – looking at the theological significance of the parable, which he does by examining what the great interpreters of the past have had to say about it. This is a crucial point for understanding past voices in the interpretation of Scripture: Before one situates them with respect to modern theological concerns, one has to first understand their writing in its own right.

In sum, the Orthodox movement in the Church of England, at least with respect to the interpretation of Scripture, stands out as a holistic, Christological approach to the Bible that always involves the self. Finer points may be open to dispute, but this general orientation, the

The “Davidson case” mentioned here refers to the Irish non-conformist biblical scholar Samuel Davidson, who was forced to resign from his position at Lancashire Independent College because he rejected Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and admitted that errors prevailed in the text of the Old Testament. The “Robertson Smith” case refers to the Free Church of Scotland Old Testament scholar William Robertson Smith, whose writings cast doubt on the inspiration of Scripture. See Religion in Victorian Britain: III Sources, ed. James R. Moore (Manchester: Manchester University Press in association with the Open University, 1988), 146-6, 151-62.

15 See section 3.4.
orientation that Trench was defending, was one parameter to the movement. It is in many ways akin to premodern approaches to Scripture, and a carry-over from the general consensus in previous generations of the Church of England, though now having to give an account of itself in light of innovative biblical and scientific research. Broad Church thinkers such as those writing *Essays and Reviews* were looking more at the historical questions surrounding the Bible, whereas Tractarians were self-conscious about their ecclesial readings. Evangelicals tended to be less Christologically focused with the whole of Scripture, as they focused on the personal transformation that occurs through heeding the moral sense of Scripture. Orthodox thinkers such as Trench, not fitting neatly into these categories, carried on with their theological readings though their particular emphases shifted. Trench held to this basic Christological reading, which was shaped by his conservatism, traditionalism, and the cohesiveness of his vision.

2 Coleridge, Maurice, and Trench: Contrasts and Overlaps

To bring Trench’s position as an Orthodox churchman into greater relief, it will be helpful to draw attention to his friend and fellow churchman F.D. Maurice. Like Trench, he did not fit into the typical categorizations of Church parties, but diverged from Trench’s Orthodox leaning, often being classed as Broad Churchman.16 Something of their relationship can be traced in the published correspondence between the two in Trench’s memorials, but they were also connected through their time together at Cambridge, especially in their membership in the Cambridge Apostles.17 And though they had divergent theologies, especially when interpreting Scripture, Trench maintained a close relationship with Maurice.18 Beyond this, Trench and Maurice were

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16 I am not here suggesting that Maurice was an Orthodox Churchman, but only that biographically and intellectually he had much in common with Trench. Furthermore, though they shared several influences, which I explore below, Trench carried forward the “attachment to the sacraments, to patristic tradition, and to the English Reformation as a rediscovery of that inheritance” that was characteristic of pre-Tractarian Orthodox. Gareth Atkins, “‘True Churchmen’? Anglican Evangelicals and History, c.1770–1850,” *Theology* 115, no. 5 (2012), 342.


18 It is no surprise that Trench maintained an amiable friendship with Maurice despite their theological differences; he was known for his wide circle of friends, despite their eccentricities. For instance, Maurice notes how William Palmer treated John Sterling sternly because he thought his faith was being undermined; Maurice then goes on to reflect on the way Trench (and Hare) both maintained close relationships with Sterling despite all of this. I do not think this is an exceptional instance, but rather reflective of Trench’s ability to maintain good relationships with those with whom he disagreed. In Alexander Roper Vidler, *F.D. Maurice and Company: Nineteenth Century Studies* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1966), 240.
both deeply influenced by the thought of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Indeed, Coleridge’s thought played a significant role in how Maurice approached the Bible. As for Trench, references to Coleridge and his works appear throughout his memoirs, especially in his earlier years; Trench uses Coleridge’s thought to understand the French Revolution, extols Coleridge’s work above Carlyle and Hare, and recommends to his future wife Coleridge’s *Aids to Reflection* as a difficult but rewarding text that requires patience from the reader. Trench thought very highly of Coleridge’s poetry, especially “Kubla Khan,” and, in his work on Jesus’ parables, cites Coleridge’s *Literary Remains* to nuance a discussion on faith in the parable of the two debtors. And this is to say nothing of Trench’s use of Coleridge throughout *On the Study of Words*, about which I will say more below.

The common Coleridgean heritage shared by Trench and Maurice is especially evident in their conservatism, but also in their understanding of language. Stephen Prickett picks up on the

19 I have noted Trench’s relationship to Coleridge in section 4.2. Trench noted the influence that Coleridge had on Maurice in his discussion of the merger of the *Literary Chronicle* with the *Athenaeum*, where he wrote that “Maurice and that gallant band of Platonico-Wordsworthian-Coleridgean-anti-Utilitarians still keep with undivided sway at the helm.” Trench and Trench, *Letters and Memorials*, vol. 1, 10. Maurice wrote at length about his debts to Coleridge in the dedication to his masterful defense of the Church of England, *The Kingdom of Christ*. See Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ; or, Hints to a Quaker, Respecting the Principles, Constitution and Ordinances of the Catholic Church*, vol 1 (London: Rivington, 1842), v-xxxii.

20 Stephen Prickett sketches this influence in his discussion of the reception of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the nineteenth century. Prickett notes that Maurice, like Coleridge, saw that language – especially the language of Scripture – was both shaped by history and referred symbolically to divine reality. He writes that for Maurice, “History – and supremely Biblical history – shapes and conditions the way we interpret the present; language is simultaneously vehicle and symbol of this process. Thus, if the language of religion most clearly exemplifies the transcendent yearnings of all language, it is the more, not less, rooted in the historical consciousness of a particular period.” Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 131; Pricket later slightly rephrased this in Prickett, “F.D. Maurice: The Man Who Re-Wrote the Book,” 11. Though this sense of historical consciousness was to become determinative of other thinkers associated with the Broad Church movement, we can see a distinction between Trench and Maurice. For Trench, providence described the way God unveiled his inspired Scripture to further interpretive insight over time, for others like Maurice, human understanding progressively evolved as humans matured throughout history.

21 Trench and Trench, *Letters and Memorials*, vol. 1, 10, 38, 75. In fact, Trench even suggests that the *Aids to Reflections* has the same effect as reading St. Paul or St. John.


23 This should be cross-referenced with my discussion of Trench and language in section 3.6, for he and Maurice have a similar debt to Coleridge in this respect. On another note, Jeremy Morris points out the potentially surprising element of Broad Church conservatism in social and political matters that is indebted to the influence of Coleridge. This conservatism is exemplified in both Trench and Maurice, though their association with the Broad Church is
Coleridgean strain in Maurice’s thought, both with respect to his notions that “articulate knowledge is rooted in certainties and modes of awareness that extend far beneath consciousness to layers [of meaning] that are accessible to aesthetic rather than rational discursive forms of apprehension,” and also in his belief that “words develop progressively as they are used, constantly being adapted and changed to fit new situations, yet always laden with the freight of their past history. At the same time, they reach out from that immediate context towards something that is other and transcendent.”

This belief that language and knowledge are ontologically linked to what they reference was at the heart of the famous debate between Maurice and Mansel on the knowledge of God. Don Cupitt notes, for instance, that “Maurice believes that the basis of knowledge is a real ontological communion between knower and known. We can have and we can speak of such an experience in the case of God. Our talk of God is not metaphorical but refers directly to a genuine and conscious experience of him.”

Maurice and Trench both see language as participating in the nature to which it refers, yet also bearing upon it the imprint of history. It is pressured and shaped by humans, but it retains its divine core.

Jeremy Morris offers some helpful insight into both Trench’s and Maurice’s understanding of the nature of language in his discussion of Broad Church philology. He notes, “Though with varying emphases, all of these writers sought to steer a third course between two popular but extreme conceptions – the materialist notion that language was an artificial product, and the ‘pre-Adamic’ notion that language itself was revealed by God.”

Morris picks up this thread in another essay as well, noting that Maurice (like Coleridge and Trench) thought that theology and philology are contestable at best. One facet of such conservatism is a strong sense of nationalism that views the stable order of the state to be beneficial to all. This is part of the reason that thinkers like Maurice and Coleridge turned to the Church of England, because of its role is stabilizing the whole of England; Trench’s thought would align with theirs in this respect. Jeremy Morris, “The Spirit of Comprehension: Examining the Broad Church Synthesis in England,” Anglican and Episcopal History 75, no. 3 (2006), 429. See also Charles Richard Sanders, Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement: Studies in S.T. Coleridge, Dr. Arnold of Rugby, J.C. Hare, Thomas Carlyle and F.D. Maurice, Duke University Publications (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 15-6.

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25 Don Cupitt, “Mansel and Maurice on Our Knowledge of God,” Theology 73, no. 601 (July 1, 1970), 311.

were complementary because all literature was inspired, though the Bible most of all.\textsuperscript{27} Morris continues,

Language, in essence, for Maurice and these writers, was sacramental. Careful study of it could penetrate the surface of material reality to apprehend the metaphysical structure of the world. Yet this was always, intrinsically, a historical task. It required attention to the dense texture of human history, with a readiness to grasp the complex, multi-layered nature of historical process.\textsuperscript{28}

Morris draws out this careful nuance in the thought of Maurice and Trench (both drawing from Coleridge) that words themselves are what they signify, or rather, they participate in what they signify. Morris aptly describes this vision of language as sacramental, for it gives full due to the reality of history without mistaking the historical developments of words with their ontological definition.\textsuperscript{29} This more general conception of language held by Maurice is important because it colours his approach to the specific language of Scripture.

It also evident that Trench’s understanding of language is influenced by Coleridge in \textit{On the Study of Words}, wherein he credits Coleridge with opening up the minds of many young men to the importance of carefully examining the meaning of words. Trench also praises Coleridge for drawing out the nuances of various words that are often wrongly thought to be synonymous, as

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\item[28] Morris, \textit{F.D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority}, 49.
\item[29] The idea that language is “sacramental” in this context might be illustrated by looking at the sacrament of baptism as it is understood throughout the historical churches (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Mainline Protestant). While the ritual of baptism may differ across the traditions in many of its aspects, its essential symbolic action is recognized to be efficacious as long it is performed within certain parameters (in the triune name, for example); baptism retains its sacramental character despite differences in practice. Thinking about baptism sacramentally allows one to see that on the one hand, it is not a purely spiritual event taking place in the abstract, but on the other hand neither is it a mere physical ritual. Within the sacrament of baptism, real physical entities that have a concrete history (for example, the font, the water, the presider), signify, and indeed even participate in, the spiritual event that they represent. In a similar way, for Coleridge, Maurice, and Trench, language is sacramental in the sense that words each develop in their own concrete, historical fashion, but they are able to convey something of the ontological depth to which they are connected. Language is thus neither mere historical artifact, nor is it an immediate, exact instantiation of the ideas it communicates, but rather it retains some ontological weight along with its shape in history.
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well as his advice about understanding words by visualizing their constitutive parts. Trench refers to Coleridge directly in his discussion on the importance of using words accurately, especially religious words, writing, “Nowhere perhaps is accuracy in this matter more vital than in words having reference to, and designating, religious truths; for such words, as Coleridge has well observed, are never inert, but constantly exercise an immense reactive influence on those who employ them, even as they diffuse around them an atmosphere, which those who often hear them used unconsciously inhale.”

This calls to mind the idea of the sacramental character of language that both Maurice and Trench inherited from Coleridge. Especially when it comes to religious discourse, words are not arbitrary signs, but they are endued – despite their historical origins – with an ontological character that exudes beyond the intention of the one using them. This explains the fascination with words and language that Maurice and Trench picked up from Coleridge; not any word will do because it “gets the idea across.” Words retain something of their ontological root even if they are not immutable, thus making the selection of specific words deeply important.

On another note, Maurice, like Trench, did not sit easy with the traditional categories of his day; neither were strongly identified with the Tractarians, Evangelicals, or Broad Churchmen. Both stood apart from these classifications, yet remained on genial terms with their contemporaries (though Maurice did have his critics), while also enjoying vast amounts of influence. This much is true, and yet despite drinking from many of the same theological springs, they were formed in two very distinct directions. Shortly, I will go on to describe Trench’s character as an interpreter of Scripture as deeply conservative and traditional. The same cannot be said about Maurice, at least in the same sense. Furthermore, Maurice has not suffered from the dearth of scholarly treatment that we find with Trench; significant works have been written on his theology more broadly, but within these there have also been substantive discussions of his interpretation of Scripture more specifically.

30 Trench, On the Study of Words, x-xi, 186, 34.
31 Ibid., 117.
32 For instance, see Arthur Michael Ramsey, F.D. Maurice and the Conflicts of Modern Theology: The Maurice Lectures, 1948 (Wipf and Stock, 2011), 82–96; Vidler, F.D. Maurice and Company, 138–60; and probably the most substantive work on Maurice’s theology, Torben Christensen, The Divine Order: A Study in F.D. Maurice’s Theology (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 145–60. For a look a Maurice’s use of the Old Testament, see J.W. Rogerson and
One of the most striking facts about Maurice’s work is how much of it deals explicitly with interpreting the Bible. While his commentaries and sermons prove useful for understanding the way he actually exegeted passages of Scripture, the rich account of the Bible given in the second volume of his apologetic for the Church of England, *The Kingdom of Christ*, illuminates his interpretive theory. In the first place, Maurice brought a basic conservative disposition to the text. Essentially Maurice believed that one should accept the standard beliefs in the Church about the Bible unless one has good reason to doubt them. He writes,

> If they will resolutely hold fast that which they have felt and ascertained in their own lives to be true; if they will say, “This we have learnt and received; the Bible taught it us, and we cannot give it up for any arguments –,” I believe their position is a safe and impregnable one. It is not a position of prejudice, it is a reasonable and sound position; it is founded upon the first and wisest maxim of ethical philosophy, Keep what thou hast; add to it if thou canst; but if thou wishest to realize more, never let anything which thou hast realized be snatched away from thee. My fear is that few people in our day are likely to be content with this position.33

It is this basic orientation toward the status quo of the faith that Maurice thinks the Christian interpreter ought to take for granted. And it is precisely this that he suggests all students ought to do with great works of literature, including the Bible.34 One can only be critical of a work once one has started to read and teach it. In this sense, Maurice is very close to Jowett in that he thinks Scripture ought to be read as other books are read, with appreciative and critical eyes, but only after one has recognized their value and worth; it will do no good to chop the Bible up into parts the way historical critics have, any more than one would divide up a novel or a great poem to study its discrete parts.35 Rather, great books are to be taken as a whole first, and the rule for

33 Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, vol 2, 235.
34 Ibid., 237.
35 Vidler picks up on this with respect to Maurice’s attitude to biblical criticism in Vidler, *F.D. Maurice and Company*, 141-2.
Scripture should be the same as with other texts.\textsuperscript{36} Maurice’s exhortation is to focus on learning the Bible more deeply first, for critics have jumped too quickly to analysis and thus have missed the real lessons of the Bible. He goes on,

I perfectly agree, therefore, with the Rationalist, that to talk as some do of our right to sit in judgment upon all other books, and of the duty of submitting our judgments to the Bible, is not practical or reasonable. If we think that in reading Cicero or Shakspeare our proper position is that of judges, I am quite certain that we shall not be able to think otherwise when we study the Scriptures. And I am equally certain that while we do fancy that we are judges of Cicero or Shakspeare we shall not understand them. The posture of children or learners is the true profitable posture in all cases. It is not safe to propose to ourselves the end of being judges in any case. It is not safe for our minds generally, it is most unsafe for the judging faculty itself.\textsuperscript{37}

It seems that Maurice is willing to concede that if we are to judge all other books, then the Bible is to be equally judged. There is a problem, however, and that is not with a lack of respect for Scripture, but rather a judgmental spirit that could keep us from learning anything from any text. It is interesting that Maurice points to the ideal posture of a child, for it calls to mind the word of Jesus, that “…unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

I mentioned earlier that Maurice does not begin with the same conservative approach to Scripture as Trench’s, or at least not in the same sense as Trench. The significant difference is that while Trench receives the Church of England’s traditional understanding of Scripture as authoritative, he takes this as more than an apt place to start, as does Maurice. Rather, for Trench, as we shall see more below, the conviction that Scripture interrogates the reader (and not vice versa) is a more fundamental principle that one ought to hold to with some strength, not merely until one has reason to believe otherwise. Maurice is conservative because it is useful enough, and is open

\textsuperscript{36} Maurice, \textit{The Kingdom of Christ}, 239, 241-2.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 253.
to refutation if the right “evidence” presents itself, whereas Trench relies on the conservative approach to Scripture taken by the Church of England because he thinks it is true.

To explore Maurice’s thought further, it is important to note that not only did he approach Scripture with this sense of child-like trust, but also with a theological conviction that Scripture was the revelation of God. J. W. Rogerson notes that this was part of Maurice’s rejection of *Essays and Reviews*, because many of the essays sought to envision a record of progressive education about God wherein the old could be laid aside for the new, whilst Maurice – not rejecting the progressive nature of Scripture necessarily – focused on the fact that throughout that canon, God was the one educating humanity in a way that remained “a word of God for contemporary readers.”

In many ways, Maurice has a high view of Scripture, as Christensen illustrates in his argument that “Maurice accepted the entire Bible as true. He was convinced that it narrates how, through His acts in a particular history, God revealed Himself to be the Redeemer and the Deliverer, the One who seeks man to save him and wars against the foes of His creation.”

On the other hand, though Maurice really did believe the Bible was God’s communication, he was reticent to offer a theory of interpretation. He notes, “For the Bible will not allow me to have any faith in it apart from faith in God, and whatever I find to be his way of training me and my race, that I hold to be the right way, and the way in which we may be trained to all goodness and all truth. I do not want to lay down a scheme or chart of the road in which it is fitting we should be led; that, I think, is presumption.”

He was not willing, however, to separate the language of Scripture from its ideas, and noted the mysterious complexity by which God speaks through the particular words of Scripture while also allowing its universal impact. Contemplating this idea, Maurice reflects,

> I have no notion of inspired thoughts which do not find for themselves a suitable clothing of words. I can scarcely, even in my mind, separate the language of a writer, from his meaning. And I certainly find this difficulty greater in studying a book of the Bible than in studying any other book. The peculiarities of its language seem to me strangely

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significant. And yet its greatest peculiarity of all, if I may be pardoned the solecism, is its universality, its capacity of translation into any dialect which has a living and human quality, which is not merely the echo of passing impressions and the utterance of animal necessities.  

In short, then, Maurice started with a basic conservatism toward the received views of Scripture that were standard in the Church of England; he accepted Scripture as a whole and viewed it primarily theologically rather than merely a record of the Divine’s interaction with a primitive people. Furthermore, Maurice, drawing from Coleridge, honoured the language of Scripture itself in the particular, while also seeing that this particularity was connected to something more universal. Insofar as Maurice went with this conservative view of Scripture, he was similar to Trench. All of this said, however, Maurice did not share the designation as an Orthodox churchman that others gave to Trench; though both figures could not be pigeonholed into the prevailing categories of churchmanship, they had significant theological differences between them, even regarding Scripture. Maurice had criticisms of the traditional reception of Scripture and its reading that Trench did not make.

Alec Vidler was right to say “According to Maurice, the Bible is itself one of the signs of the kingdom of Christ, and it also enables us to interpret the other signs. It reveals the divine constitution of man.” It is especially important to note, however, that for Maurice the Bible is only one such sign. Expanding upon this belief, Christensen writes,

While unreservedly accepting the authority of the Bible, Maurice opposed the view that it witnesses to an exclusive history of revelation. He could assert and use everything the Bible records on the sole condition that every intimation of the exclusive and particular is discarded. Dr. Ramsey was, therefore, mistaken in maintaining that the characteristic

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41 Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 245-6. The idea that the language of the Bible is inseparable from its meaning and at the same time is translatable to other languages is an example of Maurice’s (and Trench’s for that matter) theory of language being expressed. For them, the ontological significance of the words of Scripture must be carried forward by precise language that participates in the same ontological reality despite its differing historical origin. It is not just the outward relations of words that need to be considered when translating, but their inner meaning as well.

feature of Maurice’s view of the Bible is that he considered it a record of a “special sort of history,” which in its uniqueness may be contrasted with the history of the rest of the world. It is indeed this very attempt to maintain “the uniqueness of the Biblical history” that Maurice so vigorously opposed: “It has been a miserable part of our apologetic system to set up Sacred History as a kind of rival to Profane; to treat one as if it concerned God, and the other as if it were merely of the earth.”

Maurice breaks with tradition here in his unwillingness to affirm the special place that Scripture plays as a unique and sufficient revelation of God. For example, Davies notes in his discussion of *The Kingdom of Christ* that Maurice is willing to agree with George Fox, that “the Living Word, dwelling within each man, is superior to Scripture. The doctrine of the essential connexion between man, as man, and the Living Word, he reaffirms to be involved in the very idea of Christianity and of a Christian Church.” This kind of affirmation does not sit well with the orthodoxies of the time, and despite his insistence on the authority of Scripture elsewhere, it is not difficult to see why Maurice was a controversial figure.

To sum up, an overview of Maurice’s theology of Scripture and of the way it ought to be interpreted is in order. Though his consistency may be questionable, as it may be in any thinker with voluminous work, the following quote from his commentaries on John’s epistles proves useful. Maurice’s approach to Scripture in a nutshell is that

…the Bible may be read as a continuous history, and that it is a history of the unveiling of God to the creature to whom he has made in his image. I have tried to show you this by taking separate books in the New Testament, and examining them chapter by chapter, verse by verse. I have tried to show it you by beginning at the beginning of the Old Testament, and tracing the course of its narratives. I have tried to show it you by comparing the Old Testament with the New. I have not used any arguments to prove that the book was divine or was worthy of our attention. If it was divine and worthy of our attention, I thought it would make good its claims for itself, thought I could not make

43 Christensen, *The Divine Order*, 151.

them good. All I wanted was that we should find out what it is that it was saying to us… What I chiefly desired was, that I might put myself as little as possible between you and the revelation which I was sure the book contained.45

One can see several facets of Maurice’s theology coming to the fore here. First, his emphasis on the narrative of Scripture that must be kept backgrounded to more in-depth discussions of particular passages. This is related to his second point, that the Old and New Testaments are connected through such a narrative, though they may be dissimilar in many respects. And finally, the interpreter of Scripture is not tasked with defending the Bible or giving an apologetic for its divinity. Rather, the task of the interpreter is to present the story of Scripture as clearly as possible in order that his or her hearers may recognize the special character of the Bible for themselves. This is because that special character is already assumed by the interpreter and she trusts that, given the Bible’s nature, it will strike those to whom it is presented without any need for preamble. In what Maurice affirms here, he would fit within the parameters of Orthodox churchmanship and sounds similar to Trench. There are major divergences, however, and this helps to bring Trench’s own position to the fore.

While Trench and Maurice would affirm much the same truths about Scripture, it is what Maurice is unwilling to affirm about it that keeps him from following Trench in the more traditional ways of reading Scripture that were so common in the Church of England’s past. Most notably, Maurice’s reticence to affirm the exclusivity of the Bible is paramount. Reticence to offer a theory of inspiration is one thing, but in suggesting that the Bible is merely one inspired work among many (even if it is the most intensely inspired), he fails to do justice to Scripture’s unique character, neglecting to note that it differs not only in quantity of inspiration but in quality as well. Further, while Maurice’s desire to let the Bible speak for itself shows that he views it highly, his unwillingness to make affirmations about its nature leaves his theology of Scripture underdeveloped. Trench too was only trying to reaffirm what Scripture teaches about itself in *The Fitness of Holy Scripture*, but he did the further work of articulating a synthesis of his findings from the whole of Scripture that was congenial to the tradition in the Church of

England to which he was heir. In his desire not to say too much, it seems that Maurice in fact said too little, or at least too little to be received as a thoroughly Orthodox thinker the way that Trench was. Trench’s outworking of the doctrine of Scripture led to a more thorough and thus cohesive vision than Maurice was willing to give.

In the past few paragraphs I have tried to show that though two thinkers may not fit into the standard theological and/or ecclesiological categories of the nineteenth century, it does not follow that they come to the same conclusions. Though Trench and Maurice both studied at the same college, though they both read the same philosophy, enjoyed the same circle of friends, and even transcended (or perhaps escaped) some of the theological tribalism that was prevalent at the time, they arrived in very different destinations. Though I have offered a brief and partial sketch of the domain that Maurice occupied as theologian and interpreter of Scripture, I want to now delve more deeply into the specific character of Trench’s thought in this respect.

3 Trench’s Scriptural Conservatism

All of the preceding is only to say something of the general movements with which Trench can be associated. It is important to situate him in just this way, but these general observations and remarks, while true, only serve as an entry point into the more specific and concrete discourse about Trench himself. In the previous chapters I have looked at Trench in relation to Simeon, Jowett, and Keble respectively; I will now summarize his similarities with each. I have chosen to use the term “Orthodox” in my description of him in order to keep with the symmetry of the previous chapters and to capture something of the deeply traditional vision that Trench has. I will do this by noting three characteristics of his thought, which, though implicitly present in previous chapters in various ways, now must be described in more detail: Trench’s conservatism, Augustinian traditionalism, and finally, the cohesiveness of his visions.

First, I will look at Trench’s theological conservatism, especially how this shapes his exegesis. I have already sketched the way Trench’s scriptural conservatism was based on conviction, whereas I have shown that Maurice’s was more based on utility. Second, I will turn to Trench’s traditionalism; here I mean to show that Trench sees himself to be a part of a school of thought that has historical continuity. To be sure, there are many traditions with which one might associate him (such as Platonism, or a certain Coleridgean tradition), so I will look specifically at the Augustinian thought that he has carried forward. This is a strain that is largely absent from
Maurice’s work as I described it above. Finally, I want to discuss the third and subtest of these characteristics, namely, the cohesiveness of Trench’s theological vision, most notably his vision of Scripture. Without over-defining Scripture or describing it too narrowly, Trench was able to articulate a compelling and full vision of Scripture that stands out for its completeness, especially when compared to the more intentionally vague direction that Maurice went. I will discuss more fully these three characteristics below, beginning with Trench’s theological conservatism.

While there are various perspectives on what constitutes theological conservatism, several factors are central to the concept. The kind of theological conservatism I will be referring to is of a distinctly Protestant character. As with the preceding chapters, I will be focusing especially on the doctrine of Scripture. Generally speaking, to be a theologically conservative Protestant when it comes to Scripture is to see it as authoritative, true, and necessary. Trench can

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46 In their reconsideration of theological conservatism in contemporary American society, Hempel and Bartkowski offer a helpful overview of the scholarship on the same in Lynn M. Hempel and John P. Bartkowski, “Scripture, Sin and Salvation: Theological Conservatism Reconsidered,” Social Forces 86, no. 4 (July 20, 2008): 1647–1650. I realize that one may question the aptness of applying a study of American conservatism to a Victorian figure; there are certainly many cultural differences. However, even taking these into consideration, I think the theological themes that are prevalent in descriptions of American theological conservatism in the twenty-first century map nicely onto the theological conservatism of figures like Trench in nineteenth-century England.

47 Though it may be in vogue in some contemporary circles to speak of Anglicanism as “reformed and catholic” rather than Protestant, the impetus behind much of this thought is the result of the successes of the Oxford Movement and its influences. Certainly, in Trench’s time, especially in Ireland, the Anglican Church was — save for those associated with the Tractarians — very self-consciously Protestant in its theology. As for the Protestant character, I concur with Alec Ryrie’s assessment that “In the seventeenth century, those implicit tensions would emerge into the open and lead to the development of something called Anglicanism. But if there is one clear consensus in recent studies of the English Reformation, it is this. The English Reformation was a Reformation, indeed a Reformed Protestant, a Calvinist Reformation.” Alec Ryrie, “The Reformation in Anglicanism,” The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 39. In Trench’s setting within the Church of Ireland, it was indeed a Protestant Anglicanism (of one form or another) that prevailed, despite some High Church connections with the Oxford Movement. Peter Nockles, “Church or Protestant Sect? The Church of Ireland, High Churchmanship, and the Oxford Movement, 1822-1869,” The Historical Journal 41, no. 2 (1998): 457–493.

48 In a recent study of biblical conservatism in the Church of England conducted in 2013, Andrew Village described a conservative understanding of Scripture in the following manner: “Conservative beliefs vary but are commonly derived from the Reformation ideas of the necessity, authority, sufficiency and perspicuity of Scripture…. Doctrines of inerrancy and infallibility refer to ways in which the Bible is understood to be true, and these have made literalism the default mode of interpretation. Although the detailed theology of Reformed thinkers does not necessarily shape the beliefs of most worshippers, those in conservative Protestant traditions generally believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God, authoritative for all matters of faith and conduct, which contains sufficient and exclusive truth for salvation. It is considered to be a true account of events recorded, and to reveal universal truths that are evident to those who have faith.” Andrew Village, “Biblical Conservatism and Psychological Type,” Journal of Empirical Theology 29, no. 2 (December 6, 2016), 138.
be said to meet these criteria in his various writings, as I have so far discussed. And in this conservative approach to Scripture more generally he was not alone. This is illustrated by the lively response to the controversial methods of interpretation that were propounded in *Essays and Reviews*. Josef Altholz notes, for example, that of the one hundred and forty or so replies to *Essays and Reviews*, many together made the point that if one is to concede that the Bible is not the Word of God, but only contains it, then one cannot easily determine which parts are in fact truly divine, and so once having started down this road, there is no end in sight. Interestingly, Altholz also notes that many (but not all) of the replies were content to only affirm the Bible as the Word of God, and preferred to remain reticent about a specific theory of inspiration. Save for the more radical Broad Churchmen in the 1860s, there was then a certain commonplace assumption that Scripture was authoritative, because it was the Word of God.

Though Trench shared these tacit assumptions, there was a sense in which his scriptural conservatism was distinct, and this distinctiveness is readily visible when his views are compared with the contemporaries I have explored in the past few chapters. Jowett’s writing exhibits the avant-garde approach to Scripture that was so odious to the mainstream Church; it caused such a stir because it challenged so much that was taken for granted, even across the spectrum of churchmanship. What Jowett espoused in “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” at least in the context of Victorian England, was innovative, challenging, and paradigm-shifting. The point from which he departed most notably from the status-quo scriptural conservatism in the Church of England was his rejection of infallibility. This is not to say anything of the way Jowett was willing to dismiss parts of the Old Testament because of the more “enlightened” stance of the New. Maurice had to reject Jowett’s contribution to *Essays and Reviews* on these grounds.

Trench, in contrast, assumed Scripture’s providential ordering, so that even what appeared to be overlaps in Gospel parables, for instance, were shown to be divinely orchestrated nuances. Trench compares the parable of the hid treasure to the pearl of great price, pointing out,

> The second parable repeats what the first has said, but repeats it with a difference; they are each the complement of the other: so that under one or other, as finders either of the

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pearl or of the hid treasure, may be ranged all who become partakers of the blessings of the Gospel of Christ. Of these there are some who feel that there must be an absolute good for man, in the possessing of which he shall be blessed and find the satisfaction of all his longings; who are therefore seeking everywhere and inquiring for this good.... Such as are compared to the finder of the hid treasure, who stumbled upon it unawares, neither expecting nor looking for it.\textsuperscript{50}

It is evident here that Trench sees the importance of the truthfulness of Scripture in all of its parts. This has something to do with the doctrine of infallibility. Because Trench believes Scripture to be true, he is able to look at parables that are quite similar and see that, in their respective structures and shapes, these parables express two complementary but distinctive truths. The parables present two types: there is the merchant who actively seeking for the truth in Christ, and there is the finder of the treasure, who being passive, is surprised by the revelation of the truth of Christ.

This observation is an important illustration to Trench’s conservatism precisely because the observation itself was so unoriginal. In fact, he credits both Grotius and Bengel for making similar comments. Here Trench could have worked to be innovative, searching for novel interpretations, but instead he clearly set forth a much older view. Surely this is tied to his traditionalism, which I will look at in more detail shortly. The point I am making here is not merely that Trench is content to reinforce the beliefs of earlier generations, but rather that it is only logical to do so given the premise of Scripture’s truthfulness.

How is Trench’s conservatism unique, then, if this only illustrates something quite commonplace? It is side by side with Keble, Simeon, and Maurice that we see how Trench has a view of Scripture that is more distinct.

When reading anything by Keble, one feels the weight of his theological conservatism. Whether it is his castigation of governmental interference in ecclesial affairs voiced in his “Assize Sermon” or the call to return to a more venerable line of exegesis in his tract \textit{On the Mysticism Attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church}, he seems to stand staunchly against innovation.

\textsuperscript{50} Trench, \textit{Notes on the Parables of Our Lord}, 123.
and tendencies to depart from the established pattern of the Church.\textsuperscript{51} Yet these very attempts to return to a theology and practice that was much older, rooted in previous centuries of the Church, were viewed by many to be a radical departure from the standard teaching of the Church of England.\textsuperscript{52} The Oxford Movement was viewed as an innovation or a perversion by those who held the Reformation in a positive light. This was because the Oxford Movement sought to minimize such Reformational influences that were read in the Prayer Book, or most especially in the Thirty-Nine Articles. And so, in one sense, someone like Keble is deeply conservative in his desire to return to a scriptural vision that was once arguably commonplace, but in the way he bypassed more recent history, as well as the Reformation, he alienated many in the Church of England. To compare this to Trench, I would suggest that although both he and Keble are deeply conservative in their own ways, Trench’s conservatism is far tamer, firmly within the bounds of his context.

Simeon too is scripturally conservative, in that he has an equally high view of Scripture and would hold the Bible to be entirely true. However, one of the more evident differences between the two thinkers is that Trench has more thoroughly imbibed the tradition of the Church, and so has a conservatism that includes a deep ecclesial character. Trench is aware of the nuances of biblical scholarship, of philology, and biblical geography. He is more familiar with the traditional interpretations of the Church, drawing heavily from patristic and Reformed sources, and also from medieval thinkers and Church of England divines. It is no surprise that one theologian should be more indebted to one mode of thought than another, but Trench’s learning is vast in many directions. Simeon has a very intimate first-hand knowledge of Scripture and like Trench makes the assumptions about its truthfulness that their mainstream contemporaries make. Simeon, however, does not situate this conservatism within a broader tradition, whether


\textsuperscript{52} At least, this was the initial reaction in the Church of England. Bethany Tanis treats this initial reaction against and subsequent warming to the Oxford Movement in Bethany Tanis, “Diverging Paths: Fin-de-Siècle Britishness and the Oxford Movement,” \textit{Anglican and Episcopal History} 77, no. 3 (2008), 313. Though there was a greater acceptance of the Movement in later years, Andrew Atherstone shows that even a century after Keble’s great “Assize sermon,” there was quite a lot of opposition to the celebration of the Oxford Movement centenary. Andrew Atherstone, "Evangelicals and the Oxford Movement Centenary" \textit{Journal of Religious History}, vol. 37, iss. 1 (2013), 98-117.
academic or ecclesiological, and so he appears to have more of a conservatism that intentionally avoids reference to interpreters of the past than the kind of studied approach that is evident in Trench’s thought.

Before moving on to Trench’s traditionalism, I want to compare his conservatism to that of Maurice. Once again, Maurice, along with Trench, accepts the standard approach to Scripture received in the Church of England. It is only in Maurice’s unwillingness to offer a thorough affirmation of the uniqueness of Scripture that he diverges from Trench. Maurice was content to affirm many truths about Scripture, but his unwillingness to affirm the exclusivity of Scripture, or more to the point, his willingness to affirm that other works of literature share the same character as Scripture (if only to a lesser degree) moved him away from the Orthodox position that Trench held.

To summarize then, Trench has a conservatism when approaching Scripture that is at once quite common and similar to his contemporaries in its general shape. However, he differs from some other conservatives in the moderation of his views, in their evident situatedness within much broader frameworks, and in his willingness to offer a defense of the uniqueness of Scripture.

4 Trench’s Scriptural Traditionalism: An Augustinian Heritage

Related to, but independent of, Trench’s theological conservatism is his traditionalism. Many in the Church of England could be described as traditionalists in their unflinching support for a particular theological vision that has roots in the past. Because of this, to describe Trench as a traditionalist is quite vague; it indicates that he was not an innovator, but it says little about the specific traditions to which he was heir. I am proposing that one tradition figures largely in Trench’s work, and that he consciously stands in line with it. The traditionalism that I have in mind is Trench’s Augustinianism.

I argue that Trench’s theology can be best be described as Augustinian. This is significant because many Anglicans in the nineteenth century were not true to their Augustinian roots. As Mark Elliot reminds us, though the Victorian period was steeped in patristic influence by way of the Oxford Movement, it was “was more ‘Latin patristic’ – as Westcott would complain to Hort
Trench’s Augustinianism is interesting because he remained in harmony with the theological character of the historical Church of England (which is connected to the Book of Common Prayer). It is arguable that the Church of England has a distinctive Augustinian influence. Drawing on primary sources by Augustine, as well as more recent secondary literature discussing his interpretive moves, I suggest that Trench is indeed a faithful heir to the tradition. Trench is especially indebted to St. Augustine’s theology with respect to his interpretation of Scripture, and this connection was instrumental in shaping Trench’s overall scriptural vision. One of the more noteworthy features of Trench’s broad learning in the tradition of the Church is the fact that none of this breadth was prescribed for those training to be ordained. In fact, as John Rogerson points out, compared to a country like Germany, English theological training was very meagre. Stewart J. Brown describes the education requisite for


54 There are plenty of examples to draw from here. For instance, Michael Wheeler writes of the way Augustine was championed by many Victorian High Churchmen in their discussion of the Samaritan Woman in the account of the woman at the well in John 4. See Michael Wheeler, St. John and the Victorians (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 131. Interestingly, William Cunningham makes the case that the Church of England’s teaching on human freedom is the purest representation of Augustine; he writes that “the doctrine [of the Freedom of the Will], so subtle and so profound, has never been cordially accepted throughout Christendom: it might indeed be almost said to be the distinctive mark of the English Church that so many of her leaders have sought to reproduce and perpetuate the very teaching of the African Doctor.” William Cunningham, S. Augustine and His Place in the History of Christian Thought (London: Clay, 1886), 105. James Spalding notes the Augustinian influence throughout the whole of the Episcopal prayer book in James Field Spalding, The Teaching and Influence of Saint Augustine: An Essay with Particular Reference to Recent Misapprehensions (New York: James Pott, 1886), 104-5. Edward Cutts argues that the Church of England has its Augustinian heritage by way of Calvin’s theology, which was so influential during the Reformation, even if it was a distortion of what Augustine intended, in his view. Edward Lewes Cutts, Saint Augustine (New York: E. & J.B. Young, 1888), 211. Finally, even Trench himself notes Augustine’s influence on the Church of England’s catechism and Articles of Religion. Richard Chenevix Trench, Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, Drawn from the Writings of St. Augustine, with an Introductory Essay on Augustine as an Interpreter of Scripture (London: Kegan, 1886), xi. I am not going to argue that the Church of England was somehow especially Augustinian in comparison to other Churches, but I do think it is significant that many Victorians perceived it to be so, and thus, Trench must be read in this context.

55 Rogerson speculates as to why this was the case, suggesting that English incarnation-centred theology was simply unremarkable. He writes, “the whole Protestant German theological tradition has been far more creative than in England, with a readiness to reinterpret theology around what is seen as its centre – justification by faith – in radical ways. There is a tradition of theological giants in whose shadows German Old Testament scholars worked: Schleiermacher, Rothe, Ritschl, Herrmann, Troeltsch, to name only a few. In England, the incarnation rather than justification has been the centre of theology, and for much of the present century, the incarnation was seen as the culmination of a process in history guided by God. Although this allowed the accommodation of the Wellhausen position, it did not encourage radical speculation.” J.W. Rogerson, Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany, Issues in Religion and Theology (London: SPCK, 1984), 292. Furthermore, John Tomlinson points out that from 1750 to 1850 the degrees earned by those who would go on to be clergy were just as much a reflection of social status as it was intelligence. John Tomlinson, “An Innovation in Nineteenth-Century
clergy during the first part of the nineteenth century; he notes that many came from the middle or lower middle class, and that

most attended a “public school” (independent, fee-paying school) where they were trained, often amid harsh discipline, in classical Greek and Roman literature. They then proceeded to Oxford or Cambridge University, where they continued their classical education, picking up some theology along the way. There was very little by way of what we might call professional training in liturgy, preaching or pastoral care. The more ambitious went out of their way to associate with the sons of gentry and aristocracy and to cultivate connections with potential future patrons.56

The significance here is that Trench was educated in the early part of the nineteenth century at Cambridge, and so his vast knowledge of the Church Fathers and ecclesiastical history was not necessarily part of his formal curriculum. One only has to compare his notations to someone like Simeon or Jowett to see their relative ignorance of the tradition compared to Trench. He, despite an unstimulating educational program, pursued a deeper understanding of his theological forbears, and this is evidenced in his work. We see glimpses of how Trench deepened his understanding of the Christian faith in descriptions of his curacy under Samuel Wilberforce in the parish of Alverstoke, which involved “holding regular prayers… conducting readings from the Fathers” and “organizing discussions of pastoral problems, especially on the preparation of individual candidates for confirmation.”57 This is not to say there was not a robust tradition of patristic scholarship in England, but that it was extra-curricular, as it were.58 In light of this, one

For example, John Wesley was deeply indebted to patristic theology from his own reading of the Fathers and Anglican Divines, and also through the teaching of his father Samuel. A High Church tradition of patristic study was
easily sees that Trench was steeped in a broader ecclesiastical tradition, but Augustine’s influence leaves the more significant mark.

Trench’s biographer John Bromley notes, “Wilberforce is said once to have asked, ‘If there were only one book to be left in the world, putting aside the Bible, what would you choose?’ and Trench’s answer was, ‘O, I have no doubt I should choose St. Augustine.’” Moreover Trench dedicated what turned out to be a significant work to Augustine, *St. Augustine as an Interpreter of Holy Scripture*, a succinct, well referenced work on Augustine’s engagement with Scripture. Trench tells us that this essay was only meant as the beginning of another work on Augustine, *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, but it continued to grow until it became a work in its own right. It gives an important glimpse into the way Augustine influenced Trench.

Trench begins his book on Augustine by claiming that the one who most loves Scripture is its best interpreter. This sets the stage to understand the way that Trench followed in the tradition of Augustine; one needs to delight in Scripture to interpret it rightly, for all the other preparation it requires.

One overarching point that shows itself continuously in Trench’s *Augustine as Interpreter of Holy Scripture* is the notion that Scripture is utterly true and trustworthy. In his *Confessions*, Augustine put it this way:

> Lord, surely your scripture is true, for you, being truthful and Truth itself, have produced it. Why then do you tell me that in your seeing there is no element of time, yet your scripture tells me that on each successive day you saw what you had made that it was good? I counted them, and ascertained how many times you did this. To this you replied to me, since you are my God and speak with a loud voice in the inner ear to your servant,

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61 Trench, *St. Augustine as an Interpreter of Holy Scripture*, i; Trench, *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, Drawn from the Writings of St. Augustine, with an Introductory Essay on Augustine as an Interpreter of Scripture*.

and broke through my deafness with the cry: “O man, what my scripture says, I say. Yet scripture speaks in time-conditioned language, and time does not touch my Word, existing with me in an equal eternity.”

That Scripture is true because God is true is an axiom for Trench, as it was for Augustine. As I mentioned in the previous pages, this was a common assumption among mainstream clergymen of the time, but Trench rallies Augustine’s thought to bring this assumption into greater clarity. Moreover, he uses Augustine’s work to sharpen and support such an understanding of Scripture. For example, Trench writes,

For in the first place, as he [Augustine] is strong to urge, there was nothing hard in one passage of Scripture, but, if it nearly concerned the salvation of men, the same was set down more plainly in another; or if not so, then it was assuredly something of which simple men, those to whom the gift of an especial insight into mysteries was not granted, might safely remain ignorant; while these obscurer and more difficult passages, which only after often knocking yielded up their meaning, or, it may be, would not yield it up at all, served many important moral purposes, and could not have been absent from a Book intended to serve such ends as those for which this Book was given.

Two ideas here are drawn from Augustine and illustrate Trench’s trusting acceptance of the truth of Scripture. In the first place, there is a unity in Scripture (as I have noted in the chapter on Simeon) so that in its many parts, the same theological points in different ways. And in the second case, if a passage is not readily accessible, or perhaps not accessible at all, one should have a baseline trust that it is there to accomplish one of God’s purposes. Now Trench, in his

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64 Trench, Augustine as Interpreter of Holy Scripture, 6-7.
65 Trench repeats himself along these lines several pages later; he writes, “We may first observe that Augustine very often presses excellently well the duty of interpreting Scripture according to the analogy of faith; in other words, that no single sayings there shall receive such an explanation as shall put them in opposition with the whole body and complex of doctrinal truth drawn from other Scriptures; that the explanation which does place any single passage in this opposition must, however plausible it may seem, at once be rejected; since all interpretation must be, so to speak, panharmonic.” Ibid, 31. The important nuance that Trench makes here is that, for Augustine and (as I argue) for himself as well, the harmony of Scripture is not the result of empirical reasoning, but is rather held to be the case a priori.
Hulsean Lectures, upholds this unity of Scripture as well as the fittingness of Scripture to all kinds of people – both the ignorant and the learned.\textsuperscript{66} Both of these ideas are expressions of the faith that Trench places in the integrity of Scripture, which is itself related to, if not directly descended from, his much deeper faith in the providence of God.

The notion of Scripture’s inexhaustibility, along with its future unfolding, were also features of Augustine’s thought. Both of these theological ideas are tied to the way that Scripture can have multiple meanings, inexhaustibility linked with Scripture’s layered depths. The future unfolding of Scripture is tied to its latent meanings that will only be revealed or discovered at the appropriate time in history. Yet, despite Scripture’s plurivocity in these respects, it remains ultimately united in Christ. This opens up the possibility of figural reading. On this score, Augustine suggests, for instance, that “all, or nearly all, of the deeds contained in the books of the Old Testament are to be interpreted not only literally but figuratively.”\textsuperscript{67} The Old Testament does not just refer to events, but these events themselves are signs of something deeper. In fact, even the ambiguity of certain words calls for a figural reading, as Tarmo Toom notes: “For him, [Augustine] polysemy was not a hermeneutical deficiency, but a providential divine gift,” so that event distinct phrases point to increasingly deeper realities.\textsuperscript{68}

Some of the most striking illustrations of Augustine’s figural reading of the Old Testament come from his work on the Psalms. For instance, as Augustine is writing of the psalmist-as-prophet, he notes,

\begin{quote}
It is Christ, therefore, who here speaks in the prophet; yes, I dare to affirm, Christ is speaking. The prophet will utter certain things in this Psalm which may seem impossible of application to Christ, to the excellence of our Head, above all to that Word which in the beginning was God abiding with God. Sometimes, too, certain other things will be said which seem scarcely relevant to Him who has taken the form of a servant, the form
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{66} Trench, \textit{The Fitness of Holy Scripture}, 19-56.


\textsuperscript{68} Tarmo Toom, “Augustine’s Case for the Multiplicity of Meanings,” \textit{Augustinian Studies} 45, no. 2 (September 22, 2014), 185.
he took from the Virgin. And yet it is Christ speaking, because in Christ’s members Christ Himself speaks.  

One can see the complex interpretation going on in this passage. Besides its more straightforward historical reading, a psalm can be prophetic, it can be the words of Christ, it can be the words of Christ’s members, the Church, or it can be all of these voices at once. Augustine goes on in the same passage to admonish, “Allow that Christ is speaking, therefore, because in Christ the Church speaks, and in the Church Christ speaks: the Body in the Head, and the Head in the Body.” Not only can the Old Testament refer to Christ, but it constitutes the words of Christ, which at the same time are the words of his body. This rich passage reflects the grounds for Augustine’s figural readings, and in fact Trench’s interpretation resembles them.

While figural reading of Scripture came under fire in the modern period, it was often assumed to be the standard practice for the early Church. Michael Cameron gives attention to this, noting,  

Ancient interpreters thought the text itself determined the circumference of meaning that lay within and before it. They didn’t view the Bible as an object yielding correct content to those operating on it with the proper analytic method. Scripture for them was first of all a divine unity, mysterious but accessible, mediated through a wild variety of earthly voices, genres, events, teachings, and even contradictions, all of which were kaleidoscopic variations of a single divine picture. In their minds the divine author embedded these variations purposefully in order to lure readers into becoming part of that picture.  

This is an important point. Some of the features that set Trench apart as an interpreter of Scripture were a standard part of an Augustinian or even broader patristic heritage. Both Trench and Augustine are united in their hermeneutic of trust, assuming that providence has woven

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70 Ibid., vol. 2, 14.

together the contradictory and even seemingly absurd fabric of Scripture with good reason, even if that reason is not immediately accessible. This hermeneutic is countered by a suspicious reading of Scripture, but also by the reading of Scripture that does not take it as a whole, but breaks it up piecemeal, in a failure to recognize its theological coherence. “An integral part of Augustine’s belief in biblical inspiration is his view that Scripture is a single whole comprising both the Old Testament and the New. Rightly understood, both Testaments bear witness to the same faith,” Eric Plumer notes in his introduction to Augustine’s commentary on Galatians.72 And ultimately that faith for Augustine, as it is for Trench, is united in the person of Christ.

Trench makes much the same point as Augustine about the way the Old Testament figures Christ, not only in particular passages only, but as a whole. Just as Augustine pointed out that Scripture is united as a whole in its witness to Christ, Trench notes that “it was ordered that each one of the mighty acts of our Lord’s life should not stand wholly apart, and without analogy in any thing which had gone before, but ever find in something earlier its lineaments and its outlines.”73 That is, all Scripture that precedes the Incarnation is meant to anticipate and prepare the way for Christ. Furthermore, Trench says that, just as God revealed himself in Christ, so when he revealed his truth to the holy people in the Old Testament, it was only fitting that they should point to the “the Holiest of all”: “All the Old Testament… is prophetic; and not by an arbitrary appointment… but prophetic according to the inmost necessities of the case, which would not suffer it to be otherwise.”74 For Trench, as it was for Augustine, this belief in God’s ordering of Scripture rests upon the faith that God is indeed to be trusted, especially in his orchestration of the writing of the Bible, for this is where he has chosen most fully to reveal himself in Christ.

Another way of framing this discussion of Trench’s traditionalism is to ask the role that reason plays in his theology of Scripture. Trench, following Augustine, does not begin with reason and


73 Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 67.

74 Ibid., 69.
move toward faith, but rather, he believes it is by having faith – by trusting God – that reason is able to do its work rightly. Trench writes,

We see here how it came to pass that he [Augustine] was the Father to whom schoolman and mystic alike appealed. He does demand this submission; he does evermore affirm that the true order is not, as proud man would have it, Know and believe, but rather, Believe and know: yet at the same time reason, in the very submission which it makes, does honour to its own worth; since it is by an act of its own that it recognises the reasonableness of putting itself into an higher school, of postponing its own exercise. For, this he very much dwells on, that it is a postponing, not a renouncing, of its own exercise.\(^{75}\)

In fact, it was just this submission of reason that makes Augustine’s impact so broad. His *Confessions* combined intimate portraits of his encounter with God in Christ with sophisticated theological and philosophical work. This combination is part of what gives Augustine an air of enduring freshness, and why he has always played a significant role in the Western Church.

### 5 Trench on Scripture: A Cohesive Vision

This leads to the last and most exquisite characteristic of Trench’s position as an Orthodox churchman, and that is the cohesiveness of his scriptural vision. What do I mean when I describe Trench’s scriptural vision as cohesive? I mean to say that his vision accounts for the full comprehensiveness of Scripture, that he supports it both theoretically and practically, that it is at once intellectually engaging while remaining deeply pastoral, and finally, because of this, it is a compelling and vibrant vision of Scripture and how it should be read.

Trench’s approach to Scripture was shared with those High Churchmen identified as Orthodox who preceded him. Peter Nockles, writing of these High Churchmen, notes that they “did not deny that Holy Scripture, in the words of Article 6, ‘contained all things necessary unto salvation,’ and that it was entirely sufficient as the rule or basis of faith. High Churchmen tended

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\(^{75}\) Trench, *Augustine as Interpreter of Holy Scripture*, 31.
to argue that Scripture needed to be understood in the light of antiquity, properly understood.”

This view was carried forward by Trench in his own way, but also by Keble, both of whom were able to see the theological character of Scripture, being attuned to its authority (affirming the Articles of Religion) and its complexity (and thus the assumption that it should be interpreted with the Fathers of the Church). When it comes to this aspect of Trench’s theology of Scripture, Keble tracks very close. Simeon too would affirm the authority of Scripture but misses some of the difficulty in interpreting Scripture for which the sage wisdom of the Church is useful. Figures like Jowett and Maurice do not seem to give the same weight to the authority of Scripture, nor to the way it was interpreted throughout the Church in time.

To understand the comprehensiveness of Trench’s understanding of Scripture, the best place to turn is his Hulsean Lectures. It is here that Trench lays out a vision of Scripture that is so comprehensive it must rely on paradox. The fact that Trench has distinct lectures on both the unity and manifold nature of Scripture is significant. If one is to read either lecture as an isolated work, one will be left with a clear but one-sided understanding of the voice of Scripture. Only when the two are read side-by-side does one see how Scripture is at once united in its witness and also truly manifold. Trench notes that,

This idea of the oneness of Holy Scripture is incomplete and imperfect, till it pass into the higher idea of its unity; till we acknowledge that it is not sameness which reigns there; that, besides being one it is also many; that as in the human body we, having many members, are one body, and the perfection of the body is not the repetition of the same member over and over again, but the harmonious tempering of different members, all being instinct with one life – not otherwise is it with Scripture.

Here Trench is outlining the way that Scripture has a unity but retains difference as well. He reaches for the metaphor of a body to show that, like a living person, Scripture has various parts that work together as a whole. This is an attempt to sketch the complexities of Scripture in a way that pays full due to its unity and diversity. In this commitment to portray faithfully the reality of

76 Nockles, The Oxford Movement in Context, 104.
77 Trench, The Fitness of Holy Scripture, 38.
Scripture’s life in all its fullness, one can see the cohesiveness of Trench’s theology. Aaron Edwards, in his incisive essay on the dialectics of preaching, sets up both the problem and solution to interpreting Scripture faithfully in light of its inherent paradox. He writes,

Any number of biblical texts might be spoken of to show the polyphony of these warring voices. At a glance, Ecclesiastes seems relentlessly dissatisfied with itself, even with its own existential conclusions. And what of its wisdom-sibling, Proverbs, which tells us both to speak and not speak to a “fool” with equal vigour? There are also those New Testament quandaries of Jesus telling us to be child-like and Paul telling us not to be childish, Paul telling us to be foolish and wise, and demonstrating that we must appreciate culture and yet count it as garbage. It is no wonder, of course, that Peter finds Paul “hard to understand,” a fact that led some nineteenth-century scholars to the controversial hypothesis that these were two competing doctrinal schools within the New Testament. And all this before even mentioning Luther’s dreaded “Epistle of Straw” or that cosmic book at the end to which Calvin answered: “no comment.” Although such formulations can be easily exaggerated, it is clearly evident that, even within a high view of Scriptural authority, facing intra-canonical tension is inescapable for any preacher.78

The reality that Edwards is pointing out here, with copious examples, is that Scripture comes to us with contradictions. It will not do to ignore them or pretend they do not exist, and neither will it do to gouge them out from the whole of Scripture’s shape and to make too much of them. Rather, as Trench does, it is important to recognize these many voices in the whole of Scripture in view of its higher vision, affirming both the plurivocality and the unity of Scripture. One cannot subsume one of these realities into the other.79


79 Edwards is helpful here again as he draws from the work of G.K. Chesterton to posit the kind of move that is necessary when writing about the paradoxes of Scripture: “Indeed, a truly paradoxical formulation insists that both polarities maintain a distinctiveness of their own. Concepts such as ‘dilution,’ ‘balance’ or ‘synthesis’ are intolerable to Chesterton because such formulations lead to a negation of both: ‘Being a mixture of two things, it is a dilution of two things; neither is present in its full strength or contributes its full colour.’ Chesterton’s preferred articulation was an outright tension between the two: ‘Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious.’ The ‘furious opposites’ are intended not to supersede one another but to exist in continuous conflict.” Edwards, “Preacher as Balanced Extremist: Biblical Dialectics and Sermonic Certainty,” 431. It is significant that truths of Scripture are not “balanced out” or “watered down” but rather they
For example, in *Augustine as Interpreter of Scripture*, Trench writes of his admiration for Augustine’s reconciliation of various Scripture passages, clarifying, “I mean not merely the removal of apparent discrepancies between one historic fact and another recorded there, such discrepancies as lie on the surface as the several narrations, but of those seeming oppositions, ethical or doctrinal, which lie much deeper, and can only be reconciled in an higher unity wherein the differences atoned.” This comprehensiveness gives his theology of Scripture the ability to remain grounded in the actual shape of Bible and still move toward a cohesive account of the same.

Moreover, Trench, without smoothing out the tumultuous passages of the Bible or doctrines of Scripture, casts them in such a wider and harmonious vision that it has room for both sides of the dialectic. This contrasts with a thinker like Jowett, who baldly asserts that Scripture has only one single meaning, which is that intended by the human author, as he does in “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” though he seems to allow greater nuance in scriptural meaning in his essay on inspiration.

In fact, Jowett is so difficult a figure to grapple with because he intimates a certain dialectical movement in his work. But rather than getting the sense that it is intentional and part of his theological method, as it clearly is with Trench, the reader has the sense rather that Jowett is not sure what he believes. And this is a crucial point of difference between the two thinkers: Jowett does not offer an explanation for his paradoxical ways, but boldly makes one proclamation here, and another counterpoint there, without any sort of explanation. Trench, on the other hand, allowed for paradox to exist in his interpretation, but offered a thoughtful rationale for why this was the case. Jowett does not. Simeon, in his methodology at the beginning of his great commentary, writes of his intention to allow distinct passages of Scripture to speak stand in their full strength, though they may even appear to be antagonistic toward one another. Paradox cannot be dismissed because of the possibility that God has chosen to reveal himself in just this way. Trench is an Orthodox and a cohesive thinker in his ability, in writing about Scripture, to maintain and uphold this kind of comprehensiveness.

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paradoxically, but for him it is from a distaste for systems that obscure biblical truth. Trench does not present a hermetic system wherein everything is taken into account, but his approach to Scripture is far more powerful in its explanatory scope because he allows paradox or dialectic to flourish within a broader Christological vision. This broader vision, even if it remains somewhat ethereal, is enough to bring a pleasing harmony to what one sees empirically present in Scripture without forcing a crude coherence upon it, and also without succumbing to the confusion one is left with upon reading Jowett. The crucial point that sets Trench apart is his thoughtful rationale in allowing paradox to remain, in contrast with Jowett’s seeming inconsistency.

Trench is a cohesive thinker in another way too – namely, in the way he puts his theory into practice. Many of his commentaries, whether his Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia, Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord, or Notes on the Parables of Our Lord, give concrete and detailed treatments of Scripture that take the whole variety of his theoretical work into account. Further, these commentaries are not written in a vacuum but critically engage the tradition of the Church. Trench shows he is able to grapple with matters more recherchés while remaining pastorally practical. His work has aged well; certainly, some of the historical scholarship he refers to has become outdated with new strides in archaeology, but one can hardly fault him for this. The more striking insights, those dogmatical points that he has drawn from the text of Scripture, in consultation with the work of the Reformers and Church fathers, remain valuable today.

This leads to the last point that marks Trench as a cohesive thinker in the Orthodox tradition: his ability to answer specific questions definitively. Trench does this by delving into questions about the nature of Scripture and how it ought to be read, and by doing so puts down stakes as to what “inexhaustibility” or Scripture’s “unity” really mean. To take an even more specific example, let us look to his essay on the inexhaustibility of Scripture. He begins by noting how many often

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81 Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, vol.1, xxiii. Simeon, strictly speaking, is more of a biblicist in this respect, for he is purely empirical. He begins with Scripture as such, and does not intentionally allow for any external theological or philosophical intrusions. Whether or not he is successful in this is another matter, but the attempt is part of his plan.

82 For an illustration that shows the importance of specificity in defining one’s terms and the utility this has for meaningful arguments, see Chesterton’s discussion on capitalism. G.K. Chesterton, *The Outline of Sanity* (Norfolk, Virginia: IHS Press, 2001), 26-8.
feel the Scripture is inspired, before suggesting that, given Scripture’s divine character, it is only fitting that it be so:

For this is a most important need for a Book such as we affirm the Bible to be, a Book for the cultivating of humanity, for the developing, by the ministry of the Church, through the teaching of the Spirit, the higher life of every man in the world. It belongs to the very primal necessities of a Scripture which is ordained for such ends as these, that it should be thus inexhaustible; that no man should ever come to its end, himself containing it, instead of being contained by it, as by something far larger than himself.83

Trench here very beautifully illustrates just what he means when he refers to Scripture’s inexhaustibility. And more than this, he suggests that it is fitting that Scripture would be inexhaustible in just this way, in light of the fact that it is given to develop a “higher life” in all. Though some of the treasures are immediately accessible, readily apparent on its surface, some require more difficult work. This means that the doctrine of inexhaustibility, when it is discussed, must take into account the fact that understanding Scripture requires a certain kind of person, one who is intimate with Scripture.

Now all of this talk about the specificity of Trench’s terms, and his clarity in expressing them, is paramount both for the Victorians and in his continued value today. I shall say more about the latter in the next chapter, but I think it provides the kind of clarity (without losing any sophistication) that is necessary for serious engagement with Scripture. This, coupled with the complexity with which Trench treats Scripture – coming at it from various angles – as well as his willingness to offer both a theoretical and practical outworking of his ideas, makes his work on Scripture an imposing corpus with which to engage.

By way of conclusion then, let me finish with a summary of Trench as an Orthodox churchman. In this, he is not alone, and I have situated him within a movement that, if vague, has been recognized in scholarly literature. Furthermore, I have traced some of the lines of such an Orthodoxy. Though they are characteristic of other figures as well, Trench exhibits his own distinctive manner and takes them in his own direction. I have outlined three particular facets of

his Orthodox churchmanship: his conservatism, his traditionalism, and his cohesiveness. More specifically, with respect to his conservatism, I have shown the way he was in line with the mainstream theological mores of the Church of England, opposing innovation. On the score of his traditionalism, I have shown that, although there were different attempts to rehabilitate traditions in the Victorian period, with the Oxford Movement’s enamoured use of the Latin Patristic tradition, for instance, Trench drank deeply from Augustinian wells. Finally, I have examined the way that Trench spoke powerfully to this Orthodox position in both depth and breadth because of his cohesive and clear vision.
Conclusion

Locating Trench: The Bible in the Anglican Communion Today

Richard Chenevix Trench has been unduly neglected as a theologian and interpreter of Scripture, especially in the last decades. The goal of this essay has been to draw attention to the importance of his work on the doctrine of Scripture and scriptural interpretation, especially as it compares with that of other Victorians who have been the subject of more thorough scholarly attention. Having further insight into the way Trench reads Scripture, as well as the way his contemporaries read it, is valuable for understanding the Victorian period more generally, given the pride of place which the Bible held in England at the time. Moreover, the preceding research has deepened the understanding of how various figures in the Church of England specifically approached and read Scripture. While this is valuable in and of itself, I do think a better appreciation of Trench has significant potential in helping to bring further clarity to the role that Scripture plays in the current debates in the Anglican Communion and beyond. The remarks that follow are a modest indication of such a potential benefit, and they point, I hope, to the way Trench’s contribution to biblical interpretation could yet prove fruitful to Anglicans and other Christians.

One of the crucial centres of debate in the Anglican Communion over the past few decades has been human sexuality.1 While I do not have the space to develop the complexities of this debate at present, taking a cue from Christopher Seitz I wish to focus on the way that Scripture has been

1 Shaw provides a helpful and compact historical overview to this debate from a vigorously liberal angle. While her historical sketch is accurate, her critical reflection is sometimes mystifying, such as when she discusses the crisis caused by the ordination of openly gay and lesbian people to the priesthood, saying, “Despite threats from some parties, the Anglican Communion has not split, though some splinter groups have left.” It is difficult to know what Shaw means by such statements, conceding that groups have left the Anglican Communion but that it has not yet split. Certainly she seems to ignore the ongoing costly conflicts around the topic. Jane Shaw, “Conflicts Within the Anglican Communion,” in The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender, ed. Andrian Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 347. See also the House of Bishops of the Church of England, ed., Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate (London: Church House, 2003); Stephen Sykes, “The Basis of Anglican Fellowship: Some Challenges for Today,” Journal of Anglican Studies 1, no. 2 (December 2003): 10–23; Jason Bruner, “Divided We Stand: North American Evangelicals and the Crisis in the Anglican Communion,” Journal of Anglican Studies 8, no. 1 (May 2010): 101–125; and Ephraim Radner and Philip Turner, The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).
used within it. My argument is that Trench is a helpful resource for clarifying the terms for such a debate.

Seitz notes that in what has become an iconic discussion amongst the Churches, one of the key pieces that has been overlooked is the role that Scripture plays and how one is to approach it on questions of sexuality. Indeed, he avers that the Bible and its authority are the central arena for these discussions.² Or as he puts it quite succinctly, “The same-sex crisis in the American Episcopal Church (TEC) and in other churches is a symptom of the deeper disagreement over the interpretation of Scripture.”³

A study of Trench suggests that, in addition to confusion over the interpretation and authority of Scripture, there is a very real confusion about what exactly Scripture is. And though there are many factors and implications when discussing something like human sexuality in the Church, one of the gifts that this discussion has afforded is the opportunity to see clearly the varying understandings of Scripture and its purpose that are at play in the Anglican Communion.

In another essay, detailing what is entailed by Anglican “comprehensiveness,” Seitz discusses the notion that Scripture cannot be applied to the modern understanding of homosexual coupling. He asks:

Can we take seriously the full epistemological implications of saying something like, “The Bible does not know anything about this?” Increasingly the charge is that the plain sense of Scripture cannot comprehend, cannot extend itself to contemplate and consider, in its details and specificity, a behavior and a kind of living never before accommodated or contemplated on the terms we are now told we must comprehend it, en route then to accommodating and indeed blessing and sanctifying it. Here is a form of comprehensiveness which, to my mind, cannot ever be “reconstructed,” for on the terms

³ Ibid., 174.
of the argument, it has no known antecedent and cannot have one, if the form of sexual living is properly to be appraised for what it is.\textsuperscript{4}

Seitz is arguing, in essence, that to interpret Scripture in a way that excludes its referential relevance from contemporary concerns about sexuality is not to be “comprehensive” in the historical sense but is something entirely novel. And, if I could expand here on the position that Seitz is referring to, I would say that those who hold that “the Bible does not know anything about this,” whether the “this” is human sexuality or some other issue, their position is quite telling of their theology of Scripture. This view must only come from an understanding of Scripture wherein the referential potential of the Bible is bound only to the historical contexts of its authorship (taking into account the authorial intention, the initial reception, the redactorial process, etc.), and is null with regards to any hope that it might actually speak (in the present tense) to ecclesial or broader human life today. At most, with this view of Scripture, some lessons or implications might be extracted from the text, scraped clean of their historical situation, and set aside, before they can be taken as timeless truths and pressed into service in a particular situation. But the implication here is that, once having extracted all of these lessons, like gold from a mine, the Bible becomes exhausted and useless, for it has already yielded its treasures which have then been separated from it. It may be an aid for historical information, for personal inspiration, for inciting nostalgia, or any number of other things, but the Bible has ceased to be used as Scripture, living and active, God-breathed.

If anything, such an understanding of Scripture that limits its referential reach shares a family resemblance to that of Jowett, but is even more tame, for Scripture no longer needs to be read like any other book, because, after a certain point, it need not be read at all. Once Scripture has been skillfully exploited, all of its truths set apart, it becomes like an empty vessel, without anything left to yield.

This understanding of Scripture is deeply problematic, but more fundamentally, this understanding of Scripture is at its most unhelpful when it is left unrecognized. The confusion goes beyond methods for interpreting Scripture; it touches the nature of Scripture itself.

\textsuperscript{4}Christopher R. Seitz, “Can Classical Anglican Comprehensiveness Be Reconstructed?” \textit{Anglican Theological Review} 86, no. 4 (October 1, 2004), 621.
Understanding how Trench sees Scripture, and the way his contemporaries saw Scripture, is important as a baseline or ruler so that one might examine one’s own views along these lines. The inherent value in such an exercise, even if one’s views remain unchanged, is that one is then able to articulate and name them with some clarity.

The Crisis in Focus: “The Bible in the Life of the Church” Project

One illustration of the way the Church has limited the referential capacity of Scripture is the recent Communion-wide “The Bible in the Life of the Church” project (BILC from now on).\(^5\) The BILC recognize the problems of Scripture and its interpretation, taking its cue from their articulation by the Windsor Report (2004):

> The current crisis thus constitutes a call to the whole Anglican Communion to re-evaluate the ways in which we have read, heard, studied and digested scripture. We can no longer be content to drop random texts into arguments, imagining that the point is thereby proved, or indeed to sweep away sections of the New Testament as irrelevant to today’s world, imagining that problems are thereby solved. We need mature study, wise and prayerful discussion, and a joint commitment to hearing and obeying God as he speaks in scripture, to discovering more of the Jesus Christ to whom all authority is committed, and to being open to the fresh wind of the Spirit who inspired scripture in the first place. If our present difficulties force us to read and learn together from scripture in new ways, they will not have been without profit.\(^6\)

Thus, the conflict in the Anglican Communion is not an unfortunate incident, but rather an opportunity for re-evaluating the role that Scripture does and ought to play in the common life of the Church. The BILC is a concrete response to this opportunity, aiming not only to provide descriptive “snapshots” of what is actually happening in the Anglican Communion, but also to

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“distil and develop from these explorations the working principles of Anglican hermeneutics.”

This is certainly a step forward in uncovering the underlying approach that Anglicans have to the Bible, and the results – though less than comprehensive – are promising. The report on the BILC goes on to enumerate seven principles from the project, as well as from other research on Anglican use of the Bible:

- Principle 1: Christ is the living Word of God.
- Principle 2: The Old Testament is the foundation of Christian Scripture.
- Principle 3: The Bible is to be taken as a whole and has within it great depths of spiritual meaning.
- Principle 4: There are many different literary genres in the Bible, which are to be distinguished carefully and consistently.
- Principle 5: An accurate reading of the Bible is informed, not threatened, by sound historical and scientific understanding: the God who inspires Scripture as a true witness is the same God who created the world.
- Principle 6: The Bible must be seen in the contexts of the world in which it was written and also brought into conversation or confrontation with our worlds in order to discern God’s will for us today.
- Principle 7: We listen to the Scriptures with open hearts and attentive minds accepting their authority for our lives and expecting that we will be transformed and renewed by the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.

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7 Deep Engagement, Fresh Discovery: Report of the Anglican Communion “Bible in the Life of the Church” Project, 3. The report is quick to point out that it “is NOT a prescribed programme or way forward – but a toolbox or collection of ideas, approaches and resources to dig deeper into the process of our engagement with Scripture,” and further that it “is NOT a set of answers to the question, ‘How do Anglicans engage with and interpret the Bible?’ – but a mirror or checklist, a set of questions and encouragements to challenge us, as Anglicans, to think further.” Ibid., 5. In part, these qualifications stem from the fact that the study “did not achieve its aim for reaching people across a broad range of Anglican Churches with a broad range of backgrounds.” Ibid., 45; for details see 44 as well. I use this study only as a sufficiently clear instance of the confusion over Scripture present in the Anglican Communion.

Many of these principles are deeply theological in their claims, despite having been gleaned from sociological exploration of the Church’s practice, rather than from an explicit desire to work out a fitting description of the nature and interpretation of Scripture. Further, as suggested by the report, many of these principles are corroborated by historic Anglican teaching on the subject of Scripture.

The strength of this report is in its recognition of the importance of the Old Testament (Principle 2) and the holistic nature of the Bible (Principle 3). But its discussion of the context in which the Bible was written and its place in the “conversation” with contemporary concerns (Principle 6) is insufficient in its grappling with the nature of Scripture. For instance, in the explication of Principle 6, the Steering Group of BILC notes,

> We each read the Bible in a community of interest and in a particular context. At the same time the Holy Spirit is given to the Church for all times to lead it into all truth. Often this involves a prophetic challenge and confrontation. As we sought to engage within the Bible in the Life of the Church project, important contemporary issues facing Anglicans emerged including economic injustice, ecological degradation and the social disenfranchisement of women. A number of passages explored within the project were far from straightforward in the way they addressed these issues. They are all issues that Scriptural texts speak to in challenging ways with which we as a community of faith are called to wrestle.\(^9\)

What is evident here is that the Bible, if it speaks at all to the present, does so by the Spirit as a “prophetic challenge” and “confrontation” in a non-straightforward way. But this vision of Scripture ultimately sits uneasily with other principles that call for a holistic reading of the Bible and the various uses of the Old Testament. Behind all of this, the belief that the Bible is primarily for another time, primarily a historical text, shuts any possible windows that it might open to the present, that the voice of God might reach throughout (or beyond time) to speak to his people.

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through his scriptural Word.\textsuperscript{10} This leaves us a Bible bereft of richness, and leaves the modern reader unable to see the intelligibility of the interpretation of the past, which is so often based upon just such a premise, that God continues to speak through Scripture.

One should not make too much of this single project of BILC, given the restraints that one expects with authorial teams, limited time, finite resources, etc. But the BILC is a potent example of the kind of ambiguity with which Scripture is held and read. Among other things, there is a real confusion about the nature of Scripture and how it is to be interpreted. Because the project aims to be reflective (in however limited a fashion) of the Anglican Communion more broadly, the authority of the BILC project is mimetic, ultimately derivative from what the Church is doing, without having any explicit standard by which it can evaluated. These principles, however sound, are merely depictions of what is, and so there is more work to be done to determine what ought to be the case, at least in a general theological sense, with some latitude for the various contexts of communities throughout the Communion.

With this in view, while I do think a lot of the disagreement over Scripture in the Church is substantive and clear, a real amount of disagreement is based on hazy understandings of Scripture’s nature and how it should be read. I bring forward this work on Trench here not only to remedy some gaps in the study of Victorian interpretation of Scripture, which I hope it does, and not only to draw some attention to the brilliance of Trench’s theology, which has long been overshadowed by his important but (I believe) ultimately secondary merit as a philologist. More than this, however, I bring forward this work on Trench as a sufficiently coherent starting point for understanding Scripture in the Anglican Communion with reference to one of the lights of the past (even if he is a lesser light). Some of Trench’s contributions are consonant with findings of the BILC project, but he offers a more thoroughly robust and expansive vision to this as well.

To a greater or lesser extent, the first five principles enumerated by the BILC project are consonant with Trench’s understanding of Scripture; he too notes the Christological nature of

\textsuperscript{10} This is not to say one cannot be edified, or bump into the mystery of God when reading the Bible as a historical artifact; for instance see Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, “Relentless Intimacy: The Peculiar Labor of an Anglican Biblical Scholar,” \textit{Anglican Theological Review} 93, no. 4 (October 1, 2011), 563–4. The reality is, however, that any meaningful text can have the same positive effect; what is Scripture’s unique character and contribution if Shakespeare or Rumi will do?
Scripture (Principle 1), the foundational nature of the Old Testament (Principle 2), and the holistic nature of the Bible (Principle 3), while also being attuned to the literary differences within the canon (Principle 4), and the way modern research can contribute to understanding the Bible (Principle 5). Trench would bring further nuance to these points, however, for instance noting that we do not only read the Old Testament in light of Christ (Principle 2), but it is indeed his Word, and he is present within it; furthermore, for Trench, the Old Testament is not just read for spiritual lessons, but it prefigures Christ himself (Principle 3). A further difference between Trench and the BILC project, even when their principles substantially agree, is that Trench is aiming to understand Scripture as a communication from God. He approaches the Bible as a theological text that, given its nature, warrants a sort of appreciation and reading that is fitting to this. The BILC project’s aim is only to describe themes that are evident in the way the Church is engaging with Scripture; it purposely brackets questions about Scripture’s nature, asking instead about its utilization.

There are more significant divergences between the BILC project and what Trench might say. Trench would offer a more robust description of Scripture than the BILC project’s suggestion that the Bible must be brought “into conversation with or confrontation with our worlds in order to discern God’s will for us today.” Rather, Trench suggests that the Bible does indeed refer to present concerns in the world and Church, because the God of history, in his providence, knowing the end from the beginning, has placed within the Bible the resources necessary for a Church that exists millennia after the writing of Scripture. As the BILC project agrees, Scripture’s application may not always be straightforward. Still, differing from the BILC project, Trench suggests that God’s wisdom for whatever the Church faces is concretely present in Scripture by the Holy Spirit. The Church does not have to wrestle texts to make them “speak” to the present, for God has already spoken, and the Church’s job is rather to discern what God has said.

I am not here suggesting that there is no other touchpoint for discussion on Scripture. However, seeing Trench, especially in comparison with other interpreters of his time, captures something of the fragmentation with which Scripture is read today, and of the diversity in its interpretation. Unless Anglicans today can engage substantively with the insights given by Trench through his own careful and comprehensive study of Scripture amid the diversity of views about the Bible from his own context, they cannot responsibly move forward with resolving their own interpretive conflicts.

Finally, I hope my work proves useful in current discussions within the Anglican Communion centering around the authority of Scripture. Even if one rejects Trench’s approach, there is value in understanding it, if only because Trench so concretely describes the character of Scripture and its use. Perhaps a simple but clear identification of the conception of Scripture with which we are working in the Church – and Trench’s is but one paradigm – will provide a more fruitful starting point for discussion, rather than focusing so much on the controversial ends of interpretive decisions.
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