

other disciplines, such as philosophy: we must understand before we can criticise. But because the literary artist is primarily concerned to organise (or re-organise) our experience and allows us to realise his meaning for him, or with him, the suspension of disbelief in art is of a much more thorough-going character than the kind of engagement required in other disciplines.

*The second part of this article will appear next month.*

## JESUS AND THE LEAVEN OF SALVATION

FRANK McCOMBIE

That there has recently been an eruption of opinion on the nature of myth in the New Testament is scarcely a matter of surprise. For too long we have been content to use words in one context as if they had no significance in any other. The significations of "myth" are legion, and current debate about myth in the New Testament must remain quite pallid until definitions are agreed: which is not something anyone familiar with the history of myth could possibly think imminent. But if "myth" is certainly the most notorious of lightly-used and little-comprehended terms, "symbol" and "metaphor" are no more respectable. Both are related to myth, which speaks typically through received symbols of one kind or another, and which rests upon the imagery of metaphor. Giambattista Vico defined metaphor long ago as "a fable in brief", and certainly the notion that myth grows out of metaphor, and the related notion that metaphor summarises myth, are both familiar enough to students of literature. And the notion that the literal reading of metaphor in the Bible is the source of much of the mythologising that some now wish to see reversed is familiar enough to students of the New Testament. The difficulties that might be involved in that reversal, however, must give us pause. It is in illumination of some of these difficulties, rather than in any attempt to solve them, that this paper is offered.

It is a commonplace of current thinking that language is essentially metaphoric in nature, but like many another commonplace, the thought seems somehow to have anaesthetised the situation which gave rise to it. The largely unaccommodated fact remains that in all verbal communication (to push the argument further) we are involved in metaphor very much more deeply than we are generally aware; so that our statements very often commit us in

the eyes of others in ways which, were we more alert, would thoroughly disconcert us. And conversely, the statements of others make imaginative demands upon us which our vague notions about metaphor do not equip us to meet. Without going all the way with McLuhan, we have to accept that, in any given situation, more conveyable meaning may be reposed in the form of the communication than in the "message". If for the ordinary purposes of our lives we are content to rub along in a hit-and-miss way, we are regularly in trouble when we come to examine the Gospels. For Christ chose to speak chiefly in ways which were markedly metaphoric, almost eschewing directness and literalness. We need not be surprised that He did so, for the validity of direct statement is in fact a less secure quantity than that of metaphor, for the simple reason that direct statement lacks the flexibility of metaphor: it is over-rigid, and encourages an over-rigidity in the reader or listener. On the other hand, the flexibility of metaphor encourages the all-too-easy creation of myth, and in a manner which confounds definition, so that the only safe retreat is into vagueness. It is a difficulty, the ramifications of which the centuries since New Testament times seem to have been remarkably slow to respond to. Yet, few at any time would have taken great exception to Barclay's observation that:

a faith that can be neatly stated in a series of propositions and neatly proved in a series of logical steps like a geometrical theorem is an impossibility and a contradiction in terms.<sup>1</sup>

It is significant that Barclay should have felt it necessary to issue that reminder in dealing with the Gospel of St. Mark, for Mark himself was quite clearly fascinated with Our Lord's apparent dependence upon metaphor. It seems to be fairly generally accepted—though it is a view which has led many into difficulties—that Mark, as Schweizer has put it, placed greater importance upon the nature of Christ's teaching than upon its content:

Why is this? . . . It is similar to the way married couples use certain metaphors which are not understood by anyone other than the two who are related to one another in a common experience. Therefore, figurative language has a force more binding than that of direct speech, since it requires that the hearer be ready to enter into a special relationship with the speaker. According to Mark, Jesus must speak about God in a way that reaches hearers who will permit themselves to become involved.<sup>2</sup>

I think we should have to be forgiven for thinking that this is more easily said than done. In order to examine the difficulties of self-

1 William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (2nd ed. 1955) pp. 331-32.

2 Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark* (1967, trans. 1971) p. 85.

involvement such as Schweizer calls for, I have selected for consideration a passage in Mark over which there has been sufficient confusion to suggest that involvement might be achieved only at a price.

The passage I have selected occurs in Chapter VIII, and I quote it in the Authorised version, which renders it with a fidelity to the structure that many more modern versions, in their search for a sense of greater immediacy, tend to obscure:

Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. And when Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand? (14-21)

It is as well to remember one or two facts about the placing of Chapter VIII in Mark's general scheme, for not to do so would be to risk the distortions of a needlessly limited response. Mark's Gospel falls into various sections, depending upon how it is regarded, and each of the definable patterns has a truth which cannot be ignored altogether. The dominant pattern is perhaps the geographical—the ministry in the north, in and around Galilee, and that in the south, in and around Jerusalem. But as Lightfoot points out, there is another pattern, not quite coincidental with the geographical, and having more to do with atmosphere, and with focus:

In the first half of the book, the interest and emphasis are on the Lord's mighty acts which are narrated in terse and vivid language; and the shadow of the cross falls only rarely, and then indirectly, on the scene. After Caesarea Philippi, however, the mighty acts almost come to an end; with the beginning of the journey to the south the shocking destiny in store there for the Son of Man is repeatedly proclaimed; and the teaching is addressed to the disciples much more than, as has hitherto been the case, to the attendant crowd of listeners.<sup>3</sup>

But whichever way we look at this Gospel, Chapter VIII—especially up to verse 26, and thus including the passage we are concerned with—figures in an important way. To say that in verses 14 to 21 we are looking at the great hinge of Mark's Gospel would not

3 R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (1950) p. 13.

be an exaggeration, though we should have to understand “hinge” in a special way. The events here recorded by Mark (taking them to be *events* in one sense or another) take their place in a Divine scheme that could not have been clear to those who took part in them, and perhaps not in a way Mark himself was specially clear about, telling the story as he does: though we should be very cautious about believing this of a writer whose chief talent seems to have been an editorial one. Whatever the truth of that, the events recorded have a particular set of functions in his story-telling: they repeat pericopal patterns from the past; they wind up a series of pericopes; they throw emphases upon certain features in those pericopes; and they impressively set the stage for what is to come by throwing Christ into unique relief as the Son of Man. Chapters II and III especially had laid emphasis upon Our Lord’s failure to find acceptance with the Jewish establishment, and had insisted upon the conflicts that His very presence seemed to arouse. Chapter III had shown Him selecting His apostles, to whom He turned as it were in despair of other support. Chapter VI had rather pointedly kept all this alive by introducing the story of Our Lord’s rejection in “his own country”, which clearly means his own native town (*πατρις*) of Nazareth, but also signifies of course His nation at large. And the death of John the Baptist is also recorded in Chapter VI in a way calculated, not so much to foreshadow the ultimate fate Jesus was to suffer at the hands of the Jews, as to emphasise the incomprehension of all levels of society before the fact of Our Lord’s ministry. In both Matthew and Mark (the only two who record John’s death, and in closely similar terms), the story is in parenthesis to the statement that Herod had heard of Our Lord’s ministry, and thought John the Baptist must have risen from the dead. It is richly ironic (as well as portentous), for Herod had not understood John either, though he had had the wit to fear him. This pericope is sandwiched between that of the rejection of Our Lord at Nazareth and that of the first great feeding miracle. Shortly after this, the Pharisees come attacking Our Lord for His lack of reverence for the written letter of the law. After the second great feeding miracle, in Chapter VIII, Our Lord is once again assailed by the Pharisees, this time—ironically enough—demanding a sign. They have to leave without one; but this time there is a significant difference in the context, which is to say, in the arranged presentation of the material. The process of misunderstanding and rejection has now reached new depths: spurned by the scribes and the Pharisees, misunderstood by the prince and the populace, Our Lord is now misunderstood even by His own apostles. The re-appearance of the Pharisees at this moment, asking for a sign, emphasises the inability of all, without exception, to read a sign when it is given. Our Lord has, as it were, played along with the sign-seekers as He searched for support. He

has found no support He can rely upon. From now on, He is alone; and the details of the Transfiguration, especially as Mark recounts them, emphasise all this again. In his discussion of the significance of the term "Son of Man", T. W. Manson argues that an essential feature of the concept is involved in this utter isolation:

His mission is to create the Son of Man, the Kingdom of the saints of the Most High, to realise in Israel the ideal contained in the term. This task is attempted in two ways: first by public appeal to the people: . . . then, when this appeal produced no adequate response, by the consolidation of his own band of followers. Finally, when it becomes apparent that not even the disciples are ready to rise to the demands of the ideal, he stands alone, embodying in his own person the perfect human response to the regal claims of God.<sup>4</sup>

But this is not the whole of the context which we must take account of. As if He were making some sort of comment upon His last question—How is it that ye do not understand?—the first thing Jesus seems to have done on reaching Bethsaida was to cure a blind man. But He did so in a particular way: He first took the man outside the town, and then restored his sight gradually. However, as we read this pericope, we are struck by a certain falsity in the account. The half-cured man speaks of seeing people imperfectly—"they look like trees walking." It has a spurious air; it is the sort of thing a man who had all his life been able to see might imagine a half-cured blind man would say. It would not do to press the point; perhaps he was just a very curious blind man. But whatever the *fact* behind the pericope, the sense of its being a fabrication is still conveyed very strongly. It announces itself very clearly as one of those instances in which facts are profoundly unimportant and only significances matter. That these relate to the passage we are considering, with all the talk of seeing, perceiving, eyes, and so on, cannot be doubted: the curing of the blind man is a kind of epilogue to the drama in the boat. It is also an indication of the way in which that drama is to be seen and read.

The pericope of verses 14 to 21 also has an air of fabrication about it, which the Authorised Version copes with quite admirably by not trying to dress it up. Here too what we are primarily concerned with is not an event, but an epitome. Understood in this way—as a kind of abstract of the Gospel so far, a highlighting of key issues, a placing of punctuation-marks—it would still have to be thought of as an event or incident, and only empty speculation could deny it the status of a *happening*. Nevertheless, here, as in the story of the blind man, it is significances rather than facts that matter: it is the metaphoric rather than the literal response that

4 T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (1931, repub. 1963) pp. 227-28.

will reveal the truth. Verses 19 to 21 speak explicitly about two feeding miracles, though Luke and John speak of only one. The apparent contradiction in *facts* has given rise to a good deal of speculation, some of it less than impressive. Nineham observes:

No doubt because of its eucharistic connexions, the story was highly valued in the early Church, and in the course of constant repetition it acquired two, or, for aught we know, more than two, forms.<sup>5</sup>

That comes much too pat: reaching for speculation with this sort of ease merely brings scholarship into disrepute. Besides, there is no reason at all for thinking that there may not have been several points of origin for this story: the one speculation is at least as valid as the other. What is interesting, however, is that Matthew, in his version of the pericope we are considering (in which he follows Mark fairly closely), seems to be doing his best to *clarify* it. What he seems to think desirable is the distraction of the reader's attention away from the two miracles, away from facts altogether, and the direction of attention to significances. Matthew rather labours the business, in fact: Taylor talks—justly, I think—of his “cloud of words”.<sup>6</sup> Matthew scarcely gives the impression of one who is comfortable about Mark's presentation here, and this discomfort may derive from a number of sources: the rather rough handling of the obtuse disciples, the poetic density of the writing, and perhaps—though only perhaps—the insistence upon two feeding miracles *in this kind of way*. For Matthew must have recognised that Mark's presentation, while speaking consistently of two miracles, nevertheless did so in a way which really suggested that there had been only one. Without wandering with Reuchlin into the fascinating excesses of neo-Pythagorean number-mysticism, we may still be sufficiently impressed here by certain apparent significances in the numbers involved in the two feeding miracles to pause before declaring any conviction that there must have been more than one original incident. Richardson summarises it:

The scene of the Feeding of the Five Thousand suggests a Galilean (*i.e.* Jewish) crowd; that of the Feeding of the Four Thousand suggests a crowd drawn from the neighbourhood of the Decapolis (cf. Mark vii:31) on the south-eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, *i.e.* a Gentile crowd. The Five Thousand receive the five loaves (possibly a reminiscence of the Five Books of the Law); the Four Thousand receive seven loaves (cf. the seventy nations into which the Gentile world was traditionally divided, the Septuagint, the Seven Deacons of Acts vi:3, and St. Luke's Mission of the Seventy, Luke x:1ff.). At the former

5 D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark* (1963) p. 206.

6 Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark* (2nd ed. 1966) p. 368.

miracle twelve baskets are taken up, representing the Twelve Tribes of Israel (cf. Matt. xix:28); at the latter, seven baskets remain over . (cf. the above references).<sup>7</sup>

In effect, there is so much art in Mark's presentation here that any evidence that might have survived to prove conclusively that there *were* two feeding miracles rather than one has been obscured; and we must assume that this was deliberately done. There may have been several such feedings, or there may have been only one; but for the purposes of his Gospel, Mark felt the need for two. Matthew, who almost certainly felt that he was superseding Mark, recognised the motive for presenting the doublet, but seems to have had a doubt about the need: Luke and John clearly felt that there was no need; and perhaps for their audiences and for the various times for which they were writing, they were fully justified in thinking so. Mark, however, is much concerned with insisting upon the parity of Jew and Gentile in the scheme of the Redemption. His recognition of the central importance of a feeding miracle is reflected in his artistic elaboration of the doublet so that it comes across, in quite a subtle way, as one total experience. After the first miracle, the disciples embark for Bethsaida, leaving Jesus to join them later—as He does by walking on the water. They land, however, at Genesareth, south of Capernaum. After the second feeding, they arrive, eventually, at Bethsaida, presumably after a long walk. This time they had set out for the non-existent Dalmanutha. Between the departure for Bethsaida and the arrival, there is a sufficiently close re-working in the account of the second feeding of details in the first, as to lead us to believe that Mark was either artistically arranging an impressively close, though not exact, repetition of the earlier pattern; or, with equal artistry, insisting upon the few differences: and in either case bringing the first story to its diametrically schemed conclusion only at the end of the second. It is necessary to bear in mind, in approaching VIII: 14-21, the possibility that the linguistic patterns are not intended to have a signification in terms of things said and done, but a signification only in terms of Christ's message, the Gospel itself.

Approaching verses 14-21 with this in mind, we are perhaps the more sensitive to the two words used for "basket" and the carefully selective way Mark has employed them. On a literal level, it must seem a matter of remarkable punctiliousness in Our Lord that He should so carefully distinguish, in successive sentences, between the *kophinos* and the *sphuris*. What is clear is that either Our Lord Himself, or Mark, His editor, is carefully balking the literal response. The rather ritualistic way in which Our Lord puts His questions—or Mark arranges them for presentation—makes the literal response even harder to sustain. Indeed, a literal reading in-

7 Alan Richardson, *The Miracle-Stories of the Gospels* (1941, repub. 1969) p. 98.

volves us in the belief that Our Lord was being rather heavily sarcastic: and that is a reading we ought to have no hesitation in rejecting. So with the *one loaf* that has been brought for the voyage, it can only be an absurdity to remark that:

It was a normal precaution to take provisions when crossing over to the eastern shore of the Lake of Galilee.<sup>8</sup>

It is on the level of saying that they usually took a few sandwiches: it is not a context in which that *kind* of comment can have any kind of significance whatsoever; and this is to say that it is not a context in which literal responses have any validity above the level of triviality. We have to ask, with Austin Farrer:

What is the point here of the curious detail, that they had just *one loaf*? Would not the point be clearer if the evangelist merely said that they had forgotten to bring bread?<sup>9</sup>

Farrer asks this question at the end of a lengthy analysis of the numbers involved in the feeding miracles, in which he indulges in a bit of number-mysticism of his own, and rather more to his satisfaction than to ours, I fancy; but he is hard to resist when he answers his own question:

“One loaf among twelve.” Here surely we have the Last Supper prefigured ... what Christ distributes in the supper is the substance of God’s Israel, and therefore in a manner twelve-fold, yet it is a more immediate thought to us, that Christ distributes the substance of Israel because he distributes himself, his body; and Christ is one. So Mark makes haste to supplement the symbolism of the twelve loaves with the sacramental reality of the one, which alone is needful. (pp. 303-4)

That, surely, is very well said, showing how Mark, at the beginning of this pericope, provides the key to its interpretation: in a clear sense, the *one loaf* is what it is all about.

It is in the light of this knowledge that we must consider verse 15; and it is with some misgivings that one encounters Nineham’s comment upon it:

Probably this verse reached St. Mark as an isolated saying which he incorporated here because the reference to bread in v.14 provided as good a context for it as he could find. (p. 215)

It is important that we recognise what is going on here, for Nineham is not merely indulging in empty speculation, but mythologising in a particularly dangerous way. He is at the opposite extreme from the sandwich-makers, who would empty metaphoric significance out into the trivialities of day-to-day literalness; Nineham—and he is not alone in this—would inflate metaphor into myth, and in doing so blur the edges of reality sufficiently to permit the intru-

8 J. A. O’Flynn in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* ed. by Bernard Orchard (1953) p. 918.

9 Austin Farrer, *A Study in St. Mark* (1951) p. 303.



sion of any and every-kind of obscurantism. What must be identified is the middle position alluded to by Taylor in speaking of this particular pericope:

Mark is writing didactic history with the special needs of the Church in mind. Accordingly, under the pressure of practical interests, the historical prelude fades away. The stupidity of the disciples is exaggerated and their failure to interpret the metaphorical allusion in 'the leaven of the Pharisees' is left unexplained.... The story illustrates the beginnings of a type of Gospel narrative found often in the Fourth Gospel and which has persisted down to the present day. Touch with history is not lost, but catechetical interests supervene. (p. 364)

Taylor, at least, is in no doubt about the metaphorical nature of the language, and indeed it is very difficult to see how anyone could be: Herod and the Pharisees, whatever else they might have been, were not bakers. Some of the trouble people have had with this verse is, in fact, the manner in which it wrenches a narrative in which it has been just barely possible to sustain a literal reading into incontrovertible metaphor. And matters are not helped by the fact that it is, all too clearly, somebody else's metaphor, not ours. What we have to ask ourselves in such a situation is a set of questions the answers to which may not be readily accessible: what, to start with the easy question, is the force of the metaphor for us? for Our Lord? for His audience? for Mark? for Mark's audience? Was Our Lord employing a metaphor in its generally accepted usage? or was He investing it—as He often invested language—with new significances? Too many of us never pause to ask anything beyond the first question—if that; the literalists fall back upon existentialist responses that effectively fog the issues: for them, only mysticism offers an alternative to literalism. The mythologists ransack their cupboards for possible referents which might allow them to over-ride contextual considerations and explain everything in terms of generalised, "mythical" significances: they jostle the literalists in the fog.

The reference to leaven, linguistically, has less force for us than it presumably had for the disciples, less force, at any rate, than the reference to the Pharisees, or that to Herod. *Pharisee* is a powerfully evocative word for us; so too is *Herod* (though most of its connotations belong to Herod the Great); so that we tend to read significances back into "leaven" from the genitive nouns which qualify it. It is at least doubtful whether any Jews would have done so at the time, however strongly they may have felt about the hypocrisies of the Pharisees or the flagrant immoralities of the Tetrarch of Galilee. For them, it seems likely—both from what we know of the Hebraic tradition, and from the way Our Lord worded His sentence (or Mark worded it for Him)—that it was the word "leaven" which would carry the most powerful con-

notations in this sentence. Most commentators remark upon the connotations of corruption which, they argue, the word then carried. Plutarch is usually cited—not always by name—he having observed that leaven is:

itself the offspring of corruption, and corrupting the mass of dough with which it has been mixed.<sup>10</sup>

This seems to me to be an appeal away from metaphor to myth, and to be not only unwarranted but a positive distraction from the real issues and true meanings that are here proposed.

Plutarch, it is at least worth recalling, was not a Jew, but a rather devout Greek from Boeotia, and one must wonder just what weight his testimony can bear in the debate. Looked at literally, the leaven used by most Jews was a piece of dough kept over from a previous baking and broken down in water when it was thoroughly decayed; then it was used in the familiar way. It is certainly tempting to think of it as a symbol of corruption, if it is looked at in this rather exclusive way. Quite apart from this, we must be tempted by Leviticus 2:11 to think that leaven must symbolise something unclean, if not actually corrupt. At the Feast of Passover, not only had the bread to be unleavened, but on the eve of the feast—if the Kabbalistic traditions were followed—ten pieces of leaven were hidden about the house, to be sought out by candle-light and then burned: the practice had all the appearance of ritualised cleansing. However, it is well to remember two features of the case which these facts tend to obscure. The first is that the nomadic ancestors of the Hebrews, like many Bedouin even to the present day, made their bread without leaven; so that we have always to take into account a conservative streak in Jewish ritual that derived from long and deeply-respected traditions of primitive innocence. The second feature is, of course, that the Exodus was carried through with miraculous speed, but it was a miracle supported by a rigidly enforced discipline. The leaving of the bread without leaven was simply one of several external manifestations of that discipline: there was to be haste, so there would be no time for the rising of the dough. And the nation was to return for many years to a nomadic existence. No actual *corruption* in the leaven was thus implied, any more than, in Leviticus 2:11, there is any *corruption* associated with honey. Leavened bread was not proscribed on all feasts. At the Feast of Weeks, also known as the Feast of First Fruits, leavened loaves were offered along with other fruits of the earth. What is interesting here is the fact that this was a harvest festival, held seven weeks after the sickle was first put to the corn. It lasted for one day, the fiftieth day, and was thus known sometimes as the Day of Pentecost; and here it is tempting to believe that the use of leaven had some fertility signif-

10 Quoted by Kennedy in *A Dictionary of the Bible*.

icance even at a quite early date. Certainly, the rising of dough has been a symbol of pregnancy in all sorts of cultures from ancient times. What is linguistically interesting—if not actually significant—is the regular collocation in all these contexts of three terms: “leaven”, “circumcision”, and “first-born” (or “first-fruits”). It may have been no more than collocation initially, but it is a linguistic axiom that regular collocation eventually produces connotation, the evocation of, not just another term, but an associated idea. It is a semantic situation in which we have to exercise some conscious care, for we are effectively reduced to a special apprehension of terms so coloured.

It may have been a special apprehension of *leaven* that St. Paul had—though I believe that he was trying to broaden it—on those occasions when (I Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9) he employed this term. In I Corinthians, he talks of leaven in two ways, speaking of getting rid of the “leaven of yesterday, that was all vice and mischief”, and keeping the feast “with unleavened bread, with purity and honesty of intent”, where leaven is certainly a metaphor of moral corruption; then going on to observe: “Have ye never been told that a little leaven is enough to leaven the whole batch?” and urging the getting rid of “the leaven which remains over”: where, clearly, leaven is a metaphor of human sexuality, not evil, but not to be over-indulged. And the passage is wholly concerned with warning the Corinthians against the evils of incontinence, adultery, and sexual perversion. In Galatians, Paul uses his catch-phrase, “It takes but a little leaven to leaven the whole batch”, in arguing that a great deal of damage can be done in the community by a few misguided Judaizers. He then goes on to talk of the corrupt impulses of nature, among which those of the flesh figure very prominently. He is echoing Jesus (as at Mark 7:20-22), but *not* in collocating *leaven* with corrupt practices listed by both. As the various collocations of *leaven* came to Paul, they came with fairly sharply-defined connotations of corruption, so that we find words for corruption collocated by him in the contexts of his usage of the term. He seems, however, either to have been unaware of Our Lord’s use of the term, or not specially responsive to it.

The fact is that Our Lord seems to have accepted the sexual connotations of leaven—which lie so close to the surface of Paul’s use of the term—but not to have attached any association of corruption to them. Rather does He use them to make an excellent point, investing the metaphor with a new and wonderfully rich complex of meanings and significances. He warns the disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod; and it is tempting to read this as signifying corrupt religion and corrupt politics, but we are likely to miss the point if we do so. There is an image here of fertility, perhaps even in a sexual sense: what, Our Lord is asking, will be the product of such a begetting? It isn’t the

leaven of Herod, or that of the Pharisees, which will produce a first-born, or first-fruits, fit to be offered to God, but *My* leaven, and only *My* leaven. That Jesus thinks and speaks in this way of leaven is, I think, substantiated in Matthew, in a passage repeated almost verbatim by Luke:

The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. (13:33)

Here we have Our Lord's characteristic use of the term, and here too we have an image of the Church as the Bride of Christ—the woman who took leaven and hid it in three measures of meal. It is not difficult to see how what Our Lord is saying in Mark 8:14-21 is a reflection and development of what He said in 2:19-22, where we have the familiar and, in the early Church, very popular image of Our Lord as the bridegroom, the Church His Bride. The clothing image which follows takes its place with a series of others, evoking here, obviously enough, the wedding-garment, references to which pervade Our Lord's ministry. The equally pervasive wine image, in the Gospel story as a whole, though not specifically in Mark, must evoke the marriage-feast at Cana. This marital imagery was not a feature of Old Testament theology, but it is central in that of the New Testament; and in the subtlest of ways, it is reflected in 8:14-21 in the offering of an idea of a new relationship in all its fullness, a marriage consummated and bearing fruit; and second by relating all this to the mystery of the feast or the wedding-meal.

If we exclude the Passion and Resurrection, we may say that Our Lord's Ministry starts and ends with a meal—the marriage-feast at Cana and the Last Supper. In the exact middle, we have 8:14-21 in Mark's account, summarising the miraculous feedings. In one aspect it looks back to Cana, and the fruits of marriage; in another it looks forward to the upper room, and the breaking of a loaf of bread. But the Passion and Resurrection are not excluded: in the completest sense they are contained, and their significance illuminated. For Christ, in taking upon Himself the corruption of sin and death, and going down into the tomb, is clearly prefigured in the leaven; and its action in dough prefigures His resurrection, which is not personal to Himself but raises all mankind. And ever since, in the Eucharist, we have been celebrating that "reaction" in the breaking of bread: in the breaking of that bread we find the leaven of salvation, the leaven of Christ, the leaven which *is* Christ.

At the great hinge of Mark's Gospel, as events are about to acquire new complexities of significance, Christ casts the puzzled gaze of His followers both backwards and forwards, and in a cryptic way encapsulates the whole of his Mission. The question He puts, as Vincent Taylor says, "is aimed at the readers and not merely at the original disciples" (p. 364). There is much to be

understood.

In commenting upon the pericope we have been considering, Schweizer protests that:

Man is so enmeshed in his own world and its cares that he always interprets God's metaphorical language in a crassly literal sense and is not drawn by that language to the kind of faith in which he surrenders himself to the one whom he can never capture in words and concepts, but can only experience. (p. 162)

There is a great deal of truth in this; and certainly, only faith responds, and only to men of faith will the metaphors speak in all their fullness. But in talking of "surrender" and "experience", Schweizer is asking of metaphor more than metaphor has to give. He is, in fact, asking it to operate as myth, at least as that word is very commonly defined. In what I have said of this pericope, I should hope that there is abundant evidence that no amount of mere "surrender" could be commensurate with the complexity of meanings conveyed. Existentialism is the happy hunting-ground of the myth-maker; and appeals to the—largely mysterious—operations of myth figure significantly in justification of any existentialist approach to literature. The fact is, however, that for most of the time we do much better to settle just for the metaphors. What we must seek is the imaginative but *informed* response. It is four hundred and fifty years since Erasmus argued:

Theology is by rights the queen of all the sciences, but she will have more honour and more learning if she receives such useful waiting-women with proper kindness into her household.<sup>11</sup>

The waiting-women he was talking of were the study of language and the study of good letters: *bonae litterae*. Easy resort to symbolism is an almost infallible sign of decadence; myth-making a sign of idleness and irresponsibility.

Given its nature, and the history of its compilation, the Bible, including the New Testament, must inevitably include a great deal of serious, God-given myth. We need grope for no more. The demythologising of the Bible we have been well warned about, in the parable of the wheat and the tares. By adhering to the principles of *bonae litterae* let us avoid the mistake of sowing more tares than are choking the wheat already.

11 Margaret Mann Phillips, *The "Adages" of Erasmus: A Study with Translations* (1964) p. 380.