

# Themelios

An International Journal for Pastors and Students of  
Theological and Religious Studies

Volume 2

Issue 3

May, 1977

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# Karl Barth and Christian apologetics

Clark H Pinnock

*Clark Pinnock, our associate editor with special responsibility for apologetics, is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada. He is also co-ordinator of the work of the Theological Students Fellowship in North America.*

It is an advantage, when striving to develop our own thought about a subject, to engage a significant thinker like Barth in dialogue on it, because it compels us to deal with the matter at a more serious level than we otherwise might have done. This is particularly true when the ideas of the dialogue partner chosen are significantly at variance with one's own, as in this case.

Karl Barth, over at least five decades of vigorous theological activity, consistently maintained a stance directly antithetical to the concerns of Christian apologetics. Flew does not greatly distort the truth when he cites Barth: 'Belief cannot argue with unbelief: it can only preach to it.'<sup>1</sup> Such a sentiment fairly summarizes Barth's attitude, set forth at length and in numerous publications over the long years of his fruitful career. Barth does not believe it necessary for the evangelist or preacher to defend the basis of his proclamation by the use of arguments or evidences.

The view that truth in religion is finally based on faith rather than on reasoning or evidence is known as 'fideism'. It can appear in both extreme and moderate forms, both of which may be found within Barth's writings. He understands theology to be an autonomous realm of the church's truth, confessed by faith, and not joined to other areas of human knowledge and experience by epistemological bridges. His position is sometimes labelled 'theological positivism' because of its scepticism toward all truth claims other than its own. Whatever we call it, Barth's viewpoint invites us to reconsider the nature of Christian apologetics in the light of his forceful position.

Though unique in its contours and extent, Barth's anti-apologetic theology fits comfortably with a widespread revolt against the use of reason in theology which has deep roots within Protestant

thought and has become a major trend in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> To discover the historical sources of Barth's stance we need only refer to Luther's hostility to the claims of reason, to Kant's restriction of human knowledge to the phenomenal realm, and to the shrill and influential ranting of Kierkegaard's theology of paradox. The stage was well set for irrationalism in theology, and when the twentieth century dawned, bringing with it awesome proof of man's vicious inhumanity and insanity, the time was ripe for a Barth to sally forth with his theology of unreason.<sup>3</sup>

Barth's rejection of Christian apologetics is, in my judgment at least, one of the most vulnerable points in his whole theological system, and exposes his entire work to repudiation by all who are not yet convinced by the Christian claims. Fideism in theology is not only singularly inappropriate in a pluralistic world with its competing truth claims, but stands opposed, as I hope to show, to the biblical concept of revelation and truth as well.

## I Karl Barth's fideistic theology

The over-all effect of Barth's position on Christian apologetics is clear and unmistakable, though its outworking over five decades, involving subtle alterations in expression, makes exposition of it a considerable challenge. The best approach is to examine his view in stages as it developed.

1. The liberal theology out of which Barth emerged treasured the values of reasonableness, tolerance, openness and the critical study of the Bible. In a letter to Barth in 1923, Adolf von Harnack protested at Barth's exaltation of faith over reason because he felt it gave 'a carte blanche to every conceivable fantasy and to every theological dictatorship that dissolves the historical element in our religion and seeks to torture the consciences of others with its own experience.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> L. Harold DeWolf, *The religious revolt against reason* (New York: Harper, 1949).

<sup>3</sup> On the possible sources of Barth's fideism, cf. Sebastian A. Matczak, *Karl Barth on God. The knowledge of the divine existence* (New York: St Paul Publications, 1962), pp. 292-310, and James Richmond, *Theology and metaphysics* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 1-21.

<sup>4</sup> *The beginnings of dialectical theology*, I, edited by James M. Robinson (Richmond: John Knox, 1968), p. 174.

<sup>1</sup> Antony Flew, *God and philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), p. 9.

From Barth's point of view, of course, liberal so-called 'reason' was simply the tool of a man-centred theology, and he felt compelled to oppose both the instrument and its user together. He did so in such an extreme manner as to suggest that he thought that if reason were granted a role in theology, the result could only be apostasy and unbelief; not a very positive assessment of the rational objectivity of Christian truth!

At the same time, ironically, liberal theology itself, in which Barth trained, was quite ambivalent about the role of reason. The influence of Kantian philosophy upon it had fostered deep opposition to metaphysical apologetics, and religious certainty, in the last analysis, rested on experience rather than reason. It seems likely therefore that Barth inherited a suspicion about reason from liberalism, and intensified his hostility to it due to the irrationalism of existential philosophy stemming from Kierkegaard and Overbeck.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that Barth's hostility to rational apologetics, especially to natural theology, is not so much a rejection of his liberal inheritance as continuity with it.

2. In the writings of the twenties, the new note of the 'dialectical' theology began to be sounded, of an abyss between God and man, resulting from both creation and fall, making it impossible for man to attain any knowledge of God by his own thought processes. The great divide could be bridged only by God himself, and this had already been done for man by Jesus Christ. Barth made all this clear in the famous second edition of his commentary on Romans (1922), expressing specific indebtedness to Kierkegaard and his view of the 'infinite qualitative difference' between time and eternity. Nevertheless, the remnant of an apologetic structure based on anthropology can still be detected both in the Romans commentary and in the abortive *Christian dogmatics* (1927). In both works there is the idea of existential questions being correlated to revelational answers, though Barth is careful to insist on the priority of answer to question.<sup>6</sup> Though even this was not much of an apologetic by traditional standards, Barth was on his way to a much purer and more extreme fideism, and was to eliminate this 'apologetic' element from the successive editions of the Romans commentary, and scrap the *Christian dogmatics* altogether be-

cause of this lingering taint of rational methodology. Thus, in *Church dogmatics* I/1, Barth proudly announces: 'To the best of my ability I have cut out in this second edition of the book everything that in the first issue might give the slightest appearance of giving to theology a basis, support, or even a mere justification in the way of existential philosophy' (p. ix).

3. The summit of purest fideism is reached in Barth's book on Anselm (1931) and the application of it in his first half-volume of the *Church dogmatics* (1932). In his book *Anselm: fides quaerens intellectum*, the familiar themes emerge in bold relief: God makes God known, and faith needs no proofs; knowledge does not lead to faith; faith needs no evidences to rest on, save the divine-human encounter itself. Many doubt that Anselm himself is the actual source of these positions. It seems that the medieval sage believed that his proof of God's existence had universal rational validity even apart from faith. But it is enough for our limited purposes that Barth read him this way, since it is his view and not Anselm's which concerns us here.<sup>7</sup>

The theological method developed in *Fides quaerens intellectum* is applied in *Church dogmatics* I/1. Theology, as the new title suggests, is firmly tied to the believing community, and isolated from the rational checks universally applied in the other sciences (p. 9). God's revelation in Jesus Christ is a 'presupposition' of theology, not needing to be bolstered up by apologetic argumentation of any kind (pp. 29-34). Indeed, the theologian must refuse to discuss the basis of grounding of the biblical claim lest some human certainty or rather uncertainty be mixed with a perfect, inner, divine certainty (pp. 12f.). Even the question why the canon of Scripture is chosen to play so normative a role is not to be answered (pp. 120f.). Barth sums it up: 'The Word of God becomes knowable *by making itself knowable*. The application of what has just been said to the epistemological problem consists in the fact that we hold fast to this statement and not one step beyond do we take' (p. 282).

In the same part-volume, Barth presents a defence and exposition of the doctrine of the trinity which lies at the heart of his understanding of revelation. At least a minor cause of its inclusion at such an early point in the system is the rational offence which it brings. As Tillich says, 'In his system this doctrine falls from heaven, the heaven of an un-

<sup>5</sup> James D. Smart, *The divided mind of modern theology. Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, 1908-1933* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), pp. 100-107.

<sup>6</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic questions in theology*, II (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 207f.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, D. P. Henry, *The logic of St Anselm* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 148f., and F. Coplestone, *A history of philosophy*, II/I (New York: Image Books, 1962), pp. 183-185.

mediated biblical and ecclesiastical authority.<sup>8</sup> To intensify the scandal, Barth devotes a major section to refuting all *vestigia trinitatis*, analogies of the trinity in the natural realm, removing the possibility of adducing any rational support for it from accessible data other than the self-authenticating Scriptures (pp. 383-399). In the treatment that follows, Barth points to Jesus Christ as the sole source of our revelational knowledge, and to the Holy Spirit who alone creates a saving relationship with God in the heart of man.

4. In the works of the thirties, in particular the Gifford lectures on natural theology (1937) and in the first half-volume of *Church dogmatics*, II, Barth launches his famous assault on natural theology, an extension and application of his view that any knowledge of God occurs only in the context of faith and obedience through the work of the Spirit. Considering the fact that the Gifford lectures were established in order to develop natural theology, the choice of Barth to deliver them in 1937 was remarkably inappropriate. According to Barth, God cannot be known by the powers of human reason, but is apprehended solely as a result of his own action and decision. Therefore, natural theology which seeks to debate and even establish the reality of God by means of rational argumentation is simply ruled out. Theology has no use at all for it (*CD*, II/1, p. 168). It lacks any scriptural basis, pursues in reality an alien god, and leads inevitably to theological compromise (pp. 84, 99, 163). Barth cannot say enough in opposition to it.

A sampling of the reasons Barth gives for his implacable opposition to natural theology would include the following. God has acted to reveal himself to man in Christ, and God's being is not to be separated from his act. Barth rejects the traditional notion of a twofold revelation of God (pp. 124, 318). Furthermore, he refuses to distinguish between a theoretical knowledge of God's existence and an effective knowledge of God involved in a whole-hearted saving relationship with him. He will have no part in any idea that the knowledge of God's existence gained apart from the Christian revelation might serve as a stepping-stone on the way to the saving knowledge of God. *Sola gratia* is also an important factor. God gives himself to be known by grace. It is not a work of man's intellect. The possibility of knowing God comes from God, and man must have no credit (pp. 29, 43f., 63).

5. In the writings immediately following the

<sup>8</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic theology*, III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 285.

second world war, we notice a slight softening of Barth's intransigent attitude toward apologetics, though certainly not a reversal of it. True to his antipathy to general revelation, Barth insists that we know the world to be God's creation solely by faith, and through the biblical narrative (*CD*, III/1, pp. 22f.). Even the nature of man is not discoverable through empirical investigation of things human, but has its source in the knowledge of the man Jesus (*III/2*, p. 3). We should not speak about man in general until we learn the essence of man as seen in Christ, who is *vere homo*. Later on, however, Barth comes back to the general knowledge of man, and admits that what can be found out apart from faith may be a 'symptom' of his true nature and consequently has value, but not, he quickly adds, as evidence to lead us to the true knowledge of man (pp. 200-202). Giving with one hand and removing with the other is typical of Barth when he strays into moderate fideism.

The closest Barth ever gets in the *Church dogmatics* to adducing actual evidences in support of the biblical truth claim comes in III/3 (pp. 198-238). In the course of human history, the sphere of God's government, Barth detects certain phenomena which call attention to God's rule over the world: for example, the Scriptures, the Jewish people, the Christian church, the limits of life. Very cautiously, Barth points to these riddles in history as 'standing, permanent, objective reminders' that God indeed is King (p. 200). One might suppose that Barth has had a change of mind concerning apologetics, were it not for two factors. First, in referring to this section in a later volume, Barth indicates that these very signs are discernible and meaningful only to those who are already believers (*CD*, IV/3(2), pp. 714f.). Second, in his *Dogmatics in outline*, delivered as a series of lectures in 1946, and roughly contemporaneous with III/3, Barth registers an extremely fideistic position once again (pp. 23f.). Clearly, Barth zig-zags from extreme to moderate fideism, but never adopts a really non-fideistic stance.

6. Considering the emphasis placed on the resurrection of Jesus by the New Testament, as an event validating and confirming his claim to divine authority, one might expect to find at least a hint of sympathy in Barth for an apologetic based on history. But this is not the case. As is generally known, Barth shifted from an earlier position on the resurrection shared with Bultmann in which he maintained it to be an event tangential to history and not strictly part of it, to an emphasis on its objectivity, historicity, and actuality, in decisive opposition to Bultmann who carried on the ad-

vocacy of Barth's earlier stance without wavering (III/2, pp. 439ff.).<sup>9</sup> Though evangelical critics have doubted it, I see no reason to doubt that the later Barth did in fact come to espouse and defend the bodily resurrection of Jesus and the empty tomb, although he will have nothing to do with verifying the event by means of historical evidences. For some reason Barth does not believe that calling an event objective implies the possibility of its verification. He insists on the one hand that the resurrection is a physical event and on the other hand that the historian can determine nothing about it. Although I can appreciate why some resolve this ambiguity by charging that Barth's 'resurrection' is not actually historical at all, I attribute the strange dialectic between objectivity and unverifiability simply to his *fideism*. He cannot bear to think for a moment that Jesus might need a mortal man to validate or authorize his resurrection and his claim to be the Son of God, which is the work of the Spirit alone (IV/3(1), p. 75). Therefore, he *must* insist that the resurrection, though historical, is inaccessible to scholarly research.

7. In works from the last period of Barth's life, we encounter a few slight concessions in the direction of Christian apologetics. In the *Shorter commentary on Romans* (1959), for example, Barth acknowledges what he may always have believed concerning general revelation, though loathe to admit it earlier, that there is a witness to God in the world to which all people have access, though they have not profited from it (p. 28). This suggests a notional acquaintance with the being of God apart from the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which qualifies the earlier invective against natural theology more than a little.

Also in 1959, *CD*, IV/3 appeared in German, and in the midst of a lengthy discussion there on the finality of Christ as the light of the world, Barth makes reference to other lights which exist in the cosmos (pp. 137, 139, 151). Has Barth changed his mind, and abandoned his fideism? Probably not, seeing that his only purpose in referring to them is to exalt the finality of the revelation in Christ which they cannot rival and need not support. Far from aiming now to establish an independent source of revelation, Barth wishes only to insist that all the other 'lights' in the world are subsumed under the light of Christ, and that without that great light there is no light (pp. 154-165).

Toward the end of *CD*, IV/3, Barth discusses the

ministry of the community, and deals with the duty of explaining the gospel it has proclaimed and making it intelligible (pp. 846ff.). But lest he be thought to have drifted into apologetics, Barth immediately adds that the only 'explanation' that can be permitted is one which does not go beyond Christian presuppositionalism. The church should not feel compelled to measure her explanation by worldly standards of evidence or logic (p. 849). Although Christians should keep the world's questions and concerns in view at all times, they are not to bow to the world's standards of truth and verification. In the last analysis, Barth's pretended apologetic is nothing more than dogmatics again. If the world does not understand the gospel the first time, repeat it. As Barth says, 'Good dogmatics is always the best and basically the only possible apologetics' (p. 882).

In summary, it seems plain that Barth is a theological fideist of great consistency. The only rationality for which he contends, and he does contend for it strongly, is an internal rationality, an inner consistency within the presuppositions of the faith, but not a rationality which can address those of another theological or intellectual persuasion. Throughout his writings, Barth is remarkably consistent in holding to the view that theological knowledge is independent of the rules which govern knowledge in other fields of investigation. Although he will occasionally soften his resistance to apologetic activity, and refer fleetingly to evidences of the truth, he never abandons his basic fideism, and never allows apologetic arguments any positive role in communicating the gospel. God speaks to man directly, and the existential event is not debatable or subject to rational checks of any kind. He utterly rejects the demand for verification or confirmation of the message.<sup>10</sup>

## II Evaluation and critique

1. In appreciation of Barth's approach, we can applaud his deep admiration for the gracious initiative of God in revealing himself to man, and his profound conviction about the intrinsic truthfulness and power of the gospel itself unaided by human explanation. It is unfortunate that these excellent commitments could not have been integrated into a manner of presenting the truth which would have served the biblical message better than

<sup>10</sup> Though Barth has few thorough-going followers, Helmut Gollwitzer takes up Barth's view in *The existence of God as confessed by faith* (London: SCM, 1965), and, although not linked to Barth ideologically, members of the school of Dutch Calvinism such as Berkouwer, Runia and Van Til can always be counted on to fly his presuppositional banner.

<sup>9</sup> *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 30, 222.

fideism. After all, if the Spirit is able to create faith through the preaching of the Word, could he not do the same through the agency of apologetic activity in service of that same Word? As it is, Barth has made it virtually impossible for those who reject the gospel, or have intellectual difficulty in believing it, to be confronted with the claims of Christ, because of his negative attitude toward Christian apologetics.

2. Curiously enough, Barth's motive behind his fideism is itself at least in part apologetic. Indeed the entire *Church dogmatics* has been interpreted as one massive answer to Feuerbach's reduction of theology to anthropology. The only way Barth saw to counter effectively the charge that religion is merely a projection of man's inner life was to insist on the self-authenticating nature of revelation. Any apologetic tie-in to latent human qualities, for example, would just play into Feuerbach's hands, and provide him with the evidence for his projection theory. Revelation must be rooted solely in the free decision of God, and not in man's inherent possibilities. If, indeed, as Ritschl had argued before Barth, non-Christians have no knowledge of God, atheism can be claimed as confirmation of the exclusiveness of revelation in Christ. In a certain sense, Barth builds on the atheism of Feuerbach, much as traditional orthodoxy built on natural revelation.<sup>11</sup>

Though providing a consistent alternative to Feuerbach, it is difficult to see how Barth has settled the truth question. The theologian and the atheist are engaged in a shouting match: one says, 'Religion is man's invention!', the other 'No, it's not!' Barth offers us no help in resolving the question of who is right. Though hoping to enlist Feuerbach on the side of theological positivism against liberalism, Barth fails to show why his own position is not equally threatened by the philosopher's criticisms. Why should Barth's 'revelation' not be regarded as just another example of man projecting himself into deity? So long as apologetics is ignored, the question has no answer.<sup>12</sup>

3. Barth's fideistic theology is authoritarian, a form of theological imperialism. Other religions and philosophies are declared human inventions, *à la* Feuerbach, on the strength of a self-authenticating revelation claim. Surely the day is past when we can expect the authority of the Christian tradition

to be accepted uncritically, as if a mere claim for it could somehow guarantee the truth of its contents. The result of such a procedure is not really to exalt God and put him first, as Barth supposes, but to make the believer himself the centre of attention and the ultimate ground of faith. For if the revelation comes with no credentials of its own, it can only be accepted by man acting to sacrifice his intellect. Wingren was correct to call Barth's so-called theocentricity into question. The result of fideism is to make man the centre, and to make revelation the private property of a privileged society of those willing to suspend their reasoning.<sup>13</sup> Avoiding the authoritarian posture, the church ought to subject her theology to the canons of rationality operating in the wider human community, grounding the message on public evidences, not on a subjective decision alone. Only in this way can a person see the difference between 'I am telling you' and 'Thus says the Lord'. The confirmation, accreditation, and justification of religious assertions is imperative. Objections to the Christian revelation cannot be warded off by claiming that it is self-authenticating. There are many religious commitments that would claim as much. In addition to expounding the content of revelation, the theologian is obliged also to justify his claim that this revelation is indeed from God. The biblical message, though not Barth's rendering of it, enables us to do just that.

4. Barth's theological epistemology differs from the biblical view of revelation and its epistemology. The *locus* of divine revelation according to Scripture is not the self-authenticating gnostic word, but rather the open, public, verifiable historical event. Pannenberg is on firmer biblical ground when he describes revelation as occurring at the end of history in its fullness, but proleptically appearing in advance in the mighty acts of God in history.<sup>14</sup> Revelation is not an arcane, hidden communication with the select few. The biblical writers go to considerable lengths to declare the exact opposite. God has given evidence to all men of his redemptive activity in history (Acts 17: 31). Luke composed a two-volume work in order to show Theophilus the historical foundations on which the proclamation surely rests (Luke 1: 1-4). Jesus granted many infallible proofs to the disciples after his resurrection to convince them beyond doubt of his victory over death (Acts 1: 3). Barth's emphasis on the hiddenness of revelation from all except believers

<sup>11</sup> W. Pannenberg, *Basic questions in theology*, III (London: SCM, 1973), p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Mark Noll, 'Feuerbach: his thought and influence upon religion', *Themelios* (old series) 10 (1974), section 3, pp. 8-24.

<sup>13</sup> Gustaf Wingren, *Theology in conflict* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958).

<sup>14</sup> Wolfart Pannenberg, *Revelation as history* (New York: MacMillan, 1969), pp. 125-158.

is attractive only because it preys upon the fear many Christians have of intellectual confrontation over the basics of their faith. It confirms their intellectual timidity which ought rather to be dealt with as a weakness and eliminated. Worst of all, it changes the gospel of the objective activity of God on behalf of all sinners into a faith free from criticism because it is a faith cut off from the reality of its own historical substance.

5. Barth is also mistaken when it comes to general revelation. For centuries it has been accepted that, alongside the special revelation actualized in the history of Israel and the Christ event, there was a divine disclosure to all men through the light that illumines every man and makes itself evident in the creation and in universal history. Almost all earlier theologians would have been astounded by Barth's attempt to eliminate general revelation. Even apart from clear scriptural evidence, how could the world be God's creation if it did not bear the imprint of his will and purpose at least to some extent? It is not necessary, in making the valid point that sinners resist the light given to them, to deny the reality and objectivity of the light itself. Nor is it necessary, having admitted it, for general revelation to pose a threat to God's revelation in Jesus Christ, unless for some reason it is placed on a par with it. Though less forceful in debate, and probably also less theologically capable, it seems that Brunner, so harshly treated by Barth, really had the sounder and more biblical position, when he defended the reality and importance of general revelation.<sup>15</sup>

6. Because of his refusal to allow reason a place in validating the Christian claim, Barth has been accused of inconsistency. How can he disparage the ability of man's reason to arrive at truth, and at the same time engage in subtle argumentation himself? But the criticism is not valid because, although he rules out the use of reason for justifying the objects of faith, he insists on employing it in the theological elaboration of the Word. Barth's theology is a kind of language game, operating with rational consistency in terms of its own presuppositions, but standing apart from the evaluating standards of other language games such as science or history. Reason may be used in theology, but not in apologetics.

But is this satisfactory? Surely it is important to be able to show where the theological language game touches reality and what would verify it as being objectively true. Without such verification, theology is a subjectivist balloon, floating free, indistinguishable from fantasy and dream, on the

<sup>15</sup> Emil Brunner, *Revelation and reason* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), pp. 58-80.

same level as any fanaticism which claims, 'I have a revelation!'

We are touching on the heart of the difficulty with Barth's fideistic theology. Though it is rational within itself, there is no indication where it touches reality, and so it is impossible to distinguish true revelation from false. Therefore, the theologian is left incapable of helping the unbeliever to sort out the options and to see the rationality of the Christian position. There is no way to discuss faith with the neighbour, nor any basis for persuading him to accept the gospel. Between Christian and non-Christian there is only a great gulf fixed, and no way to settle the question whether the believer has received a genuine revelation or not. Barth's attempt to remove religious convictions from the realm of rational discussion is deeply disturbing and dangerous. Furthermore, Barth offers no assistance whatsoever to the believer with questions or doubts about his faith. Although Barth claims that the true knowledge God gives is unassailable, without anxiety or doubt, we know it is not so (*CD*, II/1, p. 7). It is a common experience of Christians to ask about the 'why' of this or that. And it does not help at all just to be told in a louder tone of voice to believe, when believing is exactly the problem.

God made man a thinking creature, intending that he should engage in critical thought and reflection. We cannot allow Barth, in the name of revelation, to nullify this gift, opening up the spectre of subjectivity and confusion. Reason has a noble place, both in the establishment and in the exposition of religious truth, in dependence on the Spirit of God.

### Conclusion

Evangelicals ought not to imitate the fideistic theology of Karl Barth. To retreat as he has done into the ghetto of the self-authenticating Word amounts to notifying the world that we no longer believe the gospel to be rationally defensible and do not expect those who respect human intelligence to be found within the Christian ranks. The challenge of this study should be to place our minds at the disposal of God in the service of the gospel. There are so many important tasks for dedicated minds to do: to persuade non-Christians of the truth, to frame our doctrines in language meaningful to our day, to apply biblical principles to the complexities of modern life. There is so much that we can learn from Barth even in these areas. But his basic refusal to understand the essential Christian commitment itself as intelligibly defensible is unacceptable, and should be rejected.

## ***Five Ways to Salvation in Contemporary Guruism***

**Vishal Mangalwadi**

[p.72]

Man's basic problem according to Hinduism is not moral but metaphysical. It is not that man is guilty of having broken God's moral law, but that he has somehow forgotten his true nature and he experiences himself to be someone other than what he is. Man is not a sinner; he is simply ignorant of his true self. The problem is with his consciousness. His salvation consists in attaining that original state of consciousness which he has lost.

Man's true nature or original consciousness is defined differently by monistic and non-monistic gurus. The monistic gurus, who believe that God, man and the universe are ultimately one, teach that man is Infinite Consciousness or God, but has somehow been entangled in finite, personal, rational consciousness. So long as he remains in this state he is born repeatedly in this world of suffering. Salvation lies in transcending finite, personal consciousness and merging into (or experiencing ourselves to be) the Infinite Impersonal Consciousness, and thereby getting out of the cycle of births and deaths.

In other words, salvation is a matter of perception or realization. You are already one with God; you just have to perceive or realize this fact. Perceiving, in this context, is not a cognitive activity. It is not a matter of intellectually knowing or logically deducing that we are God, but rather transcending this cognitive rational consciousness and experiencing a 'higher' state of expanded consciousness which is believed to be God and our true self.

The non-monistic gurus, such as Swami Prabhupada of the Hare Krishna movement, do not believe that man is or ever becomes God. God, Prabhupada believes, is a personal being—Krishna. Man's original state is Krishna-consciousness and his true nature is to be a loving servant of Krishna. But man has forgotten this and become entangled in this material world. He has to re-establish his link with Krishna and gain Krishna-consciousness. Only then will man get out of the cycle of births and deaths and live forever with Krishna in *Goloka* or heaven.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, to sum up, salvation in Hinduism consists in the realization, perception or experience of our so called 'true nature'. The realization takes place when we are able to alter our consciousness and attain what is called the 'higher' state of consciousness.

How can we alter our consciousness? Through the manipulation of our nervous system, because the consciousness is dependent upon the nervous system.

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<sup>1</sup> Other dualists or qualified monists explain man's problem and salvation differently, but in almost all sects the problem is metaphysical and the solution in terms of realization.



During the preceding millennia numerous techniques have been developed to manipulate one's nervous system in order to alter one's consciousness. These are generally called *yoga*.<sup>2</sup> Here we can discuss only a few of the techniques that have been popularized by the modern gurus.

### 1. Hatha yoga: salvation through physical exercises

*Hatha yoga*, which consists of physical and breathing exercises, is a very ancient method. The belief

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that one can attain 'salvation' through physical exercises rests on the belief that salvation is a matter of perception, which depends on the state of one's nervous system, which in turn depends on one's physical condition. By physiological manipulation of one's body, the nervous system can be affected and consciousness altered.

The problem with *hatha yoga* is that it is a long and tedious process requiring much discipline and a competent teacher.

The question is frequently asked whether a Christian can practise *hatha yoga*. Many Christians see nothing wrong in practising it because it is often advertised as non-religious in nature and sold for its therapeutic values. But once a person experiences the alteration of consciousness and has a 'vision of possibilities' (Mahesh Yogi), he becomes open to the Hindu philosophy on which *hatha yoga* rests. There may be some teachers of *hatha yoga* who are not interested in propagating its philosophical basis at all, but only in teaching it to make money or impart health. I am not qualified to pronounce on the therapeutic benefits of *hatha yoga*, but it seems to me that if a person is practising for health reasons certain exercises developed in India he should not say that he is practising *yoga*. For the physical exercises become *yoga* only when they are practised to alter consciousness, or to merge into God. For *yoga* means union of the soul with 'God'.<sup>3</sup>

It may be asked, 'What is wrong with artificially altering consciousness?' By itself I do not think there is anything evil in an altered state of consciousness. Madness, hypnosis, sleep-walking, hallucination and hibernation are all 'altered' states of consciousness, which are not morally evil, even though they are undesirable. But to consider your own altered consciousness to be God is certainly evil from the biblical point of view. And to ascribe spiritual significance to physical exercises is to become prey to the deception of Satan.

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<sup>2</sup> The word '*yoga*' has, for many Westerners, become synonymous with the physical exercises of *hatha yoga*. Physical *yoga* is only one form of *yoga*. *Yoga* means union, the union of soul with God or the merging of finite consciousness into the infinite.

<sup>3</sup> Originally *yoga* was associated with a dualistic philosophy called *sankhya*. Its goal was separation of *purusha* (soul) and *prakriti* (nature). But ever since *yoga* has been accepted by monistic schools, its goal has been defined as union not separation.

The use of hallucinogenic drugs such as *charas*, *ganja* and *bhang* too has been an accepted method of altering consciousness for ages in India. But many of the modern gurus discourage their use because their results are unpredictable, they are addictive and can do harm.

## 2. Japa yoga: the 'mechanical path' to salvation

*Japa*<sup>4</sup> is the repetition or chanting of a mantra which is usually a name of God or of evil spirits. The Hare Krishna movement chants the names of Krishna and Rama:

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna  
Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare  
Hare Rama, Hare Rama  
Rama Rama, Hare Hare.

The monistic gurus prefer to use a symbolic name of God, such as 'OM', or a *mantra* whose meaning the meditator does not know, so that the name or mantra may not create any thoughts or images in the mind by association.

Constant repetition of a sound eliminates all other stimuli thus concentrating the mind and eventually itself becoming a non-stimulus. That is the stage when the mind is aware or conscious, but not aware or conscious of any thing or thought. One may say that it is only conscious of consciousness. This is what is called Pure Consciousness or Transcendental Consciousness.

In order for this technique to be effective in 'God-realization', one has to practise it for three to four hours a day. Mahesh Yogi, the popularizer of Transcendental Meditation in the West, prescribes it only for 40 minutes a day to the new initiates. That is meant to give them a taste for it and to help them have a 'vision of possibilities'. In advanced stages the Maharishi prescribes as much as one full week of silent meditation.

Because the initiation into TM is a private affair many Christians consider it to be some mysterious thing. Actually it is very simple. A seeker who is interested in taking initiation is asked to bring flowers, sweets, a white handkerchief, camphor, *etc.*, along with a substantial amount of money as fee for a *puja* ceremony. During the ceremony the teacher worships the photo of the guru and also asks the initiate to bow before this photo. The teacher invokes the blessings of various gods and goddesses and then gives a *mantra* to the initiate. Usually the *mantra* is a short word, a name of some deity such as Ram, OM, Hrim, Sring, Aing. The disciple is asked to sit in a comfortable position, close his eyes and silently repeat the *mantra* (e.g. Ram... Ram... Ram...) for twenty minutes. He is told that he will first forget the

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<sup>4</sup> *Japa yoga* is also called *mantra yoga*. Some forms of *japa yoga* come close to the principle of *raja yoga* or *patanjali yoga*. *Raja yoga* consists of eight steps. The first five are external and preparatory. The last three are internal—concentration, meditation and experience of alteration of consciousness. One may concentrate and meditate on a photo, idol, name or thought. Focus on one stimulus blocks out other stimuli and eventually itself becomes a non-stimulus, thus giving an experience of void or emptiness which is supposed to, be the experience of Pure Consciousness or God.

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rest of the world and be aware only of the *mantra*. Then he will forget the *mantra* too and transcend all thoughts and feelings and become aware of the awareness. This is the *transcendental* state of consciousness. After some time the meditator reaches a higher state of consciousness, called Cosmic Consciousness, in which he is aware both of the world and of the Pure Consciousness. Then, after some more years of meditation, one can attain God Consciousness in which he comes to perceive the subtler levels of the objective world, which appear as personal. In this state, it is said that one can even communicate with birds, animals, plants and rocks. After this state comes the final state of Unity Consciousness in which one perceives the oneness of one's self with the universe. This is liberation.

Mahesh Yogi calls this path the '*Mechanical Path to God-realization*'. He says that it is possible to realize God in a mechanical way because 'God-realization' is a matter of perception and 'the process of perception is both mechanical and automatic'. In order to perceive external objects we just 'open our eyes and the sight of the object comes automatically without the use of intellect or emotions'. Likewise, in order to perceive the inner consciousness we just have to turn the attention inside and we automatically come to perceive it.

'Whether perception is outward or inward,' writes the Maharishi, 'it is automatic and mechanical. Perception in the outward direction is the result of a progressive increase of activity in the nervous system; perception in the inward direction is the result of diminishing activity until the nervous system ceases to function and reaches a state of stillness, a state of restful alertness. This is the state described in the words: Be still and know that I am God.'<sup>5</sup>

### **3. The Surat-shabd yoga: the path of sound and light**

'God is light' many gurus affirm, and add that this light is within us. 'In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God', declare many sects, and add that this word is within us. When the soul establishes a contact with this word, the word takes it back to Godhead, its original home.

The Divine Light Mission<sup>6</sup> and Radha Swami Satsang (Beas)<sup>7</sup> have been chiefly responsible for popularizing the *Surat-shabd yoga* in the West. *Surat* means soul and the *Shabd* means the Word or Sound. *Yoga* is union. So the *Surat-shabd yoga* is union of soul and the Word.

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<sup>5</sup> *The science of being and the art of living* (An International SRM publication, 1966) p. 302.

<sup>6</sup> DLM has now split into two groups. One group is headed up by Bal Yogeshwar or the Guru Maharaj Ji, and the other by his older brother Bal Bhagwan.

<sup>7</sup> Radha Swami Satsang started in Agra (North India) in the middle of the last century. Later a breakaway group was formed at the bank of the river Beas in Punjab (West India). The latter is more influential today.

The sects that teach this path try to keep their techniques completely secret. The techniques are called by various names, such as *nam* (name) and *updesh* (knowledge), deliberately to mislead the non-initiants. The 'name' and 'knowledge' actually refer to techniques of physiological manipulation of senses and meditation on one's breathing.

Unlike TM, the sects that teach the path of sound and light do not initiate everyone who asks for it. One has to be spiritually 'ready' for initiation. There is no definite criterion for judging whether or not a person is ready; it depends on the arbitrary feelings of the initiator. Some sects stipulate a few objective conditions too, such as giving up of liquor, non-vegetarian food, drugs, *etc.*

After a person has been chosen for initiation, he is taken into a closed room, where the initiator explains to him the importance of the 'knowledge', *satsang* (the weekly gatherings for fellowship and teaching) and *sadguru* (the True Teacher). The would-be initiate takes a vow of secrecy and of following no other guru except his own. Then he bows, kneels or prostrates himself before the guru or his photo and worships him/it. Then the initiator teaches him the techniques of meditation.

In the Divine Light Mission the following four techniques are taught:

In order to show the 'divine' light, the initiator asks the devotee to close his eyes, then he places his middle finger and thumb on his eyes and starting from the corner of the eyeballs he presses the eyeballs up from the bottom, so that if the eyelids were open the centre of the pupils would be looking at the point between the two eyebrows, on the forehead, just above the nose, which is supposed to be the location of the 'third eye'. If the initiate concentrates on this point he can see a light. Some people see only a small point, others see a blinding light, some others see a psychedelic movie of moving patterns and brilliant colours, whereas some do not see anything at all. The reader can try it himself and most probably he will see the light. I have done this myself. Some devotees train their eyes so that they are able to see this light without manipulating their eyes with their fingers.

In order to hear the 'divine' music or 'the sound', the person is asked to block his ears with the thumbs so that one does not hear any external sounds. When one listens long enough to his inner silence he can eventually hear some noises. To some devotees this sounds like celestial music whereas

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others think that they are hearing their favourite tune played on some heavenly instrument.

The third technique in Divine Light Mission is a difficult yogic exercise to taste the divine 'nectar'. Usually one experiences the nectar after much practice. You have to try and curl your tongue to come up to the back of the throat and then have to swallow the tongue in such a way that it points upwards. Here the tongue is supposed to hit a point and make contact with the

'divine' nectar that is constantly flowing through one's body. It is claimed that this nectar is the 'living water' of which Jesus spoke and it is indescribably tasty. Some devotees claim that this nectar is the 'bread of life' and that after making contact with this ever-flowing stream of nectar you can live without water or food.

The main meditation is a breathing exercise called hearing or contacting 'the Word'. The devotee is asked to sit in a lotus position (if possible) with both hands on the knees, and concentrate on his breath going up and down, up and down. This is supposed to tune one into that 'primordial vibration', the Word or Logos, which has created the universe and sustains it. By constant meditation one reaches the *samadhi* or the expanded state of consciousness. According to the Divine Light Mission, when you reach the state of *samadhi*, you become full of the divine light. At initiation the light may appear as a small dot, but in *samadhi*, it overtakes you and you feel (or perceive) that you have become that Light.

The other sects which teach salvation through this path describe their experiences differently. According to some sects, such as the Radha Swami Satsang, during meditation your 'third eye' is opened, the soul gets out of your body through this eye with the Sound Current (logos) and travels up to heaven; on the way it has many wonderful experiences and finally it merges into God.

#### **4. Kundalini yoga: salvation through the 'serpent power'**

Hindu psychology teaches that in the human body, three centimetres above the rectum and three centimetres below the genitals, at the base of the spine, is a beautiful triangle in which lies the *kundalini sakti* or the Serpent Power. What *kundalini* really is nobody knows, but it is supposed to be red and white in colour. It is also described as 'coil power' or the 'creative sex energy'. Normally, it is taught, the *kundalini* lies coiled and dormant in most humans, but when it is awakened, it rises up and begins to travel upward. In its journey from the base of the spine to the top of the head it passes through six psychic centres called *chakas*. When it passes through the *chakra* it gives various psychic experiences and powers. At last when it reaches the top *chakra*, called *sahasrara chakra*, one can attain power to perform miracles and also achieve the liberation.

Many means are used to awaken the *kundalini*. They range from breathing exercises like *pranayam* to the homosexual handling of genitals. The most influential guru today who preaches *kundalini yoga* is Swami Muktananda of Ganeshpuri, near Bombay. He calls *kundalini yoga*, *naha yoga* (great yoga) or *siddha yoga* (perfect yoga), for he says it is the only *yoga* in which the aspirant does not have to do anything. He just surrenders to the guru and the guru's grace does everything for him.

Thousands of people have testified that Muktananda has awakened their *kundalini*, but the method he uses is still a secret. The *kundalini yoga* has not been very popular in India because many of the experiences it gives are what William James calls 'diabolical mysticism'. It gives

pain, makes people depressed and even produces madness. Describing his own experiences Muktananda says:

'On reaching my destination I sat for meditation. Soon after sitting for meditation I started feeling restless and uneasy. Within moments strange things were happening to me. I could not understand it. I was perturbed mentally and emotionally. My mind seemed deluded. By the time evening came this delusion became worse. Generally, I am a man of great courage but that day I was overcome by fear. I felt I would soon become insane. My mind was terribly agitated.'<sup>8</sup>

That evening, at about nine o'clock, Muktananda sat again for meditation.

'I felt there was great commotion around. My entire body started aching and automatically assumed *padmasana*, the lotus-posture. The tongue began to move down the throat and all attempts to pull it out failed as I could not insert my fingers into the mouth. My fear grew; I tried to get up, but I could not, as my legs were tightly locked in *padmasana*. I felt severe pain in the knot (*manipur chakra*) below the navel. I tried to shout but could not even articulate. It seemed as if something was stuck in my throat. Next I saw ugly and dreadful demon-like figures. I thought them to be evil spirits.

I then saw blazes of fire on all sides and felt that I too was burning. After a while I felt a little better. Suddenly I saw a large ball of light approaching me from the front; as it approached, its light grew brighter and, brighter. It then

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entered unobstructed through the closed doors of my *kutir* and merged into my head. My eyes were forcibly closed and I felt a fainting sensation. I was terrified by the powerfully dazzling light and it put me out of gear.'<sup>9</sup>

## 5. Tantra: salvation through sex

Tantra is often said to be the opposite of yoga, but they both aim at the same end. It is opposite of *hatha yoga* because the latter is the path of great discipline and effort, whereas *tantra* is the way of free indulgence. The tantrics claim that *tantra* is the easiest and original way of salvation. The possibility of *samadhi* or Unity Consciousness must have appeared to sages during sexual intercourse. In orgasm you transcend rational consciousness and have the pleasurable experience of oneness. *Tantra*, among other things, is a system of techniques of prolonging orgasm in order to experience 'God' or the Unity Consciousness.

Paul writes that when men suppress the truth in unrighteousness and begin to worship creation instead of the Creator, God gives them up to a base mind or 'in the lusts of their hearts to

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<sup>8</sup> Amma, *Swami Muktananda Paramhansa* (Ganeshpuri, 1971), p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves'. And their base minds and lusts lead them to unbelievable depths of filth and foolishness.

Before the spread of Christianity in India and the consequent Hindu renaissance, tantricism had sunk to such levels of crudity and cruelty, witchcraft and superstition that in any sophisticated society the descriptions would appear unthinkable. But now that the Christian influence has diminished in India the old tantric cult is coming back openly on the surface. There are around fifty-two known centres in India where *tantra* is taught and practised. In its crudest forms it includes worship of sex organs, sex orgies which include drinking of blood and human semen, black magic, human sacrifice and contact with evil spirits through dead and rotting bodies in cremation grounds, *etc.*

In its more sophisticated forms it is being advocated by gurus like Acharya Rajneesh and authors such as Professor Aghenanda Bharati, an Italian convert to Hinduism who lectures in anthropology at Syracuse University in America.

Both Rajneesh and Professor Bharati are amongst the most brilliant of Hindu thinkers. Before becoming a guru, Rajneesh was a professor of philosophy for nine years. His writings have been on top of the bestseller list in India for many years and continue to be so. He has published over a hundred books already. This to me is an indication that the sexual path of salvation will be one of the most popular paths in the coming days.

Some time ago Rajneesh gave twenty-one lectures on Jesus Christ in the city of Pune, West India, in which he argued that Jesus taught that the way of salvation was through sex. His lecture on 'new birth' would be a typical example of his thesis.

Reality is one, he argued, but our problem is that we perceive other things to be different from ourselves. This is our fundamental problem—that we perceive reality as dualistic. The ultimate reality is sexual. We see everyone either as a man or a woman. We realize Oneness only when we transcend this duality. Jesus taught that the way to enter the kingdom of God is through the new birth. And we experience this new birth, or the kingdom of God, when the two 'become one flesh'.

### **The role of the guru in granting liberation**

The role of the guru in the liberation of a devotee is described differently in different sects. Generally speaking, the guru's task is only to teach the technique of achieving liberation. The devotee has to achieve liberation by his own efforts by practising the technique. Some sects, however, also teach that at initiation the guru takes the *karma* of a disciple upon himself. Without getting rid of *karma*, the disciple will be forced to take repeated rebirths in order to reap the consequences of his *karma*. *Karma* is defined as 'action'. According to the 'law of *karma*', each man has to take the consequences of his good and bad actions. For this he has to be continuously reborn into this world. But if the guru takes the *karma* the necessity to be reborn vanishes, and

one can attain deliverance from the bondage to the cycle of births and deaths. It is taught that the guru takes the disciple's *karma* upon himself out of love and grace. And therefore it is believed that without the guru's grace one cannot be saved.

This concept of grace and the guru taking the disciple's *karma* is a recent development in Hinduism directly borrowed from Christianity. The only difference is that Jesus took our sin and its consequence (death) upon himself. The guru says he takes our *karma* upon himself, but he does nothing about it. The devotee is acquitted of his *karma* without anybody paying the penalty or reaping the consequences. Thus, the law is not satisfied but simply set aside. It is not fulfilled but broken. The Hindus do not see the need for atonement or the necessity for Christ's death because they do not view the law of *karma* to be an absolute moral law, rooted in God's character, whose demands have to be met. God is not a moral being, man is not

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morally guilty, therefore the need for propitiation does not arise.

### **The talking-point**

The Hindus interpret our 'one way' preaching to be narrow-mindedness,<sup>10</sup> because there truly are many ways to alter consciousness and attain to 'salvation' if salvation is what they think it is. Therefore a meaningful conversation about salvation must come to grips with the question: what is man's problem and what is salvation? Once we can help a Hindu to see that man's basic problem is moral, that we are guilty of breaking God's law and deserve punishment, it will be easier for him to see that Christ is the only way to salvation, *i.e.* forgiveness and reconciliation, because he is the only one who has died for sin.

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Prepared for the Web in September 2006 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>

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<sup>10</sup> Many of the present Hindu sects do claim uniqueness and exclusiveness. But what they say is that 'in this age our way is the best and the easiest' not that this is the only way.



# The 'rapture question'

Grant R Osborne

*Most Christians are aware that not only are evangelical views divided over the question of the millennium, but questions about the 'rapture', the 'tribulation' and related matters are also hotly debated in some evangelical circles, particularly in North America. But many, including a good number of theological students, have only the haziest idea of what the debate is all about, or of why it looms so large for some Christians. Dr Osborne, who is Chairman of the Department of New Testament at Winnipeg Theological Seminary in Canada, here explains some of the issues in the debate in North America, for the benefit of those of us in the rest of the world to whom words like 'pretribulationist' are unfamiliar! His aim is not to stimulate or to export the debate, but to encourage mutual understanding.*

There is now occurring, among a large segment of North American evangelicalism, an intensive debate over the 'rapture question', a discussion unknown to many in the rest of the world. The prominence of this debate in North America is a result of the strong entrenchment of premillennialism on this side of the ocean.<sup>1</sup>

## **Premillennialism**

Three eschatological schools are generally distinguished with regard to their views of the millen-

<sup>1</sup> This does not imply that the majority of North American evangelicals are premillennialists. Rather it notes that the majority of premillennialists are found there. The actual statistics would probably indicate that the camps are fairly evenly divided.

num, a thousand-year period prophesied in Revelation 20: 4-10. *Amillennialists* believe there will be no millennium in a literal sense; rather, the prophetic passages are general, symbolic pictures of this present age and its spiritual state. *Post-millennialists* view the millennium as a period of peace which will precede the parousia and will result from the evangelization of the world. Both of these positions employ a figurative interpretation of the Apocalypse and related passages. *Premillennialists*, however, argue for a literal hermeneutic regarding prophecy. Of course, the 'literal' aspect is relative; not even the most ardent dispensationalist would argue for a literal seven-headed dragon in the end times (Rev. 12). Rather, they assert that biblical apocalyptic foreshadows literal, future events.<sup>2</sup>

Premillennialism differs not only in espousing a literal thousand-year reign of Christ following the parousia (hence the title 'premillennial'; Christ will return *before* the millennium) but also in teaching a seven-year 'tribulation' period leading up to the millennium (taken from the seventieth week of Daniel, Dn. 9: 24-27; cf. Mt. 24: 15ff., Rev. 4-18). Advocates of this view believe that there will be a literal seven-year period at the end of the Church Age involving the rise of the 'Antichrist' (Dn. 7: 25;

<sup>2</sup> For a deeper discussion of the differences, see O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the church* (Philadelphia, 1955) for the amillennial position; L. Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia, 1957) for the postmillennial view; and G. E. Ladd, *Crucial questions about the kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, 1952) for the premillennial side.

2 Thes. 2: 3ff.; Rev. 13: 5ff.) coming to power over the entire world; the 'abomination of desolation' (Dn. 9: 27; Mt. 24: 15) in the middle of the period, when he demands universal worship of himself; and the 'Great Tribulation' (Mt. 24: 16ff.) in the last half of the period, when he persecutes the saints.

This movement was called 'chiliasm' in the early church,<sup>3</sup> and disappeared after the work of Augustine and the rise of the historical interpretation of prophecy. It did not reappear until the early 1800's in England, with the prophetic conference movement. Two main forms developed: (1) the classical chiliasm of the early church, associated with the return of Christ after the tribulation period; (2) the dispensational school, expounding the return of the Lord before the tribulation period. The latter view developed within the Plymouth Brethren movement in England and became connected with the writings of J. N. Darby (it was called 'Darbyism' for many years). It was Darby who popularized the position in North America; he made six trips there between 1859 and 1874. There it became extremely popular and carried the day in 'grass-roots' evangelicalism.<sup>4</sup>

We might distinguish three reasons why it became so strong in North America, even while it failed to generate strong support in England or the continent: (1) the prophetic conferences in North America became the major bastion of teaching in the increasingly bitter fundamentalist-liberal debates of 1880-1930. In these dispensationalism more and more carried the day. (2) The popularity of the Scofield Bible (1909) made it the Bible of the common man. It contained dispensational interpretations of passages in footnotes, and these came to be viewed as almost biblical in their authority in the eyes of many Christians. (3) The Bible institute movement of the mid-twentieth century was led almost entirely by men who considered dispensationalism to be essential to any true evangelical faith. As a result, hundreds of churches and small denominations were dominated by this view.

In the last twenty-five years, however, there has developed an increasing debate within premillennialism regarding the temporal connection between the return of Christ and the tribulation period. Three views have emerged: (1) the pretribulation view, teaching that there will be two returns, one before the tribulation to 'rapture'<sup>5</sup> the saints and

the other after the tribulation to defeat the forces of Antichrist and establish the millennial reign; (2) the mid-tribulation position, which states that the 'rapture' will occur in the middle of the tribulation, in connection with the 'abomination of desolation'; and (3) the post-tribulation position, which asserts that there is only one return of Christ and that the two aspects will occur simultaneously. It will be helpful to set out the biblical evidence that each position marshals to support its view.

### The pretribulation view

At the outset, it is crucial to understand the 'dispensational principle' (which 'is determined more by ecclesiology than eschatology'<sup>6</sup>) which declares that Israel must be kept distinct from the church in God's redemptive plan. Supporters of this position argue that the church is the 'mystery' revealed only at Pentecost<sup>7</sup> and that the Old Testament prophecies refer only to Israel and not to the Church. Therefore, Daniel 9: 24-27 and Jeremiah 30: 7, the two major prophecies connected with the tribulation, are said to show that the tribulation period is Jewish in character. Therefore, the first sixty-nine weeks in Daniel's vision are Jewish, and the seventieth week must also be seen in this way.

The Church Age, which comes between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, was not revealed to Israel. This is supported by the Jeremiah verse, which speaks of 'the day of Jacob's trouble'.

The rapture of the saints before the tribulation is said to be prophesied in John 14: 3, where Christ promises to take the Church to his Father's house. It is revealed as a further 'mystery' in 1 Corinthians 15: 51-52 and is fully explicated in 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18. There the saints meet Christ in the air and Christ is not seen as coming to earth.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, this could not be the return of Christ after the tribulation period.

Another major argument is taken from passages teaching the imminence of the parousia. Here passages are noted exhorting the believer to 'watch' (Lk. 21: 36, *et al.*) or 'await eagerly' (Lk. 12: 36;

technical term for the parousia. It began to be used in the prophetic conferences to express the joy of the Lord's return for the Christian.

<sup>6</sup> J. F. Walvoord, *The rapture question* (Grand Rapids, 1957), pp. 16-17.

<sup>7</sup> Walvoord, pp. 22f., says that the first prophecy of the church was given by Christ (Mt. 16: 18, *et al.*) and is not found in the Old Testament.

<sup>8</sup> See W. Evans, *The coming King* (Chicago, 1923), p. 98. C. C. Ryrie, *The basis of the premillennial faith* (New York, 1953), p. 133, argues that there could be no 'comfort' (4: 18) if the Thessalonian Christians knew they first had to pass through the tribulation period.

<sup>3</sup> See the writings of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian *et al.*, as discussed in G. E. Ladd, *The blessed hope* (Grand Rapids, 1956), pp. 19-31.

<sup>4</sup> For a good description of this school, see C. C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism today* (Chicago, 1965).

<sup>5</sup> The term 'rapture', naturally, is not biblical as a

Tit. 2: 13; Rom. 8: 23, 25, *etc.*) Jesus' return. Of special importance are those describing the return as 'at hand' (Phil. 4: 5; Jas. 5: 8, 9; 1 Pet. 4: 7). Scholars of this persuasion argue that these passages demand an 'any-moment' return which means there are no signs to be fulfilled. Therefore there could not be a seven-year tribulation period which must occur before the parousia.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, we might note passages indicating an escape from God's wrath (Lk. 21: 36; 1 Thes. 5: 8; Rev. 3: 10) which advocates of this school apply to the outpouring of God's wrath in the tribulation period (Rev. 6: 8, 17 *et al.*). They argue that the promise to keep the saints from the hour of testing (Rev. 3: 10) means that they will be taken out of this world before God's wrath 'tries' the world.<sup>10</sup> Therefore the church cannot be on earth during this period.

### The mid-tribulation view

This view has not had a great deal of literature written on its behalf.<sup>11</sup> It is, however, gaining adherents and influence in the debate today. The key to this position is found in the Apocalypse and in the argument that the seals, trumpets and bowls must be interpreted according to successive sequence rather than repetitive cycles. That is, the future events pictured in those images are three separate occurrences; and so the images of the seals, trumpets and bowls do not refer to a single outpouring of wrath but to three successive outpourings.

These scholars believe that the 'rapture' occurs in Revelation 11: 15-19, at the seventh trumpet.<sup>12</sup> The events of chapter 11 revolve around the two witnesses who for a time confound the forces of Antichrist, are finally killed and lie in state in Jerusalem, then are caught up to heaven. Mid-tribulationists identify this with the events of chapters 12 and 13 and with the abomination of

<sup>9</sup> The word 'parousia' is used among premillennialists as an all-inclusive term for Christ's return in general. This means that for the pretribulationist it can stand either (as here) for the rapture before or for the revelation after the tribulation; only the context will determine which aspect is in view.

<sup>10</sup> Ryrie, p. 135; and Walvoord, pp. 84f., believe that the Holy Spirit will also depart at this time. They base this on 2 Thes. 2: 6, 7, interpreting the 'restrainer' to be the Holy Spirit, whose influence is not present during the tribulation period.

<sup>11</sup> The two major works are N. B. Harrison, *The end* (Minneapolis, 1941); and J. O. Buswell, *A systematic theology of the Christian religion* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids, 1962).

<sup>12</sup> Pretribulationists believe that this occurs in Rev. 4: 1, being pictured when John is called up into heaven. Post-tribulationists assert that there is only one return, and that the church is taken up in connection with the events of Rev. 19.

desolation in Matthew 24: 15 (Dn. 9: 27). The great tribulation of Matthew 24: 21, 22 is equated with the three and one half days of Revelation 11: 10, 11; the orgy of rejoicing over the witnesses' bodies will also involve an orgy of persecution against the church and will be 'shortened for the elect's sake' (Mt. 24: 22). Therefore the coming of Christ in Matthew 24: 29-31 is equated with the events of Revelation 11 and the seventh trumpet is identified with the 'last trumpet' of 1 Corinthians 15: 52. Eschatological symbols common to Revelation 11 and the other major passages on the parousia include the cloud, the great voice, the ascension, the trumpet, the kingdom received, the reward, the time of wrath and the temple in heaven.

Further evidence is taken from Daniel. Buswell states<sup>13</sup> regarding the seventieth week of 9: 24-27, that the first half is a time of truce, not of tribulation. Only the second half involves the outpouring of wrath. Then in 12: 1-2, when Michael stands up and delivers the people (a prophecy of the rapture), 'at that time' refers to the abomination of desolation in 11: 31 and 12: 11. Therefore the rapture will take place in the middle of the tribulation period.

### The post-tribulation view

This position argues that Scripture nowhere teaches two separate aspects to the return of Christ. In every passage there is only one return, and it includes both aspects, the return for the church (1 Thes. 4: 13-18) and Jesus' coming to defeat the forces of the Antichrist (1 Thes. 5: 1-10). They point to the three terms used for the return—*parousia* or 'coming', *epiphaneia* or 'manifestation' and *apocalypsis* or 'revelation'. Each is used of both aspects, so there is no terminological basis for separating the two.<sup>14</sup>

These people argue that imminence does not mean 'any moment' in Scripture. In an extensive discussion of the passages relating to imminence, R. H. Gundry<sup>15</sup> asserts that they teach an expectation which includes a necessary delay before the parousia. During this time such signs as the evangelization of the whole world (Mt. 24: 14), the great apostasy and the appearance of Antichrist (2 Thes. 2: 3) must occur. This delay is pictured in many of the kingdom parables like the parables of the talents (Lk. 19: 11-27)<sup>16</sup> and the virgins (Mt. 25: 1-13).

<sup>13</sup> Buswell, II, pp. 375f.

<sup>14</sup> For more extensive discussion, see Ladd, pp. 61-69.

<sup>15</sup> R. H. Gundry, *The church and the tribulation* (Grand Rapids, 1973), pp. 29-43.

<sup>16</sup> Note especially verse 11, 'he proceeded to tell a parable... because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately' (RSV).

The Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 is the major passage for this position. In verses 21, 22, 'elect' is said to refer to the church as well as Israel, since Jesus uses it in this way in Matthew 22:14. Moreover, throughout the New Testament the term is used for the church, so it is the church which will pass through the tribulation period. Then, in verses 29-31, the 'elect' are gathered together 'after the tribulation'. The symbolism of the entire passage fits that of 1 Thessalonians 4 and must therefore speak of the rapture of the church.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the first Thessalonian Epistle is used to prove a single, undivided return of the Lord. This school argues that the temporal element missing in 4: 13-18 is found in 5: 1-4. In the original, without chapter and verse distinctions, 5: 1 follows directly after 4: 18; and the conjunction 'but' in 5: 1 indicates the transition from the persons included in the parousia to the time when it will come. Therefore 4: 13-18 concerns the relation of the dead to the living at the parousia, while 5: 1-4 tells when it will come.<sup>18</sup>

Two passages in 2 Thessalonians are also used. First, 1: 7-10 indicates that the 'rest' of the believers will not occur until Christ's return in vengeance and flaming fire. Second, 2: 1-10 states that the Antichrist must be in power before the parousia can occur. Ladd asserts<sup>19</sup> that the rapture

<sup>17</sup> See A. Reese, *The approaching advent of Christ* (London, n.d.), pp. 207, 208, as well as Ladd and Gundry.

<sup>18</sup> See Gundry, pp. 105-108. Pretribulationists believe that 4: 13-18 refers to the rapture before the tribulation and 5: 1-10 relates to the revelation in judgment after the tribulation.

<sup>19</sup> Ladd, pp. 73-75.

and the revelation in judgment must have been considered as simultaneous or else Paul would have distinguished them between verses 1 and 3. Since they are not, the church must be meant to pass through the tribulation.

## Conclusion

Christians have a tragic history of dividing over minor issues such as the mode of baptism or the type of church government. In fact, it must be admitted that a major impediment to world evangelization (Mt. 24: 14) is the inability of Christians to work together because of these minute doctrinal differences. In North America, eschatology is one such issue, and the rapture debate is to many a crucial question in a sound evangelical theology.

A perusal of the evidence in this as in so many honest discussions must convince the reader that certainty in such an area is impossible.<sup>20</sup> While evangelicals must take a strong stand on doctrines where Scripture is clear, we must learn tolerance regarding issues where God's Word is not clear and differences are based on interpretation. While the balance is undoubtedly difficult to maintain, we must work at it. So long as we continue to labour in small, isolated groups, we will duplicate effort and waste our energy. May we all seek to eliminate judgmental narrowness and unite in true oneness of spirit (Phil. 2: 1-4).

<sup>20</sup> In fact, many readers, unable to accept a literal interpretation of prophecy, cannot identify with any of the above views.

# Acts and Galatians reconsidered

Colin J Hemer

*Colin Hemer, who is currently engaged in research at Tyndale House, Cambridge, has for many years specialized in the historical geography of Asia Minor, particularly in the New Testament period. His doctoral dissertation on the background to the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 is scheduled for publication in the SNTS Monograph series, and he has published several articles and notes on this area. The following article is adapted from a paper read to the Theological Students Fellowship group in Cambridge in 1975.*

I shall begin by letting the cat out of the bag, by stating directly the position I want to maintain on three complex interlocking problems. There is nothing novel in this position, but the correct solution to a puzzle of this kind is not likely to be novel: the ground has been too often explored. It is more likely to be a matter of judgment between acknowledged alternatives than any radically new combination of the data.

My view then is in essentials that which has been favoured recently by Professor F. F. Bruce in his series of Rylands Lectures entitled 'Galatian Problems'.<sup>1</sup> It argues for (1) an early date for Galatians, (2) a destination in the so-called 'South Galatia', that is, the region of the churches of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and perhaps Derbe,<sup>2</sup> and (3) a direct equating of Galatians with Acts in their reports of Paul's visits to Jerusalem, Galatians 1: 18ff. with Acts 9: 26-30 and Galatians 2: 1ff. with Acts 11: 30.

The last of these three is by far the most questionable, and I am fully aware of my temerity in offering it so baldly. But I feel it is correct, and, since with any view there are acute difficulties to be met, this is the ground on which I choose to meet them. And underlying each of our three theses, and particularly the third, is the deeper question of our evaluation of Acts as a historical source. Again I

<sup>1</sup> 'Galatian Problems. 1. Autobiographical Data', *BJRL* 51 (1968-69), pp. 292-309; '2. North or South Galatians?' 52 (1969-70), pp. 243-266; '3. The "Other Gospel"', 53 (1970-71), pp. 253-271; '4. The Date of the Epistle', 54 (1971-72), pp. 250-267.

<sup>2</sup> I add the qualification in deference to the arguments urged by G. Ogg, 'Derbe', *NTS* 9 (1962-63), pp. 367-370. J. B. Lightfoot long ago cited Strabo and Pliny for the attachment of Lystra and Derbe to Galatia.

will say plainly, and in the face of much recent opinion, that I value it highly.

I have mentioned Bruce's lectures, and they will provide a useful reference point for our discussion. But at the outset I should like to raise two areas of doubt or qualification to which his case may appear open. (1) While stating his argument clearly and persuasively, he does not deal in detail with some of its difficulties. Some will see a decisive objection to the identification of the Jerusalem visits in that the accounts in Galatians 1 and Acts 9 are presented in widely differing terms; but Bruce says they 'may certainly be identified'.<sup>3</sup> (2) On some minor points of exegesis and topography his reconstruction may give occasion for debate.<sup>4</sup> But in any case the answers to these must be tentative.

I purpose to say little here on these minor points which do not affect the basic issue. But the identification of the Jerusalem visits is crucial, and I shall try to face the difficulties.

An analogy may help to clarify the way I see the case. The whole topic is rather like a jig-saw puzzle with so many pieces missing that we cannot hope to make more than a partial picture. Different points of approach may suggest different conclusions about the original whole. We may be tempted to force pieces into any plausible-looking place or even create an imaginary picture to fill the gaps. It may indeed be possible to force data into a superficially complete and impressive whole. Such reconstructions are commonly designated 'brilliant', but may be quite erroneous.

But how does one argue for or against the correctness of any partial or hypothetical reconstruction? Only by exercising judgment, by considering whether this is the simplest and most natural and most convincing explanation of the available data. The strength of any such hypothesis consists in the amount of light it throws on the ramifications of the subject without doing violence

<sup>3</sup> *BJRL* 51 (1968-69), pp. 300.

<sup>4</sup> This division of viewpoints is not of course rigid. It is perfectly possible, for instance, to combine a South Galatian view with a later date for the Epistle, or a North Galatian view with a high view of the historicity of Acts. But these positions have other difficulties, and seem at variance with the most natural patterns of synthesis. See further Bruce, *BJRL* 52 (1969-70), pp. 265f.

to the evidence. If one solution tends to permit the answers to interlocking problems to explain each other, that is a strong point in its favour. But if it has to depend largely on fundamental gaps in the evidence, this should render it suspect. We may not be able to say it is wrong. It may indeed be very hard to disprove. But it does not explain so much so naturally.

The first big problem in our present complex is to decide where to begin. I propose to start with the question of the destination of Galatians because I think it gives the simplest potential key, and because the most fundamental polarization of opinion results from the answer given to this question. On this answer hinges the possibility or probability of an early dating of the Epistle, and upon the early dating hinges the easiest reading of the relationship of the Epistle with Acts.

### 1. The destination and date of Galatians

Who then were these Galatians? The story must take us some way back into the history of Asia Minor.

King Nicomedes of Bithynia in 278/7 BC invited a horde of marauding Celts across into Asia to serve him as mercenaries. They quickly escaped his control and plundered the cities and states of the area mercilessly until defeated in about 230 by Attalus I, king of Pergamum, and restricted to a territory in North Central Anatolia around Ancyra, now Ankara, the capital of modern Turkey. These people were of the same stock as the Celts of Gaul (France), and their territory, once part of Phrygia, became known as 'Galatia', the Greek for 'Gaul'.

When Rome acquired extensive territories in Asia Minor after 133 BC she came into contact and alliance with the Galatian Celts. Galatia became a client-kingdom of Rome in 64 BC, but in 25 BC Amyntas, its last king, fell in battle against the fierce brigand tribes of the Pisidian Taurus, on the southern border of the territory he had won at that date. Augustus promptly organized his kingdom as a Roman province. This province had no organic unity, ethnic or otherwise. Its boundaries were quite arbitrary, a sheer accident of history. They were evidently unsatisfactory from a purely military and political point of view, for to our knowledge they were repeatedly modified during the first 150 years of the Empire.

The most urgent military problem was the chronic menace of the Pisidian mountaineers. Augustus established a key fortress at Antioch, on the Pisidian border of Phrygia, elevating the older town to the status of a Roman colony, and eventually developing a chain of military colonies

eastward to Lystra, linked by a great military road.

Under the ensuing peace, Pisidian Antioch<sup>5</sup> dominated what became the great route to the east from Ephesus and Laodicea across the Anatolian plateau. Ancyra was the provincial capital and the natural focus of the northern part of the composite province. But that whole northern region was less important under the early Empire than it had been in primitive times or would become again when the routes came to focus upon Constantinople. And the two principal districts of the province were sharply distinct. The intervening ground is largely arid steppe and seasonal salt-marsh bordering the great salt-lake in the central depression of the plateau. The terrain was, and is, some of the emptiest in Asia Minor, and it now appears that the official route between Ancyra and Antioch actually ran indirectly across the province of Asia.<sup>6</sup>

The northern and southern districts were accordingly somewhat different also in race and culture. The southern had never had an admixture of Celtic people: the Roman colonies there were superimposed upon a superficially hellenized Phrygian culture, but the great road brought a cosmopolitan character and prosperity to the main centres, Antioch and Iconium. And the Jewish synagogues at both, if we may accept Acts 13: 14 and 14: 1, offered an opening for Christian evangelism.

Now we can look at the alternative views of the Epistle in the light of this outline of the geographical background.

#### (a) *The North Galatian theory*

The traditional position has seen in 'Galatia' the apparently strict and natural sense of the territory of the old Gaulish kingdom around Ancyra. There is no record in the Acts to suggest that Paul could have visited that area before his second missionary journey, when Acts 16: 6 speaks of his going 'throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia' (AV)—whatever in fact that means. Unless then we assume the licence to postulate unrecorded journeys, we must conclude that the Epistle was written later than the event of Acts 16: 6 (which

<sup>5</sup> The name is thus rendered in the preferable text of Acts. The city was strictly 'Antioch (in Phrygia) near Pisidia'. The Western reading 'Antioch of Pisidia' (cf. AV) reflects a later situation.

<sup>6</sup> See W. M. Calder and G. E. Bean, *A classical map of Asia Minor* (London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1957). No direct attested road of the Roman period is there shown, and the old route west of Lake Tatta traverses a desolate land almost devoid of identified settlements. But the route through Asia seems to have been the responsibility of the governor of Galatia (*Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua* 7.193).

followed the Council of Jerusalem) at earliest—or, more probably, later than the event of Acts 18: 23 (the second visit to 'Galatian' territory in Acts), for Galatians 4: 13 probably implies that Paul had already made two visits when he wrote to them,<sup>7</sup> that is, after about AD 52.

Many commentators have followed J. B. Lightfoot in seeing confirmation of a dating about AD 55 in the literary and theological affinity between Galatians and the great Epistles of that period to the Corinthians and the Romans.

If, however, we argue that Galatians was written at any time after the events of Acts 16: 6, problems immediately follow. In Galatians 1 and 2 Paul describes his relations with the Jerusalem apostles. He insists he is telling the truth (1: 20).<sup>8</sup> Since his conversion he has visited Jerusalem only twice. His argument depends on that: he must give no handle to anyone to come back at him and say he is hiding something, however innocent. Yet Luke in Acts represents him as having made three significant visits to Jerusalem by the date of Acts 16: 6. If Paul is right, and surely he must be, Luke is evidently wrong.

This, however, is not the only possibility. The impasse means no more, I think, than that we may have been on the wrong track. We must explore a different assumption about the references to Galatia in Acts.

But before we do that we must glance at one important argument which the traditional view has thrown up. Is it in fact necessary to assign Galatians so closely to the same stage of Paul's ministry as Corinthians and Romans? The themes of justification by faith and of the background of Judaistic legalism are prominent in the whole group, and recent study of Galatians has shown particular interest in the Galatian opposition rather than in the older questions as providing a key to the letter.<sup>9</sup> But what is either of these factors likely to prove?

<sup>7</sup> 'Through infirmity of the flesh I preached to you at the first.' But *to proteron* may not necessarily have to mean 'on the earlier of two occasions', or, if it is so taken, the two occasions may have been (on a South Galatian view) Paul's visit and return (Acts 14: 21) in the course of his first journey.

<sup>8</sup> Note however J. T. Sanders, 'Paul's "Autobiographical" Statements in Galatians 1-2', *JBL* 85 (1966), pp. 335-343, where he questions the historicity of Paul's own account. But 'the subordination of historical fact to theological aims in this situation would have defeated Paul's purpose in writing' (Bruce, *BJRL* 51 (1968-69), p. 296n.).

<sup>9</sup> The traditional view that the opponents were Judaizers from Judea has faced several challenges: (a) that Paul had to fight on two fronts here, as later at Corinth, against legalists and against libertarians who taunted him with submissiveness to the Jerusalem apostles (W. Lütgert, J. H. Ropes); (b) that the opponents were Gnostics (W.

I feel personally that we shall not find a decisive lead in either direction from these considerations. Paul's grasp of a matter so central to his message as justification was surely matured even before the earliest feasible dating of Galatians. And its setting in controversy with Jewish legalistic opposition is likely to have been chronic and recurrent, even if the focus of debate shifted somewhat with the passage of time. One might indeed argue that 1 Corinthians, for instance, reflects a later stage of the controversy (see next section). The issue of the circumcision of Gentile converts had apparently been settled at the Council of Jerusalem, according to Acts 15: 24, and that aspect of the dispute does not arise at Corinth.

### (b) *The South Galatian theory*

If Paul's 'Galatians' are understood to be the Christians of the area round Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and perhaps Derbe, in the southern part of the extended province of Galatia, a different synthesis becomes likely. Paul had visited and returned through these cities on his first journey, and the controversy and the Epistle could be dated almost immediately afterwards (*cf.* Gal. 1: 6), about 49-50 on the probable chronology. Then Paul's third visit to Jerusalem, on the occasion of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, is omitted from Galatians 1, 2 for the simple, but cogent, reason that it had not yet happened. Two visits in Galatians correspond to two in Acts.

This assumption will at once explain the *raison d'être* of Galatians itself. Why should this closely reasoned letter have been necessary if its case had already been conceded at the Council? Was it not rather the activities in South Galatia of teachers like those of Acts 15: 1 which prompted the Epistle as they occasioned the subsequent Council? The circumcision question has to be argued in Galatians because the Epistle antedates the Council, but that particular issue was dead and buried before the Corinthian correspondence.

This 'South Galatian' hypothesis is economical and attractive. But is it fair? Is this simpler account convincing? I intend to discuss a few controverted points in a little more detail, and to conclude with an attempt to tackle the problem of the Jerusalem visits.

(i) The North Galatian view has great authority on its side. It held the field from patristic times. It

Schmithals); (c) that they were Gentile converts from within the church (J. Munck). See the discussion by Bruce in his third lecture, *BJRL* 53 (1970-71), pp. 253-271. Note also the recent contribution by R. Jewett, 'The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation', *NTS* 17 (1970-71), pp. 198-212.

was presented afresh in the classic commentary of J. B. Lightfoot, and it has continued to receive strong support, especially in Germany.<sup>10</sup> The South Galatian view was put on a solid basis through the researches of Sir William Mitchell Ramsay in Asia Minor. It was easily shown that the Fathers assumed that New Testament Galatia was the same as in their own day, which was not so. But the influence of Lightfoot persists.

It should be emphasized that the first edition of Lightfoot's *Galatians* appeared in 1865, the tenth posthumously in 1890. Lightfoot died in 1889. Ramsay's earliest statement of his South Galatian argument was published in 1893.<sup>11</sup> So Lightfoot died before the modern form of the debate was initiated. (It is fruitless to speculate about the might-have-beens of history. Dare I claim that a scholar with Lightfoot's sense for historical evidence would have become a 'South Galatian' had he lived long enough to get a favourable opportunity to be so?)

(ii) I want to stress strongly the importance of thorough study of the data in breadth and depth. It is deeply regrettable that scholars are ready to use historical data as ammunition in defence of preconceived positions without immersing themselves in a sympathetic appraisal of the whole context. Rigorous study will not hurt us, and it is more likely to help than otherwise in reaching the truth of the matter. It is important to get the 'feel' of the thing.

The 'North Galatian' view has in fact been upheld at a high level of scholarship by men like James Moffatt.<sup>12</sup> But the point is that their views, right or wrong, did attempt to grapple with the hard, intractable problems of the texts and facts, whereas in the modern preoccupation with theological interests, important as these questions are, the textual and factual framework of the case is too easily conceded by default to the prevalent hypothesis.

<sup>10</sup> Thus recently W. Marxsen and W. G. Kümmel. J. Moffatt and A. D. Nock were notable 'North Galatians' on the British side.

<sup>11</sup> *The church in the Roman Empire before AD 170* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1893). Ramsay was by no means the first to hold this view. It was propounded by G. Perrot in a Latin dissertation, *De Galatia Provincia Romana* (Paris, 1867), and popularized first by Renan.

<sup>12</sup> *An introduction to the literature of the New Testament*<sup>a</sup> (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1918), pp. 90-101. On some recent opinion cf. Bruce in *BJRL* 52 (1969-70), p. 261: 'It is disquieting to see how superficially the North Galatian hypothesis is defended by many of its champions nowadays, when we think of the careful arguments adduced by scholars of two and three generations ago—especially disquieting to see how little attention is paid to the relevant data of historical geography.'

It is upon such basic study that I would wish to rest my case for the South Galatian view. My plea is that evidence shall be admitted and heard. And it has been said: 'It is significant that all those who know the geography of Asia Minor well are "South Galatianists" to a man.'<sup>13</sup>

(iii) There is not space here to practise what I preach; I can do little more than state a position on a few geographical details in the texts whose reference is disputed.

In *Galatians* itself the crux is in the actual address. The 'churches of Galatia' (1:2) would certainly apply to those of the south, and exclusively so if they were the only ones yet established, but could their members have been appropriately addressed as 'Galatians' (3:1), which ethnically they were not? One may ask what other comprehensive term could have been used. 'Phrygian', for example, connoted 'slave'. Of course we have no attestation in support, but for that matter we have no other extant instance, to my knowledge, of any other form of address to a comparable grouping of peoples of the area. We have to be guided by probabilities and sensitivity to contemporary feeling. The indications are that a strong attempt was made at this period to foster a provincial identity, even if in the long run that proved abortive. Thus an inscription of AD 57 has been cited as showing that the citizens of Apollonia, south-west even of Antioch, regarded themselves as 'Galatians', and perhaps that they were even designated as belonging to the Trocmi, one of the three specifically Celtic tribal divisions.<sup>14</sup> There is in fact a surprisingly large body of material in the inscriptions to give circumstantial confirmation of the wider usage of the ethnic 'Galatian'.

And so to Acts. The references here pose questions which are from some points of view independent. We may accept 'South Galatia' and an early date, and still debate the meaning of Acts 16:6 and 18:23. In fact I think the weight of probability here is that neither refers to North Galatia; indeed I doubt whether we have grounds for believing that Paul ever visited North Galatia. The 'southern' view, then, is not necessarily embarrassed by any interpretation of these verses, but the 'northern' may be.

I regard the phrase *tēn Phrygian kai Galatikēn*

<sup>13</sup> J. A. Findlay, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: SCM, 1934), p. 166, cited by Bruce in *BJRL* 52 (1969-70), p. 252n.

<sup>14</sup> W. M. Ramsay, *The first Christian century* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), pp. 172-174, and *A historical commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*<sup>a</sup> (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), p. 135. The text is accessible in *Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua* 4. 140.



*chōran* (16:6) as referring to one entity, 'the Phrygio-Galatic country' or 'Galatic Phrygia', the district of Antioch and Iconium, 'Galatic' as belonging to the province of Galatia and as opposed to the much larger part of Phrygia which lay in the province of Asia. It will be objected that this term and sense is otherwise unattested. That is not surprising, for the materials we are dealing with are extremely fragmentary and their interpretation often extremely difficult. Much of our knowledge or belief in these areas necessarily rests on the cautious appraisal of a single attestation. And here I think usage favours the interpretation I have offered, linguistically (a pair of adjectives<sup>15</sup> with a common article), analogically (comparable terminology can be adduced, including 'Galatic Pontus'), and contextually (to summarize a return visit bringing the Apostolic Decree to settle the issues argued in the Epistle). Incidentally I think *kōlythentes* ('having been prevented') here amounts to no more than *kai ekōlythēsan* ('and they were prevented'), with little emphasis on the relative time of the intimation.<sup>16</sup>

About the rather different phrase *tēn Galatikēn chōran kai Phrygian* in Acts 18:23 I am hesitant. Ramsay is, I think, over-subtle, as though determined to find ground for denying a foothold to the North Galatians. But a strong case does not need dogmatic overstatement. This seems to mean 'the Galatian country and Phrygia'. I am open to persuasion about what exactly that implies. But I doubt whether 'Galatian country' here means anything especially different from what it meant in 16:6. It is likely to resume the same essential usage, and in context to summarize yet another pastoral visit to the same district. But that supposition militates alike against Ramsay's 'Lycaonia Galatica' and against North Galatia.

(iv) May there not however be a mediating view, a 'Pan-Galatian' or 'Mid-Galatian' view? I mention the point because the weighty authority of Kirsopp Lake sought a solution on these lines.

<sup>15</sup> *Phrygian* is, I think, to be taken as an adjective, though the form is identical with that of the noun. Cf. the close parallel *tēs Itouraias kai Trachōnitidos chōras* in Luke 3:1, where *Itouraias*, elsewhere a substantive, is used adjectivally. *Phrygios* is well attested as an adjective both of three, and of two, terminations. See C. J. Hemer, 'The Adjective "Phrygia"', *JTS* 27 (1976), pp. 122-126. The existence of the separate feminine adjective *Phrygia* has been unwarrantably denied in a series of commentaries from Lake to Haenchen, though in fact it is well attested throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

<sup>16</sup> The usage of this aorist participle has been keenly debated. See most recently K. L. McKay, 'Syntax in Exegesis', *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972), pp. 39-57, for a most interesting study of the aspectual, as opposed to the temporal, element in the Greek verb.

I have drawn attention to the double focus of the province and the arid emptiness and poor communications of the central lands. A rigorous study demands a convincing reconstruction of possible routes and places. It is now apparent that Lake's suggested route lay almost entirely through the province of Asia.<sup>17</sup> Bruce quotes a letter from a great Anatolian scholar, the late Professor Sir W. M. Calder. Why should Paul have made the suggested detour, asks Calder, 'unless he had a prophetic vision of what Luke was going to say in the fulness of time, and some interest in proving him right?'

Drawing lines on maps is easy, but has been a bane of this study. We are probably all familiar with the maps in old Bibles which show Paul's journeys tacking in acute zig-zags across the whole land surface of Asia Minor to take in Ancyra at their most eccentric apex. But because Paul was obedient to the Spirit there is no reason to suppose his progress was arbitrary. He followed great routes to strategic centres, or perhaps sometimes for special reasons he followed emergency paths through lesser places. The itinerary offered in Acts is to be open to reasoned interpretation and criticism.

It is unnecessary to dwell here on the many indecisive or two-edged arguments which are often debated. One may merely suggest in general terms that surviving evidence points to an earlier and stronger penetration of south than north by Judaism and Christianity alike, an earlier and stronger development of great hellenized cities in the south, and that the evangelization of the north may more probably have been effected along the natural lines of communication from the west and north-west. Paul's strategy was essentially directed to work through social patterns which I take to have been better represented in the south.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. The Jerusalem visits

The bulk of my paper has been devoted to one question within the complex, and that, you may feel, a pedantic argument about geography; surely a theological student is called to higher things! My aim in this has been simply to try to establish the part of the jig-saw which I think gives us our clearest interlocking fragment of the picture. There

<sup>17</sup> See the map by Calder and Bean; cf. Bruce, *BJRL* 52 (1969-70), pp. 257-258. Orcistus, for instance, was in Asia, and inscriptions found in the neighbourhood show that the indigenous language was Phrygian.

<sup>18</sup> See further Ramsay, *A historical commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians and Cities of St Paul* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907). Cf. also E. A. Judge, *The social pattern of Christian groups in the first century* (Tyndale Press, London, 1960).

are many points of approach, and while some will be impressed with an answer where the difficulties explain each other, others will only feel that this approach bypasses their real problems. But I stand by my fragment, and will try to accept the difficulty of considering in conclusion whether I can enlarge my fit to include the Jerusalem visits. Any theory is in honour bound to do something about them, and the various difficulties are well known. On our present synthesis we have arrived at the convenient *prima facie* position that two equals two, that Galatians 1 equals Acts 9 and Galatians 2 equals Acts 11. But is that possible?

Here is a brief summary of the recorded details of these visits, set out for comparison of these provisional identifications:

(a) (i) *Galatians 1*: After his conversion Paul did not go up to Jerusalem, but to Arabia (verse 17). Three years after returning to Damascus he went to Jerusalem to 'interview'<sup>19</sup> Cephas, and stayed fifteen days. He saw no other apostle save James, the Lord's brother (verses 18, 19). He was then unknown by face to the churches of Judea (verse 22).

(ii) *Acts 9*: After his escape from Damascus Paul came to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples, but they were afraid of him and did not believe he was a disciple. Barnabas brought him to the apostles, telling them of his conversion and his bold preaching in Damascus. He stayed 'going in and out among them', speaking boldly in the name of Jesus and debating with the Hellenists, but they sought to kill him, and the brethren took him down to Caesarea (verses 26-30).

(b) (i) *Galatians 2*: After fourteen years Paul went up to Jerusalem in obedience to revelation, accompanied by Barnabas and taking Titus. There he communicated to the men of repute in the church the gospel he preached to the Gentiles, so that his work should not prove to have been in vain. But not even the Gentile Titus with him was compelled to be circumcised; that issue arose only through the activities of false brethren. The men of repute—not that Paul judged in terms of personalities—recognized Paul's divine calling to the Gentiles as they recognized that of Peter to the Jews, and James, Cephas and John, who seemed to be 'pillars' among them, pledged their fellowship and agreed that he and Barnabas should go to the Gentiles while they concentrated on the Jews. They asked of him only to continue remembering<sup>20</sup> the

poor, a matter of which Paul had made a special point<sup>21</sup> (verses 1-10). Afterwards Cephas came to Antioch (verse 11).

(ii) *Acts 11*: When Paul was at Antioch prophets came down from Jerusalem. One of them, Agabus, foretold a world-wide famine, which indeed happened in the reign of Claudius. The disciples, each according to his resources, determined to send relief to their brethren in Judea. They sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (verses 27-30).

These accounts display a patent diversity of detail throughout. But the few explicit notes of time, place and circumstance are not inimical to our pairings, whatever we make of the other details. In both versions of (a), Paul went to Jerusalem from Damascus after some period of 'many days'/'three years', and in both he appears to be making his first personal contact with the Jerusalem church. Both versions of (b) presuppose a considerable lapse of years: the 'fourteen', however reckoned, will suit a date under Claudius, when widespread and recurrent famines certainly occurred, as we know from Josephus, Tacitus and Suetonius, perhaps in about AD 46 and again later.<sup>22</sup> In both cases the implication is that Paul was resident at Antioch at the time (*Galatians 2: 11* with *Acts 11: 25-27*); in both his journey was made in response to divine revelation and in company with Barnabas.

In my judgment these pairs of accounts correspond. But are they incompatibly contradictory as accounts of the same events?

I am often amused to recall an instructive little incident. I had been obliged to leave a certain meeting early to keep another appointment. The next day one of those present gave me a rather surprising account of what had happened after my departure. A couple of hours later another person gave me his account. They were totally different. There was no point of contact. I was fortunate later to get further details from an independent witness. Otherwise I should have been utterly baffled. Knowing the first two as I did, their reactions then proved revealing, more perhaps about themselves than about the meeting.

Such an illustration must not be pressed too far. It is much harder than some would suppose to

<sup>19</sup> Gk. *historēsai*. Thus Bruce, *BJRL* 51 (1968-69), p. 299. RSV renders it 'to visit', NEB 'to get to know'.

<sup>20</sup> Note the present subjunctive *mnēmoneuōmen* (Gal. 2: 10).

<sup>22</sup> Jos. *Antiq.* 20.2.5.(51); Tac. *Ann.* 12.43; Suet. *Claud.* 18.2. See further K. S. Gapp, 'The Universal Famine under Claudius', *HTR* 28 (1935), pp. 258-65.

analyse the minds and motives of writers of the distant past who cannot answer back. But my point is that different accounts of the same event may be very different indeed without thereby being contradictory. Summarized impressions, as embodied in different sources, are liable to be consciously and unconsciously selective in a far greater degree than we may realize. Human events and motives are complex things, and none the less so if we postulate the direction and guidance of God in the processes. It may be a mistake to look for simplistic harmonizations or simplistic contradictions. We are too little informed about the whole sequence of events. We might have the ingenuity to think of a dozen plausible harmonizations or a dozen possible contradictions, and perhaps all would be wrong—only there is nobody to tell us so.

So I concur with Bruce here in finding no insuperable problem in these identifications, having regard to the circumstances. The historian has to make do with the evidence he has, evaluating his sources as best he may. And here I think we have fundamentally good ones.

But in deference to those who will certainly think I ought to find a problem here, I will offer at least a speculative attempt to show the possibilities for harmonization.

The second visit is probably the easier. Paul in Galatians 2 is concerned only with his relations with the Jerusalem apostles. His account centres upon his discussion with them on a point of basic importance for the justification of his apostleship for the Galatians. This discussion was doubtless an important outcome of the visit, but there is no need to think that a conference with the apostles was the original or principal object of the journey. Paul went 'by revelation', by divine command, not because summoned by authorities in Jerusalem to account for his actions. Luke tells us only of the occasion. The 'revelation' may plausibly be identified with the prophecy of Agabus. The occasion was impending famine. The divine prediction and the response in love of Gentile to needy Jew were a testimony to the transforming presence of God in this Christian movement, and so properly belonged to the story of the primitive church. Granted the occasion, it was natural that Paul should take the opportunity of conference with the Jerusalem leaders. And their injunction to remember the poor, as Paul phrases it, fits the supposition that this had been the very occasion of the visit.

The first visit involves sharper differences. In Galatians 1 Paul went to see Peter, and saw no other apostle except James; in Acts 9 Barnabas brought him to 'the apostles'. In Galatians 1 he

remained unknown by face to the churches of Judea, but in Acts 11 he apparently moved openly among the apostles, preached and debated boldly, and was finally conducted by Christians to Caesarea.

The point of the two accounts differs. Luke is giving a generalized account of this visit. Only in Paul do we sense the underlying tension in his personal relations with the Jerusalem apostles. And here he is at pains to specify the precise limits of his contact with them at this time. Peter and James were representative of 'the apostles'. It is, I think, needless to quarrel with Luke's vaguer expression, or to ask how many constituted a quorum of the whole body. Luke says Paul had apostolic contact: Paul tells us who he saw. The other matter goes deeper. Here we find at least one suggestive implication common to both accounts, that Paul's introduction to the church was oddly limited and difficult. In the one case he met few individuals and was unknown to the church at large, in the other the church feared him and disbelieved his conversion. It seems very likely those two things go together. One of the tragedies of Christian missions in the Middle East today is that established Christians will reject converts from Islam whose sincerity is suspected though they may have lost everything through their conversion. Paul first came to Jerusalem not to a welcome as a mighty evangelist of the future, but as a virtual outcast, rejected by both communities. Barnabas broke the ice, and representatives of the apostles responded, perhaps fearfully. Paul declared Christ in the synagogues, but the bulk of the church shunned contact with him.

That is but a guess. But we should beware of being hypercritical. If we were to submit the works of a single known modern writer to an over-rigid analytical criticism, he might not survive the treatment.

I should see the real difficulty of my view elsewhere, in its chronology. If we make Galatians as early as suggested in this paper the question is raised whether there is enough time available to contain the primitive history of the Jerusalem church before the conversion of Paul and to accommodate the periods of three and fourteen years to which he refers (Galatians 1: 18; 2: 1). On one side this hinges on the uncertainty of the dating of the crucifixion and resurrection, on the other on the uncertain chronology of Paul's conversion and subsequent activities.

The events in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 1-9 may well have happened within a space of months. The three and fourteen years are probably both to be reckoned from Paul's conversion, concurrently

rather than consecutively: ancient practice regularly reckoned fractions inclusively. The whole period from the crucifixion *may* have been no more than fourteen years of our reckoning. The Acts account need not be taken as rigidly chronological. Herod Agrippa I died in 44, but the famine-relief visit is likely to have happened in about 46 (*cf.* Josephus), even if the proclamation of Agabus and the preparation of assistance had occupied some considerable time. The crucifixion was perhaps in 30,

or might be as late as 33.<sup>23</sup>

There are many variables here, and no dogmatic chronology can be offered. It must be allowed that the dating would be very tight on some *possible* permutations of these data: but I suggest that on a variety of *likely* readings of them there is sufficient time to fit the reconstruction I have offered.

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<sup>23</sup> G. Ogg, *The chronology of the public ministry of Jesus* (Cambridge University Press, 1940).