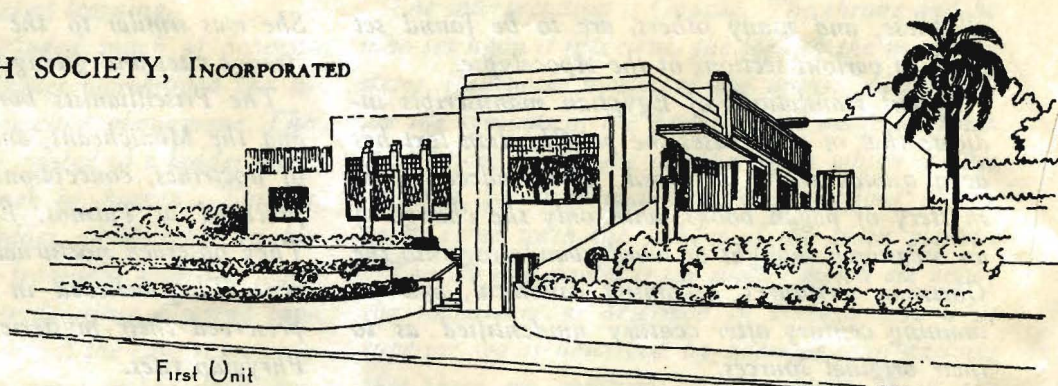


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BIBLE COURSE SERIES

BY MANLY P. HALL

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THE STUDENTS MONTHLY LETTER

Letter No. 12

THE SECRET DOCTRINE IN THE BIBLE

THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN

Dear Friend:

It was the wish of Martin Luther that the Book of Revelation should be omitted from his translation of the Bible. In his opinion, the Apocalypse was of pagan origin and was not a writing of the beloved John. It was filled with Hermetic inferences and strange allegories which troubled the soul of the great German reformer. Though not greatly learned in comparative religion, Luther sensed the Gnosticism that pervaded the book. He denied the divine inspiration of the entire work, affirming with Erasmus that the Apocalypse had no legitimate place in the Christian scripture. He raised his voice against tradition, but tradition was stronger; and after his death, the Book of Revelation was restored to the Bible and has remained in its accustomed place ever since.

The debate concerning the origin of the Book of Revelation began in the second century. Even the Gospel according to St. John was involved. Dionysius of Alexandria declared that both books had been written by Cerinthus, a Gnostic, who, to add credence to his writings, had appended thereto the name of John. Later, St. Jerome attacked the validity of the Apocalypse, lending to the con-

troversy one of the greatest names in the Church. Jerome insisted that through some machination of the evil one, the devil had introduced his voice into the scripture itself in an effort to undo the whole labor of Christendom.

It must be acknowledged, then that the authorship of the Revelation is extremely uncertain. The claims of the Authorized Version that it was the work of John while on the Isle of Patmos may be liberally discounted. It is quite possible that the Cerinthus story is the correct one. If so, the Revelation may be the most important work in the entire New Testament for the reason that it arose from Gnostic scholarship.

From a philosophical standpoint, the Book of Revelation exhibits a wisdom far in excess of the other Testament writings. Here comparative religion is introduced. The great mystery institutions which dignified the past with their initiates find a place in the Apocalypse. The rites of Phrygia, those celebrating the Aged One who walks amidst the lamps; the rites of Osiris wherein is set forth the last judgment; and the rites of the ancient sun-god and the horsemen who ride through the sky;

all these, and many others, are to be found set forth in various sections of the Apocalypse.

Recent translations of Egyptian manuscripts indicate that in some cases the pre-Christian text has been quoted word for word. Here indeed is the mystery of pagan books, with only the change of an occasional thought or word, wandering into the Christian scriptures, becoming canonical, and remaining century after century unidentified as to their original sources.

John was one of the disciples who did not suffer martyrdom. He is believed to have been buried at Ephesus, the city of the Mysteries, near the tomb of the Virgin Mary. John sleeps through the centuries awaiting the return of his Lord. When that great day comes, he will arise and be seated upon the right side of his master.

These legends have little regard for history, but are products of the traditional trend in early Christian thought. During this period, fantastic accounts of Christian origins were developed, and these inventions ultimately took on a stature second only to the scriptures themselves. There was a wild confusion of Christian and pagan doctrine. The Greek god Dionysus was canonized, as was also his Roman mode, Bacchus. The pagan mathematician Hypatia, a victim of Christian monks, blossomed forth as St. Catherine of Alexandria. It was not until the end of the Dark Ages that anything resembling reason could be clearly distinguished in the picture. This was no time of critical scholarship. From our present perspective it is reasonably certain that the Apocalypse is a compilation of pagan doctrines with an occasional Christian reference interpolated into the text.

Revelation 1:9 reads: "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."

During the years when John is supposed to have lived on the Island of Patmos, he was far from the boundaries of Christian influence. The people who dwelt in that region were called Priscillianists, the followers of a priestess by the name of Priscilla.

She was similar to the Roman sibyls, practising strange rites and giving oracles.

The Priscillianists borrowed from the Gnostics and the Manicheans, and from the wild diffusion of doctrines, conceptions, and sorceries that were practised at Patmos, Ephesus, and Philadelphia. They observed nocturnal rites in grottoes and caverns. They believed in a messianic tradition and preserved their mysteries under what were called Phrygian rites.

The Phrygian Mysteries were celebrated not only near Patmos but at Ephesus and Philadelphia, two of the seats of the early Church. The Phrygian arcana were a curious combination of the messianic tradition of Egypt, part of the Dionysian Mysteries of the Greeks, together with elements from the Mithraic doctrines of Persia. It was a conglomerate mysticism which grew up and flourished in the most polyglot areas of the Near East, especially at Ephesus which was called the melting pot of the ancient world.

Ephesus has been referred to as the "city of the sorcerers." Caravans of traders came there from all parts of the then known world to exhibit their wares. A score of strange religious beliefs and rites mingled, mixed, and prospered in the confusion of the community. Devotees worked spells and enchantments; black magic, necromancy, and divination thrived in the congenial atmosphere. The concourse abounded in witches and magicians who sold indiscriminately love potions and poison.

And over this bustling community brooded the sovereign goddess, Diana of the Ephesians.

It should not be concluded, however, that Ephesus was without genuine enlightenment in spiritual matters. Here Buddhist thought mingled with Greek, and the religions of the corners of the earth found common meeting ground. The result was a broader and more tolerant learning than would have been natural in a more secluded area. It was because of this cosmopolitan atmosphere that the Apocalypse contains such a wide distribution of ideas. The book could not have been the product of one simple Syrian. It required a broad contact with the beliefs of the time, and an acquaintance

with many forms and styles of learning.

The rites of Phrygia included much of Sabeanism or astrolatry. The initiates worshipped the sidereal bodies and various celestial phenomena. The ancients had conceived the symbol of a ladder leading upward from the earth to heaven. This is Jacob's ladder, and the ladder of Mithras. In his "Cave of the Nymphs" (a fragment from the wanderings of Ulysses). Homer describes a sacred cavern of Zarathustra. He says that the cave represents this world. There are two great arched doorways, and the ceiling is painted to represent the heavens. Of the two entrances, one is for the descent of souls, and the other for the return upward of the "gods" to the celestial state.

Revelation 4:1 reads: "After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter." This verse must be interpreted according to the doctrines of the ancient pagans. The door which opened in heaven is one of the two gates of the mundane sphere. John ascended a symbolical ladder composed of the seven churches, not to be considered literally as religious institutions, but as symbols of the rungs of the ladder of the Mysteries. Even Tertullian and Epiphanius acknowledged that there were not the seven churches at the time of St. John.

The nature of the ascent into the mystery of divine things is clarified further in the opening words of Revelation 4:2: "And immediately I was in the spirit." This can only mean an illumination or internal spiritual mystery by which John was raised up through the door in the mundane sphere into communication with that which abode above the firmament.

Having ascended by a mystical experience, John is made to describe symbolically that which is above the material heavens. He saw a throne, and upon the throne was a great light. Before the throne were four and twenty elders and seven lamps; and the throne was surrounded with a great sea of glass like crystal.

The interpretation is Gnostic. The throne and he who sat upon it represents the lord of the mundane states, Ildabaoth, master of the aeons. About him are the symbols of the hours which make up time. And before his throne are the lights which are his children, for it is said that from the lord of the aeons came forth the princes of the seven planets.

The sea like crystal is the waters which are above the firmament as described in Genesis 1:7. This superior sea is described by Socrates who declares that there are creatures which dwell about the shores of the air which are imperceptible to men. This is the schamayim of the Cabala, the sidereal sea that washes the shores of heaven. This also is the proper sea of life, the waters of life, the heavenly humidity, the ocean of generation, from which souls, once immersed in its mysterious essence, fall into the sphere of generation. It is described in detail in the DIVINE PYMANDER of Hermes and in the writings of the Neoplatonists. In every great system of mythology, this superior sea is mentioned. It is this same water which is above the firmament which is supposed to have descended in the flood of Noah. In the mystery of initiation, this sea becomes a laver of purification, and as such was symbolized in the rites of the tabernacle by a fountain or basin in the courtyard, with its surface inlaid with the mirrors of the women of Israel.

The section of the Apocalypse which deals with the seven lamps in the midst of which walks the Ancient One is pure Sabeanism. The seven golden candlesticks are the seven planets, and he who walks in the midst of them is the same as the mysterious being who is seated on the throne above the heavens, and the shining figure that rides upon the wheels and the cherubim in the vision of Ezekiel. He wears a golden girdle, his hair is as white as snow, his eyes are as a flame of fire, his feet are like brass, and his voice as the sound of many waters. In his right hand he holds seven stars, and from his mouth comes forth a sharp two-edged sword.

Even the wildest imagination can not construe this figure to be an orthodox part of Christian theology. He wears the attributes of the seven powers of God, and, according to Revelation 1:20,

the stars in his hand are the angels of the seven churches. He is garmented in white and like the great figure of the Zohar, moves in a splendor perceptible only to the awakened eye of the seer.

And what are the seven churches which are in Asia? They are the seven races, the seven continents, the seven days of creation, the seven sacraments, and the seven mysteries. They are the seven vowels which are spoken by the mouth, the seven senses of the perfect man, the seven bodies of the complete man, and the seven principal orifices of the body.

The mystery of the seven is the supreme mystery of the one who was, is, and shall be, Ildabaoth, lord of the aeons, creator of all forms in the mundane sphere, ruling like Zeus with a sevenfold scepter of universal law. He is the master of the Mysteries, hierophant of the rites of Phrygia, keeper of the seven keys by which shall be opened the seven doors of the Mysteries.

The mystery of the seven is completed in the story of the seven seals and the seven churches. The churches constitute a ladder, the lowest rung of which is the symbolic church of Ephesus. Ephesus was ruled over by Diana, a lunar goddess. Therefore, the order ascends from the moon to Mercury, the church of Smyrna; then comes Pergamos, the church of Venus; Thyatira, the sun; Sardis, Mars; Philadelphia, Jupiter; and lastly, Laodicea, Saturn. There are other arrangements assigning the churches differently to the planets, but the result in each case is the same; the churches are rungs of the ladder which leads upward from the elements to the stars.

Astronomically considered, the vision of John assumes unexpected significance. Ascending through the door in heaven, he beholds the constellational diffusion composed of the twelve northern constellations and the twelve southern constellations. These were called the ASSOCIATES or the FIRST ARMY OF THE REDEEMED. The northern constellations were called the NORTHERN BRETHERN, and the southern constellations the SOUTHERN BRETHERN. Each was crowned to represent the fact that it was a radiant star or star group.

The ancients considered the area south of the equator as a great ocean from which the constellation arose. The great monster or leviathan creeping out of the southern sea was, therefore, Cetus, the constellation of the whale. This had been related earlier in the story of Jonah. It is interesting to note that the round table of King Arthur contained space for twenty-four knights seated before panels alternately black and white.

At the beginning of the present astronomical age there was a conjunction of the seven planets in the sign of Aries. This is described in Revelation by the symbol of the lamb with seven eyes and seven horns. By eyes must always be understood planets or stars, and by horns, the power or ray which emerges. In modern astrology, the sun is exalted in the sign of the ram. Bacchus is pictured in the ancient mosaics with a lamb in his arm, and in the catacombs of Rome, figures believed to be those of Christ carry the lamb in one arm and hold the shepherd's crook in the other hand. Jesus is referred to as the good shepherd. Hermes was the shepherd of souls, master over the little stars of the constellation of the ram. The sun is essentially dignified in Leo and exalted in Aries, therefore it is written: "The lamb and the lion shall lie down together."

It is usual to represent the Book of Revelation as a scroll from which are suspended seven seals. These seals represent a mystery, a secret which can not easily be revealed because it is sealed up in the mysteries. By the seals is also to be understood the seven keys of the scriptures by the possession of which the initiate may behold all mysteries and all truth.

Upon the opening of the first seal, a horseman rode forth upon a white horse. Revelation 6:2: "And he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him; and he went forth conquering, and to conquer." Here, again, is the moon and the bow of Diana.

When the second seal was opened a red horse came forth; and he who rode upon the horse was given a great sword to take peace from the earth. The second horse and rider represent the sun.

Upon the opening of the third seal, a black horse came forth; and he who sat upon the horse had a balance in his hand. Revelation 6:6: "And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine." Oil and wine represent soul and spirit, and the barley and wheat, the lower nature of man. The destroyer upon the black horse is Saturn.

The fourth seal, when it was opened, gave forth a pale horse, and the name of him that sat upon it was Death, and hell followed with him. The pale horse is Venus; and Venus is Lucifer, the rebel angel whose light was taken from him.

The fifth seal is the seal of the martyrs who cried out in a loud voice. Revelation 6:10: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" The fifth seal is Mars, the seal of blood.

The sixth seal, when it was opened, gave forth a great earthquake, the stars fell from the heavens, the sun became black, and a great and mighty motion moved the heaven and the earth, and the kings of the earth hid themselves. The sixth seal is Jupiter.

The seventh seal was called the great silence, and out of the silence at the sounding of the trumpet of the seventh angel appeared a mystery called the "woman clothed with the sun" who was bearing a man child. This seventh seal is Mercury which completes the great vessels of wrath.

When the seals were opened, the power of them fell upon the earth and upon all natures, therefore, these modes of energy were represented as seven vials which poured out their contents upon the world.

The story of the woman clothed in the sun who went forth into the wilderness to give birth to her man child is susceptible of a most prophetic interpretation. About the time of the beginning of the Christian Era, the temple at Jerusalem was destroyed and the Alexandrian libraries were burned. Wisdom departed into the desert where it was cultured and guarded by the Arabs for nearly a

thousand years, and then returned again to Europe by way of Moorish Spain. Astronomically speaking, the woman clothed with the sun is the position of the sun in Virgo which corresponds with the present Catholic feast of the Assumption of the Virgin in which she is lifted up in glory with her Son.

The last judgment is derived almost completely from the metaphysics of Egypt. According to the Egyptians, the human being is born with seven souls which are in a way the potential powers of the seven planets in man. The souls are manifested through the seven senses, the seven vital organs, and the seven bodily systems. Each of the seven souls has its planetary name. Saturn is the contemplative or rational soul; Jupiter is the reasonable soul; Mars is the impulsive soul; the sun is the vitative soul; Venus is the amative soul; Mercury is the intellectual soul; and the moon is the vegetative or generative soul.

The seven souls together are the bodies of a self which is the ruler of the entire bodily economy. These souls may be lost, one or more of them, by the misuse of the qualities which they represent. In the BOOK OF THE DEAD, papyrus of Ani, the spirit of the deceased, speaking from the urn of the heart, beseeches Osiris: "Let me not perish with the king that ruleth for a day." This is the personality. In each life we have a personal complex which is a king ruling for a day. After death the complex is broken up and the seven souls return to the seven planets unless initiation has bound them together in a spiritual personality.

In the great hall of Amenti, in the room of the columns of the twin truths, the beam and the balance were set up for the last judgment. The twelve assessors (modern jury derived from this) were seated to decide the verdict. Thoth, Lord of the Writing Tablet, prepared to set down the findings. Anubis, the jackal-headed, brings in the heart of the departed, whose KA or ethereal self is also present to behold the judgment. Osiris enthroned, his body filled with eyes, presides over the weighing. The crocodile-headed Set waits to devour the heart of the unworthy; and Cynocephalus, the ape

of wisdom, sits on the beam of the balance. The feather of Maat is placed upon the scales and soul is weighed. If the deceased is perfect in the negative confession of faith (I have not committed, etc.) it goes forth into the plains of Aaru where the "reeds are long" and there is happiness for the day that has no night.

If the seven souls are lifted up, they become a seven-headed creature, but those parts which fail are judged unworthy of the resurrection, and are cast into darkness. The outer darkness represents the various planes of the universe from which these souls have come. Here each disintegrates into its primal substance, resulting in the picturing of the seven hells. But it is not the spirit that goes to these places of punishment, but the castoff souls which are slowly destroyed and their essences returned to the planes from which they came.

The psychostasia or weighing of the soul has been taken bodily from the Egyptian rites and, with only a few interpolations and changes, has been made the last judgment of Revelation. The dead who rise from their graves at the sound of Gabriel's trumpet is a mystery of initiation. They arise not from the earth, but from their bodies into the spiritual state.

The New Jerusalem consummates the mystical drama. Here is the city four square, its gates and walls of jewels, adorned as a bride. The New Jerusalem should not be regarded as a city, or even as a symbol of a place. The New Jerusalem is the perfected and redeemed measure and proportion of the initiate. He himself is a sanctified and holy place adorned as a bride.

It was an early Christian custom for those entering sacred orders to be united by a mystical marriage with Christ. They, indeed, were the "brides of the lamb." As a whole, the church itself theoretically was a bride ready to be united with truth, to be lifted up into holy communion with the most high.

The New Jerusalem is not lighted by the sun nor by the moon, but the lamb is the light thereof. Its jewelled foundation is the breastplate of the old tabernacle. It is St. Augustine's City of God.

According to the Platonists, those who had received the Mysteries, that is, according to Christendom had been taken into the Ecclesia, were as a race apart. The old pagan dialogues describe the sages who meet in their groves far from the abode of men and here reason together upon the mysteries of the universe. The New Jerusalem, therefore, is the temple of the greater Mysteries, the house built without the sound of hammer or the voice of workmen, which is eternal in the heavens. It is the city of the Son existing in the paradisiacal sphere from which man fell in the book of Genesis.

According to Jacob Boehme, the New Jerusalem is the redeemed Adam, the man lifted up by the mystery of Christ. It is, therefore, a spiritual symbol of a mystical state of being where those dwell together who have received the light.

In the parable of the prodigal son is described a man who went from his father's house and wasted his substance among the fleshpots of Egypt. He then became a keeper of swine, less than the least. But after these sad adventures he returned to his father's house, sadder but wiser, and rejoiced to remain there. In the HYMN OF THE ROBE OF GLORY, a Gnostic fragment, is set forth the story of one who travelled far and forgot the land from which he came. As he wandered among the bazaars and shops of Egypt, he found no happiness or satisfaction, for dimly through his forgetfulness, he sensed his participation in some other life long forgotten. In the grail legends, there is the story of Parsifal, the guileless fool, who having entered the castle of the grail, there beheld a great mystery which was beyond his understanding. He, therefore, was sent forth again into the world; and after grievous sufferings, he again discovered the castle of the grail. All these stories have an identical meaning. Like the Odyssey of Homer, they describe the wanderings of the soul in search of "its own far distant land."

In the Apocalypse is set forth a strange, fantastic pageantry, the story of the Mysteries. It seems as though the book had been taken bodily from some learned and ancient rite. It is the only book that has descended to us in which the rituals of the

Mysteries are openly described. The study of it must completely change the Christian viewpoint. The understanding of it must bring a universal perspective wider far than the corners of Christendom.

CONCLUSION

It is impossible in a few hundred pages to interpret the mysteries of the Old and the New Testaments. All that we can do is to remind each and every Bible student that there is a mystery, not apparent to the mind alone, nor the reason, but a mystery that must be experienced inwardly through realization. Historically the Bible is of little value. Its literary excellence comes not from the original, but from repeated reediting to match the scholarship of the times. Its strength lies in its presentation of the Mystery teaching of ancient Israel and early Greece. It is a book of comparative religion and worthless to the individual who perceives Christianity to be a unique revelation. It is read weekly by the thousands of churches of Christendom, but remains sealed with its seven seals until the individual seeker opens it with his own scholarship and understanding.

The first step must be a serene tolerance, even better, a sublime realization that the Mysteries of God have been given in all time to all peoples according to their capacity to understand. If you would read the Bible intelligently, you must read certain commentaries by which its keys are made to turn in the ancient lock. The following are some of the most important commentaries:

THE SIX BOOKS OF PROCLUS ON THE THEOLOGY OF PLATO translated by Thomas Taylor.

London, 1816.

THE GNOSTICS AND THEIR REMAINS by C. W. King.

London, 1887.

PISTIS SOPHIA translated by G. R. S. Mead. Theosophical Publishing Society, London, 1896.

THE BOOK OF BEGINNINGS by Gerald Massey.

London, 1881.

THE NATURAL GENESIS by Gerald Massey.

London, 1883.

EGYPT THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD by Gerald Massey. London, 1907.

THE GHEBERS OF HEBRON by Samuel Fales Dunlap. New York, 1898.

THE HISTORICAL LIBRARY OF DIODORUS THE SICILIAN. *Diodorus Siculus. Various translations.*

THE BOOK OF THE DEAD. *Various translations.*

THE JEWISH WARS by Josephus. *Various translations.*

THE MISHNA. *Various translations.*

THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD.

THE JERUSALEM TALMUD.

SEPHER HA ZOHAR.

SEPHER YETZIRAH: *The Book of Formation and the Thirty Two Paths of Wisdom. Translation by Wm. Wynn Westcott. Theosophical Publishing Society, London, 1893. Translation by Knut Stenring. Wm. Rider & Son, London, 1919.*

THE GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED, by Moses Maimonides. *Translated from the original Arabic text by M. Friedlander. E. P. Dutton and Co., New York, 1919.*

The writings of St. Chrysostom.

The writings of Origen.

All of these works are available in English; many can be secured from your own library, or borrowed by your library from the Library of Congress for your use.

Through an understanding of the origins and developments and the beliefs relevant to Christianity, it is possible to understand at least in part the Gnostic Mysteries in the New Testament. You will also gain some insight into the changes and interpolations which have been made, and so have crippled the text.

It is not merely a desire for scholarship that should impel this research, but rather a desire for understanding and a true insight into the mysteries of the scriptures. The Holy Bible is the sacred book of Christendom, the spiritual guide of nearly 800

million people. A work so widely diffused throughout human society and so intensive a part of the lives of human beings should be read with understanding, with some grasp of the broader meanings and deeper inferences. Superficiality has led to intolerance, but depth of scholarship will bring about an adequate tolerance.

We should remind you that other peoples also have their sacred books, writings which have guided moral conduct and spiritual aspirations for centuries. These scriptures of non-Christian peoples should receive the same veneration and the same research that is accorded to our more familiar writings. All the Bibles of the world united together reveal one spiritual tradition. They all bear witness to an enlightenment which is imperishable and which has been passed on from age to age as a priceless heritage of wisdom. Every person who is a student of the Christian Bible should read the principal non-Christian scriptures, not critically to point out their defects, but with a sincere desire to increase his own knowledge through a wider acquaintance with the inspired writings.

In the last twenty-five years there has been a considerable breaking down of religious prejudices. The sacred books of other peoples are now available to all who desire to read them. Read first the Koran, its inspiration seated in the Christian Revelation; then the Dhammapada, the great Buddhist scripture of the Law; then some small section of the Indian writings such as the Bhagavad Gita. From that pass to the Chinese; read the great Confucian classics, and Lao-tse's Tao Teh King.

When you have made this brief survey, ask yourself sincerely if each of these sacred books has not

added something to your inspiration, or clarified some point of spiritual conduct. In a world torn by materialistic beliefs, these noble and inspired writings give added courage to meet the problems of the day.

Examine several editions of the Christian Bible, as for example, compare the King James version with the modern revised edition and a recent publication THE BIBLE AS LIVING LITERATURE. Consider the polyglots, and get a parallel Greek-English text. You will make many interesting discoveries. You will find that upon the skeleton of the Greek text has been built the beautiful version that we know. We will discover numerous errors and alternative renderings, and slowly recover from the infallibility complex from which so many orthodox Bible readers seem to suffer. Read the Vulgate, the Septuagint. And get a good dictionary of English-Hebrew terms. These will all prove valuable. They will not destroy your faith in the Bible, but they may injure your faith in some of its translators. You will see the uselessness of picking phrases to pieces and trying to think in terms of "jots and tittles." You will be free to consider the larger issues.

The Christian Bible as we know it today is a fragment of the Christian traditions of the first and second centuries. This fragment was arbitrarily preserved and the rest destroyed. Politics and policy played a large part in the compilation. Still, with all its faults, and with all its misinterpretations, the Christian Bible is the greatest book in English literature. But like most other great books, it must be approached with understanding, gentleness, impersonality, and a sincere desire to find truth.

Sincerely yours,

Manly P. Hall