

HAMILTON'S THEORY OF LANGUAGE AND INSPIRATION

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Kenneth Hamilton, *Words and the WORD*, begins his study of language and inspiration by contrasting empiricism and idealism. The empirical theory restricts words to the function of describing physical things, and, as in Logical Positivism, makes nonsense of theology. The idealistic theory extends language to transphenomenal reality, but as a result loses the world of sense where history takes time and space.

In chapter two the author expounds how these two theories evaluate myth. Obviously empiricism holds that myth is a mistake to be outgrown, serving only some childish subjective demands of an insecure self. For the idealist, with his different view of the nature of reality, myth is the method by which an alienated people remember an original wholeness that has been lost, and not merely a primitive language to be outgrown. It is a sort of pointer to transphenomenal Being.

In opposition to the empirical and the idealistic theories, Hamilton proposes an historical theory. But one must be careful not to speak of empiricism, idealism, and then conclude that Hamilton accepts *historicism*. Language seems to fail the author at this point.

There is also another failure. Hamilton has throughout treated empiricism and idealism as mutually exclusive. It is as though he were a zoologist classifying animals as either pachyderms or mammals. The classification is poor because some animals are both. Similarly some philosophers are both. The best known (probably) of all modern idealists was a vigorous empiricist—Bishop Berkeley. In the present century Edgar A. Singer published *Empirical Idealism* (Part II of *Mind as Behavior*, 1924).

Not only does the classification fail because some philosophers are both empiricist and idealist, it fails also because the two classes are not exhaustive. This remains a flaw even when "historical" is added as a third class. Presumably Leibniz is a non-empirical idealist, but he is also "historical," as his definition of Alexander the Great shows. Descartes and Spinoza are neither empirical, nor idealistic, nor "historical" either. This failure in classification throws the whole study off balance, result-

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ing in a pervasive ambiguity that the superficial reader is not likely to detect.

Although the author rejects idealism, he retains a somewhat similar view of mythical language. On page 87, where he has left off his descriptions of other views and is totally engaged in explaining his own, he says, "Nevertheless, as we have seen, all language grows out of mystic thinking and still bears the marks of its origin." This is a surprising statement for two reasons. The first is in the words "as we have seen." This is surprising because the reader has nowhere seen it. In chapter two Hamilton expounds the view of Ernst Cassirer "without following him all the way," and later turns for three pages to Micrea Eliade. If this material is pure exposition, it cannot serve as proof for his later statement that "all language grows out of mythic thinking." But if these expositions are included because Hamilton adopts them as his own, what can one make of his qualification, "without following him all the way." The author gives us no definite statement of how much he accepts. Therefore we must assume that he accepts all he reports. Even so, it is far from clear that Cassirer, with Eliade's help, has produced a plausible argument for the mythical origin of language. There are many assertions, but few reasons.

For example, Hamilton, expounding Cassirer, says, "Intelligence . . . is not man's decisive characteristic. What really distinguishes him from other animals is his ability to construct symbols. . . . He does not first understand the world, and then learn how to put his knowledge into words. Rather his invention of verbal symbols provides the possibility of his having knowledge. . . . Cassirer argues therefore that myth (as the primal form of thinking) and language go hand in hand in educating man to make sense of his existence" (p. 45).

Since the author through the remainder of his book seems to depend wholly on Cassirer, immediate attention should be given to this quotation. In the first place, this reviewer does not see that "Cassirer argues." He simply asserts and his assertion are implausible. One at least is also anti-biblical. Cassirer tries to construct an intelligent man from a non-intelligent but symbolizing man. Now aside from the fact that this contradicts the Biblical doctrine of the divine image in man and renders the view anti-christian, it supposes that an unintelligent or non-rational being can construct words or symbols to refer to objects. This is patently backwards. It takes intelligence to construct symbols, and in particular before constructing the symbol the man must have something in mind to symbolize. A primitive man would never invent the sound or vocal symbol *cat*, unless he had first seen a little tail and heard its other end say meow. Does anyone believe that he said to himself, "*Cat* is such a nice sound, I shall use it to symbolize whatever I see tomorrow at noon"?

Hence the assertion that "all language grows out of mythic thinking" is baseless. Baseless also is the assertion that language "still bears the marks of its origin." Hence Cassirer's assertion on which Hamilton

depends, viz., "invention of verbal symbols provides the possibility of having knowledge," is quite implausible. Certainly the truth is what Cassirer denies: man first understands the world and then invents symbols to express his thoughts.

In the second place (and here we need not simply guess at how much Hamilton accepts from Cassirer, for these are his own words), it is equally implausible to assert, without evidence, that all language still bears the marks of its mythological origin. True enough, Hamilton admits that scientific thought "tries as much as possible to escape from the subjectivities of language by using the sign-language of mathematics" (p. 87). But it is not enough to brush mathematics aside with such a brief admission. What is needed is evidence that the words *two* and *three* bear the marks of their mythic origin. What are these marks? They should be specified.

It might seem to belabor the matter overly much, if mention were made also of the square root of minus one. But this is not only devoid of marks of mythological origin, it also reinforces a previous point, for the symbol -1 was not first invented and then later some object found to apply it to. The mathematicians first understood that all quadratic equations should have two roots, and this understanding caused them to invent (an extremely simple task) a symbol to denote the roots of $x^2+1=0$.

But to annoy non-mathematical minds no further, be it noted that Hamilton makes no effort to show that even the word *cat* has a mythological origin and still bears discernible traces of the same.

Chapter two, where Hamilton apparently tries to justify his mythical view, is replete with ungrounded assertions. Examples are: (1) "Myth then is not in the first instance a fiction imposed on one's already given world. . . ."—I should think it is; (2) "each life reenacts in part the history of the human race"—sufficiently vague to be true in some sense or other, but does Hamilton mean 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny,' or that each boy sometimes suffers a Napoleonic complex; (3) "The close relationship between the mythic and the religious consciousness is very visible *here* [italics mine]," i.e. in the fact that children's "personal excursions into myth making result in their being accused of being deliberate liars!"—where is there *here* any relationship between the religious consciousness and myth, and does the conjoined quotation from Wordsworth's poetry suffice as a reason or argument; (4) similarly to a previous thought, "Being some thing [like a cat] has been given a name, it remains unknown. . . . Naming it causes it to 'be' in the sense that it now enters into human consciousness as an entity existing in its own right. . . ."—was this true of the planet Neptune after it was discovered and before it was named, or the continent now named America?

Here then are four instances in which Hamilton has given no reasons for asserting that "all language grows out of mythic thinking and

still bears the marks of its origin."

Although mythology is the basis of Hamilton's theory of language and inspiration, one must not suppose that he is a simple "mythologist." He is far from endorsing Bultmann's program of demythologization. To arrive at Biblical language, two steps away from mythology must be taken. The first is to dilute, or refine, myth into poetry. This advance, he says, gives us a God who really exists, as opposed to mythological gods who do not.

Here again is a classification with the same defect that vitiated his empirical-idealistic-historical division of philosophers. He speaks as if poetry and mythology are mutually exclusive—poetry is a higher form of language than mythology. Obviously such is not the case: Homer and Hesiod wrote poetry and their poetry is mythology. Because of the false disjunction, Hamilton's thought is hard to disentangle. He seems to think that mythology was first expressed in prose (which might very well be true) and then poetry was a refinement away from myth. But then must there be something other than prose and poetry to give a proper and mature expression of religion?

In any case, poetry cannot give us any literal truth about God. It still retains too much myth. Of course, the retention is not all bad. Myth, says the author, is not merely superstition (p. 63). "The true religion is born in the midst of the many false religions." From which the reviewer concludes that mythology had to work toward a concept of Jehovah before Adam could have had this idea. No evidence for the quoted statement is given. It apparently depends on the evolutionary principle that monotheism is a late social development.

Even so, the influence of the old mythological language continues, either in poetry or in Hamilton's second step. "The Scriptures did not fall down from heaven..." (p. 63). Well, of course. The manuscripts (except the tables of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments) did not fall down from heaven. Moses used a pen to write them. Therefore what the author expressly says is literally true. But does he not mean to suggest that the verbal message of the Scriptures did not come from heaven? "The Word of God comes to us as the words of men, men rooted in their times and speaking the language of their country." Again, true literally, apart from its context. The Scriptures come *to us* in the twentieth century translated into English. They did not fall down from heaven to us in our life time. But what about revelations to Adam, Abraham, and even to Moses before he wrote them down? Could not God have used Hebrew? Must God have used language formed by mythology? Is God incapable of revealing the literal truth? Hamilton clearly holds that human language is incapable of expressing literal truth about God. His last sentence in chapter two would have been unnecessary and impossible if he had thought that Scriptural language was literal. The last sentence is: "How human language, formed on patterns

that have grown out of myth can convey to us the truth of God's own revelation: this is the subject of my next two lectures" (p. 63).

Before summarizing chapters three and four, one can well pause to consider the phrase *human language*. When Paul in human Greek says that God justifies believers, did he speak the literal truth or some other, unknowable kind of truth, that is not truth at all? A phrase similar to "human language" occurs frequently in other authors. They contrast "human logic" with "divine logic." But do they dare make explicit what this phrase means? Human logic says, If all men are mortal, and if Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal. But if divine logic is different, then all men can be mortal and Socrates can be a man, yet Socrates will not be mortal. Or, again, if human mathematics says that two plus two is four, and if divine truth differs from ours, then for God two and two are five or ten or anything but four. The point here is that human logic and divine logic are identical. Human logic is a part of the divine image in man. It is God's trademark stamped upon us. Only by rejecting the Biblical doctrine of God's image can one contrast human language with divine language and divine logic with human.

Finally, if human language cannot be literally true, any assertion "language is not literal" cannot be literally true. The position is self-refuting; and one can have little hope of explaining how "language formed on mythical patterns" can convey God's truth.

Chapter three starts with a resume: empiricism gives us actuality without God, idealism has God without actuality (chapter one); empiricism makes myth a dead end road on the journey from ignorance to knowledge, while idealism makes myth the basic form of human speech that cannot describe the phenomenal world but instead symbolizes the transcendental world of meaning (chapter two).

At this point Hamilton begins to take his second step away from myth. He goes from myth to poetry to parable. "Christian faith . . . gladly admits that better knowledge of the objective world has made religions founded upon the literal acceptance of myth untenable" (p. 67).¹ Yet he will have man, by reason of symbolic language, remain a "myth-making creature." Then, he continues, Christian faith gives "no privileged instruction about 'what the case is' in the created world," e.g. that David was King of Israel, "nevertheless [it] gives him essential knowledge about the world as divinely created. It also gives him assurance of the human meaning of his existence. It mediates this meaning beyond the reaches of his own consciousness . . ."

But if faith or revelation cannot tell us about David, how can it tell us about the divine creation of the world? Surely the latter is harder to

1. By *objective world* here Hamilton seems to mean *sensory world*, as if the world of meaning or intelligibility were subjective. Yet on p. 68 he speaks of the Word Himself—surely not a sensory object—as objective. It is hard to say precisely what his argument is on these two pages.

discover. Then too, how can faith "mediate" any meaning beyond consciousness? Is not faith an element of consciousness?

But let us get on with the second step away from mythic language to parabolic language that supposedly reveals divine truth better than plain literal statement can. Why and how does Hamilton arrive at parable? The how is not at all clear. No theory is worked out to show that language, assumed to originate in myth, must by the laws of evolution become poetry, and then by those same laws become parabolic. Hamilton's *why* is clearer than his *how*. The reason is that he does not want to get so far away from mythology as to arrive at literal truth. He wants to prepare the ground by rejecting plenary and verbal inspiration. "Dictation" theories of revelation sometimes seem to assume that God communicates His Word through vocables,² so that understanding the exact sense of an aggregate of propositions is to receive the Word of God. This is surely to bind the divine Word to the measure of human words...."

Here again evolutionary theory is assumed. Human words and human logic are naturalistic products of society. They are not recognized as the image of God in man. No doubt Hamilton calls them gifts of God, but only as finger nails and the United States Constitution are gifts of God. The element of divine normative imposition is lacking. This type of argument is essentially similar to the Pentecostalist charge that those who repudiate speaking in tongues 'bind the divine spirit to the measure of their human theology.' The Reformation answer is that the Scriptures describe the Spirit's function in tongues and miracles as limited to certain ages. To say what the Spirit does is not to limit God's power. Therefore emphasis on the propositions of Scripture does not prevent God from saying anything he chooses to: it only indicates what he has chosen to say.

Hamilton, on the other hand, apparently wants revelations in addition to Scripture. The remainder of his sentence half quoted above is: "for it is to say that we already have the words that can state all that God can possibly want us to know." "Can possibly" is the language of propaganda. The question does not concern what God can possibly do: it is a question of what God has actually done. The Reformation view is that the Scriptures give us all the information about salvation that God wants us to know. As II Peter 1:3 says, God's "divine power has [already] given us *everything* pertaining to life and piety." And the well-known II Timothy 3:16-17 says that Scripture furnishes a man *completely* for *every* good work." Nothing else is needed. For this reason Hamilton's word "state" is also a propaganda device. It was never the Reformation view that the Bible *states*, explicitly, all that God wants us to know. But as the Westminster Confession says, "The *whole* counsel of God, concerning *all things* necessary for His own glory, man's salvation,

2. For instance, God directed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, or, God directed Ananias to go to the house of Judas on Straight St. and ask for a man named Saul of Tarsus. Or are not these passages, with their specific directions, the word of God?

faith, and life, is *either expressly* set down in Scripture, or *by good and necessary consequence* may be deduced from Scripture," i.e. by human logic that is logical because it is first divine logic.

Therefore, what Hamilton objects to seems to be Biblical divine truth, viz., "faith in God consists essentially in the believing reception of..." not perhaps of "each and every scriptural statement," for this would require a prodigious memory, but at least of the basic theology "as objectively true" (p. 75).

It is quite clear that Hamilton does not accept the Bible as the Word of God. "The fact that words are in the Bible... does not mean that our reading of them necessarily must yield authoritative statements that we can proceed forthwith to identify with the Word of God." Well, of course, not *necessarily*, for some people some of the time do not understand the words they read; so that "our reading" the words, if we are such people, does not necessarily yield correct propositions. The phraseology here is again propaganda, for the important question is not whether some people misread the Bible, but whether the words and sentences of the Bible are authoritative statements because they are true because they are the words of God. It is obviously poor thinking to attack a theory of the inspiration and truth of the Scriptures on the ground that some people do not understand the words. Must one take a textbook on calculus as mythological, poetic, or parabolic and not literally true, because some high school students cannot understand it? It is by such invalid reasoning that Hamilton rejects the Scripture as revelation. He says, "Were this the case [identifying the words of the Bible with the word of God] then the Bible, rather than being that inspired record... would be the written law of God."

Now there is a sense in which the Bible is an inspired record. It inerrantly records God's revelation to Abraham and the wars of David King of Israel. But in addition to being a record of divine revelations, it is itself the complete revelation. As the opening section of the Westminster Confession (determinative of the evangelical position) says, "it pleased the Lord... to commit the same [earlier revelations] wholly unto writing... those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased." Thus in contrast with Hamilton's denial, the Bible is indeed the written law of God.

Hamilton's use of the term *law* instead of the term *word* may be pejorative. The *law* of God carries restrictive connotations in opposition to grace. A careless reader might well be impressed because he would not want to limit the Bible by excluding the message of grace. But if *law* is used in a broader sense, if it means the written message of God, if as Hamilton says in the next paragraph law is 'something set, placed, fixed, laid down,' then an Evangelical would accept his statement as true, and not as false as he intended it. The Bible most certainly is some-

thing fixed and laid down. Thus Hamilton's reason for rejecting the Reformation view turns out to be a reason for accepting it.

Before that next paragraph is finished, however, Hamilton reverts to the narrower and more usual sense of law as an enactment prescribing certain conduct and specifying a punishment for disobedience. Grace is left out. Therefore the author misinterprets II Corinthians 3:6 to mean that Paul "was speaking of himself as a minister of . . . a covenant not of the written word but of the Spirit" (p. 77). This is a false disjunction, for the covenant of grace is both a covenant of the written word—in Genesis, Ezekiel, and Galatians—and a covenant of the Spirit. Obviously, arguments dependent on false disjunctions are invalid. A similar example of fallacious reasoning is the use of a universal statement that is only sometimes true. Hamilton asserts that "Worship in spirit and in truth includes the recognition that human words are inadequate, so that our prayers must be given by the Spirit a meaning that we cannot verbalize." But can anyone seriously believe that all worship must include such recognition? Or that *all* prayers *must* be given a different meaning that we cannot verbalize? For my part I rather suppose that the woman at the well worshipped Christ in spirit and in truth without any such recognition. It also seems to me that when I pray God to ease the sufferings of an elderly friend, the Spirit does not change the meaning into something I cannot verbalize. But then it may be, that when I pray that a friend may be relieved of suffering or that God would grant repentance to millions, that I am not worshipping in spirit and in truth. But I pray to do so, and for this purpose I find literal language completely adequate.

It must be emphasized that Hamilton has rejected the historical position of Protestantism, and in doing so has misunderstood what that position is. He speaks of "a lapse into legalism among those followers of Calvin who had gone beyond Calvin's robust practical grasp of Christian faith to erect, *as he did not* [italics mine], theories of verbally inerrant inspiration.

Now, besides the pejorative use of the words *lapse* and *legalism* in contrast with *robust*, one must note the historical reference in the words "as he did not."

Calvin's position, which is somewhat different from what Hamilton would have us believe, is set forth at length by Kenneth Kantzer in the E.T.S. publication, *Inspiration and Interpretation* (edited by John F. Walvoord, Eerdmans, 1957) chapter four, *Calvin and the Holy Scriptures*. Here Kantzer quotes Calvin's *Institutes*, "God . . . was pleased to commit and consign his word to writing . . . he commanded also the prophecies to be committed to writing, and to be held part of his word. To these at the same time were added historical details, which are also the composition of prophets but dictated by the Holy Spirit" (p. 137).

In fact, as Kantzer points out, Calvin frequently asserted that God

"dictated" the text. True enough, Calvin did not use the verb as it applies in a modern business office. But its frequency should warn everyone against attributing to Calvin a view that God dictates errors. Kantzer refers to Calvin's calling the prophets "clerks" and "penmen," "sure and authentic amenuenses of the Holy Spirit; and therefore their writings are to be considered as the oracles of God." He also calls them "organs and instruments." He refers to Scripture as the "sure and infallible record," "the unerring standard"—here is inerrancy,—"the pure Word of God" and "the infallible rule of his holy truth." Quoting no less than thirteen other passages, Kantzer remarks, "The merest glance at Calvin's commentaries will demonstrate how seriously the reformer applied his rigid doctrine of verbal inerrancy to his exegesis of Scripture" (p. 142).

May I also add a quotation from the Institutes I, vii, 1: "Believers . . . are satisfied of its divine origin, as if they heard *the very words* pronounced by God himself."

Because of all this the reader can surmise that the reviewer will be less than enthusiastic about Hamilton's fourth and concluding chapter.

Here Hamilton notes that the OT's denunciation of idolatry (and he might have added II Peter 1:16, "We have not followed sophisticated myths") requires the rejection of myth. Christian "revelation must have a propositional aspect to it."³ Yet "all language . . . bears the marks of its mythological origin. . . . The Bible does not remove us out of the reach of mythic language, yet it allows us to avoid the untruth of myth" (p. 86).

How the Bible, or Xenophon for that matter, allows us to avoid the untruth of myth may not be too important. For if Paul and Herodotus simply substitute some other type of untruth for the untruth of myth, and if we never arrive at literal truth, why should we not dismiss the whole thing as fanciful stories?

In spite of the fact that Hamilton wants to escape myth through poetry to parable, he continues to say, "The language of Scripture . . . would have been incomprehensible otherwise. . . ." i.e. unless mythic patterns had been used. Ananias would not have understood the directions to Straight St., had it not been mythological in form. "Sumerian, Babylonian, Phoenician, and Egyptian myths [were] taken up into the biblical accounts of creation" and "Gnostic myths [are] present in the N.T. descriptions of Christ⁴ The biblical language employs the imagery of myth, while transforming its content."⁵ Creation myths in which the gods wrested apart earth and heaven out of the body of the monster Chaos account for some of the phrasing of the biblical account of creation" (p. 89).

3. This sort of assertion is meaningless. Mythical statements are also propositional. The important distinction should be true versus false, or literal and exact versus fantastic and inaccurate. But all statements have a propositional "aspect," whatever *aspect* might mean.

4. For a definitive refutation see *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, J. Gresham Machen.

5. Does it? How? With what result?

Clearly, however much Hamilton may want to go beyond myth, he does not seem to get very far away, for on the next page he says, "Lacking the mythic pattern [of Gnosticism] that originally produced the necessary terminology, we should not be able to speak of Christ's death and resurrection" (p. 90).

Is this not complete nonsense? Am I dependent on Gnostic or other myths when I speak of Roman soldiers laying Jesus on a cross and pounding nails into his hands and feet? Certainly I understood this in childhood long before I ever heard of Gnosticism. Nor am I at all sure that Matthew knew anything about Gnosticism. If anyone now replies that Matthew and I did not need to have known Gnosticism because we use language already formed, let him explain to us how mythology formed the words: nails, soldiers, cross, spear, and death. Similarly what mythology is needed for Peter to see that the tomb was empty and later to see Jesus in Galilee and talk with him? Is it not therefore complete nonsense to say that we could not talk about Christ's death unless mythology had given us these words?

At this point someone will likely object that since Hamilton does not allow literal language, he does not really mean what he says. He said we could not talk about Christ's death. What he meant (though not literally) was that Paul could not explain the Atonement without depending on Gnosticism. Paul's explanation begins by stating that men exchange the glory of God for idols. Well, of course, Paul could not have said this (truthfully) unless there had been idolatry. In this sense some assertions of Scripture depend on false religions. But this is far from proving that monotheism is a late social product, and equally far from proving that this is mythic, non-literal language. When further Paul says that God set forth Christ as a propitiation so that God might be both just and the justifier of some sinners, the fact that there were pagan sacrifices neither proves that they antedated the animal sacrifice in Eden and Abel's later sacrifice, nor that any of this language is other than literal. That God should be satisfied with Christ's death is just as literal as that soldiers drove nails through Jesus' hands and feet.

One hardly escapes the impression that the author does not treat his opponents fairly. He says, "Yet because revelation is given in human words, it cannot be more precise than language allows. [How true! A perfect tautology. But is God, who produced language, unable to use it with perfect precision?] The belief that the Bible consists of statements of *literal truth* [italics his], therefore, is ill-conceived. [The *therefore* is a logical fallacy.] The notion of literal truth is quite correct if we oppose literal to the mythical. . . . In this sense we must say that God *literally* created the world. . . . It is quite another matter, though, if we insist that all the statements of Scripture are literally true. . . ." (p. 91). This sort of argument is hardly fair to the Reformation view because no one from the time of Moses to the present ever said that all statements are strictly

literal. Did Luther, Quenstedt, Gausson, or Warfield ever say so? Of course there are figures of speech, metaphors, anthropomorphisms, and the like. But these would be meaningless if there were no literal statements to give them meaning. For example, II Chronicles 16:9, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth," is ludicrously ridiculous if taken literally: little eyeballs rolling over the dusty ground. But unless the statement, God is omniscient, is literal, the figure has nothing to refer to. Surely Hamilton did not publish his book to remind us that the Bible contains some figures of speech. And yet his argument here depends on the alleged fact that someone said "all the statements of Scripture are literally true."

Consider the footnote on this page: "Literal' is not synonymous with 'historical'. Inspiration does not imply that what is inspired must be understood literally, and even less that everything must be viewed as having actually happened. . . . To put it bluntly, to accept everything reported in the Bible as having actually happened, one must tamper with the text." These words which Hamilton with approval quotes from H. M. Kuitert are unclear. The language is typical of liberals who want to appear conservative to orthodox people, while they undermine the truth of the Scripture. When Kuitert says "everything reported," does he refer to metaphors, to statements made by Satan, or does "everything reported" refer to everything reported as having actually occurred? The first two possibilities are puerile. The third is a repudiation of Evangelical religion. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the latter is the meaning intended. For example, II Peter claims that it was written by Peter. About such a claim Hamilton writes, "For a long time now, every author has been considered to have a proprietary right over his works. But the biblical books came out of a milieu in which such a concept was unknown, and where there was no issue of truth or falsehood involved in using a revered name in connection with writings by other hands." This statement is not true even of pagan scholarship, for the Alexandrian philosophers carefully distinguished between thirty-six genuine Platonic dialogues and ten spurious. See also E. M. B. Green, *Second Peter Reconsidered* (Tyndale Press, 1960), where he writes to the effect that forgeries were not cordially received as the critics maintain, but that the sub-apostolics distinguished themselves and even Apollos from the apostles, and deposed the author of *Paul and Thekla* for his imposture. Another instance was Serapion, who banned the *Gospel of Peter* from his church because by careful investigation he had discovered it was a forgery.

After his remarks on the authorship of spurious writings, Hamilton comes quickly to his solution to the problem of how language with its mythical inheritance can express divine truth. It is done by parable. The book of Jonah, he says, does not report actual occurrences. Its literary form shows that it is a parable. [There never was a Jonah. I guess there was no Ninevah, either.] Everyone acknowledges that Christ taught in

parables.⁶ Not everything in the Bible, Hamilton acknowledges, is a parable; the apocalyptic visions are not. But "if we are to look for a 'key' mode of language-usage in Scripture, then parable fits this position much more suitably than myth does" (p. 100).

Let us immediately agree. There are also other sentences in the book, which, if detached from their context, can be understood in an orthodox sense. So, it is true that parable is more suitable than mythology. But is parable more suitable than and a substitute for literal language? Hamilton has made the wrong comparison. He has here avoided mentioning the weak link in his argument; for if there is no literal truth of which the parable is an illustration, it has no referent and becomes pointless.

It would indeed seem that Hamilton has made parables pointless and meaningless. He says, "A parable... assumes that the divine reality its human words open to us, though literally beyond our comprehension, can actually be revealed to us by means of human words. Thus many of the parables of Jesus begin, 'The kingdom of God is like....' Certainly the comparison is no more than a comparison. The kingdom of heaven cannot be brought down to earth for our inspection; it remains always a mystery. Yet Jesus could say... 'It is given unto you to know the mysteries....'" (p. 96).

This quotation is peculiar. It begins by saying that the sense of the parable, i.e., the divine reality it reveals, is literally beyond our comprehension, but ends with Christ's assertion that the disciples should understand it. In the middle is the word *mystery*: the kingdom remains always a mystery. But mysteries are not necessarily impossible or even difficult to understand. One might even say that they are usually easy to understand. In the N.T. *mystery* does not refer to something we call *mysterious* in English. For example, I Corinthians 15:51 states a mystery: it may be hard for some people to *believe*, but there is no difficulty in *understanding* it.

Then too it is false to say that "the kingdom of heaven cannot be brought down to earth for our inspection." Christ did just that. Also the kingdom remains with us, and we inspect it daily.

But once more, if "the comparison is no more than a comparison," or, better, if it is as much as a comparison, the particular truth illustrated by the comparison must be understandable, for otherwise the parable's language would not reveal the truth to us.

In conclusion, first, Hamilton's theory of language is destructive of Christian truth. Surely language, as God's gift to Adam, has as its pur-

6. A common criterion for distinguishing a parable of Christ from something he reports as having happened is the absence in the first and the presence in the second of names: a man that was a householder went out early to hire laborers, or a certain king made a marriage feast for his son, versus the blood of Abel... of Zachariah, son of Barachiah, whom ye slew, or other references to OT events.

pose, not only communication among men, but communication between man and God. God spoke words to Adam and Adam spoke words to God. Since this is the divine intention, words or language is adequate. To be sure, on occasion, even on frequent occasions, sinful man cannot find the right words to express his thought; but this is a defect of man, not an inadequacy of language. The Bible does not countenance a theory that originates language in pagan mythology with the result that divine truth is unintelligible.

Similarly, second, on Hamilton's theory God remains unknowable. The chief difficulty with myths is not that they are literally false, but rather than their alleged non-literal "truth" is meaningless. Hamilton fled from myth to poetry to parable in order to arrive at some sort of revelation, but he never succeeded in showing how parables convey truth or what truths parables convey. Their "message" remains unintelligible.

Third, Hamilton has rejected the doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration and places himself outside the bounds of historical Evangelicalism.

Fourth and last, it is most appropriate for the E.T.S. to make note of this and reaffirm by its constant practice that "the Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs."