Testament are given when Achan breaks the taboo on the spoil of Jericho, and involves the whole of Israel in defeat and, on discovery, the whole of his family in destruction;[2] or when seven of Saul's descendants are executed to expiate the Gibeonite blood shed by Saul;[3] or in the practice of Levirate marriage, which (on any explanation of its origin) points to a unitary group conception;[4] or in the responsibility of a whole city for murder or heathenism within its area;[5] or in the belief that Yahweh visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children;[6] or in the practices of the blood-feud, before it was limited by the *lex talionis*.[7] Such examples are very familiar. They have to be admitted because they found expression in external acts. They presuppose a conception of the family or clan very different from the group ideas of today. The modern man usually starts from the rights of the individual; English law, for example, warrants the removal of the child from the control of the father, where its individual claims are at stake.[8] This, of course, is in direct opposition to the ancient *patria potestas*;[9] in modern times a son might feel morally bound to pay his father's debts, but in the ancient world he would often have been sold as a slave to pay them.

It is, however, not only in Hebrew law that the conception operates, but also in ways much less easy to detect, because

[2] Josh. 7. Such social solidarity is found throughout the world wherever there is a primitive but socially organized group; cf. A. H. Post, *Afrikanische Jurisprudenz*, p. 49. For other examples see M. Löhr, *Sozialismus und Individualismus im Alten Testament* (Giessen, 1906), *passim*; Otto Procksch, *Über die Blutrache bei den vorislamischen Arabern* (Leipzig, 1899).

[3] II Sam. 21.

[4] Deut. 25:5 ff.; cf. J. M. Mittelmann, *Der altisraelitische Levirat* (Leipzig, 1934), p. 7.

[5] Deut. 13:12 ff., 21:1 ff.

[6] Exod. 20:5.

[7] Gen. 4:15, 24; Exod. 21:23–25.

[8] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *s.v.* "Children-Protective Laws." The Children Act was passed in 1908.

[9] Judg. 11:34 ff.; Jer. 32:35; Deut. 21:18 ff., etc.

they have found less open expression. They are often important for the exegesis of the Old Testament, and will be illustrated in the second part of this paper. But it is necessary first to glance at certain aspects of the conception itself. Four of these call for special notice, viz., (1) the unity of its extension both into the past and into the future; (2) the characteristic "realism" of the conception, which distinguishes it from "personification," and makes the group a real entity actualized in its members; (3) the fluidity of reference, facilitating rapid and unmarked transitions from the one to the many, and from the many to the one; (4) the maintenance of the corporate idea even after the development of a new individualistic emphasis within it.

(1) The extension of the living family to include its ancestors, or, as we should rather say, the extension of the ancestors to include the living members of the family, is best expressed in the familiar phrases about being gathered to one's fathers, or going to one's fathers, or to one's kindred.[10] Thus Jacob says, "I am to be gathered unto my kindred; bury me with my fathers" (Gen. 49:29). This shows that burial in the family sepulcher is the realistic act which unites a man with his ancestors. If he is not properly buried, this unity is not properly achieved. No doubt it is difficult for us to reconcile this burial in a grave with the conception of Sheol, except by thinking of Sheol as an assemblage of all the graves. Thus in Ezekiel (32:17–32), the shades of Sheol are depicted in groups according to different nationalities and fortunes. Yet as Pedersen[11] reminds us, Sheol is not the mere sum of the separate graves. "All graves have certain common characteristics constituting the nature of the grave, and that is Sheol. The 'Ur'-grave we

[10] Gen. 15:15, 25:8, 49:29; Num. 27:13.

[11] J. Pedersen, *Israel: its Life and Culture*, I–II (Copenhagen: Branner, and London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 462.

from the general social system of the speakers of a language. This is why what one says and what one means to say can often be quite different, especially for persons not sharing the same social system. By translating the Gospel of Matthew into English, what we do is transplant our first-century Syrian Hellenists into our modes of saying, and all too often we presuppose that what they say embodies our modes of meaning as well. An English translation of Matthew 19:12 yields the following:

> For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth,
> and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men,
> and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs
> for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

This is the English equivalent of what you would have heard as you eavesdropped on the Christian group reading Matthew in the scene above. When you heard it in Greek in first-century Syria, you were the foreigner observing and overhearing a group of natives. But when you read your Bible translation in twentieth-century America, you transfer the coherent words of first-century non-Americans into your own social world. In effect, you are listening to the words of a transplanted group of foreigners from another time and place, with you, the native, wondering what in the world these people are talking about. Why the mention of eunuchs at all? Eunuchs are hardly the topic of our dinner-time conversations, much less the object of prolonged sermonizing in our churches. And why the peculiar listing of three types of eunuchs? While we employ all sorts of verbal listings, do we have any such three-type listings that we habitually use in our conversations?

Perhaps the first and largest step that a twentieth-century American can take toward understanding the Bible is to realize that in reading the Bible in English, we are in fact listening to the words of a transplanted group of foreigners. It takes only the ability to read to find out what these foreigners are saying, but it takes far more to find out what they mean. If meaning derives from a social system, while wording (e.g., speaking or writing) simply embodies meanings from the social system, then any adequate understanding of the Bible requires some understanding of the social system embodied in the words that make up our sacred Scripture. That the author of Matthew's Gospel speaks of eunuchs, for example, can be easily verified. That the word "eunuch" refers to a castrated male can also be easily verified. But why the reference to a castrated male? What does being called a eunuch mean to a first-century Palestinian male? What does it mean in terms of male social roles and values? How can a person in twentieth-century America find out such information relative to the first-century Mediterranean world? The purpose of this book is to explain how we might retrieve such information as

well as to set out some examples of such information and its utility for getting to understand the Bible.

Questions about the social norms and values that made up the world of first-century Palestine, as well as methods for answering such questions, are rather new in biblical studies. Such questions and methods are the contemporary end product of a whole series of useful approaches to understanding the Bible. They have developed largely because they are the logical outcome of attempts to understand the Word of God in our own day and age.

At bottom, biblical scholarship from antiquity to the present (e.g., read St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*) presupposes that studying the Bible for the purpose of gaining some understanding is much like eavesdropping on a transplanted group of foreigners with the purpose of getting to understand them. Hence scholars have provided reliable translations to help people find out what those foreigners are saying. If the Bible is important to us, we would want to know where these foreigners come from so that we might relate what they are saying to some concrete objects, objects of the sort found in their world. We would want to know about the persons they make reference to as they speak, about when they lived, about what they did and built. Scholars have produced biblical encyclopedias to provide this sort of information. We might also want to situate the country of origin of these foreigners in terms of geographical space and environment. The various biblical atlases help us do this.

If we look through our Bible translations, encyclopedias, and atlases, we will find information about who our foreigners are, what they say, and where they come from—but all from the viewpoint of our twentieth-century American existence. All this information makes it more than apparent that they are indeed foreigners, not from our country and not from our social group at all. Is this amount of information sufficient for you to say that you can understand what they say and mean to say as you read their words in the Bible? Or is it just about enough information to help you situate them relative to yourself and to place them relative to other foreign groups?

Chances are that if other people knew only your name, your social rank, some of your statements, and some geographical information about you, you would say that they really cannot understand you yet. What more would they have to know? What more would you have to know to understand a foreigner? Just as you get to know yourself by comparison with others, by comparing how you are similar to and different from others, how you are just like others and unique relative to others, so you might now move on to asking the same questions about our hypothetical group of foreigners. How are they similar to others in their area of the world and period of history; how are they different? How are they just like other people in their time and place; how are they unique relative to others? How did they dissociate

Greek. Bible translations offer English equivalents of what the authors of the writings have to say. To aid our imagination, atlases and encyclopedias offer information about the concrete environment, artifacts, significant individuals and groups mentioned directly or indirectly in the texts. Histories explain how events prior to the New Testament period came to influence the situation in which the Jesus movement began, how the Christian movement got under way and initially developed, and the like. Commentaries on the individual New Testament writings point out the meanings of words and the literary forms of individual books (Gospels, history, letters, tracts, "apocalypse") as well as of specific passages within given writings (parables, proverbs, genealogies, birth announcements, psalms, conflict discussions, miracle stories, recommendations, travel plans, and the like). Biblical commentators often focus on the meaning of a literary form or the meaning of words in that culture, while historians talk about the meaning of behavior. The question of meaning is a *why* question. On what basis can a why question be adequately answered? On what basis can a why question in your life, in your group's behavior, be adequately answered? I submit that such why questions can only be answered in terms of cultural story. If commentators, historians, and ordinary Bible readers derive meaning from the New Testament, the question we might put to them is whether such meaning comes from *their* cultural story or the cultural story of the people who produced the texts. Were I to interpret all your actions in terms of my own behavior, I am afraid you might end up socking me in the mouth. After all, where I come from, all who "carry out" groceries from a supermarket pride themselves on their shoplifting abilities, and I would presume the same for you and everyone else. You might find this very offensive. Yet when it comes to deriving meaning from the Bible, there is no one to give you pause, to urge you to reconsider, to sock you in the mouth in case of misinterpretation.

The misinterpretation I am referring to comes from identifying your cultural story with human nature: "Since we do it this way, all people of all times must do it this way." This is an "Archie Bunkerism," known in learned circles as ethnocentrism. When applied to history, it is called anachronism—imposing the cultural artifacts and behavior of your own period on people of the past. Ethnocentric anachronisms are cute on the lips of children, readily discernible when it comes to concrete things, e.g. the Holy Family taking a TWA flight on the flight to Egypt; Paul buying a King James Version of the Bible to quote when he preached; or Jesus traveling from Nazareth to Jerusalem in a jeep. But such ethnocentric anachronisms are insidiously irretrievable when it comes to the meaning of behavior. For example, Jesus condemned divorce, people in our society get divorced, so Jesus must be condemning that sort of behavior in our society. The problem

is: do marriage and divorce mean the same thing when Jesus speaks of them and when we speak of them?

Understanding Culture

The only way to avoid such misinterpretations, such "Archie Bunkerisms," such ethnocentric anachronisms, is to understand the culture from which our foreign writings come as well as to understand our own cultural story along with realizing that perhaps in most instances the cultural stories are very different. In this way we might get to understand those foreigners as we eavesdrop on what they said to each other and as we attempt to imagine the behavior they allude to. What then does culture mean, and how do we come to understand a culture?

What the term "culture" means in this book is what cultural or social anthropologists mean when they use the term. For example, Clyde Kluckhohn describes culture as follows:

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts: the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning influences upon further action.

What this means is that culture is a system of symbols relating to and embracing people, things, and events that are socially symboled. Symboling means filling people, things, and events with meaning and value (feeling), making them meaningful in such a way that all the members of a given group mutually share, appreciate, and live out of that meaning and value in some way. For example, on the level of nature, human beings mate and reproduce because males of the species fertilize the ova of females of the species. When the fertilized ovum comes to term, the female drops the offspring. What culture does is take this process and the agents in the process and fill them with meaning and value. The sperm contributor is interpreted as "father," the ovum bearer as "mother," and the offspring as "child." I am sure you do not celebrate Ovum Bearer's Day, even if you are terribly scientifically minded. Nor do you view the sperm contributor who hangs around the ovum bearer of your existence as the family sperm bank. Rather, you relate to these beings as parents (a cultural interpretation of their role and activity). Together with them, you form a family (a cultural interpretation of the naturing and nurturing group). You learn to interpret their relationship to each other and to you as affection and loyalty (a cultural interpretation of this inner group relation or event).

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that the generalizations or abstract statements deriving from the model have been checked out according to the steps of the scientific method and have been found adequate, given the experiences or data the model is meant to chunk. In other words, all the data readily fit the postulated model, and anyone can check it out.

Now understanding cultures is possible because of our ability to think abstractly, to make models of experience, and to compare the various models we come up with. Model-making or abstract thinking points to how we can understand a culture other than our own as well as our own. But why can we claim to attempt the understanding of an alien culture like that of the persons who people the New Testament? Our own culture outfits us with two important cues of perception that work to this end. The first is the awareness of the possibility that we ourselves can change, that there are many roles open to us, that people in history and in our own milieu have taken on roles other than the ones we have. The second cue is the ability to take on the role of another empathetically, to move into someone else's shoes, to perceive from someone else's horizon or standpoint. (Sympathy is your putting them in your place, like when you feel sympathy for a dog that hurt its paw.) Empathy leads to an awareness of the actual differences and potential similarities between another and yourself, between another group and your own group.

Models in Cultural Anthropology

So what we need in order to understand our hypothetical group of foreigners—the New Testament writings and the behavior of the people portrayed in them—are some adequate models that would enable us to understand cross-culturally, that would force us to keep our meanings and values out of their behavior, so that we might understand them on their own terms. If you will recall, the purpose of models is to generate understanding. Models formulate relationships among the persons, things, and events that we want to study. These relationships between various persons and groups, persons and things, as well as the interactions and activities such persons and groups undertake—all these have to be named and described. For example, the ovum bearer of your existence gets named "mother"; mothers do not exist except in terms of children, so mother presupposes child, and child presupposes mother. What is the normal behavior of mother toward child? This interaction might be called "nurturing," and we might generalize by saying that in our society mothers nurture their children. So big deal! But why the mother-child interaction? What does it mean relative to the social group in general? What does it mean relative to social roles, role playing, role taking, and role making within a given culture?

Models in anthropology at a rather high level of abstraction derive from

certain presuppositions, much like models in chemistry, physics, and biology. These presuppositions that underpin the models revolve around the nature of groups or social systems. The first question about the mother-child interaction that I posed above (What does this interaction mean relative to the social group in general?) presupposes that a social system is a group of interacting persons whose interaction is structured (patterned behavior, structure) and oriented around common concerns or purposes (functions). In other words, meaningful human behavior is behavior according to socially shared patterns (remember the cultural cues above) performed for socially meaningful purposes (functions). If we were to take a still photograph of our entire society, freeze all activity for a moment, so to say, and then analyze what is going on in terms of what relationships and for what purposes, we would end up with a general image of the main outline of the structures of the society along with their functions. This sort of still picture, when verbalized as social theory or model, is called *structural functionalism*. The still picture that we get to see is one of a society that is cohesive and integrated by consensus on meanings, values, and norms. The various smaller social systems like family, government, economics, education, and religion are bound together by common values and norms, and these smaller social systems (called social institutions) interact with each other in a cooperative and harmonious way. Thus society is in equilibrium, in good balance, and the social system tends to persist with minor amounts of adaptive change. Changes in one institution lead to changes in others, so if you wanted to start a revolution, you could do so by changing any one of the smaller social systems.

The structural functionalist model presupposes that every society is a relatively persistent, stable structure of elements. Every society is a well-integrated structure of elements. Every element in a society has a function; it renders a contribution to maintaining society as a whole system. Every functioning social structure is based on a consensus of values among its members. In this still-photo type of model, any social change is deviance; the picture is static.

Now still-life photographs, much like those taken by reconnaissance planes, are very useful in helping to understand what was going on when the picture was taken. So one good way to get to understand our group of foreigners is to find out what sort of structures or patterns of behavior were typical in their society, what norms expressed the "oughts" for this sort of behavior, and how such behavior supported and fulfilled a useful social function.

Structural functionalism pictures social systems as the result of consensus, a sort of consensual obligation in which people freely choose to oblige themselves in a certain way. But this is obviously not the whole