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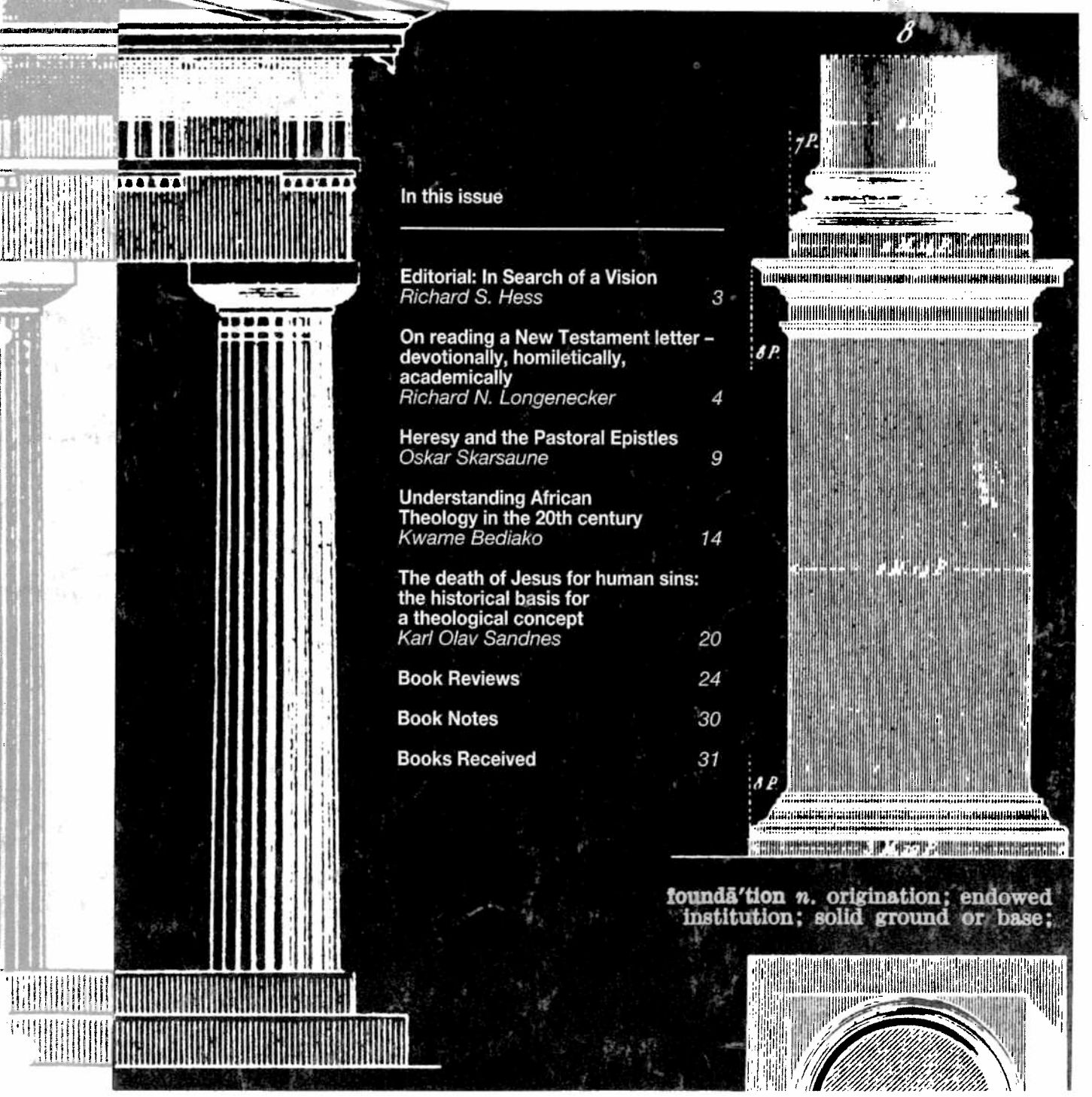

In this issue

foundā'tion *n.* origination; endowed institution; solid ground or base;

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Contributors

While contributors express their own views, it is expected that they are in agreement with the theological position of the RTSF and IFES. Articles should be submitted to the general editor or (in case of North America) to Dr Jim Stamoolis, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois 60187-5593, USA

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Editorial: In Search of a Vision

'Where has our vision gone?' This was a question that I heard 20 years ago in a college chapel service. At that time the speaker recalled how the ideals and dreams of his own college classmates had gradually disappeared as the years passed. He wondered why. What had happened to lose the early sense of radical commitment to Christianity and the evangelical life to which it beckoned? I have often pondered this, having had a similar experience. Perhaps this is a function of life and a developing sense of realism. In this theory, youthful zeal gives place to sober judgment. Perhaps so, but is there not also the gradual absorption of the spirit of the age, the *Zeitgeist* that permeates us and our lives? Have we passed into an era when human hearts find meaning and life in the material rather than the spiritual? Is this because people are more materialistic? Or, more likely, is this a time of fragmentation, one that lacks a single moral focus that can recruit many to its standard?

This year seems particularly appropriate for considering these questions. British evangelical scholarship celebrates the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Tyndale Fellowship. The founders held to a common vision of promoting evangelical scholarship, especially through addressing those issues raised by a dominant perspective that challenged Christian faith. Judged by these aims, one may identify an amazing success. Never has the Fellowship enjoyed such widespread support. Its members publish a flood of books, journals and articles. They occupy key posts in the academic establishment. Its vision receives worldwide support. A comparable North American institution adapts many of its principles. Public addresses and publication projects continue to address the issues and concerns of the founders.

However, it is no solution to focus only on the past. Previous generations faced their own challenges in their own distinct ways. We learn from the past in order to avoid repeating it. The human dimension of past success lay in the genius of those who identified the challenges and opportunities of their era, and who could obtain and marshal the resources necessary to address them. To use a popular metaphor, the combination of fidelity, creativity and honest self-assessment formed a powerful 'cocktail' that realized the vision of the preceding 50 years.

The direction of focus must point forward. The year 2000 casts its millennial shadow across the present decade. To mention setting an agenda for the future will win no prizes for originality, but perhaps more important is to ask who is setting the plan, for whom is it set and what does it hope to attain. Two concerns seem prominent in every discussion of this sort: the Third World and postmodernism.

The issue of the Third World must affect theological study at the end of the 20th century. It cannot be relegated to the 'missions department' as though it were another academic topic for the traditional theological syllabus to categorize. One cannot lock out the press of several billion human faces. They impinge on every area of our lives. Not only do they challenge our daily comforts and our use of natural resources, they also pose unresolved dilemmas about the ethics of 'doing scholarship' irrelevant to the needs of humanity. It is no answer to say that the challenges of 'Western' critical thinking will eventually reach all corners of the world. This ignores the inadequacy of the pronouns 'them' and 'they' in this essay. Modern communications mean that theological disciplines have reached into every major community. No longer is the world divided between those who study and those who are studied, with the latter having no voice of their own. All communities increasingly represent their concerns and perspectives in the worldwide seminar on theology. The 'they' of the Third World has become 'we' in the theological discussion. The result is a new range of issues that challenge the traditional disciplines. The Third World deserves to influence the agenda of the theological curriculum and thereby to change the type of scholarship that serves and enriches both northern and southern hemispheres.

Postmodernism is the sort of term one hesitates to use because it is already loaded with so much connotative baggage. Nevertheless, its impact seems all-pervasive. On the one hand, it has served to reduce some of the critical positions of another era from dominant 'assured truths' to one claimant among many in the scholarly game of competing methodologies. On the other hand, it has forever changed the religious landscape, vitiating the objective claims of truth found in every monotheistic faith and destroying the public perception of their importance. Religious observance must bow to commercial interests and the vision of a future monarch reinterprets 'defender of the faith' to mean 'defender of faith'. There is no panacea on the horizon. We now find truth distinctive to particular communities but lacking any overall means to adjudicate between their competing philosophies. As always, the temptation is to opt for power as a weapon to win the debate. The university with the most money, the commentary with the largest circulation, the journal in the most prestigious series – all these become markers of modern scholarship, markers that in the end resemble those of previous generations with their own special interest groups.

The discussion concerning postmodernism is intimately tied to the realities of the Third World. It lies in an agenda, but more, in a vision for the future that remains evangelical as it reaches beyond traditional boundaries. This vision seriously incorporates the worldwide membership of the Christian faith into the theological dialogue. In this way the universality of the church achieves a theological maturity. Only by encompassing the diversity of all its members in the debate, as it has already incorporated them into its membership, can Christianity fully and effectively witness to its truth claims. To follow this direction requires fidelity to the faith of Christ, as it confesses dependence on the will and witness of God's Spirit who chooses when and how to reveal and convict. All the while it affirms the promise of Jesus' prayer for the church in John 17: 'May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.'

Richard S. Hess, Lecturer in Old Testament and Hebrew, Glasgow Bible College, *Themelios* Book Review Editor.

Dr Wright (who is now Principal of All Nations Christian College) has now finished his period as General Editor of Themelios. *The publishers and editorial committee would like to thank him for all his services to the journal over the past five years. We appreciate all he has done in the midst of a very busy schedule.*

We are delighted to be able to announce that from January 1995 Rev Professor Stephen Williams, formerly of Whitefield Institute, Oxford, will be taking over as General Editor. Prof Williams has recently taken up the Chair in Systematic Theology at Union Theological College, Belfast.

On reading a New Testament letter – devotionally, homiletically, academically

Richard N. Longenecker

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How do we read a NT letter? With respect to genre, some view a NT letter as a compendium of Christian theology, others as a structured literary instrument used for general teaching purposes that was known in antiquity as an epistle, and still others as a personal communication that reflects the particulars of a specific time, place and circumstance. With respect to contents, some read a NT letter devotionally, others homiletically, and others academically. There are, in fact, a variety of ways in which the letters of the NT are read today. So the question is pertinent: how should we read a NT letter?

I. A question of genre

It was Adolf Deissmann who, at the turn of the century, first alerted us to the fact that NT letters were written as real letters to specific people in response to particular situations. Deissmann called them 'private letters' as distinct from 'public letters' or 'epistles'. And he argued that apart from their salutations, thanksgivings and closings, the letters of the NT have no standard epistolary structure or literary form at all – that they were dashed off as personal communications to address specific circumstances, without any thought, for the most part, as to structure or form.

Yet important and laudatory as Deissmann's thesis was (and is), subsequent study has brought to light at least four ways in which his understanding needs to be more carefully nuanced. In the first place, his classification of NT letters as 'private letters' is somewhat misleading. Paul's letters, for example, are not merely private, personal communications – at least, not 'private' and 'personal' in the usual sense of those terms. They were written to Christian believers for instruction in their common life together by one who was self-consciously an apostle, and so were meant to be read aloud in the corporate worship of the community of believers to which they were sent and to be received as from an official representative of the Christian faith. As George Milligan long ago pointed out, they are 'missionary' or 'pastoral' letters and not just 'private' or 'personal' letters:

> The letters of St Paul may not be epistles, if by that we are to understand literary compositions written without any thought of a particular body of readers. At the same time, in view of the tone of authority adopted by the author, and the general principles with which they deal, they are equally far removed from the unstudied expression of personal feeling, which we associate with the idea of a true letter. And if we are to describe them as letters at all, it is well to define the term still further by the addition of some such distinguishing epithet as 'missionary' or 'pastoral'. It is not merely St Paul the man, but St Paul the spiritual teacher and guide who speaks in them throughout.[1]

A second correction that needs to be made in Deissmann's thesis has to do with his contention that NT letters lack epistolary structure and literary form, except for a few stereotyped conventions and customary formulae in their salutations, thanksgivings and closings. This was a deduction that Deissmann drew from his premise that Paul's letters are non-literary, personal communications and not literary, artistic productions – that Paul, while making tents with gnarled hands and sweating brow, dictated his letters to his associates in unstudied fashion, and that they took down his rapid-fire statements exactly as he gave them without any major improvements of style or expression. But Deissmann's conclusion in this regard is a *non sequitur*, for recent study has demonstrated the existence of many conventional structural features and forms in both the common, private letters of the Hellenistic period and the Pauline corpus.[2] Admittedly, there is a wide range of literary styles in the extant, real letters of the Hellenistic period. Yet there are certain epistolary conventions that can be observed in those letters, as well as in all the letters of the NT – conventions to be found not only in the salutations, thanksgivings and closings, but also in the bodies of both Hellenistic letters generally and NT letters in particular.

A third way in which Deissmann's thesis needs to be modified has to do with the distinction he makes between a letter and an epistle, which distinction must be nuanced more carefully in view of the wide variety of types of letters to be found among the non-literary Greek papyri.[3] Demetrius in his handbook *On Style* listed 21 types of real letters, while Proclus expanded that list to 41 – identifying, for example, letters of friendship, of recommendation, of request, of information, of instruction, of consolation, of praise, of thanksgiving, of accusation, of apology, of introduction, of interrogation, of invitation, and of rebuke, with some letters evidencing a mixture of types.[4] None of our NT letters corresponds exactly to the types described in the ancient handbooks on style or as exemplified in the Greek papyri. Nevertheless, an examination of the purpose, mood, style and structure of each of the letters of the NT provides a basis of classifying it roughly according to one or the other of the then existing types of Hellenistic letters. One Pauline example would be Philemon, as a letter of recommendation. Others are Philippians as a letter of thanksgiving, 1 Corinthians as a letter of response and instruction, and Galatians as a letter of rebuke and request.

Finally, it needs to be said that Deissmann's rather simple classification of NT letters as real letters needs to be nuanced further to take into account the NT writers' use of other literary traditions as well, such as their use of then current rhetorical forms and modes of persuasion, as well as their use of chiastic structures of thought and expression, midrashic exegetical procedures, early Christian hymns and confessional formulae, and certain fixed paraenetic materials. So though Deissmann was right to insist on the real, private Hellenistic letter as the primary category to which all of the NT letters belong, that must not be taken to exclude the NT writers' use of other literary traditions as well, as drawn from their Jewish, Hellenistic and Christian backgrounds. Epistolary and rhetorical conventions were 'in the air' in antiquity, much like the details of grammar. One didn't have to be a trained scribe, rhetoritician or grammarian to think, speak and write well. Literary, rhetorical and epistolary conventions were generally common to all, and the letters of the NT reflect many of the conventions of the day as well.

Given, then, that NT letters are of the genre of real letters – though letters that were sent with apostolic authority to various congregations of Christian believers and that reflect many of the epistolary and rhetorical conventions of the day – the question remains: How should they be read by us today? Broadly speaking, I suggest that they can be read in three ways: devotionally, homiletically and academically. My thesis is that each of these ways of reading a NT letter is legitimate in its own right, but that all three must be ultimately brought together for a proper understanding. And in spelling out this thesis I will use Paul's letter to the Galatians as *exemplar*.

II. Reading devotionally

Probably most of us were first introduced to the NT as devotional literature – either because we were raised in a Christian home and within the church, or because, when witnessed to by others, we turned to one or more of the NT letters for spiritual direction and edification. Some may have first encountered the NT in a university religion, history or literature course, but even then any continued reading was usually for devotional reasons. For most of us, then, if not all, reading a NT letter began as a devotional experience, and it continued mainly out of a desire for spiritual direction and edification. Particularly as Christians, who have come into relationship with God through Jesus Christ, we read the NT letters first of all in a devotional manner.

The focus of a devotional reading is spiritual direction and edification. Doctrinal themes are looked for so that we might better understand our faith; moral guidance is sought so that we might better live our lives. A minimum of knowledge about what is written in a NT letter is helpful for a devotional reading of the texts, and so various Bible study aids on a popular level have been produced: brief introductions as to author, addressee(s) and occasion at the start of each letter; concordances so that we can trace out word usages elsewhere in Scripture; cross-reference Bibles so that we can identify historical allusions and tangent themes; and Bible dictionaries so that we can get a summary account of all that is deemed to be essential for an understanding of the material.

At the heart of a devotional reading of a NT letter are the great Reformation principles of (1) the perspicuity of Scripture (*i.e.*, that Scripture is clear in its basic message and can be understood by everyone as to the essential content of that message; that Scripture is lucid and understandable, even to those of limited intellect and different cultures), and (2) the effectiveness of the Spirit in illuminating the Scriptures and witnessing to Christ. So the various Bible Societies, whether regional, national or international, distribute copies of the Bible with the conviction that the combination of the written Word and the Spirit – even apart from study aids – will bring men and women into vital union with Christ, the living Word, and so into a redemptive relationship with God himself. And the results of their wide distribution of Scripture have repeatedly vindicated their confidence.

Reading the Letter to the Galatians devotionally, it is hard to miss Paul's major points: (1) that the Christian gospel is rooted in God's grace; (2) that the gospel has as its focus what Christ has done on behalf of all people, principally in his death on the cross; (3) that redemption from sin and reconciliation with God are offered to all who respond to God's grace and Christ's work by faith; (4) that what the gospel offers is apart from human works ('legalism'); (5) that the Christian life is to be lived out apart from any necessary allegiance to the Jewish law ('nomism'), but rather (6) that the Christian life is dependent primarily on the Holy Spirit for its direction and enablement. When read devotionally, Galatians is clear that faith mixed with works is an impossible situation for either acceptance before God or a life lived out in his favour – even though true faith always expresses itself in appropriate works or actions – for Christianity *vis-à-vis* Judaism is Christ-centred and not just Torah-centred. So Luther, using an illustration drawn from one of Aesop's fables, could assert that Paul's teaching in Galatians is quite clear: that 'the one who mixes faith and works is like the dog who runs along the bank of a stream with a piece of meat in its mouth, and looking down into the stream and seeing there what it thinks to be another dog with another piece of meat in its mouth and desiring both pieces of meat, opens its mouth to catch up the second as well – and so loses even that which it has.' For Luther, as for most who read the letter, Galatians is clear in its main polemical and doctrinal thrusts. Read devotionally, most find the letter lucid and plain.

There are, of course, dangers in any devotional reading of a NT letter. Two are immediately evident. First, it is always possible to impose one's own concerns, issues and ideas onto the text, and so to read the letter as only reflecting some personal situation and/or as only confirming some previously held position. Indeed, we all come to the NT letters with a preconditioning that affects our understanding of what is written. The danger, however, is that we will do it to excess, without allowing the text itself to judge our own views and preconditioning.

History is replete with instances of reading Galatians, for example, as only a confirmation of one's own views. Marcion did this in the second century, finding throughout the letter support for his sharp dichotomy between Paul's gospel and everything Jewish. Origen did this as well in the late second and early third centuries, finding in the Hagar–Sarah allegory of 4:21-31 justification for his own allegorical method of exegesis. And the early Gnostics found in Galatians substantiation for their claim that the true Christian must move from a 'fleshly' to a 'spiritual' type of existence, as do also all sorts of cults today. What these excessively 'biographical' or 'personalized' readings fail to do, however, each in its own way, is to allow the text to judge their preconceptions and to correct their own preformed opinions.

A second danger in any devotional reading of a NT letter has to do more with volition or will than understanding or intellect. For frequently, even though we understand, we are reticent or opposed to put into practice the principles enunciated in what we read. Most often this is because such a response would require a reorientation of life such as we are not prepared to make. So we remain deaf, oblivious and unaffected by what we read and understand, with the result that our knowledge turns sour and becomes something to be discarded from our active consciousness.

Nonetheless, despite its dangers, a devotional reading of the NT letters is necessary, even vital, for the Christian individually and for the church corporately. As part of the Word written, NT letters feed the Christian soul. Despite their particularities, they are also both intrinsically and instrumentally – in ways constantly debated, but ultimately beyond our finite comprehension – the means God uses to give spiritual nourishment to his people. And so the reading of the NT letters devotionally is of great importance for the spiritual health of every Christian.

III. Reading homiletically

The focus of a homiletical reading of a NT letter is proclamation, which has to do with setting out the message of the letter clearly, indicating its relevance for the hearer, and applying its principles for life today. Homiletics has to do with preaching to others. So when preachers study a NT letter, their concerns are (1) how to capture the centrality of the message (both in its statements and in its ethos), (2) how to translate and package that message in a way that will be clear and meaningful to a particular audience, and (3) how to apply that message to the lives of those addressed, asking for a response of faith and action.

Reading Galatians with a view to proclamation, certain major emphases immediately stand out. Chief among these is that of the supremacy and completeness of the work of Christ, both for acceptance by God (justification) and for living as a Christian (lifestyle). In the salutation at the very beginning of the letter, for example, when Paul speaks of Jesus Christ he immediately adds 'who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father' (1:4) – which is a significant addition to Paul's normal salutations as found in his other letters. Furthermore, in what has been identified as the 'propositio' or thesis paragraph of the Galatian letter in 2:15-21, Paul sets out the contours of his

argument to follow in chapters 3 and 4, with that thesis paragraph laying all of the emphasis on the supremacy and completeness of the work of Christ as against the 'works of the law'. For in speaking about our acceptance by God and setting out his thesis against legalism, Paul writes: 'We know that a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ' (vv. 15-16). And in speaking about Christian living and setting out his thesis against nomism, he writes: 'Through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (vv. 19-20).

And this same emphasis on the supremacy and completeness of Christ's work appears many times and in many ways throughout the Galatian letter. In 3:1, to cite a further example, when he begins to deal theologically with the issues that had arisen within his Galatian churches, Paul sets out at the head of his presentation the statement: 'Jesus Christ has been clearly portrayed [or 'placarded'] as having been crucified' – as though the work of Christ on the cross puts an end to all stray thoughts about the appropriateness of 'works of the law' for either acceptance by God or Christian living. And in 4:4-5, when he gives a précis of the Christian message, Paul quotes what appears to be an early Christian confession that relates our 'adoption as God's children' solely to God's action in sending his Son and the Son's redemptive action on our behalf: 'But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption as God's children.'

Much more, of course, could and should be said about the major proclamation themes that appear in Galatians. All we have done is to 'scan the surface' in support of our argument that a homiletical approach to a NT letter looks for 'grist for its preaching mill' from its reading, with attention then given as to how to translate, package and apply that message to a particular audience being addressed by the preacher. But such a superficial scanning must suffice, at least for now.

There are, however, dangers in reading any NT letter (or, for that matter, any portion of Scripture) in a homiletical fashion. First, there is the danger of imposing one's own organizational structures on a text and not allowing the text itself to speak its own message in its own way. We all know preachers who seem to organize their sermons on almost every portion of Scripture considered in terms of such standard logical questions as 'Who?', 'What?', 'How?', 'When?', 'Why?', *etc.* Or who restructure everything in a passage in terms of three or four alliterative points. Seldom, it seems, do people under such preaching ever hear the Word of God preached, but rather come away impressed only with the preacher's own cleverness. A second danger in a homiletical reading of a NT letter, and one that is probably even worse than the first, is the temptation to seek too quickly for contemporary relevance in the text – or to allow relevance itself to be the only criterion of truth, so turning Scripture into only a modern commentary on our times.

Another danger in a homiletical approach, of course, particularly in recalling the importance of a devotional reading, is to read Scripture only in terms of what can be proclaimed to others, without feeding devotionally on that same material for one's own spiritual nourishment. And finally, looking ahead to what will be discussed in terms of an academic reading, it needs to be asserted that just as dangerous is the reading of any biblical text in a homiletical fashion without being at least somewhat attuned to scholarly readings of that same material in order to check one's own interpretation and to expand one's own understanding.

Nonetheless, despite its dangers, a homiletical reading of the NT letters is also necessary and vital for Christians individually and the church corporately. For without proclamation, the Christian and the church become stagnant, always taking in but never giving out. According to the commissions given by our resurrected Lord in such passages as Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8 and elsewhere, proclamation is a major mandate of the Christian and the church. And that requires not only a devotional but also a homiletical reading of Scripture.

IV. Reading academically

Many Christians today know only two kinds of reading of a NT letter (and of Scripture generally): a devotional reading, which they absorb from popular Christian books and experience (at times) for themselves when they read the Bible privately, and a homiletical reading, which they hear in church. There is, however, a vitally important third kind of reading, an academic reading, which not only serves to inform the above devotional and homiletical readings but also functions, at its best, to lead both Christians and the church into deeper understandings of Scripture and heightened appreciations of their Christian faith. Each of these three kinds of readings of Scripture is important for Christians individually and the church corporately. In fact, it is only as these three kinds of readings are brought together and allowed to interact with one another that real spiritual health for Christians and the church comes about.

It can be noted, of course, that whenever a devotional or homiletical reading gives consideration to such matters as authorship, addressee(s), chronology and/or the circumstances involved in the writing of a biblical portion, there is something of an acknowledgment of the value of an academic reading of the portion in question, even though unstated. And certainly in many devotional and homiletical readings of Scripture there exist various elements that can be attributed, in one way or another, to past scholarly study, even though not always credited. For much of the popular piety of today lives off the intellectual capital built up by scholars of the past.

But whether credited or not, an ongoing and actively pursued academic reading of Scripture is vitally important for the spiritual health of Christians individually and the church corporately. And while it is obvious that such introductory matters as authorship, addressee(s), chronology and the circumstances of writing are part-and-parcel of any academic reading of a biblical portion, I would go on to claim that the following eight areas of consideration are also of great importance for an academic interpretation of a NT letter.

A first consideration in any academic interpretation must always be that of a *history of interpretation, i.e.* giving attention to how the letter has been understood in the past. The maxim 'Those who are ignorant of the past are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past!' is as true for biblical interpretation as it is for any other discipline. Understanding how a NT letter has been read in such times as the Patristic period, the Reformation period, among Roman Catholics and during the past century-and-a-half of critical scholarship enables one to profit from both the advances and the false starts of previous interpreters. Of equal importance, it gives direction to one's own study through the isolation of perennial and crucial issues.

Sadly, some academic studies of NT letters seem to work *de novo*, as though nothing of significance has been written or said on the subject before the modern commentator began his or her work. But we can learn from the history of interpretation. And this is an important facet in the scholarly study of a NT letter – particularly in the scholarly study of Paul's letter to the Galatians, which has been interpreted in all sorts of ways in the past.

A second important matter in an academic study of a NT letter has to do with an analysis of the *epistolary structures and conventions* of the letter. After all, a NT letter is a letter. So one of our initial approaches to it must be in terms of it as a letter, which means understanding what type of letter it is, its basic letter structure and the various epistolary conventions used in it in order that we might better understand its contents.

The study of a NT letter in terms of epistolary genre, structure and conventions is a rather new discipline. It began with the discoveries during the last decade of the 19th century of some 40,000–60,000 non-literary (*koine* or common) Greek papyrus letters in the Fayum district of Egypt. These discoveries revolutionized our understanding of the morphology, syntax and usages of *koine* Greek (the type of Greek in which our NT is written), with the result that all of our Greek grammars and lexicons today are based on these materials. But these discoveries did not, at the time, have any great impact on understanding

the epistolary genre, structures or conventions of NT letters, that being left for investigation during the last quarter century. In the past 25 years or so, however, a great deal of research has gone into analysing the forms of the non-literary Hellenistic letters that are roughly contemporaneous with our NT letters, into identifying the functions of the various component parts of a typical Greek letter, into spelling out the various types of early letters and how their component parts operate within them, and then in comparing the letters of the NT to what has been found from the studies of these Hellenistic letters.

In brief, it has been shown that the Greek papyrus letters from Egypt are usually constructed according to a fairly consistent pattern – *i.e.*, an opening salutation, a section that in some manner establishes personal contact with the addressee(s), a central body section, a paraenesis or hortatory section, and a closing – and that our NT letters follow this usual pattern. As well, it has been demonstrated that the respective sections in this usual epistolary pattern, for both the Greek letters generally and NT letters in particular, have quite definite and distinctive functions. Furthermore, it has been shown that the papyrus letters evidence a number of fairly standard epistolary conventions – *e.g.*, motive for writing formulae, disclosure formulae, rebuke formulae, request formulae, vocative formulae in the paraenesis sections, autographic subscriptions, farewell formulae – and that the letters of the NT have many of the same. And, interestingly, it can be seen in the Greek letters that these epistolary conventions tend to appear in clusters at the beginning and end of the units or sub-units of a writing, and so serve to indicate breaks or turning points in the development of a letter-writer's argumentation – which is how they also appear in NT letters, thereby providing us with a more objective way of identifying the various phases of an argument in these letters.

This is not to suggest that the NT letter-writers must now be seen as trained epistolary theorists or that they used the letter-writing conventions of their day in any slavish manner. Epistolary styles and conventions were 'in the air' during the Hellenistic period and were evidently widely practised by all reasonably educated people, much as certain letter-writing conventions are today or as is the proper use of grammar. Rather, what we are arguing is that, though at first sight a somewhat mundane or even trivial exercise, epistolary analysis of a NT letter *vis-à-vis* what we now know about the types of ancient Greek letters, their structures and their conventions is of real importance for (1) establishing what type of letter we are dealing with, (2) laying out the structure of the letter in a more objectively defensible fashion, and (3) signalling the epistolary markers that serve to set out the course of the writer's argument. And while not telling us everything we might want to know about the letter, these matters are of great significance for interpretation.

A third matter of importance for any scholarly study of a NT letter has to do with an analysis of *rhetorical modes of presentation and persuasion* in the letter. For if letters represent the written form of oral arguments, then we are not only interested in a letter's epistolary structures and conventions but also its rhetorical features and conventions. So it is important in an academic study of a NT letter to identify the correlations between (1) its rhetorical features *vis-à-vis* what can be found in other writings of the time, both Greco-Roman and Jewish (*i.e.*, 'synchronic rhetorical analysis'), and (2) the development of its argument *vis-à-vis* how arguments were developed in the Greco-Roman world generally and the Jewish world in particular, both according to the ancient style books on rhetoric and according to what we find was actually practised (*i.e.*, 'diachronic rhetorical analysis').

While it may be claimed that rhetorical analysis has always been a part of the study of any biblical text (for in dealing with the argument of any passage commentators have usually had to take into account similar features found in other writings (at least those within the canon of Scripture) and to observe how the author develops his argument), it is only of late that rhetorical analysis of biblical materials as a distinguishable discipline has come to full bloom. It began as a sub-discipline of OT scholarship, but has become important in NT studies as well. To date, Hans Dieter Betz's work on Galatians is the most serious and significant attempt to interpret a NT letter on the basis of a diachronic rhetorical analysis,[5] though others during the last decade have interpreted the rhetorical data within Galatians somewhat differently.[6]

What a rhetorical analysis of a NT letter attempts to do is to show how one part of an argument relates to another, thereby revealing something of the underlying structure of the author's presentation. By means of a diachronic analysis, it seeks to identify the particular type of rhetoric used by the author and to isolate the various rhetorical conventions that appear, showing how those conventions carry forward the argument. By means of a synchronic analysis, it seeks to show how the argument is developed through such main modes of persuasion as ethos (the personal character of the speaker or writer), pathos (putting the audience in a certain frame of mind) and logic (setting out the proofs of the argument), with all sorts of supplementary modes of persuasion brought in as well as the occasion demands. In so doing, rhetorical analysis offers interpreters a great deal of help in their attempts to understand more adequately the argument of an author in a particular NT letter – assuming, of course, that such an analysis is done properly.

After dealing with the usual introductory matters of authorship, addressee(s), chronology and circumstances involved in writing, and following hard on the heels of a history of interpretation, an epistolary analysis and a rhetorical analysis, a fourth important area in the academic study of a NT letter arises, that of *exegesis proper*, with its attendant disciplines of comparative and historical linguistics (*i.e.*, 'philology'). Here the scholar is concerned with the meaning of words, phrases, idioms, expressions and sentences in the text studied, both as to how these units of language were used in the author's day and as to how a given author shaped them for his own purposes.

True, devotional and homiletical readings of the Bible are also interested in exegesis, for their interpretations depend on making sense of the materials before them. But an academic reading works with the text in its original language; and since Greek, the original language, is much more inflected than English, an academic reading is able to discern nuances in the text that are often impossible to carry over into English, apart from some paraphrastic elaboration, cumbersome locution or commentary exposition. Thus the academic study of words, phrases, idioms, expressions and sentences in a NT letter is vital for the spiritual life of Christians individually and the church corporately, for without such scholarly, exegetical study all other readings of Scripture would be only superficial, at best, and erroneous or harmful, at worst – as the various cultic forms of Christianity have repeatedly demonstrated, both in the past and in our day.

A fifth matter of importance in an academic reading of a NT letter is that of a *comparative study of Jewish exegetical procedures and practices*, both those of the rabbis as codified in the Talmud (and associated materials) and those of the extant sectarian writings. This is especially true for the Letter to the Galatians, which has the highest percentage of biblical quotations of any NT writing. But it is also true of many other NT materials, particularly the letters designated as Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Hebrews and 1 Peter – as well, of course, as the Gospels of Matthew and John (if not also those of Mark and Luke) and the Apocalypse. While there are scholars who try to work only from the canonical materials, one cannot really understand what is going on in a NT writer's use of the Jewish Scriptures without taking into account that writer's usage *vis-à-vis* the Jewish uses of the day of those same Scriptures, including both rabbinic and sectarian usages.

A sixth matter has to do with the identification of incorporated Christian *confessional materials* and the detailing of how these materials have been used in a NT writer's argument. For in the letters of the NT there often appears a formulaic statement of belief that seems to have (1) arisen from the central convictions of the earliest believers, (2) taken various forms dependent on their respective settings (*e.g.*, worship, preaching, liturgy, teaching, catechism, apology and the like), and (3) been used by the NT writers to support their presentations, often in conjunction with quotations from Scripture. Form criticism is the prerequisite tool for identifying these early Christian confessional materials. As well, it is necessary to treat the content of these

portions in two ways: first, on their own, in terms of what message they would have conveyed in their original settings; then, as they appear in the writings of the NT, in terms of how they are there used. In Galatians there are, I believe, six such confessional portions used by Paul in support of his arguments (*i.e.*, 1:4; 3:1; 3:13; 3:26; 3:27-28 and 4:4-5).

A seventh item in our listing has to do with what has been called *phenomenological historiography, i.e.*, the identification and tracing out of similar themes and parallel ways of looking at things in roughly contemporary and cognate materials, with the hope of spawning fresh interpretive insights. It is necessary in biblical scholarship that one be a comparative religionist. In particular, this means that in the area of NT study one must be as familiar as possible with Israel's Wisdom literature, Greek classical and popular religious philosophy, the Jewish apocalyptic writings, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Josephus, Stoicism, the Talmud and its associated compilations, and the Nag Hammadi texts. And while at times such quests for tangent material may seem something like 'parallelomania' (to use a term coined by Samuel Sandmel), when properly done such a tracing out of similar themes, concepts, expressions and approaches in roughly contemporary and cognate materials can prove to be highly significant for interpretation – particularly, I believe, for the interpretation of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Finally, by way of concluding our listing with an eighth matter of importance, it is also vital in an academic study of a NT letter that one be involved in tracing out the *development of thought and expression* that appears both within a particular letter being studied and between that letter and the other writings of the NT. A NT letter is neither a static nor an isolated phenomenon. Within it an argument is developed, and between it and its neighbouring canonical writings there is development. So just as there is the need for NT scholarship to trace out matters having to do with historical circumstances and chronological relations that appear both within a given writing and between writings, there is the need to trace out conceptual developments and relationships both within a particular writing and between the writings of the NT as well. And, as has been said before of other approaches, such an endeavour is particularly helpful in an academic study of Galatians, for it enables us to appreciate better how the message of Galatians functions and how it should be taken in the broader scope of early apostolic proclamation.

Of course, each of the above eight matters involved in an academic reading of a NT letter can engage the mind and strength of any one scholar for a lifetime. The task when laid out as above seems staggering, perhaps impossible. But scholarship is a co-operative enterprise. So while perhaps working in only one area, a scholar can learn from the work of others in other areas and thereby allow their work to inform and temper his or her own work.

There are, however, many dangers in an academic study of Scripture. Pride of accomplishment, laziness after having to some degree attained and resting on past laurels without always pushing ahead in the quest for understanding, are perennial dangers for the scholar. As well, there is the danger of becoming so engrossed in one area of study as to fail to appreciate the insights gained from study in the other areas. But probably most disastrous for the individual personally and the church corporately is getting so wrapped up with an academic reading of the NT letters (and Scripture generally) as to forget about reading them devotionally, and so to separate oneself from their spiritual nourishment, or to forget about reading them homiletically, and so retreat from being interested or involved in the proclamation of the gospel.

V. Conclusion

The purpose of what has been said above has not been to spell out the details of each of the disciplines cited as being important in an academic reading of a NT letter. That would take much more space and time than are available here. In fact, it would take volumes to do it properly. Rather, my purpose has been twofold, with the first having something of a scholarly bent and the second being more pastoral in nature: (1) to set out a number of areas of study, some of which are sometimes neglected, that I believe are vitally important for an academic reading of the NT letters, and (2) to urge a bringing together of a devotional, homiletical and academic reading of the NT letters, both in our own lives as Christians and in the life of the church at large. It is very easy to become myopic, whether as laity, ministers or scholars. So while we may have our own special interests and particular expertise, we need to be reading the NT letters in all three ways: devotionally, homiletically and academically. Our mental health and spiritual vitality as Christians individually and as a church corporately depend on it.

[1]*The New Testament Documents, Their Origin and Early History* (London: Macmillan, 1913), p. 95.

[2]*Cf.* esp. J.L White, *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter: A Study of the Letter-Body in the Non-Literary Papyri and in Paul the Apostle* (Missoula, 1972); *idem, The Form and Structure of the Official Petition: A Study in Greek Epistolography* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1972); C.H. Kim, *The Form and Structure of the Familiar Greek Letter of Recommendation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1972).

[3]*Cf.* my treatments of 'Letters in Antiquity', 'Pastoral Letters' and 'Tractate Letters' in 'On the Form, Function and Authority of the New Testament Letters', in D.A. Carson and J.D. Woodbridge (eds.), *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Leicester: IVP, 1983), pp. 101–106.

[4]*Cf.* W.G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), p. 10; see also T.Y. Mullins, 'Petition as a Literary Form', *NovT* 5 (1962), pp. 46–54; C.H. Kim, 'The Papyrus Invitation', *JBL* 94 (1975), pp. 391–402; J.L. White and K. Kensinger, 'Categories of Greek Papyrus Letters', *SBLASP* 10 (1976), pp. 79–91.

[5]See Betz's 'The Literary Composition and Function of Paul's Letter to the Galatians', *NTS* 21 (1975), pp. 353–379; *idem, Galatians. A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1979), pp. 14–25.

[6]*E.g.*, G.A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), pp. 144–152; and my own commentary on *Galatians* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1990), pp. cix–cxiv, *passim*.

Heresy and the Pastoral Epistles[1]

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I

In antiquity, the term *hairesis* was not a negative concept – it meant quite simply a party or a school tradition, especially as applied to the different schools of philosophy.[2] Used like this, *hairesis* is a neutral or even a positive word, and Josephus applies it in this way to the different parties among the Jews.[3] It is also applied in this way in several instances by the author of Acts.[4]

There was, however, one aspect of Jewish and Christian self-understanding which implied negative connotations for the term. This aspect is the notion of the one, undivided people of God. Within the one people of God, a real people, there should be no parties or competing schools.[5] This holds true for the early Christian self-understanding, and in Paul we observe how *hairesis* and *schisma* are put together as terms describing the serious sin of destroying the unity of the body of Christ.[6] From this beginning, the term *hairesis* gradually developed into a *terminus technicus* for heresy, often used since the beginning of the second century.[7]

But of course the notion of false teaching and false practice is known to several authors who do not employ the term *hairesis*. They use other terms current in their milieu, like error *(plane)*, false teachers *(pseudodidaskaloi*, 2 Pet. 2:1), foreign teaching (*heterodidaskalein*, 1 Tim. 1:3), false prophecy, blasphemy, *etc.* When I use the English term heresy, I mean this wider concept of false teaching, which only gradually came to be expressed by the Greek term *hairesis*.

II

The text which has been chosen as the starting point for this article, 2 Timothy 2:18, certainly knows the concept of false teaching, even if it does not apply the term *hairesis*. The author comes close to this term, however, in Titus 3:10. There he speaks of a *hairetikos anthrōpos*, apparently meaning a man who establishes himself with a private doctrine and a group of followers, thus creating a faction within God's one people.

Let us take a closer look at 2 Timothy 2:14-26. We find that the warnings and admonitions given to Timothy are mainly concerned with the strategy to be followed in his dealing with the false teachers. Their doctrine is not reported, nor refuted. This accords with the advice given to Timothy: debate with the heretics should be avoided, it is of no use (14, 16f., 23).

The only glimpse we get of the doctrine of the heretics comes in verse 18. They apparently say that '[the] resurrection has already taken place'. Now, we would naturally like to ask two questions: (1) What is the meaning of that saying? and (2) What is heretical about it? Once we begin to ponder these questions, we find that the immediate context is of very little help – or at least so it seems. We therefore turn to a wider context, *viz.* the other anti-heretical passages in the Pastoral Epistles. The most important ones may be listed as follows:

1 Timothy 1:3-11; 4:1-7; 6:3-5, 20f.
2 Timothy 2:14-26; 3:1-9, 13; 4:1-5
Titus 1:10-16; 3:8f.

For the most part, these passages resemble our text in so far as they contain little if anything which further characterizes the teaching of the opponents. They consist of lengthy characterizations of the heretics as immoral, greedy, fond of strife, quarrelsome, not practising their own teaching, *etc.* Several commentators have followed the lead of M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann[8] in recognizing this kind of polemic as quite conventional, especially in the polemics between the philosophical schools of antiquity. R.J. Karris[9] has given precision to this thesis by collecting numerous parallels especially from the philosophical polemic against the sophists. He speaks of a traditional polemical schema, and argues that these conventional charges yield no clue at all concerning the heresy in question. I shall provisionally accept that.

There remain, however, a few sayings which are not part of the traditional schema, and which actually seem to contain authentic scraps of the doctrine of the heretics. They may be listed as follows:

1 Timothy 1:4 'occupying themselves with *myths* and *endless genealogies . . .*'
1:7 'desiring to be *teachers of the law*, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions'
4:3 'they *forbid marriage* and enjoin *abstinence from foods*'
4:7 'godless and silly *myths*'
4:8 (by implication): *'ascetics?'*
6:20 'Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is *falsely called gnosis*'
2 Timothy 2:18 *'The resurrection has already taken place'*
Titus 1:10 'There are many insubordinate men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially *those of the circumcision*'
1:14 *'Jewish myths* . . . commandments of men'
3:9 'stupid controversies, *genealogies*, dissensions, and *quarrels over the law*'.

If we try to synthesize these sayings, the following picture emerges: we have to do with Judaizing people, some of them circumcised, who claim to be expert interpreters of the law, mainly interested in genealogies and myths supposed to be contained therein. They forbid marriage, enjoin abstinence from certain foods, and in general seem to have advocated ascetic practices. Probably they had a negative attitude towards the created world in general. This would correspond to a purely spiritual conception of the resurrection, with no concern for the resurrection of the body. They could thus claim that the resurrection had already taken place – perhaps with reference to baptism. Most commentators conclude that the adversaries were Judaizing Christians with a Gnostic leaning, or gnosticizing Christians with a Judaizing tendency.[10] This would accord with the characterization in 1 Timothy 6:20: the teaching of the opponents falsely claims the name *gnōsis*.

If we take this as a preliminary conclusion, we have in part answered the first question asked above concerning 2 Timothy 2:18: What is the meaning of the saying that the resurrection has already occurred? We have seen that the context of the Pastorals as a whole points to the conclusion that we have to do with gnosticizing opponents who despised the material aspect of creation, who had no use for a resurrection of the body, and who thus ended up with a one-sided stress on realized eschatology – or 'over-realized eschatology'.

But our second question remains: Why did the author of the Pastorals deem this to be so utterly false that it merited no refutation? On what criteria did he condemn it as heresy?

In order to show that the answer to that question is not self-explanatory, let me briefly call to mind some passages in the recognized letters of Paul. Concerning marriage, Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 gives the advice 'not to seek marriage' (v. 27). Concerning restrictions on food, Paul is very lenient towards those who abstain from food offered to idols (1 Cor. 8), or food from animals in general (Rom. 14). Concerning the resurrection, Paul's baptismal theology might be seen to imply that the believer has risen with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6; Col. 2). Concerning the body, Paul had said that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). In other words: could not the heretics attacked in the Pastorals claim Paul's support for their doctrines? There is, in fact, a distinct possibility that they did so.[11]

No doubt the author of the Pastorals thought that his opponents had perverted the true Christian teaching, but the modern historian may hesitate in accepting that conclusion. From a modern point of view, would it not be better to say that we are facing two interpretations of Paul emphasizing different aspects of his theology – and, some would like to add, none of them representing the genuine, the real Paul?[12]

This of course makes the whole question of orthodoxy and heresy extremely complex and delicate, even if one only concentrates on the Pauline tradition within early Christianity. If we include the other dominant traditions – the Johannine, the 'school of Matthew', and so on – the complexity increases. Some would say that the very use of terms like orthodoxy and heresy within a first-century setting is hopelessly anachronistic. The concept of heresy implies the idea of deviation, distortion – in other words, it implies the idea that an original, authentic deposit of truth has later been perverted. But is this idea at all appropriate in the first-century context? Many would argue that the appropriate model is not one of an original deposit and later deviations, but rather one of different and originally independent lines of tradition, 'trajectories through early Christianity'.[13] The appropriate model would then be that some of these trajectories were able to merge and establish themselves as a dominant mainstream during the second century, emerging as orthodoxy and branding the other traditions as heresy.

The informed reader will know that I am now referring to the recent revival of what may be called the 'Bauer debate'.[14] Walter Bauer published his stimulating book on orthodoxy and heresy in 1934, and was answered by H.E.W. Turner in 1954,[15] but the debate has gained new impetus in recent years by the republication of Bauer's book.[16] The recent publication of all the Nag Hammadi texts in translation[17] has added new aspects to the discussion.

If the present writer had any intention of saying something like the final word on this very complex set of problems, or even of providing the final solution, any such intention would prove beyond doubt that he were a very young man indeed, having succumbed to the 'youthful passions' against which our text warns. So I shall try something more modest.

III

I shall ask a simple question: Is there some kind of common denominator in the first- and early second-century concept of heresy? I emphasize that I am asking about the meaning of heresy *in this period*. No doubt it is possible to define heresy in a quite formal and apparently timeless fashion, but then I doubt whether the definition is of much help when we pose the problem of heresy as a historical problem. One may reasonably argue that not only the classical heresiologists against whom Bauer directed his attack, but also Bauer himself tended to define heresy in such a formal way that the historical dynamics in the early controversies over right doctrine were lost sight of.

If we approach the concept of heresy from a historical point of view, I believe we are wise first to ask the question of background. The first Christians were – most of them – Jews, or Gentiles familiar with Judaism. What would their Jewish background mean to them with respect to the phenomenon of heresy?

We find in the relevant Jewish material a rich variety of terminology and concepts which is of interest in our present discussion.[18] But the most important point to notice in our context is the dominant position of the Torah. Apostasy and heresy – the two terms can hardly be sharply separated – are for the most part defined as theoretical or practical denial of the Torah, or something contained in the Torah. In rabbinic literature, the heretics, the *minim*, violate the Sabbath commandment, deny God's unity, believe in an independent divinity of evil, portray God as a cruel jester, deny the election of Israel, deny physical resurrection and the coming of the Messiah. In short, a *min* is a person who disregards the commandments of the Torah or denies some of its basic teachings, first and foremost those related to God's unity and his activity as creator and re-creator of this world.

The rabbis had a special term for someone who denied that the one God of the Bible is the one and only creator of this world – they called such a person a *kofer ba-ikkar*, a denier of the root.[19] A parallel expression is 'a denier of Him who created him' (*kofer bemo shebaro*). In a Toseftah passage we read the following:

> Once R. Reuben spent the Sabbath in Tiberias and a certain philosopher found him, and said to him: 'Who is hated in the world?' He replied: 'The one who denies Him who created him.' Said he to the Rabbi: 'How so?' He answered him: 'Honour thy father and thy mother; thou shalt not murder. . . . A man does not deny anything until he disavows the Root, and a man does not commit a transgression unless he first denies Him who enjoined us [not to do] it.' (*Tos. Shev.* III:7).[20]

We first notice the juxtaposition of *denial of God as the creator* and *moral depravity* claimed by this text. Next we observe that R. Reuben in his reply stresses that the one hated is someone who denies Him who created them – not just God in general, but the *creating* God.[21]

Let me at once quote a roughly contemporary Christian text. It is the first Mandate of Hermas:

> First of all believe that God is one, who made all things and perfected them. . . .[22]

In Justin, perhaps ten years later, we find the following rendering of two important Jesus logia:

> He convinced us that only God is to be worshipped, when He said: 'The greatest commandment is this: "Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve, with all thy heart, and with all thy strength, *the Lord God who made thee*", and when a certain man came to Him and said: 'Good Master', He replied: 'There is none good but God alone *who made all things*'.[23]

One may speculate that this non-synoptic addition of the creation concept is added by Justin as a polemic against Marcion, but that is hardly the only explanation, for we find antecedents to this peculiar rendering of the commandment to love God already in the *Didache*:

> First love God *who made thee*, and secondly your neighbour as yourself.[24]

Let me add at this point a Christian text written about 100 years later than Hermas. It is a passage in the Syrian *Didascalia Apostolorum*, defining heresy:

> [The heretics] all had one law, that they
> ★ should not employ the Torah and the Prophets,
> ★ and that they should blaspheme God Almighty,
> ★ and should not believe in the resurrection.[25]

This is a strikingly Jewish definition of heresy, which can be placed beside the Mishnah's characterization of those who have no share in the life of the coming age: 'he that says that there is no resurrection from the dead prescribed in the Law, and [he that says] that the Law is not from Heaven, is an Epicurean'[26] (that is, one who does not care about God because he thinks God does not care about men).

If more evidence from the second century is needed, let me add that when Justin brands Marcion and the Gnostics as heretics, it is not because they deny Christ: they do not.

> They pretend to be Christians and confess the crucified Jesus as their Lord and Christ, [and yet they are not Christians, for they] blaspheme the Creator of the Universe, and the Messiah which he prophesied should come, and the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.[27]

The very identification mark of heresy is thus the *blasphemia creatoris*. In everything he says about Christian heretics, Justin expects to find approval from Trypho, the Jew. The corollary of this is that Justin never speaks about the Jews, or about Jewish Christians, as heretics – even if the Jews deny Christ, even if the Jewish Christians have a defective, adoptionist Christology. Justin uses strong and harsh terms about Jewish unbelief, but he does not apply the traditional terminology for heresy. The Jews may be guilty of blasphemy against Jesus,[28] but they are not guilty of the *blasphemia creatoris*, the hallmark of heresy.[29]

Let me pause here, and emphasize an implicit point in what I have stated so far. Perhaps the main reason why many scholars have refused to apply concepts like 'heresy' and 'orthodoxy' to the first or early second Christian centuries is the feeling – in itself entirely justified – that these two concepts presuppose a religion, a community that has 'come of age'. Time is needed before orthodoxy and heresy can crystallize, and also before a 'winner' can emerge, a winner who can define who the orthodox and the heretics are. What is overlooked is the fact that early Christianity to a very great extent was deeply rooted in a community that had indeed 'come of age', the Jewish community. The heretic was already an established category – and it is amazing to see to what extent this Jewish concept still determined the early Christian concept of heresy, even into the third century, as in the *Didascalia*. With this in mind, let us turn to some NT evidence and some early post-apostolic writings to see how the Jewish heresy concept is handled there.

IV

The first thing which needs to be emphasized is the fact that the earliest Christians *themselves* soon came to be regarded as heretics by orthodox Jews, just as Jesus had been. Jesus, according to the gospel report, was found guilty of blasphemy against God because of the high claims he made for his own person, and during his career had to face the charge that he abolished the Torah. The first recorded Christian martyr, Stephen, was confronted with the charge that he had spoken 'blasphemous words against Moses and God' (Acts 6:11; *cf.* vv. 13f.). And according to Acts, a similar accusation was later levelled against Paul (Acts 21:21, 28).

I believe this is of some significance for our understanding of Paul's polemic in his letters to the Galatians and the Romans. His point of departure was not that the recipients of the letters were threatened by a traditional, well-known heresy, and that Paul could place his opponents in some well-known category of heresy. It was the other way round. By Jewish standards his opponents were perfectly orthodox – it was Paul himself who was charged with heresy, specifically antinomism. Paul, therefore, writes partly to defend himself, and when he comes to this defence, he cannot use any of the traditional models of heresy to combat his opponents, for they are not heretics by the usual Jewish standards. They embrace the Torah – at least, so it seems – and want all others to do so, including Gentile believers. And that is Paul's problem. If they were right, his entire mission to the Gentiles had been a failure, and his apostleship a misunderstanding. There was no Jewish – or Christian! – tradition which on this point could provide Paul with all the answers, and so he had to rely on the commission entrusted to him by the risen Christ outside Damascus, and to think through all the implications of God's revelation in Christ. While preaching a gospel without circumcision and without Jewish observance of the Torah to the Gentiles, Paul was very conscious of not being an anti-Torah preacher: 'Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? On the contrary, we uphold the law!' (Rom. 3:31).

From Acts and other early sources we get the impression that problems connected with circumcision and Torah observance were for a long time much debated; and while the majority within the primitive community in Jerusalem seem to have sided with Paul in his practical conclusions, not everyone would have been able to share all his theological premises. There gradually emerged a widely recognized consensus that Gentiles should not be subjected to circumcision and observance of the ritual elements of the Torah, although not all parties within Jewish Christianity were able to agree. But even among those who agreed, there seems to have been considerable variance with regard to the theological justification given for the common practical conclusions.

Again, let me emphasize the point I am trying to make here: in the process of defining itself in relation to Judaism and the Torah, the early church could make little use of the traditional heresy concepts within the Jewish tradition, for they were coping with a startlingly new problem, and it was they themselves rather than their opponents who could be described as heretics in the traditional way. And this continued to be so – we have seen already that a writer like Justin in the second century may call the Jews unbelievers and even worse names, but he never calls them heretics.

But now let us consider the other front on which the church had to define itself – the frontier between Christianity and Hellenistic/pagan life and practices. My thesis is that on *this* front the early Christians thought and reacted as good Jews, and made full use of the traditional Jewish heresy concept. If some who claimed to be Christians and believers in Jesus denied the essential goodness of the material creation, they were branded as heretics and described in the terms traditionally applied to antinomists and despisers of the Torah, that is, as immoral people – even if they were strict ascetics.

I believe perhaps the best illustration of this is to be found precisely in the anti-heretical polemic of the Pastorals, but before I come back to the texts from which I started, I should like to comment quite briefly on some earlier and later texts.

We begin in Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul argues, among other things, that *the resurrection from the dead* is an essential part of the drama which brings God's universal rule over the world to its fulfilment (vv. 20-28). They who deny the resurrection (of the body!) *do not know God* (v. 34). Notice that Paul says 'God', not 'Christ'.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul has a saying about unbelievers which, taken in isolation, is open to an entirely Gnostic interpretation: '. . . *the god of this world* has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of *God*.' If we take the 'god of this world' to be the creator God of the OT, and the God whose image Christ is to be the highest, unknown God, we have a perfect Gnostic or Marcionite saying. That is of course not Paul's meaning – for Paul the 'god of this world' is the devil, and nothing could be more abhorrent to him than identifying the God of the OT with the devil.[30] Nevertheless, it looks as if Paul himself had somehow felt the danger inherent in his language, for he goes on to add: 'For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", who has shone in our hearts to give the light of knowledge *[gnosis!]* of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (v. 6). Among other things, this is a perfect refutation of any Gnostic reading of Genesis 1 – or of Paul!

It would be tempting to go through all the Pauline letters to look for similar examples, but this is not the place to do it. I also omit a treatment of the anti-heretical polemic in Jude and 2 Peter – with the remark that in those texts my thesis is most easily proved. The heretics are described as antinomists, ridiculing the doctrine of God's judgment and his creating the world anew. Besides, they are said to blaspheme angels – perhaps a reference to Gnostic doctrine about the inferior angels responsible for the creation of the world.[31] Instead, I shall comment on a kind of anti-heretical polemic which at first sight might seem to have another orientation, *viz.* the polemic against docetic Christology in Ignatius (partly paralleled in the letters of John). I should like to argue that docetic Christology is not primarily a christological, but rather a *theo*logical, heresy.

Basic to this position is the Greek dogma that God is *apathees*, that he is entirely beyond any human emotions or affections, not to speak of suffering and death.[32] When Christian theologians later tried to reconcile this dogma with the OT and

NT concept of God, they got into much trouble.[33] But it seems that the opponents of John and Ignatius evaded that trouble by letting the *apathēes* dogma have full play. Consequently, there could be no real contact between the divine and the material world – the incarnation was only apparent.

Ignatius reacts against this as if he were one of the Maccabean martyrs.[34] In fact, impending martyrdom is a significant setting for all Ignatius has to say about heresy. 'For I know and believe that he [Christ] was in the flesh even after the resurrection. And when he came to those with Peter he said to them: "Take, handle me and see that I am not a phantom without a body." And they immediately touched him and believed. . . . *Therefore* they despised even death . . .' (*Smyrn.* 3:1f.) – just like Ignatius himself. If the passion, death and resurrection of Christ was not a real flesh-and-blood event, Ignatius is going to sacrifice his own body in vain. The docetic heretics are those 'who neither the prophecies nor the Law of Moses persuaded, nor the Gospel even until now, *nor our own individual sufferings*' (*Smyrn. 5:1*). One should notice here the reference to the Law and the Prophets. They are mentioned as authoritative testimonies to the reality of the resurrection. Apparently the opponents were also interested in OT exegesis, but they refused to read the OT as a book foretelling the passion and resurrection of Christ (*Philad.* 8:2); instead, they seem to have specialized in some kind of gnosticizing exegesis which bolstered their docetic Christology. They were not circumcised Jews; they were rather Gentile Christians who had great difficulties in relating the OT faith in God's creation, and his direction of the history of salvation, to their own theology.

Ignatius – like the author of the letters of John – answers by putting great emphasis on the flesh-and-blood reality of the events enumerated in the christological summaries: Christ was *truly* born, he *truly* suffered, *truly* died, *truly* rose again. To insert this repeated *aléthos* in the christological 'creed' amounts to much the same thing as confessing in the first article of the 'creed', 'I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth'.

V

Let me add a parenthesis at this point. I have several times spoken about the early heretics as representing Gnostic tendencies. This is rather customary in recent NT research, and the evidence which points in this direction seems so unambiguous that this terminology can hardly be avoided. It is easy to observe how heretical positions reconstructed from polemic in first-century documents can be directly confirmed in Gnostic documents from the second century onwards, and also in the reports on Gnostic doctrines by the anti-Gnostic Church Fathers. This of course makes one inclined to say that the Gnostic systems known from the second century should be thought to have already existed 100 years earlier. Some scholars have drawn that inference, and have regarded for example Paul's opponents in 1 Corinthians as fully fledged Gnostics.[35] But others have warned against this reading-back of second-century evidence, and rightly so.[36] Robert McLachlan Wilson has found a wide hearing for his suggestion that in the first century we should not speak of Gnosticism, but of Gnosis, meaning by the latter term ways of thinking which point the way to second-century Gnosticism, but which are not yet integrated into a Gnostic system.[37] But even if we accept Wilson's terminology, we are left with the question once asked by him: 'How Gnostic were the Corinthians?'[38] – or: How Gnostic were the Gnostics of the first century?

I submit a simple observation which may have some bearing on the issue. In the anti-Gnostic polemic from Justin onwards, the main point of attack is always the *blasphemia creatoris*, the claim that the God of the OT, the God of the Jews, who created the material universe, is a quite inferior deity, wicked or stupid or both. There can be no doubt that the horror exhibited by the Church Fathers when confronted with this doctrine was quite sincere, and that their violent protests came from the bottom of their hearts.

In writings prior to Justin I have found no similar direct attack on the *blasphemia creatoris*. I think that this silence is significant and allows for some conclusions. Had Paul met with opponents who claimed that the God of the OT was a wicked or stupid demiurge, I am sure he would have responded with an anathema sharper than the one in Galatians 1:8f. Nothing of the kind is found in Paul, nor in other writings from the apostolic or post-apostolic period. What we do find is polemic against something I should like to call *blasphemia creationis*. That there existed a way of thinking which could properly be characterized by this term is confirmed when we turn to the reports of the Church Fathers concerning the earliest forms of Gnostic heresy. In early Simonian Gnosis, it seems as if the God of the OT is still identified with the highest God, the Father. But he is not directly responsible for the creation of the material universe: it is made by lower angels (Iren., *Adv. Haer.*, I:23:2). The same point of view recurs in Menander, who is also reported to have said that baptism conferred the resurrection and that the baptized should not die – a saying often quoted *à propos* of 2 Timothy 2:18 (*Adv. Haer.*, I:23:5). Let me suggest that we may here have one of the criteria by which a more precise distinction between first-century Gnosis and second-century Gnosticism might be drawn.

With this I conclude the parenthesis and return to a brief review of some anti-heretical motifs in the Pastorals. The reader will know my thesis: we are facing polemics which are mainly an adaptation of traditional Jewish polemics against deniers or despisers of the Torah and its main dogmas.

VI

Let me first point out that the traditional schema of anti-sophist polemics which can be recognized in the Pastorals was used within Greek-speaking Judaism to attack those who opposed or denigrated the 'kingly highway' of the Torah. Many examples of this occur in Philo, as Karris has pointed out.[39]

Taking a closer look at some of the relevant passages in the Pastorals, we notice that the first of them (1 Tim. 1:3-11) is concerned precisely with the right interpretation of the law. The opponents do not read the law according to its true intention, which is ethical. They do not read it *nomimós*, lawfully, but rather seek to extract from it esoteric myths.

The next passage (4:1-8) is concerned with the ascetic precepts of the heretics. Their doctrine is said to derive from the deceitful spirits (*pneumas in planois*) and demons. This motif has no counterpart in the philosophical polemic against the sophists, but is at home in Jewish warnings against apostasy from the Torah, especially in the Qumran writings[40] and in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. I quote a passage from the *Testament of Asher* (6:2f.): 'You shall hate the deceiving spirits *[ta pneumata tēs planēs]* who fight against man, but keep the Law of the Lord!'

The argument against the ascetical precepts of the opponents in 1 Timothy is drawn from the concept of the goodness of all that God has created: 'They enjoin abstinence from foods which God *created* to be received with thanksgiving[41] by those who believe and know the truth. For every thing created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with thanksgiving' (4:3f.).

In 2 Timothy 3:8 the author recalls the two Egyptian magicians Jannes and Jambres as types of present heretics. They are known from the *Tarqum Ps. Jonathan*[42] and the *Damascus Document*. Here they are said to preach rebellion against the commandments given through Moses (CD V:17-21).

In our pilot passage, 2 Timothy 2:14-26, we notice in verse 19 a quotation from Numbers 16:5 (LXX). If we could be sure that the author had the OT context in mind, it is of interest to notice that the Numbers passage is the story of Korah's rebellion, which according to the rabbis was directed against the Torah.[43] It would also be of interest to notice that according to the heresy passage in *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 10, Korah and his fellows are among those who have no share in the resurrection. But we can hardly be sure that this OT context is intended, so I shall not argue my point from this text.

I shall rather make a brief comment on verse 22: 'Shun youthful passions *(neoterikas epithymias)*'. The commentaries I have consulted take this as a warning against passions in Timothy's heart (he was young!), and take the concept to be of a psychological nature: the passions due to young age. But as W. Metzger has pointed out in an article on this verse,[44] this sidetracks the argument in the context. Metzger argues, to my mind convincingly, that the *neoterikai epithymiai* signify the aspirations *of the heretics*, not Timothy's. But Metzger keeps the usual psychological understanding of the concept. However, in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, I came across the following passage: 'Listen, my children, to what I learned . . . concerning the seven deceiving spirits *(pneumata tēs planēs)*. Seven spirits are given (by Beliar) who oppose men, and they are the instigators of the *acts of rebellion (ta erga tou neoterismou)*' (*Test. Reub.* 2:1f.). In the context, these *erga tou neoterismou* are clearly related to men of young age, but only with respect to their tendency to transgress against the Torah (2:9 and esp. 3:8). The essence of *neoterismos* is the illegitimate striving to make changes and innovations to the established order, in this case the commandments of the Torah. Similar connotations may attach to the term *neoterikai epithymiai* in 2 Timothy 2:22 also.

VII

It is time to conclude. My thesis may briefly and somewhat pointedly be summarized as follows: according to the earliest definition, a Christian is a person who believes in Jesus as the Lord and Messiah promised by the God of the OT. If one does not confess Jesus as Christ and Lord, one is either a Jew or a Gentile, in either case a disbeliever, but not a heretic. A heretic is a person who confesses Christ as Lord, but denies the basic dogmas of OT revelation, first and foremost the belief in God's creation of the universe. The definition of heresy is essentially Jewish and to a great extent traditional. When the church had to define itself in the opposite direction – against Judaism – it could make little use of the traditional concept of heresy, and there was much debate on precisely how this line of demarcation should be drawn. On the other front, against heresy, we find no similar insecurity.

Let me add some final remarks. I get the impression that in rejecting the *blasphemia creationis* and, later, the *blasphemia creatoris*, the early church reacted very much on sheer instinct. The NT writers had the basic OT dogmas deeply engrained in their very nerve system, and one is quite impressed to see how their later followers carried on this deep feeling of a basic continuity with OT salvation history. In those who committed the *blasphemia creationis et creatoris* one senses, on the other hand, a very fundamental discontinuity with respect to the Jewish origins of Christianity. In this sense, I think the concepts of orthodoxy and heresy may, after all, make good historical sense in a first- and early second-century context. It all amounts to something very simple and fundamental, *viz.* whether you affirm or deny the sentence 'I believe in God who created heaven and earth'. Or, if we should like a more explicit creed, we could quote the creed proposed by the author of the Syrian *Didascalia*. It is, in fact, a perfect summary of what the author of the Pastorals had to say against his opponents, and it may thus be a suitable conclusion of this article:

> We have established . . . that you
> worship God Almighty
> and Jesus Christ
> and the Holy Spirit;
> that you employ the Holy Scriptures
> and believe in the resurrection of the dead,
> and that you make use of all His creatures with
> thanksgiving;
> and that men should marry.[45]

[1]Doctorate lecture, assigned theme, Oslo University, 7 May 1982. Only slightly revised.

[2]*Cf.* i.a. H. Schlier, art. *haireomai etc.*, *Th.DNT* I, pp. 180–185.

[3]*Bell.* II:118f. (Loeb edn. p. 368); *Vit.* 10, 12, 191, 197 (Loeb edn. pp. 4, 6, 72, 74); *Ant.* XIII:171, 293 (Loeb edn. pp. 310, 374); XVIII:11 (Loeb edn. p. 8).

[4]Acts 5:17; 15:5; 26:5; *cf.* also 24:5,14; 28:22. *Cf.* W.C. van Unnik, 'Die Apostelgeschichte und die Häresien', *ZNW* 58 (1967), pp. 240–246.

[5]The resulting negative connotations seem to be present from the very beginning of the use of the Hebrew term *minim*: *cf.* i.a. G.F. Moore, *Judaism* III (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 68f.; Jacob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ* (3rd edn.; Grand Rapids, 1979), pp. 174–190.

[6]1 Cor. 11:18f.; *cf.* Gal. 5:20; and M. Meinertz, '*Schisma* und *hairesis* im Neuen Testament', *Biblische Zeitschrift* 1 (1957), pp. 114–118.

[7]*Cf.* esp. Ignatius, *Eph.* 6:2 (Loeb edn. p. 180); *Trall.* 6:1 (Loeb edn. pp. 216/218); Justin, *Dial.* 51:2 (emend. text, Goodspeed, pp. 150f.); and Joachim Rohde, 'Häresie und Schisma im Ersten Clemensbrief und in den Ignatius-Briefen', *Nov. Test.* 10 (1968), pp. 217–233; Marcel Simon, 'From Greek Hairesis to Christian Heresy', in W.R. Schoedel/R.L. Wilken (eds.), *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition. In Honorem Robert M. Grant* (Théologie Historique 54, Paris 1979), pp. 101–116 (repr. in M. Simon, *Le Christianisme antique et son contexte religieux. Scripta Varia* Vol. II, Tübingen, 1981, pp. 821–836.

[8]M. Dibelius, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (3. Aufl. nebearb. von H. Conzelmann, *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* 13, Tübingen, 1955), pp. 14f., 52–54.

[9]'The Background and Significance of the Polemic of the Pastoral Epistles', *JBL* 92 (1973), pp. 549–564.

[10]*Cf.* i.a. W. Lütgert, *Die Irrlehrer der Pastoralbriefe* (Beiträge zur Förderung Christlicher Theologie, 13:3, Gütersloh, 1909), *passim*, esp. pp. 91–93; Dibelius/Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 14f.; J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Black's NT Commentaries, London, 1963), pp. 10–13; N. Brox, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (Regensburger Neues Testament 7:2, Regensburg, 1969), pp. 35f.; C. Spicq, *Saint Paul: Les épîtres pastorales* (Études Bibliques, Paris, 1969), I–II, pp. 85–119; Günter Haufe, 'Gnostische Irrlehre und ihre Abwehr in den Pastoralbriefen', in K. -W. Tröger (ed.), *Gnosis und Neues Testament* (Berlin, 1973), pp. 325–339; I.H. Marshall, 'Orthodoxy and heresy in earlier Christianity', *Themelios* 2 (1976), pp. 5–14, esp. p. 7.

[11]On Gnostic readings of Paul, and of Gnostics claiming Paul as their authority, *cf.* i.a. Elaine Pagels, ' "The mystery of the resurrection": A Gnostic reading of 1 Corinthians 15', *JBL* 93 (1974), pp. 276–288; *idem*, *The Gnostic Paul. Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (1975); and the wise cautions in A. Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum. Das Bild des Apostels und die Reception der paulinischen Theologie in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Marcion* (Beiträge zur hist. Theol. 58, Tübingen, 1979), pp. 297–343.

[12]*Cf. e.g.* the works by E. Pagels (see preceding note).

[13]*Cf.* esp. H. Koester/J.M. Robinson, *Entwicklungslinien durch die Welt des frühen Christentums* (Tübingen, 1971).

[14]A sample of contributions: Helmut Koester, 'Häretiker im Urchristentum als theologisches Problem', in E. Dinkler (ed.), *Zeit und Geschichte. Festschrift für R. Bultmann* (Tübingen, 1964), pp. 61–76; Hans Dieter Betz, 'Orthodoxy and Heresy in Primitive Christianity. Some critical remarks on Georg Strecker's republication of Walter Bauer's *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*', *Interpretation* 19 (1965), pp. 299–311; Hans-Dieter Altendorf, 'Zum Stichwort: Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum', *Zeitschr. f. Kirchengeschichte* 80 (1969), pp. 61–74; G. Clarke Chapman Jr., 'Some theological reflections on Walter Bauer's *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*: A Review Article', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 7 (1970), pp. 564–574; B. Drewery, 'History and Doctrine: Heresy and Schism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 23 (1972), pp. 251–266; A.I.C. Heron, 'The Interpretation of I Clement in Walter Bauer's "Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum" ', *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 55 (1973), pp. 517–545; H.J.W. Drijvers, 'Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten syrischen Christentum', *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 197 (1974), pp. 291–308; M. Elze, 'Häresie und Einheit der Kirche im 2. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 71 (1974), pp. 389–409; Robert A. Kraft, 'The Development of the Concept of "Orthodoxy" in Early Christianity', *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation (Festschrift M.C. Tenney)* (Grand Rapids, 1975), pp. 47–59; I.H. Marshall, 'Orthodoxy and heresy in earlier Christianity', *Themelios* 2 (1976), pp. 5–14; F.W. Norris, 'Ignatius, Polycarp, and I Clement: Walter Bauer Reconsidered', *Vigiliae Christianae* 30 (1976), pp. 23–44; J.F. McCue, 'Orthodoxy and Heresy: Walter Bauer and the Valentinians', *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (1979), pp. 118–130.

[15]*The Pattern of Christian Truth. A Study in the Relation between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London, 1954).

[16]Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 10), 2. Aufl. mit einem Nachtrag hrsg. von G. Strecker (Tübingen, 1964); American and English versions in 1971 and '72.

[17]James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco, 1977).

[18]*Cf.* i.a. D.J. Silver, art. 'Heresy', *Encyclopaedia Judaica* Vol. 8, cols. 358–362; and the literature on *minim* listed in n. 5 above.

[19]*Cf.* esp. Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages. Their Concepts and Beliefs I* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 26–36, with references to primary sources.

[20]Quoted according to Urbach, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[21]As E. Urbach points out in his comment on the passage, *loc. cit.*

[22]*Mand.* I:1; Loeb edn. p. 70.

[23]*1. Apol.* 16:6. *Cf.* the comments on this passage in A.J. Bellinzoni, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Writings of Justin Martyr* (*Suppl. to Nov. Test.* 17, Leiden, 1967), pp. 37–43.

[24]*Did.* 1:2; *cf.* similar in *Barn.* 19:2.

[25]*Didasc.* 23 (VI:10), quoted according to R. Hugh Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Oxford, 1929 (=1969)), p. 202.

[26]*Sanhedrin* 10:1, Danby, p. 397.

[27]*Dial.* 35:2, 5. The last clause refers to their denial of the resurrection, as the parallel in *Dial.* 80:4 makes plain.

[28]*Dial.* 47:4; 93:4; 108:3; 117:3; 137:2.

[29]My point here is in part anticipated in A. Davids, 'Irrtum und Häresie', *Kairos*, N.S. 15 (1973), pp. 165–187.

[30]This point seems to me to be often overlooked by scholars who regard Gnosticism as a possible 'development' of Pauline theology.

[31]Or perhaps a reference to reviling of angels because of their mediatorship at the giving of the Torah. *Cf.* J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (Black's NT Commentaries, London, 1969), pp. 263f.

[32]*Cf.* esp. Werner Elert, *Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie* (Berlin, 1957), pp. 71–75; R.M. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God* (Charlottesville, 1966), Appendix II: 'The Impassibility of God', pp. 111–114.

[33]The monograph of Elert (see n. 32) treats this conflict as the main theme of Old Church Christology.

[34]On the Maccabean martyrs as model martyrs in early Christianity, *cf.* esp. W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, 1981), pp. 19–22.

[35]*Cf.* the history of research recorded by E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism* (London, 1973).

[36]*Cf.* i.a. R.P. Casey, 'Gnosis, Gnosticism and the New Testament', *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology. Studies in Honor of C.H. Dodd* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 52–80; C.K. Barrett, 'Paul's Opponents in II Corinthians', *New Test. Stud.* 17 (1970/71), pp. 233–254; Sasagu Arai, 'Die Gegner des Paulus im 1. Korintherbrief und das Problem der Gnosis', *New Test. Stud.* 19 (1972/73), pp. 430–437.

[37]Robert McL. Wilson, *Gnosis and the New Testament* (1968) – I have used the German edition, *Gnosis und Neues Testament* (Stuttgart, 1971). *Cf.* esp. pp. 15ff.

[38]*New Test. Stud.* 19 (1972/73), pp. 65–74.

[39]Karris, article quoted in n. 9 above, pp. 551ff.

[40]I.a. *Manual of Discipline*, IQS, III:18-22 (Lohse p. 10); *Damascus Doc.*, CD, IV:12-18 (Lohse pp. 72/74); V:18ff. (Lohse p. 76); XII:2ff. (Lohse p. 90).

[41]The point of this is sharpened when one has in mind the typical Jewish form of 'thanksgiving', the *berakah* formula: 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord, *creator* of the produce of the vine . . .' (quoted here from the Passover Haggadah, introductory *giddush*, but any random *beraka* has the same structure).

[42]And from later Midrashim, *cf.* the collection of material in Strack-Billerbeck *ad loc.*, III, pp. 660–664; and in L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1968), II, pp. 334f.; V, p. 425.

[43]*Cf.* Ginzberg, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 286–292.

[44]Wolfgang Metzger, 'Die *neôterikai epithymíai* in 2. Tim. 2,22', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 33 (1977), pp. 129–136.

[45]*Didasc.* 24 (VI:12); Connolly p. 204 (see n. 25 above).

Understanding African Theology in the 20th century

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African Christian thought in the post-missionary era: liberation and integration

It has become well known that two distinct trends have emerged in African Christian thought in the post-independent and post-missionary era, from the late 1950s to the late 1980s. One has been the theological dimension to the struggle for the social and political transformation of the conditions of inequality and oppression in South Africa. This is what produced Black Theology, a theology of liberation in the African setting, in response to the particular circumstances of southern Africa. The other has been the theological exploration into the indigenous cultures of African peoples, with particular stress on their pre-Christian (and also pre-Islamic) religious traditions. This trend has been more closely associated with the rest of tropical Africa, where political independence seemed to have taken away a direct regular experience of the kind of socio-political pressures which produced Black Theology in South Africa. In this second trend, the broad aim has been to achieve some integration between the African pre-Christian religious experience and African Christian commitment in ways that would ensure the integrity of African Christian identity and selfhood.

This article will focus on the second of these 'trends', which is what is generally meant by the designation 'African Theology'. It needs to be pointed out, though, that the two are by no means to be regarded as mutually exclusive. Rather, they may be described as 'a series of concentric circles of which Black Theology is the inner and smaller circle'.[1] Nonetheless it will be more helpful to make 'Black Theology' the subject of a separate discussion.

An early shared concern: the African religious past as a prime theological issue

The predominant concern with the pre-Christian religious traditions of Africa in the early literature of African Theology has been characterized, sometimes, as an unhealthy, inward-looking preoccupation with an imagined African past. No less an interpreter of African Christianity than Adrian Hastings has made this criticism, and is to be taken seriously; he saw greater possibilities in the more politically-attuned *theologia crucis* of Black Theology.[2] At the same time, African non-Christian critics have vehemently rejected what they have regarded as African Theology's attempt to 'christianize', and hence to distort, African tradition. For them, the effort to seek an integration of the pre-Christian religious tradition and African Christian experience is misplaced and unwarranted, being the search for the reconciliation of essentially and intrinsically antithetical entities.[3]

However, it is significant that it is a practitioner of Black Theology who has made one of the most positive evaluations of African Theology, and of its achievements.[4] Desmond Tutu's observations at the Jos Conference on Christianity in Independent Africa are worth citing at some length:

> African theologians have set about demonstrating that the African religious experience and heritage were not illusory, and that they should have formed the vehicle for conveying the Gospel verities to Africa. . . . It was vital for the African's self-respect that this kind of rehabilitation of his religious heritage should take place. It is the theological counterpart of what has happened in, say, the study of African history. It has helped to

> give the lie to the supercilious but tacit assumption that religion and history in Africa date from the advent in that continent of the white man. It is reassuring to know that we have had a genuine knowledge of God and that we have had our own ways of communicating with deity, ways which meant that we were able to speak authentically as ourselves and as pale imitators of others. It means that we have a great store from which we can fashion new ways of speaking to and about God, and new styles of worship consistent with our new faith.[5]

Whereas Archbishop Tutu's observations are a strong affirmation that the effort made in African Theology to 'rehabilitate Africa's rich cultural heritage and religious consciousness' has been valid, it still remains important to appreciate why this effort has been made as a self-consciously *theological* endeavour, and in a specifically *Christian* interest.

Writing on the early developments in African Theology in his *African Christianity – An essay in interpretation*, Adrian Hastings drew attention to the fact that 'the chief non-Biblical reality with which the African theologian must struggle is the non-Christian religious tradition of his own people', and that African Theology early became 'something of a dialogue between the African scholar and the perennial religions and spiritualities of Africa'.[6] For Hastings this was frustrating, since it meant that 'areas of traditional Christian doctrine which are not reflected in the African past disappear or are marginalised'.[7] He was particularly concerned about the absence of serious discussion on Christology.[8]

It is not hard to see what had happened: the same religious traditions – the primal religions of Africa – which were generally deemed unworthy of serious theological consideration in missionary times, now occupied 'the very centre of the academic stage'[9] in African theological reflection. It is worth recalling at this point that in 1910, the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, operating under the prevailing European value-setting for the Christian faith, had concluded that Africa's primal religions 'contained no preparation for Christianity'.[10] Accordingly, it becomes crucial to understand this heightened theological interest in the primal religions of Africa if we are to interpret correctly the pioneer writers of African Theology, to give due recognition to their achievement and to discern accurately the trends and directions which they set.

African Theology and the shaping of a method – theology as the hermeneutic of identity

To the extent that African Theology's effort at 'rehabilitating Africa's cultural heritage and religious consciousness' has been pursued as self-consciously *Christian* and *theological*, it may be said to have been an endeavour at demonstrating the true character of African *Christian* identity. For looked at from the standpoint of the context of the writers themselves, the primal religions of Africa belong, strictly, to the African religious past. However, this is not so much a chronological past as an 'ontological' past. The point of the theological importance of such an ontological past consists in the fact that it belongs together with the profession of the Christian faith in giving account of the same entity, namely the history of the religious consciousness of the African Christian. It is in this sense that the theological concern with the African pre-Christian religious heritage becomes an effort aimed at clarifying the nature and meaning of African Christian identity. Involved in such an effort is the quest for what Kenneth Cragg describes as 'integrity in conversion, a unity of self in which one's past is genuinely integrated into present commitment, so that the crisis of repentance and faith that makes us Christian truly integrates what we have been in what we become'.[11] It is the same notion which E.W. Fasholé-Luke had in mind in his statement that 'the quest for African Christian theologies . . . amounts to attempting to make clear the fact that conversion to Christianity must be coupled with cultural continuity'.[12]

From the perspective of African Christian identity, therefore, the missionary presumption of the European value-setting for the Christian faith, which led to the exclusion of any 'preparation for Christianity' in African primal religions, could only produce the *problematik* of what John Mbiti meant when he wrote of the post-missionary church in Africa as a 'Church without theology and without theological consciousness'.[13] This could only result from not allowing, in the first place, for the existence of a pre-Christian memory in African Christian consciousness. For theological consciousness presupposes religious tradition, and tradition requires memory, and memory is integral to identity: without memory we have no past, and if we have no past, then we lose our identity. Andrew F. Walls, commenting on the literature of African Theology, rightly, in my view, identified what lay at the heart of the theological investigation of the religious past:

> No question is more clamant than the African Christian identity crisis. It is not simply an intellectual quest. The massive shift in the centre of gravity of the Christian world which has taken place cannot be separated from the cultural impact of the West in imperial days. Now the Empires are dead and the Western value-setting of the Christian faith largely rejected. Where does this leave the African Christian? Who is he? What is his past? A past is vital for all of us – without it, like the amnesiac man, we cannot know who we are. The prime African theological quest at present is this: what is the past of the African Christian? What is the relationship between Africa's old religions and her new one?[14]

Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that 'the central theme of this literature' became 'the nature of the traditional religion of Africa and its relationship of continuity rather than discontinuity with Christian belief'.[15] Whereas this theme of continuity would be pursued with varying degrees of vigour by different writers, nonetheless it could only become a common concern because there existed a number of equally common factors which in turn helped to shape African Theology itself. These factors included: the need to make some response to the sense of a theological *problematik* in African Christianity produced by the widespread and much-publicized perception that the Western value-setting for the Christian faith in the missionary era had entailed also a far-reaching under-estimation of the African knowledge and sense of God; the unavoidable element of Africa's continuing primal religions, not as the remnants of an outworn 'primitive mentality', but, in terms of their world-view, as living realities in the experience of vast numbers of African Christians in all the churches, and not only in the so-called Independent churches; and the intellectual struggle for, and 'feeling after', a theological method in a field of enquiry which had hitherto been charted largely by Western anthropological scholarship, and in terminology relating to Africa which would often be 'unacceptable' to Africans. Terms like 'fetish', 'animist', 'polytheistic', 'primitive', 'uncivilized' and 'lower' – these were the Western intellectual categories devised to describe and interpret African religious tradition; each of these, African Theology would reject. In this respect, it is significant how virtually all the pioneer writers of this formative period of African Theology, though trained in theology on Western models, in their actual academic and intellectual careers in Africa became engaged in areas of study and writing for which no Western theological syllabus had prepared them, being 'forced to study and lecture on African Traditional Religion, . . . and each one writing on it'.[16]

It is extraordinary, therefore, that the practitioners of African Theology in fact took on the challenge of re-interpreting African primal religions, approaching the subject 'not as historians of religion do, nor as anthropologists do, but as Christian theologians', [17] and arriving at some startling conclusions. Thus when African theologians came to describe African primal religions, using terms like 'monotheism' or 'diffused monotheism', as Bolaji Idowu did with regard to Yoruba religion;[18] or when John Mbiti, reversing the verdict of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, calls African pre-missionary religious experience a *praeparatio evangelica*,[19] these writers are simply to be understood as drawing on their sense of belonging within Christian tradition and using categories which to them describe their understanding of *their* pre-Christian heritage when related to *their* Christian commitment. The failure in some of the criticisms expressed of African Theology may be related to the misconception about what the tasks of these African Christian writers ought to be. When John Mbiti's *Concepts of God in Africa* is objected to for its 'primary theological purpose', in that it 'is attempting to lay the basis for a distinctively African theology by blending the African past with the Judeo-Christian tradition';[20] or when his book on *The Prayers of African Religion* is

judged to be 'unsatisfactory' because 'it tends to blur the distinctiveness of African spirituality by seeking a *praeparatio evangelica* rather than the integrity of the cult-group',[21] such criticisms also have the effect of obscuring the contributions which these African theologians could be making towards the understanding of what is, after all, their own religious heritage, which is, indeed, a proper task of theology. In both of these instances, the critics, in my view, have rightly interpreted the intention of the African theologian; it just happens that they do not approve of what they find. And yet, if it is the case that an underlying motivation of the quest for an African Christian Theology in the first place was an endeavour 'to draw together the various and disparate sources which make up the total religious experience of Christians in Africa into a coherent and meaningful pattern',[22] then African Theology is more accurately judged by its own 'primary theological purpose' than by any extraneous criteria.

Once it is granted that African Theology's investigations into African primal religions are qualitatively different from the observations of anthropologists, then it becomes possible also to appreciate how, by its fundamental motivation, African Theology, in fact, may have been charting a new course in theological method. It is not that this course has no parallel in the totality of Christian scholarship, for the categories were being derived from Christian tradition, as much as from African experience and realm of ideas. Rather, this new theological approach had no counterpart generally in the more recent Western theological thought forged within the context of the notion of Christendom. At the heart of the new theological method would be the issue of identity, which would itself be perceived as a theological category, and which therefore entailed confronting constantly the question as to how and how far the 'old' and the 'new' in African religious consciousness could become integrated into a unified vision of what it meant to be African *and* Christian. The issue of identity in turn forced the theologian to become the *locus* of this struggle for integration through a dialogue which, if it was to be authentic, was bound to become personal and so infinitely more intense. A far cry from 'the clinical observations of the sort one might make about Babylonian religion', the African Christian theologian is quite often 'handling dynamite, his own past, his people's present'.[23] Hence the development of theological concern and the formulation of theological questions became linked as the unavoidable by-product of this process of Christian self-definition. Here, in fact, is the clue to Adrian Hastings' apt observation about African Theology becoming early 'something of a dialogue between the African Christian scholar and the perennial religions and spiritualities of Africa', but also the answer to his complaint that 'areas of traditional Christian doctrine which are not reflected in the African past disappear or are marginalised'.

A range of responses: indigenisers, biblicists and translators

Against this background of a common concern there emerged, nevertheless, divergences and differences, some of which were considerable.

While the theme of continuity was manifestly central, the terms in which the argument for it was pursued differed among its protagonists. The pace-setter in the argument for a radical continuity was, quite clearly, Bolaji Idowu. Curiously, the argument, founded on the continuity and the unity of God,[24] was coupled with an equally strong case made for a 'radical indigenisation of the Church',[25] on the grounds that the church in Africa, as a result of its peculiar historical connection with Western cultural dominance, was failing to develop its own theology, churchmanship, liturgy, or even discipline. In order to remedy this 'predicament' of dependence,[26] the African church needed to build its bridges to the 'revelation' given to Africans in their pre-Christian and pre-missionary religious traditions of the past.[27] Ostensibly intended to connect the 'old' and the 'new' in African religious experience, the fundamental postulate of the 'foreignness of Christianity' which underlies this position tended to lead it towards a minimalist reading of the newness of Christianity in Africa at the specific level of religious apprehension. Accordingly, African Christian experience emerged as not much more than a refinement of the experience of the 'old' religion,[28] and the vindication and the affirmation of African selfhood, which, at the start, had been conceived as the task of the church, later came to be entrusted to the revitalization of the 'old' religions, with their 'God-given heritage of indigenous spiritual and cultural treasures'.[29] The kind of perspective which Idowu exemplified found an echo in later writers, such as Gabriel Setiloane,[30] Samuel Kibicho[31] and Christian Gaba[32] among others.

A less radical form of the same concern with continuity was exemplified in the work done by another 'pace-setter' and vindicator of the claims of a specific African religious consciousness, especially among the francophone, and predominantly Roman Catholic theologians, the Zairian scholar Mulago, and in the 'school' of thought which grew from his researches at the Centre d'Études des Religions Africaines in Kinshasa.[33] While he retained a firm conviction regarding the relevance of the Christian message for Africa, Mulago insisted nonetheless that the process of forging the new integration 'cannot be solid and viable except as it remains faithful to ancestral traditions and as it manages to be judicious in its contact with the civilisations of other peoples and with the revealed religion'.[34]

In its more radical forms, this perspective, with its fundamental postulate of the *foreignness* of the Christianity that had been transmitted in Africa, as well as its minimalist view of the *newness* of the Christian faith in relation to African religious tradition, was always in danger of leading specifically *Christian* reflection into an impasse. In other words, if the Christian gospel brought little that was essentially new to Africa in religious terms, then in what lay the value and the rationale of the quest for a specifically *Christian* theological thought in Africa? The writings of Bolaji Idowu represent, in my view, an acute form of this dilemma.

At the other extreme of the spectrum was the radical discontinuity stoutly championed by Byang Kato, representing the thought of those Christian churches and groups linked with the 'Association of Evangelicals of Africa' (formerly also 'of Madagascar'), and who trace their spiritual heritage, in the main, to the missionary work of Western Faith Missions in Africa. Basing himself on a radical biblicism, Kato stressed the distinctiveness of the experience of the Christian gospel to such an extent that he rejected the positive evaluation of any pre-Christian religious tradition as a distraction from the necessary 'emphasis on Bible truth'.[35] Kato's insistence on the centrality of the Bible for the theological enterprise in Africa must be reckoned a most important contribution to African Christian thought. On the other hand, his outright rejection of the understanding of theology as a synthesis of 'old' and 'new' in a quest for a unified framework for dealing with culturally-rooted questions meant that Kato's particular perspective could not provide a sufficient foundation for a tradition of creative theological engagement of the sort that the African context seemed to be requiring. Before long, other evangelicals, without denying their commitment to the centrality of the Bible for the theological enterprise, were already seeking more positive ways whereby the Christian gospel might encounter African tradition.[36]

However, the largest portion of the literature of African Theology has been in the middle ground between the two radical positions. In other words, as well as a widespread consensus that there does exist an African pre-Christian religious heritage to be taken seriously, there has been also the realization that it is important to recognize the integrity of African *Christian* experience as a religious reality in its own right. The view here is that Christianity, as a religious faith, is not intrinsically foreign to Africa. On the contrary, it has deep roots in the long histories of the peoples of the continent, whilst it has proved to be capable of apprehension by Africans in *African* terms, as is demonstrated by the vast, massive and diverse presence of the faith in African life. In other words, the eternal gospel has already found a local home within the African response to it, demonstrating that Christ had effectively become the integrating reality and power linking the 'old' and the 'new' in the African experience. This perspective, therefore, seemed to offer the most hopeful signs for the development of a sustainable tradition of an African Christian thought into the future, having firmly taken on board the critical notion that the Christian faith is capable of 'translation' into African terms without injury to its essential content. Consequently, the task of African Theology came to consist, not in 'indigenizing' Christianity, or theology as such, but rather, in letting the

Christian gospel encounter, as well as be shaped by, the African experience; and this task could proceed without anxiety about its possibility, but also without apology to Western traditions of Christianity, since the Western traditions did not enshrine universal norms. The overall goal of African Theology then, was to seek to show that there were genuinely and specifically *African* contributions – derived from the twin heritage of African Christianity, namely, the African primal tradition and the African experience of the Christian gospel – to be made to the theology of the universal church. Some of the best-known exemplars of this perspective became Harry Sawyerr,[37] John Mbiti[38] and Kwesi Dickson[39] among others.

The 1990s and beyond – into new directions

It will probably be helpful to consider the 1980s as a period of transition, as a number of the earlier writers appeared to bring their major work to a close (some, such as Idowu, seemed to have begun to do so even in the 1970s), and a new generation was emerging to continue from where the previous one had left off. While the broad concerns of the relationship of the primal religions to Christianity still retained some interest, all the indications were that a watershed had been passed, and that the fortunes of African Christianity had ceased to be beholden to Western assessments and interpretations of Africa. Not what Western missionaries did or said (or failed to do or say), but what African Christians would do with *their* Christian faith and commitment was now seen to provide the determining factors in the development of Christian thought in Africa.[40]

Furthermore, an indication that the early concentration on the theological meaning of the pre-Christian primal heritage had been appropriate was the fact that a later generation of African theologians, while exploring other themes, were able to do so by taking off from genuinely African categories. This was most markedly so in relation to christological discussion, which had been rather conspicuously minimal or absent in earlier writings. It was interesting, however, that much of the 'new' concern with christological explorations began around categories such as Christ as *Healer*, as *Master of Initiation* and as *Ancestor* – all of which were derived directly from the apprehension of reality and of the transcendent as experienced within the world-views of African primal religions.[41] Apart from Christology, the 'new' African Theology was also engaging seriously with subjects such as African Christian theological discourse and methodology,[42] soteriology and conversion,[43] as well as the broad sweep of the history of Christian expansion and diffusion[44] and historical theology, in which issues in contemporary African Christianity were being related to the Christian tradition as a whole.[45] It seemed as though the growing realization that Africa, in the late 20th century, had become one of the heartlands of the Christian faith itself,[46] had substantially registered in African scholarship. In 1983, in an innovative investigation of West African Christian history, Lamin Sanneh felt able to conclude:

> No one can miss the vitality of the [Christian] religion in much of the continent . . . African Christianity may well have entered upon a universal vocation in the onward march of the people of God in history, a destiny comparable to that of Gentile Christianity in the early Christian centuries.[47]

It is no mean achievement, then, that African Theology, by the sort of agenda that it set for itself from the start, as well as by the method it evolved, managed to overturn virtually every negative verdict passed on African tradition by the ethnocentrism of the Western missionary enterprise; and it is a mark of that achievement that African Theology has succeeded by and large in providing an *African* re-interpretation of African pre-Christian religious tradition in ways which have ensured that the pursuit of a creative, constructive and perhaps also a self-critical, theological enterprise in Africa is not only viable, but in fact distinctly possible, as a variant of the universal and continuing encounter of the Christian faith with the realities of human societies and their histories.

African Theology – a feeling after new languages?

The era of African theological literature as reaction to Western misrepresentation is past. What lies ahead is a critical theological construction which will relate more fully the widespread African confidence in the Christian faith to the actual and ongoing Christian responses to the life-experiences of Africans. Here, academic theological discourse will need to connect with the less academic but fundamental reality of the 'implicit' and predominantly *oral* theologies found at the grassroots of many, if not all, African Christian communities,[48] where, in the words of John Mbiti, 'much of the theological activity in Christian Africa today is being done as oral theology, from the living experiences of Christians . . . theology in the open from the pulpit, in the market-place, in the home as people pray or read and discuss the Scriptures. . . .'[49] This process may well validate Adrian Hastings' early observation that 'It is in vernacular prayer, both public and private, both formal and informal, and in the spirituality which grows up from such experience that the true roots of an authentic African Christianity will most surely be found.'[50]

In this regard, it may even be suggested that it is in modern Africa where Christianity's essential character as an 'infinitely culturally translatable' faith[51] has been most notably demonstrated in more recent Christian history. For unlike, say, in Islam, where the word of Allah is fully heard only through the medium of Arabic, in Christianity the perception of the word of God is achieved in our own mother-tongues (Acts 2:11). This recognition and its impact on missionary action had the effect of loosening the grip of any 'Western possessiveness' of the faith that there may have been in the process of its transmission.[52] Whenever Western missionaries or a missionary society made the Scriptures available to an African people in that people's own language, they weakened, by the same token, whatever Western bias might have characterized their presentation and prescription of the gospel. African Christians, with access to the Bible in their mother-tongues, could truly claim that they were hearing God speak to them in their own language. It amounts to the awareness that God *speaks our language too.*

In Africa, the continent of language and languages, the significance of this has been far-reaching. For, as Lamin Sanneh has graphically put it, the import of Scripture translation and its priority in missionary work is an indication that 'God was not disdainful of Africans as to be incommunicable in their languages'.[53] This, Sanneh goes on, not only 'imbued African cultures with eternal significance and endowed African languages with a transcendent range'; it also 'presumed that the God of the Bible had preceded the missionary into the receptor-culture'. As, through the very process of Scipture translation, 'the central categories of Christian theology – God, Jesus Christ, creation, history – were transposed into their local equivalents, suggesting that Christianity had been adequately anticipated', they created, in indigenous languages, resonances far beyond what the missionary transmission conceived.

Through these local equivalents, Jesus Christ the Lord had shouldered his way into the African religious world, and could be discovered there through faith by all those who 'approach the spiritual world with requests for guidance and help in difficulties', even where these requests are 'formulated in traditional terms'.[54] This process is entirely consistent with what is reported to have taken place in New Testament times, as in Acts 14:15-18. For the centrality of Scripture translation points to the significance of African pre-Christian religious cultures as a valid carriage not only for the divine revelation, but also for providing the medium of Christian apprehension. Indeed, the possession of the Christian Scriptures in African languages, which could probably be regarded as the single most important element of the Western missionary legacy in Africa[55] – in some cases, the Scriptures becoming the foundation for a new literary culture which did not exist previously[56] – ensured that there did take place an effectual rooting of the Christian faith in African consciousness. This, in turn, ensured also that a deep and authentic dialogue would ensue between the gospel and African tradition, authentic in so far as it would take place, not in the terms of a foreign language or of an alien culture, but in the categories of local languages, idioms and world-views.

At this point, one may well express a concern as to why African Christian theologians have not followed the logic of the translatability of their faith into a full-blown recourse to African indigenous languages.[57] John Pobee showed awareness of the

problem in his *Toward an African Theology*. Though written in English, Pobee's book nevertheless made ample use of Akan wisdom-concepts and proverbial sayings, and he felt it necessary to remark: 'Ideally, African theologies should be in the vernacular. Language is more than syntax and morphology; it is the vehicle for assuming the weight of a culture. Therefore, this attempt to construct an African theology in the English language is the second best, even if it is convenient if it should secure as wide a circulation as possible.'[58] And perhaps it is to the same problem that the Cameroonian theologian Engelbert Mveng has attempted to respond, though somewhat polemically: 'When the objection is made that this theology is not written in native languages, we reply that it is *lived* in native languages, in the villages and in the neighbourhoods, before being translated into foreign languages by its own rightful heirs, the African theologians.'[59] Mveng's observation is useful as a pointer to the impact that a 'translatable faith', apprehended by and large through the medium of mother-tongues, has had in Africa. It arises from the realization that the emergence of a significant African theological tradition in the 20th century, even if it is articulated predominantly in 'foreign languages', is itself an indication that the African Christian life there is a substratum of vital Christian consciousness, and a sufficiently deep apprehension of Jesus Christ at the specific level of religious experience, itself of a theological nature, which alone can be the real basis for a viable activity of academic and literary theology. In that sense, the translated Bible has provided in Africa an essential ingredient for the 'birth of theology'.[60]

The fact still remains that the seriousness with which African Theology will treat African mother-tongues as a fundamental medium in its theological discourse may well become an important test of the depth of the impact, not only of the Bible, but also of the Christian faith itself, in African life, and so determine the directions in which African Theology too will grow.

African Theology – a relevance beyond Africa?

Since African Theology developed also as an African response to Western views and interpretations of African pre-Christian traditions, it may be worth exploring whether the African Christian thought that has emerged may, in turn, have some relevance for the same process beyond Africa. The issue may hold some special interest for the present task of theology also in the West.

It is worth mentioning that when the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 concluded that the primal religions of Africa contained no 'preparation for the Gospel', the realization that the primal religions of the world have, in fact, provided the religious background of the faith of the majority of Christians in the 20 centuries of Christian history, including the Christians of Europe, still lay in the future.[61] In this connection one may recall Paul Bohannan's observation that 'African culture shares more of its traits, its history, its social organisation with Europe than Asia shares with Europe, and certainly more than the North American Indians share with Europe'.[62] In relation to our present discussion, what is important is the fact that Europe shares with Africa a pre-Christian primal religious heritage. But it is in Africa (as in some other parts of the non-Western world) that the significance of the primal religions in the history of Christianity has been seen for what it is. In the case of Europe, Christian mission on the basis of substitution appears to have been pursued to such an extent that the primal traditions were virtually completely wiped out.

What this – together with the fact that there was no sustained interest in the use of indigenous European languages and their pre-Christian world-views for Christian purposes – has done to the total Western religious memory may probably never be fully recovered. In the light of the European story, one might be forgiven for thinking that the old primal religions of Europe quickly became a spent force. Yet the fact that Christians continued to name the days of the week after pre-Christian deities, that pre-Christian elements and notions made their way into the celebration of Christian festivals, and in several other ways too, must be indicators that the old beliefs had not entirely lost their hold upon people's minds. It may well be that in Africa, the opportunity which was lost in Europe for a serious and creative theological encounter between the Christian and primal traditions can be regained.

Curiously, the fact that African Theology at its formative stage in the immediate post-missionary era focused on the theological interpretation of the African pre-Christian religious heritage may be the sign that such an encounter is possible; and it could be argued that in the process, African Theology has gained rather than lost. For, having been forced to do theology in the interface of their Christian faith and the perennial spiritualities of the African primal traditions of their own backgrounds, as well as having to internalize that dialogue within themselves, African theologians have recaptured the character of theology as Christian intellectual activity on the frontier with the non-Christian world, and hence as essentially *communicative, evangelistic* and *missionary*. It is this character of African theology which Dutch theologian and missiologist, Johannes Verkuyl, recognized when he wrote:

> African theology does all the things which theology in general does, but in African theology (as in Asian) all these other functions are embraced in the missionary or communicative function. It is not primarily an intra-ecclesiastical exercise, but a discipline whose practitioners keep one question central: How can we best do our theology so that the Gospel will touch Africans most deeply?[63]

But, perhaps even more significant in this African effort has been the underlying argument that space had to be made for a positive pre-Christian religious memory in the African Christian consciousness, on the basis that 'religion informs the African's life in its totality',[64] and that memory is integral to identity; and without memory, none of us knows who we are. As Dickson further explains, the theologian who fails to 'recognise the structures of religion as revealed by the historian of religions . . . may not notice the absence of religion from his theology. In the context of Africa, Christian theology must of necessity take account of that understanding of religion which bears the stamp of an authentic African contribution [that means, the primal religions].'[65] To the extent that the African endeavour has achieved a measure of success, it may hold promise for a modern Western theology which is now also asking seriously how the Christian faith may be related, in a *missionary* sense, to Western culture.[66]

It is this relocation of African primal religions 'at the very centre of the academic stage' which may prove a benediction to Western Christian theology as it also seeks to be communicative, evangelistic and missionary in its own context. For the African vindication of the theological significance of African primal religions, if it has validity, also goes to affirm that the European primal heritage was not illusory, to be consigned to oblivion as primitive darkness. The nature of the meeting of Christianity with European primal religions may hold more significance for understanding the modern West than it may have been assumed. A serious Christian theological interest in the European primal traditions and in the early forms of Christianity which emerged from the encounter with those traditions could provide a fresh approach to understanding Christian identity in the West too, as well as opening new possibilities for Christian theological endeavour today. And the primal world-view may turn out to be not so alien to the West after all, even in a post-Enlightenment era.

For the signs of what appears to be a *post-modernist* rejection of the Enlightenment in the West, which can be seen partly in the resurgence of the phenomenon of the occult as well as in the various 'quests' for spiritual experience and wholeness – even if without explicit reference to God – all bear the marks of elements of a primal world-view. These are sufficient indicators that a primal world-view, suppressed rather than encountered, redeemed and integrated, rises to haunt the future. In this connection, the viability of a Christian consciousness which retains its sense of the spiritual world of primal religions, as well as the theological encounter between the primal world-view and Christian faith that is evident in African Christianity, constitutes an implicit challenge to the notion that humanity can be fully defined in exclusively post-Enlightenment terms.

It seems, then, that the world's primal religions – in Europe as in Africa and elsewhere – the religious traditions which have

been most closely associated with the continuing Christian presence historically in the world so far, may yet again point the way into the Christian future, and specifically, the future of the Christian theological enterprise.[67] If this expectation proves right, the African contribution will have been an important one.

[1]Desmond Tutu, 'Black Theology and African Theology – Soulmates or Antagonists?', in John Parratt (ed.), *A Reader in African Christian Theology* (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 54.

[2]Adrian Hastings, *African Catholicism – An Essay in Discovery* (London: SCM Press, 1989), pp. 30–35.

[3]Okot p'Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1970); see also Ali Mazrui's 'Epilogue'. See also Ali Mazrui, *The African Condition – A Political Diagnosis* (London: Heinemann, 1980).

[4]Desmond Tutu, 'Whither African Theology?', in E. Fasholé-Luke et al. (eds.), *Christianity in Independent Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1978), pp. 364–369.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 366.

[6]Adrian Hastings, *African Christianity – An Essay in Interpretation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1976), p. 50f.

[7]*Ibid.*, p. 52.

[8]As an indication that Hastings was not alone in this concern, I recall that about 20 years ago, at an international theological conference, a Western missionary theological educator working in Africa admitted to me his bewilderment at having to teach 'African Theology' when virtually all the African theological literature he came upon seemed to be discussing and interpreting 'African Traditional Religions'. 'Where is the theology in that?' he inquired.

[9]Adrian Hastings, *African Christianity*, p. 183.

[10]See *The Missionary Message in relation to non-Christian religions – The World Missionary Conference 1910 – report of Commission IV* (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910), p. 24.

[11]Kenneth Cragg, 'Conversion and Convertibility with special reference to Muslims', in John R.W. Stott & Robert Coote (eds.), *Down to Earth – Studies in Christianity and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 194.

[12]E. Fasholé-Luke, 'The Quest for an African Christian Theology', in *The Ecumenical Review* Vol. 27 No. 3 (1975), p. 267.

[13]John S. Mbiti, 'Some African Concepts of Christology', in Georg F. Vicedom (ed.), *Christ and the Younger Churches* (London: SPCK, 1972), p. 51.

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The death of Jesus for human sins: the historical basis for a theological concept

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Introduction

The early church was involved from its very beginning in the question of how to interpret the death of Jesus. This was not an easy matter since the crucifixion of Jesus formed a stumbling block to Gentiles as well as to Jews. This is clearly indicated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:23 and its immediate context. To the Gentiles, the cross of Jesus was regarded as shameful (*cf.* Heb. 12:2). Proclaiming a crucified Saviour was not in keeping with the heroic ideals of Greco-Roman antiquity. They considered it foolishness. Justin Martyr describes well how the message of a crucified Saviour appeared to the ancient world: 'They say that our madness consists in the fact that we put a crucified man in second place after the unchangeable and eternal God, the Creator of the world' (*1. Apology* 13:4). This message was no more acceptable to the Jews. They considered the death of Jesus a sign of God's punishment upon a deceiver. Scriptural proof was provided by Deuteronomy 21:23: 'a hanged man is accursed by God' (*cf.* Gal. 3:13).[1]

In this situation, the early church made known how they saw Jesus' death. The NT itself witnesses that they had a number of options, or models, to bring out the meaning and significance of this event: the Passover Lamb; the dying and rising servant of Isaiah 53; the suffering righteous one (Pss. 22; 69); the Temple cult; prophets suffering by the hand of the people even to the point of death (the deuteronomistic pattern of the prophetic ministry); Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac (the so-called 'Akedah', the binding of Isaac); releasing of slaves (ransom); the Greco-Roman ideal of friendship *(philia)*. Jesus' willingness to die for the good of others represents an example of a man laying down his life for his friends (*cf.* Jn. 15:13; Phil. 2:4-8).[2]

The presence of all these models fully demonstrates that the meaning and significance of Jesus' death was not easily formulated. Although these models all have their place within the early Christian project of unfolding the meaning and significance of Jesus' death, they were not all of equal importance. Speaking from a general NT perspective, some of these models were, if taken alone, unable to give an adequate description of the theological aspects involved in Jesus' death. The models which stand out in the NT are those which interpret Jesus' death as in some way righting the wrongs of human sins. It here suffices to evoke texts like Matthew 26:68; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 3:18; Revelation 7:14. All these texts are pieces of old liturgical material, and should therefore be given weight.

How did the early church come to think of Jesus' death in terms of the expiation of sins? This is the question addressed by this article. Three observations will be suggested as forming the basis and point of departure for this theological enterprise. Two of them are taken from the ministry of Jesus, while the last concerns his meeting with his disciples after the resurrection

Jesus must have expected an unhappy end for himself. He could not escape the conclusion that the way ordained for him was death. He found himself involved in conflicts with all the influential Jewish groups: conflicts over crucial issues such as Sabbath observance, purity rules and the Temple. Certainly after what happened to John the Baptist, his own fate must have become quite clear to him. Jesus' death did not come as a surprise to him, but was a result of his mission and his messianic activity. Wrestling with this threatening possibility was painful indeed, and he hoped till the very end that another way would be found. As Jesus prepared himself for this painful end of his life, the disciples were hardly left uninformed about the issue, although they only came to understand it fully later.

Jesus exercising forgiveness of sins outside the cult

The soteriology of Jesus is very much dependent upon how he saw himself, and the role of Jesus himself is a key issue in any

presentation of his thoughts about salvation. In all the Gospels, the basis for his ministry is the key role Jesus assigns to himself in questions of salvation: '. . . everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God' (Lk. 12:8-9 = Mt. 10:32-33; *cf.* Mk. 8:38). Jesus further announces a blessing upon anyone who takes no offence at him (Mt. 11:6; Lk. 7:23), and he prepares his followers for sufferings to come for the sake of him and his name (Mt. 5:11). In choosing 12 disciples, he assigns to himself a key role in the restoration of God's people. These texts make the question of salvation entirely dependent upon people's relationship to Jesus himself. It is not necessary to discuss the authenticity of each individual saying referred to above. They witness to the historical role of Jesus which makes his ministry as well as his death intelligible. If Jesus thought of himself in highly exalted and important terms, he is also likely to have redefined salvation with reference to his own person.[3] This forms an adequate starting point for considering the historical basis for the NT's attempts to define the meaning of Jesus' death and, in particular, sheds light on the forgiveness offered by Jesus in his ministry; in other words, the basis for the atonement theology found in the NT.

The Gospels have preserved a variety of indications that forgiveness of sins was an essential part of Jesus' ministry. His name is explained in terms of forgiveness (Mt. 1:21), he is depicted as associating with sinners (Mk. 2:13-17 par.; Lk. 15), and also as exercising forgiveness of sins (Mk. 2:1-12; Lk. 7:36-50; 19:1-10). In other words, this element of his ministry is found in material of different genres, thus suggesting its authenticity. Of special interest are Mark 2:5-7, 10 and Luke 7:48, which speak of Jesus as, not proclaiming, but exercising forgiveness of sins. Sin is an offence against God, therefore he alone can give acquittal. In a biblical context, the exercising of forgiveness is due either to a direct message from God ministered by an angel or a prophet (2 Sa. 12:13; Zech. 3:3; Is. 6:13 (the last-mentioned text is related to the cult)), or it is transmitted by sacrifices performed within the cult. At the time of Jesus, emphasis should be given to the cult and the role of the priest. In Jesus' words in Mark 2:5 and Luke 7:48, 'your sins are forgiven', the perfect tense expresses completed action, while the passive voice is indicative of God's action. Jesus speaks as though he knows God's disposition at this point of time, and as though he has been given the right to make this come true now. What Jesus actually says is something that the priest could say in the Temple to those who brought a sin offering, or what could be accomplished in a ritual washing (*cf.* Mk. 1:4-5). The priest had the right to forgive sins, but within the sacrificial ritual prescribed by God himself. Jesus exercises this right outside the prescribed rituals. His forgiving words are based neither on cult nor on ritual washing, but on his own presence and powerful words. By his words Jesus was, by implication, identifying his role with that of the sacrificial system of atonement for sins. He embodied in himself the function of the cult for the expiation of sins.[4] His Christology and his soteriology are closely connected.

The so-called cleansing of the Temple (Mk. 11:15-19)

The significance of the Temple in Jesus' time – in religious, national and political terms – can hardly be overestimated. This is seen in the fact that the Temple moved the Jews to take up war even against the Roman Empire. The presence of God was intimately connected with the Temple as the place where sins were put right. Josephus says that it was impossible for any Jew to forgo the offerings, and that they would rather give up their lives than this worship (*Ant.* 15:248).[5]

In all probability we have in the Temple act a scene in the life of Jesus. The incident is told both by the synoptic gospels and by John, as well as in Oxyrhynchus Papyrus fragment 840. Furthermore, the Temple act should not be considered a large and far-reaching incident. Jesus was hardly involved with all the merchants in the place. It was most likely a prophetic symbolic action, allowing a small-scale act to be given a large-scale meaning. Finally, it is very unlikely that primitive Christianity would invent a text about Jesus taking any sort of violent action in the Temple. Desecrating a temple was regarded as very serious in antiquity.

The traditional interpretation of the Temple act is that Jesus intended to purify the Temple. The act is then understood in terms of restoration. Jesus wanted to purify the place of defiling trade – hence the common name of this event as 'the cleansing of the Temple'. This is supported by a number of reasons, of which the most important are the following:

1. 'Den of robbers' suggests that the trade and not the cult as such was the target of Jesus' criticism.

2. Scriptural expectations that the Messiah would restore the Temple: *e.g.* Zechariah 6:12; 2 Samuel 7:13; *PsSol* 17:30-32. This restoration involved a prior destruction before rebuilding, as can be seen in most of the texts telling about reforms of the cult (1 Ki. 18/2 Chr. 29; 2 Ki. 23; *1 Macc.* 4:36-61; *2 Macc.* 10; *Ant.* 12:316-322; *cf.* Ne. 13:6-9). A 'two-step programme' emerges: the Temple is criticized even to the point of destruction, and is then reformed or rebuilt. The destruction is then part of the restoration programme. Zion is being made ready for its eschatological function, to display the glory of God not only to the Jewish nation but to the Gentiles also: 'And he [the royal Messiah] shall purify Jerusalem, making it holy as of old; so that nations shall come from the ends of the earth to see his glory' (*PsSol* 17:30). This hope is clearly expressed in Jesus' Temple act (Mk. 11:17) by quoting Isaiah 56:7.

3. Traditions such as those found in Matthew 5:23-24; Acts 2:46 and 21:26-30 argue that the disciples continued to attend the Temple services even after the Temple act, which then suggests that Jesus' intention was not judgment but cleansing.[6]

Before I make my own position clear, I will advance some comments:

1. General OT and Jewish expectations about the Messiah are not necessarily proper guides for interpreting Jesus' deeds. He frequently, sometimes decisively, broke with expectations laid down in the tradition. If Jesus intended a restoration of the Temple, that has to be suggested not only by expectations in the OT and Judaism, but by analysis of the text itself as well as by being indicated by his ministry in general. This can be exemplified by the mentioning of the Gentiles in the Temple act. No doubt this is an element of expectations commonly found in Judaism. But in the light of Jesus' ministry these expectations have been reshaped and redefined. The Gentiles will come in large numbers not to Jerusalem and the Temple, but to the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus himself (Mt. 8:11 par.). This way of re-reading the scriptural expectations should make us cautious about thinking that Jesus just copied given expectations.

2. Most of the texts usually referred to as suggesting a cleansing interpretation speak of purifying the Temple from pagan rites and practices taking place within the precincts of the Temple. *2 Maccabees* 10:1 may serve as an example: 'Now Maccabaeus and his followers, under the leadership of the Lord, recaptured the Temple and the city, and pulled down the altar erected by the aliens in the market-place, as well as the sacred enclosures.' The cult is purified from *pagan* practices. Whether this is a relevant background for Jesus expelling the money-changers and dove-sellers is to be questioned. Furthermore, the texts usually mention both steps, criticism/destroying and some kind of rebuilding. In Jesus' Temple act, the second step is not easily found, if at all.

3. As for the relationship to Jewish practices and the Temple, this was a much-disputed issue in the early church. Primitive Christianity was not a harmonious movement in every aspect, in particular concerning these issues. An ambivalent attitude towards Jewish practices clearly emerges in the NT. In fact, the Jesus tradition leaves traces of both continuity and discontinuity. The reluctant attitude, generally speaking, that is found concerning the Temple cult is in itself surprising within a Jewish context, and demands some explanation. Concerning the Temple, the Christians seem mainly to have taken the attitude that it was a house of prayer and preaching (*e.g.* Acts 3:1; 4:1; 5:20), not a place providing the necessary offerings for sin.

These observations now lead me to present an alternative interpretation. The context in which Mark has embedded Jesus' Temple act represents the first written interpretation of it. The story of the Temple act is framed by the story of the fig tree.

Thus Mark signals some connection between the fate of the Temple and that of the cursed fig tree which will no longer bear any fruit. The evangelist clearly intends his readers to see in the doomed and dead fig tree a picture of the Temple. This is certainly a picture of judgment and destruction. The most appropriate model for interpreting Jesus' Temple act seems to be *symbolic actions* usually performed by prophets. These actions were dramatic embodiments of the prophetic message. Symbolic actions usually consist of two elements, the action itself followed by its oral interpretation:

Jeremiah 13:6-9:	*Symbolic action* Jeremiah is asked to dig a place for a loincloth, and hide it there. Later he is asked to dig it up. It was then destroyed and was of no use. *Interpretation* God will make an end of Judah and Jerusalem.
Jeremiah 27:2-8:	*Symbolic action* Jeremiah is instructed to lay upon his neck thongs and a yoke. *Interpretation* The people will be slaves of the Babylonian king.
Jeremiah 28:10-11:	*Symbolic action* Hananiah takes the yoke and breaks it. *Interpretation* The people will be released from their captivity.
Isaiah 20:3-6:	*Symbolic action* Isaiah is instructed to walk naked and barefoot in the town. *Interpretation* The Egyptians and the Ethiopians will be led into captivity naked and barefoot.
Acts 21:11:	*Symbolic action* Agabus binds Paul's feet with a girdle. *Interpretation* Paul will be arrested.

This list (*cf.* 1 Ki. 11:29-36; 2 Ki. 22:11) suggests a close relationship between the symbol and its interpretation. The symbolism of the prophetic action speaks almost for itself. The action chosen as a symbol already indicates and suggests the verbal interpretation. In particular, this is clear in Hosea 1 and 3 in the names given to the prophet's children. There the symbolic action (*i.e.* the names) in itself embodies the interpretation.

The action chosen as symbol in the Temple act is that of *driving out* (*ekballein*) and *turning over* (*katastrephein*). In the light of the material presented above, this action should by itself suggest the proper interpretation. According to a 'two steps restoration model', a cleansing interpretation cannot be ruled out; but it is not likely. Keeping to the observation that the interpretation is embodied in the action itself, that questions the traditional cleansing interpretation. The act of overturning and driving out can hardly be seen as referring to more than the first step. In fact nothing suggests the second step. Cleansing is not a very likely interpretation of the action performed by Jesus. The action itself carries the entire message, and in this action I can hardly see a reference to the second step. The positive, constructive side of a cleansing might in a biblical context have been symbolized in an additional way, *e.g.* by water or fire (Ezk. 36:25; Zech. 13:1-2,9; 2 Ki. 23:4, 6). In short, if we keep to the principle that the action itself embodies the appropriate interpretation, then this action of Jesus primarily signals the disqualification of the Temple.[7] Some scholars say that overturning some tables is not self-evidently a symbol of destruction. This act should, however, be taken together with Jesus driving people out of the Temple.[8] Particular emphasis should be paid to whom he is driving out, and to their role within the Temple precincts.

The presence of the money-changers and the pigeon-sellers was intimately connected to the main function of the Temple, as the place where sacrifices were offered. Both groups were required for the sacrifices to go on. The money-changers made it possible to change foreign currency with forbidden images (*cf.* Ex. 20:4) into the coinage accepted by the Temple, and the pigeon-sellers provided poor people with the offering demanded in the OT (Lv. 5:7; 12:8; Nu. 6:10; Lk. 2:24). The business arrangements represented by the people Jesus was driving out were essential and necessary if the commandments about sacrifices were to be obeyed. Jesus actually expels the necessary apparatus of the sacrifices. This is why I have questioned the relevance of texts speaking about reforming and purifying the Temple from pagan practices. Here something quite different is going on. The target of Jesus' action is the means necessary for the divine institution of expiation of sins to continue. Jacob Neusner refers to relevant Jewish texts (*Mishna* Sheqalim 1:3 and *Tosephta* Sheqalim 1:6) showing that the money-changers not only provided the so-called half-shekel demanded in the Temple. For doing this they charged a sum which served through the coming year to provide the public daily whole offerings in the Temple. They thus served for the atonement of Israel's sin. Neusner says that Jesus' action 'will have provoked astonishment, since it will have called into question the very simple fact that the daily whole offering effected atonement and brought about expiation for sin, and God had so instructed Moses in the Torah'.[9] Jesus' action makes the claim that there is a means of atonement other than the sacrifices in the Temple. This suggests that Jesus' Temple action was based upon the conviction of replacing the atoning function of the Temple, making it available to all nations, as emphasized in the first part of the scriptural quotation.

I have argued on the basis of the immediate context given to Jesus' Temple action by Mark as well as by taking the very action itself to carry the entire message of the episode. It seems correct therefore to say that Jesus attacked the sacrificial system and indicated a replacement of its atoning function. Now this interpretation has to be confronted with the oral interpretation laid down in Mark 11:17. Of particular relevance is the last part, the citation of Jeremiah 7:11. My interpretation is challenged by this quotation, since it is not quite obvious that it continues the attack on the sacrificial system; rather it seems to point to some moral deficiency. Craig E. Evans takes the expression 'den of robbers' to indicate an attack on the priesthood, and advances the following question: Why is an attack on the sacrificial system followed by a reference to the greed of the priests? Evans correctly expects a continuation here. Since this apparently fails to appear, Evans favours the view that Jesus was concerned about moral deficiency. But 'den of robbers' is not an obvious reference to a prophetic critique of the priests. In Jeremiah 7:11 it clearly refers to the people in general.

I would like to take another approach to understand 'den of robbers'. Jesus' vocabulary brings to mind the words of Jeremiah about the impending judgment upon the Temple. It was a common feature in contemporary prophecy, Jewish as well as Christian, to use conventional biblical phrases as part of the prophetic rhetoric. Jesus Son of Hananiah did this (*Jewish War* 6:300-309). This prophet entered the Temple in AD 62 and proclaimed the impending judgment on the place. For seven years and five months he continually uttered his message against the city and its holy place. In his message he also used the phrase 'a voice against bride and groom', which surely is reminiscent of Jeremiah's prophecies about the destruction of the city and the Temple (Je. 7:34; *cf.* 16:9; 25:10). The prophet deliberately used conventional phrases from the OT as his rhetoric style. This may be a satisfactory explanation of Jesus' words in Mark 11:17 as well. Jesus acts and speaks like a prophet; Matthew's version actually says so (Mt. 21:11). Where could Jesus find a more appropriate language than in Jeremiah's speech against the Temple and its worshippers? This means that the reference to 'den of robbers' (v. 17) is rhetorical rather than a description of the Temple of Jesus' own day.

That Jesus' Temple act involved more than a traditional restoration programme is finally suggested by the claim of Jesus that 'something greater than the Temple is here' (Mt. 12:6), as well as by his sayings about the destruction of the Temple (Mk. 13:1-2; 14:57-58; 15:29; Acts 6:14; Jn. 2:18-22). In these sayings, an element of rebuilding is clearly found, but that refers not to the actual Temple but to another. The concept of rebuilding the

Temple is here redefined in terms of a replacement. By the principle of multiple attestation this saying should be considered authentic. Furthermore, these sayings of Jesus then correspond to his action in the Temple. A correspondence between sayings and action indicates that the interpretation of the Temple act presented here is correct. This saying about destroying the Temple played a major role in the trial of Jesus. Obviously, Jesus' Temple act had provoked the anger particularly of the priesthood and Temple authorities (*cf.* Mk. 11:18).

The disciples' post-Easter meeting with Jesus

Jesus' unconditional forgiveness of sins as well as his symbolic act of replacing the cultic institution formed a starting point for interpreting his death as a means of righting the wrongs of human sins. The NT emphasizes, however, a close link between the salvific effect of Jesus' death and his being raised from the dead. The resurrection was a divine manifestation of his death as valid and effective. Thus the resurrection meant an intensification and assurance as to how Jesus' death was to be interpreted. This close link between a soteriological interpretation of his death and his being raised is clearly stated by Paul: 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins' (1 Cor. 15:17; *cf.* vv. 3-4; Rom. 4:25). Special attention should here be paid to the disciples' meetings with Jesus after his resurrection. These post-Easter encounters were a decisive factor in assuring them of the result of his death being one of atonement for sins.[10]

All the Gospels give an unfavourable picture of the disciples during the passion. In Gethsemane they fell asleep, leaving their Master alone in his agony. When he was arrested, they left him behind. The climax of their failure was Peter's threefold denial which strongly contrasts with his words in Mark 14:29, 'Even though all become deserters, I will not'. This information is certainly historical, not only on the basis of multiple attestation, but also because it was a constant reminder of the failure of the leaders of the church. It is impossible to imagine that this embarrassing piece of tradition was invented by anyone in the church.

When Jesus met his disciples after the resurrection, their unfaithful attitude must have been a painful obstacle for them to full rejoicing. The Gospels only hint at this aspect of their meeting. But in the major and special role assigned to Peter in these traditions (Mk. 16:7; Lk. 24:12, 34; Jn. 20:21; 21:15-19), it can clearly be seen that Jesus offered the disciples, and Peter in particular, a new beginning based upon forgiveness. This can be substantiated by means of one of the oldest texts in the NT. In the creed quoted in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, Paul mentions the witnesses of the risen Lord. Verse 5 distinguishes between the appearance of Jesus to Peter and to the other disciples: 'He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.' This is a clear reminder of the role of Peter in the passion and resurrection story. The saying refers to Peter's sin and his being restored by forgiveness. Without this narrative background the special mentioning of Peter in this creed becomes meaningless. The creed here calls upon the passion story for further information. Peter's role in the creed can be substantiated by taking the context into consideration. Paul's use of the creed is due to his strategy of gaining a basis for his apostolic ministry. He counts his Damascus revelation as equal to the Easter appearances to the disciples. The stereotype *ôpthê* ('he appeared' + dative) which he keeps even in verse 9 underlines this. Paul leaves his readers in no doubt as to the essential nature of this event: it was a meeting of forgiveness. The persecutor became the apostle by means of God's grace (*cf.* Gal. 1:15-16). Paul compares his Damascus experience to the twelve's Easter appearances. Paul's logic in the text allows a related line of comparison to be drawn. Jesus appeared with forgiveness to Paul as well as to Peter and the disciples. That Jesus died for sins, which is the first part of the creed, is exemplified by Peter. The mentioning of Peter separate from the twelve thus substantiates what it means to say that Jesus died for sins. Paul adds himself as another related example. This experience of the leaders of the church should not be underestimated; it played an important role in reaffirming the interpretation of Jesus' death as providing expiation for sins.

Summary

This article has emphasized that an adequate understanding of Jesus' death is dependent upon the role Jesus assigned to himself in questions of salvation. He exercised forgiveness of sins outside the sacrificial system, and thus embodied in himself the function of the sacrifices. This perspective naturally sheds light upon Jesus' Temple act, in which he was driving out those who were essential and necessary for the prescribed cult to go on. Mark, representing the oldest written interpretation of the Temple act, clearly understood it as a judgment scene. The aspect of rebuilding the Temple I found to be absent in the scene. It was, however, found in Jesus' sayings of destroying the Temple; but there it is redefined into a disqualification and replacement of the present Temple. To the disciples who were naturally confined to the traditions, the redefinitions presented by Jesus must have appeared more suggestive than obvious. They were, however, finally convinced and assured in their post-Easter meetings with Jesus, in which he gave them his forgiveness of their unfaithfulness and offered them a new beginning.

[1]In Qumran this text is transferred to the person executed by crucifixion (11QTemple 64:3-13). Without explicitly quoting this text, Trypho the Jew says that Jesus' crucifixion was a sign that the curse contained in the Law of God fell on him (*Dial.* 32). For a general reference to crucifixion in antiquity, see Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

[2]See L. Michael White, 'Morality between Two Worlds: A Paradigm of Friendship in Philippians', in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: In Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 201–215.

[3]This has been pointed out by Dale C. Allison Jr., 'Jesus and the Covenant: A Response to E.P. Sanders', *JSNT* 29 (1987), pp. 57–78 (particularly pp. 66–68) and Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

[4]This is pointed out by Daniel J. Antwi, 'Did Jesus Consider His death to be an Atoning Sacrifice?', *Interpretation* 45 (1991), pp. 17–28.

[5]See George W. Nickelsburg and Michael E. Stone, *Faith and Piety in Early Judaism, Texts and Documents* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 51–88, and Per Bilde, 'Templets Betydnind i Jødedommen på Jesu Tid', *Religionsvidenskapeligt Tidsskrift* 4 (1984), pp. 41–68.

[6]A forceful renewal of this interpretation has recently been presented by Craig A. Evans, 'Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?', *CBQ* 51 (1989), pp. 237–270.

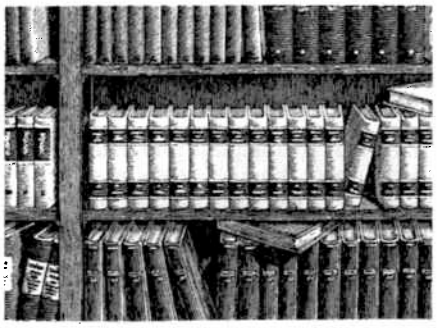
[7]This position has recently been advocated by E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 61–71.

[8]James D.G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press/Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), pp. 47–49, minimizes the significance of Jesus overturning the tables, and more or less leaves out the aspect of 'driving out'.

[9]Jacob Neusner, 'Money-Changers in the temple: The Mishna's Explanation', *NTS* 35 (1989), pp. 287–290 (quotation on p. 289); see also his *Jews and Christians, The Myth of a Common Tradition* (London: SCM Press/Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), pp. 97–104. Neusner says that the table of the money-changers was replaced by the table of the Eucharist ('table for table'). This is somewhat far-fetched. It is more natural to say that a new way of putting sins right is transparent in this text, in particular if it is seen within the larger perspective of Jesus' ministry.

[10]Martin Hengel, *The Atonement, The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 67, touches upon this.

BOOK



REVIEWS

The Message of Judges. Grace Abounding (The Bible Speaks Today)
M. Wilcock
Leicester: IVP, 1992,
175 pp., pb., £6.95.

Michael Wilcock, Vicar of St Nicholas's Church, Durham, is by now a well-known and valued contributor to the Bible Speaks Today series. The present work maintains the high standard he has already set in his earlier volumes on Chronicles, Luke and Revelation.

Those familiar with my own work on Judges (*The Book of the Judges*, 1987) and the more recent exposition by D.R. Davis (*Such a Great Salvation*, 1990) will find that the present volume falls somewhere between the two. It is more popular in style than the former, but less racy and more thorough than the latter. True to the character of the BST series, Wilcock's work is ideally suited to the needs of the busy Christian who wants to be drawn fairly directly into serious engagement with the text, and be given a start in responsible application.

The approach is straightforward. A brief introduction alerts us to the nature of the judges period and the special sense in which the term 'judge' is used in the book. It also points us to The Judge (Yahweh) who stands behind the judges, and to the overall theme of the book as Wilcock understands it: the faithfulness of God to his people despite their sinfulness and the (at best) patchy performance of their leaders. Wilcock is surely right here. It is only Yahweh's perseverance with Israel in spite of her failings that brings her through this chaotic period. This basic understanding of the book's message is then developed and applied in an exposition spanning eight chapters. The first is devoted to the book's introduction (1:1–3:6), the next six to the long central section with its cycles of apostasy, oppression and deliverance (3:7–16:31), and the last to the epilogue (chs. 17–21) with its sardonic commentary on the rampant individualism of the period ('every man did what was right in his own eyes').

As someone who has worked intensively on Judges, I found myself in disagreement with Wilcock on minor points. Is Barak's refusal to do what Deborah has told him to do unless she agrees to go with him really 'the glorious combination of a humble confession of his own inadequacy and a sure confidence in the grace of God'? This is to read too much back into Judges 4 from the reference to Barak's 'faith' in Hebrews 11. His response is certainly not what Deborah expects, as shown by her reply (4:9). Hebrews 11 tells us Barak had faith; Judges shows us how weak his faith was (all the more glory, therefore, to God!). But there will always be such disagreements among readers. It is part of the ongoing struggle to understand the text better, in the process of which iron sharpens iron. The overall thrust of Wilcock's exposition is sound and contains many fine insights along the way.

This book displays the kind of sensitivity to the literary skill of the ancient author(s) that we have rightly come to expect since the rise of modern 'literary' approaches to biblical interpretation (especially of narrative texts). Wilcock's own style, too, evinces much felicitous use of language and many memorable illustrations. The Book of Judges is likened to 'a precarious bridge slung between the certainties of the exodus on that side and the monarchy on this'. But the fragility of this bridge is, in an important sense, an illusion. For 'God's people are as secure on it as the cliffs at either end of it', and 'the very first verse of Judges shows them looking to that unchanging authority, the Lord himself'. The relevance of this to our own uncertain age with its reckless individualism is clear, and the book is full of application which flows quite naturally from the exposition. This is a very well-written volume. Its usefulness is enhanced by a full-page map in the introduction which enables the reader to follow the action of the various episodes with ease.

I had only a few reservations. I wonder whether, with a biblical book of 21 chapters, the benefits of including the full text, section by section, are not outweighed by the disadvantages. The last nine chapters of Judges, a very significant part of the book, were covered in only 25 pages, of which nearly nine were taken up with the RSV text. Given the requirement to include application, this necessarily results in an exegesis of the text which is too thin to sustain what is built on it. I wonder, too, whether it's still sensible to base a volume like this on the RSV, given the established place the NIV now has in evangelical circles? And finally, given the emergence (or re-emergence) of 'ethnic cleansing' in our contemporary world, it would have been helpful if more direct comment had been offered on the moral dilemmas inevitably posed for modern readers by the wars of occupation in the first two chapters of Judges.

But these are mere quibbles. This is a worthy addition to the BST series. Highly recommended.

Barry G. Webb, Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia

King Saul in the Historiography of Judah (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 121)
Diana Vikander Edelman
Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991, 347 pp.
hb. £40.00/$70.00.

The author tells us (p. 11) that she had planned to write a historical investigation of Israel under King Saul. However, what was intended as an introductory chapter evaluating the literary evidence for Saul's reign grew to become an independent study of 1 Samuel 8–2 Samuel 1. Hence the present book. The author accepts (with some hesitation) a form of M. Noth's theory of a Deuteronomistic History extending from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings, and regards the account of Saul as a distinct, though not wholly separate, part of that larger history. While holding that these chapters stem from more than one source, she believes that they were edited into their present form in the late seventh century by a member of the Jerusalem court, and were intended for members of the court and, perhaps by means of public readings at religious festivals, for Judahite citizens in general. She aims to 'put myself in the shoes of a member of the intended audience so that I can understand the author's allusions, structuring techniques, and idioms' (p. 11). Questions of historicity and of source history have been temporarily shelved, and we are presented with an interpretation of these chapters as they now stand.

Edelman's interpretation follows the general style of many recent literary 'readings' of these chapters: she sees thematic significance in recurring words such as 'heart' and 'eye'; she notes that the narrator can make a character's motives seem unclear by not telling us what s/he was thinking (*e.g.* David in 1 Sa. 18); she accepts that narrative incidents may be deliberately patterned so as to suggest links with other incidents. All these, she argues, were literary techniques which a seventh-century audience would have understood. The author constantly adopts the viewpoint of this audience, giving a 'sequential' reading in which knowledge of what follows is not assumed: uncertainties, suspicions, doubts as to what will happen next are allowed to stand until the subsequent narrative (perhaps) resolves them. Saul emerges from this interpretation as 'a man who was chosen in good faith by Yahweh' but who 'failed because . . . he eventually failed to rely on inward, divinely inspired perception and trusted instead in his own perception' (p. 321). At crucial points he disobeys Yahweh or fails to restrain the people from disobeying Yahweh (1 Sa. 13:8-15; 15:24), and as a result his kingdom is not established: he and many Israelites are 'swept away' in the battle of Gilboa (1 Sa. 31), in fulfilment of Samuel's words at 1 Samuel 12:24-25.

This is a clearly written and suggestive study which interacts with much recent scholarship on these chapters. I did not agree with every feature of Edelman's interpretation (*e.g.* that when Jonathan is 'taken' by lot in 1 Sa. 14:42, this amounts to his rejection by Yahweh as Saul's possible successor; or that already in 1 Sa. 16 Saul knows that David is to succeed him); but her clarity makes it possible to identify points of disagreement precisely. However, there is too much discussion of literary features which lend only slight support to a case already established. In particular, the author's 'sequential' approach, though it often draws attention to important aspects of the text (*e.g.* that Samuel's motives are opaque at points in 1 Sa. 8–15), also leads to much unnecessary ruminating over what the audience is 'left to wonder about' or 'suspects' at various points. Surely it would have been better to have left the main lines of the interpretation less cluttered.

The author appears to find the account of Saul coherent. In 1 Samuel 10–12, which some scholars have seen as a conflation of pro- and anti-monarchical sources, she finds a single, three-stage process of king-making ('designation' in ch. 10, 'testing' in ch. 11, 'coronation' in ch. 12). At other points where scholars have seen redactional seams (*e.g.* 1 Sa. 16 and 17) or duplicate accounts (*e.g.* 1 Sa. 24 and 26), she offers a unitary interpretation which seems to render such explanations unnecessary. However, as she has deliberately postponed to a subsequent volume discussion of possible underlying sources (p. 17), it remains to be seen how her present interpretation affects her discussion of these questions. The author generally prefers MT

to LXX. Curiously, textual issues do not feature in her treatment of 1 Samuel 17 (where LXX is significantly shorter than MT).

This book is a serious attempt to do justice to the OT account of King Saul. In view of its considerable detail it is, perhaps, more suited to the needs of postgraduates than undergraduates.

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The Song of Songs (Hermeneia)

Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm.
Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990,
xxii + 237 pp., hb

Father Murphy's contribution to Hermeneia continues that careful, thorough treatment of the material which we have come to expect from the series. Murphy's long-time interest in the Song (his published material goes back to 1949) and his wide-ranging knowledge of the relevant literature makes this a valuable tool.

Any commentator working on the Song is faced with major interpretive problems, and it is difficult to maintain a proper balance between the desire to explain every jot and tittle of the text and the need to maintain a reverent agnosticism in the face of some of the issues. Father Murphy has managed this well.

Murphy follows most modern commentators in rejecting a Solomonic (10th-century BC) date for the book as it now stands, but he is not so confident in identifying when it was written. As he notes, the philological material reveals parallels all the way from Ugarit (14th century) to the Greek period (third-century BC).

The Hebrew text is in relatively good shape, and in the few cases where major difficulties occur, the ancient versions are of little help – the problems obviously ante-date the third century BC. What *is* a problem is the presence of a large number of unique or unusual words. Over one-third of the vocabulary of the Song occurs so infrequently in the biblical material that there is little context from which accurate meaning can be deduced. Over two-thirds of the verses in the Song contain one or more of these uncommon words. Nevertheless, Murphy's judicious treatment of parallels from other Ancient Near Eastern literature often provides useful insight in these tricky areas.

A final, and in many ways the most important, problem associated with the interpretation of the Song is that of identifying the genre of the material we are dealing with. The traditional rabbinic and early Christian approach has been to treat the Song as an extended allegory (or, occasionally, as a cultic drama), describing the relationship between Yahweh (the lover/husband) and Israel (the beloved/wife) or between Christ and his bride, the church. Murphy devotes 30 pages to this view before turning to 17 pages on the Egyptian and Ancient Near Eastern love songs, and then an additional 32 pages of detailed examination of the structure, themes and rhetorical devices employed in the Song.

Murphy argues that the Song is a collection of love poems (not love 'songs'), 'a crafted work of poetic imagination that portrays the profound emotions of physical love between a man and a woman' (p. 91). And then he tosses in another comment that at first glance appears totally revolutionary. 'In sum, the multi-faceted rhetorical structures of the Song contribute in substantial measure to its aesthetic beauty as well as to a strong sense of its literary coherence. If this is the craft of an editorial compiler of diverse poems, she – or whoever did the work of "Solomon" named in the superscription – deserves to be recognized as a superlative poet in her own right' (p. 91).

Many commentators, myself included, would disagree with some of Murphy's proposals, both in specific instances on individual texts, or in some cases, in broad interpretation strategies, but it is beyond question that Murphy has given us a judicious treatment of this most difficult and most beautiful of Songs.

In my own ministry with students and in the church, I have found the Song of Songs to be particularly useful in pre-marital and marital counselling. The ever-present issues of committed relationship and our human sexuality are addressed in this small book. Father Murphy's commentary is a major contribution and deserves careful attention from anyone seriously investigating the Song of Songs, God's own commentary on Genesis 1–3.

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Amos (Hermeneia)

Shalom M. Paul
Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress Press, 1991, xxxvii + 409 pp.

This is the second volume in the Hermeneia series to be dedicated to the book of Amos. The other is the well-known commentary of H.W. Wolff (Fortress, 1977). This new work is not meant to replace the latter but, as the Editor clarifies, is designed 'to make good our promise to commission new works on biblical books that have already appeared in the series' (p. xvii).

The two commentaries could not be more different. Though conversant with archaeological findings, Wolff focuses his energies on classical form-critical criteria to categorize passages and to sort out what he considers the authentic material of the eighth-century prophet from later additions. On this basis, Wolff posits a six-stage development of the final form of the text. In addition, Wolff closes his discussion of each pericope with a general homiletic or theological thought ('Aim') directed primarily at the Christian church. For his part, Paul, a well-known Jewish scholar working in Jerusalem, presents a fine historical and exegetical study of the book of Amos against the background of Ancient Near Eastern material. His discussion and footnotes provide the reader with an impressive treasure of data from detailed comparative studies in the cognate languages and from the histories of the surrounding nations.

The author also offers a certain kind of literary reading of the prophetic text that brings out word plays and internal patterning within and between passages. This approach leads him at some points to argue against much scholarly opinion and call for greater respect for the integrity and unity of Amos. For example, his extended analysis of the oracles against the nations in 1:3–2:16 builds an impressive case for the authenticity of the entire section (pp. 7–30); another instance would be his defence of the originality of 9:11-15 (pp. 288–290). This greater commitment to the final form of the book is a welcome counterbalance to the piece-meal dissecting sometimes evident in studies concerned with hypothetical *Sitze im Leben* and textual development.

This reviewer, however, would have liked to have seen the incorporation of other kinds of literary methods which try to bring to light unity across larger portions and that highlight other features like characterization and point of view. This lack of sensitivity to these other kinds of literary insights is evident in several instances. Such is the case at 5:1-17, where Paul does not perceive the chiasm demonstrated by others in the past, and so he questions the appropriateness of the present setting and shape of the doxology of 5:8-9.

The author's historical orientation excludes the contributions of liberationist and feminist studies. Some might also question Paul's sometimes too easy dismissal of other opinions, but he is everywhere thorough in his documentation. This work provides an impressive bibliography for those who seek to penetrate more deeply into the area of Amos studies: the commentary is prefaced by an eight-page list of frequently cited articles and monographs (pp. xix–xxvi) and closes with 68 pages of material classified by topic and verse (pp. 299–367). Sadly, the massive commentary on Amos by Andersen and Freedman (Anchor Bible 24a, 1990) appeared too late for Paul to interact with. The several indices are also helpful, although inexplicably the author index ignores the footnotes and only cites names that appear in the discussions proper.

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Speaking of Speaking: Marking Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Bible (VT Sup. 46)

Samuel A. Meier
Leiden: Brill, xvi + 383 pp., approx. $100/£67.

Samuel Meier asks some questions about reported speech in the Hebrew Bible which open doors to further research in biblical grammar and literary technique. By design, this will serve as a reference work (p. vii). The main concern is to determine normative patterns for the lexical items used to introduce speech.

Unsurprisingly, the distinction between poetry and narrative turns out to be significant. Meier shows that at times poetry seems purposely to use the ambiguity of unintroduced direct speech (pp. 32–37). He also presents a convincing case that biblical narrative never uses unintroduced direct speech. The counter examples are all textually suspect (p. 32).

One important observation is that when לאמר ('saying') is used it immediately precedes direct speech (DD) without any intervening material (pp. 135–137).

A more functional question is: 'Since לאמר does not always appear before DD, is it possible to discern what determines its presence?' (p. 97). One of the most important contributions of the book is the partial answer that 'randomness is precisely what one does not find' (p. 99). His fuller attempt at an answer, though, is flawed by a restricted linguistic framework. Markedness theory, relevance theory and pragmatics would help him break out more completely from a philological mould. Meier tries to use lists in order to establish syntactic or lexical constraints for verbs, with a statistical preference for לאמר. He settles for a lexical-historical answer: לאמר started out as a purpose clause and is more frequent with verbs that at one time needed to

show that the actions involved speech (pp. 131, 139). His profile statistics (pp. 132–133) really prove that some other factors beyond a lexical, historical or semantic constraint are operative. (On the question of לאמר, the 1992 University of Chicago dissertation by Cynthia Miller goes further because of a more 'pragmatic' (in linguistic terminology) approach.)

Meier argues that אמר, דבר and ענה were originally three undifferentiated verbs that marked direct speech and came from three different literary communities. His position is well documented and illustrates the importance of considering the diachronic dimension and multi-dialectical background of the final biblical texts.

Another commendable feature of his work is that many variants in the textual tradition of a particular passage are listed and often discussed. However, it seems to the reviewer that Meier is too ready to dismiss minority patterns of usage because some Greek text, somewhere, does not follow expected translation practice.

Meier uses this approach where direct discourse is introduced and then a second introduction breaks up the speech without a change in speaker (*cf., e.g.*, Ruth 2:20 and 3:14-15). He concludes, 'The repetition of DD markers within a single speech was a marginally legitimate feature of Hebrew narrative, but that many occurrences mask the activity of redactors' (p. 80). More helpful would be to establish the text on normal text-critical grounds and to approach the resulting phenomena from a relevance theory perspective (Sperber and Wilson). Extraordinary marking means that the author wants the audience to do extra processing. The reader should look for significance even if obligatory rules cannot be established.

The chapters on the prophets (pp. 207–272) and divine speech (pp. 273–322) are suggestive in pointing out the frequent ambiguity or imprecision in signalling who is speaking. In addition, Meier is able to show distinctions between earlier and later practices.

A major area that is avoided in this work is the variation in marking of speakers and addressees before direct speech. Meier mentions work by Longacre on this question (p. 16) and rightly points out the problematic textual base for names and nouns versus pronouns or absence. But he declines to take up the significant issue.

The typesetting is crowded, readable, but a little less than state-of-the-art. A helpful table of contents is complemented by a 25-page index of Scripture citations. The price adequately communicates that the book is for research libraries.

Meier has done his homework. The book opens up a systematic discussion of speech frames and lays a foundation demanding philological rigour. Both grammarians and students of rhetoric will profit from the book.

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The Theme of Recompense in Matthew's Gospel (JSNT Supplement 79)

Blaine Charette

Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992, 184 pp., hb., £27.50/$50.00.

This publication of a PhD thesis written while the author was at Tyndale House is an examination of the themes of reward and punishment in Matthew's Gospel.

The thesis falls into three even parts. Firstly, Charette sets out the OT background to the theme of recompense. He rightly argues that the OT is the most plausible background to the Gospel as a whole and therefore the particular themes of reward and punishment which are the focus of this investigation. Further to this, he argues that Matthew is continuing the story of the OT, showing how Jesus fulfils and advances the OT story. In brief, he argues that Matthew describes reward in terms of 'inheritance' and entrance, and punishment in terms of 'removal'. By an examination of the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants he finds the background to these concepts in God's promises to Israel of a land and then his expulsion of disobedient Israel from the land into exile.

The second section examines Matthew's teaching on reward. He argues that the model for the new covenant inaugurated with Jesus is the same as that of the old covenants: there is both blessing and curse. Stipulations adhere to the new covenant just as they did to the old. The difference now, of course, is that the categories are no longer physical but spiritual. Given that Matthew is thinking in OT categories then it is to be expected that he would not attempt to establish that he is seeing, for example, eternal reward and punishment in covenantal terms. He would simply assume it. This makes the task of the exegete a difficult one for there is little internal evidence in the Gospel itself that behind Matthew's words and expressions lies a wealth of OT theology. All the scholar can do is present the plausible OT background and suggest the verbal and conceptual links. This is what Charette has attempted to do.

Finally, Charette examines the judgment texts with special attention given to the themes of fruitlessness, and weeping and gnashing of teeth. Finally, he examines the picture of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25. On the identity of 'the least of these my brethren', he argues, rightly I believe, that this phrase refers to disciples.

Charette is on solid ground when he relates Matthew to its OT antecedents. His ground is much shakier when he tries his hand at identifying the community behind Matthew's Gospel. Surely we must recognize that such a task is so conjectural and tentative that, in the end, it is an exercise in futility. Charette builds his case for the character of the Matthean church on his identification of the 'world' with the church in the parable of the weeds (Mt. 13). This goes against Jesus' own explicit identification of the field as the world. Further, such an identification makes the parable anachronistic in its setting in Jesus' ministry. Lacking, therefore, a firm exegetical base, the conclusions that Charette draws about the Matthean church remain purely speculative.

The publication of a thesis carries with it all its inherent strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side we are able to engage in the full argument of the book as well as having before us the complete bibliography and footnotes. But inevitably such a publication means that theological and pastoral issues are raised and then left dangling. Such a topic as this one raises important questions regarding the relationship of grace and merit, the relationship between judgment according to works and justification by faith. One is left wanting more.

For all this we are grateful for the availability of a work of conservative scholarship which rightly anchors the first Gospel in its proper harbour: the mind- and thought-world of the OT.

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Matthew: (The New American Commentary, Vol. 22)

Craig L. Blomberg

Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992, 464 pp., $27.99.

It is a considerable challenge to write a single-volume commentary of moderate size on the Gospel of Matthew. The commentator must know what to leave out, as well as what to put in, and must have the knack of coming right to the heart of the issues that are to be discussed. Craig Blomberg succeeds admirably in using his limited space well in this new commentary.

Blomberg's commentary is solidly evangelical, well-informed, and judicious in its conclusions. While it is not a technical commentary, it reflects a high level of scholarship, and its footnotes will lead the reader to further resources for the study of a passage or problem. Blomberg approaches the text from the standpoint of 'a cautious evangelical redaction criticism', *i.e.* with a concern to focus on the distinctive theology of Matthew. Not every opportunity along these lines is taken up, however. To be sure, this may often be due to space limitations. In one case, rather surprisingly, Blomberg denies that in 15:10ff. Matthew's omission of Mark's editorial insertion, 'Thus he declared all foods clean', is a toning down of Mark's radicalism for the sake of his Jewish-Christian readers. In another case, Blomberg denies that in 9:17 Matthew has redacted Mark in a conservative direction by alluding to the preservation of the old and new in the allusion to *both* the wine and the wineskins being preserved.

In addition to redactional analysis, however, Blomberg gives considerable attention to the matter of 'narrative flow' (the particular sequence of discrete sections) and its implications for the outline of the book. He opts for a combination of the structural analyses of Bacon and Kingsbury, adding to them his own inductive observations about the outline of the Gospel.

Blomberg leaves the date of the Gospel open, although he inclines slightly to a date between 58 and 69; similarly, as to authorship, Blomberg tentatively suggests the apostle Matthew as the author of an original draft of the Gospel or perhaps of one of its sources. He assumes the two-source hypothesis (Mark and Q), and somewhat less confidently the possibility of an M source. As to the life setting of the Gospel, Blomberg accepts the view that the evangelist writes to a Jewish-Christian church in Palestine that has recently separated from the synagogue, but which remains in dialogue with the Jewish community. Indeed, he finds that the most fundamental theological theme of the book is the problem of particularism and universalism. On these issues, Blomberg is full of insight.

Blomberg's earlier work on the historical reliability of the Gospels stands him in good stead in his handling of this question in the commentary. He rightly insists that we measure the Gospel's reliability by the standards of the day and the intention of the evangelist. He disallows forced harmonizations and he puts the burden of proof upon those who contest the authenticity of the tradition. As enlightened as Blomberg's approach generally is, one is surprised to find him arguing that Matthew's five major discourses are actually single sermons, or distillations of sermons, that were spoken by Jesus on specific occasions, rather than compositions of the evangelist from the sayings tradition. When it comes to the miraculous deeds of chapters 8 and

9, on the other hand, Blomberg does not hesitate to conclude that the evangelist has collected these narratives together for thematic reasons and that they are not to be understood as reflecting actual chronology.

As one might expect, again from Blomberg's earlier work, his treatment of the parables is especially strong. He opts for a mediating approach that treats the parables as 'limited allegories', giving attention to their meaning in the ministry of Jesus and in the life of the early church.

On the difficult question of Jesus and the law, Blomberg has it just right, in my opinion. Matthew's view is dialectical: Jesus comes in faithfulness to the law to bring it to its intended goal; yet Jesus contravenes the letter of the law at a number of points. Thus Christ 'makes it clear that he is not contradicting the law, but neither is he preserving it unchanged' (p. 103).

On other assorted Matthean cruxes Blomberg is equally convincing. He takes *porneia* (5:32; 19:9) as meaning sexual unfaithfulness. He corrects the NIV, upon which the commentary series is based, in 11:12 to read: 'from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent people attack it'. The rock upon which Christ will build his church (16:18) is Peter, and not his confession. Blomberg handles Matthew's OT quotations with insight, allowing for multiple levels of fulfilment and the nature of typological correspondence.

On the difficult imminence logia Blomberg takes long-established conclusions. The promise of 10:23b refers to the parousia of the Son of Man, since the Jewish mission remains perpetually incomplete. Blomberg understands 16:28, 'the Son of Man coming in his kingdom', as referring to the transfiguration narrative that immediately follows in all three synoptics. The 'immediately after' of 24:29 refers to the period of tribulation described in verses 21-28, which is to be distinguished from the fall of Jerusalem, and 24:34 refers to everything in 24:1-26, but not the parousia itself.

In our day it is refreshing to see Blomberg's openness to the supernatural in history – and it is a great disadvantage for a Matthew commentator *not* to accept the possibility of the supernatural! From the supernatural birth of Jesus and the moving star of 2:9 to the miracles performed by Jesus, and thence to the transfiguration and finally the resurrection of Jesus, Blomberg affirms that God has broken directly into the historical process. Even the strange story of the resurrection of the dead saints in 27:52f. does not cause Blomberg to flinch, although he does attempt to put this resurrection *after* Christ's resurrection. At one point, with little justification, Blomberg makes the storm at sea (8:23-27) into an attack of Satan.

Two main things stand out about this commentary. First, it is clear that the author is an exegete, and a good one. His obvious priority is to make clear what the author meant his first readers to understand, using the good old-fashioned grammatical-historical method. Second, he is concerned to bridge the hermeneutical gap by helping the reader to understand what the text says today. Here Blomberg again and again provides sane, pastoral wisdom. He can affirm the charismatic tradition as worthy, and while not making it a norm, he can affirm the possibility of supernatural healing 'from time to time' in the modern world. As a further example, Blomberg notes that the exception clause of 5:32 'does not reflect a consideration of every conceivable legitimate or illegitimate ground for divorce'.

Blomberg has, in short, produced a fine commentary filled with solid, informative exegesis. The fact that he has managed at the same time to squeeze as much sensible application into his commentary as he does, will make the commentary especially appealing to pastors and lay teachers.

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Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross
Robert H. Gundry
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993,
lv + 1069 pp., $59.99.

Anyone who takes the time to read Martin Hengel's *Crucifixion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) and then the Gospel of Mark will appreciate Robert Gundry's new commentary. The problem is that we moderns do not appreciate the shame and disgrace of the cross in antiquity. To us it has become a religious symbol; it has taken on a positive and sacred meaning. In the Roman Empire the cross was reserved for slaves and criminals of the lower classes. Crucifixion was a cruel, painful and usually long-drawn-out death. The paradox that early Christians faced was proclaiming a crucified Jew as God's Son, Israel's anointed king, and the world's saviour. To the Greco-Roman world such a concept would be ridiculous. Conquerors, emperors and mighty men were the saviours of the first-century Mediterranean world, not defeated and executed would-be kings.

One of the most pleasing features of the commentary is that it is completely at variance with the regnant interpretation of Mark. This interpretation, with some variation and a few dissenters, understands Mark as an attempt to correct a theology of glory (as seen chiefly in traditions about Jesus' miracles) by means of a theology of suffering (as seen in Jesus' passion and, in various ways, in the disciples' inability to understand or accept Jesus' teaching regarding his passion). Gundry argues that it is the theology of glory, not suffering, that is dominant. This explains why so much of the Markan Gospel is given over to miracles and to an emphasis that Jesus is in command of his fate. Everything in Jesus' life and ministry, including his death, bears the mark of a 'success story'.

Gundry further argues that the tradition, principally drawn from Papias (early second century) via Eusebius (*cf. Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.15), that the Gospel of Mark was penned by John Mark, cousin of Barnabas and assistant to Peter in Rome sometime around 60 CE, is reliable (see pp. 1022–1051). Gundry's conclusion, based on a careful reading of the Papias fragments, relevant external evidence, and especially the Gospel of Mark itself, is plausible. Although this reviewer is not as optimistic as Gundry, his careful arguments deserve due consideration.

The conclusion that the Gospel of Mark was composed in Rome midway through the reign of Nero comports with Gundry's interpretation. The Markan evangelist has written an apology for the crucifixion of Jesus, an apology that was calculated to deflect Roman criticisms and misgivings. Jesus has not been defeated; he has not died in disgrace. The cross was his destiny and his victory. But death was not the final word; Jesus was resurrected. In conquering death his identification as Son of God and Saviour is now fully justified. He now compares favourably to the saviours, conquerors and mighty men of the Roman world. Indeed, he is greater.

This massive commentary is rich with exegetical detail and critical assessment of the secondary literature. It is not a commentary for beginning students. To profit from it fully one must be able to follow the Greek text. To understand the issues with which Gundry grapples one must be familiar with at least the major contributions to Markan studies in recent years. No translation is offered, though translation of various words and phrases are proposed throughout.

There are several specific points of interpretation that stand out. His treatment of the cursing of the fig tree (Mk. 11:12-14, 20-25), a difficult passage by any reckoning, is intriguing. His argument that Mark's Gospel did not end at 16:8 is compelling. Redaction-critical claims and 'close readings' that try to argue that 16:8 ('. . . for they were afraid') was the original ending are not convincing. More convincing is Gundry's suspicion that Mark's Gospel concluded with a brief account of the appearance of the risen Christ, pieces of which are probably preserved (and elaborated on) in Matthew 28:9-10, 16-20 and Luke 24:9b-12.

There is one point of Gundry's interpretation that gives me pause. He does not think that there is present in Mark an anti-Temple theme (see p. 676 and elsewhere). I think there is. It is seen in chapters 11–15, where Jesus challenges, criticizes and warns the Temple establishment, and then finally predicts its destruction.

Gundry's commentary is sure to become the standard heavyweight for the Gospel of Mark. By way of bibliography, Gundry provides only a list of the books that he cites, advising the reader to consult the massive bibliography on Mark assembled by Frans Neirynck.

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Reading the Gospel of John. An Introduction
Kevin Quast
Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1991,.
165 pp., pb., $8.95.

As the title indicates, this is an introductory guide, aimed at first-year level or, more likely, lay individual study sessions. Although it occasionally assumes some familiarity with concepts such as the Messianic Secret (p. 18), it is generally quite elementary. Each chapter ends with study questions, testing comprehension of what has been written, but not stimulating further reading, thought or application. Quast offers a well-written sequential reading of the text rather than treatments of isolated themes. Thus the reader derives a good grasp of the overall discourse and flow of narrative. In addition he provides some useful elementary literary analyses of chapters 4, 9 and 18–19, though, surprisingly, not of chapter 11. There are lots of helpful charts and maps.

Quast is clearly aware of the main trends in contemporary Johannine scholarship but does not really interact with them in any substantial way. The bibliographies at the end invite the reader to pursue questions of interest, but this book is in no way a survey of scholarship. Quast takes a fairly middle-of-the-road view on the Johannine Community and detects seams within the Gospel reflecting a gradual community enter-

prise, with chapters 6, 15–17, 21 and the Prologue being late additions. It is of Palestinian Jewish origin and written for a Hellenistic readership. The Beloved Disciple is simply the hero lying behind the composition. Whilst it is not completely independent of the synoptic tradition, it is able to draw on an early independent source as well. It is an in-house document not intended to evangelize but to address problems experienced by the community.

Although Quast never really discusses historicity, he is not prepared to defend it at points when it would be comparatively easy. The fishing incident in chapter 21 is thought to be drawn from the same traditions as Luke 5 and 24. Despite the similarities with Luke 5:1-11, this reviewer regards it as a completely separate incident. In the account of the discovery of the empty tomb in chapter 20, we are told that 'history and faith come together' (p. 129), but also that 'the Gospel of John . . . develops the empty tomb into an occasion for faith' (p. 131). The reader is left uncertain as to how historical that particular narrative might be.

Further, it is simply not true that 'only in John is the term "Messiah" forthrightly used of Jesus' (p. 18). We might refer to Peter's confession in the synoptic tradition or even Jesus' affirmation in Mark 14:61-65 before the High Priest. One understands what the author wishes to convey but such a simplification can lead to an uncritical acceptance of scholarly generalizations.

With respect to Johannine soteriology, Quast's view is that John proposes 'redemption by relationship' (p. 3). That is, salvation comes through believing and knowing, through the incarnation rather than the cross (following Bultmann, Forestell and Hultgren). In his discussion of the Lamb of God sayings in 1:29 and 1:36, Quast outlines three possible backgrounds to the saying but fails to draw any conclusions concerning John's view of the atonement. He ignores Caiaphas' reported statement in 11:50ff. and, although he acknowledges the Passover context and allusions of the passion narrative, this does not seem to affect his stated view. This reluctance to be decisive over disputed points is again evident in the discussion of 'born of water and spirit' (3:5) – some options are noted, but no preferred solution is offered. The reader is left uncertain.

I found this book rather disappointing. In scope and design it promised to be a valuable introduction, but it is too flawed in execution to meet the need for which it is intended.

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The Spirituality of the Gospels

Stephen C. Barton

London: SPCK, 1992, 161 pp., pb., £9.99.

This is a brief, well-written, honest, and appropriately documented introduction to the 'spirituality' of each of the canonical gospels. Barton defines the term 'spirituality' somewhat vaguely as having to do with 'the sense of the divine presence and living in the light of that presence' (p. 1). Since the gospels are 'faith documents from start to finish' and since Christian communities hold them to be sacred Scripture, it is fair, says Barton, in view of the recent upsurge of interest in things 'spiritual', to attempt to 'describe and evaluate the spirituality of the gospels in their canonical context'. His approach involves a sensibly eclectic combination of critical methods (involving historical, canonical, literary and redactional approaches).

The main strength of the book is the descriptive material where Barton takes a broad approach to the 'spirituality' of each gospel, placing his discussion within the context of the main themes of each gospel (this explains why in the preface he can describe the contents of this book as 'what I had come to understand each of the canonical gospels to be *really* about'). His sympathetic descriptions of the themes of the gospels are clear and (despite quibbles of both substance and emphasis) will genuinely help careful readers to understand and appropriate the message of the gospels. Barton helpfully notes both the theocentric and the christocentric nature of the 'spirituality' of the gospels (with additional emphases for the different evangelists). For example, Matthew's 'spirituality' is described in terms of 'the sense of the presence of God' in the person and ministry of Jesus (*e.g.* pp. 10–12, *cf.* Mt. 1:23; 28:20), which gives rise to a particular ethical position. Mark has an eschatological 'spirituality' ('a spirituality for martyrs'), which would give strength in persecution or difficulty. Luke's 'spirituality' is one of joy and gladness understood as appropriate responses to God's grace in Christ (*e.g.* pp. 74–77). John's 'spirituality' is thoroughly Christ-centred, providing (among other things) grounds for both present assurance and future perseverance. In general these descriptions are clear and useful summaries of the biblical material, with useful endnotes to each chapter.

It is when he turns to evaluate the 'spirituality' of the gospels that Barton's position becomes (for this reader) untenable. Ultimately, of course, this is rooted in Barton's doctrine of Scripture, but even on his own terms he has a problem. He describes the gospels as 'documents of the canon of Christian scripture held as sacred within the communities of Christian faith which scripture sustains and nourishes' (p. 3). The problem for Barton (leaving aside the biblical claims which lead evangelicals to describe the Bible as the Word of God) is that the very term 'canon' involves the idea of a normative rule or statement of Christian faith. But Barton does not allow the gospels to function in any normative (*i.e.* 'canonical') manner. His evaluations of the gospel message of 'spirituality' (or 'gospel spiritualities') include many negative value judgments about the actual teaching contained in the gospels.

Since this goes to the heart of Barton's idea of what 'spirituality' actually is, it is worth highlighting some of these judgments and the basis from which they are arrived at. As regards Matthew, Barton makes three criticisms. Firstly he suggests that in controversy with the Jews (expressed especially in ch. 23), Matthew himself has not learnt the lesson of loving one's enemies (*cf.* Mt. 5:44). Secondly, Barton is critical of 'Matthew's doctrine of reward and punishment' which he describes in the following terms: 'the kingdom of heaven is breaking in with the coming of the messiah and a great sorting out is about to take place on the basis of both Israel's and the nations' response to the revelation of the will of God by his Son Jesus' (p. 30). Barton asserts that this is untrue and is basically a doctrine designed 'to bolster the identity and self-esteem' of a threatened community. Thirdly, Barton is critical of Matthew's certainty that the resurrection was an historical event supported by witnesses and evidence.

Nor do the other gospels emerge unscathed. Barton regards Mark's presentation of the passion and death of Jesus as excessively dark and oppressive in its focus on the suffering Son of Man. Luke's 'unabashed' or 'unsubtle' supernaturalism (whereby Luke presents the miracles of Jesus as validating and revealing the identity of Jesus, pp. 104ff.) is criticized as propagandist, as is his belief in the steady progress of the gospel 'in a context of miraculous guidance and in fulfilment of a divine plan for the salvation of the world' (p. 107). Finally, Barton is critical of the particularity and exclusiveness of John in presenting Jesus as the only way to the Father and the unique focus of God's revelation and salvation (pp. 136f.). It is at this point in the book that Barton finally owns up to his own 'modern "liberal" sympathies'. Indeed, his honest disagreements with the teaching of the gospels help to clarify the distance between his 'modern liberalism' and traditional 'orthodox' Christianity.

I say this because none of these matters (the final judgment and resurrection certainty of Matthew, the dark passion of Mark, the supernaturalism of Luke and the particularity of John) can be regarded as of marginal importance for the evangelists, the whole NT, or even Jesus of Nazareth (although this last could be disputed). Barton's quest for a gospel 'spirituality' begins to look very much like a 'spirituality' devoid of a gospel. Certainly it contains no supernatural salvation from wrath and judgment only through the sin-bearing death and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus it is a 'spirituality' without the heart of the apostolic (and God-given) gospel; it is a man-made 'spirituality' for today's liberal; and it is a striking example of 'holding the form of religion but denying the power of it' (2 Tim. 3:5; *cf.* the context).

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The Agency of the Apostle: A Dramatistic Analysis of Paul's Responses to Conflict in 2 Corinthians (JSNT Supplement 51)

Jeffrey A. Crafton

Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991, 188 pp., hb., £21.00/$35.00.

Jeffrey Crafton believes that the time for umovation in the method of studying 2 Corinthians, one of Paul's most complex and enigmatic letters, has come. Crafton applies to 2 Corinthians the contemporary rhetorical-critical method known as 'dramatism', which is based on the theory and practice of Kenneth Burke. *The Agency of the Apostle* is the first thoroughgoing Burkean analysis of a NT document. Crafton makes no small claim for the results: 'through the eyes of dramatism, this enigmatic document has become fascinating and alive, full of adroit rhetorical strategies, marvellous eloquence, and profound insight into the nature of true leadership and the life of faith'.

What is Burke's dramatistic theory? It is a technique of analysis of language and thought as basically modes of action rather than as means of conveying information. The fundamental thesis is that 'humans *act* with language'. In describing the method Crafton introduces the reader to alien terministic screens, the dramatistic pentad, the dramatistic ritual, the *agonistic* principle, the purgative-redemptive *agon*, and so on. At times one is tempted to ask whether dramatism or 2 Corinthians is the more complex and enigmatic. As applied to 2 Corinthians, Crafton seeks to analyse the strategy of Paul's rhetoric and the self-image he projects as he attempts 'to offer to his audience a new language describing a new way of life, and to lead them to live this re-created orientation'.

Perhaps the theory is best explained with reference to the case study, 2 Corinthians. Crafton sees dramatism coming alongside rather than replacing more traditional methods of NT study. Hence the conflict which gave rise to 2 Corinthians is investigated in an uncontroversial manner (although Paul's encounters with the Corinthians in Acts are ignored) and the insights of a wide range of commentaries are utilized in the exegesis of the book. He views 2 Corinthians as a compilation of three letters. In the 'Letter of Initial Response' (2:14–6:13 + 7:2-4) Paul presents himself as an 'agency'; he 'desires to reduce rather than promote the actualization of his presence in the letter' (p. 67). He is a channel, an instrument, a vessel through which God the Agent acts. However, in the 'Letter of Attack' (10:1–13:13) Paul's *'agent-persona'* stands at centre stage. By the frequent use of the first person singular and the focusing of attention on his unique identity and characteristics, Paul acts forcefully in the Corinthians' presence, demanding their loyalty. Finally, in the 'Letter of Reconciliation' (1:3–2:13 + 7:5-16) Paul is a coagent with God and mediator of God's comfort in order to reconstitute his relationship with the Corinthians.

Leaving aside questions of alternative reconstructions of Paul's relations with the Corinthians and the integrity of 2 Corinthians, we may agree with Crafton that 'a critical method is good insofar as it accomplishes its task' (p. 36). Does dramatism simply describe the obvious in a complicated and avant garde way? What is the interpretive gain? Having negotiated the jargon, this reviewer found the discussion of Paul's strategy in a situation of conflict quite useful. Crafton is concerned to ask not just what does Paul say, but what does he hope to achieve in his relations with the Christians in Corinth by saying what he says. The value of dramatism may lie in the questions it asks. In terms of particulars, the use of metaphor, irony, parody and sarcasm in the letter receive full and often enlightening treatment.

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The Epistle to the Galatians (Epworth Commentaries)
John Ziesler
London: Epworth Press, 1992, 122 pp., £6.95.

Stendahl and Sanders pointed out as long ago as 1977 that no Jew in Paul's day believed that one could be saved by good works or by obeying the whole law, nor did they believe that salvation depended on the whole law being kept perfectly. Salvation was always seen as based on God's grace, and forgiveness was provided at the Day of Atonement for individuals as well as the nation. This means that the traditional interpretation of Galatians, as a polemic against salvation by good works, must be wrong.

Ziesler guides the reader through Galatians as though it were a totally new letter from Paul. Paul is writing not against good works, or even against circumcision, but against the demand for circumcision. The plethora of arguments which Paul uses come down to two main points. Firstly, the Gentile Galatians do not know what they are getting themselves into. They do not realize that if they get circumcised they will also be expected to obey the whole Torah. This is not impossible, because Paul managed it (Phil. 3:6), but for Gentiles living in a non-Jewish society it would be much more difficult than for Jews.

Paul's second main point is that circumcision would deny their faith in Christ. This brings the matter into general terms which apply also today. Salvation is by faith in Jesus, and by nothing else. The Galatians were in danger of getting circumcised in order to become part of the people of God, which implied that faith in Christ's death was not sufficient. Essay I, at the end of the book, points out that salvation by good works and self-righteousness is still a problem today, though circumcision is not. Even though Paul says nothing in Galatians about salvation by good works, he still condemns it by what he does say, because Paul condemns adding *any* requirement to faith in Jesus.

It is a pity that Ziesler did not put Essays I and II at the beginning of the book. Essay II covers the ground normally found in introductions, *viz.* authorship, dates, and the geographical problem about 'Galatia', while Essay I asks how one can combat the heresy of salvation by good works when Paul never addresses it. One feels that many readers will not understand the commentary on chapters 1–4 unless they read these Essays first.

It is also a pity that Ziesler chose to interpret each passage twice, first with introductory comments and then with detailed phrase-by-phrase comments. This is a common device by commentators, but it does not work well in a commentary this short. Because of the constraints of space, his detailed comments are no longer than his introductory comments, and they sometimes overlap in content.

Given the brevity of this commentary, it is amazing how much Ziesler packs in. Rarely does he avoid a difficulty, unless it really does not affect the meaning of the text, and one does not feel that he is rushing through major issues. Ziesler is a master of summary. He can present a whole field of scholarly debate in a couple of paragraphs without belittling the untold details nor making the uninitiated feel lost. For example, he reduces the recent research on 'Son of God' to one paragraph with one footnote. He refers mainly to modern commentaries which are easily found, and even gives page numbers for the one-volume TDNT which the reader may actually own rather than the ten-volume set found in well-endowed libraries.

'Salvation by God's grace alone' is a slogan which Christians and Jews alike can agree with. Ziesler shows that it is *because* Jews agreed with this principle that Paul appeals to it. It is ironic that Galatians has been used by Protestants to preach against 'legalistic' Jews for hundreds of years. Rarely has such an ancient text seemed so new, as in this commentary.

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Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews (JSNT Supplement 73)
Marie E. Isaacs
Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992, 253 pp., £35.00/$60.00, hb.

Cutting across the surface of this study of the letter to the Hebrews are two turbulent and potentially disruptive critical issues. The first concerns the historical circumstances under which the letter was written; the second has to do with the nature of its controlling structure – what, if anything, holds it together? The final measure of this well-written and instructive work of exegesis is likely to be whether Marie Isaacs, a lecturer in Biblical Studies at Heythrop College, London, succeeds in keeping these two streams within the channels that she has defined for them.

Her review in chapter 1 of the debate over authorship and readership from Nairne onwards is comprehensive and useful. With some reservations and due respect for the difficulties involved she suggests that the letter was written after the destruction of the temple in AD 70 to Jewish Christians with the purpose of reshaping a conception of the means of access to God that relied too heavily on the continued existence of the sanctuary. The force of this interpretation rests on the assumption that it is only really with the loss of the Temple that the church was led to understand Christ as the unique means of access and that it is in Hebrews that such an understanding is first developed.

With equal cautiousness Isaacs acknowledges that the author has some affinity with Philo and Hellenistic metaphysics, but argues that this is a matter more of terminology than of substance. While he makes use of certain atemporal relations – between, for example, the heavenly tabernacle and the earthly copy – this does not displace the traditional Judaeo-Christian concept of two ages. In this respect Hebrews has more in common with Jewish apocalypticism than with Platonic idealism.

Isaacs' thesis is that Hebrews aims at a 'relocation' of 'sacred space' from earth to heaven. In chapter 2 she explains how the author develops this theme, first in terms of the promised land and God's rest, secondly in terms of the Temple cult and the Aaronic priesthood. What the destruction of the Temple must finally demonstrate to Jewish believers is that the OT conception of salvation, which had been tied so closely to geographical space, can be fulfilled only if projected on to a heavenly landscape.

The emphasis shifts in chapter 3 from the failure of the old system to the success of Jesus in establishing the 'definitive means of access'. Here one important weakness with Isaacs' thesis becomes apparent, which is that she is unable to subsume to any worthwhile degree what is said about the person and work of Christ under the rubric of 'sacred space'. The conclusion reached at the end of the chapter, that Jesus is portrayed primarily as Davidic son, is reasonable and the analyses on which it is based – Jesus as mediator, and in relation to Moses, Melchizedek and the angels – cover the ground well. But the attempt to connect this with the spatial motif is less convincing and one is left wondering why the idea has been given such prominence.

The final chapter consists of three studies relating to the theme of Christ's heavenly session. In the first Isaacs argues that, partly in pursuit of the spatial perspective, the writer to the Hebrews has gone beyond the traditional Christian interpretation of Psalm 110 by linking the exaltation and priestly motifs to produce an 'innovative soteriology'. The second deals with the prologue and with the Wisdom motif in particular against a background of Jewish Wisdom speculations. Finding no other passages that clearly express a doctrine of Christ's pre-existence, Isaacs concludes that the brief allusion to his protological role in this chapter is atypical of a letter whose principal focus is soteriological. In the third study she examines four images used for heaven (promised land, holy city, royal court, sacred shrine) that can be shown to have both a spatial and a temporal reference.

Taken as a piecemeal study of the theology of Hebrews, this is a valuable book whose use of

exegesis and comparative literary analysis is balanced and persuasive. The attempt to organize the material around the concept of 'sacred space', however, has a somewhat cosmetic feel to it, partly because it diverts attention from the christological concerns of the letter, but also because Isaacs fails to relate it to the consistent paraenetic burden – the exhortation to persevere – which arguably has better claims for structural priority than any theological motif. Although Isaacs covers the readership options well, her own assumption – that the destruction of the Temple is the cause of the crisis of faith – is only cursorily defended; for her thesis to be finally convincing it needs to be demonstrated more confidently that the need to relocate sacred space better fits the historical and paraenetic circumstances of the letter than, say, that of making good an imperfect understanding of salvation.

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Who Was Jesus?
N.T. Wright
London: SPCK, 1992, 107 pp., £4.99, pb.

If every book on theology was written in the style of this one the anti-intellectual 'Babylonian Captivity' of theology in church life might be at an end. Although treating a serious theological subject, it avoids technical language and regularly dives (or soars) into illustration and humour. It is a topical book dealing with three challenges to traditional Christian belief about the person of Christ. The three writers involved are the Australian, Barbare Thiering, the British journalist, A.N. Wilson, and the Episcopal US Bishop, John Spong. Without being uncharitable, it is fair to say that none of the three have particularly made a mark on academic theology. All of them, however, have ridden the media very well indeed, Thiering reaching the dizzy heights of ITV's *Lunchtime News*, Wilson presenting a TV documentary series, and Spong being the darling of the producers of Radio 4's *Sunday* ('Radio Spong' as I should like to call it), who seem to think that all other bishops have died off.

Thiering, deservedly, suffers the worst mauling. Wright mercilessly completes the demolition job begun in his encounter with her on *Lunchtime News*. He shows convincingly that Thiering's eccentric theory that Jesus married Lydia (yes, the one in Acts 16:4) has alone 'raised her status from a writer of complex, obscure and unconvincing theories to that of a worldwide bestseller. And the passage in question consists of this: a few pages of totally worthless argument.'

With Wilson and Spong, Wright is charitably willing to recognize points of legitimate concern and to extract some useful starting points. All the same, the two writers do not last many rounds with him. It almost (only almost) arouses sympathy for them to see their theories irretrievably coming apart in his hands: Wilson's that Jesus was a simple Galilean holy man, Spong's that Jesus was the issue of a rape and was married, probably to Mary Magdalene.

It is a sad commentary that the outstanding skill and scholarship of the author needed to be deployed at all in refuting this flotsam and jetsam of religious speculation, destined for the same short but corruptive life as John Allegro's 'mushroom' theories. But it is a fact that it *is* needed. Some strange and bizarre theories have engaged the greatest minds in Christian history, precisely because such theories exercise a fascination on the popular mind. Although scholarship has barely recognized the three writers, popular media could not resist them.

Wright amply justifies his book in other ways, though. In his treatment of A.N. Wilson, he gives us a usefully popular version of his own scholarly account of NT Christology. This alone is a valuable spin-off which justifies the exercise. Other topics receiving trenchant conservative handling include the virginal conception, the historicity of the Gospels, the meaning of Jewish monotheism, the resurrection and the NT imagery for the last times. It is all presented with priceless popular-user access and, not infrequently, humour.

And to think we owe it all to Thiering, Wilson and Spong.

Roy Kearsley, Glasgow Bible College

Entering the Darkness. Christianity and its Modern Substitutes
Edward Norman
London: SPCK, 1991, vi + 106 pp., £6.99.

Edward Norman, Dean of Chapel at Christ Church College in Canterbury, has provided us with a characteristically eloquent and provocative collection of 20 short (five-page) essays originally delivered as addresses to students. Each essay is self-contained but they all share a common preoccupation with the spiritual destitution of both the Western world and contemporary Christianity. Evidence for this parlous condition is presented in terms of the preference of modern people for meaning over redemption, for happiness and a painless existence over repentance from sin, for emotional uplift over dogmatic truth, for the fulfilment of personal desire over moral obligation. The outcome is that the majority live mundane lives focused on trivial matters.

Although his tone is often negative, Norman is impressive in his ability to discuss cogently a wide selection of topics including, for example, black Christianity, worship, the church, revelation, and religious pluralism. The essay on the role of charities in providing a religion of good works to satisfy contemporary moralism, and the essay on sexuality where adultery is judged more ethically objectionable than homosexuality, are perhaps the best of the collection.

This short tome is worth a place on the bookshelf if only for the quality of the prose and his sceptical appraisal of the state of religion in Western Europe.

Ian Smith, St Andrew's University

BOOK NOTES

The Gospel according to Saint Mark (BNTC)
Morna D. Hooker
London: Black/Peabody:Hendrickson, 1991, 424 pp., $24.99.

For most of her distinguished career, the Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity in Cambridge has specialized in Markan studies. Off and on over the last 20 years, she has been working on this commentary. For a good number of those years, her university seminar of postgraduates and resident scholars painstakingly worked through the Gospel one pericope at a time. At last her work has seen the light of day.

In this commentary, replacing Sherman Johnson's in the Black series, Hooker engages in vintage redaction criticism. A brief introduction dates Mark to after 70, with unknown provenance. Adopting Markan priority, and following an outline reminiscent of E. Schweizer's, she focuses primarily on what the gospel meant for Mark and his community of Christian believers. Often admitting agnosticism as to what actually happened during Jesus' ministry (*e.g.* with the nature miracles), or parcelling up the text along the lines of an older form-critical distinction between tradition and redaction (though usually finding a historical kernel), she is at her best when elucidating Markan theology.

'Additional notes' discuss several important topics raised by Mark's first four chapters (John's baptism, Son of man, parables, *etc.*); these then disappear until a closing note on the longer ending of Mark. A medium-length bibliography and deliberately selective parenthetical notes to other literature throughout the commentary proper rely primarily on British scholarship, with an occasionally surprising emphasis on somewhat dated sources (*e.g.* Branscomb, Rawlinson, Nineham).

Hooker's historical reconstructions occasionally land her in improbable impasses – the Last Supper was probably not a Passover meal but Mark has done his best to convince us that it was. And in light of the many newer critical tools for studying the gospels, it is a bit disappointing that she has utilized almost none of them, particularly literary-critical and sociological analyses. Yet overall, she has probably done about all that the scope of the Black series could permit. She alludes to having begun writing for a different series, and one realizes that 20 years of study have barely begun to see the light of day in this handbook-size volume. We can only hope that she anticipates a more extensive outlet for the wealth of exegetical insights she has accumulated.

Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice

Andrew Cornes

London: Hodder & Stoughton/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, 528 pp., pb.

Advice on the pastorally delicate issues relating to divorce and remarriage is abundant these days, and conservative evangelicals have forged no consensus on the theological principles which should guide that advice. Some seem too quick to support both divorce and remarriage for a variety of reasons that go substantially beyond the relevant biblical texts; others interpret those texts with such strictness that their suggestions seem pastorally unworkable. No-one will accuse Cornes, vicar of All Saints, Crowborough, and former associate of John Stott's in London, of the former extreme, and Cornes himself has tried to guard against charges of the latter by devoting a full half of his work to principles for pastoral implementation. Whether he has successfully guarded against such a charge, however, remains questionable.

In Part One, Cornes surveys the biblical texts and principles which he believes should guide a theology of divorce and remarriage. While adopting the traditional Erasmian and Protestant views on when divorce is permissible (in cases of adultery or desertion by an unbeliever) and even allowing some latitude for analogous circumstances not considered by the biblical authors, Cornes then sides with the early Church Fathers (and recent influential writers like G. Wenham and W. Heth) in prohibiting remarriage under any circumstances after a divorce. Part Two offers suggestions for mitigating the harshness of this judgment in church life; numerous helpful comments are organized under the headings of educating, caring, reconciling and bearing witness.

It is doubtful, however, if the biblical data can sustain Cornes' stricter views. David Atkinson's *To Have and To Hold* (London: Collins, 1979) is more convincing in arguing against the 'indissolubilist' position which forces Cornes to assume, for example, that all remarriages after divorce are permanently adulterous. Grammatical considerations of Matthew 19:9-12 and 1 Corinthians 7:15, 39 make Cornes' conclusions dubious as well. It is a pity that Craig Keener's well-reasoned and heavily documented . . . *And Marries Another* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991) was apparently not available to Cornes during the production of his manuscript. Drawing on a wealth of primary Graeco-Roman and Jewish sources, Keener's work successfully defends the Erasmian view on remarriage (it *is* permissible in cases of permissible divorce).

If Cornes' views help salvage or reconcile marriages which otherwise would be legally ended, we can be grateful for his hardline though pastorally sensitive approach. But even in maritally conservative British Christian circles (at least *vis-à-vis* the US!), influential evangelical pastors have declared his views to be pastorally unworkable. To the extent that Cornes scares people away from Christianity by his excessive conservatism, God's reign is unnecessarily hindered. We can only hope the latter scenario will prove less common than the former.

Jesus and the Last Days: The Interpretation of the Olivet Discourse

George R. Beasley-Murray

Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993, 518 pp., $29.95.

Dr G.R. Beasley-Murray, longtime principal of Spurgeon's College and Professor of New Testament at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is one of this past generation's 'greats' among evangelical biblical scholars. His *Jesus and the Future* and *A Commentary on Mark 13* have stood the test of time for a half-century as standards in the study of synoptic eschatology. Now, in his retirement, Dr Beasley-Murray has provided scholars and students alike with the painstaking service of updating his material in the light of dozens of specialized studies impinging on Mark 13 which have come out in the last 40-odd years.

This work reproduces four chapters – on the presuppositions and the development of the Little Apocalypse theory, on other theories on the origin of this 'sermon', and on attempts to vindicate the eschatological discourse – relatively unchanged from his earlier study. A huge chapter, occupying nearly 40% of the whole volume, surveys contributions since the rise of redaction criticism, *i.e.*, mostly since his earlier two books. The final two chapters reflect Beasley-Murray's thorough rewriting of 'a fresh approach to the discourse of Mark 13' and 'a commentary' on that same chapter.

The care with which Beasley-Murray surveys and the graciousness with which he critiques virtually every significant American, British and German contribution to the scholarly study of this vexed discourse offers an exemplary model for all younger scholars. His conclusions clearly resemble the original Beasley-Murray: the substance of the discourse is authentic, despite numerous touches attributable to Markan redaction; verses 5-23 reflect events fulfilled in the first generation of Christianity, culminating in the destruction of the temple in AD 70; verses 24-27 refer to Jesus' parousia to earth (*contra, e.g.*, R.T. France) which Jesus (and Mark) believed would come soon on the heels of the abomination of desolation wrought in 70, but without specifying the precise time, which no-one, not even the Son, can know. But Beasley-Murray is not adverse to admitting where he has changed his mind – *e.g.*, in interpreting verse 32 in the light of verse 30, instead of vice versa, and in other minor matters.

Overall this is vintage Beasley-Murray, which means that it is vintage, paradigmatic, meticulous scholarship, for which we owe this giant of the second half of the 20th century our inestimable thanks. Even more significantly, it is probably the correct interpretation at least of the meaning, if not always of the tradition-history, of Mark 13.

Craig Blomberg

Sociology through the Eyes of Faith

David A. Fraser and Tony Campolo

Leicester: IVP, 1992, xx + 316 pp., £8.95.

Another volume in a series which provides complementary texts for Christians beginning to study particular disciplines, this work also has the value of effectively challenging assumptions in the field: *e.g.* that Christians had little to do with its origins and development, that science erodes faith, that social sciences are more ideologically controlled than natural sciences, and that social sciences operate in a value-free world. The authors provide a tour of sociology, including its origins, its major thinkers and the premises and methods with which it functions. The second half of the book considers NT evidence of key words and their related concepts. This develops into several biblical models for dealing with society, a consideration of Anabaptist, Lutheran, and especially Reformed approaches to society, and an appreciation of the complexities in relating Christianity and sociology, first through a number of possible models and then through the lives of contemporary sociologists. Although the latter part of the book will be of most interest to theologians, the entire volume is a useful introduction (and at times, a critique) to a discipline which plays an increasingly significant role in biblical and theological studies.

Richard S. Hess, Glasgow

SELECTED BOOKS RECEIVED

R. Alan Day
1993, *Lordship. What Does It Mean?* Nashville: Broadman.

Roy Clements
1994, *Masterplan. How God Makes Sense of Our World.* Leicester: IVP.

Holman Bible Handbook
1994, Holman Bible Publishers.

John F. MacArthur
1994, *Ashamed of the Gospel. When the Church Becomes like the World.* Nottingham: Crossway.

Donald A. Carson
1994, *Holy Sonnets of the Twentieth Century.* Nottingham: Crossway; Grand Rapids: Baker.

Richard D. Land and Louis A. Moore (eds.)
1992, *The Earth Is the Lord's. Christians and the Environment.* Nashville: Broadman.

Donald L. Hamilton
1992, *Homiletical Handbook.* Nashville: Broadman.

Bruce L. Malina
1993, *The New Testament World. Insights from Cultural Anthropology.* Revised edition. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox.

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Rodney Clapp
1993, *Families at the Crossroads. Beyond Traditional & Modern Options.* Leicester: IVP.

Robert H. Stein
1994, *Playing by the Rules. A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible.* Grand Rapids: Baker.

Alister McGrath
1994, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity.* London: Hodder & Stoughton, vii + 195 pp., paperback, £7.99. ISBN 0-340-60809-9.

J.L. Houlden
1991, *Bible and Belief,* London: SPCK.
1992, *Jesus, A Question of Identity,* London: SPCK.

J. Wenham
1993, *Christ and the Bible* (3rd edn.), Guildford:Eagle.

BOOK REVIEWS

'built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone'
(Ephesians 2:20)

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