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The Bible and Homosexuality

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Preamble

The role of the Bible in addressing the modern question of the place of the homosexual in the church is complex. The nature of a biblical perspective will invariably be affected by the questions posed of the Bible, by the particular hermeneutic employed, and by the unavoidable perspective which every student (or scholar) brings to his or her reading of the Bible. In writing this essay, I hope to ask some of the right questions and to be fair to the views of others concerning this important issue which is pressing hard on the church and on the consciences of Christian people in various parts of the world.

Clarifications

First, the term 'homosexuality' (and also the term 'homosexual') will be avoided in the biblical portion of this essay in preference for a more awkward cluster of words like 'homosexual relations'. This odd change in terminology is necessary because, as P.D.M. Turner notes, the term 'homosexuality' does not match well with the way in which the Bible itself addresses the issue.¹ Turner's point is that 'homosexuality' can refer to a condition or inclination apart from the acting-out of sexual relations, whereas the Bible does not recognize this distinction but normally speaks rather in terms of actual same-sex sexual relations.²

Second, in view of the danger to which the church has often succumbed, that of showing insensitivity towards chaste persons of homosexual orientation,³ it is important to clarify that the issue for the Christian is *not* whether persons with homosexual orientation should be welcomed into the fellowship of the church – let us never forget that Christ died for all – but whether sexual relations between homosexuals are ever appropriate and, if so, on what terms. Because conduct and not orientation is the real issue, the purpose of this essay is to ask whether the Bible considers homosexual relations to be sinful. If the answer suggested by biblical reflection is 'yes', even when the case of covenanted Christians of homosexual orientation is considered, then the homosexual person accepted by God in Christ could no more engage in this activity than any other faithful Christian could in other forms of sin. The perspective of the Bible – indisputably authoritative in matters of Christian faith and practice – is thus crucial; it plays a primary role in determining the context and terms within which Christ is calling the church to minister faithfully to persons of homosexual orientation.

Because the Bible nowhere directly answers the question concerning the modern phenomenon of a person with homosexual orientation seeking to be involved in a covenanted relationship, we must first ask what the Bible says in response to questions raised about homosexual relations in ancient times, and then we must ask how what the Bible says may be applied to the modern situation. We begin, however, with a brief consideration of the background against which these questions must be raised, the general tenor of Scripture as a whole.

The general tenor of Scripture

The issue of homosexual relations and the Bible cannot simply be addressed with reference to the half-dozen or so passages that have at least traditionally been understood as condemning homosexual intercourse; otherwise, we might be guilty of 'proof

texting'. Rather, we must ask: In which direction *on the whole* do the biblical winds blow with respect to appropriate sexual expression between persons? By virtually any notion of the 'literal sense' of the Bible, these winds blow in the direction of heterosexual marriage, with affirmation being given to celibacy alone as an alternative. This is so from Genesis to Song of Songs to Revelation, through well over a millennium of Scripture writing and in both the OT and the NT. The rapidly evolving dominance of heterosexual relations within the context of a monogamous nuclear family is unmistakable; quite simply, heterosexual relations (or, in their place, celibacy) are the only options which appear to receive approval in the Bible. Thus, unlike the ministry of women or the notion of freedom from slavery, no biblical winds blow in the direction of same-sex relations that similarly invite re-evaluation of passages traditionally considered a problem for such a view. (It is nonetheless important to re-examine the traditional passages to see if they are indeed condemnatory of homosexual relations as has traditionally been thought, a point to which we shall return.)

The account of creation is a prime example of the predominant biblical affirmation of heterosexual marriage. In Genesis 1:27-28, humanity in the form of both male and female is created in the 'image of God'. In Genesis 2 the Lord creates woman, God's specially selected emotional and physical counterpart to the man, and the two – the 'iš and the 'iššā – become 'one flesh'. Within the canonical context of the preceding chapter, this 'wedding' is not just a union, but a re-union of humanity created in the image of God. Just as Genesis 1 ends with a declaration that the order of creation involving the creation of man and woman is 'very good', Genesis 2 ends with the climactic statement that the woman is the reason why a man leaves his own father and mother, to become 'one flesh' with his wife (Gn. 2:24).⁴ If the powerful affirmation of heterosexual relations as the carefully planned order of creation in these two introductory chapters of the Bible is not striking to the modern Christian reader, it certainly was to the writer(s) of the Holiness Code and to St Paul (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27); indeed, the doctrine of creation articulated in these early chapters of Genesis seems to be at the heart of the Bible's uniformly negative attitude towards same-sex sexual relations.

Some scholars have suggested that a few passages in Scripture constitute an important exception to the idea that heterosexual relations alone are appropriate in the Bible. For example, Tom Horner maintains that David and Jonathan and Naomi and Ruth respectively had possible homosexual relations, and he even goes so far as to suggest that Jesus and Paul had homosexual traits.⁵ Leaving aside the Christological issue that the suggested case of Christ would present, V.P. Furnish is almost certainly correct that 'our sources simply do not provide the data to support such ideas'.⁶ Similarly, the relative infrequency with which the Bible mentions homosexual relationships, and the possible silence of Jesus on the issue,⁷ do not suggest that these relationships were relatively unimportant to biblical writers or to Jesus, as is sometimes maintained.⁸ Rather, the phenomenon of relative silence probably reflects the fact that homosexual relations were not a major issue in the early church, most likely because it shared the perspective of Hellenistic Judaism that sexual relations of this kind were sinful. In sum, one searches the Bible in vain for the suggestion that homosexual relations were a viable option for the faithful.

With this general perspective in mind, we now turn to consider the passages which specifically make reference or allusion to homosexual sex. Our approach will be to survey a range of exegetical options (both traditional and revisionist), and to assess the feasibility of the various options offered.

Passages traditionally considered to condemn homosexual relationships

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis 19, Judges 19

These well-known stories recount incidents in which the male citizenry of a town (Sodom and Gibeah respectively) proposes to have intercourse with a male visitor (or, in Gn. 19, visitors).

D.S. Bailey's attempt to interpret the verb 'know' in Genesis 19:5 as meaning something other than sexual knowledge⁹ is untenable in light of verse 7, in which Lot's daughters are offered as an alternative to the men.¹⁰ Homosexual relations are clearly in view here and they are almost certainly construed negatively. The *type* of homosexual union negatively construed, however, is far from what is typical today (it is homosexual *gang rape*, which is no less abhorrent to most modern-day homosexuals than to heterosexuals), and the broader context which concerns a breach of Eastern hospitality is at least partly involved in the negative construal.¹¹

A few considerations from the broader context are also relevant. Because Genesis 19 has parallels with Genesis 6:1-4, which concerns 'unnatural' relations between angels and humans, it is probably important for the story that the sexual sins of Sodom also be understood as unnatural; they are, in fact, doubly so, since the sexual relations proposed are with visitors who are both men and angels. Moreover, as Gordon Wenham notes, just as the story of unnatural relations between angels and humans in Genesis 6 is followed by a judgment involving destruction (the flood), so too the unnatural relations proposed in Genesis 19 are followed by a parallel judgment involving destruction (the downpouring of fire and brimstone).¹² In sum, although set within a particularly abhorrent context, the homosexual nature of the relations proposed forms part of the basis upon which the judgment is made that the people of Sodom were 'wicked, great sinners before the Lord' (Gn. 13:13), and thus deserving of destruction.

As an important corrective to those who might judge the sin of Sodom to be homosexual relations alone, Bailey and others rightly point out that the Bible on the whole interprets the sin of Sodom very broadly to include things other than homosexual intercourse, such as pride and insensitivity to the poor (Ezk. 16:49-50; cf. Is. 3:9). This does not mean, however, that the sexual dimension (*i.e.* involving unnatural relations) is ignored in the biblical witness; important here is Jude 7, which refers to Sodom's indulgence in 'unnatural lusts', and 2 Peter 2:6 which mentions Lot's oppression by the 'sensual conduct of unprincipled men'.¹³ Of course, only at a later period does Sodom become a byword specifically for homosexual (or bestial) relations.

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

As Wenham notes, because Leviticus 18:22 uses the very general term *zākir*, 'male', the passage clearly prohibits every kind of male-male intercourse (were the word *na'ar*, 'youth', used instead, presumably only pederasty would be condemned).¹⁴ These homosexual relations are further described by the very strong word *tō'ebā*, 'abomination'.¹⁵ In Leviticus 20:13 the penalty for offenders is death, putting the offence on a par with adultery (20:10) or the worst cases of incest (20:11, 12).¹⁶ Moreover, three factors make it clear that the sexual relationship here condemned involved mutual consent between two males: (1) both parties are punished; (2) the verb used is simply 'lie' (as opposed to, say, 'seize and lie' which would imply rape); and (3) the further comment is made, 'their blood be upon their own heads', which suggests an awareness of the action and its consequences.¹⁷ Thus, unlike Egypt where only pederasty was condemned or Mesopotamia where apparently only forcible homosexual relations were forbidden, OT law appears to forbid *all forms* of homosexual relations.¹⁸ Wenham's explanation is probably correct that 'it therefore seems most likely that Israel's repudiation of homosexual intercourse arises out of its doctrine of creation'.¹⁹

Some scholars cast these passages from Leviticus in a very different light, however. For example, it is sometimes maintained that the context for the homosexuality referred to in Leviticus is cultic prostitution within a pagan Canaanite shrine

and that the biblical writer is thus concerned more with idolatry than with homosexuality.²⁰ In support of this view it is sometimes claimed that the term *tō'ebā*, 'abomination', is a highly specific word that points toward a religious concern for cultic purity in relation to the other nations and their gods.²¹ What is in view, so the argument goes, is cultic prostitution in which the participants attempt to procure fertility and fecundity by sympathetic magic through ritual sex acts, as is thought to have taken place in Canaanite culture. In short, the problem is not homosexual relations but their pagan, often idolatrous context(s).²² Which of these perspectives is correct?

The weight of evidence at present seems clearly to favour the former construal. Recent OT scholarship questions seriously the extent to which the traditional model for understanding cultic prostitution was in evidence at all either in Canaan or in Israel.²³ Moreover, it is clear from the use of the term 'abomination' elsewhere in the Bible and in other literature that an abomination could refer generally to various things abhorrent to God and that it could even refer to practices of the Gentiles, in which case the word cannot be limited to a specific concern within Hebrew religion for purity in relation to other nations.²⁴ Thus, given the uncertainties concerning this narrower understanding of the context and the clear generality of the condemnation of men lying with men, the view of Wenham that all forms of homosexual relations are condemned seems preferable.

A problem still possibly remains with these passages, namely their applicability to a setting in the NT and beyond to our own day. For example, on what grounds should the law concerning homosexuality be upheld and the law concerning intercourse with a woman during menstruation, mentioned in the same context, be dismissed?²⁵ Though alien to the OT itself and difficult to sustain, the theological distinction between moral laws which are binding and ceremonial, ritual, and civil laws which are not, has long been upheld in Christian tradition (note for example Article 7 of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion).²⁶ The problem in the present case is nonetheless mitigated significantly by the fact that the OT attitude to homosexuality is picked up and carried into the NT, which clearly has binding authority for Christians.²⁷ Certainly, early Christian writers considered the levitical laws concerning homosexual intercourse to be relevant to the issue of sexual behaviour in their own day, a point denied by Boswell but convincingly reaffirmed by Wright.²⁸

Summary

To summarize, the attitude towards male homosexual relations in the OT is uniformly negative. Contrary to some current thinking, the relevant passages in Leviticus do not appear to condemn homosexual relations for their associations with prostitution within the context of an idolatrous heathen cult.²⁹ Thus, unlike other societies in the Ancient Near East, this negative construal within Hebrew society seems to apply to all forms of homosexual intercourse. Homosexual sex between men was termed an 'abomination' (something abhorrent to God), for which the prescribed legal penalty was so severe as to function as a strong deterrent. The explanation for this apparently blanket condemnation of homosexual unions is almost certainly to be found in the Hebrew understanding of creation, according to which the divinely ordained context for human sexuality takes place between a man and his wife. Together, the male and the female reflect the image of God, and their union, alone deemed natural in the created order, ensures procreation and the formation of a nuclear family.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Romans 1:26-27

Romans 1:26-27 is clearly the most important passage on homosexual intercourse in the NT. The broad context is summarized succinctly by Robin Scroggs: 'Since the entire world, both Jew and Gentile, is guilty of sin, grace (salvation) is entirely God's gift and extends equally to Jew and Gentile.'³⁰

The more immediate context is Paul's story of how the world came to be guilty of sin; it is Paul's 'story of the universal fall'.³¹ Paul argues that humanity committed the primal sin of rebellion against God by failing to acknowledge God as creator

and instead turned to idolatry, the worship of created things. As a consequence or punishment for the sin of abandoning the worship of God in favour of the worship of things in nature, 'God handed them [humanity] over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves . . .' (Rom. 1:24-25).

How do the depravities in verses 24-31, including specific mention of homosexual relations in verses 26-27, contribute to Paul's argument? According to the exhaustive treatment of Hays, the depravities function in two ways: (a) 'First of all, when the text is read with literal precision, these various forms of "base mind" and "improper conduct" are seen to be *manifestations* (not provocations) of the wrath of God, punishments inflicted upon rebellious humanity . . . rather like the plagues visited upon the Egyptians in Exodus'; and (b) 'At the same time, the heaping-up of depravities also serves to warrant Paul's evaluation of humanity as deeply implicated in "ungodliness and wickedness" (1:18b)'.³² The depravities point to the conclusion that 'the refusal to acknowledge God as creator ends in blind distortion of the creation'.³³

It is probably safe to say that no NT scholar denies that the passage presents homosexual relations as an obvious sinful distortion of God's original intention for creation.³⁴ Moreover, a majority of these scholars maintain that the reference to homosexual relations in Romans 1:26-27 is not to homosexual cultic prostitution, but rather to homosexual (including lesbian) sex in general; as even Boswell admits at one point, 'it is clear that the sexual behavior itself is objectionable to Paul, not merely its [cultic] associations'.³⁵ However, as Hays has conclusively demonstrated in his lengthy rebuttal of the late Yale historian, Boswell is far from correct in going on to conclude, (a) that Paul's words are not applicable to persons of homosexual orientation (Boswell, McNeill, and others maintain that Paul refers to heterosexual people unnaturally 'exchanging' heterosexual³⁶ for homosexual unions), and (b) that 'contrary to nature' means not immoral but merely 'unexpected, unusual, or different from what would occur in the normal order of things'.³⁷ Contrary to Boswell, the 'exchange', for Paul, is between the natural course of things such as worshipping God instead of idols, and heterosexual union instead of homosexual union, and *para physin* means not simply 'unusual', but 'contrary to nature'. Hays puts Paul's concept bluntly: 'those who indulge in sexual practices *para physin* are defying the creator and demonstrating their own alienation from him'.³⁹

Nevertheless, in much contemporary reflection upon Romans 1, scholars differ about the abiding hermeneutical significance of Paul's argument that homosexual acts are 'contrary to nature'. For example, because Paul's argument is not original, but is in fact closely paralleled in the Graeco-Roman philosophers and in literary texts, Furnish seems to imply that Paul's assumption that homosexual relations are 'contrary to nature' is not of abiding significance but reflects simply the common (Stoic) wisdom of the day which is subject to reinterpretation in our own day.³⁹ However, although Furnish is right that Paul's teaching here has clear parallels, Furnish does not emphasize sufficiently well an important aspect of the discussion, namely that Hellenistic Jewish writers such as Philo and Josephus – and, significantly, Paul – recognized a parallel between the secular Hellenistic notion that what was 'unnatural' was wrong and the OT teaching of the Law of Moses in which all forms of intercourse between males were 'unnatural' because they were contrary to the order of the world as designed by God the creator (see the discussion of Lev. 20:13; 18:22 above). Significantly then, only when the reference to God as creator and the clear allusions to the creation story in Genesis 1-3 are ignored or significantly downplayed (as in the works of William Countryman, Scroggs and Furnish for example)⁴⁰ can Paul's clear teaching that homosexual union is 'unnatural' plausibly be regarded as culturally conditioned and thus of very limited (or no) relevance for the modern issue of homosexual relations and the church.

A few additional points about Romans 1 ought to be made in order to avoid misunderstanding Paul. None of what Paul states in this passage offers support of any kind for singling out homosexual intercourse as if this alone constituted a perversion of God's natural order. Nor is Paul's primary intention here to offer Christians instruction on ethical matters (although his teaching has ethical implications). Moreover, Paul's discussion of homosexual intercourse, though poignant and important,

plays a fairly modest role as illustrating one of the vices that is both the consequence and evidence of humanity's rebellion against God. In light of Romans 2:1, from which it is clear that all of humankind stands without excuse before God, it would be inappropriately self-righteous for anyone to condemn homosexual relations as if these relations were not evidence of a sinful rebellion in which all persons participate. To miss this would be to miss Paul's point entirely.

1 Corinthians 6:9

In this passage, Paul considers taking another person to court to be appropriate only for 'the unrighteous' (*i.e.* unbelievers), which the Corinthian Christians once were but no longer are. To highlight the inconsistency of their present behaviour and to remind them that unbelievers have no share in God's kingdom, Paul recalls the unbelieving past of the Corinthians, rooted in the paganism of being, among other things, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*.⁴¹ Wrongly translated together in the RSV as 'homosexuals', how should these words be translated? The word *malakos* means literally 'soft' but is used here substantively in the sense of 'a male performing the female role in homosexual relations'.⁴²

There is more confusion concerning the meaning of *arsenokoitēs* than in the case of *malakos*. Scroggs states that the first word-element, *arsen*, means 'men', and the second, *koitai*, means 'bed', so 'marriage-bed', then sexual intercourse in general.⁴³ He suggests that the second component likely has a verbal force and that the first is an objective noun.⁴⁴ He translates *arsenokoitēs* as 'lying (with) a male', or 'one who lies with a male', translations which Turner similarly advocates.⁴⁵ According to Boswell, however, the first word-element is subjective (*i.e.* 'male' describes the gender of the one engaged in the sexual activity and not the object of it), and the second word-element is a coarse term for 'a person who, by insertion, takes the "active" role in intercourse'.⁴⁶ In other words, according to Boswell, in using the term *arsenokoitēs*, Paul is not referring to a "'homosexual" or even a "sodomite"' but to 'male sexual agents, *i.e.*, active male prostitutes'.⁴⁷

Boswell's view that *arsenokoitēs* refers to a male prostitute has been convincingly refuted by Wright who demonstrates that the term means 'a man who lies (with a man)'.⁴⁸ In fact, according to Wright and others (Turner, for example, and to a certain extent Scroggs as well), the real inspiration for *arsenokoitai* appears to come directly from the LXX version of the laws concerning homosexual expression in Leviticus 18 and 20 in which the words *arsēn* and *koitē* both occur.⁴⁹ Turner draws the following conclusions:

Probably, then, the compound, whether chosen or coined in I Cor., is intended to evoke the Holiness Code with its emphasis on male penetration of the male. Actually as a Biblical Hellenist and Hebraist I should put it more strongly; in the absence of earlier attestation, a deliberate, conscious back-reference by the Apostle is as certain as philology can make it. (He may or may not have known that he was dropping into 'translationese'.) Fascinatingly, by avoiding the available *paiderastēs*, he [Paul] sees to it that 'loving, consensual, adult relations' are fully covered.⁵⁰

Significantly, then, *arsenokoitai* appears to be a Pauline invention, a direct allusion in the NT to the 'all-inclusive' condemnation of homosexual relations found in the laws of Leviticus.

As with the passages concerning homosexual relations in Leviticus, it has been argued that Paul's condemnation of homosexual relations both here and in 1 Timothy 1:10 refers only to pagan ritual practice. In response to this, it must be noted that there is nothing in the context that requires (or even strongly suggests) so specific an application. Certainly the background in the Greek text of Leviticus for *arsenokoitai* offers no support for this. Moreover, based on his judgment that *pornoi* must mean 'at least male prostitutes' in 1 Timothy 1:10 and 1 Corinthians 6:9, Turner states:

The clinching refutation of the argument that Paul's condemnation of both kinds of male homosexual act[s]⁵¹ refers only to heathen ritual practice is that, in both N.T. passages, precisely the 'prostitute-inclusive' word⁵² is listed separately, as we have seen. As for the idea that the Fathers condemned only the identical heathen cult-prostitution, as there were no other people who performed such acts, there is no evidence for it. Even if there was evidence, the Greek Fathers would still have called the activity itself sinful.⁵³

The broader context of 1 Corinthians 6:9 offers two important additional points of relevance to the issue of homosexual relations. First, through Christ's justification and washing, the lifestyles of unbelief cited earlier in the passage must no longer characterize the Christian (v. 11). Second, Paul goes on to argue that a Christian's body, now part of Christ's own body and a temple of the indwelling Holy Spirit, should not be united with a prostitute, since intercourse involves becoming 'one flesh' with the other person. My point is that there is an operating principle here that is relevant to homosexual relations as well as to inappropriate heterosexual relations: since part of the body of Christ himself is united with another in a Christian's sexual union, that union must be holy, which homosexual intercourse evidently is not.

To summarize the discussion of 1 Corinthians 6:9: *malakos*, 'catamite', refers to the man who plays the passive (female) role in homosexual intercourse, and *arsenokoitēs*, 'sodomite', which invokes the language of the laws against homosexual relations in the LXX of Leviticus, refers to a man who lies with another man. By referring to the passive role as well as to the more general *arsenokoitēs*, by referring earlier to *pornoi* which likely already covered the case of male prostitution, and by not using more confining terms such as the term for pederasty (*paiderastēs*), Paul seems to be offering a comprehensive (*i.e.* non-context-specific) condemnation of homosexual intercourse. Moreover there is nothing to suggest that Paul's condemnation of homosexual relations is based on cultic or ritual connections with these relations. The broader context helps to make it clear that relations of this kind are incompatible with membership in the body of Christ.

1 Timothy 1:10

In 1 Timothy 1:10, *arsenokoitēs* appears again, this time in a list that describes the kind of people for whom the law is useful in offering correction. The logic is that the law addresses issues of relevance primarily for the sinner, an example being the murderer who is thus told, 'thou shalt not commit murder', *etc.*

Scroggs suggests that groups of words in this list of vices belong together and that the words *pornos*, *arsenokoitēs* and *andrapodistēs* seem to be a grouping. When seen in relation to each other, the best translation, according to Scroggs, is 'male prostitutes, males who lie [with them], and slave dealers [who procure them]'.⁵⁴ On this view, then, we have the same situation here as in 1 Corinthians 6:9 where another word or series of words affects the meaning of the more general term *arsenokoitēs* such that it becomes linked specifically with homosexual prostitution.

To evaluate: at least some of the words that describe similar sorts of sins are indeed grouped together in this list, but on what basis? Scroggs argues that the law of verse 8 is possibly civil and that the words in verses 9-10 are grouped together according to the categories of crimes against civil government ('lawless', 'rebellious'); then against religious law ('impious', 'sinner', 'unholy', 'profane'); then against various forms of murder ('patricide', 'matricide', 'murder'), *etc.* But commentators more often argue that the law in verse 8 is the law of Moses, and that at least the words in the latter part of the list – including those relevant to our discussion – are grouped in relation to the Ten Commandments.⁵⁵ On this understanding, the list beginning with 'patricide' and 'matricide' refers to extreme violations against the fifth commandment (to honour one's parents); 'murder' applies to the sixth commandment; 'fornicators'⁵⁶ and 'sodomites' refers to the seventh commandment concerning adultery; 'kidnappers' refers to the eighth commandment concerning stealing,⁵⁷ and 'liars' and 'perjurers' refers to the ninth commandment concerning bearing false witness.

What are the implications of this for the meaning of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Timothy 1:10? Given the meaning of the word as applicable to homosexual relations in general (and not male prostitution in particular, as argued earlier), its occurrence together with the general term *pornoi* (which quite possibly already covers the case of male prostitution), and its function together with *pornoi* as illustrative of breaches of the seventh commandment, *arsenokoitai* appears again not to be linked in its context to homosexual prostitution or pederasty, but to homosexual relations in general. For these and other reasons,⁵⁸ the view of Scroggs that the writer likely refers to something like a group of co-conspirators in a same-sex ring is clearly less likely than the view that the words reflect their more natural

meanings of 'fornicators', 'men who lie with men', and 'slave dealers' respectively.

The applicability of the biblical witness

Up to this point, we have been concerned with what the Bible states concerning homosexual relations. It remains to be asked: how does what the Bible says apply in our own day? As noted earlier, the question is particularly important since the Bible nowhere deals directly with the issue of a Christian of homosexual orientation seeking to be united sexually in a covenant relationship with a partner of the same sex.

Evidence adduced in this paper suggests that one must differ with those who argue that there is little or no impediment in the way of condoning covenanted homosexual Christian unions on the ground that the Bible condemns only exploitative or idolatrous forms of homosexual relations such as pederasty or male cultic prostitution. There is no clear evidence for this view. Homosexual intercourse *itself* is condemned in the OT primarily on the basis of the doctrine of creation and this view is upheld in the NT within the theologically substantive discussion of what is 'contrary to nature' in Romans 1. Most likely, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 similarly refer to homosexual relations in general (*i.e.* they do not allude only to a specific type of homosexual relationship such as homosexual prostitution or pederasty).⁵⁹

How does this apply to the modern situation involving homosexual relations between committed partners? Since the condemnation of homosexual relations in the Bible can nowhere necessarily be identified with or limited to the particularly heinous moral or ritual contexts in which these relations allegedly occurred, the fact that the modern-day context is different (*i.e.* non-exploitative, non-ritualistic, *etc.*) is not directly relevant, since the Bible seems to condemn the act of homosexual intercourse *itself* as inherently sinful.

The issue of homosexual relations within the modern church may be addressed further in relation to the church's traditional forms of authority: Scripture, tradition, reason and (according to some) experience.⁶⁰ Concerning Scripture, an avenue of recourse yet unexplored in this paper is the invocation of general principles (such as 'all our actions should be guided by love'), or analogy (such as 'just as the early church accepted Gentiles, so we should accept [sexually active] homosexuals').⁶¹ Those who argue along these lines are often at odds with those who invoke specific biblical laws (Lev. 18:22; 20:13) or who appeal to Paul's authoritative and unambiguous depiction of the human condition in Romans 1. In this regard, Hays' response is apt: 'Whatever one may decide about the weight of the appeal to the love-principle . . . the fact remains that no biblical text directly contradicts the authority of Paul's teaching on this matter.'⁶² It could of course be added that other passages seem in fact to support it, and that providing a sanctioned context in which an inherently sinful act may be given free rein cannot ultimately be considered an act of love.

Concerning tradition, there can be no question that the ethical instruction of the Christian church throughout its history has been consistently opposed to homosexual intercourse.

Concerning reason, as Hays observes, statistical and scientific data describe what is, but cannot alone make moral judgments about what ought to be.⁶³ Thus for example, were studies to show that sexual preference is not a matter of choice, as Paul probably thought, but a matter of orientation, Paul could theoretically reply to the effect that this simply supports his understanding that all of humanity is under the 'power of sin'. (To Paul, 'sin' is so fundamental to the human condition that it leads one to involuntary acts of disobedience for which one still remains culpable.⁶⁴) Hays elaborates as follows: 'The gulf is wide between Paul's viewpoint and the modern habit of assigning culpability only for actions assumed to be under free control of the agent. . . . Scientific investigations cannot provide a refutation of Paul's statements; nevertheless it is clear that "reason", in contrast to Scripture and tradition, does provide arguments that may be *counterposed* to the authority of Paul's judgment.'⁶⁵

Finally, concerning experience, certainly this is the most subjective (and debated) category from which to draw authoritative conclusions.⁶⁶ Whose experience counts above that of another and how may this experience be assessed? When individuals claim to be in a supportive homosexual relationship

in which the grace of God is experienced, how is this to be measured in the light of Scripture? Was Paul wrong? Has the creator suddenly ordained a new order by which such experiences are now right and valid? Could not the opinion of a person who claims to be in a fulfilling homosexual union not simply be a manifestation of humanity's self-deception and confusion as Paul describes it in Romans 1? How could one determine whether or not this is so without reference to a norm such as Scripture? Even if one's 'story' could be assessed in such a way that it functioned authoritatively for the church, would this story stand alongside or eclipse the old scriptural norm? And if Scripture can be eclipsed, on what basis will the church evaluate other people's experiences in the future?⁶⁷

The weight of the fourfold bases for authority in relation to the issue of homosexual relations has been summarized cogently by Hays:

Arguments in favor of acceptance of homosexual relations find their strongest warrants in empirical investigations and in contemporary experience. Those who defend the morality of homosexual relationships within the church may do so only by conferring upon these warrants an authority greater than the direct authority of Scripture and tradition, at least with respect to this question.⁶⁸

Conclusion

So what might a biblical strategy for ministering to homosexual persons look like? This takes us to yet another question which is worthy of a full discussion on its own. Suffice it to note briefly that a biblically sensitive strategy would clearly take us along the lines of offering love, acceptance, and understanding, and it would include a theology of the shared humanity and fallenness of us all. It would condemn any self-righteous attitude that would suggest that a person should be subject to discrimination or isolation from the church purely on the basis of homosexual orientation. It would include a message in love that, contrary to society's thinking, sexual expression is not essential to human fulfillment, as the example of Jesus Christ and countless faithful single Christians (many of them homosexuals) has shown. It would offer openly and without prejudice or judgment the message of the divine forgiveness of sins for all. It would seek to reclaim for the church a more credible, workable and dignified social context for living a meaningful and fulfilling single life. It would call upon sexually involved homosexuals who wish to join the fellowship of the church to join with other Christians in turning away from sin in their pilgrimage in faith. It would seek to hold in balance unprejudiced compassion, on the one hand, with the recognition of the stark reality of sin on the other hand – something our Lord did when he said to the woman caught in adultery, 'Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more' (Jn. 8:11). The calling for the church is to live up to the high calling of its Lord by holding these two perspectives in balance, for where there is no fallenness, there is no need of compassion, and where there is no compassion there is no escape from fallenness.

⁶⁷P.D.M. Turner, 'Biblical texts relevant to homosexual orientation and practice: some notes on philology and interpretation', unpublished MS, p. 8 n. 1. An apparent point of intersection between homosexuality as an inclination or condition and a biblical descriptive terminology appears in the word 'homosexual' in the RSV at 1 Corinthians 6:9, but this translation is misleading. (The New RSV is preferable: 'male prostitutes, sodomites'.)

⁶⁸As Turner notes (*ibid.*), only in Rom. 1 does one find a description of a state of mind associated with homosexual practice, but the practice itself is still mentioned along with this state of mind. Moreover, the state of mind is referred to only in general terms and in conjunction with various other 'disordered desires' that lie at the root of outward vices.

Turner notes two additional reasons for avoiding the terms 'homosexual/homosexuality' in contemporary discussions. First, 'it is unclear whether it connotes (a) the state of mind or emotion, (b) the conduct, whether or not expressing (a), or (c) the condition accompanied by expression'. Turner adds: 'Moreover, the ambiguity now extends to "orientation": is protection being sought for the right to act it out in all situations?' And second, in his opinion, 'in God's providence Scripture reflects a reality of which we are now more aware, namely that the condition [of homosexuality] is not always chosen and that some people have no area of freedom (*except in action*) for which they can be held responsible' (*ibid.*, emphasis mine).

⁶⁹Note for example the following excerpt from the Statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England, December 1991: 'The story of the Church's attitude to homosexuals has too often been

one of prejudice, ignorance and oppression. All of us need to acknowledge that, and to repent for any part we may have had in it' (*Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement by the House of Bishops*, London: Church House Publishing, 1991, p. 48). In illustration of the point made in the previous footnote, notice, however, the confusing ambiguity that arises from the use of the term 'homosexual'.

⁷⁰This give-away line appears to provide the *raison d'être* for the so-called second creation account.

⁷¹Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Bible Times* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978).

⁷²Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul: Selected Issues* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), p. 81. Even if there were substance to the claims of Horner, the alleged biblical allusion to homosexual traits and/or same-sex sex would have to be prescribed or set forth in a positive exemplary light for it to be significant for Christian ethical reflection today.

⁷³Although there is no reference in the gospels to Jesus having spoken specifically about homosexual relations, Turner ('Biblical texts relevant to homosexual orientation', p. 4) makes an interesting case on the basis of the meaning of *porneia* in the Greek Bible, that homosexual relations would likely have been included in the use of this word by Jesus according to Mt. 5:32 and 19:9. Turner defines biblical *porneia* as coming to mean 'all irregular genital contact except adultery and in some contexts [it] seems to be a portmanteau for adultery too. Mt. v and xix are cases in point'. He adds, 'It is thus not tenable that the Gospel record shows Jesus making no reference to homosexual acts' (*ibid.*). In any case, the gospels portray Jesus affirming the traditional view of heterosexual marriage as the divinely ordained order for humanity (see for example Mt. 19:4-6; Mk. 10:6-9).

⁷⁴Even in scholarly literature, one is sometimes led to infer that it would be of no great significance if homosexual behaviour was condoned by the modern church since homosexual relationships are mentioned relatively infrequently in biblical literature. Although the proponents of this logic would hardly be likely to do so, the same logic could be applied to cases such as bestiality or child sacrifice.

⁷⁵D. S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955). Bailey argues that the men of Sodom were not wanting intercourse with Lot's guests, but simply credentials by which to judge that the strangers posed no threat to the town.

⁷⁶Cf. also Jdg. 19:25.

⁷⁷The following comment of Turner ('Biblical texts relevant to homosexual orientation', p. 1), made with reference even to those who acknowledge the sexual connotation of the Hebrew word 'know', is poignant: 'Some . . . want to make the main moral point the threat of a breach of hospitality. This makes a weak argument. Why should homosexual gang-rape have violated hospitality, unless it were inhospitable?'

⁷⁸Gordon Wenham, 'The Old Testament attitude to homosexuality', *Expository Times* 102 (1990-91), 361. Wenham states, 'It may also be noted that the motive for divine judgment is similar in both cases. The flood was sent because of the great wickedness of man demonstrated by the illicit union of women with supernatural beings, the "sons of God". In the case of Sodom another type of illicit sexual intercourse is at least contributory in showing it deserves its destruction' (emphasis mine).

⁷⁹The unnatural relations primarily in mind in Jude 7 might possibly be between the men of Sodom and angels (which Lot's visitors were, in addition to being men). It is interesting to note that the implications of this passage from Jude are sometimes downplayed by implying that this epistle is somehow less deserving of a place in the Christian canon than certain other epistles. For obvious reasons, this kind of argument should be allowed to carry very little weight.

⁸⁰Wenham, 'Old Testament attitude', 362.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 363.

⁸⁶Works which uphold this view include the following: John J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (Kansas City: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1976); Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*; and Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

⁸⁷See, for example, John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 100-102. It is unfortunate that so highly influential a book as this contains so many misleading lines of evidence. It is no exaggeration to say that many of the arguments rallied in support of Boswell's thesis are based upon misinterpretations of classical and other sources.

⁸⁸Even if Israel's negative attitude toward this practice were attributable in part to a xenophobia *vis-à-vis* the Canaanites, this alone cannot have been determinative, since Israel had no qualms about sharing many practices with the Canaanites, such as many forms of sacrifice (Wenham, 'Old Testament attitude', 362). Wenham states: 'Aversion to Canaanite custom no more explains Israel's attitude towards homosexuality than it does its preference for monotheism' (*ibid.*).

⁸⁹See for example Karl van der Toorn, 'Prostitution (Cultic)', *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 5 (1992), pp. 510-513; Elaine Adler Goodfriend, 'Prostitution (OT)', *ibid.*, pp. 507-509. A possible reference to male cultic prostitution

occurs in Dt. 23:17–18. Goodfriend (*ibid.*, p. 508) is nonetheless dubious, while van der Toorn (*ibid.*, p. 512) suggests that the prostitution was possibly cultic only in the sense that the money gained from prostitution was paid to the temple, in payment for a vow.

²¹See Richard B. Hays, 'Relations natural and unnatural: a response to John Boswell's exegesis of Romans 1', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1986), 212 n. 7.

²²Lev. 20:18. The law concerning menstruation is often cited as an example against the applicability of the law concerning homosexual intercourse. Given the fact that many of the principles lying behind OT law concerning sex are expressed in the early chapters in Genesis, it may be that the law about menstruation reflects a more general concern for pollution of the land as the result of the shedding of human blood, a phenomenon which in other contexts usually occurred as a result of violence, as in Gn. 4:10–11. This might help to explain why, as Sperling notes, menstruation is only one of two categories in which blood in itself is a source of contamination, the other category being unjustified homicide (S. David Sperling, 'Blood', *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 1 (1992), p. 762).

²³In illustration of the difficulty with applying this distinction meaningfully, as noted above, Lev. 18:22 and Lev. 20:13 cannot be limited to a law concerning ritual purity alone. For additional problems in so limiting these laws, see the *Statement by the House of Bishops*, p. 15.

²⁴See the discussion later in this paper of Rom. 1:26–27 and of the OT background to the meaning of *arsenokoitēs* in 1 Cor. 6:9.

²⁵David F. Wright, 'Homosexual or prostitutes? The meaning of *arsenokoitai* (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10)', *Vigilia Christianae* 38 (1984), 125–153.

²⁶Idolatry is mentioned in the same context as homosexual relations in Leviticus, but it does not follow from this that the relations condemned involved cultic prostitution in pagan cults. Rather, the OT quite commonly discusses moral-social vices in the same context as religious ones (see for example Ezk. 8–9).

²⁷Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), p. 110.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹Hays, 'Relations natural and unnatural', pp. 190–191 (emphasis his).

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 190.

³¹Hays observes (*ibid.*, p. 211), 'We must forthrightly recognize that in Romans 1 Paul portrays homosexual activity as a vivid and shameful sign of humanity's confusion and rebellion against God; then we must form our moral choices in light of that proposal.'

³²Boswell, *Christianity*, pp. 107–117.

³³As Hays notes ('Relations natural and unnatural', pp. 186, 187), Boswell must here assume the phenomenon of sexual 'orientation' which was not recognized until modern times (see further my introductory comments).

³⁴Cited in Hays, 'Relations natural and unnatural', p. 187.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 194.

³⁶Furnish, *Moral Teaching of Paul*, pp. 72–77.

³⁷William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); for the works of Scroggs and Furnish, see the references given above.

³⁸These words occur in a 'stock list' of vices which scholars suggest Paul possibly borrowed from Hellenistic Judaism. See further David Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), for elaboration and other examples of vice (and virtue) lists.

³⁹Turner, 'Biblical texts relevant to homosexual orientation', p. 4. Turner observes further that 'in such a context straight after the word *moikoi* no-one would have read it differently . . . "Catamites" is the right rendering'. Compare W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich and F.W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1952/University of Chicago, 1979), p. 489, s.v. *malakos* '2. of pers. soft, effeminate, esp. of catamites, men and boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually'. Scroggs (*New Testament and Homosexuality*, p. 106) concludes similarly that *malakos* likely refers here to 'the "call-boy", the youth who consciously imitated feminine styles and ways and who walked the thin line between passive homosexual activity for pleasure and that for pay'. Contrast Boswell (*Christianity*, pp. 339–341) who tries to argue that *malakos* 'refers to general moral weakness, with no specific connection to homosexuality' (*ibid.*, p. 341).

⁴⁰Scroggs, *New Testament and Homosexuality*, p. 106.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 106–107.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 107; compare Turner, 'Biblical texts relevant to homosexual orientation', pp. 5–6.

⁴³Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 342.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 345, 344.

⁴⁵Wright, 'Homosexuals or prostitutes', pp. 125–153.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 126–146; cf. Turner, 'Biblical texts relevant to homosexual orientation', p. 6.

⁴⁷*Ibid.* Here, as in certain other cases, I transliterate the Greek where the original quotation contains the actual Greek letters.

⁴⁸*I.e.* both the passive and the active role in male homosexual intercourse.

⁴⁹*I.e. pornoi.*

⁵⁰Turner, 'Biblical texts relevant to homosexual orientation', p. 6 (cf. p. 4).

⁵¹Scroggs, *Homosexuality and the New Testament*, p. 120.

⁵²Note, for example, Gordon Fee (*1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), who states, 'Most likely the list is a conscious reflection of the Mosaic Law as law and expresses the kinds of sins the law was given to prohibit.'

⁵³Or, possibly, 'male prostitute'. In support of this alternative, see Turner, 'Biblical texts relevant to homosexual orientation', p. 4; for references to *pornos* meaning 'male prostitute' outside the NT, see for example Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon* p. 700, s.v. *pornos*.

⁵⁴Fee (*1 and 2 Timothy*, p. 49) draws attention to the fact that there is a very early rabbinic tradition that links slave dealing to the eighth commandment.

⁵⁵For Scroggs's interpretation to be correct, *arsenokoitēs* would have to refer to the passive partner here, whereas he argued that in 1 Cor. 6:9 this same word denotes the active partner (*i.e.* the homosexual prostitute). In other words, on his understanding, Scroggs has two words for the active homosexual prostitute and none for the passive partner. The apparent incongruity between *arsenokoitai* as active in 1 Cor. and passive in 1 Tim. may be seen in Scroggs's statement that '*Pornos* could effectively function in relation to *arsenokoitēs* in precisely the same way as *malakos* does in 1 Corinthians' (Scroggs, *Homosexuality and the New Testament*, p. 120). Later Scroggs seems to allude to the incongruity again in his comment that 'perhaps the effeminate call-boy is also included in the condemnation, but I see no way of making a judgment on the matter' (*ibid.*, p. 121).

⁵⁶It is interesting to note that *pornos* and *arsenokoitēs* are the only terms listed *both* in 1 Cor. 6:9–10 and 1 Tim. 1:9–10.

⁵⁷For a discussion of the roles of these various authorities within the context of Anglicanism, and the question whether and to what extent experience is applicable in an Anglican context, see Murray L. Newman and Richard Reid, 'The Bible and sexual ethics', in *A Wholesome Example: Sexual Morality and the Episcopal Church*, ed. Robert W. Prichard (Alexandria, VA: Charter Printing, 1991), p. 1.

⁵⁸Some argue similarly for the acceptance of a sexually active homosexual on the analogy that the non-procreative and outcast eunuchs of Mt. 19:12 and Acts 8:26–40 were so accepted, but the analogy labours at the point of the eunuchs being celibate and sexually inactive.

⁵⁹Hays, 'Relations natural and unnatural', p. 208.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁶¹*Ibid.*; cf. Rom. 7:13–25.

⁶²*Ibid.* (emphasis his).

⁶³Newman and Reid observe that experience, 'if it is to be included', is clearly the 'most elusive and problematic' category ('Bible and sexual ethics', p. 1). They cite Richard Hooker in support of the claim that of the various categories, 'The Bible is first and primary' for Anglicans. This stands in contrast to the growing popularity in some ecclesiastical circles of hearing people's stories and of reflecting upon them as if these stories determine the church's stance – even above Scripture, tradition and reason. This represents a remarkable change from the church's position historically, a change that is perhaps symptomatic of a crisis of authority in society as well as in the church, particularly in relation to a timeless standard such as the Bible.

⁶⁴Hays, 'Relations natural and unnatural', p. 211.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

Deliverance: The Evolution of a Doctrine

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Throughout the 20th century, the controversial subject of exorcism has been something of an embarrassment to the established church in a rational and secular world. Historically, the rite of exorcism had largely been accompanied by discretion and kept within the ambit of ecclesiastical authority. Until recently, the position of the Church of England (in the Canons of 1903/4), which in mode has been very similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church, stipulated that there needed to be formal permission by the Bishop. In practice this was rarely exercised.

In the mainstream churches 'caution' is the catchword in the whole area of exorcism. The prevailing attitude, as made clear by many of the official pronouncements, is to defer to medical interpretations. Typical is the Methodist Conference's 'Statement on Exorcism', published by the Methodist Church Division of Social Responsibility in 1976, which argued that it should only be entered into after a thorough pastoral investigation and in close collaboration with medically qualified practitioners and the social services.¹ The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland received a report of its Working Party on Parapsychology (21 May 1976) which tackled 'the vexed question of exorcism' and concluded that the practice 'does more harm than good' and that 'it effects nothing that cannot be accomplished by the expeditious use of medical skills and pastoral care' (paragraphs 36, 45 and 51).

The timing of these statements is significant because it was clear in the 1970s that exorcism was back on the agenda for the churches in Britain generally, and that 'deliverance' as a form of 'lesser exorcism' had also gained a heightened profile. Practitioners in deliverance, however, had been active as early as the 1950s in Britain. Most operated covertly, as they were subject to a great deal of derision and condemnation since they dealt in no uncertain way with the spiritual oppression of Christians. The first editions of books on the subject were literally sold under the counter of some Christian bookshops until the mid-1980s, although, amongst charismatics at least, such books have now become more acceptable. The reasons as to why deliverance now enjoys a wider acknowledgment are extremely complex and I have sought to show below that the growing practice has come with the expansion of the Pentecostal and charismatic renewal movements of the 20th century, and as a result of the confluence of distinct but overlapping developments within both the church at large and the secular world.

Deliverance defined

In charismatic circles, the distinction between 'exorcism' and 'deliverance' is an indispensable one, although it remains true that the terms still remain poorly defined. Stated simply, the distinction is that exorcism is administered to those who are demonically 'possessed' and deliverance is for those who are merely 'oppressed'. This distinction is not particularly new. Roman Catholicism has traditionally distinguished between a 'major' and 'lesser' exorcism as if there were graduations of the need for demonic expulsion where, according to one Catholic commentator, 'full' exorcism is only relevant when an evil spirit 'doubtless dominates the body, seizes its organs and uses them as if it were its own'.² In the Anglican church, vestiges of the practice of minor (or 'lesser') exorcism remain. For instance, in the Baptism Service of the Alternative Service Book (1980), the traditional rite of the making of a catechumen has been restored.

The renunciation of evil is followed by the giving of the sign of the cross and a minor exorcism signified in the words: 'May almighty God deliver you from the powers of darkness, and lead you in the light and obedience of Christ'.

The question of the legitimacy of deliverance has resulted from the vexed theological issue, which has concerned the evangelical world in recent years, of whether Christians can 'have' an evil spirit. In the charismatic movement, the dispute is all but settled with a positive affirmation. It is argued, in simple terms, that Christians cannot be possessed, that is, totally controlled by an 'unclean spirit', since this would be a contradiction in terms. Nevertheless, it is possible for Christians to be 'oppressed', 'bothered by', 'in bondage to', demonic forces. While the spirit, the innermost being, of the Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit, the outer regions of the person, body and personality, can be 'infested'.³ A certain amount of confusion, however, still remains in charismatic doctrines. The theological difficulties arise partly because of the spatial model of being indwelt by the Spirit of God. The usual model is that of the Christian's life as a battle zone where the Holy Spirit and the sinful nature meet in confrontation.⁴

All this is very much more than mere subtle theological semantics. It amounts to a precise belief that evil spirits can exercise considerable influence over certain aspects of a Christian's life. In turn, this is often perceived as a product of 'spiritual warfare', in which the Christian is under the relentless attack of demonic agencies. Moreover, while it is argued that some deliverance may take place at conversion, the Christian also has to deal with the legacy of sin which remains. The believer, then, is viewed as subject to the consequences of a fallen world in much the same way as a non-Christian, and has the same physical and emotional health problems, as well as sharing in the consequences of Satan's assault. The act of deliverance, therefore, becomes a weapon in the armoury of the 'born-again' Christian.⁵

According to contemporary charismatic teachings, an evil spirit may enter through some open 'legal doorway', or when a Christian's 'defences are down'. Under the first rubric we find the area of 'habitual sin', that is, 'ungodly habits' developed before conversion and which persist under demonic influences. Ancestral curses and sins are also a 'legitimate' basis for demonic activity, which may hold the Christian in 'bondage'. The theological justification offered for this doctrine is rooted in the curses outlined in the book of Deuteronomy on those who act against the covenant law (Dt. 27). They are regarded as still relevant today. The punishment for transgressing the law is eventually carried out by evil spirits and passed on through generational lines in the form of spiritual and perhaps physical affliction. Under another rubric is placed emotional traumas of various kinds experienced by Christians (both before and after conversion) which can also open doorways to evil spirits. Like ancestral sins, these emotional problems may not be a direct result of the actions of convinced Christians. Indeed, they may result from sins perpetuated by others, for instance, sexual abuse.⁶

Classical Pentecostalism and deliverance

For the most part, these doctrines reverse the earlier teachings of classical Pentecostals who maintained that it was the unsaved, not Christians, who needed deliverance. A significant number of Pentecostal writers have traditionally made a distinction between demonic possession and demonic 'influence' but have categorically denied that Christians could have an evil spirit

which was somehow 'indwelling'.⁷ This is clear in the official statement of the General Assembly of the Assemblies of God: 'Can Born-Again Believers Be Demon Possessed?' (Nottingham, May 1972). The condemnation of this doctrine has also been made very clear in a critique of the practice of modern charismatics in one of the Assembly of God's major publications.⁸ In this, the Pentecostals are at one with the views of conservative evangelicals.⁹ At first glance, therefore, it might appear curious that it was Pentecostalism that initially provided the impetus for the deliverance ministry as applied to Christians.

After the great Pentecostal revivals of the early 20th century, the major bodies came out against the practice of deliverance for Christians. Andrew Walker has attributed this opposition to the essentially 'evangelical' nature of the movement, which was aggressively outward-looking and Christ-centred, and, consequently, left 'its demonism in the wake of excitement and enthusiasm'. Secondly, Pentecostals were too entranced with their own tongue-speaking, healings and worship to be 'bewitched by beguiling theories of demonism'.¹⁰ Be this as it may, the Pentecostal movement did develop a strong dualist emphasis on the conflict between good and evil spheres, which allowed little room for the concerns of the natural universe. Quite possibly, this outlook has been enhanced by the social marginality of the movement and the (perceived or real) persecution experienced at the hands of the secular world and of non-Pentecostal Christians. Whatever the origins of this strong dualist theology, the worldview which fostered an acceptance of the active nature of demonic forces 'gave a momentum to the practice of deliverance on the unsaved in the missionary field at home and abroad'.¹¹

One of the first struggles of the early Pentecostals was against the teachings of Jessie Penn-Lewis, who befriended one of the great leaders of the Welsh revival, Evan Roberts. With him, she wrote the book *War on the Saints*, which was denounced and banned by the Pentecostal churches. The publication amounts to a detailed account of how the demonization of Christians occurs and includes a graphic description of the infiltration of various parts of the physical body.¹² Although conservative evangelicals have sometimes been keen to expose the Pentecostals as charlatans and fanatics, as far as all things demonic are concerned, some have recognized that their practice of deliverance was a major weapon on the mission field. It was held by Pentecostals to be important as part of the 'power encounter' with pagan religions and could be viewed as an integral part of the proselytizing venture, and of an impressive church growth strategy. However, in their proselytizing endeavours, the Pentecostals opposed those on the fringes of the movement who claimed to have a specialized ministry in deliverance. Indeed, it was argued that there was no distinct spiritual gift related to exorcism or deliverance, merely the special gift of 'spiritual discernment' as part of the protection of the church against false teachers, demonically inspired or otherwise.

One of the reasons why these idiosyncratic characters emerged on the periphery of Pentecostalism, and for whom the theological debates were largely superfluous, was that the established Pentecostal churches had few clarified doctrinal statements on demonology and exorcism. One important exception is Duffield and Van Cleave's *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*.¹³ Much of the Pentecostal literature has tended to be a reworking of earlier evangelical commentaries on the subject.

There were several Pentecostals who furthered the interest in deliverance and had stimulated a concern with the demonic in the 1930s and after the Second World War. Two examples will suffice. One was the Indian healer, L. Jeevaratham, who had experienced some theological training with the Assemblies of God, and significantly advanced teachings related to evil spirits. Some Pentecostals from the mainstream organizations were profoundly influenced, especially by the way he attempted to cast out evil spirits at public meetings. Another important figure within the classical Pentecostal structure was J. Hornell whose book *Concerning Demons: Questions and Answers* introduced a more coherent demonology and was, in Pentecostal terms, a best-seller: 1,000 copies in 1936, 10,000 in 1937, and 4,000 as late as 1949.¹⁴

The mid-century itinerant healing ministries

After the Second World War, a good deal of the momentum for

the practice of deliverance came from the itinerant quasi-Pentecostal ministries. Many of these were a product of the widespread healing and evangelizing campaigns in the USA. They included A.A. Allen (1911–70) who was perhaps the most strident Pentecostal of the 1950s and early 1960s and whose demonology appears to be close to that of the Latter-Day Rain movement that arose in the USA in the late 1940s within Pentecostalism. The 'Holiness' strand of Pentecostalism, which was exemplified by the 'Latter-Day' movement, was essentially a protest against the rise of formal church organization and what was perceived as the Pentecostals' increasing worldliness and moral ineptitude. At the same time it had developed a profound awareness of the forces of evil. A typical prayer ran: 'I pray, purify me from all the evils that cling to me. . . . Bind all powers that whisper temptation and eavesdrop, and the calling voices of magical powers. . .'.¹⁵

Allen wrote copiously on demonic oppression and possession and advanced the idea that Christians could 'have' a demon. It became fashionable in his churches to talk of spirits with particular attributes: 'jealousy', 'lust', and 'anger'.¹⁶ Allegedly, Allen even spoke of the 'spirit of nicotine'. This all gave a lead to the modern charismatic movement's concern with demons associated with specific conditions and maladies. From the 'Holiness' tradition also came the late Oral Roberts who pioneered 'slaying in the Spirit', especially in the context of deliverance. Roberts is the link between deliverance and the impetus emerging from the 'Faith' movement and the 'health and wealth' theology in the USA. The leading exponent of the latter, Kenneth Hagin, with his vast international ministry in the USA, was inspired by Roberts, and subsequently began to develop his distinctive dualist theology.

There were also alternative channels in the development of deliverance theology amongst the itinerant healing ministries. William Branham (1909–65), a somewhat unusual figure, who claimed to have his own personal guardian angel, launched into warfare with demons, and 'diagnosed' illness through the colours of auras. Like A.A. Allen, he was eventually disowned by the established Pentecostal churches. Two men associated with Branham also proved to be influential. One was Ern Blaxter, who was later to become a major figure in the so-called 'Shepherding' or 'Discipleship' movement. Among other teachings, Blaxter stressed the exclusiveness of male leadership within the church, and attacked feminism, which he interpreted as 'the spirit of Jezebel'. The other is Paul Cain, who maintains that he is a modern prophet and who originally came from a 'Holiness' background. For a while, he was associated with the Kansas City prophets who, in turn, eventually came under the 'covering' of John Wimber's Vineyard ministry. Cain has claimed to have been inspired in the area of deliverance by the teachings of the famous 'Faith' minister, Hobart Freeman, who produced a great deal of literature on demonology and the occult.

The Fort Lauderdale Five

In discussing the rise of the deliverance ministry, the influence of the 'Fort Lauderdale Five', of which Blaxter was a member, cannot be ignored. The FLF was a group of individuals, largely from a Pentecostal background, who came together on the basis of a number of common theological interests. Another key member was Don Basham (1926–89), whose major publication was: *Can a Christian have a Demon?*, which included a graphic account of a girl demonically oppressed and subsequently delivered.¹⁷ Basham argued, like many others since, that the perception of the need for the deliverance of Christians came through the experience of those with a healing ministry. He put forward what he believed was the biblical basis for the practice and may have been the first to use 'words of knowledge' within the context of deliverance; that is, a belief that the Holy Spirit identifies through us an evil spirit and its 'nature'.¹⁸ In this practice he may well have been influenced by the healing evangelist Maxwell Whyte, whom he witnessed 'delivering' a 'demon of asthma' and a 'demon of smoking', which were vomited out.¹⁹

Derek Prince, another member of the FLF, is possibly the most important figure in furthering the demonology behind deliverance. Some of the leading practitioners today, such as Frank Hammond and Bill Subritzky, pay tribute to the work of Prince (the latter having been trained at Prince's Fuller Ministry). Prince had pioneered a belief in the hidden prevalence of witchcraft in the USA and spoke of demons as

disembodied spirits trying to control human beings, and of dark angelic powers attempting to dominate churches, cities and other geographical areas. (These teachings corresponded with those of Peter Wagner at Fuller Seminary in California, where John Wimber taught.) Prince has also been largely responsible for developing teachings of ancestral spirits, and the alleged demonic implications of self-curses, generational curses and 'soulful prayers', through his very influential work *Blessing or Curse*.²⁰ Prince's teachings also overlapped with those of the non-charismatic theologian, Dr Kurt Koch, who had a considerable impact on the emerging charismatic movement with his work on deliverance and the demonic origins of much mental illness. Koch had attempted to show beyond dispute that involvement in the occult could produce dire emotional and spiritual effects 'to the third and fourth generation', with the implication that Christians were also susceptible.²¹

Another quasi-Pentecostal group which advanced deliverance was the Full Gospel Business Men's Federation International. This organization constituted a somewhat new type of Pentecostal, wealthy, with a vision for an international ministry endeavour. It not only practised deliverance ministry, but also produced copious literature on the subject.²² The most serious controversy in the early history of the Federation involved the public deliverance of Christians, and this was one of the reasons why it was initially denied access to American television networks. Nevertheless, the movement grew quickly in the 1970s to the point of working closely with charismatics in Britain's mainline denominations.²³

The renewal movement

Deliverance gradually grew as a practice in the charismatic renewal movement both within the mainline denominations and the independent 'house churches'. Often it was perceived by charismatics as being all part of 'the present moving of the Spirit' and the renewal of the church.²⁴ At the same time, it coincided with the wider interest in 'divine healing' by Catholic and Protestant neo-Pentecostals. As part of their concern with healing, the charismatics had developed a fascination for secular counselling, which was then applied to those in need of therapy within the churches. Some critics of the present deliverance ministry have argued that it is merely a form of 'spiritualized psychotherapy'; in particular, an expression of 'encounter' counselling/therapy overlaid with a 'spirit gloss'. Many sceptics have speculated that practitioners have taken the Christian psychologist Frank Lake's teachings of 'rebirth' to their most extreme conclusions. From this perspective, deliverance mirrors the secular world's preoccupation with psychotherapy and emotional healing.

There is some evidence to support this claim. More than a few of the leading practitioners had begun in counselling before embracing the deliverance ministry. A good number were only later to join the charismatic movement. It is not surprising, then, that today, deliverance ministries are not afraid to tackle emotional/psychological problems which are of great interest to the secular world, especially related to problems in personal relationships.²⁵ They do so in the case of anorexia nervosa and of bulimia. The former is essentially viewed as a demonic force, 'a spirit of suicide, self-hate, or self-destruction' which manifests itself as 'suicide by starvation', the result of unforgiveness and bitterness. With bulimia, the origins are said to include the spirit of 'the fear of starvation' along with a 'little girl spirit', where the woman is trapped in some childhood state as a result of experiencing a past emotional trauma.²⁶

At the time that the charismatic churches had established an interest in counselling, another set of problems had begun to beset the church at large. In the widely read article in *Theological Renewal* in 1982, which constituted part of the continuing debate on Michael Green's *I believe in Satan's Downfall*, John Richards stated: 'The ministry of deliverance and exorcism are not the prerogative of the renewal, and the majority of those in the '60s and '70s who engaged in these ministries . . . brought to it a great appreciation of the scriptural accounts because of what they were meeting, rather than bringing a fundamentalism to their pastoral caring'.²⁷

In the growing acceptance of deliverance, Richards' work *But Deliver Us From Evil* was a landmark.²⁸ For nine years previously, he had worked with the Bishop of Exeter's Study Group on Exorcism, conducted a number of conferences, and written extensively on exorcism and deliverance. The report

indicated that many Anglican clergy felt out of their depth in the area of exorcism and that they were inadequately prepared to deal with the implications at parish level of the 'Occult Explosion'. At the end of the 1970s, many Christian books emerged stressing the dangers of the occult and often advocating exorcism. These were not, for the most part, theologically scholarly, but were written by those involved in pastoral work. The secular media also found news in the bizarre and tragic consequences of the activities of those not properly trained in the ministry, notably the notorious 'Barnsley case', where a man murdered his wife during an exorcism in 1975. With these considerations, the Christian Study Group on Exorcism produced the well-known publication *Deliverance*.²⁹ Whether or not there was a justifiable need for such a publication, its detailed account of the ministry gave an extra momentum to the practice in charismatic circles.³⁰

Within the charismatic churches, there were also Christians claiming to experience demonic oppression very often because of pre-conversion involvement in the occult. Some practitioners had entered the deliverance ministry precisely for this reason. Typical was Mike Costello, a former Baptist minister in London, who embarked on the practice when some individuals in his church believed that they were demonically oppressed because of occultist interests, or because of their involvement in eastern religions or the use of psychedelics prior to conversion. It was Costello who invited the leading American exponent of deliverance, Frank Hammond, to Britain. In addition, he published the unabridged reprint of Penn-Lewis's *War on the Saints* in 1973 through the Diazaso Trust, which is dedicated to warning Christians of the implications of occultist activities.

Pentecostal ministers have been included among those who were at the forefront of developing the deliverance ministry in Britain since the 1970s. One is John Barr, an Elim pastor in east London. Barr himself came from a gypsy family and was once caught up in the occult. His interest in deliverance grew when evangelizing on the streets of London. Here he dealt with drug addicts and alcoholics whom he found difficult to cure and perceived that the root was demonic. Among those he claims have inspired him are the Anglican Trevor Dearing, Frank Hammond and Derek Prince. Although Barr's ministry has not always endeared him to the leadership of Elim, his effect on charismatics and Restorationist churches has been considerable. It was Barr who largely won over Gerald Coates and Roger Forster, the leaders of the Pioneers and Ichthus respectively, to the legitimacy of the deliverance of Christians.

Other Pentecostal churches which have accepted the same teachings are those generally located in areas where there are several non-white ethnic groups and a whole variety of cultures not originating in Britain. Some, like Kensington Temple (Elim) and New Life Centre in Croydon (Assemblies of God), are among the largest congregations of any churches in the country. Their flourishing deliverance ministries largely derive from the demands of black converts previously involved in occultism or non-Christian religions. John Edwards, the pastor at New Life, is one of the most well-known in the deliverance ministry, although his doctrines have led to him being banned from teaching in some Pentecostal churches in the USA and France.

Restorationism, post-millenarianism and deliverance

Restorationism is a distinct strand of the charismatic movement in Britain, one which began outside the established church structures.³¹ Significantly, some of the earliest advocates of Restorationism had taken an interest in deliverance. As early as 1962, Cecil Cousen seemed to be hinting that Christians might need deliverance as a result of demonic oppression.³² Another was Sid Purse, who ran a deliverance ministry based in Chard, Somerset, which attracted people from all over the world. A third figure was G.W. North who wrote a series of articles lamenting the use of psychiatry in Christian counselling and argued that many of the symptoms commonly recognized as symptoms of physical, emotional and psychological problems, may have demonic origins. North argued that in 'extreme cases' it was possible for hereditary 'family demons' to be imprinted on patterns of behaviour over generations.³³

Since these early contributions, deliverance has come to rest upon a quite distinct and elaborate demonology and eschatology. To at least some extent, this was due to the influence of the Fort Lauderdale Five. In the 1970s the FLF functioned as the American connection with British Restora-

tionism, especially with Derek Prince and others speaking at the Downs and Dales Bible Weeks. Without wishing to simplify the theological contribution of Restorationism, it has become increasingly clear that the demonology it teaches has foundations in post-millenarianism and shares common elements with the so-called Third Wave movement.

An important aspect of both is the notion that the Christian church, in the Last Days, is being restored to being a dynamic spiritual force and returning to many of the practices of the NT church which had subsequently been lost over the centuries. This includes gaining a greater understanding of the demonic than ever before. The resultant demonology identifies an organized and hierarchical satanic kingdom waging war on human social structures and wreaking havoc in the lives of individuals through spiritual, emotional and physical infliction. The deliverance ministry is, therefore, seen as returning to the church at precisely the time the spiritual warfare intensifies and is part of the overarching cosmic struggle. This makes the church an aggressive and militant force divinely equipped to make assaults upon Satan's realm.³⁴

Another function of deliverance, which is linked to the post-millenarian eschatology, is concerned with the cleansing and restoring of the church as part of the preparation for the Second Coming of Christ. While deliverance is applied on the individual level, its wider aim is to purify and free the corporate church of alleged complacency, legalism, and intellectualism, all of which are viewed as products of spiritual oppression.³⁵

Ever since the 'Third Wave' conference at the Central Methodist Hall, Westminster, the flagging charismatic movement has been profoundly influenced by John Wimber's Vineyard International, above all in the area of healing ministry and teachings concerning the demonic.³⁶ Wimber, in turn, had been inspired by the theological strands developed at Fuller Seminary, California, particularly Peter Wagner's thought. Wimber's eschatology is difficult to pin down as 'post-millennial', but his strategy of 'equipping the saints' also carries the idea of cleansing and purifying the church before the Second Coming. His appeal, however, is derived from his 'kingdom theology' and the stress upon 'signs and wonders'. Kingdom theology allows the possibility of God bursting through into the physical world through the faith of Christians. Thus Christians are said to be able to perform healings and cast out evil spirits as Christ had done. Wimber's ministry has had a profound effect on charismatic churches in the traditional 'mainline' denominations, especially Anglican and Baptist. The impact on the principal Restorationist churches has also been considerable, including Pioneers, Ichthus and New Frontiers. In the area of deliverance, the major exponents of Vineyard's teachings are Ellel Ministries in Lancaster led by Peter Horrobin, who has also been influenced by the New Zealander, Bill Subritzky. This ministry epitomizes the endeavour to conduct deliverance within the context of spiritual warfare. It is perhaps the most coherent expression of post-millennial theology and is said to have taken Wimber's teachings to their furthest conclusions, with deliverance taking place in audiences numbering several thousand, by evoking the Holy Spirit.³⁷

Conclusion

In this article I have sought to sketch the development of the deliverance ministry in Britain. It would be unfair to attempt a theological assessment in a few concluding words. Clearly its various features are very controversial. These have had publicity, including recently in the media. In the light of this, it is worth remarking that reports of abuse or serious malpractice in the deliverance ministry are relatively infrequent. However, cases such as that outlined in the *Church of England Newspaper* (9 December 1994) identifying alleged sexual abuse of 'clients' also damage reputations, including reputations of well-meaning

practitioners. Moreover, such abuses do expose the church generally to unfavourable criticisms. That is why the method is so important. Most practitioners are apparently earnest individuals who share a considerable concern for the spiritual welfare of Christians and non-Christians alike. Questions will undoubtedly still continue to be asked in the foreseeable future as to the real viability of deliverance as a healing method. The theological questions are urgent and it is hoped that our survey will provide an informed indication of what those questions are.

³⁴Quoted in M. Perry (ed.), *Deliverance* (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 112.

³⁵F. Marquart, *Exorcism and Diabolical Manifestations* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1951).

³⁶N. Wright, *The Fair Face of Evil* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989), p. 125.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 126.

³⁸F. and M. Hammond, *Pigs in the Parlour* (Chichester: New Wine, 1992), p. 56.

³⁹B. Subritzky, *Demons Defeated* (Chichester: Sovereign World, 1992), p. 192.

⁴⁰C.M. Conn, *The Anatomy of Evil* (Longley, n.d.).

⁴¹*Redemption* magazine, 'Deliverance from Evil?' (Feb. 1990), pp. 13-17.

⁴²P. Masters, *The Healing Epidemic* (London: Wakeman, 1991); A. Morrison, *The Serpent and the Cross* (Birmingham: K. & M. Brooks, 1994).

⁴³A. Walker, 'The Devil you thought you knew', in T. Smail, A. Walker and N. Wright, *Charismatic Renewal. The Search for A Theology* (London: SPCK, 1989).

⁴⁴R.M. Anderson, *Visions of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: 1979).

⁴⁵J. Penn-Lewis and E. Roberts, *War on the Saints* (London: Diazo Trust, 1973).

⁴⁶Z. Duffield and Z. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (1983).

⁴⁷Nottingham: Assemblies of God Publications, n.d.

⁴⁸Quoted in W. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 144.

⁴⁹A.A. Allen, *Demon Possession Today and How to Be Free* (Dallas: Allen, 1953).

⁵⁰D. Basham, *Can a Christian have a Demon?* (Kirkwood: Impact Books, 1991).

⁵¹*Idem*, *Deliver Us From Evil* (Washington: Chosen Books, 1972).

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵³D. Prince, *Blessings or Curse. You Can Choose* (Milton Keynes: Word Publishing, 1990).

⁵⁴K. Koch, e.g., *Demonology, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1972).

⁵⁵D.G. Buckley, *Exposure of Seducing Spirits* (Full Gospel Deliverance Crusade, 1966).

⁵⁶P. Hocken, *Streams of Renewal* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986).

⁵⁷M. Harper, *Spiritual Warfare* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970).

⁵⁸F. Hammond, *Soul Ties* (USA: The Children's Bread Ministry, 1988).

⁵⁹B. Banks, *Deliverance from Fat and Eating Disorders* (Kirkwood: Impact Books, 1988), pp. 34-40 and p. 69 respectively.

⁶⁰J. Richards, K. Leech and K. Houston, 'Affirmation and agnostic debate about Satan's downfall', *Theological Renewal* No. 2 (March, 1982), pp. 23-26.

⁶¹J. Richards, *But Deliver Us From Evil* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974).

⁶²Perry (ed.), *Deliverance*.

⁶³S. Pattison, *Alive and Kicking: Towards a Practical Theology of Illness* (London: SCM, 1989), p. 193.

⁶⁴A. Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985).

⁶⁵C. Cousen, *Voice of Faith* (July/August/September 1962), p. 57.

⁶⁶G.W. North, e.g., 'Deliverance - Ancient and Modern', *Voice of Faith* No. 4 (Jan/Feb/March 1969), pp. 10-13.

⁶⁷F. and M. Hammond, *Pigs in the Parlour*, p. 17.

⁶⁸N. and P. Gibson, *Evicting Demonic Intruders* (Chichester: New Wine Press, 1993).

⁶⁹T. Stafford, 'Testing the Wine from John Wimber's Vineyard', *Christianity Today* (8 August 1986), pp. 17-20.

⁷⁰D. McBain, *Discerning the Spirits* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1986), p. 183.

The Parousia: Getting our Terms Right

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If we are going to assume that one of the signs that a biblical teaching is important lies in the amount of space given to it in the Bible, then it is clear that Jesus' return to earth is one of the most important teachings to be found in the NT. It is frequently spoken about, clearly taught, and consistently applied from the teaching of Jesus himself right through to the last writing of the NT period. Our investigations into the life of the earliest generations of believers demonstrate very clearly that the anticipation of the return of Jesus was a vital part of their faith. The declaration 'Maranatha!' (Come, Lord!) was a common greeting when they met. However, there is also little doubt that in many of our churches today, certainly in Britain, scant attention is given to this cardinal doctrine and hope. It is there in our creeds; it is there in our Advent guidelines; it is there in our Bibles: but it is all too often missing from our sermons, our meetings for prayer and our daily lives.

Of course, there are differing interpretations of verses and passages. Christians differ over questions of the timing of the parousia, and over questions of the nature of the signs of our Lord's return, etc. Nevertheless, the fact of his return and the purpose of his return should not be neglected. We shall remark on the purpose only in a brief comment in the conclusion. The fact, however, is the better grasped if we get our terminology right. It is to this task we now turn.

Terms apart from 'parousia'

There are several terms which are used in the NT in association with the return of Jesus, although the chief of these is certainly the term 'parousia'. Our focus will therefore be on this term. However the other terms also play their part in our understanding of what God has chosen to reveal to us, and we shall begin by looking at these.

1. The Day of the Lord

There are verses which speak about the great 'day' to come in the works of almost all of the writers in the NT. In Paul's letters we have, for example:

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light (Rom. 13:12).

In the synoptic Gospels we find the following examples:

No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Mk. 13:32).

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken (Mt. 12:36).

The book of Acts is also represented here:

For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

We could go on into other parts of the NT, but I shall cite only one other passage, namely 2 Peter 3:11b-12a:

You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

If we examine all of the references to this day in the NT, then we shall find that there are a number of specific and related expressions used. We find 'that day', 'the day of wrath', 'the day of judgment', 'the day of the Lord', 'the last day', 'the day of the Son of Man', 'the day of Christ', 'the day', and 'the great day of God'. This 'day' is one of both punishment and vindication, of

final death and resurrection, and therefore of both fear and joy. This is clear from the events associated with it in the relevant verses, and this in turn fits perfectly the pattern of teaching in the Hebrew Bible about the day of the Lord. *Indeed we shall note this double purpose as a characteristic of our findings.*

A second characteristic is the inseparability of spirituality and morality when it comes to the significance of this event. Its impact on us will depend on our attitudes and behaviour to one another as well as on our attitude to God. So much is this the case, that in several verses we are admonished to live our daily lives in the shadow of that day. Having quoted Romans 13:12 above, let us remind ourselves of the verse which follows it:

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

Bearing in mind these two points, we move on.

2. Maranatha

This Aramaic expression is only found once in the NT, at the end of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him. Come, O Lord! (1 Cor. 16:22)

The expression itself is capable of two interpretations, each of them based on the two Aramaic words, *maran/marana* (= our Lord) and the verb '*ata*' (= to come). We are either dealing here with a simple perfect form of the verb (*maran ata*), giving us the proclamation that 'Our Lord has come!', or with an imperative form (*marana ta*), expressing the longing, 'Come, our Lord!' There is evidence of both interpretations being favoured by different scholars and churchmen in the Patristic period, but there is also evidence of a growing consensus that the imperative form was the more likely in Paul's context.

Of particular interest is the fact that in the Didache (c. AD 100) the expression 'maranatha' is used in prayers which were part of the liturgy of the Lord's Supper (see 10:6, for example). Now we know from 1 Corinthians 11:26 that from the earliest times an important aspect of the celebration of this feast was a looking forward in hope to the return of the Lord:

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

This has to be appreciated in the context of Jesus' own words at the institution of this feast:

I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom (Mt. 26:29).

We are surely right to see this as a prayer for the return of our Lord Jesus. We are both thrilled and relieved when we hear him say to us in the words of Revelation, 'Yes, I am coming soon'. And with his servant, John, we echo, 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus' (Rev. 22:20).

3. Epiphaneia

This is the first of the three specific terms used in the NT with regard to the second coming of Jesus. It is derived from the Greek root 'to appear', a root which was in common use, although producing a cluster of words with quite specialized meanings. The two words which are best known in modern English usage from this root are: 'Epiphany', the name given to the liturgical day of 6 January, when the wise men appeared (if you are western) or when Jesus appeared at his birth (if you are eastern), and 'Phantasm', a word applied by psychics to the mysterious appearance of spectral forces. But the root is also

connected with one which has to do with light and brightness, giving us the word 'phosphorescence' in English. So it refers to something which is easily visible and which has a certain radiance.

Originally, the actual term *epiphaneia* referred merely to the outward appearance of some object; for instance, it is used of the visible aspects of a town. But it soon developed a specialized meaning, relating to the glorious or majestic appearance of a dignitary, for example a king making an appearance before his subjects. It is also important to note that it could be used on occasion to refer to the impact upon a person which such a meeting with a dignitary could cause. By the time of the NT community, it had developed a yet more specialized meaning, namely the needed and welcome appearance of a god with his people. It is invariably used in contexts of divine intervention, stressing the power of the god to act on behalf of his people.

It would also be true to say that we are dealing with a term which carries with it a sense of purpose. It is used in definite contexts rather than just to describe casual visits by the gods, and also tends to suggest an appearance which happens rather suddenly. We should further note that this word is used with respect to someone or to some god who is already known to the subject or worshipper. It is the *visit* of the visitor, and the resulting impact, which are seen as being significant and salvific. Of course, we are aware of the fact that sometimes human rulers who saw themselves as incarnations of gods, or as uniquely related to the gods, took a related term for themselves. This was so with the Roman Caesars, and also with the Syrian ruler Antiochus *Epiphanes*, known to us from the books of the Maccabees. In short, this is a powerful title, denoting a glorious appearance by gods or by kings.

In the Septuagint, we find the verbal root of this term used to translate a number of Hebrew verbal roots to do with 'shining' and 'becoming known'. This is much as we might expect. What is of importance is the fact that the contexts all have to do with theophanies of the Lord, and situations in which he comes to redeem his people (see, for example, Gn. 35:7; Dt. 33:2; Je. 29:14). The adjectival/participial form, *epiphanes*, is also found in the LXX. It can refer to the terrible and glorious deeds of the Lord on behalf of his people (2 Sa. 7:23), reflecting the issue of power, but, of particular importance to us, it usually refers to the character of the expected 'day of the Lord' (Joel 2:11, 31; Mal. 3:23 (4:5 in the translations)).

Although there is a verse in the NT where the specific term *epiphaneia* is used of the first coming of Jesus to live among us (2 Tim. 1:10), it is predominantly used in respect of his powerful return to earth after the period of his ascension. Jesus' second 'appearance' will mean the coming of judgment:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge. . . . Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his *appearing* (2 Tim. 4:1, 8).

Jesus' second 'appearance' will also bring about the end of 'the man of lawlessness'. This creature who sets himself against God and who prefers the darkness will be destroyed by the shining power of the appearance of Jesus:

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the *splendour* of his coming (2 Thes. 2:8).

In short, this appearance will be met by Christians with unparalleled relief and joy. The struggle will be over. As Paul says, it is a 'blessed hope':

We wait for the blessed hope – the glorious *appearing* of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ . . . (Tit. 2:13).

4. *Apokalypsis*

This is the second of the three specific terms to which we referred under (3) above. This Greek verbal root is concerned with the uncovering or revealing of things which up to the point of revelation had been unknown or hidden. The actual term in which we are interested is used almost totally in religious contexts, although it must be said that the term is not really a common one. Nevertheless, it is an important biblical term. It is invariably translated by the word 'revelation' in English.

However, this term is actually best known to us all in its transliterated form. It was simply taken over into English to describe that distinctive form of thought and literature called

'apocalyptic'. This type of religious consciousness is focused on the revelation of the hidden mysteries concerning the future of God's dealings in history. There are traces of apocalyptic in several books of the Bible, but it is especially associated with the books of Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation. In fact *apokalypsis* is the opening word of the book of Revelation.

In the LXX, this root is used in a variety of ways, including the physical uncovering of material (for example, a woman's 'head' in Nu. 5:18; the roof of the ark in Gn. 8:13). It is commonly used in the context of disclosing or discovering significant information (see, for example, Jos. 2:20; 1 Sa. 20:2, 13; 22:8, 17). The noun *apokalypsis* only occurs once in the LXX, and that too is in a 'non-theological' context (1 Sa. 20:30). The factor to notice at this point, therefore, is that this verbal root has to do with *significant or intimate revelations*.

Ezekiel is the prophet who takes this term and uses it characteristically of the action of God in disclosing the sin and corruption of his people:

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Because you poured out your wealth and *exposed* your nakedness in your promiscuity with your lovers, and because of all your detestable idols, and because you gave them your children's blood, therefore I am going to gather all your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, those you loved as well as those you hated. I will gather them against you from all around and *will strip you* in front of them, and they will see all your nakedness (Ezk. 16:36-37; see also 13:14; 16:57; 21:29).

This will therefore be a time of shame, but also the time when sin and guilt can begin to be dealt with.

The term is used of God's 'revelation' to those significant servants of God who have leadership roles in Israel (see, for example, 1 Sa. 3:7, 21 for Samuel; 2 Sa. 7:27 for David; Amos 3:7 for the prophets generally). The recipients of this 'revelation' receive knowledge of God's perspectives and plans. In the more commonly understood sense of 'apocalyptic', namely having to do with future mysteries, this verbal root is used in the LXX in connection with Balaam, whose eyes are 'opened' by God so that he can see what God has in store for Israel (Nu. 22:31; 24:4, 16).

When we turn to the NT, we find that this root is perhaps not as common as might have been expected. It is only used with any frequency by Paul, Peter, Matthew and Luke. Speaking more positively, the first point to note is that in the NT this root is certainly focused on theological contexts. It is used of the revelation of God's wrath and judgment, as in these verses:

The wrath of God *is being revealed* from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. . . . But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment *will be revealed* (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; see also 1 Cor. 3:13).

In particular, though, the focus is on the person of Jesus. Luke is happy to introduce us at the start of his gospel to Simeon, who is inspired to recognize that Jesus is 'a light for *revelation* to the Gentiles' (Lk. 2:32). Jesus has brought revelation to an unprecedented degree. The gospel is the uncovering of a mystery which had been hidden until he came:

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the *revelation* of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known . . . (Rom. 16:25f.; see also Eph. 3:3).

The comfort and vindication which Jesus' followers are in need of in the midst of this fallen world are not yet revealed, but when Jesus returns the world will see that Christians were right to put their trust in him, and Christians will realize that the path of suffering really does lead to glory. Both of these truths can be hard to believe by those who will one day testify to their truth. The following examples will suffice:

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus *is revealed* from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels (2 Thes. 1:7; see also 1 Cor. 1:7f.).

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that *will be revealed* in us (Rom. 8:18; see also 1 Pet. 1:5-7).

Of course, Jesus will also be fully vindicated when he returns to earth, and the wonderful glory which is his due will at last be manifest for all to see:

But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Pet. 4:13).

The second coming of Jesus will come as a dramatic shock to people. It will be a sudden revelation of the glorious Son of God, and he in turn will open up to the light of his glory all the dark secrets of our lives. Just as suddenly, we shall all comprehend at last the wisdom of the Lord's ways in our lives and in our world's history.

'Parousia' itself

This is our third term and the one most frequently used for the second coming of Jesus in the NT. The verbal root means 'to be present with' someone, or 'to have come to be with' someone. The noun 'parousia' means therefore either 'presence' or 'arrival'. It is used in several contexts for the arrival of rulers or military commanders. In the Roman world it was even used as a kind of technical term for the celebration of an emperor's visit to, and extended presence with, a particular city or community.

Although this word is not really known by modern English speakers, its Latin equivalent certainly is. The Latin term is *adventus*, from which we get the English term 'advent', which is known at least from the popularity of the church season of that name. Advent is, of course, the time when we focus our thoughts particularly on the birth of Jesus (his coming to earth), and his future return (his second coming).

It is especially important for us to note that in the various Greek (and Latin) inscriptions and writings which we have concerning the 'parousia' of a visiting dignitary, the distinct impression given is that this is not simply a future visit which is listed in the people's diary, but a most significant time of meeting. It will not only have an important impact on the people when it happens, but because of its significance, and the consequent sense of eager anticipation, coupled with the massive preparation which is required for the arrival of the one who is coming, it is already having a serious impact *before the event*.

The term *parousia* is actually used in the NT in connection with the apostle Paul. However, he does not come out of it well in comparison with the parousia of Jesus! It was evidently said by some Christians that he was a better writer than a personal communicator, since, in their opinion at least, he had no real personal charisma, or 'presence', as we might say:

For some say, 'His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing' (2 Cor. 10:10). The italicized words are a translation of the Greek phrase, 'the parousia of his body'. See also Phil. 1:26; 2:12).

In the LXX, this verbal root is quite commonly used, and in fact it serves to translate no fewer than seven Hebrew verbs, each of which lies in the overall semantic range of 'coming'. The contexts of this usage, however, are not particularly significant for our purposes, since they simply cover the basic nuances of the verb 'to come'. There is no trace of the specialized NT meaning here. The noun *parousia* is only found twice in the LXX, in neither case referring to God. Other verbal roots are used when the Hebrew Bible speaks about the 'coming' of God to be with his people (for example, Gn. 20:3; Nu. 24:2; Ps. 24:7). Even in two of the classic Messianic texts, where mention is made of the 'coming' of the Messiah, this verbal root is not the one which is used (Gn. 49:10; Zech. 9:9f.). It seems clear, then, that this particular term, *parousia*, is strictly a NT term in the sense in which we are using it here.

As we noted above, however, the noun *parousia* is also used in a more general sense in the NT. Apart from the verses quoted above which refer to Paul's *parousia*, we also find joy over the 'arrival' of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:17), and comfort at the 'coming' of Titus (2 Cor. 7:6f.). Verbal forms of the root are used in the same way, for example in Acts 10:33; 24:19; 1 Corinthians 5:3; Galatians 4:18, 20. The verbal root of the term *parousia* is even used of the Beast in Revelation 17:8, where we read:

The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction . . . he once was, now is not, and yet will come.

Now, when we come to examine the specific and distinctive meaning of the term *parousia* in the NT, we find that it is used to describe the eschatological return, or 'coming', of Jesus to earth. More than this, though, we see that this 'coming' of Jesus actually has an impact on the lives of those who are expecting

his return, and who are consequently longing for it. This is the most common of the three special terms, but it is not found quite as frequently as one might think from the impression given by some Christian writers. All in all it is used 24 times, 14 of which are part of the Pauline corpus:

Pauline

- *1 Corinthians 15:23
- 1 Corinthians 16:17
- 2 Corinthians 7:6-7
- 2 Corinthians 10:10
- Philippians 1:26
- Philippians 2:12
- *1 Thessalonians 2:19
- *1 Thessalonians 3:13
- *1 Thessalonians 4:15
- *1 Thessalonians 5:23
- **2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8-9

Other

- ****Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39
- **James 5:7-8
- 2 Peter 1:16
- **2 Peter 3:4, 12
- *1 John 2:28

An analysis of the references asterisked shows that only one half of the Pauline references are actually to the eschatological 'arrival' of Jesus, whereas nine of the other ten (non-Pauline) references are to this event. It is also clear from this simplest of tables that the Thessalonian epistles and the Matthean apocalypse are the two main concentrations within the NT.

What, then, do we learn from these passages about the eschatological 'parousia' of Jesus? It will be the *arrival* of the moment for which we are all waiting in our need and inadequacy. It will be a time of unprecedented *meeting* with Jesus, even though in one sense all Christians may be said to have met with him already. It will be a sudden and public *appearance*; his *presence* will vindicate the faith and the hope of Christians everywhere.

The purpose of the parousia

Although, as I indicated at the beginning, we cannot go into the purpose of the parousia in this article, it may be convenient to list the five main ones found in the NT. These are found in passages which use the whole range of terms which we have been examining. The parousia *firstly* brings about the final conquest of the devil and his forces (1 Cor. 15:23-24). *Secondly*, it brings about the final judgment of the world (1 Cor. 4:5). *Thirdly*, it completes the redemption of the redeemed (1 Jn. 3:2; 1 Thes. 4:16-17; Heb. 9:28). *Fourthly*, it brings the whole of history to its climax and fulfilment (Rom. 8:19; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). And *fifthly*, it establishes, once and for all, the public vindication and glorification of Jesus (Mk. 15:62; Rev. 1:7). Examples of texts could, of course, be multiplied.

Nor are these exhaustive of the purposes of the parousia. We could subdivide and further analyse the five points above. We could also add to the list. For example, I believe that the parousia will also fulfil God's purposes for the Jewish people; that when Paul states in Romans 11:26 that 'all Israel will be saved', he is preparing the Jewish people for a massive turning to faith in Jesus when he returns. But this is a theme I have developed elsewhere, and as particular controversies attach to it, I shall not pursue it here. Of course, there is a purpose too for the delay of the parousia. There seem to be two distinct and broad purposes for the fact of its delay between the two advents of Jesus, both represented in 2 Peter: (a) to give people an opportunity to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9), and (b) to allow needed time for the process of sanctification in Christians (2 Pet. 3:10-12). What we must constantly keep in mind as we touch on this issue, is that God's perspective differs from ours: 'With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day' (2 Pet. 3:8).

Getting our terms right in relation to the parousia is not a merely academic exercise. On the contrary, as we probe them, we should be drawn into the wonder and glory of God's promises. Our knowledge should transform our lives. If we know that Jesus will return, despite any ignorance about its 'when' and 'how', we should be mobilized for mission, seeking to win more and more people for the Lord's kingdom, committed to a holy life. That is the purpose of the revelation of the parousia. And this purpose plays its significant part in the overall purpose of the parousia itself.