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Editorial: A Word from James Orr

As the editor gets his twopence worth elsewhere in this issue of *Themelios*, it is opportune to quote at length some words from a lecture whose centenary we celebrate this year. In the work subsequently published as *The Progress of Dogma*, the great Free Church theologian, James Orr concluded as follows.¹

If, however, I were asked in what I think the distinctive peculiarity of twentieth-century Christianity will lie, I should answer that it is not in any new or overwhelmingly brilliant discovery in theology that I look for it. The lines of essential doctrine are by this time well and surely established. But the Church has another and yet more difficult task before it, if it is to retain its ascendancy over the minds of men. That task is to bring Christianity to bear as an applied power on the life and conditions of society; to set itself as it has never yet done to master the meaning of "mind of Christ", and to achieve the translation of that mind into the whole practical life of the age—into laws, institutions, commerce, literature, art; into domestic, civic, social, and political relations; into national and international doings—in this sense to bring in the Kingdom of God among men. I look to the twentieth century to be an era of Christian Ethic even more than of Christian Theology. With God on our side, history behind us, and the unchanging needs of the human heart to appeal to, we need tremble for the future of neither. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the grass. The grass withereth, and the flower falleth; but the word of the Lord abideth for ever. And this is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you."

The argument which led Orr to this conclusion is well worth studying. This is especially because the variety of subjects studied under the title 'Theology' today means that fewer and fewer theological students are grasping the broad sweep of the history of Christian doctrine. Orr's volume offers an interesting way into that history. He argued that there was a logic to the historical development of doctrine that corresponded to the systematic relation of doctrines. By 'development of doctrine', or 'of dogma', Orr did not mean something that went beyond Scripture, but the unfolding of biblical truth. Theological text-books follow a logical order: prolegomena (including the questions of revelation, faith and reason, Scripture); the doctrine of God; theological anthropology; christology; the work of Christ (objective soteriology); the application of redemption (subjective soteriology); eschatology. The Church has deepened its understanding of doctrine precisely in that order: it sorted out the question of authority and apologetics in the first centuries; God as Trinity in the fourth; theological anthropology (Augustine and Pelagius) in the early fifth; christology in the middle of the fifth century; the atonement (Anselm) in the eleventh; subjective soteriology with the Protestant Reformation of the

¹ Publication came four years later by Hodder and Stoughton (London) in 1901. The quotation above is found on p. 353f.

sixteenth century. On eschatology, Orr thought in 1897, there is more to do; for the rest, his views are set out in the quotation.

A number of queries occur as we read these words, of differing kinds and weight. Would it not have been better, and is it not better today, to distinguish ethics from doctrine or dogmatics, and not from theology, and so make clear that ethics is theological ethics? Does not Orr's conclusion reflect an optimism which turned out to be ill-fated? However we answer these two questions, we draw attention, one hundred years on, to two other considerations.

The first concerns theological novelty. Orr, it is true, did not cover everything; ecclesiology is formally absent from his scheme. But how are we to regard the history of theology? It is tempting to say no more of Orr's position than that it was culturally conditioned. Surely we need fresh thinking in theology ... and try telling theologians today, let alone in the next millennium, that we do not need much modification, still less, innovation! Indeed, Orr's matching of logical and historical order in doctrine is open to serious criticism. But there is enough in what he says to make one pause long and think hard before tampering too much with what we might call 'the tradition'. The force of Orr's argument now, as then, lies in his reminder of just what we might be unravelling if we are too readily tempted to doctrinal revision.

The second concerns ethics. His claim, be it noted, is not that ethics is now becoming more important than what he calls 'theology'. It is that intellectual advance is on the cards in the former, rather than the latter, sphere. But the task is demanding. One hundred years on, we have surely made less progress here than one might expect. Not only do many of us who are confident of our general doctrinal framework not have a clue about how, in practice, to approach ethical questions. We do not really understand very well what those questions really are. As soon as we have grasped the dimensions of a contemporary issue, society has proceeded to the next dilemma. How do we use the Bible when everything seems so fast and mobile? One hundred years on, though not quite in the way that he envisaged, Orr may well be right in pressing us to theological creativity (in fidelity to Scripture) in the area of ethics. Perhaps the intellectual credibility of Christianity will largely depend on its capacity to produce a fruitful theological ethic.

On the occasion of their centenary, we salute these lectures and their author.² If we can recapture this sense of the solidity and depth of our doctrinal inheritance, and at the same time ponder the suggestion that Christian ethics demands peculiar attention, it will be much to our profit.

² Orr was a contributor to the renowned series. *The Fundamentals*, indicating a somewhat greater diversity in these contributions than we might usually suppose. His weighty *The Christian View of God and the World* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1893) can be commended for several things, including, it may be helpful to point out, the spirit of its treatment of the question of hell, punishment and annihilation (pp. 386–97).

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Definition

In a previous issue of *Themelios*, modern trends in pentateuchal studies were explained.¹ It was found that critical scholarship has moved away from the older, documentary kind of theory to models that focus on how the text has come into its present form. The situation with the historical books that come after the Pentateuch in our OT (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) has never been quite the same as with the Pentateuch. Although some scholars formerly tried to find the classic pentateuchal documents continuing in these books, this never became the consensus view. Rather, study of these books somewhat anticipated modern trends in pentateuchal scholarship by adopting a model whereby sources were combined into a unified historical work by a single thinker. That hypothetical writer has become known as the Deuteronomist (Dtr), and his history the Deuteronomistic History (DtH), as it was thought to have been prefaced by the book of Deuteronomy (Dt.). The scholar responsible for this view was Martin Noth, writing in 1943.

As with pentateuchal studies, there have been many developments since Noth wrote. The aim of this article is to explain and evaluate the most recent thinking about the composition of these books.

The essential question

The books of DtH purport to tell of a succession of periods in Israel's history, from the occupation of the land in the sub-Mosaic time, through the period of the judges, the united monarchy of David and Solomon, and the separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah, until these in turn fell to the Mesopotamian powers of Assyria and Babylon. The narrative perspective is plainly the exile. The question, therefore, is how an exilic writer (or writers) may have used materials and records already in existence in order to bring his account into the shape that we know. Was he in reality an 'author' (and thus historian and theologian), or was he rather someone who collected and ordered materials that were already formed, and carried an interpretation of events with them?

The classic theory

Noth thought that a single exilic author (Dtr) had used sources in order to write a history of Israel. Dtr, finding a law-book already before him (that is, the putative original Dt.), provided it with a historical introduction (Dt. 1:1-3:29) which also served as the introduction to the whole history. In this way the history was made to conform to the canons of the deuteronomic law. The deuteronomic ballast of the history could be found principally in the speeches of important characters at important junctures, which emphasized the covenantal commitment of Israel to Yahweh (*e.g.* Jos. 23). The point of the history was thus interpreted as an explanation of the fall of the two kingdoms of Israel, in terms of their failure to keep this commitment. The discovery of the Book of the Law by King Josiah (2 Ki. 22:8) and the ensuing reform of religion (2 Ki. 23) could not turn the tide, because Judah relapsed quickly into apostasy.

The 'Josianic redaction' (or double redaction) theory

This concept of a single author of the history was powerfully challenged by those, like F.M. Cross, who thought that there were not one but two editions

of the history, the first having been produced in the reign of King Josiah (628–609 BC), a generation or so before the exile. The first problem that Cross and others identified was the status of the dynastic promise to David (2 Sa. 7). If Dtr simply wanted to draw a line under the failed experiment of the Davidic covenant, why had he left in his account the story of God's promise to David, with its unconditional-looking assurance that his son's kingdom would be established 'for ever' (2 Sa. 7:13)? Admittedly this very promise receives a new qualification at the point at which David, on his deathbed, charges Solomon his son with his royal responsibilities (1 Ki. 2:4). And Noth's view was that the portrayal of the ideal king, in David, would become the measure by which his successors could be shown to have failed. But even this can hardly explain the strong emphasis laid on the royal promises, and indeed the 'messianic' idea which seems to lie at the heart of the books of Samuel.

According to Cross, the first author (Dtr1) wrote in the time of Josiah, and brought the history up to the narrative of that king's reform (2 Ki. 23:25). Josiah is thus depicted as a wholly successful king, after the manner of David, and the story celebrates the fulfilment of the ancient promise to that king. This Deuteronomist is thus strongly pro-monarchical, in the sense that he attributes to the Davidic king an exceptionally strong influence and responsibility in the sphere of worship.⁴ This means that Cross's Dtr1 is quite a different proposition from Noth's Dtr; he celebrates, while the latter bewails. Noth's Dtr finds his counterpart, in Cross's concept, in the second writer, Dtr2. Writing in the exile, Dtr2 brought the history up to date, by adding 2 Kings 23:26–25:30, and making other light revisions to the body of the work. A crucial passage for Cross was 2 Kings 23:26–27, which seemed to be wholly incompatible with the high praise for Josiah. The sudden turn from optimism to pessimism, from a narrative of reform and restoration to a decision to punish Judah in any case because of sins committed by Josiah's predecessor, Manasseh, seemed to be explicable only on the basis of a separate redaction written at a later time.

The advantage of Cross's work is that it accommodates the positive material on the monarchy rather better than Noth's theory could do. Against it is the sudden change of direction that has to be assumed when Dtr2 revises Dtr1. Cross is arguably no more successful than Noth was in dealing with the full range and nuancing of the narrative. Could such a light revision as he envisages really turn a story of resounding triumph into one of total defeat and judgment?

The theory of a Josianic redaction has been elaborated, however, well beyond Cross's seminal work. R.D. Nelson tried to show a difference in redactional methods between Dtr1 and Dtr2, for example, in the formulas used for summing up the kings' reigns before and after 2 Kings 23:25.⁵ More recently, G.N. Knoppers, in a treatment of the books of Kings from Solomon to Josiah, has argued that Dtr (that is, in his terminology, the Josianic Dtr1) has incorporated a range of pre-exilic traditions concerning kingship, some of them critical of it as an institution. This allows a more nuanced reading of the bulk of Kings than Cross's. Solomon, for example, can be criticized for his sins, as part of an orchestrated demonstration of the sequence of sin, judgment and renewed promise.⁶ The idea that Solomon offers a contrast to Josiah, in order to promote the latter as the great, unparalleled Davidic king, has been taken up by others, too.⁷ But Knoppers's main argument is that, while Dtr1 acknowledges the past failures of the kings, he still offers the ideal of a strong reforming king, who controls and promotes the worship of Yahweh alone, as the best hope for Judah's future.⁸ In this way the Josianic dating and rationale of DtH is maintained, but there has been some allowance for the contribution of other, and older, perspectives. (Knoppers stresses, for example, that DtH is a story of both kingdoms, a point which emphasizes the importance of received traditions.)

S.L. McKenzie also maintained that DtH is a Josianic work, but took a slightly different tack, managing to follow both Noth and Cross. He thinks that Noth was essentially right in identifying a single author of the history, but wrong only in dating it. For him, the work comes from the time of Josiah, for similar reasons to those offered by Cross. He differs from Cross only in thinking that there was no systematic Dtr2 revision, but rather a number of unrelated additions to the basic work, including the story of Judah after Josiah.¹⁰ Knoppers, incidentally, offered no separate account of Dtr2. These two authors, furthermore, focused on Kings, and extrapolated from there to the whole history.

A triple redaction

In a quite different way of thinking traced to R. Smend,¹¹ DtH is thought to have come into being in the exilic age in three stages, a basic form of the history (DtrG) having been augmented by two redactions, one concerned with the law (hence DtrN, for 'nomistic'), the other characterized by an interest in prophecy (hence DtrP). This form of the theory differs from that of Cross by reason of its strong focus on the exilic period. The idea that the text might give evidence of Israel's actual pre-exilic religious history is virtually absent here. The 'prophetic' redactional layer, for example, is not linked closely to a pre-exilic prophetic tradition, but belongs to a somewhat intellectualized inner-exilic debate, in which there are different adaptations of the idea of prophecy.¹² This seems on the face of it implausible. And there is a serious problem with the assumption that an exilic writer created the unconditional Davidic promise, when the exile itself had made such a concept problematical.¹³

Modern developments

The modern debate may be said to revolve around the following themes: definition of the extent of the literature; the relation of the text to actual tradition; the literary relationship between the component parts and the whole; the diversity of ideas, for example the attitude to kingship and worship; and the theological orientation of the work. These are interconnected. A theory about where the work begins, for example, is likely to be closely associated with an understanding of what it means. Serious contributions, therefore, have to address all or most of these questions. We will illustrate the state of research by considering three important, and quite different, lines of development.

A single Deuteronomistic author: J. Van Seters

Like Noth, Van Seters sees Dtr as a creative historian who has used sources in order to produce a connected history of Israel. However, Noth is criticized here for failing to go far enough in recognizing Dtr's creativity. In Judges, for example, there is no evidence for Noth's 'Sammler' (that is, a pre-Deuteronomistic collector of stories from old Israel).¹⁴ In these stories, it is impossible to distinguish any older material from Dtr's own expression. Noth had thought that older sources could indeed be discerned by means of literary criticism. In the book of Judges the distinction between pre-Deuteronomistic 'story' and Deuteronomistic 'framework' became widely accepted in commentaries and monographs on Judges.¹⁵ Van Seters, however, denies that such distinctions can be made. In his view the 'framework' has been so thoroughly integrated into the story that it is difficult to extract a previous literary stratum.¹⁶ The stories, indeed, were never intended as a self-contained collection, but only had meaning as part of a larger narrative, including Eli and Samuel, which formed the historian's prologue to his history of the monarchy.¹⁷

Other elements that might be considered signs of material older than Dtr are not so, according to Van Seters. In particular, there is nothing here that has

intruded from pentateuchal sources. (It should be remembered that Van Seters, unlike most other scholars, dates J after Dtr.) Where there are links with pentateuchal stories this is because the material in DtH is secondary. Thus the Rahab story, for example (Jos. 2), has been contrived by the Yahwist (J) in order to promote a universalistic outlook on Israel's religion. It is therefore secondary in DtH, that is, added to Dtr's history at a later stage. Van Seters claims: '... If Pentateuchal sources are to be found in Joshua, whether J or P, they are all secondary additions made directly onto the original Dtr work'.¹⁸

The main difficulty with Van Seters's view is in his insistence that DtH has priority over all the pentateuchal traditions. The problem is acute with Deuteronomy itself, where the opening historical retrospect (Dt. 1-3) seems to presuppose that the story has been told more fully elsewhere. And this sort of factor may explain why his views do not command a broad following. Yet Van Seters's insistence on the literary unity of DtH is interesting, and chimes in to some extent with the literary studies of the historical books, which we shall turn to below. For him, the total history clearly overrides the idea of 'books', or 'blocks' (such as the Ark Narrative), that might have their own existence within it. And as for Judges: 'The history of the books of Kings is the intellectual prerequisite for the history of the judges.'¹⁹ He thus maintains consistently his contention that Dtr freely and creatively used such sources as he had to produce a complex and coherent narrative. It follows, of course, that Dtr's work – for all Van Seters's insistence that he is a 'historian' – affords very little access to Israel's pre-exilic history.

Sources and Deuteronomistic redactions: H. Weippert and A.F. Campbell

Many scholars, however, are far from ready to give up the well-established idea that older sources underlie DtH, now to be found in narratives concerning the Ark, for example, or in the so-called Succession Narrative (2 Sa. 9-20; 1 Ki. 1-2).²⁰ The old idea of the presence of early northern material in DtH has been taken up again recently by A. Rofé, who criticized Noth for simply failing to take account of it.²¹ The interest in a variety of northern sanctuaries in Joshua 24-1 Samuel 12, and in northern prophetic stories, has posed a problem for theories that focus on Josiah and the exile.²² P.K. McCarter, in his commentary on Samuel, argued for a northern, anti-royalist, pre-Dtr prophetic history of the monarchy, standing close to Hosea.²³ And A.F. Campbell thought he could discern a continuous ninth-century 'Prophetic Record' contained in 1 Samuel 1-2 Kings 10, promoting a view of the prophet as the one who, by his prerogative of anointing kings, played a decisive role in directing the life of Israel.²⁴

In support of this position, linguistic arguments have been brought to bear. The Dtr theory rests partly on the idea of an identifiable Dtr style. Campbell argues that the idea of a 'typical' Dtr style (with its repetitions, its rhetorical sound, and its recognizable vocabulary) may not be an infallible guide to authorship.²⁵ These features, indeed, may have been shared by many writers; there is the possibility of imitation; and in any case the danger of circular argument is not far away.

Common to the above theories is a concept of pre-Dtr material that has come to Dtr already in a certain shape, that is, with some measure of editing and interpretation.²⁶ The idea of pre-Dtr authors is handled, with some similarities and differences, by Campbell and H. Weippert. Campbell, as we have noticed, postulates a Prophetic Record (PR) which he thinks can be reconstructed on the basis of a study of 1 Samuel 1-2 Kings 10. The argument is based on identifying texts that have certain regular features and characteristic formulae. These include the stories of the anointing of Saul, David and Jehu, and the designation/rejection stories concerning Jeroboam, Ahab and Jehu,

together with texts that link these into a connected narrative. The existence of the PR depends on being able to show that its author(s) has reworked previously existing texts. Thus in 1 Samuel 9, for example, Samuel as the prophet empowered to anoint Saul according to the purpose of Yahweh has superseded the 'man of God', or 'seer', in 9:6-9, whose role is much less developed.²⁷

H. Weippert has written a number of articles that attempt to account for relatively early and late material. Initially, she postulated not two but three redactions, in the periods of Hezekiah, Josiah and the exile respectively.²⁸ The idea of a Hezekiah redaction proved influential, and Weippert's work was one of the stimuli to another important contribution, that of Iain Provan. Provan argued for a Hezekian redaction on the basis of formulae regarding (a) David and (b) the 'high places', which he thought varied after the account of Hezekiah's reign.²⁹ Hezekiah, therefore, was the culmination of the earliest form of DtH, being seen as one who lived up to the Davidic promise. On the face of it, the view that the story of Hezekiah and the fall of Samaria is a first climax, or conclusion, of the book is quite attractive.³⁰ The statement 'after him, there were no kings like him' (2 Ki. 18:5) may suggest an edition that does not yet know Josiah. The case is not overwhelming, however. The 'incomparability' clause probably has something conventional about it.³¹ And the structure of the books of Kings still seems to point to Josiah, not Hezekiah, as the high point. (Provan recognizes this in a later work, in which he takes a narrative approach to the books of Kings, and sees the accounts of Hezekiah and Josiah as a kind of double climax.)³²

Weippert nevertheless contributed to the debate in other important ways. In a recent article, she builds on von Rad's insight that DtH bases its narrative structure on the concept of history as promise-fulfilment. This she understands in a profound way. It cannot be limited simply to forms that are strictly 'promise', but may be found in a range of speech-types.³³ The promise-fulfilment schema can structure individual narratives. The crossing of the Jordan, for example (Jos. 3), is an event that is directed throughout by the LORD; it is a self-contained fulfilment story. The schema also connects narratives across larger reaches of text. The stories of Gideon, Jephthah and Samson, for example, are linked in a pattern of promise-fulfilment.³⁴ In this way quite disparate material is bound together.

Like Campbell, Weippert analyses individual texts to find the limits of early stories and where they have been developed. Ahijah's prophecy to King Jeroboam (1 Ki. 14) illustrates what she means. At the simplest narrative level, Ahijah foretells the death of Jeroboam's son, which then follows (vv. 3, 17-18). The composition, however, broadens the significance of Ahijah's words to take in all Jeroboam's male offspring (vv. 7, 10-11). And a final redaction finds a further fulfilment in the exile of the people of the northern kingdom to Assyria (vv. 15-16).³⁵ This succession of interpretations, in which each builds on the last, explains the title of her essay (the 'history' has arisen out of 'histories').

The procedure just described is a somewhat traditional redactional approach. However, in another article Weippert advocated a compromise between redaction criticism and the rather different idea that pre-Dtr material might have existed in already formed 'blocks' (exemplified by Campbell). This mixed concept of pre-Dtr material would then account for both unity and diversity in DtH (i.e. 'redactions' would produce the effect of a unified perspective, while 'blocks' would account for the individuality of the various parts).³⁶

Compromise views have also been taken up, in different ways, by A.D.H. Mayes, N. Lohfink and most recently by M. O'Brien (a student of Campbell's). Mayes allows for pre-Dtr material in the history books, but then distinguishes three separate Dtr editorial hands: a Dtr historian (Dtr1), a second Dtr (Dtr2)

characterized by a concern for law and covenant (resembling Smend's DtrN, therefore), and a third Dtr, who shows an interest in Levites.³⁸ Lohfink adopts a combination of the positions of Cross and Smend, involving more than one Josianic redaction and several post-exilic redactions. The 'block' that he postulates, on the grounds of phraseological usage in the topic of land possession, stretches from Deuteronomy 1 to Joshua 22, and is called DtrL. His solution errs on the side of the redactional, however, the block comprising Deuteronomy and Joshua having the character of a redactional layer rather than a true deposit of early tradition.³⁸ O'Brien attempts a systematic combination of the Cross and Smend hypotheses.³⁹

The individual books as separate blocks: C. Westermann

C. Westermann, in a recently published work, has undertaken a more radical critique than any mentioned so far of Noth's notion of Dtr as a single creative author, and moves in the direction of the separate editing of the various books. He sees two basic problems with Noth's theory: (i) it is not a connected history, rather a concatenation of episodes, and (ii) it possesses no narrative of origins.⁴⁰ This is in obvious contrast to Van Seters also. One of Westermann's central contentions is that there was a pre-Deuteronomistic narrative stretching from Exodus to Kings. (The issue of the beginning of the narrative is thus a central factor in Westermann's challenge to Noth.) This narrative shows, he believes, that the true beginning of the story of Israel was the exodus, and that this appears from various kinds of references to the event in all the historical books. The theory of Dtr as a historian is thus dealt a fatal blow because it is inexplicable how Dtr could betray a belief in the body of his work that the exodus was the true beginning of the story, yet fail to narrate it in his history.

Within the basic narrative, the individual books had their own literary histories.⁴¹ They contain diverse forms, some originally oral, that arose from diverse situations going back to the pre-monarchic time.⁴² The book of Judges again provides the best illustration of the distinction between old forms and later interpretation. The stories of Israel's 'saviours' are close to 'family' stories, and therefore belong to the time of Israel's transition from a tribal to a political society.⁴³

Westermann has not actually abolished Dtr. He has simply argued that he is not a 'historian'. Rather, Dtr is responsible only for a 'Deuteschicht', that is, a redaction that provides an interpretative theological framework. He is adamant, for example, that the books of Samuel cannot originate from the exilic period, but must reflect a time of national greatness. Nevertheless, he accepts that it contains interpreting texts which suit the later time well.

The difference between Weippert's and Westermann's accounts may be seen as a matter of degree, in that both think that earlier material can be separated from later by critical means. Nevertheless, Westermann adds important factors to the discussion. The observation about the importance of the exodus in the historical books has probably been underestimated in the discussion of how DtH relates to the Pentateuch.⁴⁴ The presence of this 'pentateuchal' theme is a problem for Van Seters's view that J post-dates D. Westermann also scores against Van Seters when he points to the differences in form and substance between the books of DtH. His theory offers a different way of understanding the unity and diversity in DtH. His concept is like Weippert's in that it proposes an accommodation between blocks and redaction (though he does not use these terms); it is unlike hers in that the blocks correspond to books.

Mention may be made in this connection of Gillian Keys's critique of the theory of the Succession Narrative. Keys offers a reading of the books of Samuel as such, finding that they are rounded off in a satisfying way by the so-called 'Appendix' (2 Sa. 21-24), and that 1 Kings 1-2, classically considered the end

of the Succession Narrative, is different in character from 2 Samuel, and should be seen rather as the introduction to Kings (though its author clearly knows Samuel). Her most important conclusion is that 1 and 2 Samuel were incorporated into DtH 'as a block'.⁴⁵

The idea that books themselves might constitute self-standing 'blocks' of material suggests a final development, to which we will now turn.

Literary readings of DtH

Literary readings, that is, those that want to read the books of the OT as complete works of literature, regardless of any hypothetical previous history of the text, are now numerous and influential. While they are regarded by some more traditional scholars as at best a parallel study to the historical-critical approach, they seem to me to have important implications for the study of DtH, because they say something about natural entities within the larger narrative.

Barry Webb's study of Judges offers a good example.⁴⁶ Webb focuses on the literary interrelationships of the parts of the text, showing a coherent thematic development within it. The theme is expressed in terms of Israel's gradual descent into anarchy, sharpened by an ironic portrayal of its failure to perceive the source of its true strength. This analysis finds an echo in an article by C. Exum, which also shows how the well-known pattern there (the cycle of apostasy, judgment, repentance, restoration) breaks down as the narrative progresses, and that this breakdown is not an effect of careless redaction, but artfully matches form to content: the breakdown of the form itself articulates the message of dissolution.⁴⁷

There are consequences in both these studies (though they are made explicit only by Webb) for literary-critical questions. In particular they blur the well-tried distinction between story and framework, showing that these are integrated in the narrative's exposition of its theme. Webb also suggests that books, within DtH, may have been separately edited,⁴⁸ and implies that his type of study can in principle lead to revisions of theories about composition: 'One of the implications of my work is that it may be time to re-open the question of how the Deuteronomistic History as we have it came into existence.'⁴⁹ This is perhaps clearest in his treatment of the final part of the book, Judges 17-21, which is often thought to be a separate strand within it. Here, though he calls it a 'Coda', it finds a place in the development of the theme of Judges, and constitutes the end of this particular story. In the search for 'blocks', therefore, Webb's work suggests that the story of the judges closes at the end of the book called Judges, and not, as others have thought, with the narratives of Saul and Samuel (at 1 Sa. 12).

Unity and diversity in DtH

If the books are indeed separate and individual in character, is there a need to retain an idea of the unity of the 'DtH'? There are a number of concrete features which make it hard to dispense with such a concept altogether.

(i) The beginnings of books often indicate some form of resumption of a story that has already begun (Dt. 1:1, *cf.* Nu. 36:13; Jos. 1:1-2, *cf.* Dt. 34; Jdg. 1:1; 1 Ki. 1:1; the last two cases presuppose the preceding narrative rather generally).

(ii) Themes are often specifically advanced from book to book. For example, the dynastic promise to David, first made in 2 Samuel 7, is developed in 1 Kings 2:2-4, where it is conveyed by David to Solomon, with a new emphasis on the need for the king to be faithful to the commandments of God. The theme of the place of worship too may be traced, from Deuteronomy 12:5 ('seek the place the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and

make his habitation there'), through a first central sanctuary at Shiloh (Jos. 18:1, cf. 9:27), to a settled location at Jerusalem (1 Ki. 8:27-30; 2 Ki. 21:4). Within this theme, the stages of the story of the Ark may be pursued: its crossing the Jordan (Jos. 3-4); a fleeting glimpse in Judges (Jdg. 20:27); its adventures in the Philistine wars, and its procession at last into Jerusalem (1 Sa.; 2 Sa. 4-6); and its destruction (presumably) in the Babylonian débâcle (2 Ki. 25).

(iii) Finally, there are simple continuities of plot, character and motif (as we have observed already concerning the story of David and the beginning of Kings).

However, these continuities of story-line or theme do not necessarily prove unity of authorship. Nor do similarities of style in themselves, though these played an important role in developing the Deuteronomistic theory. The point has been well made by Campbell, as we saw, and by Lohfink.⁵⁰

These caveats become more important when laid alongside the arguments for actual diversity in the narratives. Elements in the narratives are hard to account for in the terms of 'exilic' theories. The promise to David is one such (2 Sa. 7), as is, more broadly, the struggle over kingship (1 Sa. 8-12). Even the double-redaction view (which recognized substantial pre-exilic material) had difficulty with the northern prophetic stories; and the attempt to place these *after* the main Deuteronomistic work (McKenzie) is not convincing. This seems to force us to think of a more complicated state of affairs than is envisaged by the classic theory, or even its main variation, the double redaction. The compromise between 'blocks' and redaction, advocated in different ways by Campbell and Weippert, is compelling.

How may a compromise between blocks and redaction be conceived, however? It seems as if the material of the narrative existed at various stages in blocks, and that these were united into a coherent narrative by a transmission process that is lost to us. These blocks may have developed independently, and finally been redacted together by the exilic period, but in a way that preserves their individuality. This seems to be the only satisfactory explanation of the fact that modern literary treatments (such as those of Webb and Exum) are able to focus on the individual books, and find coherence of expression and theme within them.

I have suggested that the various books themselves may have constituted separately transmitted blocks. Some modern literary study (not least the recovery of the 'Appendices' of Judges and Samuel for the books in which they stand⁵¹) tends in this direction. This is not to say that the books must have achieved their present form all at once. It is likely, rather, that they constitute distinctive units of tradition, which have grown into their present shape in the context of their own particular history. They may also, however, have been adjusted in relation to each other, as part of a process of transmission. How this 'horizontal' adjustment related to the 'vertical' development is probably impossible to trace in detail. I agree with Provan, however, when he says: 'I am persuaded ... that the books of the Old Testament generally grew gradually into their present form in dialogue with each other, each shaping the developing tradition and being shaped by it.'⁵² Indeed, such a view might imply a kind of proto-canonical tendency, as has been recently advocated for the beginnings of the formation of the Book of the Twelve.⁵³ It would also explain why the individual historical books are found to have their own concerns, which cannot successfully be reduced to those of the exile.

A further implication of this approach to the historical books is the breaking down of the rigid division between these and the Pentateuch. The connections between Pentateuch and historical books have been highlighted at a number

of points in our study. This has important consequences for interpretation. It leads to the recognition that the book of Exodus exercised an important influence on the historical books (Westermann and Friedman). The theme of priesthood also takes on fresh importance when Exodus is seen as an impetus to the history books alongside Deuteronomy.⁵⁴ The identification of strong links between the Pentateuch and the historical books is a gain, therefore, and should affect their theological assessment as well as the theory of their composition.

This means that, while there is a certain kind of unity, there is also great variety in the historical books. The various parts 'stage' various themes. The theme of 'messiah' is to the fore in Samuel, for example, and 'presence' in both Joshua and Samuel.⁵⁵ The most unfortunate consequence of casting the historical books in a Deuteronomistic/Josianic mould is the tendency to flatten them as narrative and theology. In particular, a theological typing of the material has resulted from imposing on it a certain understanding of Deuteronomy. This is exemplified by Weinfeld's belief that Deuteronomy is 'secularizing' and 'demythologizing'.⁵⁶ In the history books, this tendency appears in the undue prominence given to 1 Kings 8:27-30, misinterpreted as a programme for a theology of transcendence and desacralization. The privileged position given to Kings generally in the discussion also has the effect of de-emphasizing important themes and characteristics in the other books - especially those of 'presence' and 'messiah'.

¹ G.J. Wenham, 'Pentateuchal studies today', *Themelios* 22.1 (1996): pp. 3-13.

² M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (ET Sheffield: JSOT, 1981).

³ F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 274-89.

⁴ See G.N. Knoppers, *Two Nations under God: the Deuteronomistic History of Solomon and the Dual Monarchies* (HSM 52; Atlanta: Scholars Press, vol. 2, 1993), pp. 248-51. Knoppers advocates the double redaction theory, though without a special treatment of the nature and extent of Dtr2, see vol. 1, p. 51.

⁵ Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, p. 286.

⁶ R.D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTS 18; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981).

⁷ Knoppers, *Two Nations* I, pp. 138-9.

⁸ M.A. Sweeney, 'The critique of Solomon in the Josianic edition of the Deuteronomistic History', *JBL* 114 (1995): pp. 607-22, esp. p. 612.

⁹ Knoppers, *Two Nations* II, pp. 253-4.

¹⁰ S.L. McKenzie, *The Trouble With Kings: the Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History* (VTSup 42; Leiden: Brill, 1991).

¹¹ R. Smend, 'Das Gesetz und die Völker', in H.W. Wolff (ed.), *Probleme Biblischer Theologie* (Munich: Kaiser, 1971), pp. 494-509.

¹² W. Dietrich, *Prophezie und Geschichte* (FRLANT 108; Göttingen:

Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1972), p. 42.

¹³ See Knoppers, *Two Nations* I, pp. 38-42, for a critique of the Smend school.

¹⁴ J. Van Seters, *In Search of History* (New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 329-31.

¹⁵ The tendency may be illustrated by A.D.H. Mayes, *The Story of Israel between Settlement and Exile: a Redactional Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (London: SCM, 1983); his view of the composition of Judges is summarized on pp. 72-80. See also R. Boling, *Judges* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1975), pp. 29-38.

¹⁶ Van Seters, *In Search of History*, pp. 343-4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, *In Search of History*, pp. 323-5.

- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 350, 346.
- ²⁰ L. Rost, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (1926); and see R.P. Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel* (JSOT Guides; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), pp. 30–9, 81–94.
- ²¹ A. Rofé, 'Ephraimite and Deuteronomistic History', in D. Garrone and S. Moscati (eds), *Storia e Tradizioni di Israele* (Brescia: Paideia, 1991), pp. 221–35, here pp. 222–3.
- ²² See S.L. McKenzie's criticism of Cross on this point: *The Trouble with Kings*, p. 7.
- ²³ P.K. McCarter, *I Samuel, II Samuel* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1980, 1984); see 1, pp. 18–23.
- ²⁴ A.F. Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings: a Ninth Century Document (1 Samuel 1 - 2 Kings 10)* (CBQMS; Washington DC, 1986).
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ²⁶ A.D.H. Mayes, for example, has made an assumption of this sort for much of Judges and Samuel: *The Story of Israel*; cf. R.D. Nelson, 'The role of the priesthood in the Deuteronomistic History', *VTS* 43 (1991): pp. 132–47, e.g. on 1 Sa. 2:27–36, which already had a *Tendenz* when Dtr received it (p. 136).
- ²⁷ Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings*, p. 19.
- ²⁸ H. Weippert, 'Die "deuteronomistischen" Beurteilungen der Könige von Israel und Juda und das Problem der Redaktion der Königsbücher', *Biblica* 53 (1972): pp. 301–39.
- ²⁹ I. Provan, *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings: a Contribution to the Debate about the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (VTSup; Leiden: Brill, 1991).
- ³⁰ So W. Schnledewind, 'The problem with Kings: Recent Study of the Deuteronomistic History', *Religious Studies Review* 22 (1996): pp. 22–7, here p. 26. He mentions others who have found a Hezekian redaction (22).
- ³¹ G.N. Knoppers thinks the incomparability formulae stem from an exilic Deuteronomist: 'There was none like him', *CBQ* 54 (1992): pp. 411–31.
- ³² Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (New International Biblical Commentary; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995).
- ³³ H. Weippert, 'Geschichten und Geschichte: Verheissung und Erfüllung im Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk', *VTS* 43 (1991): pp. 116–31. On this point she directly opposes E. Würthwein, 'Prophetisches Wort und Geschichte in den Königsbüchern. Zu einer These Gerhard von Rads', in M. Oeming and A. Graupner (eds), *Altes Testament und christliche Verkündigung* (FS A.H.J. Gunneweg; Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 399–411.
- ³⁴ Weippert, 'Geschichten und Geschichte', pp. 118, 123.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- ³⁶ *Idem*, 'Das deuteronomistische Geschichtswerk: sein Ziel und End in der neueren Forschung', *TRu* 50 (1985): pp. 213–49. This sort of compromise, as she notes, is also proposed by A.D.H. Mayes and N. Lohfink. The single author model she dismisses rather peremptorily, as failing to account for diversity.
- ³⁷ Mayes, *The Story of Israel*, p. 58. He diverges from Smend on particulars, however (p. 60).
- ³⁸ N. Lohfink, 'Kerygmata des Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks', in J. Jeremias and L. Perlitt (eds), *Die Botschaft und die Boten* (FS H.W. Wolff; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), pp. 87–100.
- ³⁹ M.A. O'Brien, *The Deuteronomistic History Hypothesis Reassessed* (OBO 92; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1989).
- ⁴⁰ C. Westermann, *Die Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments: gab es ein deuteronomistisches Geschichtswerk?* (Theologische Bücherei 87 AT; Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1994), pp. 10–11.
- ⁴¹ Westermann is not the first to propose a theory like this. His most important predecessor in this respect was G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1970; original German edition 1965).

Fohrer differs from Westermann, however, in holding substantially to the hypothesis of a Hexateuch. In his view Judges-Kings came into being independently, though ultimately they were deuteronomistically edited (pp. 192-5).

⁴² Westermann, *Geschichtsbücher*, pp. 33-6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4.

⁴⁴ R.E. Friedman is an exception. His particular theory of DtH makes the exodus a key focus: Friedman, 'From Egypt to Egypt', in B. Halpern and J. Levenson (eds), *Traditions in Transformation* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), pp. 167-92.

⁴⁵ G. Keys, *The Wages of Sin* (JSOTS; Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 80-96, 203. She thus agrees with Noth that Dtr played only a small part in the composition of Samuel, beyond a certain shaping of the tradition (pp. 95-6).

⁴⁶ B. Webb, *The Book of the Judges* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987).

⁴⁷ Cheryl Exum, 'The centre cannot hold: thematic and textual instabilities in Judges', *CBQ* 52 (1990): pp. 410-31, here pp. 412-13.

⁴⁸ Webb, *Judges*, pp. 210-11.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁵⁰ See n. 25; and cf. Lohfink, 'Kerygmata', p. 89.

⁵¹ See above on Webb and Keys.

⁵² Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, p. 4.

⁵³ J. Jeremias, 'Die Anfänge des Dodekapropheten: Hosea und Amos', *VTS* 61 (1995): pp. 87-106.

⁵⁴ B. Peckham, *The Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (HSM 35; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985). Peckham's Dtr2 strongly resembles Noth's single Dtr. Dtr1, in his view, wrote a short history from Moses to Hezekiah, while Dtr2 was comprehensive, systematic and theologically more articulate. For the point on priesthood, see p. 65.

⁵⁵ H.D. Preuss, "...ich will mit dir sein", *ZAW* 80 (1968): pp. 139-73. Preuss notes the concentration of 'being with' language in narrative generally, but especially (within DtH) in Joshua and Samuel (p. 140). In the latter it is closely associated with the king.

⁵⁶ M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), pp. 190-209.

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A crucified Messiah is an impossibility – the one hanged on the tree to die is a traitor or a blasphemer. Hanging on the cross, he is accursed by God and men. Such was the priestly doctrine in the days of Jesus, as we have learned from the Dead Sea Scrolls and other early Jewish sources.

In Deuteronomy 21:22-23 we find the following law:

a man guilty of a capital offence is put to death and you hang him on a tree, you must not leave the body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury it that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is a curse of God.¹ You must not defile the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

A radical reinterpretation

In the second century BC a Jewish author close to the Essene community made a new edition of the laws of Deuteronomy, incorporating verses from Leviticus and Numbers as well as priestly teaching from his own time. He published this new edition, which included a lengthy section on the temple, as authoritative Torah of God. In 1956 the bedouins found two copies of this work north of the Dead Sea. In this book, today called the Temple Scroll, we meet a radical reinterpretation of these verses from Deuteronomy:

If a man informs against his people,² delivers his people up to a foreign nation and betrays his people, you shall hang him on the tree so that he dies. On the word of two and three witnesses shall he be put to death, and they shall hang him on the tree.

If a man commits a crime punishable by death, and he defects into the midst of the nations and curses his people, the children of Israel, you shall hang him also on the tree so that he dies. And their bodies shall not remain upon the tree, but you shall bury them the same day, for those who hang on the tree are accursed by God and men, you must not defile the land which I give you as an inheritance. (Temple Scroll 64:6-13)

In Deuteronomy it is not clear whether the evildoer should be hanged alive upon the tree or only his corpse after he is executed (most interpreters do not note that the Hebrew can be translated either 'is put to death and you thereafter hang him on a tree' or 'is put to death when you hang him on a tree'). The Temple Scroll clearly ordains that certain evildoers shall be executed by being hanged alive on the tree. The word 'tree' can mean a tree, a pole or a cross. In Rabbinic sources 'to hang on the tree' primarily means execution by hanging on a pole. Crucifixion would also be considered a form of 'hanging somebody upon the tree'.

Earlier, it was held that crucifixion was the capital punishment of the Gentiles, never of the Jews. Crucifixion was invented by the Persians,³ then taken over by Alexander the Great and his successors, among them the Seleucids in Syria, and later by the Romans. It has therefore been argued that the fact that Jesus was crucified demonstrates that his death was the responsibility of the Romans, not of the Jews. The cry of the Jewish mob that is quoted in the Gospels, 'Crucify him!', is therefore viewed as unhistoric. As good Jews they should have shouted 'Have him killed!' or 'Have him stoned', but not 'Crucify him!'

'Hanging on the tree' in Jewish tradition

The Israeli scholar Yigal Yadin, who deciphered and published the Temple Scroll some years ago, changed these presuppositions.⁴ Yadin was a renowned archaeologist, general and politician. When Israeli forces entered the West Bank during the Six Day War, he ordered a special unit to search the antique dealers in Bethlehem and Hebron to find the scroll he suspected one of them was hiding. The dealer nicknamed Kando brought forth a 9-metre-long scroll hidden in a box below the floor tiles.

Yadin and others⁵ have shown that this interpretation of Deuteronomy 21 by the Temple Scroll reflects Jewish priestly *halakhah* (legal interpretation) from the early second century BC to the fall of the temple, which ordains that the one who is guilty of national treason or blasphemy⁶ shall die by being hanged upon the tree. A sinner of this kind should be killed in the most awesome way, by being hanged on the tree before his people (whom he has betrayed) and before God (whom he has blasphemed). And while he is hanging on the tree he is, according to the word of the Torah, accursed by God and men. Traces of this exegesis are found both in rabbinical literature and early Aramaic translations of the Bible.⁷

Not only the Essenes, but probably also the other priestly group, the Sadducees, held this position. They were the party in power and the rulers of the temple in the days of Jesus. It is doubtful that the laymen's party, the Pharisees, shared this tradition on how the blasphemer should be killed. Their successors, the rabbis, prescribe that a blasphemer shall first be killed by stoning, and then be hanged on the tree.⁸ But the Pharisees would also view one crucified as being cursed by God according to the word of the Torah.

History shows that on a few occasions crucifixion or execution by hanging on the tree was indeed practised by Jews. Joshua executed the King of Ai by hanging him (possibly alive) on a tree (Jos. 8:29). According to Numbers 25:4, the foremost idolaters among the Israelites should be killed 'before the Lord in view of the sun so that the Lord's fierce anger may turn away from Israel'. Crucifixion probably became Jewish custom in the Maccabean period, influenced by the practice of the Seleucid overlords in Syria. Antiochus Epiphanes used crucifixion in his persecution of Torah-obedient Jews in Judea (Josephus, *Antiquities* XII 256; *Ass. Mos.* 8:1). In 162 BC, the Hellenizing high priest, Alcimus, had 60 pious Jews executed by crucifixion, among them the priestly scribe Jose ben Joezer.⁹ In the aftermath of a revolt in 90 BC, in which the Pharisees allied themselves with the Syrians (cf. the phrase 'delivers his people up to a foreign nation and betrays his people' in the Temple Scroll), King Alexander Janneus crucified 800 Pharisees in Jerusalem (Josephus, *Wars* I 97, 113; *Antiquities* XIII 380). According to Yadin, another Qumran scroll, the commentary on the book of Nahum,¹⁰ lauds Janneus for this deed, which followed the priestly tradition of law.¹¹ According to rabbinical sources, the leader of the Sanhedrin, Shimon ben Shetah,¹² had 80 witches from Ashkelon hanged on the tree some two decades later.

In light of this, the cry 'Crucify him!' is exactly what we should expect of the Sadducean leaders, 'the chief priests and their officials' (Jn. 19:5). The high priest had torn his garments when he heard Jesus talking about himself as the heavenly Son of Man seated on God's right hand: 'He has spoken blasphemy!'¹³ After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Sadducean high priests viewed Jesus as a threat against the temple and the people (Jn. 11:46-50). And they (the chiefs of the temple) certainly perceived Jesus' saying that he could rebuild the temple in three days (Jn. 2:19 with parallels)¹⁴ as blasphemy or national treason. Consequently, they deemed him as one who should be hanged on the tree. According to political reality, this had to be implemented by the Roman rulers of the land. When it was not in their own power to hang

the blasphemer on the tree, they pressured Pilate to do it. For the chief priests, a Roman crucifixion would certainly fall within the category 'to hang on the tree'.

At this point in the argument it must be remarked that it is historically incorrect to make the Jewish people as such responsible for the execution of Jesus; those responsible were the Sadducean temple leadership together with the Roman authorities. Neither is it plausible that those Jerusalemites who greeted Jesus with 'Hosanna!' when he entered the city were the same who later shouted 'Crucify him!' It was a group handpicked by the high priests who shouted 'Crucify him!' It is a sad aspect of Church history that these verses have been misused to justify anti-Semitism and persecutions of the Jewish people. Preachers must be on guard against generalizing derogatory statements such as 'the Jews rejected Jesus', 'the Jews did not understand that Jesus was sent by God', 'Jesus reacted against the legalistic views of the Jews'.

A messiah should not hang on a cross, accused by God and men. Therefore some of those passing by the cross of Jesus mocked, 'He is the King of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross!' The one who was crucified and cursed could not have been the Messiah. Peter knows this paradox when he boldly tells the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council, that 'the God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead - whom you had killed by hanging him on the tree' (Acts 5:30; cf. Acts 10:39; 1 Pet. 2:24). So does Paul, who 'preaches a crucified Messiah, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles' (1 Cor. 1:23). And in Galatians 3:13 he puts forward a daring claim: 'The Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Torah by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." We note that both Peter and Paul use the phrase 'hang on a tree' which we know from Deuteronomy and later Jewish interpretations. Paul, raised as a Pharisee in Jerusalem, knew the priestly doctrine of his days. He knew that Jesus hung accursed on the cross. But the rabbi from Tarsus provides a new interpretation. He knows that God has raised the accursed from the dead and thereby demonstrated that he is the Messiah. This fact means that the curse Jesus did carry on the cross was not his own, it was ours. And by willingly taking the curse of the Torah on our behalf, he redeems both Israelites and Gentiles from the curse which befell us all because we did not manage to obey the Torah. Redemption is at hand!

Other NT passages reflect the use of Deuteronomy 21:23 by Jewish opponents as a key argument against the messiahship of Jesus in the debate with Jewish Christians. G. Jeremias suggests that 1 Cor. 12:3, 'Ἀνὸς θεοῦ ἠσοῦς', 'Jesus is accursed', should be interpreted as a Jewish statement based on Deuteronomy 21:23, and that Acts 18:6, 26:11 and 1 Timothy 1:13 should be seen against the same background: Jews 'blaspheme' Jesus when they, in a confrontation with Jewish followers of his, relate this curse of the Torah to him.¹⁵

A rabbinic parable

One of the famous rabbis of the early second century AD, Rabbi Meir, used a parable to explain the difficult verses from Deuteronomy:

'Anyone who is hanged on a tree is a curse of God.' That means: why was he hanged - because he cursed the name of God, and furthermore, the hanged one leaves the name of God profaned.¹⁶ Rabbi Meir said: this can be understood through a parable; two identical twins were living in the same city, one was righteous and the other was a scoundrel. The first was made king of the city, the other committed robbery. Then the king ordered him to be hanged on the tree. But when he heard that all those passing by the executed shouted in distress: 'The king is hanging

on the tree', he ordered the body to be taken down. Thus we learn that when men feel sorry at such a sight, even more does God Himself who says: 'This is a disgrace for My head and for My arm'.¹⁷ For the hanged is an affront to God. Thus God says 'I feel grief even for the blood of the unrighteous ones, so how much more when the blood of the righteous ones is shed'.¹⁸

The citizens saw the image of their king hanging on the tree. Man is God's image – this is true also for the unrighteous. When we see an executed man hanging on the tree, we see the image of the Great King hanging there. And such a blasphemous disgrace cannot be tolerated for long, therefore the body must be taken down before evening.

I dare to apply a new interpretation to Rabbi Meir's parable: not only does everyone hanged on the tree represent God's image, one of those thousands hanged on a cross by the Romans represented God's image *par excellence*. 'He is the radiance of God's glory and the representation of his nature' (Heb. 1:3). When we see him on the cross we see the image of the Great King – of the divine Messiah who took the curse of mankind upon himself to bring redemption to Jew and Gentile alike.

The further history

For Jews, the crucified one was accursed by God. It was not easy for Jews of the first centuries to swallow Paul's claim that the curse Jesus carried on the cross was ours, not his own. NT and patristic sources demonstrate that Jewish opponents used the meaning 'accursed by God', from Deuteronomy 21:23, to defame Jesus. Two Christian authors of the second century testify to the encounter between Jews and Christians (including Jewish Christians) about how Deuteronomy 21:22-23 relate to Jesus. *Barnabas* 7 portrays the scapegoat of Leviticus 16 as a type of the Son of God: the scapegoat 'is accursed',¹⁹ 'the Son of God could not suffer except for our sakes' (7:2, 7, 9). Combining Deuteronomy 21:23, Zechariah 12:10 and Leviticus 16, *Barnabas* concludes: 'they will say "Is not this he whom we once crucified and rejected and pierced and spat upon? Of a truth it was he who then said that he was the Son of God"' (7:9).

In *Dialogue with Trypho* chapters 89–96, Justin (a second-century native of Samaria) treats this theme at length.²⁰ In 32:1 and 89:1 he quotes the Jewish objection in the mouth of Trypho: 'But this so-called Messiah of yours was dishonourable and inglorious, so much so that the last curse contained in the Torah of God fell on him, for he was crucified'; 'But whether the Messiah should be so shamefully crucified, this we are in doubt about. For whosoever is crucified is said in the Torah to be accursed'. Deuteronomy 21:23 seems to be the ultimate argument of the Jews against the messiahship of Jesus. This argument is so heavy that Justin (with one short exception) falls short of repeating Paul's claim that Jesus was indeed under a real curse on the cross. In chapters 89–94 Justin, probably using an earlier Christian tradition, uses different OT passages to show that Jesus was only seemingly accursed on the cross.²¹ In chapters 95–96, he elaborates the argument from Galatians 3: 'The whole human race is found to be under a curse ... The Father of all wished the Messiah for the whole human family to take upon him the curses of all ... he suffered these things on behalf of the human family, as if he were accursed.' In chapter 96, Justin provides yet another interpretation of the phrase 'cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree': the crucified one was not really cursed by God. But the Torah foretold that the Jews would curse the Christians and Christ himself in their synagogues.

This last claim could have a double reference: Jewish opponents who attributed the curse of Deuteronomy 21 to Jesus, and the curse against the

heretics, *Birkat ha-Minim*, which was inserted into the Standing Prayer about AD80.²² A main reason for this innovation was the high number of Jewish Christians who frequented the synagogue. After the fall of the temple it was important for the successors of the Pharisees to guard the doctrine and exclude from the synagogue Jewish Christians and other 'heretics'. The saying of Jesus, 'They shall expel you from the synagogue' (Jn. 16:2), foresees this painful development. The word of the evangelist, 'for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue', John 9:22, refers to *Birkat ha-Minim*. When John writes his Gospel, this curse is already reality. And he sees this contemporary curse and the Judean establishment's rejection of Jesus 60 years earlier as two aspects of the same matter. Evidence from Matthew, Acts and Josephus indicates that Pharisaic-influenced synagogues were open to Jewish Christians at least until the fall of the temple.

The relation between Church and synagogue has a long and painful history. The first separating fences were put up from the side of the rabbis, against Jewish Christians. *Birkat ha-Minim* was the first step in a development which marginalized Jewish Christians within the people of Israel. The second Jewish revolt under Bar Kochba ('The Son of the Star', a messianic designation; cf. Nu. 24:17) brought the next step. Jewish Christians could not follow a false messiah and did not join the revolt, and were therefore persecuted as traitors and executed by Bar Kochba when they refused to curse Jesus and join Bar Kochba's ranks.²³ Later history has seen the Gentile Christian Church taking a manifold 'revenge'.

At the time of Justin there were still thousands of Jewish Christians in Roman Palestine and the neighbouring countries, believers who kept the Torah and the Sabbath and circumcised their children while they witnessed to their kinsmen about Jesus as the divine Messiah. Today also the Church must meet the people of our Lord. We should listen sensitively to their objections to the messiahship of Jesus without hiding our conviction that all the Scriptures do point to him, and that the gospel is the power of God for salvation, first for the Jew, then for us Gentiles. Paul and Justin provide us with good examples in this encounter.

- 1 Christian interpreters (and Jewish ones until the time of Justin) usually regard the phrase *qlelat 'elohim* as a subjective genitive, 'a curse of God', and translate it 'accursed by God'. Jewish traditions recorded from the Mishnah (c. AD 220) onwards have read the phrase as an objective genitive, 'an affront to God' (so also recently Tanakh. *The Holy Scriptures. The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, Philadelphia/Jerusalem, 1985). Early Jewish sources see a double meaning in these words: in light of Ex. 22:28, 'do not curse God', the verse from Dt. also carries the meaning 'hung on the tree is [the one] cursing (blaspheming) God'. Among them is the Temple Scroll, which probably understood the deuteronomic *qlelat 'elohim* both as 'cursing God (and Israel)' and 'being accursed by God (and men)'.
- 2 This sentence is an interpretation of Lev. 19:16, 'It shall not be a slanderer in your people', where the same Hebrew words are used.
- 3 According to Est. 2:23 and 9:25 (cf. 5:14; 7:9), the two officials conspiring against the Persian king, as well as Haman and his sons, were executed when 'they hanged them on the tree'.
- 4 Y. Yadin, *The Temple Scroll 1-111* (Jerusalem, Hebrew edn 1977, English edn 1983), especially I, pp. 373-9, II, pp. 289-91; *idem*, 'Peshet Nahum Reconsidered', *Israel Exploration Journal* 21 (1971): pp. 1-12. Yadin provided a more popular interpretation in *The Temple Scroll. The Hidden Law of the Dead Sea Sect* (London, 1985). Two copies of the Temple Scroll

were found in Qumran Cave 11. A related work, *4QReworked Pentateuch (Discoveries in the Judean Desert, vol. XIII, 1995, pp. 187-351)*, was found in five copies in Cave 4. The Temple Scroll was probably not the authoritative Torah of the Qumran community as proposed by Yadin (it lacks the distinctive terminology characteristic of books authored by this sect).

It was known by the community, but rather derives from related circles.
 5 M. Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (London, 1977), esp. pp. 84-5; J.M. Ford, 'Crucify him, crucify him' and the Temple Scroll', *Expository Times* 87 (1976): pp. 275-8; J.A. Fitzmyer, 'Crucifixion in Ancient Palestine, Qumran Literature, and the New Testament', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978): pp. 493-513; D. Halperin, 'Crucifixion, the Nahum Peshet, and the Rabbinic Penalty of Strangulation', *Journal of Jewish Studies* XXXII (1981): pp. 32-46; J.M. Baumgarten, 'Hanging and Treason in Qumran and Roman law', *Eretz-Israel* 16 (1982): pp. 7-16; D.R. Schwartz, *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity* (Tübingen, 1992), pp. 81-8. H-W. Kuhn summarizes the discussion and includes a short survey, 'Die Bedeutung der Qumrantexte für das Verständnis des Galaterbriefes', in *New Qumran Text and Studies. Proceedings of the First Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Paris 1992*, ed. G.J. Brooke (Leiden, 1994), pp. 169-221.

6 In contrast to Yadin, I tend to interpret the phrase 'a crime punishable by death' in the Temple Scroll as including blasphemy. Dt. 13 and Lev. 24 prescribe capital punishment for sorcerers and those preaching apostasy. The Temple Scroll, which interpreted the verses from Dt. 21:22-23 in light of Dt. 13, Lev. 24 and Ex. 22:28, probably shared with other early sources the understanding that *qilelat* 'elohim also means 'cursing God'. The tradition that 80 witches were executed by hanging on the tree c. 70 BC (see below), as well as the NT evidence, make it probable that the Temple Scroll also had the sin of blasphemy in view. If, however, the Temple Scroll only referred to treason and not to blasphemy, other Jewish sources which connect cursing God and hanging on the tree yet provide a background for NT texts about the crucifixion of Jesus.

7 *Targum to Ruth* 1:17: 'Naomi said: We have four death penalties for the guilty: throwing of stones, burning by fire, death by the sword, and hanging on a tree'; *Targum Jonathan* to Nu. 25:4: 'and you shall hang them before the Word of the Lord upon a tree towards sunrise and at sunset you shall take them down and bury them'; *Targum Neofyti* to Nu. 25:4: 'And the Lord said to Moses: Take all the chiefs of the people and set them up in a Sanhedrin before the Lord and let them become judges. Every one who is guilty of death they shall hang on a pole and bury his corpse at sunset'. (We note that the tradition of Neofyti reflects a period when the Sanhedrin had capital jurisdiction; cf. Jn. 18:31; Acts 7:57-58.) Similarly the rabbinic commentary *Sifre* on Nu. 25:4: 'and expose them before the Lord in view of the sun, [and appoint] judges, you shall hang the sinners on the pole in view of the sun'.

All these sources use the verb *šlb*, which some scholars understand as 'crucify', others as 'impale/hang'. Baumgarten, 'Hanging', argues that the word relates to hanging, not crucifixion. A problem with his interpretation is that hanging by gallows is not attested in the region in the centuries BC, while crucifixion is: see M. Hengel, *Rabbinische Legende und frühpharisäische Geschichte: Schimeon b. Schtetach und die achtzig Hexen von Askalon* (Heidelberg, 1984), pp. 27-36; Kuhn, 'Die Bedeutung der Qumrantexte', p. 171, pp. 179-80. The Targums to Est. 5:14 (which reflect capital punishment as practised by the Romans in the second and third centuries AD) clearly understand the hanging on the tree, *šelibah*, which Haman planned for Mordecai and suffered himself, as crucifixion. In Jewish sources the primary meaning of the Aramaic *šelibah* or *šalab* 'al *qayssa*', which renders the Hebrew *talah* 'al *haes*, is to hang somebody on

- a pole with their arms tied around it. The phrase does not in itself indicate whether the culprit is killed before he is hanged on the pole. The origins of the traditions on 'hanging on the tree' go back to the time when the term referred to crucifixion. When the Jewish sources were written down from the third century AD onwards, most of them relate the term to hanging. The specific meaning 'crucify' is clear in the Esther Targums and Christian Aramaic traditions, in Syriac and in Christian Palestinian Aramaic, as well as a number of Talmudic references: see Halperin, 'Crucifixion', pp. 37-40.
- ⁸ The commentary *Sifre* on Dt. 21:22-23 relates the passage from Dt. to the blasphemer, but states that the culprit should first be put to death and then hanged on the tree. Similarly, *Mishna Sanhedrin* 6.4: 'All that have been stoned must (thereafter) be hanged'.
- ⁹ The exact meaning of the verb used here is not clear to us. Proposals include: 'to expose the culprit with broken limbs or hang him on the pole'. For the latter, cf. the Targumic versions quoted in n. 7.
- ¹⁰ 1 Macc. 7:16; Josephus, *Antiquities* XII 396; *Genesis Rabbah* 65:22; *Midrash Tehillim* to Ps. 11:7; cf. E. Stauffer, *Jerusalem und Rom im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* (Bern, 1957), pp. 123-32. The wording of *Genesis Rabbah* and *Midrash Tehillim* clearly describes crucifixion.
- ¹¹ 4QpNah I 6-8, which comments on the lion of Na. 2:13. Parts of the text are missing, but according to Yadin it could be reconstructed like this: 'Its interpretation concerns the furious young lion (= Janneus) who [found] those seeking smooth things (= the Pharisees) [guilty of a crime punishable by death, and hanged men alive [on the tree as is the law] in Israel from of old.'
- ¹² *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 6:4; *Talmud Yerushalmi Hagigah* 2:2; *Sifre* to Dt. 21:22. Hengel has put forward the hypothesis that this story conceals a specific historical event: that Shimon and the Pharisees crucified a number of their antagonists, the Sadducees, in an act of revenge when the Pharisaic party became the dominant political force after the death of Janneus (see *Rabbinische Legende*).
- ¹³ When asked, 'Are you the Messiah, son of the Blessed One'. Jesus answers, 'Yes, I am' (Mk. 14:62, cf. Mt. 26:64; Lk. 22:70). Jesus' response probably reflects the Hebrew phrase 'ani hu' (or 'ani wehu'), which was used as an appellation for God) from Dt. 32:39 and Is. 43:13; 52:6, words only God himself could use. On the 'I am' sayings of Jesus, see C.H. Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, 1953), pp. 127-31; F. Manns, *John and Jamnia: How the Break Occurred Between Jews and Christians c. 80-100 A.D.* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 68-70.
- ¹⁴ The Synoptic Gospels are probably correct in dating Jesus' temple action to his last visit to Jerusalem. This saying thus belongs to Jesus' provocative words and actions the last week before he was taken prisoner.
- ¹⁵ G. Jeremias, *Der Lehrer der Gerechtigkeit* (Göttingen, 1963), pp. 131-5.
- ¹⁶ This double explanation is found with the same words in *Sifre* to Dt. 21:23 and *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 6:4. The same mishnah states: 'None is hanged save the blasphemer and the idolator.'
- ¹⁷ The words of R. Meir, *qeloni mer'oshi qeloni mizro'i*, 'This is a disgrace for My head and for My arm', remind us of the translation of his contemporary Symmachus of the biblical phrase *qtlelat 'elohtm* as βλασφημία θεοῦ. 'a blasphemy to God'. *Targum Jonathan* to Dt. 21:23 adds that the hanged one is a curse of God (affront to God) 'because he is made in the image of God'. This tradition explains why, according to other sources, 'the hanged one leaves the name of God profaned' (as stated in *Midrash Tanna'im, Sifre* and *Mishnah Sanhedrin*).
- ¹⁸ *Midrash Tanna'im* to Dt. 21:23. Parallels in *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 9:5; *Tosefta Sanhedrin* 9:7; *Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin* 46b.
- ¹⁹ The word for 'accursed' is ἐπικατάρατος, the same word used by Paul in his dynamic rendering of Dt. 21:23 (cf. LXX to Dt. 27:26). See

O. Skarsaune, *The Proof From Prophecy. A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition: Text-Type, Provenance, Theological Profile* (Leiden, 1987), pp. 118, 309, 397.

²⁰ See Skarsaune, *The Proof From Prophecy*, pp. 216–20, 238.

²¹ The argument goes: when Moses made an image of the serpent in the desert, he suspended one of God's commandments (Ex. 20:4). In a similar way, the Law (Dt. 21:23) will be suspended at the realization of this type, namely when Jesus is nailed to the tree. By fixing the serpent to a type of the cross, Moses proclaimed that death was to come to the serpent (Gn. 3) through the cross - Skarsaune, *The Proof From Prophecy*, p. 238. '... though a curse lies in the Law against persons who are crucified, yet no curse lies on the Messiah of God, for by him He saves all them that have done deeds that deserve a curse' - *Dialogue* 94:5. When the Law appears to curse Christ - which should be impossible - this points to a deeper meaning of the 'curse'. There is thus only an apparent, but no real, application of Dt. 21:23 to Christ. Cf. Skarsaune, *The Proof From Prophecy*, p. 218 n. 77; W.C. van Unnik, 'Der Fluch der Gekreuzigten. Deuteronomium 21,23 in der Deutung Justins des Märtyrers', in C. Andersen and G. Klein (eds), *Theologia crucis - signum crucis. Festschrift für Erich Dinkler zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen, 1979), pp. 483–99.

²² *Birkat ha-Minim* was directed against Jewish heretics and specifically against Jewish Christians. Justin interprets it as a curse also on Gentile Christians. An early Palestinian version found in the Cairo Geniza mentions the Nazarenes in addition to the *Minim* ('heretics') as object for the cursing: 'For the apostates let there be no hope; and may the insolent kingdom (= Rome) be quickly uprooted. And may the Nazarenes and the heretics perish as in a moment, be erased from the Book of Life and not be inscribed with the righteous. Blessed are You, Lord, who humble the insolvent' ('the Nazarenes' is a Palestinian addition from the third or fourth century which specified the Nazarene Jewish Christians as object for the curse). On *Birkat ha-Minim*, see R. Kimmelman, '*Birkat Ha-Minim* and the lack of evidence for an anti-Christian Jewish prayer in late antiquity', in E.P. Sanders, A.I. Baumgarten and A. Mendelson (eds), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition. Volume Two: Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* (Philadelphia, 1981), pp. 226–44; W. Horbury, 'The benediction of the *Minim* in early Jewish-Christian controversy', *JTS* 33 (1982): pp. 19–51; S.T. Katz, 'Issues in the separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.: a reconsideration', *JBL* 103 (1984): pp. 43–76; T.C. Thornton, 'Christian understanding of the *Birkat ha-Minim* in the eastern Roman Empire', *JTS* 38 (1987): pp. 419–31; D. Flusser, 'The Jewish-Christian Schism', in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 637–43; R. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem/Leiden, 1988), pp. 102–7.

²³ The primary sources for this persecution are Justin, *1. Apology* 31:6; *Apocalypse of Peter* ch. 2. The Bar Kochba correspondence found in various caves in the Judean desert confirms that the leader of the revolt treated dissidents with brutality. On Jewish hostility against Christians in the early centuries, see R. Hvalvik, *The Struggle for Scripture and Covenant. The Purpose of the Epistle of Barnabas and Jewish-Christian Competition in the Second Century* (Tübingen: Mohr, forthcoming).

Alister McGrath

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Evangelicalism has always been suspicious of the academic world, and quite rightly so! In the first place, there is anxiety about the secularism, relativism and pluralism that seem to be endemic in much of today's American higher education. Evangelicals – and, increasingly, many others as well – have noted with growing concern the indications that the modern American academy seems to have more to do with élitism, ideological warfare and rampant anti-religious propaganda than with learning. Some academic theologians have often seemed to be little more than acolytes to these trends, affirming what often turn out to be profoundly illiberal theologies and firing both their opponents and less than totally enthusiastic colleagues, rather than engaging in the dialogue for which the academy was once noted, honoured and valued. Many state universities give the impression that they have become little more than Institutes of Political Correction. It is very difficult to read works such as Paul C. McGlasson's *Another Gospel: A Confrontation with Liberation Theology* (1994) without being concerned about the 'theological fascism' that seems to be rampant in some liberal seminaries.

Then there is the issue of relevance. Why bother with higher education? The important thing is to get on with preaching the gospel. Anything else is irrelevant. And the issue of relevance is top of the agenda for many evangelicals. As John E. Smith points out in his major study of 1963, *The Spirit of American Philosophy*: 'It is no exaggeration to say that in American intellectual life, irrelevant thinking has always been considered to be the cardinal sin.' Evangelicalism has always shown itself to be at its best in insisting that the gospel is deeply relevant to the life of ordinary people. So why risk side-tracking evangelicalism from some seriously relevant activity by suggesting that it become more concerned about academic issues?

Those who are concerned with understanding the contemporary state of North American evangelicalism will find the three works to which I refer in this short article deeply rewarding. Each, in different ways, explores aspects of the ways in which evangelicalism has responded to a number of pressures in modern American culture. In each case, the authors regard the outcome to be unsatisfactory.

The two of the three that have been out longest are authored by David Wells of Gordon-Conwell Seminary, *No Place for Truth* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993) and by Mark Noll, of Wheaton College, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994). Wells argues forcefully that evangelicalism has lost whatever grasp it once had of the importance of systematic theology. The strongly pragmatic nature of the movement has, he suggests, led to an emphasis on church growth, feel-good preaching and styles of ministry informed largely by secular psychology. The role of classical theology has become seriously eroded, with evangelical seminaries failing to allot it the place of honour it was once universally acknowledged as possessing. No longer is theology regarded as integral to maintaining and nourishing Christian identity in the world, or as a seminal resource in forging new approaches to ministry. Instead, it has become preoccupied with 'a technology of practice' and 'techniques with which to expand the church and master the self that borrow mainly from business management and psychology'. There is a widespread consensus within American evangelicalism that Wells has identified a real and worrying trend within the movement. Although some of his critics have suggested that his particular presentation of these defects is a little overstated, Wells makes some wise and helpful comments concerning the causes and possible consequences of this neglect of

theology. The work remains a fundamental challenge to American evangelicalism to keep a strong sense of theological identity.

A criticism of a somewhat different nature is set out by Noll. Armed with a masterly knowledge of the history of American evangelicalism, Noll suggests that evangelicalism is, as a matter of fact, quite well served by its theologians, and points to leading writers such as James I. Packer and Thomas C. Oden to make his point. The real problem is not that evangelicalism has neglected its theology; it is that it has failed to do anything of cultural significance with it. As a result, evangelicalism has largely failed to have any significant impact on the world of letters, art, drama or music, save in a kind of Christian sub-culture. The 'scandal of the evangelical mind' thus lies in the fact that, in the recent past, evangelicals have failed to allow their faith to shape their understanding of the world, and to engage with it.

Noll's work is superbly written, and can be seen as the 'lament of a wounded lover' – someone who is deeply committed to evangelicalism, yet saddened and hurt by its failings. While sharing Wells's concern for theology, Noll does not regard evangelicalism as suffering from serious neglect in this area. Rather, his concern is to move on from a theological foundation to intellectual cultural engagement – an engagement which he believes (and the evidence he musters is persuasive) to be distinctly lacking at present. Noll's plea is for evangelicalism to take its cultural task seriously, and foster evangelical contributions in this presently neglected area.

The third book is by Don Carson, well known for his many writings in the field of NT studies. Entitled *The Gaggling of God* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), it explores the way in which the rise of postmodernism has provided a challenge to evangelicalism. Carson chooses to focus on the area of NT interpretation (an excellent decision), and is able to set out clearly the many weaknesses of postmodern hermeneutics. Readers of *Themelios* who are active in any literary field will find his criticisms of postmodern theory persuasive and helpful. Perhaps I have misunderstood Carson at some points; however, I gained the impression that he regards postmodernism as a *uniformly* negative matter. My own impression is that it does indeed have serious weaknesses; nevertheless, it at least allows evangelicalism to throw off its enslavement to Enlightenment rationalism, which has so hindered its spiritual and theological vitality in the first half of the present century. Postmodernism, like the modernism which it aims to displace, is best viewed as containing both opportunities and challenges for evangelicalism. It is the task of theologians to distinguish these. While I personally have considerable doubts about the merits of postmodernism, it does at least allow us to shake off the 'evangelical rationalism' that has managed to infiltrate North American evangelicalism at a number of points.

The general conclusion of these works is that evangelicalism has a lot of work to do – recovering the importance of theology, engaging with the 'shakers and movers' of modern Western culture, and ensuring that evangelical approaches to NT interpretation and the distinctiveness of the gospel are not compromised through the pervasive influence of postmodernism. These are genuine concerns, and I have no intention of dismissing or trivializing them. Others could easily be added to the list.

So why does the kind of serious cultural and academic engagement suggested (although in very different ways) by each of these writers matter to evangelical students? The story is told of a conversation between two of the most celebrated German liberal Protestant theologians of the nineteenth century, Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf Harnack. The more conservative sections of the German Protestant churches had recently gained some significant political victories, and seemed poised to eliminate a threat posed by liberalism.

Ritschl's advice to Harnack is reported to have been something like this: 'Never mind about the politics - get on with writing the books that will change the way people think. In the long term, that is what will be of decisive importance.' As one looks at the sustained gains made by liberalism in German Protestantism up to the eve of the First World War, the wisdom of Ritschl's advice is clear. To win the long-term victories, you have to influence the way in which a rising generation thinks.

But why should we want to do this? Would it not be a distraction from the real work of evangelism and pastoral care? I concede that we must ensure that these are not neglected, and my dream has to do with supplementing these concerns, not displacing or replacing them. But the goals are laudable, and the results potentially enormously significant. Evangelicalism has been given a hard time in the liberal arts colleges of North America and colleges in the United Kingdom, generally being depicted as intellectually vacuous, culturally destructive and spiritually simplistic. Evangelicalism is portrayed as something you grow out of, not something you grow up within. I am quite sure that evangelicalism, firmly grounded in the truth and relevance of the Christian gospel, has the potential to extend its influence into the higher education sphere. Not only would this invalidate the seductive stereotypes that are force-fed to our students; it could also lead to the values and beliefs of evangelicalism percolating into areas of our culture where it is at present a silent absence.

Others have seen the wisdom of encouraging such engagement. In the period immediately following the Second World War, the World Council of Churches secured funding to allow it to launch a program to encourage potential theological educators in emerging nations to be taught at leading Western seminaries. Needless to say, these seminaries tended to be strongly liberal in their orientation. The result? Countless seminaries in developing nations found that their faculties began to be dominated by people who had received their PhDs from institutions dominated by a liberal ethos. By a gradual process, which mingled osmosis and replication, those seminaries often drifted into sharing that same liberal ethos. That lesson has been learned. John R.W. Stott, who is widely celebrated as one of global evangelicalism's wisest and most discerning leaders, saw the importance of this point, and set up a program in England to encourage such emerging leaders to gain PhDs at educational institutions which were either evangelical, or sympathetic to evangelicalism. The results of that program - named the 'Langham Trust', after Stott's flagship church of All Souls, Langham Place, London - have been substantial.

In their individual ways, the three books to which I have referred affirm the need for evangelicals to take their theology seriously, and to apply it to life in the world. They help us shape a vision of what is needed if evangelicalism is to advance in the next millenium. Each of the authors is a senior and respected leader and thinker. I recommend *Themelios* readers to read and digest them; I urge them even more strongly to act on their basis, and begin to shape a vision for the future.

Stephen Williams

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We asked Dr Alister McGrath to write a brief piece for us on evangelicals and evangelicalism today, taking special account of recent work, as he has done in the article in this volume. However, he himself has contributed at least two volumes to the literature. It would have been eccentric to ask him to survey his own writings, so I am adding a supplementary word on *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London/Sydney/Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994) and *A Passion for Truth: the intellectual coherence of evangelicalism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996). What follows is not a review, and due to the circumstances of writing this short piece, I am not going to engage in critical comment (not that the author would mind if I did). But we are certainly indebted to Dr. McGrath for both these volumes.

The former is more general and diffuse, surveying the big picture and leaving a detailed defence of evangelicalism to the second volume. McGrath is upbeat about the future of evangelicalism; liberalism has run out of steam; it 'may stimulate the mind; it cannot sustain a church' (p. 95). Indeed: 'Perhaps the most significant contribution that evangelicalism can make is to force others to realize that the liberal experiment has failed, and that the future of Christianity lies in returning to the New Testament, and rediscovering the appeal of biblical Christianity' (p. 188). Not just the New Testament; a note is consistently struck to the effect that we must retain or recover our rich heritage. The upbeat note, however, is balanced by warning. Evangelicalism has a dark side, including its fissiparous dogmatism and personality cult. It vitally needs to develop a rich spirituality that, for example, moves beyond a potentially barren and, in the contemporary world, unrealistic over-emphasis on the Quiet Time.

But what is evangelicalism? McGrath views it as the standard-bearer of orthodoxy, and lists six fundamental characteristics. These are (i) the supreme authority of Scripture, (ii) the majesty of Jesus Christ, (iii) the lordship of the Holy Spirit, (iv) the need for personal conversion, (v) the priority of evangelism and (vi) the importance of the Christian community. Where these characteristics are formally shared with non-evangelicals, McGrath tries to knit them together with the others into a coherent description of evangelical fundamentals. It is worth pointing out, here, that on this account, Roman Catholicism can emerge in a rather more positive light than the Anabaptist tradition. There are 'justice and peace evangelicals' who pick up the 'radical political agenda' characteristic of sixteenth century Anabaptism (p. 111f.), but note the firmer place given to 'Roman Catholic evangelicals' (p. 78) overall (though, in fairness, McGrath does not at all emphasize this). It may be here that some readers will detect an Anglican spin on the interpretation of evangelicalism.

A Passion of Truth, in contrast, aims to show directly the coherence and credibility of evangelicalism, in an attempt to promote the evangelical mind. First, McGrath deals with the uniqueness of Christ and the authority of Scripture. He takes the postmodern emphasis on the particular, rather than universal, in our reason and thought, to be in some respects hospitable to the Christian claim to the uniqueness of Christ. Yet it is a claim that must be maintained in its traditional form, a universal truth that does not bend in the postmodern wind. The polemical aspect of the book, in its relation to the positive, is brought out in the discussion of Scripture. Scriptural authority is contrasted with rival claimants - culture, experience, reason and tradition. These can not deliver liberating truth, if viewed as rival sources of authority.

A Supplementary Word

It is along these comparative, rather than doctrinally specific, lines that McGrath outlines the nature of biblical authority.

Three significant 'isms' then enter the lists, to stand square alongside the principal 'ism', evangelicalism. These are postliberalism, postmodernism and religious pluralism. The first is a broad movement, brought to special prominence in the work of George Lindbeck, which repudiates attempts to find a common core to religious experience, returns us to the particularity of the Christian account, but avoids thinking of religious belief primarily in terms of assent to propositions. The second, rather difficult to define, is the opponent of beliefs in a universal form of rationality and of rationalism (McGrath agrees here and criticizes evangelical rationalism), but equally the opponent of all totalistic claims to truth. The third is not just a description (there are many religions) but an ideology (Christians ought to believe in the validity of different paths to knowledge and salvation). McGrath basically seeks to sustain the main perspectives of the early chapters on Christ and Scripture in the teeth of these contenders.

Reason was given earlier for the decision to stick at report of this literature. That is not a tacit indicator of disagreement; on the contrary, I am in substantial agreement with much in these two volumes which are gladly recommended. However, let this be added. Alister McGrath's work should be read as part of a wider, and sometimes concerted, effort, to revitalize the Christian mind. That means not just evangelical doctrine, but evangelical thinking over the whole spectrum of issues. The American-based journal, *Books and Culture*, is an important expression of this. It is vital that we stand back and consider two things in relation to this project. What follows is certainly not obliquely directed at any of the specific contributions mentioned hitherto; it is an addendum.

The first is the question of ideas. No doubt ideas are important. They have played their part in shaping culture and history, and appropriate ideas about God inform the authentic Christian life. But exactly which ideas are important? How important? How do they exert their influence? How are they disseminated effectively? There is an acute danger that we develop good and coherent ideas, along with a vigorous and penetrating analysis, and yet fail to make much social impact. At the end of the day, we can either be talking to those with whom we agree, or we can be talking to those who, like us, move in the world of ideas but, like us, find the pursuit of ideas more interesting than the quest for obedience. Times of spiritual ferment throw up ideas, but times of intellectual ferment do not necessarily generate spirituality, at least not of a positive kind. And, given the unquestionable importance of ideas, the question remains of how we should map the highways and by-ways of their social influence.

The second is the question of material resources. Ideas cost 'phone calls, faxes, computer software and hardware, travel and conference expenses in a big way. The material outlay is given justification as the means justifies the end, the end being the indubitable good of the glory of God through the faithful mind. If, however, it turns out that the means reflect unsanctified attitudes towards Western material privileges, the ideas will not produce expected fruit, for the end has been compromised on the way. We are in danger of promoting the Christian mind from a base in an indulgent body. Those whose economic conditions are less privileged are the first to confess that they themselves, who observe how the West has become materialistically ensnared, find our luxurious theological style attractive. Neither of these points are meant as an indictment of others; this author finds himself guilty all too often on both of these counts. But we must surely bear them in mind.

The theological scene is very fragmented these days. Few, if any, theologians capture the common and sustained attention of the worldwide theological community. The same is true of evangelical leadership. We certainly need cross-cultural input, and we have unparalleled resources for international communication. Even so, the separate, diverse, humble communities on the ground, throughout the continents, have a key role in the divine dispensation for visible witness, and not just verbal proclamation, of Christian truth. Let's always keep it in mind.

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From many quarters, students of biblical studies and theology are told that neither the NT in general nor the Gospels in particular contain historically reliable material. It is stated that the NT books, including the Gospels, are theological documents, and that this theological purpose precludes the possibility of accurate historical data.

This was the position of the Tübingen School's work on Jesus and the early Church, which was conducted from the presupposition of historical scepticism, arguing that it was neither possible nor desirable to validate the historical aspects. The Tübingen School was a product of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rationalism, which refused to entertain even the possibility of the miraculous and anything else that human reason found difficult to accept. In addition, the prevailing spirit of scholarship was predisposed towards the fragmentation of texts rather than to holism (seeing and accepting them as complete wholes). It is these presuppositions that have dominated so much of OT and NT scholarship throughout much of the twentieth century, and they have done so more often by way of assumption, presumption and assertion than through genuine historical argumentation and investigation. Source and tradition criticism both owe much in their development to Enlightenment and rationalist thought, and such presuppositions have dominated much of the two disciplines, though they are not essential to them. Historical scepticism also underlay the development of tradition and form criticism and, through form criticism, redaction criticism as well. Yet these disciplines, once separated from such presuppositions, are far more useful than when married to them. That this is so is evidenced by the widely differing results that have been arrived at when trained historians and classicists have studied the NT.³

The legacy of the Tübingen School's historically sceptical presuppositions has greatly influenced modern NT studies in many ways, not least in the area of historicity. One example is the theologian Rudolf Bultmann, a major figure in the development of form-critical analysis, who declared concerning Jesus: 'I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus do not exist.'⁴

Another example is useful. Norman Perrin, a leading scholar in the development of redaction criticism, asserted: 'The gospel form was created to serve the purpose of the early Church, but historical reminiscence was not one of those purposes. So, for example, when we read an account of Jesus giving instruction to his disciples, we are not hearing the voice of the earthly Jesus addressing Galilean disciples in a Palestinian situation but that of the risen Lord addressing Christian missionaries in a Hellenistic world.' He then proceeded to make this sweeping claim which so many have taken as axiomatic: 'So far as we can tell today, there is no single pericope anywhere in the gospels, the present purpose of which is to preserve a historical reminiscence of the earthly Jesus, although there may be some which do in fact come near to doing so because a reminiscence, especially of an aspect of teaching such as a parable, could be used to serve the purposes of the Church or the evangelists.'⁵

Whilst an extreme form of historical scepticism continues to be advocated and applied by the Jesus Seminar,⁶ a more positive approach has been adopted by what has become termed the third quest of the historical Jesus. Whilst the

writers of the third quest have rightly sought to place Jesus firmly within the Jewish milieu, their use of historical criteria has often been accompanied by a resistance to accepting the Gospels as substantially historically reliable. This is exemplified in the work of E.P. Sanders, in his two books on Jesus. In the earlier book, Sanders, in what is presented as a resolutely historical investigation with no theological presuppositions (an impossibility in itself), finds little truly reliable historical material concerning Jesus. In his more recent and more popular book, he begins with eleven statements about Jesus which he believes are virtually beyond dispute and adds to them four further statements about the aftermath of Jesus' life.

But is there really so little about Jesus in the Gospels? It is arguable that none of these scholars are historians, and an increasing number, not only amongst evangelical scholars, contend that their results are based more on theological and philosophical considerations than on any historical ones. Yet claims for the authority of their historical declarations are made and many scholars present their positions as widely accepted, even axiomatic.

My contention is that historical questions should be asked historically.⁹ This might seem obvious but, I believe, when it comes to historical questions in biblical studies or theology, it is often overlooked, perhaps even ignored; and this axiom is equally true for the evangelical scholar as it is for the liberal one, or for anyone of any theological persuasion. The discipline of historical research has a broadly agreed methodology which, when adhered to, provides checks and balances which can improve the historical study of the NT or any literary corpus. In studies into the historical reliability of the NT in general, and the historical Jesus in particular, it has often been literary, theological or philosophical considerations, or combinations of these, which have predominated. But rather than allow any one or combination of these disciplines to take precedence over the others, we must agree with Tom Wright that they should be used together in what he calls a 'creative synthesis'.¹⁰ What this means is that the historical study of the NT or the life of Jesus cannot take place in isolation from the literary and theological and, we must add, philosophical disciplines.

Therefore, it is important that the nature of history and historical methodology is understood and practised, not least because this is the one of the four disciplines that is often bypassed.

Whenever the issue of the historical reliability of any literary corpus is investigated, the first matter the investigator must be aware of is the nature of history itself. What is meant by the term 'history'? Then, second, what is the historian's method? And third, what is meant when a document is pronounced 'historically reliable'?

'History'

The word 'history' in English has two nuances: it can refer to events that actually happened, and as such denotes the actual course of past events, or it can denote an account of past events. The historian thus studies history (in the former sense) and writes history (in the latter sense). As to the word 'historiography', it is used¹⁰ to describe either the study of what historians do, or history writing itself.

The interest of the historian, then, is in past events, but since the term 'history' is equivocal, some historians make a distinction between 'events' and 'facts'. According to this technical distinction, 'The term *event* is used to denote something which has happened in the past, irrespective of anyone's apprehension of it. *Fact* is used to denote what the historian knows of something which has happened in the past.'¹¹

Historians have only indirect contact with the events they are investigating.¹² Such contact as exists does so in the form of 'tracks' from the past.¹³ Even with events to which they are eye-witnesses, historians never have access to everything that took place. No witness, whether oral or written, is capable of conveying a complete, photo-like description of an event. Rather, it is in the nature of all witnesses to have selected, altered, interpreted and rationalized what they have experienced.¹⁴ The 'event' is far greater than the 'fact' can encompass, so the secular historian Arthur Marwick notes that the past is so rich, and so enormous, that no historian, even if dealing with a relatively short period in time, could set down everything that happened in that time.¹⁵

It is clear, therefore, that there can be no exact correspondence between the historical event and the historical fact. Colin Brown writes: 'Like scientific theory, historical construction is not a literal description of what is observed ... it is not exactly a reconstruction of reality. It is like a model or a series of models.'¹⁶ And it is vital that we recognize that it is in the nature of these facts that they necessarily involve interpretation of the events they record.¹⁷

Historical method

How, then, does the historian construct a model of the past? Since contact with the event is indirect, models of the past are dependent on historical evidence of various kinds. These tracks form the basis of any reconstruction, and, since the historical events are not directly accessible, the historian works by inferences which are drawn from a widely diverse range of information. As with scientific investigation, the historian's explanations are not propositional statements regarding directly observable events, but are hypotheses which are put forward to account for the extant data. As hypotheses, they may be tested by seeing whether they adequately explain the data, while at the same time agreeing with other accepted knowledge.¹⁸ As such, this process is neither purely inductive nor deductive,¹⁹ but requires imagination on the historian's part. The evidence available can never be complete; in most cases it is, to greater or lesser degrees, fragmentary, thus requiring harmonization, which plays an important part in all historical reconstruction. This is the method by which historians seek to harmonize apparently conflicting data. The nature of the conflict may well be due to the incompleteness of the evidence, and so the historian's task is to ascertain whether the sources do in fact conflict. Only when the harmonization becomes more incredible than accepting the error in the texts should the verdict 'unhistorical' be passed. If the text is generally accurate where verifiable, then the greater the likelihood that harmonization will be a useful tool; the less accurate the text, the less credence harmonization will have. Though the adoption of this procedure is often frowned upon by theologians, it is nevertheless a standard tool of historical method.²⁰

As the knowledge of the past is almost always indirect, the historian's knowledge is inevitably limited by the extant sources available. Obviously, not all historians have access to all the extant evidence, which can sometimes help to explain some of the differences between historians' finished works. This needs to be remembered, for example, in Gospel studies. So, when a historian comes to the study of any period, movement or person, the first job is to collect all the evidence available. This will include data from other disciplines (such as archaeology), which have their own techniques and canons of interpretation. This is what Van Harvey means when he calls history a 'field-encompassing field'.²¹ To the best of my knowledge, Bultmann and Perrin never mention such vital issues for the question of historicity as the textual and manuscript evidence or archaeology.²² Such an observation raises serious methodological questions and therefore doubts over their historical conclusions.

With the evidence amassed, the historian must then assess it. By their very nature, these tracks/sources are not identical with the past event(s) to which they bear witness. It is not simply the case that the historian has to be selective in what is drawn out from the sources,²³ but that the sources themselves have been selective in what they have recorded.

The evidence is first classified according to whether it is a primary or a secondary source. A primary source came into existence during the actual period under investigation; a secondary source is the (or any) interpretation of the events, written later by someone looking back upon a period in the past.²⁴

The first point to be established with any primary source is its authenticity, so that its value and reliability can be determined. Marwick lists five issues which must be addressed:

- 1 What type of source is it?
- 2 What person or group created the source?
- 3 How and for what purpose did the source come into existence? Was it written/made with the intention of conveying reliable information or to prove a point?
- 4 How far is the author of the source in a good position to provide first-hand information on the particular subject being investigated?
- 5 The historian has to be sure that he/she has really understood the document as contemporaries would have, so two other areas require consideration: (a) textual matters, and (b) the problems arising from archaic and foreign languages.²⁵

As for the secondary sources, the historian has to be critical of these too, using critical judgement in assessing the extent to which they can be accepted and used for the present study.

It is often assumed that primary sources are always more reliable than secondary ones, but this is not necessarily the case. Primary sources can be as tendentious, if not more so, than secondary works, whilst secondary sources are often better able to assess the event or person and their significance more fully with the benefit of hindsight and with a greater appreciation of their relationship to and effect on others. They also benefit from the work of earlier historians. Both primary and secondary sources, then, require careful examination and critical assessment.

As far as the historical Jesus is concerned, the four Gospels fall into the category of secondary sources, though it must be recognized that the pre-Gospel tradition from which they drew intimately links them with the teaching of Jesus through the pre- and post-Easter traditions (transmitters of the traditions). Both the more conservative F.F. Bruce and the more liberal E.P. Sanders regard the Gospels as primary sources, but this is technically not the case.²⁶ However, the pre- and post-Easter traditions include, according to Luke 1:2, 'eyewitnesses' and 'ministers of the word'.²⁷ The explicit statements of intent by Luke and John in particular (Lk. 1:1-4; Acts 1:1; Jn. 20:31) cannot be dismissed lightly by the historian and must be rigorously tested by every means available – a procedure seldom followed by historical sceptics. By generic association (their common genre), Mark and Matthew make similar, though implicit, claims.²⁸ Whatever title we eventually use to describe the genre of the Gospels, what cannot be denied is that they are each ostensibly 'historical' in form and content, focusing on the figure of Jesus, his teaching and deeds, his death, resurrection and abiding significance, though they do this in a way different from the way modern biographies and histories would. Added to this is the virtually unanimous early Christian testimony which associates the Gospels with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (e.g. Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.4,16 and Irenaeus's *Against Heresies* 3.1.1-2).²⁹

When coupled with, for example, Justin Martyr's reference to the Gospels as the 'reminiscences' of the apostles (*e.g. Dialogue with Trypho* 100.4), they show us the views of second-century Christians as to their authorship and content. Such statements cannot be summarily dismissed, but require careful consideration.

But if the Gospels of Matthew and John are accepted in any way as eye-witness accounts, or if early dates can be established for any or all of the Gospels,³⁰ then their classification as either primary or secondary sources for the historical Jesus would need to be reassessed. However, the consensus of scholarly opinion would not so regard or date the Gospels. But this is not the end of the matter, for the Gospels and, it must be added, the NT letters and Revelation are primary sources for the life and beliefs of the early Church.

In all this, it must be emphasized that whichever classification we accept for any part of the NT, both primary and secondary sources are equally capable of distortion or historical reliability. For each book, then, the matter must not be decided *a priori* but through rigorously applying to it historical method.

Literary sources, both primary and secondary, can be further classified as intentional and unintentional sources.³¹ Intentional documents represent what can be called 'prefabricated history', though H.E.W. Turner points out that what for the original writer was a finished product becomes merely the raw material of his/her successors in the field, sources which require checking with available primary sources and comparison with other similar end-products.³² In contrast, the purpose of unintentional documents was contemporary and practical, their value being in their unwitting testimony to a matter of interest to later historians, and because of their unintentional nature the likelihood of distortion is greatly lessened, though they nevertheless need to be tested against available knowledge for errors.

Turner sounds a necessary warning when he states that it is important not to confuse the criteria of intention and reliability.³³ An intentional document may be highly tendentious, though this does not preclude the possibility of its preserving genuine information. Therefore, no document should simply be assumed to be reliable without independent scrutiny.

Unintentional documents often require a greater degree of adaptation, but many historians prize highly the information they contain.³⁴ In some fields, the major sources of evidence are unintentional, and it is this unself-conscious character that will normally give them considerable value as sources. Yet they too must be carefully scrutinized and checked, as they may be tendentious. Even when this is shown to be the case, the historian must be aware of the possibility that historical information may still be gleaned from them.

Historians, therefore, need to be sceptical towards their sources. For example, Harvey sees the scepticism of received reports as 'a necessary attitude for the critical historian'.³⁵ He sees the historian as necessarily possessing a 'radical autonomy'³⁶ which requires the judging of sources, which are themselves made up of the judgements and inferences of others. Thus the historian's conclusions, like theirs, are made up of judgements and inferences. Citing F.H. Bradley, Harvey points out that judgements are not random inventions or isolated occurrences of thought, but they presuppose other judgements, beliefs and opinions. What witnesses think is in large part filtered through the prism of their own individual modes of perception and conception, which are influenced by the thought of the culture of which they are a part.³⁷ The historian's task, therefore, is to assess these judgements and inferences, in order to establish not only their meaning, but also their truth.

If sources were left uncriticized, the historian would become merely the transmitter of tradition. In this regard, R.G. Collingwood writes:

*If anyone else, no matter who, even a very learned historian, or an eyewitness, or a person in the confidence of the man who did it himself, hands him on a plate a ready-made answer to his question, all he can do is reject it; not because he thinks his informant is trying to deceive him, or is himself deceived, but because if he accepts it he is giving up his autonomy as an historian and allowing someone else to do for him what, if he is a scientific thinker, he can only do for himself.*³⁷

Even the evangelical Church historian David Bebbington states that the historian is one who 'develops a sceptical turn of mind', but he does qualify this by saying, 'History demands a critical mind'.³⁸

This is a vital qualification. Historians must indeed be critical of their sources, even sceptical, as understood above, but in the areas of theology and biblical studies this has all too often resulted in a general methodological historical scepticism such as that found in Bultmann and others already noted. This latter form of scepticism, in Howard Marshall's words, 'is thoroughly unrealistic - as [the sceptical historian] would realize if he attempted to apply it to all the ordinary statements made to him by other people in the course of everyday life'.⁴⁰ Tom Wright helpfully speaks of 'critical-realism',⁴¹ which recognizes that historical knowledge is possible, and this is so as much for Jesus and the early Church as for any other historical figures and movements. The conservative/evangelical scholar (historian and/or theologian) ought to be prepared to adopt historical criticism only to a point, refusing to apply to the text the attitude of wholesale scepticism and questioning, even doubt, that Harvey, for example, suggests should be done.⁴² Marshall continues with the observation that it is one thing to interrogate a text minutely, but quite another to disbelieve every statement that it makes until it can be proved to be true - that is, the text is taken to be unreliable unless proved reliable:

*If we have a narrative that purports to be historical from a writer whose general content is known to be reliable, it is more reasonable to accept it as reliable until satisfactory evidence is produced against it. In the absence of contrary evidence belief is reasonable.*⁴³

In context, Marshall is dealing specifically with the NT as an historical source, but this argument is valid for all historical records. The historian's approach is not to be one of methodological scepticism on all matters purporting to be historical, but to be critical. The Cambridge historian G.R. Elton summarizes matters thus: 'Excessive scepticism must therefore be guarded against as much as childlike trust, especially as both reactions (two sides of the coin of insufficient thought) are liable to be called forth by the historian's private, and sometimes unconscious, attitudes'.⁴⁴

Goetz and Blomberg discuss this position in an important article on the burden of proof. Despite the enormous volume of evidence which supports the general trustworthiness of the Gospels and, more widely, the NT, many scholars still refuse to accept much as genuinely historical because they are committed, *a priori*, to a historically sceptical stance on the issue of the burden of proof. For example, it is frequently assumed that each portion of the Gospels is unhistorical unless overwhelming evidence overturns such a view. But this method inverts standard historical procedure, applying more rigorous criteria to the biblical material than students of ancient history apply to other historical material. Once an historian or document has been demonstrated to be reliable where verifiable, once apparent errors or contradictions have received plausible solutions, the appropriate approach is to give that writer the benefit of the doubt in areas where verification is not possible,⁴⁵ especially where there is a high degree of probability that the author was concerned to

record reliably historical events and the methods for doing so were available to him. In the case of the Gospels, this brings in their stated aims (Lk. 1:1-4; Jn. 20:31) and the techniques for transmission of tradition which were operative in the first century.⁴⁶ To this must be added the testimony of the NT that it is explicitly concerned with transmitting the tradition of Jesus.⁴⁷

Neither external nor internal testimony can prove the accuracy of most of the details of the Gospels, letters and Revelation, for the necessary comparative data are lacking. But the coherence and consistency of material that cannot be tested with that which can, does inspire confidence in the remaining portions of the text. The burden of proof, therefore, lies with those who would disprove historical reliability, not vice versa. This conclusion is to overturn what has been the presumed methodology for the larger part of this century, but I believe it is a historically correct methodology.

The historian will, then, take a high view of the historicity of some accounts and documents and a low view of others, depending on the evaluation of the evidence itself. Colin Brown likens the work of the historian to that of the juror who, after hearing and examining the evidence, believes that one witness is competent and trustworthy whereas another is not.⁴⁸ In Harvey's words: 'The historian confers authority upon a witness. He reserves the right to judge who or what will be called an authority, and he makes this judgment only after he has subjected the so-called witness to a rigorous cross-examination.'⁴⁹

However, this does not mean that the historian can 'impose' an interpretation upon the evidence which is alien to it. Recognizing the subjective judgement of the historian is not to deny the possibility of 'objective' history. Historians have to ask questions of the sources, but some scholars believe that in this very act of questioning they artificially limit the choice of material - so that what is looked for in the evidence is what is found. They claim that the evidence is never in a position to play freely upon the enquiring mind. Elton recognizes that this sounds like 'a convincing indictment', but states that in practice this does not happen.⁵⁰ He acknowledges that the historian must make an actual choice of the main area to be studied and the line of approach to be used, but after this the historian

becomes the servant of his evidence of which he will, or should, ask no questions until he has absorbed what it says. At least, his questions remain general, varied, flexible; he opens his mind to the evidence both passively (listening) and actively (asking). The mind will soon react with questions, but these are the questions suggested by the evidence, and though different men may find different questions arising from the same evidence the differences are only to a very limited extent dictated by themselves.

So,

*the evidence is to control the writer of history and his questions quite as much as he controls it, and its control comes first in time.*⁵¹

No historian, therefore, is entitled to know the conclusions before specific and detailed study of the relevant historical evidence.

What relation has the historian's work to the event he/she has sought to record? Alan Richardson correctly observed that historical judgements are inferences drawn from the extant evidence, since the event is not observable to the historian.⁵² The corollary of this is that the events are not demonstrable; so likewise the historical facts are also incapable of proof. Does this mean, then, that historical knowledge is impossible, or just uncertain?

Historical knowledge is always only probable, to a greater or lesser degree, never certain. But as David Bebbington observes, 'There are matters, like the

existence of Caesar and Pompey, that for all practical purposes we can take for granted; yet even these matters are technically not certainties. They are strong probabilities.⁵³ Proof of anything is beyond the power of historical knowledge. But it is clear that there are many pieces of historical knowledge that are asserted only on the basis of the barest probability, and it is necessary for every historian to recognize that only a few tracks of historical evidence are available in the form of extant evidences. Elton remarks: 'Even allowing four generations to a century, we have information about only some two hundred generations, and for the vast majority of them our information is extremely patchy.'⁵⁴ To this can be added Daniel Fuller's comments that

*neither the fact that much historical knowledge is missing nor the fact that much historical knowledge wavers in the twilight zone of conjecture and minimal probability means that all historical knowledge is problematical and must be less certain than knowledge gained by immediate sense perception. There are certain things in history ... that are as certain as the ground we are standing on.*⁵⁵

Due to such 'problems' of historical knowledge, some philosophers of history have claimed that historical knowledge is simply not possible. It may be available in an ideal and theoretical manner since there is something real to be known, but in practice it can never be, due to the interposition of the historian's personality and inability to re-enact the event. To such Elton says: 'It must ... be reasserted that these uncertainties by no means cover the ground; a great deal of history, simple and basic as well as more complex, is knowable and known beyond the doubt of anyone qualified to judge.'⁵⁶ The historian is not reduced to either despair or methodological doubt/scepticism to the extent that the possibility of genuine historical knowledge is denied, and that a qualifier has to be appended to every historical pronouncement, such as 'probably' or even 'possibly'. In reality, many historical facts have been established beyond any reasonable doubt. Other facts may have to be arranged in a scale of relative probability due to the paucity of evidence and difficulties in interpreting them. Marshall concludes: 'To say ... that history cannot produce reliable knowledge of the past is to be pedantic and unrealistic.'⁵⁷

The aim of the historian, then, is to produce a model of past events, and for this model a certain objective validity can be claimed. Later discoveries may uncover new evidence which will lead to a modification or even abandonment of the former model in favour of a new one. Nevertheless, in either situation, objectivity, *as far as it is possible*, is the aim of the historian, and, even if it is recognized that it is ultimately unattainable, the study of history will never give up its search for it.

In 1824, Leopold von Ranke wrote:

*To history has been assigned the office of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of future ages. To such high office this work [his own] does not aspire; it wants only to show what actually happened (wie es eigentlich gewesen ist).*⁵⁸

Historical relativists have questioned whether Ranke's goal is realistic, and this has often taken two main lines. First, it is urged that it is naive to suppose that history is a matter of presenting 'all the facts' and letting them 'speak for themselves'.⁵⁹ Second, we are reminded that the historian never has access to all the facts, but that selection is inevitably involved. History, it is maintained, is relative to the historian who reflects a particular culture, as well as particular interests and standpoints. But such writers have exaggerated the extent to which Ranke required the historian to suppress his own subjectivity.

Harvey comments:

*When Ranke ... called for rigorous objectivity on the part of the historian he did not mean that the historian should not be interested or open: he meant rather, that the historian should have a respect for the past as it really was and not as the historian wished it might have been, and that he should refrain from the rhetoric of praise or blame.*⁶¹

In the context in which it was written, Ranke's statement is not one of presumption but of modesty. It is a declaration that the historian's prime objective is to get at the truth as it happened. He did not believe that the pastness of the past prevented history from speaking to the present. As Richardson noted, 'Detachment is the cardinal virtue of the historian. Facts were to be rescued from the conflict of opinion.'⁶¹

If all this means that the aim of the historian is rigid accuracy, then, in agreement with Marshall, it must be claimed that this remains the aim of any contemporary historian worthy of the name.⁶² History written to serve the interests of a particular theory, and twisting the evidence accordingly, is not history. However, historians who are concerned to be objective will strive, as far as they are able, to be conscious of their own presuppositions and to make due allowance for them. But it must never be forgotten that history does reflect, albeit in a limited sense, what actually happened.

A further point needs to be noted concerning von Ranke. There exists a widespread assumption that it is only since his time (1795-1856) that anything worthy of the description of historiography has existed. Any 'history' prior to this period has to be treated with scepticism and as of an inferior quality to its modern counterpart. Merkle, however, describes this as 'modern-scholarly chauvinism', whilst Tom Wright labels it 'cultural imperialism of the Enlightenment'⁶³ - for there can be no real doubt that ancient historians were as capable as historians today, both in theory and practice, of accurate historiography.⁶⁴

The historian's aim, then, is to produce a model for which objectivity, as far as it is possible, is the goal. To arrive at this model, historians are not relegated to mere subjectivism, but employ critical historical methods to assess the extant evidence. These include study of the languages of the original texts and authors (which may be different), saturating themselves in the culture of the period being studied, understanding the methods available to the authors of the existing sources and their reliability, and a familiarity with historiographical work by others on the subject and related areas of study. Elton succinctly summarizes the role of the historian: 'Criticizing the evidence means two things: establishing its genuineness, and assessing its proper significance.'⁶⁵

Miracles and history: a long interlude

Before proceeding to the final point, I wish to make some remarks on miracles and history. For many, the historicity of the NT in general, and the Gospels in particular, is impugned because of the presence of miracle stories and the supernatural. Like history, the issue of miracles is an interdisciplinary matter, involving science, philosophy, theology and history. It is so enormous a field that only brief indicators can be given here, where the emphasis will lie primarily with the historical question.⁶⁷

Since the time of the British philosopher David Hume (1711-76), many philosophers, philosophers of history and science, scientists and theologians have come to believe that the historian's purpose is not just to record historical events but to explain them in terms of what are accepted as the laws governing all occurrences of the kind in question. Historical explanation is thus

'nomological', proceeding by appeal to well-accredited laws of human or natural behaviour, thereby making historical understanding entirely dependent on scientific understanding.⁶⁸ This is also called 'philosophical naturalism', that is, 'The natural causal fabric of physical reality within the boundaries of space and time is all there is, was, or ever will be. The supernatural doesn't exist except, perhaps, as a belief in people's minds',⁶⁹ thereby making what is explicable to the natural sciences the means of assessing whether something could have happened or not. In short, science, it is widely assumed, has proved the impossibility of the supernatural intervention of God because the natural, physical laws of the universe have proved them impossible. This belief, however, owes more to an Enlightenment understanding of science than modern scientific theory. The mechanistic view of the universe which dominated for so long and continues to pervade the popular understanding of science as consisting of immutable laws is no longer held by modern science. Science does *not* operate within the sphere of 'facts' as popularly understood, but of hypotheses which seek to explain the observable universe. Further, the proper domain of science is the repeatable, the predictable and the verifiable, and miracles, by definition, are unique, non-repeatable events, and therefore lie outside its scope.⁷⁰ Further, if there is a God such as is affirmed by the Jewish-Christian tradition, then miracles are a natural corollary of his existence.⁷¹ Whether or not such a God exists also lies beyond the competency of science.⁷²

Building on what he says concerning the importance of eye-witnesses, Merkle distinguishes between the testimony of eye-witnesses and whether or not they are able to explain what they have witnessed. He writes: 'For the actual occurrence of the event we depend absolutely on testimony of people who were there - and who may be lying to us. The "facticity" of the event owes nothing to the plausibility (to us) of any *explanation* that the alleged witness may offer. His credentials as a witness come down to these two: (a). was he there? and (b). would he lie to us (or could he have been deceived?).' Merkle insists that historians tell the past, not explain it. For this they depend on prior tellers of the past, and ultimately upon original witnesses - who may or may not have had explanations, but who certainly had something to tell. 'Whether or not we accept what we are told along this chain of recitations turns not on the cogency of the explanations, but on the credentials of the witnesses.' Later he continues:

*If we are persuaded that our witness would not lie to us, we have no "right of disbelief", deriving from our knowledge of what routinely happens in life, to interpose between his testimony and ours. If we absolutely cannot believe that there is a kind of reality in the world which could contain the alleged event that he claims to witness to, then we must reject his witness: he is deceived, or he is lying to us. If we absolutely will not accept what he says, we are interposing another kind of authority between ourselves and his alleged authority as an historical witness. But, we cannot in this case claim to be rejecting him on historical grounds. The statement that "things like that don't occur in this world" is not an historical judgment.*⁷³

In section 10 of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume argued for the probability that a natural rather than supernatural explanation always exists for any purported miracle, adducing four main reasons for this. First, no miracle has ever had a sufficiently large number of reliable witnesses to support it. Second, people generally crave the miraculous and are thereby predisposed to accepting it. Third, alleged miracles only occur amongst primitive peoples. Finally, as miracles are claimed in all religions, they in fact negate each other, since their doctrines are irreconcilable.⁷⁴ These arguments have been challenged ever since Hume announced them.⁷⁵ Blomberg answers each of these points. The first, even if true, does not prove the inadequacy of

any given testimony for a miracle, and good cases have been made for affirming that the witnesses of the Gospel miracles do offer adequate testimony. Claim two is often true, but simply means that the historian needs to be extra careful in the assessment of such testimony. Three and four, as absolutes, are manifestly false, as is shown by the observation that many educated men and women today believe in miracles, and further, as Sir Norman Anderson has shown, no religion apart from Christianity stands or falls with a claim that its founder physically rose from the dead.

The Gospel miracle stories are often compared with those in other ancient religious and philosophical traditions, all of which are regarded as equally suspect. The testimony on behalf of other ancient miracles is usually not as strong, as consistent or as religiously significant as it is in the Gospels. Nevertheless, there is no reason to deny altogether the possibility of the miraculous in certain other ancient settings.⁷⁰ Bruce noted that, in general, the Gospel miracles were "in character" – that is to say, they are the kinds of works that might be expected from such a Person as the Gospels represent Jesus to be'. Not even in the earliest Gospel strata 'can we find a non-supernatural Jesus, and we need not be surprised if supernatural works are attributed to Him. If we reject from the start the idea of a supernatural Jesus, then we shall reject His miracles, too; if, on the other hand, we accept the Gospel picture of Him, the miracles will cease to be an insuperable stumbling-block.' He then added: 'No doubt, the historian will be more exacting in his examination of the evidence where miracles are in question.' To this can be added Harvey's distinction between the Gospel miracles and legendary accounts of miracles:

*... The tradition of Jesus' miracles has too many unusual features to be conveniently ascribed to conventional legend-mongering. Moreover many of them contain details of precise reporting which is quite unlike the usual run of legends and is difficult to explain unless it derives from some historical recollection; and the gospels themselves ... show a remarkable restraint in their narratives which contrasts strangely with that delight in the miraculous for its own sake which normally characterizes the growth of legend.*⁷¹

Supernatural categories, therefore, cannot be rejected *a priori*; instead, each claimed miracle has to be investigated on its own merits. The resurrection, which, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 17-19, forms the historic *sine qua non* of Christian faith, has to be investigated in the same way as any other putative historical event, and the literature on that is enormous. Blomberg writes:

*If the resurrection of Jesus really happened, then none of the gospel miracles is in principle incredible. This is not because God can do anything supernatural, no matter how eccentric or arbitrary. Christian belief in God's omnipotence does not include ascribing to him the power to do that which is logically contradictory (e.g. making the legendary stone so big that he can't move it!) or that which is against his nature (e.g. doing evil). But it is precisely in this way that the gospel miracles differ from so many of their counterparts in other religious and philosophical traditions – they all fit together in a consistent pattern, revealing Jesus as sent by his Father to usher in the kingdom of God and make known God's will and ways on earth. This revelation in turn meshes with the main details of the rest of Christ's teaching and ministry.*⁷²

William Lane Craig applies the seven factors set out by C. Behan McCullagh which historians typically use in testing an historical hypothesis and applies them to the resurrection. These are:

1. The hypothesis, together with other true statements, must imply further

- statements describing present, observable data.
2. The hypothesis must have greater *explanatory scope* (that is, imply a greater variety of observable data) than rival hypotheses.
 3. The hypothesis must have greater *explanatory power* (that is, make the observable data more probable) than rival hypotheses.
 4. The hypothesis must be more *plausible* (that is, be implied by a greater variety of accepted truths, and its negation implied by fewer accepted truths) than rival hypotheses.
 5. The hypothesis must be less *ad hoc* (that is, include fewer new suppositions about the past not already implied by existing knowledge) than rival hypotheses.
 6. The hypothesis must be *disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs* (that is, when conjoined with accepted truths, imply fewer false statements) than rival hypotheses.
 7. The hypothesis must so exceed its rivals in fulfilling conditions 2–6 that there is little chance of a rival hypothesis, after further investigation, exceeding it in meeting these conditions.

Whilst McCullagh actually considers the question of Jesus' resurrection as of greater explanatory scope and power than other hypotheses, he nevertheless rejects it for being less plausible and more *ad hoc*.⁸² However, Craig argues that once the philosophical prejudice against the miraculous is abandoned, the resurrection becomes a plausible explanation as any of its rivals, and further observes that it is only *ad hoc* because the only new supposition that is needed is that God exists, which, in actual fact, is not a new supposition for those who do not believe in a closed universe, namely theists. In defence of this latter position, Craig notes that scientific hypotheses regularly include the supposition of new, unobservable entities such as quarks, strings, gravitons and black holes, without such theories being considered *ad hoc*. 'Why should the supposition of God's existence be any different?'⁸³

The credibility of the miracle stories is a matter of historical evidence. Not only do all the Gospel strata report that Jesus performed miracles,⁸⁴ but many parts of both the OT and the NT make claims that miracles happened, and this is confirmed by later Christian apologists and other non-Christian writers who had no axe to grind.⁸⁵ To this can be added the observation that adopting several of the criteria of form criticism, specifically dissimilarity and multiple attestation, gives further reason to accept the reliability of the accounts of miracles.⁸⁶ F.F. Bruce wrote: 'If [these miracles] are related by authors who can be shown on other grounds to be trustworthy, then they are worthy of at least serious attention by the historian.'⁸⁷ Philips Long concurs when he writes that for those who do not embrace the assumption of the impossibility of divine intervention, 'I would suggest that where the larger discourse unit implies a historical purpose (and in the absence of other indicators), the burden of proof rests on those who would deny the historicity of a given text within the larger unit, whatever fabulous or miraculous elements it might contain.'⁸⁸ Long concludes: 'while the historical-critical method (as traditionally practiced) systematically and insistently excludes the notion of divine intervention, the method itself, if applied in the context of a theistic set of background beliefs, need not exclude talk of divine intervention'. Further, 'unless theists are badly mistaken in their theism, then surely it is the denial of any place for God in the historical process that is the mark of bad history'.⁸⁹

We can, therefore, endorse William Craig's conclusion:

It seems to me ... that the lesson to be learned from the classical debate over miracles, a lesson that has been reinforced by contemporary scientific and philosophical thought, is that the presupposition of the

impossibility of miracles should, contrary to the assumption of nineteenth and for the most part twentieth century biblical criticism, play no role in determining the historicity of any event. While many scholars still operate under such an assumption, there seems now to be a growing recognition that such a presupposition is illegitimate. The presupposition against the possibility of miracles survives in theology only as a hangover from an earlier Deist age and ought to be once for all abandoned.⁵⁰

What does 'historically reliable' mean?

When a document or literary corpus is pronounced 'historically reliable', it does not mean that the facts therein are identical to the historical events, but that there is a sufficient correlation between the event and the fact that the latter may be proclaimed as a true model of what actually took place. One particular interpretation of past events may be accepted over against another on the basis that it best accounts for *all* the evidence available. The historian records what he/she considers significant and memorable, excising all else as superfluous. The nature of history as fact involves the fusion of the tracks of historical events with the historian's own interpretation of those tracks. The historian is an interpreter, because the facts are his/her interpretation. History is interpretation, so there is scope for acceptable disagreement between historians,⁵¹ thus making it not just likely but even desirable that we have a number of written histories about any given person, event or movement, recognizing that different does not mean unreliable. The implications of this for the *four* Gospels will be immediately clear!

For many scholars, by far the most serious problem for the general historical reliability of the Gospels in particular is the divergences in the accounts of the same events. Some of these differences can be explained by the different interpretations given to the events by the evangelists, and, as we have just noted, to possess a number of interpretations is something to be desired. Other divergences can be understood by discovering the author's intentions, whilst still others are due to different conventions between modern historians and biographers and their ancient counterparts, the four evangelists among them.⁵² However, in Gospel studies the emphasis is frequently placed on the divergences, with scant recognition being paid to the agreements between the different accounts. That parallel passages have more in common in most cases is borne out by the general observation that scholarship is still happy to speak of the 'Synoptic' Gospels. Further, the German classical historian, Hans Stier, commenting on the resurrection narratives, regarded the limited divergence in parallel passages as not contradicting but testifying to their reliability. He wrote:

*the sources for the resurrection of Jesus, with their relatively big contradictions over details, present for the historian for this very reason a criterion of extraordinary credibility. For if that were the fabrication of a congregation or of a similar group of people, then the tale would be consistently and obviously complete. For that reason every historian is especially sceptical at that moment when an extraordinary happening is only reported in accounts which are completely free of contradictions.*⁵³

The practice of the historical-critical method *might*, on occasion, lead to the conclusion that the most viable solution to a difficulty lies in pronouncing a particular narrative or report unhistorical. This may be due to the literary form of the record (such as hyperbole, poetry, parable, myth or aretology – purported narratives of divine men in antiquity), but such a conclusion must be the result of a careful and meticulous study of the text and not be brought to the text *a priori*. However, many scholars will prefer the option of suspending their judgement until further evidence comes to light.⁵⁴

Further, the presence of an error at one point does not necessarily call into question the reliability of the whole. It is always a possibility that the interpreter is demanding more from the source than it ever intended to provide. There will also be cases of apparent historical error which cannot be explained away with the knowledge available.

An historian will never expect any two records of the same events to be identical without suspecting them of either collusion or copying (literary dependence).⁹⁵ Records are written with whatever purpose the author(s) had in mind (the author's *Tendenz*, hence *Tendenzkritik*/tendency criticism). These need to be discerned by the historian so that they are not misrepresented. Authors may have used different sources (the realm of source criticism), or different interpretations of the same sources. They may reflect differences of emphasis (redaction) and have adopted different styles in order to record the same events (form criticism). The exact kind of source also has to be determined and the whole document must be interpreted accordingly (the question of genre⁹⁶). Simply because their methods of presentation and even, perhaps, their final presentation⁹⁷ include or exclude details recorded elsewhere; explicate or condense certain incidents or sayings;⁹⁸ or emphasize or play down one or other aspect of the events they are seeking to record, will not give sufficient grounds for deeming them unreliable. The Gospels, like all literary documents, must be read within the conventions and methods of their own time.⁹⁹ Failure to do this is to make the cardinal error of anachronism. Each source *must* be treated on its own terms, and this requires the historian to examine them minutely with all the methods of historical criticism available, and without trying false harmonizations or imposing false, anachronistic and alien criteria on them.

Conclusion

The 27 books which comprise the NT are historical documents in two ways. Firstly, they were written in the first century AD and they have survived. This makes them automatically the focus of interest for historians and historical research. Secondly, they are historical because they both implicitly and explicitly make historical claims. Implicitly, they continue the belief of the OT that God, the Creator, is real and intervenes within human history. In the NT this is nowhere more clearly evident than in the doctrine of the incarnation (e.g. Jn. 1:1-5, 14, 18). Explicitly, the writers of many of the books make historical claims. For example, not only does Luke tell us his intention to write an orderly account so that Theophilus may know the certainty of the things he has been taught (Lk. 1:1-4;¹⁰⁰ cf. Acts 1:1), but he also explicitly sets his Gospel within the context of world history (Lk. 2:1-2; 3:1). The events recorded in Luke's second volume take place within the ancient Mediterranean world,¹⁰¹ which lends it, more than any other NT book, to external corroboration. The NT firmly locates the origins of Christian faith in the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth, and at the same time provides the primary sources for our knowledge of the life and faith of the earliest Christian communities. As we have contended, then, we must study the NT with whatever disciplines are appropriate – theological, literary, philosophical *and* historical, and each of these have their own methods which need to be both properly understood and properly applied. For too long, historical judgements and pronouncements have been made by non-historians, judgements which have had little or no basis in legitimate historical methodology. The purpose of this paper, then, has been to introduce historical methodology and to indicate its application and usefulness to the study of the NT.

A correct understanding and proper use of historical methodology can contribute much to the study of the NT and brings important checks and balances to some of the scholarly excesses, for example, the much publicized

Jesus Seminar, which rejects all but 20 per cent of the Gospels' teaching of Jesus as having any kind of historical value. More positively, it helps us appreciate the integrity and reliability of the NT writers. It further grounds the belief of orthodox Christian faith that God has been, is and will continue to be present in human history and that he has decisively entered into it in the person of Jesus.¹⁰²

Though the canonical Gospels, Acts, letters and Revelation are each very different, they are all, nevertheless, concerned to set out both the story of Jesus of Nazareth and their authors' understanding of the significance of his works and words for their lives and the lives of the individuals and churches to which they were writing. History and theology are inseparably intertwined. They are, therefore, two complementary ways of approaching the NT books. The NT writers inform us about both the 'past' story of Jesus and the 'present' significance they attach to him for their continuing faith and witness. In the words of John 20:31: 'these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name'.

I shall argue that this is unacceptable. Equally unacceptable is the fundamentalist approach to the NT which uncritically accepts everything in a literalistic manner, refusing to admit tensions between different biblical authors and tending towards the over-application of harmonization, even when this, for example, leads to Harold Lindsell's now famous example of six denials of Jesus by Peter, *Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), quoted and examined by C.L. Blomberg, 'The legitimacy and limits of harmonization', in D.A. Carson and J.D. Woodbridge (eds), *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Leicester: IVP, 1986), p. 148. However, this fundamentalist position has made little impact on the academic disciplines of biblical studies and theology and so does not come under discussion here.

On the Tübingen School, see H. Harris, *The Tübingen School* (repr. Leicester: Apollós, 1990; first edn 1975). The 'Tübingen School' needs to be clearly distinguished as a school of thought which took its lead from F.C. Baur, who taught at the University of Tübingen in the mid-nineteenth century. It was characterized by a strongly anti-supernaturalistic interpretation of history, tendency criticism in the interpretation of biblical writings which set in opposition to each other the Jewish Christian church led by Peter and the Hellenistic Gentile church led by Paul, and the application of an idealist philosophy of history. As such, the Tübingen School must be distinguished from the scholars who have been based at the university since that time who have not shared the same negative and sceptical presuppositions, notable amongst whom today are Martin Hengel, Otto Betz, Peter Stuhlmacher and Rainer Riesner.

E.g. E.M. Blaiklock, *The Century of the New Testament* (London: IVP, 1962), and his 'The Acts of the Apostles as a document of first century history', in W.W. Gasque and R.P. Martin (eds), *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays presented to F.F. Bruce on his 60th Birthday* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970), pp. 41-54; A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, The Sarum Lectures, 1960-1961 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); F.F. Bruce, 'The NT and classical studies', *NTS* 22 (1975-6): pp. 229-42, repr. in F.F. Bruce, *A Mind for What Matters. Collected Essays* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 3-16, and also his *The New Testament Documents. Are They Reliable?* (Leicester: IVP, 1960), and *New Testament History* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1982); Wolfgang Schadewaldt, 'The reliability of the Synoptic tradition', in Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark* (London: SCM, 1985), pp. 89-113; Paul Merkley, 'The Gospels as historical testimony', *EvQ* 58 (1986): pp. 319-36;

Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989).

R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (London: Fontana, 1958), p. 14.

Bultmann sought to apply this presupposition in his important *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1972). For a discussion of form criticism, see, for example, Craig Blomberg on 'Form criticism', in J.B. Green, S. McKnight and I.H. Marshall (eds), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (hereafter *DJG*), (Leicester: IVP, 1992), pp. 243-50.

N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967),

pp. 15-16, cf. pp. 24, 221. See also Perrin's *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969). Like form criticism, redaction criticism is a most valuable tool for biblical scholarship, but it is often the accompanying historical scepticism that cannot be accepted. For a positive and critical appraisal of redaction criticism, see G.R. Osborne, 'Redaction criticism *per se* that is being criticized here, but the historical scepticism that has so often accompanied their use, and this has become a deeply rooted presupposition in so many investigations into the historicity of the NT, not least through the advocacy of Bultmann and his followers.

Useful summaries of the Jesus Seminar, along with criticism of it, can be found in Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest. The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), pp. 42-57 and *passim*; Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (eds), *Jesus Under Fire. Modern Scholarship Reinvests the Historical Jesus* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), which examines and answers other modern interpretations of Jesus as well as that of the Jesus Seminar.

E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985), and *idem*, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993).

Canadian historian Paul Merkley draws attention to the double standard which historically sceptical theologians often adopt when they apply different historical criteria to the NT than they do to, for example, non-biblical events such as Caesar's crossing the Rubicon: 'Gospels as historical testimony': pp. 319-22.

N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God. Christian Origins and the Question of God: Volume 1* (London: SPCK, 1992), p. 26, though Wright does not include the philosophical perspective in his discussion. See the whole of his 'Introduction', pp. 3-28.

I.H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1988), p. 21.

J. Peter, *Finding the Historical Jesus* (London: Collins, 1965), p. 18; see also pp. 105-6, followed by Marshall, *Luke*, p. 23.

See M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954), pp. 48-53; T.A. Roberts, *History and Christian Apologetic* (London: SPCK, 1960), p. 23

Bloch, *Historian's Craft*, pp. 54-6; Roberts, *History*, p. 24.

V.A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer. The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), p. 41.

A. Marwick, *Introduction to History* (Open University Press, 1977), p. 111.

C. Brown, 'History and the believer', in C. Brown (ed.), *History, Criticism and Faith* (Leicester: IVP, 1976), p. 183. Since this collection of four essays was published, Brown has expanded his paper into a book, *History and Faith. A Personal Exploration* (Leicester: IVP, 1987). See also Marshall, *Luke*, p. 23.

Roberts, *History*, pp. 4-5, 20, 47-8; I.T. Ramsey, 'History and the Gospels: some philosophical reflections', in F.L. Cross (ed.), *Studia Evangelica III* (Berlin: Akademie, 1964), p. 207.

Brown, 'History and the believer', p. 169.

Ibid. See especially p. 208 n. 78: 'In a valid deduction the conclusion is related to the premises in such a way that, if the premises are true, the

- conclusion must also be true. In induction inferences are drawn from a number of cases which point to a general conclusion.'
- 20 Roberts, *History*, pp. 115-16; Blomberg, 'The legitimacy and limits of harmonization', pp. 139, 144-5.
- 21 Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, pp. 54-9.
- 22 Excellent summaries of these disciplines are to be found in *DJG*: G.D. Fee, 'Textual criticism', pp. 827-31, and R. Riesner, 'Archaeology and geography', pp. 33-46. See also Bruce, *New Testament Documents* ch. 2, 'The New Testament documents: their date and attestation', pp. 10-20; E.M. Blaiklock, *The Archaeology of the NT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974); J.A. Thompson, *The Bible and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), Part Three, pp. 307-437.
- 23 Roberts, *History*, p. 3
- 24 Marwick, *Introduction*, p. 53.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 71-2.
- 26 See F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the NT* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984 edn), p. 203, and Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, p. 49. Even those who argue that the Pauline letters (meaning the undisputed Pauline letters) are the primary sources for the Jesus tradition are technically incorrect, though Paul's letters are, in all probability, the earliest sources we have for the historical Jesus. Such a position was expressed by M.D. Goulder in a BBC television interview broadcast over Easter 1996.
- 27 Merkle, 'Gospels as historical testimony': pp. 332-3, places the highest importance on the reliability of eye-witness accounts. See also pp. 323-5, where Merkle examines eye-witness testimony to the empty tomb. Marshall, *Luke*, p. 41, notes that Luke's construction of the phrase 'eyewitnesses and ministers of the word' indicates 'that one class of people, who were both eyewitnesses and servants of the word, is meant, and we are probably to see the apostles as being comprehended within the group'.
- 28 This generic identity was recognized by the Tübingen Gospel Symposium in 1982. Here, Graham Stanton argued that 'if Mark is *euangelion*, so is Matthew', who almost certainly did not create a new literary genre. Howard Marshall observed that though there existed an alternative pattern for Luke and Matthew to follow, namely Q, the important thing was 'that neither Luke nor Matthew followed its pattern', though both writers incorporated Q material 'in a pattern that is based on Mk.' James Dunn asserted that in spite of its differences from the Synoptics, 'John is far closer to them than to any other ancient writing (as the Symposium has shown)'. When the evangelist could have presented his work comprised solely of discourses or sayings of the Redeemer, like the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*, *Thomas the Contender* and *Pistis Sophia*, he rather 'chose, and chose deliberately, to retain the developed discourse material within the framework of a Gospel as laid down by Mark'. See respectively G.N. Stanton, 'Matthew as a creative interpreter', p. 287, I.H. Marshall, 'Luke and his "Gospel"', pp. 292-3, and J.D.G. Dunn, 'Let John be John', pp. 338-9, all in Peter Stuhlmacher (ed.), *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien* (WUNT 28; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1983). This volume has subsequently been translated as a whole into English as *The Gospel and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).
- 29 Merkle, 'Gospels as historical testimony', p. 324 n. 7, accepts the traditional ascriptions to the Gospels, adding, 'Any challenge to these traditional attributions must be strong enough to override the unanimous tradition of the early Church, for which there is documentary support too strong to admit of serious doubt.'
- 30 For examples of this minority position, see Bo Reicke, 'Synoptic prophecies on the destruction of Jerusalem', in D.E. Aune (ed.), *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 121-34; J.A.T. Robinson's *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976) and

- The Priority of John* (London: SCM, 1985); E.E. Ellis, 'Dating the NT', *NTS* 26 (1980): pp. 487-502; and John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke. A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991). For helpful introductions to the issues of dating, see the appropriate sections of D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Leicester: IVP, 1990), and W.G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975).
- ³¹ Bloch, *Historian's Craft*, pp. 60-2, followed by Roberts, *History*, pp. 25-7; H.E.W. Turner, *Historicity and the Gospels. A Sketch of Historical Method and its Application to the Gospels* (London: Mowbray, 1963), p. 11; F.G. Downing, *The Church and Jesus: A Study in History, Philosophy and Theology* (London: SCM, 1968), pp. 47-8.
- ³² Turner, *Historicity*, p. 11.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13. See also Bloch, *Historian's Craft*, pp. 62-4.
- ³⁴ E.g. Bloch, *Historian's Craft*, pp. 63-4.
- ³⁵ Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, p. 41.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-42.
- ³⁷ F.H. Bradley, 'The presuppositions of critical history', in *Collected Essays I* (Oxford: OUP, 1935), pp. 1-53, cited by Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, p. 41.
- ³⁸ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), p. 256, ed. with an Intro. by Jan van der Dussen.
- ³⁹ D. Bebbington, *Patterns in History* (Leicester: IVP, 1979), p. 4. He also notes: 'History . . . entails investigation, questioning, inquiry: the word history is derived from the Greek for "inquiry".'
- ⁴⁰ I.H. Marshall, 'Historical criticism', in *idem* (ed.), *NT Interpretation. Essays on Principles and Methods* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1979), p. 134.
- ⁴¹ Wright, *New Testament*, pp. 32-46. Critical realism is 'a way of describing the process of "knowing" that acknowledges the reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower (hence "realism"), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiralling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known (hence "critical")' (p. 35, italics his). Here, any hard-and-fast distinctions between objective and subjective are rightly abandoned.
- ⁴² Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, pp. 39-42.
- ⁴³ Marshall, 'Historical criticism', p. 134 (italics original). Many of the recent studies on Luke's two volumes, the Gospel and Acts, have concentrated almost exclusively on the theology, a position which mirrors that at the beginning of the century, when W.M. Ramsey, at first a historical sceptic, visited the locations mentioned by Luke and discovered his accuracy on the minutest of details. Since then many scholars have followed him, though often more cautiously, in recognizing that Luke is both a theologian and an historian. See Marshall's book and note its subtitle, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, especially ch. 3, 'Luke the historian', which outlines the work of Ramsey and others such as F.F. Bruce. Historically, then, because Luke-Acts has been found to be reliable in so many ways where verifiable, it is legitimate to expect it to be reliable unless it can be demonstrated otherwise. This conclusion has been given added credence by the work of the late Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1989), and the Tyndale House, six-volume project, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting*, published by Paternoster-Eerdmans, from 1993.
- ⁴⁴ G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (London: Collins, 1970), p. 105.
- ⁴⁵ See S.C. Goetz and C.L. Blomberg, 'The burden of proof', *JSNT* 11 (1981): 39-63. This position is also advocated by R.H. Stein, 'The "criteria" for authenticity', in R.T. France and D. Wenham (eds), *Gospel Perspectives I* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), pp. 225-53, but especially p. 253. The whole of this valuable article examines the criteria of authenticity and proposes their positive application.

- 46 The study of the reliability of techniques used for the transmission of oral tradition is an important area of research which increases the probability that the Gospels and other NT writers were able to memorize accurately and pass on the teaching of Jesus and other early Christian teachers. On this see R. Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1981), accessible summaries of which can be found in the articles by R. Riesner, 'Teacher', pp. 807-11; C.L. Blomberg, 'Form criticism', pp. 243-50, and his 'Gospels (historical reliability)', pp. 291-7 (which also includes a summary of Goetz and Blomberg's argument); and P.H. Davids, 'Tradition criticism', pp. 831-4, all in *DJG*. Also see K.E. Bailey, 'Informal controlled oral tradition and the Synoptic Gospels', *Themelios* 20.2 (January 1995): pp. 4-11. A wide-ranging series of essays has been collected together by Henry Wansbrough (ed.), *Jesus and the Oral Gospel Tradition* (JSNTSS 64; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991). See also Birger Gerhardsson, 'The path of the gospel tradition', in Stuhlmacher (ed.), *The Gospel and the Gospels*, pp. 75-96.
- 47 Within the NT itself there are many explicit references to the use of traditions and their transmission. F.F. Bruce, for example, has noted that Paul's references to the tradition of Christ comprise three elements: (1) a summary of the Christian message, expressed as a confession of faith, with particular focus on Christ's death and resurrection, e.g. 1 Cor. 15: (2) various words and deeds of Christ, e.g. the institution of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11:23-36; (3) ethical and procedural rules for Christians, as in 1 Thes. 4:1-2; F.F. Bruce, *Tradition Old and New* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970), pp. 29-38. Some examples will suffice. In 1 Cor. 11:23 Paul writes: 'I received (*paralambano*) from the Lord (*apo tou kyriou*) what I also delivered (*paradidomi*) to you.' What is important here is the use of the terminology of tradition, namely *paralambano*, 'to receive', and *paradidomi*, 'to deliver'. Col. 2:6-7 reads: 'As ... you received (*paralambano*) Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught ...' Amongst many others, see also 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14, 2:2; 1 Jn. 1:1-3; Jude 3.
- 48 Brown, 'History and the believer', p. 153.
- 49 Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, p. 42.
- 50 Elton, *Practice*, pp. 82-4.
- 51 *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 119-20.
- 52 A. Richardson, *History Sacred and Profane* (London: SCM, 1964), p. 210.
- 53 Bebbington, *Patterns*, p. 9.
- 54 Elton, *Practice*, p. 41.
- 55 D.P. Fuller, *Easter Faith and History* (London: Tyndale Press, 1965), p. 258.
- 56 Elton, *Practice*, p. 107.
- 57 Marshall, *Luke*, p. 24.
- 58 L. von Ranke, *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker, 1494-1535* (Berlin: Reimer, 1824), also in his preface to *Sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig), XXXIII, vii, ET 'Preface to the history of the Latin and Teutonic nations', F. Stern (ed.), *The Varieties of History* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 57, italics added.
- 59 See Brown's discussion of this in 'History and the believer', p. 177.
- 60 Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, p. 183.
- 61 Richardson, *History*, p. 173.
- 62 Marshall, *Luke*, p. 25.
- 63 Merkley, 'Gospels as historical testimony', p. 324; see also p. 326.
- 64 Wright, *New Testament*, p. 84. Wright characterizes this 'modern' view as believing that 'writers in the ancient world were ignorant about these matters, freely making things up, weaving fantasy and legend together and calling it history'. Such a view is not held by historians of the ancient world and classicists!

⁶⁵ See the discussions by Michael Grant, *The Ancient Historians* (London: Duckworth, repr. 1995, originally 1970), which includes examinations of Josephus and Eusebius, and Hemer, *The Book of Acts* ch. 3, 'Ancient historiography', pp. 63-100. Hemer summarizes the importance of eight points for ancient historiography (p. 100): '(1) the existence of a distinctive and rigorous theory of historiography; (2) the stress on eyewitness participation; (3) the importance of interviewing eyewitnesses; (4) the limitation of coverage to material where the writer has privileged access to evidence of guaranteed quality; (5) the stress on travel to the scene of events; (6) the prospect then (and for us) of checking details with contemporary documents; (7) the occasional insistence on the use of sources for speeches; and (8) the vigour of the concept of "truth" in history "as it actually happened".'

⁶⁶ Elton, *Practice*, p. 97.

⁶⁷ Useful introductions to this subject, as well as those mentioned below, include Gary R. Habermas, 'Did Jesus perform miracles?', in Wilkins and Moreland (eds), *Jesus Under Fire*, pp. 117-40; C. Brown, *That You May Believe. Miracles and Faith Then and Now* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1985); H.C. Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale, 1983); C.F.D. Moule (ed.), *Miracles* (London: Mowbray, 1965).

⁶⁸ See Merkley's discussion in 'Gospels as historical testimony': pp. 328-9. On p. 234, Merkley describes 'most academic-philosophical agonizing' which seeks to provide 'explanations' as a red herring. See, too, Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* (ET, Concordia, 1977), p. 16: 'as long as one makes analogous classification a precondition for acceptance, much in the world of the Bible remains without foundation. But how can the pure historian without further ado reject something just because it happens only once? What can be experienced and what has analogies can certainly not be declared synonymous.' Merkley, 'Gospels as historical testimony', p. 334, adds: 'Every historical event is an event that happened only once. What we need to know is: what happened.' He exemplifies the danger of this on p. 333, citing Voltaire, *The Philosophy of History* (1766) (New York, 1965), pp. 151-2, who 'condemned Herodotus as the "father of lies" because of the "absurd" stories that Herodotus told about the behaviour of people in the ancient past. In particular, Herodotus' story that in ancient Babylon fathers required their daughters to serve as temple prostitutes for one night as part of an initiation rite, Voltaire rejected as "a calumny on the human race".'

⁶⁹ M.J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland, 'Introduction: The furor surrounding Jesus', in Wilkins and Moreland (eds), *Jesus Under Fire*, p. 8. See the whole of the helpful discussion of irrational faith, world-views and philosophical naturalism on pp. 7-10.

⁷⁰ Norman Geisler has written that 'belief in miracles does not destroy the integrity of scientific methodology, only its sovereignty. It says in effect that science does not have sovereign claim to explain all events as natural, but only those that are regular, repeatable, and/or predictable': N.L. Geisler, *Miracles and Modern Thought* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 58, cited by C.L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Leicester: IVP, 1987), p. 75.

⁷¹ The subject of world-views is ably and succinctly discussed by Wilkins and Moreland in *Jesus Under Fire*, pp. 1-15

⁷² Colin A. Russell, Professor of Science and Religion at the Open University, has written a most helpful book on the compatibility of the relationship between science and faith: *Cross-currents. Interactions between Science and Faith* (Leicester: IVP, 1985). At the time of the controversy over the historical scepticism of the then Bishop of Durham, fourteen scientists (six of whom were Fellows of the Royal Society) wrote to *The Times* stating that 'it is not logically valid to use science as an argument against

- miracles. To believe that miracles cannot happen is as much an act of faith as to believe that they can happen' (*The Times*, 13 July 1984, cited by Russell, *Cross-currents*, p. 250). Another useful book, though specifically focusing on Gn. 1-11 and science, is Ernest Lucas's *Genesis Today. Genesis and the Questions of Science* (London: Christian Impact, 1995). This concludes with a useful bibliography of books representing a wide variety of views.
- ⁷³ Merkle, 'Gospels as historical testimony': pp. 332-3, italics his.
- ⁷⁴ Good summaries of Hume and convincing refutations of his claims can be found in Brown, *History and Faith*, pp. 19-25, and Brown's larger work, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984); W.L. Craig, 'The problem of miracles: a historical and philosophical perspective', in D. Wenham and C. Blomberg (eds), *Gospel Perspectives 6. The Miracles of Jesus* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), pp. 9-48 (the whole volume is worth careful study).
- ⁷⁵ Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, p. 77, citing J.N.D. Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions* (Leicester: IVP, 1984). On the first point, Merkle, 'Gospels as historical testimony', p. 334, states that 'contrary to popular assumption, the authority of historical testimony does not tend to vary with the distance in time between ourselves and the witnesses; nor does it necessarily increase as the number of witnesses increases'. On points two and three, A.E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (London: Duckworth, 1982), has shown that scientific arguments were adopted in antiquity and that the ancients were no more credulous than moderns (pp. 101-2). He concludes on p. 110: 'The gospel miracle stories in general . . . show an extraordinary restraint in the accumulation of any kind of detail', and 'one can say that the miracle stories in the gospels are unlike anything else in ancient literature in that they avoid either of the tendencies [to heighten the miraculous element or to sensationalize and elaborate the accounts] which we find in any comparable accounts'. He also adds: 'To a degree that is rare in the writings of antiquity, we can say, to use a modern phrase, that they tell the story straight.' Also on points two and three, Merkle, 'Gospels as historical testimony', p. 332, remarks that the contemporaries of the Gospel writers fully understood that virgins do not conceive and bear sons, being 'not an iota more or less free than we are to disbelieve this claim'; therefore, they believed it because they were persuaded of the authority of the witnesses to accept what they otherwise knew to be impossible. 'Such a fact as this contradicted the "facts of life", for them no less than for us. All the undoubted advance that the sciences have made in describing the processes involved in the conception of new human lives neither adds to nor subtracts from the simplicity of the issue involved. There are today devout gynaecologists who confess without reservation the dogma of the virgin birth, and there are masses of scientific illiterates who reject it.'
- ⁷⁶ Blomberg, 'Gospels (historical reliability)', in *DJG*, p. 297. See also Blomberg's fuller treatment of parallels to the Gospel miracles in other literature in *Historical Reliability*, pp. 81-92.
- ⁷⁷ Bruce, *New Testament Documents*, p. 62. Here we can add C.S. Lewis's statement that 'the accounts of the "miracles" in first-century Palestine are either lies, or legends, or history. And if all, or the most important, of them are lies or legends then the claim which Christianity has been making for the last two thousand years is simply false', *Miracles* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1947), p. 97.
- ⁷⁸ Harvey, *Constraints*, p. 100.
- ⁷⁹ See W.L. Craig, 'The bodily resurrection of Jesus', in *Gospel Perspectives. Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels 1*, pp. 47-74, also his 'The empty tomb of Jesus', in R.T. France and D. Wenham (eds), *Gospel Perspectives. Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels 2* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), pp. 173-200; G.E. Ladd, *I Believe in the*

Resurrection (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975); M.J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1985); G.R. Osborne, 'Resurrection', in *DJG*, pp. 673-88.

Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, pp. 110-11.

W.L. Craig, 'Did Jesus rise from the dead?', in Wilkins and Moreland (eds), *Jesus Under Fire*, pp. 143-6, 163-5, citing C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), p. 19.

McCullagh, *Justifying*, p. 21.

Craig, 'Did Jesus rise?', pp. 163-4.

So B.L. Blackburn, 'Miracles and miracle stories', in *DJG*, pp. 556-8, who provides a good, accessible overview of miracles that repays study (pp. 549-60).

Early Christian apologists referred to Jesus' miracles as events beyond dispute by Christianity's opponents: e.g. Quadratus, in his *Apologia* addressed to the Emperor Hadrian in AD 133, cited by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* 4.3; whilst outside Christianity, Jesus was also known as a miracle-worker in Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.63-64) and an exorcist and healer in the magical papyri (PGM 4.3019-30) and within later Jewish circles (e.g. *Tosepta Hullin* 2:22-23).

So argues Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, pp. 92-5, who adds (p. 94) the warning that evidence for the general reliability of the miracle accounts does not prove the authenticity of every individual miracle. A good collection of such individual studies is provided in *Gospel Perspectives* 6. *The Miracles of Jesus*. Craig, 'Did Jesus rise?', pp. 162-3, applies seven of the criteria for authenticity to the resurrection of Jesus and concludes that the historicity of this event passes the same tests for authenticity used by the Jesus Seminar for establishing Jesus' authentic sayings.

Bruce, *New Testament Documents*, p. 62. He adds (p. 67): 'Historical research is by no means excluded, for the whole point of the gospel is that in Christ the power and grace of God entered into human history to bring about the world's redemption.'

V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5; Leicester: Apollos, 1994), pp. 114-15. In this he is in agreement with Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, p. 240: 'Once one accepts that the gospels reflect attempts to write reliable history or biography, however theological or stylized its presentation may be, then one must immediately recognize an important presupposition which guides most historians in their work. Unless there is good reason for believing otherwise one will assume that a given detail in the work of a particular historian is factual. This method places the burden of proof squarely on the person who would doubt the reliability of a given portion of the text.'

Long, *Art of Biblical History*, p. 134. In his section 'The historical-critical method and the question of divine intervention', pp. 128-35. Long reports and agrees with the position taken by William Abraham, *Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism* (Oxford: OUP, 1982).

Craig, 'The problem of miracles', *Gospel Perspectives* 6. *The Miracles of Jesus*, p. 43.

Marwick, *Introduction*, p. 141.

Richard A. Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (SNTSMS 70; Cambridge: CUP, 1992), provides a most helpful overview of the methods used by ancient Graeco-Roman biographers. See esp. chs 5-9, and particularly his discussion in each of those chapters of 'external features' - mode of representation, size, structure, scale, literary units, use of sources and methods of characterization - and 'internal features', perhaps most relevant here being the author's intention and purpose which determined both the selection and final presentation of his material.

Hans E. Stier, *Moderne Exegese und historische Wissenschaft*, p. 152

(italics added), quoted by H. Staudinger, *The Trustworthiness of the Gospels* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1981), p. 77, and cited by Blomberg, *Historical Reliability*, pp. 102–3, who also suggests replacing Stier's two references to 'contradictions' with the word 'apparent'.

⁹⁴ Perhaps the best example of this in the NT is the census under Quirintus referred to in Lk. 2:2: see the discussion in B. Witherington III, 'The birth of Jesus', in *DJG*, pp. 67–8. H. Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium I* (Freiburg, 1969), pp. 98–101, provides a survey of the debate, warning against the easy option of accepting Luke's inaccuracy, believing that only the discovery of new historical material can lead to a solution of the problem. He is cited by Marshall, *Luke*, p. 69 n. 5.

⁹⁵ Bloch, *Historian's Craft*, p. 114.

⁹⁶ That the Gospels are not modern biographies has long been noted, but it has been overlooked by too many writers. Until recently, the conclusion that seemed to answer the data available was that the Gospels are unique but also bear similarities to Graeco-Roman biographies. See G. Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching* (Cambridge: CUP, 1974), ch. 5 'The Gospels and ancient biographical writing', pp. 117–36; R.A. Guelich, 'The Gospel genre', in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, pp. 183–219; L.W. Hurtado, 'Gospel (genre)', in *DJG*, pp. 276–82; D.E. Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1987), ch. 1–4. However, more recently Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, has impressively and convincingly argued that the Gospels are not unique but are Graeco-Roman biographies and that they form a sub-genre of *Bios Iesou* (pp. 243–7). Burridge prefers the designation 'Bios/Lives' over 'biography' (pp. 62–3), as the latter carries too many modern connotations and assumptions, and concludes that 'the time has come to go on from the use of the adjective "biographical", for the gospels are *bioi*!' (p. 243). Burridge, a classically trained scholar, provides us with an excellent example of the interdisciplinary approach that is required to answer the issue of genre and other historical, biblical and theological issues, as he brings together Gospel studies, literary theory and the literature of the Graeco-Roman world, and in so doing avoids the pitfall of anachronism, e.g. 'the gospels must be compared with literature of their own day' (p. 53), and 'genre must always be set in its historical context. Study of the historical context will include analysis of which genres were actually available at the time' (p. 48). He also provides a most useful overview of the Gospel genre debate with his 'Historical survey', ch. 1, pp. 3–25, as well as an 'Evaluation of recent debate', ch. 4, pp. 82–106.

⁹⁷ I.e. the forms of their histories – e.g. chronological or thematic, or their degree of selectivity, concentrating perhaps on only several central figures in the story to the exclusion of others.

⁹⁸ Blomberg, 'Gospels (historical reliability)', *DJG*, p. 294: 'Ancient biographers and historians did not feel constrained to write from detached and so-called objective viewpoints. They did not give equal treatment to all periods of an individual's life. They felt free to write in topical as well as chronological sequence. They were highly selective in the material they included, choosing that which reinforced the morals they wished to inculcate. In an era which knew neither quotation marks nor plagiarism, speakers' words were abbreviated, explained, paraphrased and contemporized in whatever ways individual authors deemed beneficial for their audiences. All of these features occur in the Gospels, and none of them detracts from the Evangelists' integrity. At the same time, little if any material was recorded solely out of historical interest; interpreters must recognize theological motives as central to each text.'

⁹⁹ See Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching*, pp. 117, 119, a point agreed to by M. Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1979), p. 19. Interestingly, in identifying the Gospels as *bioi*, Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*, p. 258, adds the note that

identification of the correct genre for the Gospels affects the 'quest for the historical Jesus', in that 'because this is a Life of an historical person written within the lifetime of his contemporaries, there are limits on free composition'. The creativity of the evangelists has been explored by those who have argued that the early Church failed to distinguish the oracles of early Christian prophets from the teaching of Jesus: e.g. M.E. Boring, *Sayings of the Risen Jesus* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), and *idem*, 'Christian prophecy and the sayings of Jesus: the state of the question', *NTS* 29 (1983): pp. 104-12. See, more cautiously, G.F. Hawthorne, 'The role of Christian prophets in the Gospel tradition', in G.F. Hawthorne and O. Betz (eds), *Tradition and Interpretation in the NT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 119-33. This position has been all but laid to rest by the work of David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), and David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). See also J.D.G. Dunn, 'Prophetic 'I' sayings and the Jesus tradition: the importance of testing prophetic utterances within early Christianity', *NTS* 24 (1978): pp. 175-98. The only NT examples that record words of the risen Christ appear in the context of Rev. 2-3, where he is clearly distinguished from the earthly Jesus. The only examples of words of Christian prophets are in Acts 11:28 and 21:10-11 and clearly attribute the Lord's message to a human speaker, Agabus. In 1 Cor. 14:29, Paul makes clear that no prophecy could be accepted that did not conform to the previously revealed word of God, so even if some sayings crept into the tradition from certain prophets, they would not have been likely to have distorted the original gospel message, as is often alleged. The lack of sayings attributed to Jesus on topics of later Church controversy (e.g. circumcision, speaking in tongues, the Gentile mission and circumcision, etc.) further supports the view that Christian prophecy was not confused with the teachings of the historical Jesus, as is further borne out by Paul's comments in 1 Cor. 7:10, 12 and 25.

¹⁰⁰ On Luke's prologue, see Marshall, *Luke*, pp. 37-41.

¹⁰¹ For explicit references to historicity, see also Mt. 1:23, "Emmanuel" - which means, "God with us"; Mk. 1:9, 'At that time Jesus came ...'; Jn. 21:25; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 15:3-7, 12-14; Heb. 5:7-9; 1 Jn. 1:1-3; Rev. 5:12, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain ...".

¹⁰² The vital importance of this subject is well stated by Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, pp. 5-10, who highlight the importance of truth and reason for religious belief, concluding (p. 10): 'In sum, *it matters* much that our religious beliefs are both true and reasonable. Moreover, there are simply no sufficient reasons for not believing in the supernatural, and there are in fact a number of good reasons ... for believing in the supernatural' (italics added).