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Editorial: Is John's Gospel Anti-Semitic?

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Jesus' words to 'the Jews' in John 8:44, 'You are of your father the devil, have a sad history of horrible anti-Semitic re-use. Lillian Freudmann writes that they 'make antisemitism respectable and encourage aggression against Jews. With "inspiration" like this, pious churchgoers have considered it acceptable at a minimum, and perhaps even their Christian duty, to join in massive attacks on Jews.'

Can we argue that anti-Semitic use of John 8:44 is a dreadful *misuse*? Or is the Fourth Gospel itself guilty as charged? We must bear in mind, of course, that in this Gospel 'the Jews' are fairly consistently portrayed as spiritually blind and hostile to Jesus.

We are challenged here by a great need for *definition*. What exactly is 'anti-Semitism'? And what exactly was the semantic content of Jesus' charge against 'the Jews' in John 8? This second question in turn needs to be divided in two: what might this charge have meant *within the context of Jesus' ministry*? and what might have been its intention and force *as included within John's Gospel*, in its original life-setting? Only if 'anti-Semitism', as generally defined, denotes ideas and attitudes which we identify either in Jesus himself, or in the Fourth Gospel, can we justly call John 8:44 'anti-Semitic'.

Anti-Semitism is widely defined as 'the hatred and persecution of Jews as a group; not the hatred of persons who happen to be Jews, but rather the hatred of persons *because they are Jews*'. This definition by Charles Glock and Rodney Stark as cited by Graham Keith, *Hated Without a Cause? A Survey of Anti-Semitism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997, p. 2f), reveals (a) the centrality of *attitude* in anti-Semitism: for whatever reasons, the Jews are *hated*, and it is the hatred, rather than its varied causes and settings, which makes anti-Semitism a *continuous* historical phenomenon. It reveals (b) that there is a certain overlap between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism. 'The hatred of persons because they are Jews' means that that hatred is directed first at their religion and culture, and then at the persons themselves. However, there is a vital difference: anti-Judaism does not have to be expressed by hatred, while anti-Semitism can only be expressed in this way. Anti-Judaism is consistent with a wholehearted love both for Judaism and for Jews, while anti-Semitism is not.

Rosemary Ruether's famous book *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Minneapolis: Seabury, 1974) which includes a powerful attack on the Fourth Gospel, refuses to distinguish (as its title suggests) between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism. She argues that, simply by portraying the Messiah and his followers as the *true* Israel, the NT commits itself to an anti-Judaism inseparable from later Christian persecution of Jews. So even if anti-Judaism *may* be compatible with love for Jews, Ruether charges that it has actually given rise to deep hostility, so that in practice Christian anti-Judaism is deeply anti-Semitic. Christians need therefore to repent, not just of the Holocaust and all that preceded it, but also of NT *Christology* as its ultimate root.

As far as Christian history is concerned, we must probably agree that the overlap between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism is almost total. Only with the rise of Puritanism did a more positive, less bleak attitude towards Jews begin to appear, the role of Israel in prophecy was emphasized, and missions to Jews were

proposed. But Ruether rejects even such *conversionist* attitudes as alike demeaning and hostile, barely distinguishable from overt persecution. On her account of the matter, all true dialogue between Christianity and Judaism as stand-alone religions must cease. At best, Christians must simply repent of being themselves. If they are not willing to do this, then a second best will be to recognize the full validity, before God, of the Jewish way and covenant. But this causes great theological problems. (a) *It apparently compromises the unity of God*: how can he say such different things to the two groups? And (b) *it fundamentally undermines the notion of 'Christian Scripture'*: for at the heart of our sacred texts, prominent among them the Fourth Gospel, lie attitudes and teaching which we must now reject.

For the Fourth Gospel certainly portrays the Messiah and his people as the true Israel. 'I am the true Vine' (15:1) says it as clearly as possible. But we must say firmly: this portrayal only qualifies as anti-Semitic if it is said with *hatred*, either by Jesus or by the fourth evangelist. So we need to be as clear as we can about the other two definitions – what this statement may have meant for Jesus, and for the fourth evangelist. I focus in this brief editorial on its meaning within John, rather than for Jesus – not because I hesitate to believe that Jesus said it, but because our access to Jesus is through John, and space is limited!

For nearly 30 years the *Sitz im Leben* proposed for the Fourth Gospel by J. Louis Martyn in his book, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), has commanded general agreement. And, if he is right, then *hostile anti-Judaism conditioned the Fourth Gospel at its very genesis*. He pictures its origin in the aftermath of the forcible expulsion of the Johannine community from its parent synagogue. The Gospel replays the story of the expulsion in terms of the story of Jesus, reflects the arguments that preceded and followed it, and rehearses the reinterpretation of their Jewish heritage whereby the Johannine community *claimed it for themselves as the true Israel*, over against unbelieving Judaism. Martyn himself maintained that the relationship was still quite cordial, and conversation was still continuing; but some of those who have developed his theory maintain that connections had been severed, and replaced by hostility and suspicion, even by *hatred*?

If this theory is correct, then it is hard to rescue the Fourth Gospel from the charge of anti-Semitism. 'You are of your father the devil' was more likely said with anger and hatred than with tears. So we will be faced with a Gospel which did indeed begin the long history of Christian anti-Semitism, albeit expressing an anti-Semitism of Jews against fellow-Jews. Several scholars have sought to limit the force of the language by describing it as an 'argument within family'. But we must admit that, if Jews can be guilty of anti-Semitism, then it makes little difference if they are within or without the 'family'. In any case, according to this theory, the Johannine community had left the family.

Is this theory right? In my recently published book *Your Father the Devil? A New Approach to John and 'the Jews'* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), I have sought to reassess the whole question. The issue cannot be tackled just by reinterpreting a verse here and another there. I believe the time is ripe to rethink the whole relationship between the Fourth Gospel and Judaism. Focusing on the essential points relating to anti-Semitism – and not rehearsing all the necessary argumentation – we must say the following:

(1) *The rhetorical background is crucial*. Luke T. Johnson in his article, 'The New Testament's anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic', (JBL 108 [1989], 419-441), has helped us with a study of rhetoric within Judaism, revealing that it was possible to use very strong language about opponents within 'the family', without losing a sense of common belonging. John 8:44 is matched by

language used at Qumran and by Philo. In particular, we must reckon with the tradition of prophetic rhetoric. Several scholars have pointed out how the prophets could denounce Israel and her leaders in the roundest terms without thereby laying themselves open to the charge of anti-Semitism. 'Hatred' was certainly not the motivation of their language – quite the opposite.

John 8 stands in this tradition. The chapter seems to owe much in particular to the language of Hosea, and to the wider prophetic notion of *the lawsuit of the Lord against Israel*. It is in dialogue form, but its portrayal of Jesus draws on this prophetic background, ironically casting 'the Jews' in the role of the Gentile nations 'who do not know God'. The language in itself, therefore, does not step outside what was possible in the prophetic tradition.

(2) We may develop this point as *the charge is ethical, not ontological*. The scholarly literature is littered with comments to the effect that John 8 'diabolizes' the Jews – locates their essential nature and the origin of their being in Satanic activity and motivation. Such comments mistake the rhetorical force and setting of this saying. When the patriarch Dan told his sons, 'Your prince is Satan!' (*Testament of Dan* 5:6), he was not making a statement about their ontology. The rhetorical function of this charge was to *warn* them against the apostasy and idolatry which the patriarch foresaw. He goes on immediately to predict salvation and restoration 'from Beliar' (5:11), and tells them: 'Fear the Lord, my children, and protect yourselves from Satan' (6:1).

Exactly the same is true of John 8:44. 'The Jews' are contemplating murder, and are rejecting 'the truth' from Jesus. They are not doing the works of Abraham, who welcomed the heavenly messengers, but are spurning this man from God (8:39-40). *Insofar as they commit themselves to such actions*, 'the Jews' are 'of your father the devil', and are 'not of God' (8:47). But at this stage, no final decision has been made. Ironically, it is one of Jesus' own disciples who takes the next step, and commits himself to doing Satan's desires by murdering Jesus. As a result, Satan 'enters' Judas (13:27). 'The Jews' in John 8 have not gone that far.

(3) *First-century Jewish readers would recognize the Fourth Gospel as an appeal to them*. This point follows from the last. In line with Martyn's hypothesis, it has become common to treat the Fourth Gospel as a *Christian expropriation of Jewish symbols and Scriptures* – investing them with new 'Christian' significance and even poking fun at figures like Nicodemus who fail to understand the new meaning. Traditional Jewish terms receive new, Christian meanings hidden from Jewish readers. But this is simply untrue. More and more studies reveal the true location of its 'universe of discourse': the Fourth Gospel is perfectly at home in first-century Judaism, not just in its imagery and modes of debate, but more particularly in its engagement with the needs and concerns which pressed upon every Jew in the last three decades of the century.

The destruction of the Temple in AD 70 has not figured sufficiently in discussions of the Gospel's background and setting. Martyn ignored it. But 2:19 refers to it, with a deep irony which would not be lost on readers, both Jewish and Jewish-Christian, who had lived through that dreadful trauma or sought to come to terms with it. And, having announced at the start that the Temple, as Jesus' body, is to be rebuilt, the Gospel then systematically works this out in terms of the festivals, of the location of God's presence, and of the identity of God's people. Jesus is now the focus of God's presence and people, the one in whom the festivals and indeed the whole OT find their true subject.

This message would have been crystal clear to Jewish readers in the late first century. The destruction of the Temple, and its aftermath of social confusion and theological uncertainty, form the context within which this Gospel speaks very

powerfully indeed. Jews would not have felt themselves vilified by this Gospel, but rather challenged – as they were by other voices, offering other recipes for the recovery of the nation. The point about the Fourth Gospel as a voice ‘within the family’ is quite right, in fact, for this is a Jewish-Christian response to the trauma which affected all Jews, thus taking its place alongside 2 Baruch, and 4 Ezra, and the Apocalypse of Abraham, and *Sybilline Oracles* Book 4, and the new rabbinism of Yavneh, and the Zealot movements which eventually produced the rebellion in AD 132 – all of which gave different and competing answers to the disaster.

(4) This leads to our last point: *‘The Jews’ were just one group in late first-century Judaism.* This insight again arises from letting the text become three-dimensional against the background of the late first century. The way in which ‘the Jews’ are portrayed makes them readily identifiable as *the Jews of Judea, those who were committed to the intense religion of Temple and Torah which could not be practised elsewhere* – and which therefore was deeply affected by the loss of the Temple. Some have suggested ‘Judeans’ as an alternative translation of ‘Jews’ in the Fourth Gospel, which is appropriate but too broad. Judaism was highly diverse in this period, and differences were accentuated by the disaster of AD 70. In this setting, ‘the Jews’ with whom Jesus debates certainly do not represent all Jews, but rather a precise group (albeit the group which gradually won the day through the growing power of the Yavneh academy).

These four points need careful argumentation and support! – which I have tried to supply in my book. But it will be obvious that, if this is the right picture, then no charge of anti-Semitism will stick. Quite the contrary: this is a Gospel deeply committed to the peace of Jerusalem, which longs to see Jews finding the *true* centre of all God’s purposes for them through faith in Jesus the Christ.

¹ **Antisemitism in the New Testament.** (Maryland etc. Univ. Press of America, 1994), p. 267. Other references are given in the text of the editorial.

We apologize for attributing a review written by Dr Millard Erickson, to Dr Craig Blomberg. The review was of The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age and found on p. 92 Of vol 23 no 1.

We apologize for a particularly vicious gremlin attack on the article by Jey Kanagaraj on the Poor in the Gospel in the same issue. End notes no.s 33, and 37-40 were misplaced, although the correct text does appear. On the last line of p. 52 read “helpless” instead of “helpers”.

David Wenham

By kind permission of the author, we extract, with minor editorial changes, Chapter 4 of David Wenham's booklet, John's Gospel: Good News for Today (Leicester: RTSF, 1997). After a short introductory chapter setting out the purpose of the booklet, two chapters deal respectively with what John has to say and why John is so different, the latter dealing with the question of theology and history. A final chapter is titled 'Using John's Gospel today'.

The view that John has been highly creative and indeed historically inventive in his Gospel, though widely held, is not definitely correct. There is no question that, at first sight, John seems to be giving us a picture of Jesus the man who worked in Galilee and Jerusalem, not to be telling us about his own later convictions concerning Jesus. Of course, this may be a naive reading of his Gospel, but the question is whether the evidence usually claimed as proving something different does so.

Doubts about Jamnia and evidence that John's theology is much earlier than late first century

The first thing to say is that the evidence which some scholars see as showing John to come from a late first-century situation, after church and synagogue have split, does not clearly prove anything of the sort.

Scholars have suggested that John's negative portrayal of 'the Jews' and the references to them excluding Christians from the synagogue reflects the situation after the so-called Council of Jamnia. But it is very doubtful if the Council did have the significance that scholars have attributed to it. We are not sure what actually happened, and not at all sure that it marked a decisive split between church and synagogue. In the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* article on the Council the author Jack Lewis comments that the hypothesis should 'be relegated to the limbo of unestablished hypotheses. It should not be allowed to be considered a consensus established by mere repetition of assertion.'

It is interesting that in one of the earliest writings of the NT, 1 Thessalonians, Paul can speak of 'the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out' (2:14-16). There Paul is referring to 'the Jews' driving Christians out, right back in the 40s AD. So John's portrayal of the Jews in his Gospel is not necessarily post-Jamnia, not necessarily even post-the time of Jesus; after all, relations between Jesus and the Jewish authorities were not entirely cordial - they had him crucified.

A Historical View of John's Gospel

The Johannine thunderbolt in 'Q'

As for the emphases that supposedly reflect John's post-Jamnia situation, all of them can be shown to go back much earlier in Christian history. One of the most interesting pieces of evidence is Matthew 11:25-27/Luke 10:21-22, where Jesus prays: 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you hid these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes. Yes, Father, because such was your good pleasure. All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.' These words of Jesus, being common to Matthew and Luke, are widely recognized by scholars as going back to early tradition (indeed to the 'Q' source, postulated by many scholars, and datable back to around AD 50). What is extraordinary about them is how Johannine they are: the language of 'Father' and 'Son', the idea of 'knowing' the Father and the Son and the idea of revelation to Jesus' followers and not to others are all things that we have seen to be very important in John. So here are these 'Johannine' distinctives being attributed to Jesus decades before Jamnia. Admittedly the synoptics do not have a lot of such Johannine sayings (though there are other slightly less striking ones²); however, the one saying on its own shows that John's distinctives do not come out of John's distinctive theological imagination at the end of the first century.

Some evidence from Paul

That point is reinforced when we look at some of Paul's writings. In 1Corinthians 1-4 Paul speaks about Christians as people who have received divine revelation, and some scholars think that he knows the 'Q' tradition of Matthew 11:25-27. More significantly, Philippians 2:5-11 is a famous passage where Paul speaks of Jesus having emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, going to the cross, and then being highly exalted. We do not have John's 'descending/ascending' language here, but we have something very like it. Paul sees Jesus as pre-existent; and his 'super-exalt' word is related to the Greek word used in John, when he speaks of Jesus being 'lifted up' on the cross. Many scholars have claimed that Philippians 2:5-11 is a hymn that existed before Paul wrote Philippians and which he took over in his letter; in which case we find that 'Johannine' Christology was anticipated not just by Paul, but possibly even earlier in the hymns of the early church. People have also seen Colossians 1:15-20 as an early hymn, and it is even more 'Johannine': its description of the pre-existent Jesus as the one through whom God created the world is strikingly similar to the prologue of John's Gospel.³

It turns out that the 'Johannine' theological emphases are not so distinctive, and that they seem to have featured in the very earliest traditions of the Christian church.⁴

Loving one another

The same is true of his ethical teaching about love. John suggests that the command 'love one another as I have loved you' was something particularly important for Jesus: it was his 'new commandment' (13:34; 15:12). At first sight this looks quite different from the Synoptics, where we find a broader emphasis on loving one's neighbour and even one's enemy. The suspicion is that John has narrowed the focus because of his church context. However, a closer look shows not only that this Johannine emphasis has a parallel in the Synoptics (e.g. in Mk. 9:33-50 and 10:41-45, with its important stress on service within the Christian fellowship), but also that it is a strong emphasis in Paul's letters, for example in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 'You are all taught of God to love one another' (also Rom. 12:10). Once again a feature of John that could point to a post-Jamnia setting is found to be part of the teaching of the Church from a very early date. In Paul we find a dual emphasis on loving fellow-Christians and loving others as well (Gal. 6:10; 1 Thes. 5:15); in John it must be admitted that there is more explicit emphasis on the first, but he too can speak of Jesus' mission in terms of God loving the world and of Christians being called to share in that mission (3:16; 20:21).

One particularly interesting text in this connection is Galatians 6:2, where Paul tells the Galatians to 'bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ'. Scholars have puzzled over why Paul speaks of the 'law' of Christ in a letter where he mainly stresses freedom from the law. But one real possibility is that Paul knows the tradition of Jesus' new commandment which we find in John – bearing 'one another's' burdens is after all much the same as loving 'one another'. Scholars have not often seen this possible connection, probably because they assume distinctive 'Johannine' traditions of Jesus to be late and not historical; but we have seen a significant amount of evidence that shows that John's distinctives go back early into Christian history.

It is entirely possible that Paul knew what we call 'Johannine' traditions of Jesus in the 50s and 60s AD – not just the new command, but perhaps also, as we saw, Jesus' teaching about 'knowing the Father and the Son' (as reflected in Mt. 11:27). Did he also know some of the teaching about the Holy Spirit that we find in John? Certainly both Paul in 1 Corinthians and Jesus in John's Gospel emphasize divine revelation to Christians and the work of the Holy Spirit: it is entirely possible that Paul learned his emphasis on the Spirit, as other theological emphases, from the teaching of Jesus (directly or indirectly).⁵ It is possible that Paul's distinctive teaching about being 'in Christ' derived from Jesus' sayings about the vine and the branches, as found in John 15: both John and Paul speak of the mutual indwelling of Christ and the believer. We could go on.

Even if some of the ideas we have discussed are speculative, what is not debatable is that many of the distinctive features of John's Gospel that are often seen to be peculiar to him and that are regarded as evidence of his advanced theological thinking are actually anticipated in some of the earliest parts of the NT. There is even some evidence that such 'Johannine' teaching was regarded as coming from Jesus himself, long before John is thought to have compiled his Gospel. We are thus moving towards the opinion that John's distinctive emphases are not to be explained in terms of his theological inventiveness, but in terms of his particular selection of early stories and sayings of Jesus. (We will come back to the question of why he has selected what he has later.)

Evidence of John having historical traditions

This view is reinforced by evidence which suggests that John did have good historical traditions at his disposal which are not found in the Synoptic Gospels. This has been argued most powerfully in recent years by John Robinson, who was not theological conservative, but who still championed the view that John's Gospel has a very good claim to be taken as historical.⁶ The evidence includes:

(1) Names and places that are archaeologically or historically confirmed. For example, there is the story found in John 5 (but not in the Synoptics) of the lame man healed at the pool of Bethesda. John describes the pool as having 'five porticoes'. Today this pool is a tourist site in Jerusalem, having been excavated in the 1930s. The archaeologists found that it was (a) a pool associated with a healing shrine, which makes good sense of John's reference to people waiting by the pool for the waters to be moved, so that they could be healed; (b) that it had a larger and smaller basin, which makes good sense of the five porticoes, if there was a portico round the sides of the whole pool complex and one between the two basins. There is also a probable reference to the double pool in the Dead Sea Scrolls. If John is writing a theological meditation on Jesus, he is doing so with the aid of accurate topographical information about Jerusalem.⁷

(2) More broadly, there are all sorts of things in the Gospel that are historically plausible, given what we know of first-century Palestine. Thus John's comment in John 6:15 on the crowd wanting to make Jesus king after the feeding of the 5,000 makes historical sense in the political context of occupied Palestine. John's description in 11:48 of the Jewish authorities being alarmed that Jesus' popularity might lead to a Roman intervention against the country is entirely plausible.⁸

Then there is John's description of Jesus and his disciples going up regularly to the different feasts in Jerusalem. Some of his description of Jesus at the feasts fits in with what we know of the temple rituals: thus John has Jesus offering people

'living water' at the feast of tabernacles in chapter 7, which may be significant in view of the fact that the festival involved a daily water-pouring ceremony (probably connected to Zc. 14:18): a procession would go down to the pool of Siloam below the temple, fill a golden jar with water, and then return to the altar in the temple, where the water was poured out at the side of the altar. Even if that particular suggestion is speculative, the Johannine picture of Jesus going up to various feasts in Jerusalem is one that arguably makes better historical sense than the Synoptic picture, where Jesus is only described as making the one visit to the holy city at the end of his ministry.

(3) That leads us on to say that things recorded in John help make sense of things in the Synoptics. Thus John's description of Jesus making a number of visits to Jerusalem helps make sense of the Synoptic story of Jesus sending his disciples to find a particular donkey in a particular place, and then to follow a particular man to his upper room (Mk. 11:2; 14:13). John's reference to the political fervour of the crowd after the feeding of the 5,000 helps explain why Jesus in the Synoptics sends the disciples away across the lake, leaving him behind to deal with the over-excited crowd (Mk. 6:45).

(4) There are also things in John that are historically plausible, because of their potentially embarrassing nature to the early Christians. Thus the failure of the Synoptics to mention the crowd's attempt to make Jesus king may well have been because of their anxiety lest people should see Jesus and his movement as revolutionary trouble-makers (*e.g.* Acts 24:5).

Perhaps as interesting as any evidence is John 3:22-4:2, where various of the points we have been making come together. In this passage Jesus is portrayed as baptizing in Judea, alongside John the Baptist, as it appears, and before John's arrest. There is no hint of this baptizing ministry of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels: they merely describe Jesus as being baptized by John, and then starting to minister in Galilee after John's arrest. The passage in John looks strongly like independent information that John had about Jesus, and historically very plausible information:

(1) It contains snippets of topographical information: thus John speaks of the Baptist baptizing 'in Aenon, near Salim, because there was much water'.

(2) John's story of Jesus baptizing alongside the Baptist seems unlikely to have been invented by the evangelist, since it makes Jesus appear a little bit like John, even perhaps a disciple of John. It is quite clear that the writer of John's Gospel wanted to avoid any such impression, since he goes out of his way to have the Baptist affirming Jesus' superiority; but the way he does so lends weight to the suggestion that the early church had some bother with followers of John the Baptist who claimed that he, the baptizer who came first, was greater than Jesus, the baptized who came second; the Christians therefore

insisted on the superiority of Jesus.⁹ The reason that the Synoptics do not describe Jesus' ministering in Judea with John and like John may have been precisely because it was a potentially embarrassing period of Jesus' ministry to them. For the same reason John is unlikely to have invented it.

(3) In any case, the Johannine narrative makes good sense in the Synoptic context: it fills in a gap in the Synoptic record – between Jesus' baptism in Judea and the start of his ministry in Galilee – and it also helps explain the otherwise unexplained fact that in the Synoptics Christian baptism appears to start after Easter at the risen Christ's command (for no very obvious reason); John's account suggests that the Church's baptizing was not something new for them, but the continuation of something that Jesus himself had started in his ministry.

Even things that at first sight seem contradictory between John and the Synoptics turn out in some cases to be complementary. Thus in the Synoptics the disciples apparently do not confess Jesus as the Messiah until the middle of Jesus' ministry, when Jesus asks them what their opinion of him is and Peter says: 'You are the Messiah'. In John's Gospel, on the other hand, people like Andrew and Nathanael are talking about Jesus as the Messiah and king of Israel from the very first chapter onwards. At first sight this looks like an obvious case of John having written without regard for the historical sequence of events: he wants to get the truth of Jesus clearly proclaimed in his first chapter. However, although that might be the explanation, the question has to be asked: is it in fact historically plausible to view Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, as it is described in the Synoptics, as the first recognition by Jesus' disciples of his messiahship? Had the idea not dawned before then?¹⁰ This seems most unlikely historically, and it is much more likely that from a very early stage people followed Jesus hoping that he might be the one they were looking for. That is what John suggests. If anything, we might argue that the Synoptic account seems more theologically stylized in this respect and in having only one journey to Jerusalem. However, there is no need to choose between them: it is entirely possible that Caesarea Philippi was a reaffirmation of faith from Peter, in face of much doubt and controversy, not the first breakthrough into an appreciation of Jesus' messiahship. John has Peter make precisely such a reaffirmation in 6:69.¹¹

The reasonable conclusion on the basis of such evidence is that John's Gospel is a historically well-informed account of Jesus' ministry, John having had good sources of information other than (or in addition to) the Synoptics.

The disciple whom Jesus loved

The Gospel itself makes precisely that claim, since it claims to be written by an eyewitness, or at least to be based on

eyewitness testimony. This is probably implied in 1:14, where the author says: 'We have seen his glory', but it is unambiguous in 19:35, where he says in connection with the death of Jesus: 'he who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is true and he knows that he tells the truth ...'. The same sort of claim is found in 21:24, where there is reference to the 'disciple whom Jesus loved', of whom it is said: 'this is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and we know that his witness is true'. It is clear that the writer of these verses is interested in eyewitness truth, not just in theological truth. More than that, it is clear that the claim is being made that the 'disciple whom Jesus loved', one of Jesus' immediate followers, is in some sense the author of the Gospel.

The 'disciple whom Jesus loved' is referred to in several texts towards the end of the Gospel (13:23; 19:26; 21:7; 21:20), and may also be referred to without being named in 1:35-39; 18:15; 19:35; 20:2-10. Scholars have argued to and fro about the identity of this beloved disciple, with candidates for the post including John the son of Zebedee (the traditional identification), Lazarus whom Jesus raised (because of 11:3), John Mark (Acts 13:5), or an otherwise unknown disciple called John. Some scholars have argued that he is not an actual historical individual, but is an 'ideal' figure – a model disciple (who, for example, is with Jesus at the cross); this is thought, among other things, to explain why he is called 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', which otherwise sounds a rather odd description to give to one of Jesus' followers.

Despite the ingenious arguments of scholars, the traditional identification remains easily the most plausible. There is a whole range of arguments for this: first, the earliest evidence that we have is that the Gospel was written by the apostle and son of Zebedee. It comes from the second-century bishop of Lyons in France, Irenaeus, who commented: 'Finally John, the disciple of the Lord, who had also lain on his breast, himself published the gospel, while he was residing at Ephesus'; Irenaeus is said by the historian Eusebius to have got this information from Polycarp of Smyrna, who was actually acquainted with the apostles (*Ecclesiastical History* 5, 8, 4). The tradition thus appears to go right back. And it does not appear to have been seriously questioned, except by a few groups who did not like some of the teaching in the Gospel.

Second, if John the apostle is the disciple whom Jesus loved, this helps to explain why John and his brother James are not otherwise named in the Gospel, except for one reference in 21:2 to 'the sons of Zebedee'. The absence of John in the narrative is otherwise very strange, since he, with his brother and with Peter, are members of the privileged 'inner circle' of three disciples of Jesus in the Synoptics: they witness momentous events like the transfiguration and the sufferings of Jesus in Gethsemane. John appears, to judge from the book of Acts and also from Paul's letter to the Galatians, to have continued to be

one of the most prominent leaders in the earliest Christian church – one of the pillars (Gal. 2:9). Given this importance of John in the Synoptics and the earliest church, it is very odd indeed if the fourth Gospel fails to mention him at all: we might almost suspect a vendetta! If, however, he is the beloved disciple, then he is mentioned, albeit with a reticence that makes sense if he is the author.

Third, and following on from the previous point, the beloved disciple is mentioned in association with Peter: thus 13:23 and especially in chapters 20 and 21. In these last chapters scholars have detected a sense of some friendly rivalry between Peter and the beloved (or other) disciple, as the two of them run to the tomb and then as Jesus discusses their respective deaths. No-one known to us among Jesus' disciples fits the role of 'rival' to Peter so obviously as John the apostle, and it makes good sense to suppose that the Gospel comes to us from church circles where John was a specially honoured figure. There may be a grain of truth in the view that the disciple whom Jesus loved is an 'ideal' figure, in the sense that his disciples saw him as exemplary in various respects; but he was an entirely real person to them, not a literary construct. As for the expression 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', this may have been an expression used by John's followers to describe the position that he had in the inner circle of Jesus' disciples. Not that it would necessarily have been immodest for John himself to have paid tribute to his experience of Jesus by describing himself as the recipient of Jesus' love.

There is, I suggest, a very strong case for thinking that the Gospel claims to derive from John son of Zebedee, apostle of Jesus. Some scholars may find it difficult to accept the claim, but some of their difficulties are not really very difficult: we have seen that the old scholarly view that John is highly Hellenistic rather than Palestinian is straightforwardly mistaken (not that John son of Zebedee will have been isolated from the Greek world of thought, especially if he was in Ephesus when he wrote his Gospel, as tradition has it). [An earlier portion of Dr Wenham's booklet establishes this point – Ed.] As for the opinion that John the fisherman could not have written as sophisticated a document as John's Gospel, that is questionable in every respect: in the first place, the style of John's Gospel is not particularly sophisticated Greek; in the second place, it is a curious prejudice that says that ancient fishermen (from families wealthy enough to own fishing boats and have servants, Mk. 1:20) will necessarily have been uneducated; in the third place, it underestimates how much Jesus' disciples would have learned from Jesus himself and from their own reflections as they later taught about him.

As for the view that John's theology and Christology represent a late stage in the evolution of early Christian doctrine, we have seen that in fact John's ideas are attested in early strands of the NT. In any case it is unwise to suppose that doctrine does

or did evolve in a neat way from less developed to more developed thinking. Paul after all is our earliest NT writer, but his theology is usually seen as more developed and sophisticated than that of most of the rest of the NT.¹²

If John's Gospel¹³ derives from John, even if it was written up by his followers,¹³ then its importance historically cannot be overestimated.

The question of differences once again

But, although the case for the apostolic origin and historical value of John's Gospel is much, much stronger than is often supposed, the differences between it and the Synoptics still remain, and still need explanation. Not that the differences are as massive as is sometimes thought: we have noted all sorts of points of continuity, with something like Matthew 11:25-27 being such a strikingly Johannine passage in the Synoptic heartlands. But what are we to make of the real differences that there are? A starting-point is to say that different witnesses to the same event do typically pick on very different things to describe and highlight; so for John to tell us different stories of Jesus from the Synoptics is not in itself surprising. The Synoptics are usually thought to be interdependent in some ways (with Mark being seen as a source of Matthew and Luke). It could be that, whereas they are interdependent, John is independent of them, going his own way and choosing his own stories. On the other hand, it is possible that John did know the Synoptics and that he quite deliberately chose different events and stories so as not to duplicate the Synoptics too much: he wanted to supplement them.

However, it is not satisfactory simply to explain that John 'happened' to include different stories in his Gospel, nor to suggest that he just chose his material because it did not overlap too much with the Synoptics. There is something much more systematic and deliberate going on.

What is going on is made clear in John 20:31, where, as we saw, John very deliberately explains his agenda: namely that he is writing to clarify the question of Jesus' identity. Whereas the Synoptics give a general picture of Jesus, John homes in on the question of who Jesus is, doing everything he can to show that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, in whom is life. John selects and presents his material, including the sayings of Jesus, in order to make that point: chapter after chapter is saying essentially the same thing.

His reason for such a sharply focused picture could be that he believed that earlier accounts (including perhaps the Synoptics) were insufficiently clear on the matter. But almost certainly the driving force for his writing in this way was the situation that he faced. He was in a situation where there was controversy about the person of Jesus, and he wanted to sort people out. Whom did he have in mind?

Jews from the synagogue

One of the grains of truth in the Jamnia hypothesis is probably that John had Jews in mind, among others, when he wrote. The Christian Church, having arisen out of Judaism, was in conflict with the Jewish synagogue throughout much of the first century: the Christians claimed to be the true successors of Israel, and the Church seemed to the synagogue to be poaching its members. The tension is understandable, and John was very likely writing in that sort of context – vigorously asserting Jesus' messiahship, which the Jews equally forcefully denied.

Followers of John the Baptist

But John's focus on Jesus' identity was not simply in response to the synagogue. It seems likely that he was also responding to followers of John the Baptist, who were claiming that John was greater than Jesus. This is suggested by the way the author of the Gospel goes out of his way to have John the Baptist testify to Jesus' greatness when people ask him. Thus in 3:30, when people ask him about the competition that Jesus seems to represent, the Baptist says: 'He must increase, but I must decrease'. The most striking verse in this connection is 1:20, where John has been asked who he is, and 'he confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ"'. Notable here are the terms of John's denial – he denies that he (rather than Jesus, we infer) is the Christ – and also the way the denial is underlined and emphasized by the evangelist. In today's computer-speak we would say that the evangelist underlines the denial of John and puts it into bold type – thus 'he confessed, he did not deny, he confessed'. The reason he writes in these terms is very probably because people were claiming that John the baptizer was greater than Jesus the baptized. They were arguing that John had the greater claim to being the Messiah: they recalled that Jesus worked alongside John baptizing in Judea, and maintained that he was John's disciple. We suggested earlier that the synoptists may have been sufficiently embarrassed by this period in Jesus' ministry simply to jump over it; but John is bolder, recording the parallel ministry, in the process making it very clear that Jesus was recognized by John as the far greater one.

To some modern Christian readers it may come as a surprise that there were any followers of John the Baptist who failed to see Jesus as the Messiah, perhaps because we have failed to recognize how considerable a figure John was in his own right; but we know that there were people who preferred John to Jesus in the third century AD, and it is probable that these people had their predecessors in the NT period itself. It is in the face of such 'Baptist' teaching that the writer of John's Gospel affirms so strongly Jesus' greatness and superiority. Jesus, not John, is the way, the truth, etc.

But there is still more evidence of controversy over the identity of Jesus which John was probably addressing, this time within the Christian Church itself. This evidence is to be found in the first letter of John. Scholars are not 100 per cent persuaded that the letters were written by the same person as the Gospel, but the style of the letters and the Gospel is very similar, and they must at least have come from the same sort of context and circle. What is interesting about the first letter of John is that it shows that within John's church there had been a serious split, focusing on the question of Jesus' identity. Thus 2:18 speaks of 'antichrists' who 'went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they went out ...'. What distinguished these 'antichrists' from John and his church? The very expression 'antichrist' is a clue, and the issue is clarified in 4:1-3: 'Many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God.' The divisive issue was Christology. It is not possible to be sure exactly what 'the antichrists' were saying,¹⁴ but somehow they were putting Jesus down, claiming prophetic inspiration by the Spirit for their views.

It is easy to see how John could be responding to such ideas in his Gospel: he devotes his energy to explaining the story of Jesus in christological terms. He emphasizes Jesus' divinity more than his humanity, because others were putting Jesus down. He affirms that Jesus, and no-one else, is the source of eternal life.¹⁵

There is an interesting parallel in Paul's letter to the Colossians, where Paul deals with a philosophy that was infiltrating the church and that was 'not according to Christ' (2:8-12). Again people were somehow putting Christ down, perhaps exalting other spiritual powers. Paul's response in Colossians is to emphasize the supremacy of Christ, as the image of God, the first-born of creation and the one in whom the fullness of deity dwelt (Col. 1:15-20); we are reminded of John 1. Paul emphasizes Christ's sufficiency as the way to life and salvation (*e.g.* 3:3), reminding us again of John. Paul speaks of the cross as a victory over spiritual powers (2:15), again rather like John with his distinctive view of the cross as glorification and victory. In face of christological heresy (in the Ephesus area) Paul writes his letter with a particular focus; in face of christological heresy (in the same area, according to early tradition!) John writes a Gospel with a similar focus.

John's 'realized eschatology' may also make sense in this context. John emphasizes that life is in Christ now, not because he has gone cold on future eschatology, but because he wants to affirm the sufficiency of Jesus in face of all competing claims. Similarly, Paul in Colossians 3:3 can speak of the Colossians

having died with Christ and of Christ 'who is your life'.

To judge from 1 John the 'antichrists' referred to there claimed to have the anointing of the Spirit (e.g. 4:1-3), and so one of the questions that the author of the letter has to address is how to distinguish the Holy Spirit from false spirits. He reminds his readers of what they have been taught from the beginning (1:1ff.). It may be no accident that John's Gospel too has a lot of discussion of the Spirit teaching the disciples, and that the Gospel makes crystal clear the intimate connection of the Spirit with Jesus. Does John want to counter people who are claiming the Spirit, but putting Jesus down?

1 John may help us in other ways, throwing light, for example, on the Gospel's emphasis on 'loving one another' as a mark of true discipleship. If John's church had recently been split, or was facing imminent division, then John might very well have wanted to major very loudly on Jesus' call to love one another. Christians loving or not loving one another was the burning issue, rather than, for example, loving one's enemy. 'Abiding' or 'remaining' in the vine was very important indeed in that context: it was more immediately pressing even than the missionary challenge, though that is not forgotten in John.

If the first letter of John helps clarify the context of the Gospel and hence its distinctiveness, it may also confirm that the writer of the Gospel is being deliberately selective in how he writes, rather than giving us the whole story. We have seen how the gospel has more emphasis on the cross as victory than on atonement (though that is not by any means absent); 1 John interestingly does contain traditional atonement language such as we associate with Paul – speaking of Christ's blood as cleansing us from all sin (1:7) and of Jesus as the 'propitiation for our sins' (2:2). We have seen too how the Gospel is fairly muted in what it has to say about the second coming; the first letter, however, speaks of the antichrists who have come as evidence that it is 'the last hour' (2:18). This is very Synoptic-sounding and Pauline-sounding language. The occurrence of such phrases in the letter has led some scholars to doubt whether it is written by the same author as the Gospel; but at the very least they show that these Synoptic/Pauline emphases were alive and well in Johannine circles. More than that, they probably confirm what we have suspected – namely that the Gospel's theology is not as 'eccentric' as some scholars suppose. It is just that the evangelist has focused, almost ruthlessly, on his task in hand in the Gospel; he has not tried to give us a rounded picture of Jesus or his message.

John's literary contribution

All that we have said so far should not be taken to suggest that John's Gospel is a word-for-word literally historical account of Jesus. It seems likely that John may often be putting the story of Jesus into his own words, and/or into words that will make

good sense to his readers. This is suggested by the distinctive style and vocabulary of Jesus' teaching in John when this is compared with the Synoptics, and also by the similarity of the style and vocabulary when Jesus speaks in John and where John is writing editorially. It has often been observed how in a passage like John 3 it is not at all clear where Jesus' words end and John's comments begin: some modern versions put the quotation marks at the end of verse 15 to mark the end of Jesus' words and others take it that the whole passage up to verse 22 should be seen as words of Jesus.

Further evidence pointing in this direction may be John's preference for 'eternal life' rather than 'kingdom of God'. John, like Paul, finds kingdom language to be rather inaccessible to his Greek-speaking readers, and perhaps also a potential embarrassment, since 'kingdom' could be understood politically. 'Eternal life' is more intelligible and conveys better John's conviction that Jesus' 'kingdom is not of this world' (18:36). In the case of 'eternal life' John has not substituted his own phrase for Jesus' actual words, since Jesus spoke of 'eternal life' according to the Synoptics. What he may have done in this case is to substitute one phrase of Jesus for another, for the reasons we have suggested.

This still means that John does not always give us the actual words (*ipsissima verba*) of Jesus. But to an extent that is true of all the Gospel writers. Apart from anything else, it is likely that Jesus spoke mostly in Aramaic; what we have then in the Gospels is a translation. But it is possible to go further than this: it is well known that translations (*e.g.* of the Bible) can be of different sorts: some are very literal, others are much freer in the actual wording, but may convey the original sense better. The Gospels arguably translate literally sometimes and much more paraphrastically at other times: John is perhaps more often in the free translation rather than the literal translation camp.

Not that translation is always the best model to explain what is going on: the modern newspaper reporter who reports on a famous person's speech may sometimes quote the actual words of the speaker (in translation if necessary), but will often summarize or paraphrase what was said in ways that will make sense to the intended reader. Such is inevitably the case in the Gospels: the writers offer us extracts and summaries, putting things into their own words and making clear the meaning of what was said. Once again, it may be that John is more the interpreter and less the exact chronicler than the Synoptics, even if it is only a matter of degree. To say that is not an oblique way of admitting that John is not historical after all; not at all. It is a matter of considering *how* John writes history, not a matter of questioning *whether* John writes history.

But let us be more specific: did Jesus say 'I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me'? The answer on the view we have been describing would be: yes,

he did, but not necessarily in those exact words (and in any case not in Greek!). Of course, he could have said those exact words; he could have said all the great 'I am' sayings exactly as they are recorded in John (only in Aramaic). But it may be that the quotation marks which modern editors have inserted into the text are misleading, and that it is John who has formulated the wording as we have it.

But John is not just drawing on his own theological convictions when he says that Jesus said 'I am the way ...', etc. The Synoptics, including Mark, suggest that Jesus did say 'I am' on significant occasions, and perhaps with significant meaning: thus, when Jesus walks on the water and says 'I am' to the terrified disciples, it may just mean 'It's me', but it may be that Mark saw a deeper meaning in the words (Mk. 6:50). The same may be true when Jesus says 'I am' at his trial in response to questions about his identity (14:62).¹⁶ The Synoptics also suggest that Jesus spoke of the 'way' or the 'path' leading to 'life', referring to his own teaching and to discipleship (Mt. 7:14). It does not require a million-mile jump to get from such Synoptic texts to John's 'I am' sayings.

The same sort of thing may be said about others of Jesus' 'I am' sayings. We do not find Jesus speaking of himself as the good shepherd in the Synoptics, but in his famous parable he does compare his own ministry to that of a deeply caring shepherd who cares for the one sheep that was lost (Lk. 15:3-7). Jesus does not say 'I am the door', but he does speak of the narrow gate/door that leads to life (Mt. 7:13; Lk. 13:24). He does not say 'I am the bread of life', but he does take bread and break it, and say 'This is my body'. He does not say 'I am the true vine', but he does speak of vines and vineyards and compare 'the fruit of the vine' to his own blood.

On the basis of this evidence the conclusion could be that the Synoptics and John are so close that there is no reason to deny that Jesus said exactly what John says he said. But the conclusion could also be that John has paraphrased Jesus' words in order to make their meaning crystal clear, not least in the light of all the controversy that he was writing to combat: he wanted to bring out the christological significance of what Jesus had said about the narrow way, because he wanted to refute those who were putting Jesus down.¹⁷

¹ Anchor Bible III (1992), pp. 634-7.

² Mt. 13:11/Lk. 8:10 (cf. Mk. 4:11) has the idea of divine 'mysteries' being made known to the disciples and not to others. All three Synoptics include the parable of the vineyard tenants, where the vineyard owner 'sends' his 'son': we are reminded of John's emphasis on Jesus as the beloved Son who is sent by the Father (Mk. 12:1-12 and parallels). The synoptic accounts of the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus are also strikingly Johannine: thus Jesus is (a) 'the Son' in both baptism and transfiguration

- narratives, (b) in a special relationship of love with the Father in both, (c) the recipient of the Spirit in a special way in the baptism story, (d) one who reflects the glory of God in the transfiguration story. Whatever else may be said, this observation makes it clear that these Johannine emphases were important in early, well-attested synoptic traditions. (The importance of such themes at an early date may be confirmed by Paul's evidence in a passage like 2 Cor. 3 and 4, where he speaks of the glory of Christ who is the image of God, and of the glory of God in the face of Christ, 4:4, 6.)
- 3 People have questioned whether Colossians was actually written by Paul himself. I think it was. But the point about 'Johannine' ideas being anticipated in Paul remains in any case, for example in a verse like 1 Cor. 8:6, which speaks of 'one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and through whom we live', or 2 Cor. 4:4, where Paul speaks of Christ as the 'image of God'.
- 4 Other Johannine-sounding texts in Paul include Gal. 4:4, 'God sent his Son ...', and Rom. 1:3, 4, where again Jesus is 'his Son'. In both cases scholars have speculated that Paul may be echoing credal material that antedates the letters concerned. If they are right, this just reinforces the impression that Johannine Christology is not a late evolution in Christian thinking, but something that goes right back in the history of the Christian Church.
- 5 Even if he didn't, his evidence makes it quite clear that the Johannine emphasis on the Spirit would be at home in a context quite different from the Jamnian context. On Paul's extensive knowledge and use of the stories and sayings of Jesus, see my *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).
- 6 It may be added that John's strong statement about the 'word becoming flesh' in 1:14 suggests that he had a major theological interest in Jesus as a real historical figure. Robinson's major work is *The Priority of John* (London: SCM, 1985). Robinson summarizes his thesis thus: 'I shall be contending that there is no either-or between recognizing John as the *omega* of the NT witness, the end-term, or an end-term, of its theological reflection, and also as its *alpha*, standing as close as any to the source from which it sprang. His theology does not, I believe, take us further from the history but leads us more deeply into it' (p. 33).
- 7 There are other topographical details which suggest good information, like the reference to Jacob's well in Sychar in 4:5.
- 8 Not only is this historically plausible, but the idea of the high priest speaking prophetically about the value of Jesus' death is very Jewish.
- 9 See further below.
- 10 According to Luke, people had talked about John the Baptist as possibly the Messiah (3:15).
- 11 People often contrast the way Jesus seems to be secretive about his messiahship and identity in the Synoptics, especially in Mark, with the openness of John. There is a difference of emphasis, but John is quite clear that there was a secretive side to Jesus and his teaching (e.g. 7:10; 16:25, 29), and in 10:24 he is urged to come out in the open about his messiahship.
- 12 It has been argued that John son of Zebedee could hardly have failed to mention events that he was involved in, like the transfiguration; but it is equally unlikely, perhaps even more so, that anyone else would have omitted that very 'Johannine' story of Jesus. The question as to why the author of the Gospel, whether

John son of Zebedee or not, omitted the stories of both Jesus' baptism and his transfiguration cannot be answered with any certainty. The one thing that may confidently be said is that he is extremely unlikely to have been ignorant of them: indeed he demonstrates his knowledge of the baptism tradition in 1:32-34 and probably alludes to the transfiguration in 1:14. Beyond that it is only possible to make speculative suggestions: thus (1) he may quite deliberately have chosen not to retell well-known traditions; (with some exceptions like the feeding of the 5000, which leads into his unique bread of life discourse). Or (2) he may have felt that the grand themes of Jesus' glory and sonship were better explained to his readers through the signs and narrative he has presented in his Gospel than through the well-known baptism and transfiguration stories. Not that he or his readers are likely to have had twentieth-century hang-ups about things like heavenly voices (any more than about demonic exorcisms which he also fails to mention). However, it is conceivable that stories such as the baptism were being used in ways that John was unhappy about. For example, the baptism story may have been used to show the superiority of John the Baptist to Jesus (and/or the equality of Jesus with other baptized people); so John chose to refer to it indirectly through the testimony of the Baptist in a way that made clear Jesus' superiority. It is also conceivable that John (like Paul in his letters to the Corinthians and Mark in his Gospel) was aware of Christians who made a lot of Jesus as a divine figure, whose glory was revealed in signs and wonders (including the transfiguration), but who had little place in their theology for the ignominious cross (cf. 1 Jn. 5:6). John portrays the cross as the moment of supreme glorification (as well also as the decisive exorcism of Satan).

¹³ Scholars have proposed that the Gospel went through multiple editings by different people, and have spoken of the Gospel emanating from a Johannine 'school' that perhaps had the apostle as its founder. I find most of such theories over-speculative and largely unnecessary, though I do not at all rule out that the Gospel may have been written down (or up!) by someone other than the apostle, as could be inferred from 21:24.

¹⁴ Just conceivably they could have been preferring John the Baptist to Jesus, or separating 'the heavenly Christ' from the human Jesus, or seeing Jesus as just the prototype of a Spirit-endowed Christian. See note 12 above.

¹⁵ This suggestion works best if John's Gospel is thought to have been written at about the same time as the epistle, or at least after the split described in 1 Jn. had taken place. Many good scholars argue, however, that the Gospel preceded the epistle. It is argued, among other things, that the epistle addresses the 'docetic' tendencies of people who were denying the fleshly reality of Jesus: the Gospel, however, does not seem to be especially worried by such 'docetism' and might indeed be seen as fuel for that view rather than as a response to it, therefore as preceding, not following, the epistle. Three brief things may be said to this point: (1) it is not certain that 1 Jn. is addressing a simple case of people denying the fleshly reality of Jesus; they may have been putting Jesus down in other ways; (2) the Gospel does contain things that scholars have identified as anti-docetic, not least 1:14; (3) even if 1 Jn. was written a significant number of years after the Gospel, it may well be that the divisions described in the epistle were beginning to surface much earlier.

- ¹⁶ Matthew and Luke have 'You say that I am' at this point (Mt. 26:64; Lk. 22:70; *cf.* 21:8). We know that John was familiar with the 'I am' of the walking on the water story from his 6:20.
- ¹⁷ What I have said leaves plenty of questions unanswered, including in my own mind! But the case for seeing John as firmly anchored in the history of Jesus seems to me a good one.

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In the early 1990s, British tabloid newspapers created an image of New Agers as gangs of unkempt, drug-crazed travellers living in old buses parked illegally on other people's property, in the vicinity of places like Stonehenge and other ancient 'spiritual' sites. In the USA, on the other hand, the New Age will forever be linked with Hollywood actress Shirley Maclaine and her TV mini-series, *Out on a Limb*, which portrayed the New Age not as a concern of social drop-outs, but as the playground of the rich and the famous, searching for a spiritual dimension to life because they already had everything else. Younger members of the British royal family have also been known to connect with this kind of spiritual search – and there is not a major city anywhere in the world which does not host a regular exhibition related to 'mind, body and spirit'. Here, the makers of witch's broomsticks rub shoulders with the saffron-robed devotees of ISKCON, while crystal healers stand alongside students of ancient Coptic Gnostic texts, tarot card readers, specialists in past-life recall, Kirlian photographers, channellers of spirit guides, aficionados in extra-terrestrial intelligence, and therapists of every conceivable variety – to mention only a tiny sample of what is typically on offer. Nor are these things confined to large urban centres, for most small communities boast their psychic fairs, while one of the surprising growth industries of the last two decades has been the unprecedented spread of metaphysical bookstores.

Definitions

It is easy enough to describe and document all this activity. But what makes these things 'new age'? In her history of the Findhorn Community, Carol Riddell describes life there as 'a spiritual supermarket, with all kinds of different "products" on the shelves to sample'.¹ She provides a bewildering list of what these 'products' might include: Buddhism, Hatha Yoga, Ta'i Chi, Sufism, Transcendental Meditation, organic food, past-life therapy, *A Course in Miracles*, as well as various elements from the Christian tradition. She goes on to indicate that 'all this makes up what has been described as the "new age" movement'.² What she describes is a mere drop in the ocean compared with what is more widely on offer. Indeed, the sheer diversity of all this led one recent writer to conclude that the New Age is 'a cluster of related ideas, teachings and groups, not altogether coherent, most of which would identify with this title'.³

Such a description is so vague as to be almost worthless, which

is why others question whether the New Age really is an identifiable entity at all. Just to complicate the picture even further, some of those who once happily used the term would now prefer to discard it. Carol Riddell again is typical:

We are now a little wary of this description, which was once eagerly embraced by the Findhorn Community, because in popular thought it has become connected with the sensation seekers ... whose interest lies less in seeking spiritual transformation than in dabbling in the occult, or in practising classical capitalist entrepreneurship on the naive.⁴

Among scholars, some regard it as the outcome of Eastern religions being adapted into Western culture. Others trace it back to the counter-culture of the 1960s, transposed into a different key as hippies reach mid-life. For yet others it is part of a revivalist movement within the traditional Western esoteric circles inspired by people like Swedenborg, the Transcendentalists, or Helena Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society.⁵ All these understandings contain elements of truth. But none of them alone can explain the amazing rise to prominence of the New Age; and it is in any case far more eclectic and more all-embracing than any or all of its apparent forerunners. Part of the difficulty of definition is related to the analytical categories within which Western scholarship has traditionally operated. We do not find it easy to imagine how anything so apparently diffuse and disorganized could also be so successful. But the truth is that there is no central organization behind the New Age, there is nothing to join, and no one way of actually being a New Ager. The movement has been variously described as a 'metanetwork', or a network of networks,⁶ or a SPIN (segmented polycentric integrated network),⁷ while Wittgenstein's notion of 'family resemblance' can also be invoked.⁸ Just to make things even more complex, the New Age is also very definitely a 'movement', in the quite literal sense that it is always on the move. Things are constantly changing, as spiritual searchers keep looking in new places, which means that almost any definition we might produce can, with perfectly good reason, be challenged by others whose experience of the phenomenon has been different. Diversity is one of the key identifying factors of the New Age, and for that reason alone the search for a single theological perspective that will be shared by all New Agers is doomed to failure.

Cultural change

In reality, the various threads that go to make up the New Age tapestry are held together not by a common ideology, but by a shared perception of the nature of contemporary cultural change. In essence, the New Age is a form of postmodernity, and as such it is part of the questioning and redefining of the values and methods inherited from the European

Enlightenment that has swept through all areas of intellectual reflection in the last twenty years or so.⁹ The New Age's answer to the dislocation and collapse now facing the world is that the only way forward will be through a massive transformational shift in consciousness, of cosmic proportions. As with many critiques of modernity (including Christian ones), the New Age is itself a product of the same world-view with which it expresses dissatisfaction, though unlike other critiques it also unashamedly searches for solutions in what can only be described as a 'pre-modern' world-view, based on a pre-scientific, essentially mythological epistemology.¹⁰

There are many ways of articulating this understanding, but something along the following lines would be typical:

Our present predicament can be traced mostly to mistakes made by western thinkers in the course of the last 500 years, which in turn was rooted in the west's love affair with the rationality of the Greeks. This philosophy has led to the marginalization of human and spiritual values, and an unhealthy preoccupation with a mechanistic, rationalist, reductionist worldview. There has been a profound loss of spiritual perception, and to resolve the present crisis that trend needs to be reversed. The recovery of spirituality must be a top priority. Traditional western sources of spiritual guidance will, however, be of little help in this process: the Christian church is inextricably bound up with the old cultural establishment, so much so that the defective Enlightenment worldview was, in effect, little more than the logical outcome of classical Christian beliefs and values.

The relationship between Christianity, Enlightenment and Western culture is not quite that simple, of course.¹¹ But in the New Age, as in postmodernism more generally, image and perception are everything, and once something is believed by a sufficient number of people, it becomes irrelevant whether or not it is historically accurate or literally true. For better or worse, therefore, Christianity (in its classical Western form) is increasingly perceived as part of the problem, and for that reason it cannot also be part of the solution: if spirituality is to be restored to today's world, it will have to come from somewhere else.

New Age reference points

It is pointless to try to construct a detailed route map that will guide us through all the intricacies of New Age spirituality. As we will see, the New Age can hold together beliefs and practices that, on conventional definitions of rationality, would be regarded as incompatible, logically contradictory and mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, it is perfectly feasible to identify some fundamental compass points that can provide a general sense

of direction through the New Age maze, without being prescriptive about the actual path that any given New Ager might actually follow. My proposal is that there are four dominant polarities through which transformational philosophies and experiences are presently being pursued within the New Age.¹²

Non-Western world-views

That is, the traditional world-views of Eastern religions. An attractive, if superficial, view states that, if the cause of our present predicament rests in things that are modern and Western, then the way to resolve it will be to seek solutions in things that are ancient and Eastern (or at least, non-Western in the traditional sense). On this basis, many Western people are committing themselves to Eastern spiritual paths, particularly – but not exclusively – Buddhism, albeit in a Westernized form. Shirley Maclaine expresses a popular opinion when she comments that

*this New Age is the time when the intuitive beliefs of the East and the scientific thinking of the West could meet and join – the twain wed at last.*¹³

First-nation beliefs

Long before white Westerners settled in the Americas, or Australasia, these lands – and others like them – were home to ancient nations. The environmentally friendly lifestyles of these people were brutally suppressed, and their spirituality was devalued by Western imperialists who labelled it ‘primitive’ and ‘unscientific’. But with the benefit of hindsight, it seems that Western people could have learned much from the traditional lifestyles of aboriginal peoples. Could it therefore be that by reaffirming these values that were previously discarded, the world’s peoples together might find new ways to take us forward into the future? In the process, white Westerners might also expiate some of the guilt they now feel for the behaviour of their forebears. This has become a major concern within the New Age.

Creation-centredness

Long before the spread of classical ‘Western’ values, articulated through the categories of Greek philosophy and spread by the power of Christendom, Europe itself was home to a different, arguably more spiritual, world-view. Should Western people not therefore be looking for answers within their own heritage, by the rediscovery and appropriation of the kind of world-view that inspired and motivated their own distant ancestors? This concern accounts for the burgeoning interest in neo-paganism in its many forms, which is one of the fastest-growing aspects of New Age spirituality in northern Europe today.¹⁴

Person-centredness

Many of those who today are searching for new ways of being

have no interest at all in anything that could be called 'religion'. The development of psychotherapies of various kinds – not least the rise of transpersonal psychology – is providing this kind of 'secular' person with access to the same kind of transformational experiences as mystical religious traditions offer, without the initially unwelcome baggage of religious dogma.¹⁵ Hence the popularity of transformational video and audio tapes, bodywork and other therapies – often supported by claims that modern physics and mathematics are somehow 'proving' the value of all this in some kind of scientific sense.

The unique forms of New Age spirituality emerge from the interweaving of these different and ostensibly unrelated threads. But while diversity is a key empirical hallmark of the New Age, not all New Agers are equally supportive of the attempt to construct an eclectic world-view from such widely assorted materials. David Spangler and William Irwin Thomson are typical of those who welcome the self-conscious merging of different traditions:

*"... This new planetary sensibility or culture will be less a thing and more a process that nourishes our creativity and wholeness and provides sustenance for building the bodies of tomorrow ...we are reimagining our world. We are taking hunks of ecology and slices of science, pieces of politics and a sprinkle of economics, a pinch of religion and a dash of philosophy, and we are reimagining these and a host of other ingredients into something new: a New Age, a reimagination of the world ..."*¹⁶

Others are less convinced by this approach. Starhawk writes disdainfully of people who are spiritually starved in their own culture and 'unwittingly become spiritual strip miners damaging other cultures in superficial attempts to uncover their mystical treasures'.¹⁷ Carol Riddell sounds a similar warning:

*It is as if we were in a market place with many stalls offering goods. Some people go to one stall to buy, others go to another. We support each other constantly, but the path of inner transformation is ultimately a personal one. However much we may share with others, each of us has a unique path to the Self.*¹⁸

Wider connections

It is not necessary here to consider every possible connection there may be between aspects of New Age thinking and the wider world of spirituality. Rather, I wish to single out two examples to show how the New Age deals with those spiritual traditions it embraces, and then to make some comments about issues of power and its wider sociological significance.

Observers with a sense of Christian history will instinctively think of Gnosticism when they encounter the New Age. As part

of the wider spiritual renaissance, there is indeed a revival of Gnostic ideas today, and even the emergence of self-consciously Gnostic 'churches'.¹⁹ Carl Gustav Jung, whose insights are highly valued in many New Age circles, himself owed a debt to his study of ancient Gnosticism,²⁰ and one of the leading New Age journals is called simply *Gnosis*. Observing all this, Ted Peters describes the New Age as 'perennial gnosticism', because 'The new age is reminiscent of gnosticism in the ancient Roman Empire both in what it teaches and in its competitive position *vis-à-vis* Christian orthodoxy'.²¹

There are indeed some sections of the New Age which adopt what is in effect a Gnostic world-view. Sir George Trevelyan, the 'father' of the British New Age, makes this connection explicit and traces his own spiritual lineage back to ancient Gnosticism, as mediated through the Knights Templar, the Cathars and Albigenses, Rosicrucianism and freemasonry. Moreover, he invokes the familiar Gnostic notion of spiritual hierarchies, and sees no hope for humankind apart from a final escape from material existence into the world of spirit.²² Those New Agers who specialize in channeling messages from spirit guides and extra-terrestrials, and speculating about the lost continents of Lemuria and Atlantis or legends of Arthurian Britain, would also share this highly dualistic outlook, in which salvation can only be found through the intervention of beings from other worlds.

Because of its frequently bizarre manifestations, this dualistic New Age has often attracted media attention. But it is only one part of the whole movement, and arguably not the largest or most significant part. Many other New Agers reject such dualism, and instead adopt a monistic world-view, in which there is an essential unity between all things, both spiritual and physical. They might share a starting point with Gnosticism (human alienation as a result of people being trapped in some form of existence which inhibits the full expression of their true nature), but their answer to it is quite different. Gnostics adopted a Platonic view, seeing the human predicament as a metaphysical imprisonment of the spirit, whereas to monistic New Agers Platonism is the root cause of the problem, and enlightenment comes not through escape from this material world, but very much within it, as people attune themselves to the spiritual powers that are all around them, and of which they are already themselves a part. Far from being world-denying in an anti-materialistic sense (like Gnosticism), this part of the New Age is strongly world-affirming. Here, dualism is not the answer to the human predicament, but a part of the problem, as it sets up confrontations between people and the environment, between women and men, between different races, and so on. On this view, the West's basic problem is its love affair with dualism, and the sooner it is discarded, the better.

Shirley Maclaine, who is representative of this monistic side of

the New Age, highlights the dynamic of what is going on here, when she claims that in ancient times 'Christian Gnostics operated with New Age knowledge and thinking'.²³ In other words, the New Age provides the controlling agenda, arising from its essential character as a product of modernity, in particular its spin on the Western doctrines that materialism is a good thing, and that individual freedom and choice are the best ways to exploit material existence. Insofar as ancient Gnosticism shared some aspects of that, then it can be claimed as an ally which will give an ancient image to what is in essence a contemporary movement.

Much the same comment may be made about the way the New Age appears to promote ideas drawn from Eastern spirituality. For example, reincarnation is popular in many New Age circles, but it would be a mistake to see this as evidence that the New Age is a form of Indian philosophy transferred to the West. For the nature of New Age reincarnation has little in common with either Indian metaphysics or ethics. In the New Age, even reincarnation can be presented as a matter of individual human choice. People are here in the form they now have because they have chosen it in accordance with their own cosmic intentions, and for their ultimate spiritual development. In the words of J.L. Simmons:

*the decision to be reborn is self-determined by each being ...The rebirth is planned ...Such plans include the circumstances of birth and a blueprint outline of the life to follow, so that certain experiences might provide the opportunity to learn certain lessons.*²⁴

Opinions like this have nothing at all to do with traditional Eastern spirituality: they are the product of the culture of modernity, with its emphasis on personal responsibility, individual choice, and the underlying philosophy which projects an unrealistically optimistic view of human nature with no limits at all to human potential.²⁵

As we approach the millennium, it is obvious that the New Age is the product of competing Western world-views, and whenever materials from other traditions are utilized, they are consistently cut loose from their original contexts and ransacked for whatever spiritual insights they may seem to offer. For that very reason, there is also a sociological side to the rise of the New Age which will help to identify other reasons for its current popularity. One of the most unexpected places where it is taken seriously is in the training of top business executives. A management course written by two professors at Stanford University describes its rationale as follows:

We look within to find our own individual self and universal source. That source has been called the inner self, the Self, the hidden mind, the divine spark, the Divine Ego, the Great I Am, God, and Essence. Some say that the very purpose of human existence is to get acquainted with

*your own essential qualities and express them in your daily activities. Whether it is the purpose of life or not, it is a fine definition of personal creativity: living every moment from your essence.*²⁶

These authors then proceed to offer advice about assorted spiritual techniques and therapies that, they claim, will put modern executives in touch with spiritual realities, including overt instructions on how to contact disembodied spirits allegedly from other worlds. Nor is this an isolated example: the phenomenon of New Age business courses has been well documented elsewhere.²⁷ So what do ambitious business executives, homeless New Age travellers, high-profile members of the British aristocracy, and countless multitudes of visitors to New Age festivals have in common? The answer, perhaps, is deceptively simple: they are all struggling with the discontinuities of Western life at the end of the twentieth century, the loss of power by Westerners in general, and the loss of power by significant minorities in particular. In his book *The Interruption of Eternity*, Carl Raschke observed that throughout history such forms of esoteric spirituality have arisen in response to a loss of social power and prestige. In this context, the disinherited (at both ends of the social spectrum) retreat into

*a self-enforced pariah mentality, expressed in both their contempt for legitimate authority and their creation of a closed symbolic universe which only those with the proper credentials can penetrate ...the safekeeping of magical lore reflects a vicarious exercise of power which in reality has slipped away from them.*²⁸

This is why there are superficial resemblances between the New Age and earlier movements like Gnosticism: both may be understood as responses to the breakdown of the prevailing culture, which in this case was the same culture. Ancient Gnosticism arose as a response to the collapse of the Greek world-view as it had been applied and exploited by the pragmatism of Rome; the New Age is a reaction to the collapse of the same essential world-view, this time mediated through the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, and the imperialistic expansion of Western nations. More than 50 years ago, Aldous Huxley argued that when material revelation becomes problematic there has been throughout the history of the West a tendency to revert to what he called 'the perennial philosophy' and search instead for an essentialist, idealist (and therefore timeless) way of understanding the meaning of life.²⁹ When combined with further traumas for Western culture related to rapid globalization, the spoiling of the environment, and the manifest failure of the Enlightenment vision, we can see that the New Age has always been a movement just waiting to happen.

Christian responses

Finally, we come to a brief survey of some Christian responses to the New Age. Considering the way in which the New Age has opened up the whole subject of spirituality and placed it firmly on the popular agenda, it is remarkable how few Christians have engaged with it at all. And when they have done so, they have frequently made two mistakes that have tended to undermine, rather than enhance, the Christian case.

First has been the tendency to adopt an uncritical approach which assumes that the New Age is some kind of monolithic movement that can be categorized rather easily. This undifferentiated approach has led some to suppose that lurking behind the New Age is a conspiratorial attempt to undermine Western civilization as we know it.³⁰

But if Western civilization is collapsing, it is because of inherent flaws in its own philosophical base, not as a result of any New Age conspiracy against it. Indeed, the New Age – however inadequately – is trying to ask where we go from here, given that the Western Enlightenment vision is no longer viable. As far as I can see, there is absolutely no evidence of any New Age conspiracy to undermine democracy or whatever, and on those occasions when New Age people do use triumphalist language they are to be viewed in the same light as Christians, who similarly claim from time to time that they will 'revolutionize the world with the gospel'.

Allied to this is the tendency of Christians to fail to take account of the different nuances that undoubtedly exist within the New Age. For example, it is widely taken for granted that the New Age has a monistic world-view, whereas in reality it quite clearly has at least two world-views, one monistic and the other strongly dualistic.³¹ These two strands do not share the same heritage: the one has historical connections to a creation-based spirituality which is either pantheistic or panentheistic and can be traced through Romantic poets such as Shelley, Blake and Wordsworth, while the other has more in common with the movements associated with people like Swedenborg, Mesmer, Blavatsky, Bailey and Cayce. To the outsider they might easily look like two entirely unrelated movements. There is certainly a significant discontinuity between them. This has been a major reason why some commentators dismiss the New Age as irrational and nonsensical. But a more productive understanding will locate these apparent contradictions in the New Age's foundational understanding of the nature of human alienation. For the experienced alienation of Western people today is not, on the whole, a cosmological or metaphysical phenomenon, but a cultural alienation. In this context, the ultimate expression of spiritual ignorance is critical scientific thinking, and it is from this that the human spirit must be set free.

This brings us to our second mistake and highlights a further weakness in many Christian responses to the New Age, which have tended to tackle it on a rational, analytical level.³² It is not that the New Age ought not to be subjected to such criticism, and in the face of an increasingly irrational intellectual Establishment, one of the things that Christians need to bear witness to today is the fact that we are creatures of reason, and that, notwithstanding all the mistakes that our forebears have undoubtedly made, the capacity for rational understanding is one of the fundamental marks of being fully human. But to engage with the New Age at this level only is a serious mistake, for to most New Agers, this methodology is one of the key contributory factors to the crisis in Western culture. Using the tools of modernity to address the New Age will get nowhere, for it is by definition immune to rational criticism. Indeed, having the courage to transcend the boundaries of conventional linear Western forms of perception and to discard the narrow confines of an over-reliance on rationalism is, for many, the ultimate expression of the kind of spirituality that will take us forward into the next century. Psychology professor Marilyn Ferguson expresses it eloquently:

*We live what we know. If we believe the universe and ourselves to be mechanical, we will live mechanically. On the other hand, if we know that we are part of an open universe, and that our minds are a matrix of reality, we will live more creatively and powerfully.*³³

We are on surer ground when we draw attention to the moral relativism of much that is in the New Age. But in the process of making an honest assessment of the flaws in the New Age, Christians also need to be prepared to face up to the weaknesses of the Church itself. The simple fact is that, while many aspects of the New Age prescription for the ailments of today's world may be nonsensical and meaningless, its diagnosis of the disease is too accurate for comfort. Dean W.R. Inge (1860–1954) is reputed to have observed that 'A church that is married to the spirit of its age will find itself widowed in the next', and that just about sums up where Christians today find themselves. Christian beliefs, spirituality and lifestyles have become almost exclusively focused on rational systems of thinking, with a consequent marginalization of the intuitional, the emotional, the relational and the spiritual.³⁴ There is a need to recognize those things that are right about the New Age analysis. But beyond that, there is also a requirement for a missiological engagement with the New Age that will effectively challenge some of its conclusions. It would take another article to begin to unpack specifically what this might involve. But it would certainly take seriously scriptural models such as that provided by Acts 17:16-34 (Paul in Athens), as well as basing itself on the 'style' adopted by Jesus. Identifying 'the unknown god' in today's burgeoning spiritual marketplace will be challenging for many Christians, and probably threatening, because it requires a confidence to move

well beyond the safe boundaries of current church perceptions, which in turn is likely to open those who do it to criticism from others within the Christian community. Australians Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson are among the few genuine trail-blazers in this direction, and their book *Sacred Quest* deserves to be more widely known than it is, pointing the way forward to effective engagement with the New Age, and at the same time posing hard questions for the Church that could yet lead to the emergence of a way of being Christian that will be so attuned to the realities of contemporary culture that there will be no need for New Age spiritual searchers to look any further. For it is a simple fact that I have never yet met a New Ager who could not potentially be a Christian, if the gospel were presented in a way that they were able to hear.³⁵

- ¹ Carol Riddell, *The Findhorn Community: Creating a Human Destiny for the 21st Century* (Findhorn: Findhorn Press, 1990), p. 222. Findhorn is on the Moray Firth in north-east Scotland, and is arguably one of the most important New Age centres anywhere in the world.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- ³ Denise Cush, 'British Buddhism and the New Age', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 11/2 (1996): p. 196.
- ⁴ Riddell, *Findhorn Community*, p. 64. Others wish to distance the serious New Age search for a new paradigm of reality from the populist or 'glamour' New Age, which concerns itself with things like the channelling of spirit guides, crystal healing, and similar phenomena. Cf. David Spangler, *The Rebirth of the Sacred* (London: Gateway, 1984), p. 79.
- ⁵ 'New thought and the New Age', in *Perspectives on the New Age*, ed. J.R. Lewis and J.G. Melton (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 15-29.
- ⁶ Elliot Miller, *A Crash Course on the New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), p. 14.
- ⁷ Cf. Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (London: Paladin, 1982), pp. 231-41; Michael York, *The Emerging Network* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), pp. 324-34; Michael York, 'The New Age in Britain today', *Religion Today* 9/3 (1994): pp. 14-21.
- ⁸ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Reflections* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), pp. 65-78.
- ⁹ On postmodernity more generally, see Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality isn't What it Used to Be* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990); David S. Dockery, *The Challenge of Postmodernism: an Evangelical Engagement* (Wheaton, IL: Bridgepoint, 1995); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).
- ¹⁰ Cf. Paul Heelas, 'The New Age in cultural context: the pre-modern, the modern and the post-modern', *Religion* 23/2 (1993): pp. 103-16.
- ¹¹ Though there is more than a grain of truth in the New Age analysis. Cf. the comment of David Bebbington: 'It is extremely hard to resist the conclusion that the early evangelicals were immersed in the Enlightenment. They were participating fully in the progressive thought of their age' ('The Enlightenment and evangelicalism', in *The Gospel in the Modern World*, ed. M. Eden and D.F. Wells (Leicester: IVP, 1991), p. 76).

- ¹² See my 'Christian theology, New Agers and the spiritual search of Western culture', in *Rutherford Journal of Church & Ministry* (1Jan 1994): 20-25; 'Christians, New Agers, and changing cultural paradigms', *Expository Times* 106/6 (1994-5): pp. 172-76, reprinted in *Mission Focus Annual Review* 4 (1996): pp. 13-21.
- ¹³ Shirley Maclaine, *Going Within* (London: Bantam, 1990), p. 99, a view put forward with some vigour (and scientific insight) by Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982); Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life* (London: HarperCollins, 1996).
- ¹⁴ For an informed account of neo-paganism, see Graham Harvey, *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism* (London: Hurst & Co., 1997). There is a good deal of debate as to whether this really is a rediscovery of the past, or whether it is not an imposition on the past of a modern agenda. See, for example, discussions of the allegation that Christianity (= 'patriarchy') displaced an original goddess-centred matriarchal culture: Mary Jo Weaver, 'Who is the goddess and where does she get us?', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5/1 (1989): pp. 49-64; Sally Binford, 'Are goddesses and matriarchies merely figments of feminist imagination?', in *The Politics of Women's Spirituality*, ed. Charlene Spretnak (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982): pp. 541-9.
- ¹⁵ Though there is a great deal of religious baggage associated with transpersonal psychology: cf. R.S. Valle, 'The emergence of transpersonal psychology', in R.S. Valle and S. Halling (eds), *Existential-Phenomenological Perspectives in Psychology* (New York: Plenum Press, 1989), pp. 257-68.
- ¹⁶ David Spangler and William Irwin Thomson, *Reimagination of the World* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1991), p. xvi.
- ¹⁷ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 214.
- ¹⁸ Riddell, *Findhorn Community*, p. 63, italics mine.
- ¹⁹ On Gnostic 'churches', cf. my *What is the New Age Saying to the Church?* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 86-94. For wider connections, cf. R.A. Segal (ed.), *The Allure of Gnosticism* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995).
- ²⁰ Cf. June Singer, *Seeing Through the Visible World: Jung, Gnosis and Chaos* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990); R.A. Segal, *The Gnostic Jung* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- ²¹ Ted Peters, *The Cosmic Self* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 55, 56.
- ²² George Trevelyan, *Operation Redemption: A Vision of Hope in an Age of Turmoil* (Walpole, NH: Stillpoint Publishing, 1985).
- ²³ Maclaine, *Going Within*, p. 30.
- ²⁴ J.L. Simmons, *The Emerging New Age* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1990), pp. 69-70.
- ²⁵ This understanding of reincarnation also raises some frightening moral spectres: cf. my *What is the New Age Saying to the Church?*, pp. 127-34.
- ²⁶ Michael Ray and Rochelle Myers, *Creativity in Business* (New York: Doubleday, 1986), p. 9.
- ²⁷ Cf. Rachel Storm, 'Disciples of the New Age', *International Management* (March 1991): pp. 42-5; Richard Roberts, 'Power and empowerment: New Age managers and the dialectics of modernity/postmodernity', *Religion Today* 9/3 (1994): pp.3-13; and my *What is the New Age Saying to the Church?*, pp. 168-201.
- ²⁸ C.A. Raschke, *The Interruption of Eternity* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980), p. 42.
- ²⁹ A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper, 1944).

- ³⁰ For examples of this approach, see Constance Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow* (Lafayette, LA: Huntington House, 1983); Alan Morrison, *The Serpent and the Cross* (Birmingham: K & M Books, 1994).
- ³¹ I myself failed to note this distinction in my 1991 study of the New Age, and assumed that monism was one of its universal characteristics (see *What is the New Age Saying to the Church?*). For a corrective, see Paul Greer, 'The Aquarian confusion: conflicting theologies of the New Age', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 10/2 (1995): pp. 151-66. The same is true of the propensity of Christians to see the New Age as an occult movement. While some traditionally occult practices are undoubtedly followed by some New Agers, this is a tiny proportion of the entire movement (I would estimate that less than 10 per cent of it falls into this category).
- ³² An example of this approach would be Douglas Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), and *Confronting the New Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988).
- ³³ Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, p. 146.
- ³⁴ For more on this, see my *Faith in a Changing Culture* (London: Harper Collins, 1997).
- ³⁵ Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson, *Sacred Quest* (Sutherland, NSW: Albatross, 1995). Though some have labelled him a 'New Ager', I would personally place the work of Matthew Fox in this category too. He lacks the prophetic edge of Clifford and Johnson, and has a wholly inadequate sense of Christian history, but he is genuinely searching for a way of articulating Christian faith that will meet the needs of postmodern culture: cf. Matthew Fox, *Confessions* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1983), 'Spirituality for a new era', in Duncan S. Ferguson (ed.), *New Age Spirituality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 196-219. For a critical assessment, see Richard J. Bauckham, 'The New Age theology of Matthew Fox: a Christian theological response', *Anvil* 13/2 (1996): 115-26; also my article 'Matthew Fox', in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997). The debate about 'post-evangelicalism' inaugurated by Dave Tomlinson is also wrestling with some of the same fundamental issues: cf. D. Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelicals* (London: Triangle, 1995); Graham Cray *et al.*, *The Post Evangelical Debate* (London: Triangle, 1997); and David Hilborn, *Picking up the Pieces: Can Evangelicals Adapt to Contemporary Culture?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997).

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The impulse of fantasy, especially as expressed in symbolic literature, is fundamental to the writings of both Lewis and Tolkien. In a letter C.S. Lewis confessed:

The imaginative man in me is older, more continuously operative, and in that sense more basic than either the religious writer or the critic. It was he who made me first attempt (with little success) to be a poet. It was he who, in response to the poetry of others, made me a critic, and, in defence of that response, sometimes a critical controversialist. It was he who after my conversion led me to embody my religious belief in symbolical or mythopoeic forms, ranging from Screwtape to a kind of theological science-fiction. And it was, of course, he who has brought me, in the last few years, to write a series of Narnian stories for children; not asking what children want and then endeavouring to adapt myself (this was not needed) but because the fairy-tale was the genre best fitted for what I wanted to say.

Similarly, J.R.R. Tolkien wrote:

*Blessed are the legend-makers with their rhyme
of things not found within recorded time...
They have seen Death and ultimate defeat,
and yet they would not in despair retreat,
but oft to victory have turned the lyre
and kindled hearts with legendary fire,
illuminating Now and dark Hath-been
with light of suns as yet by no man seen.*²

Evangelicals today tend to see the Bible only in terms of propositional truth, as if the Bible first and foremost encouraged looking at reality in a theoretical, systematic way. It is undoubtedly (and thankfully) true that the Bible can generate a consistent theoretical model that has far-reaching consequences for all of human knowledge, in the sciences as well as the arts. Seen as a whole, however, the Bible encourages, in a very basic, straightforward and ordinary way, what might be called a symbolic perception of reality – looking at reality through the frame of narrative, story, image, and other symbolic elements. The Bible begins symbolically with seven-day creation and the events in the Garden of Eden and ends with the visions of the book of Revelation and the dénouement of the Holy City, within which is the Tree of Life introduced in Genesis. The hero of heroes of Scripture is the lamb which was slain from the creation of the world. In a

profound sense, such symbols are not merely poetic, but solidly real. The lamb which was slain, for instance, is linked in a myriad ways to actual events in documented history, such as the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord. Pre-eminently, such symbols are linked to events and facts, not in the first place to concepts, even though they provide subject-matter for thought (for example, the symbol of the lamb which was slain helps our thinking about the achievement of the cross). Their primary function is to bring us into contact with significant events in history, selected events in our space-time, events of historical importance.³

C.S. Lewis suggests that comparatively recently we have lost an ancient unity between the poetic and the prosaic, the symbolic and the literal. In this, he was deeply influenced by Owen Barfield.⁴ In the Bible, for example, 'spirit' is equally 'spirit' and 'breath' and 'wind'. Again, the *logos* of John's Gospel is a profound unity integrating many meanings which we today have to separate out. The same would be true of the early portions of Genesis; the common dichotomy of facticity and poetry in reading these chapters is misleading. As we saturate ourselves in the Scriptures a healing of this division, a restoration of a basic human unity of consciousness, can begin to take place. We find this far harder than, for instance, a seventeenth-century English, German or Dutch reader of the Bible would have done. The Bible insists on looking at the natural and human worlds through its multifaceted appeal to our imaginations. It blatantly appeals to our human taste for a story, and to our delight in other unifying symbolic elements such as archetypes.

I see the imaginative work of Lewis and Tolkien as reinforcing such a biblical emphasis upon a symbolic perception of reality. Their symbolic worlds, even though fictional, are in some sense solidly real. For this reason they take us back to the ordinary world which is an inevitable part of our human living and experience, deepening both the wonders and the terrors of our world. Our awareness of the meaning of God's creation and his intentions for us is enlarged. Tolkien and Lewis guide us in seeing this world with a thoroughly Christian understanding. They also illuminate what is revealed of God in the natural order. I shall try to draw attention to this emphasis in my article. Though fantasy was their preferred medium, this is not to say that it is the only valid symbolic mode for winning truth. The Bible employs numerous modes: historical, poetic, apocalyptic, story, motif, archetype, master image, prophecy, as well as fantasy. In the natural sciences, imaginative models play an important part in winning truth, both at the macro and the micro level.

Perhaps the dominance of realistic literature has coincided with the reign of modernism – the pattern of the Enlightenment – which squeezed fantasy onto the periphery of the canon of literature. Now that we are in a post-modernist culture, the

character and social role of fantasy might change and become more central, as it was before the Enlightenment became dominant. The continued popularity and thus cultural relevance of the fantasy fiction of Lewis and Tolkien – both avowedly anti-modernist – is surely significant. They might be called pre-modernist rather than post-modernist authors who have outstanding contemporary appeal, an appeal that continues to grow.

The imagination (imaginative fantasy)

The imagination is a mental faculty. Fantasy is a power and product of the imagination, as thought is a power and product of the intellect. As thought is the reason in action, so fantasy is the imagination at work. Both imagination and fantasy are difficult to define. Colin Manlove's definition of Christian fantasy is a good working one: 'By "Christian fantasy" is meant "a fiction dealing with the Christian supernatural, often in an imaginary world."⁵ In the case of both Lewis and Tolkien, their view of nature implied the reality of the supernatural world and its myriad connections with the natural world. Hence their Christian fantasy not only concerns the supernatural, but illuminates the natural world, and brings us into contact with it.

As well as being a power and product of the imagination, fantasy is also, of course, a dimension of a number of literary and oral genres, such as science-fiction, heroic romance (such as *The Lord of the Rings*), allegory, apocalyptic (such as the biblical book of Revelation), and fairy story. Tolkien saw the highpoint of fantasy as sub-creation, and Lewis viewed it as imaginative invention. Tolkien had sub-creation as his defining feature, whereas Lewis's interest was less structural; for him, fantasy was a prime vehicle for capturing the elusive quality of joy. But for both Lewis and Tolkien, fantasy had a strong inventive and imaginative component. Fantasies generated in sleep, for instance, would not in themselves be of interest, nor would egocentric daydreaming. The two men were interested in carefully crafted literary fantasy.

I have had to use the word 'theology' in the title of this article in a very loose sense, a sense which I hope will become clear as the exposition proceeds. Broadly, it signifies the implications of the Christian reflection undergirding the exploration of fantasy in these two authors.

It was because of their common theory of imagination that Lewis and Tolkien naturally inclined to literary fantasy, rather than other fictive modes. Let me very briefly sketch the features of their theory.

Lewis in particular saw the imagination as the 'organ of meaning' or reality rather than of conceptual truth:

It must not be supposed that I am in any sense putting

forward the imagination as the organ of truth. We are not talking of truth, but of meaning: meaning which is the antecedent condition both of truth and falsehood, whose antithesis is not error but nonsense... For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition. It is, I confess, undeniable that such a view indirectly implies a kind of truth or rightness in the imagination itself ... the truth we [win] by metaphor [can] not be greater than the truth of the metaphor itself; and ... all our truth, or all but a few fragments, is won by metaphor. And thence, I confess, it does follow that if our thinking is ever true, then the metaphors by which we think must have been good metaphors. It does follow that if those original equations, between good and light, or evil and dark, between breath and soul and all the others, were from the beginning arbitrary and fanciful – if there is not, in fact, a kind of psycho-physical parallelism (or more) in the universe – then all our thinking is nonsensical.⁶

Imagination, then, is concerned with apprehending realities (even if they belong to the unseen world), rather than grasping concepts. Imaginative invention is justifiable in its own right – it does not have the burden of carrying didactic truths. Both Lewis and Tolkien as writers valued looking at reality in a symbolic way. A further central preoccupation for both of them was imaginative invention (most obviously expressed in Tolkien's concept of sub-creation). This was related to their view of the function of imagination. Products of the imagination are knowledge of sorts, important knowledge, but knowledge discovered by making, essentially not accessible in any other way, and hence different from universal, theoretical truth.

So fiction, for C.S. Lewis, was the making of meaning rather than the literal restating of truths. It reflects the greater creativity of God when he originated and put together his universe and ourselves. Meaning is at the core of real things and events. Natural objects are not mere facts. Objects, events and people are real insofar as they are in relationship to other objects, events and persons, and ultimately in relationship to God. They have a created unity. And their meaning derives from that. The complex web of relationships that is the hallmark of reality confers objects, events and people with meaning. In themselves, they do not mean: they refer elsewhere for their meaning. Their reality is their true meaning. It is on the relationship between the conceptual and the imaginative that C.S. Lewis makes his most distinctive contribution to understanding the imagination. He argues that good imagining is as vital as good thinking, and each is impoverished without the other. This is as true in the natural sciences as it is in the arts. We actually win truth by employing metaphors, or models.

As we have already noted, Tolkien's view of the imagination

centres on his idea of 'sub-creation'. This is most clearly set out in his famous essay, 'On Fairy Stories',⁷ and reveals his affinity with the ideas of Coleridge, MacDonald and Lewis. There he speaks of creating secondary worlds with an 'inner consistency of reality'. He also stresses the central importance of human language. It was typical of him to write elsewhere in a similar vein: 'Language has both strengthened imagination and been freed by it'.⁸

There is, then, an understandable preoccupation with fantasy in the fictional writings of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. What are the theological implications of their stance? What does it say, for instance, about their apologetics, their implicit or explicit defence of Christian faith in a world they regarded as essentially hostile to such a message? This preference for fantasy led them to a contemporary alternative to modernism, and a powerful exploration of meaning and reality. This preference is likely to account for their considerable and continuing popularity.⁹ Though both men had a marked taste for fantasy, they also had core ideas in common which set them an agenda for their fiction. In order to try to get at these ideas and to unravel some of the fascinating strands of such questions, it is necessary to remember the living context of their writings. It is important to remind ourselves of the remarkable friendship between Lewis and Tolkien. While some will be very familiar with the biographical details of their association, I wish to mention them briefly as a useful framework for considering their theology of fantasy.

Tolkien and Lewis had childhoods strikingly dominated by their imaginations. Lewis in Belfast created Boxen and Animal Land while Tolkien in the English West Midlands invented languages, and fell under the spell of existing languages like Welsh and, later, Gothic. Significantly, both lost their mothers when they were young, Lewis at the age of nine, Tolkien just into his teens. Both started writing seriously during the First World War, in which Lewis was wounded and Tolkien lost two of his closest friends. Tolkien was several years older than Lewis, and had already taught at Leeds University before returning to Oxford to take up another chair and meeting Lewis in 1926. The two met at an English Faculty meeting and it was not long after that that they discovered they shared similar worlds and their association began. They often talked far into the night. Their association was the core around which their literary group, The Inklings, developed.¹⁰

Their shared beliefs: the heart of a theology of fantasy

A theology of romanticism

The two friends had a great number of shared beliefs that derived from mutual tastes, and particularly from their common faith, which, though orthodox, had an original cast, to say the least. These shared beliefs constitute, I believe, the

heart of a theology of fantasy. In particular, they both shared a theology of romanticism, a movement which stressed the poetic imagination, instinct, emotion and the subjective over against what it saw as a cold rationalism. The term 'romantic theologian', Lewis tells us, was invented by Charles Williams. What Lewis says about Williams in his introduction to *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* applies also to himself, and to Tolkien. He particularly identifies romantic love and imaginative literature as the concern of Charles Williams:

A romantic theologian does not mean one who is romantic about theology but one who is theological about romance, one who considers the theological implications of those experiences which are called romantic. The belief that the most serious and ecstatic experiences either of human love or of imaginative literature have such theological implications and that they can be healthy and fruitful only if the implications are diligently thought out and severely lived, is the root principle of all his [Williams's] work.¹¹

Whereas a key preoccupation of Charles Williams was romantic love, C.S. Lewis was 'theological' about romantic longing, which he became convinced was properly about the secret of human joy. Tolkien reflected deeply on the theological implications of fairy-tale and myth, particularly the aspect of sub-creation. It is important to note, however, that these experiences are embodied in literature long before the period of Romanticism. Lewis and Tolkien cannot be identified simply as Romantics. Both belonged to an older world than the Romantic movement, believing in an objective dimension to the imagination and fantasy.

In *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis reported some of his sensations – responses to natural beauty, and literary and artistic responses – in the belief that others would recognize similar experiences of their own. J.R.R. Tolkien was fascinated by several structural features of fairy-tales and other stories that embodied myths. These features are all related to a sense of imaginative decorum, a sense that imagining can, in itself, be good or bad, with rules or norms that apply strictly in such fantasy, as they do in thought. Meaning can only be created by skill or art, and these play an essential part in human thought and language. As Tolkien said, 'The incarnate mind, the tongue, and the tale are in our world coeval.'¹²

An implied theology of fantasy

Out of their shared beliefs a number of theological features of their preoccupation with fantasy emerge.

Otherness. They shared a sense of the value of otherness – or otherworldliness. Great stories take us outside the prison of our own selves and our presuppositions about reality. Insofar as stories reflect the divine maker in doing this, they help us face the ultimate Other – God himself, distinct as creator from all

else, including ourselves. The very well of fantasy and imaginative invention is every person's direct knowledge of the other. Lewis writes: "To construct plausible and moving "other worlds" you must draw on the only real "other world" we know, that of the spirit."¹³

The numinous. For both men, this all-pervasive sense of the other is focused in a quality of the numinous, a basic human experience charted by the thinker Rudolf Otto in his phenomenological study, *The Idea of the Holy* (1923). Both successfully embodied this quality in their fiction. The primary numinous experience involves a sense of dependence upon what stands wholly other to mankind. This otherness (or otherworldliness) is in one way unapproachable and certainly awesome. But it has a fascination. The experience of the numinous is captured better by suggestion and allusion than by a theoretical analysis. Many realities captured in imaginative fiction could be described as having some quality of the numinous. C.S. Lewis realized this, incorporating the idea into his apologetic for the Christian view of suffering, *The Problem of Pain*; and he cited an event from Kenneth Grahame's fantasy for children, *The Wind in the Willows*, to illustrate it.¹⁴ The final part of *The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'* particularly embodies the numinous, as the travellers approach Aslan's Country across the Last Sea (chs. 15, 16).

Many elements in Tolkien's fantasies also convey this quality. Much of the numinous in Tolkien is the effect of his linguistic creativity. His use of Elvish names, words and phrases, which are beautiful and yet foreign, often invokes a numinous quality. Parts of *The Silmarillion*, using an archaic yet powerfully attractive style, also convey the numinous.

In Tolkien's work the numinous is embodied most of all in his idea of Faery – an other world in which it is possible for beings such as Elves to live and move and have a history. The world of the Elves is the focus of *The Silmarillion*, and had a strong attraction for his imagination. Some of his Elves, like Luthien or Galadriel, powerfully embody the numinous in their preternatural beauty and wisdom.

Where the numinous is captured, its appeal is firstly to the imagination, which also senses it most accurately. It belongs to the area of meaning that we cannot easily conceptualize. C.S. Lewis found this when he read George MacDonald's *Phantastes*, describing the effect as baptizing his imagination. It was years before he was able to reconcile this experience with his thinking. Tolkien similarly seems to have taken years of reflection (reflection often captured in his letters) to come to terms with his imaginative discoveries.

Joy. Sehnsucht, seen as a yearning or longing that is a pointer to joy, was for Lewis a defining characteristic of fantasy. Both men desired to embody that quality in their work. Though

associated with Lewis, joy is characteristic of Tolkien's fiction too, and deeply valued by him, as his essay 'On Fairy Stories' makes clear. There, Tolkien refers to the quality of joy. It is a key feature of such stories, he believes, related to the happy ending, or *eucatastrophe*, part of the consolation they endow. Tolkien believes that joy in the story marks the presence of grace coming from the world outside of the story, and even beyond our world. 'It denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.' He adds: 'In such stories when the sudden "turn" comes we get a piercing glimpse of joy, and heart's desire, that for a moment passes outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of story, and lets a gleam come through.'¹⁵ In an epilogue to the essay, Tolkien gives more consideration to the quality of joy, linking it to the Gospel narratives, which have all the qualities of an other-worldly, fairy, story, while at the same time being actual world history. This doubleness intensifies the quality of joy, identifying its objective source.

C.S. Lewis explored the quality of longing, both in the quest which led to his Christian conversion, and in his writings. He saw it as the key to joy in human experience. The two men were very much at one in seeking to define and embody this quality. Lewis saw the unquenchable longing as a sure sign that no part of the created world, and thus no aspect of human experience, is capable of fulfilling fallen humankind. We are dominated by a homelessness, and yet by a keen sense of what home means. Such longing, thought Lewis, inspired the writer to create fantasy. The creation of Another World is an attempt to reconcile human beings and the world, to embody the fulfilment of our imaginative longing. Imaginative worlds, wonderlands, are 'regions of the spirit'.¹⁶ Such worlds of the numinous may be found in some science-fiction, some poetry, some fairy-stories, some novels, some myths, even in a phrase or sentence. For Lewis, joy was a foretaste of ultimate reality, heaven itself, or, the same thing, our world as it was meant to be, unspoilt by the fall of mankind, and one day to be remade. 'Joy', he wrote, 'is the serious business of Heaven.' In attempting to imagine heaven, Lewis discovered that joy is 'the secret signature of each soul'. He speculated that the desire for heaven is part of our essential (and unfulfilled) humanity.¹⁷

In Tolkien, not only is there the quality of joy linked to the sudden turn in the story, the sense of *eucatastrophe*, but also it is connected to the inconsolable longing, or sweet desire, in Lewis's sense. Dominating the entire cycle of his tales of Middle-earth is a longing to obtain the Undying Lands of the uttermost west. The longing is often symbolized by a longing for the sea, which lay to the west of Middle-earth, and over which lay Valinor, even if by a hidden road.¹⁸

Sub-creation. This is a key feature of the preoccupation with fantasy in both Lewis and Tolkien. Tolkien in particular believes

that the art of true fantasy or fairy-story writing is sub-creation: creating another or secondary world with such skill that it has an 'inner consistency of reality'. A faery-story is not a story which simply concerns faery beings. They are in some sense other-worldly, having a geography and history surrounding them. Tolkien's key idea is that Faery, the realm or state where faeries have their being, contains a whole cosmos, a microcosm. Faery is sub-creation rather than either mimetic representation or allegorical interpretation of the 'beauties and terrors of the world'. Tolkien's concept of sub-creation is the most distinctive feature of his view of art. Though he saw it in terms of inventive fantasy, the applicability might well prove to be wider. Secondary worlds can take many forms. The philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff sees 'world-projection' as one of the universal and most important features of art, particularly fiction. It has large-scale metaphorical power. Wolterstorff claims: '... By way of fictionally projecting his distinct world the fictioneer may make a claim, true or false as the case may be, about our actual world.'¹⁹ Its metaphorical quality deepens or indeed modifies our perception of the meaning of reality.

Recovery. A further feature of fantasy for the two friends was restoration, or recovery. Tolkien, like Lewis, believed that, through story, the real world becomes a more magical place, full of meaning. We see its pattern and colour in a fresh way. The recovery of a true view of things applies both to individual things like hills and stones, and to the cosmic – the depths of space and time itself. For in sub-creation, Tolkien believed, there is a 'survey' of space and time. Reality is captured in miniature. Through sub-creative stories – the type to which *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Tale of Beren and Luthien the Elf-maiden* belong – a renewed view of reality in all its dimensions is given – the homely, the spiritual, the physical, the moral.

Tolkien and Lewis rejected what they saw as the restless quest of the modern world to be original. Meaning was to be discovered in God's created world, not to be created by mankind without him. G.K. Chesterton somewhere speaks of the way that children are normally not tired of familiar experience. In this sense they share in God's energy and vitality; he never tires of telling the sun to rise each morning. The child's attitude is a true view of things, and dipping into the world of story can restore such a sense of freshness. Lewis explains: 'He does not despise real woods because he has read of enchanted woods: the reading makes all real woods a little enchanted.'²⁰ For Tolkien, fairy-stories help us to make such a recovery – they bring healing – and 'in that sense only a taste for them may make us, or keep us, childish'.²¹

Natural theology and paganism

Because of the importance they placed on the primary meaning-function of the imagination, both Tolkien and Lewis

were preoccupied with the imaginative fruit of pre-Christian paganism, particularly what might be called enlightened paganism. Such paganism was, as it were, one large case-study for them of their view of imagination. The remainder of my article will explore this highly significant feature of their fantasy, and thus their apologetics.

Most of Tolkien's fiction is set in a pre-Christian world, as was his great model, the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, according to his own interpretation of that poem. Similarly, Lewis explored a pagan world in his novel, *Till We Have Faces*. Even while an atheist, Lewis was attracted by the pagan myths of the North, and by the idea of a dying god. In one of his *Latin Letters* Lewis speculates that some modern people may need to be brought to pre-Christian pagan insights in preparation for more adequately receiving the Christian gospel. Tolkien undoubtedly shared this view of pre-evangelism. It is worth exploring the relationship between their theology and their preoccupation with paganism. They are not unusual in making such a link. St Paul in Athens pointed out a striking insight into the truth on the part of several Greek poets as part of his apologetic strategy.²² In Romans 1:18-32 he points to a universal human knowledge of the truth that is inevitably suppressed because of sin. Though stating a universal truth, Paul's immediate environment is paganism.

In this context of an interest in paganism it is valuable to consider a pattern of thinking and imagining which held sway for many centuries in the West, a pattern which illuminates the work of both Tolkien and Lewis.

Nature and grace

The framework of nature and grace was originally largely an attempt to Christianize a Greek antithesis of Form and Matter, particularly as associated with Aristotle. By the beginning of the thirteenth century an Aristotelian concept of the soul was gaining acceptance among certain Christian philosophers and theologians. Before this acceptance of Aristotle's concept, a Platonic notion of the soul had been popular, largely through Augustine's influence. Aristotle's way of relating the soul and the body in particular was a key instance of the general relationship of Form and Matter.²³ St Thomas Aquinas drew heavily on this Aristotelian concept. The human being actualizes the potentiality of nature, for example, making it knowable by the exercise of human reason. From this arose the idea of natural theology. Truths about God and the world could be known by the unaided human intellect. Only a fuller knowledge of God, the heavenly realm and the spiritual depended on grace. In relation to God, mankind is only potential, a potential actualized by the divine. Mankind is in the middle, between form and matter, God and nature. After Aquinas, the intellect became more and more independent

of divine revelation and grace in relation to knowledge, helping to give rise to the modern sciences.²⁴

The framework of nature and grace was the paradigm not only in theology and philosophy but throughout Western culture, influencing artists and writers. Such a cultural paradigm provided a pattern for problem solving.²⁵ Lewis gracefully portrays the medieval and Renaissance world model in his book, *The Discarded Image*,²⁶ a model dominated by nature and grace. Integral to the framework is a hierarchy to the created world, ranging from the inanimate, through vegetable and sensible life, to the rational. Mankind straddled the hierarchy present on earth; it was a 'little world' or microcosmos. In a sense, persons in themselves are alternative worlds, potentially the creators of other worlds. Such a view of mankind was immensely liberating to the imagination. In contrast, increasingly mechanistic views of reality reduced mankind to a spatial segment of matter in motion, or to a dualism of mind and body. Expressing the view of man the microcosm, Gregory the Great wrote: 'Because man has existence in common with stones, life with trees, and understanding with angels, he is rightly called by the name of the world.' Similarly, and far later, John Calvin, in his commentary on *Genesis*, finds it quite natural to refer to a human being as a 'world in miniature'.²⁷

Natural theology

Tolkien was a Roman Catholic, and Roman Catholicism has always given a high value to natural theology. IVP's *The New Dictionary of Theology* defines natural theology as 'Truths about God that can be learned from created things (nature, man, world) by reason alone'.²⁸ The Reformation, in contrast, emphasized a return to Scripture alone as the source of knowledge of God, and thus of all else. Nature was interpreted through the lens of Scripture. Tolkien's natural theology is unusual in that his stress is on the imagination, rather than on reason. In contrast, Lewis's use of natural theology applied to both the reason and the imagination. His apologetic approach encompassed both his popular theology and his fiction. Lewis was vigorous in employing reason in defence of Christianity and of the objectivity of truth and morality. But it would be a grave mistake to confuse his commitment to objectivity with Enlightenment-style modernism. For Tolkien (and, to an extent, Lewis) imagination can show genuine insight into God and reality independently of the specific revelation of Scripture. However, Tolkien emphasizes in his essay, 'On Fairy Stories', that any such insights are acts of grace from the Father of Lights. They are a kind of pre-revelation, opening the way to receiving the special revelation of the gospel. Whereas traditional Roman Catholic thought emphasizes the rational and cognitive in natural theology, Tolkien links it with imaginative meaning. It is a complementary revelation to that of the propositional. The story, like language, is evidence of the

image of God still remaining in fallen humankind. He also spoke of 'the seamless web of story', the interrelationship of all story-telling.²⁹

Nature

Both Lewis and Tolkien believed that worlds of the imagination are properly based upon the humble and common things of life – what Lewis called 'the quiet fullness of ordinary nature'. Tolkien and Lewis defended fantasy on this basis against the charge of escapism. What Lewis said about Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* could have been Tolkien's words: 'The happiness which it presents to us is in fact full of the simplest and most attainable things – food, sleep, exercise, friendship, the face of nature, even (in a sense) religion.'³⁰ Such fantasy is the opposite of escapism.³¹ It deepens the reality of the real world for us – the terror as well as the beauty. In a sense, nature itself induces fantasy. C.S. Lewis writes: 'Nature has that in her which compels us to invent giants: and only giants will do.'³²

Again like Lewis, Tolkien believed that nature is best understood as God's creation. When the storyteller is building up a convincing 'Secondary World', he or she in fact is creating, as it were, in the image or as a miniaturization of the 'Primary World'. Such story-making surveys the depth of space and time. Essentially it is the imaginative equivalent of the reason's attempt to capture reality in a single, unified theory. The natural world of God's creating, however, imposes a fundamental limit to the human imagination. We cannot, like God, create *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. We can only rearrange elements that God has already made, and which are already brimful with his meanings.

There is more that we could say under each of these headings: for example, seen in connection with the frame of nature and grace, Tolkien's concept of sub-creation has important consequences for epistemology. The implication of his view is that in sub-creation stories take on an inevitable structure, anticipating or referring to the *evangelium*. Grace thus intervenes in the activity of sub-creation, leading to insight into and contact with reality. However, we shall now move on to a specific sub-creation – the matter of elves!

The centrality of elves

Central to human storytelling, indeed its epitome, according to Tolkien, is the fairy story. The concept of 'faerie' had been mutilated, and Tolkien sought to rehabilitate it. In his works, his name for fairies is of course 'elves'. In the equation of story and grace, elves have a significant place. In his invented mythology of Middle-earth, Tolkien intended his elves to be an extended metaphor of a key aspect of human nature. This 'elven quality' in human life was a central preoccupation of

his. Elves, like dwarves, hobbits, and the like, 'partially represent' human beings.³³ In Tolkien's mythology, and also in other fiction of his (such as *Smith of Wootton Major*), elves represent what is high and noble in human beings. In particular, they represent the arts. Tolkien regarded the arts in their highest form as sub-creation, work done in the image of God and his created world. The elves may in fact be taken as a metaphor of human culture, highlighting its meaning. They were to teach their arts and crafts to human beings. By the time of the Fourth Age of Middle-earth and beyond – where mythology such as Tolkien's has moved into history – the elven quality mainly persists in human form. The three ages recorded in Tolkien's Middle-earth stories and annals are pre-Christian. After them will come the Christian era, where the elven quality is perhaps now pre-eminently a spiritual one, associated with Christianity, the grace of the gospel (or *evangelium*), and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Like C.S. Lewis, Tolkien was persuaded by the view of their mutual friend, Owen Barfield, that language and symbolism have become increasingly abstract through history. In Tolkien's beginning, there are real elves (and a real Númenorean civilization). Now there is merely an elven quality to human life, which some can see clearly and others fail to perceive at all. In all the abstraction, there has been a real loss. He sees such a loss restored by the *evangelium*, as he points out in 'On Fairy Stories'. Tolkien argues: 'God is the Lord, of angels, and of man – and of Elves. Legend and history have met and fused.' He concludes: 'Art has been verified.'³⁴ Tolkien saw the elven quality embodied and made real in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. In his *Letters*³⁵ Tolkien describes the mythology of Middle-earth as being 'Elf-centred'. The mythology is embodied in *The Silmarillion*. The Elvish framework of *The Silmarillion* particularly shows up when it is compared with *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, both of which could be said to be hobbit-centred, the narrative being composed, as it were, by hobbits. This striking shift of perspective reflects the process whereby the elven quality is increasingly embodied in human beings. Hobbits belong to mankind, even though they are diminutive. The embodiment or indeed incarnation of an elven quality in human lives is part of Tolkien's solution to the reconciliation of nature and grace.

Paganism

Reference to the pattern of nature and grace in Tolkien forces us to return to the matter of paganism. As I noted, it seems that for Tolkien (and, to a lesser extent, for Lewis), paganism was a central case-study for the intervention and integration of grace in nature. Tolkien's tales of Middle-earth are set in a thoroughly pagan context. It is a pagan world, like the setting of his great model, *Beowulf*.

Tolkien says that in this poem we see 'man at war with the

hostile world, and his inevitable overthrow in time'.³⁶ The question of the power of evil is central. The hero Beowulf 'moves in a northern heroic age imagined by a Christian, and therefore has a noble and gentle quality, though conceived to be a pagan'.³⁷ In *Beowulf*, according to Tolkien, there is a fusion of the Christian and the ancient north, the old and the new. The *Beowulf* dragon, as a symbol of evil, retains the ancient force of the pagan northern imagination. The *Beowulf* poet indicates for Tolkien the good that may be found in the pagan imagination, a theme also powerfully explored by C.S. Lewis in *Till We Have Faces*, as we shall see. In holding such a view of what may be called enlightened paganism, Lewis was heavily influenced by Tolkien. Tolkien's conclusion is that 'In *Beowulf* we have, then, an historical poem about the pagan past, or an attempt at one...It is a poem by a learned man writing of old times, who looking back on the heroism and sorrow feels in them something permanent and something symbolical'.³⁸

There are a number of parallels between the author of *Beowulf*, as understood by Tolkien, and Tolkien himself. Tolkien is a Christian scholar looking back to an imagined northern European past. The *Beowulf* author was a Christian looking to the imaginative resources of a pagan past. Both made use of dragons and other potent symbols, symbols which unified their work. Both are concerned with symbolism. Like the ancient author, also, Tolkien created an illusion of history and a sense of depths of the past. Like the *Beowulf* poet, and characteristically, Tolkien was concerned with the issue of evil. Tolkien's world in general is replete with Christian heroes and yet it is a pagan world. Ultimately, grace successfully spiritualizes nature. The fading of the elves is sad for the elves. Aragorn, however, stands at the end of the Third Age with Arwen at his side, a reminder of ancient Lúthien in her grace and beauty. The future ages are full of the promise of the *evangelium*. The White Tree had at last flowered, a sign of permanent and ultimate victory over evil.

Tolkien's treatment of paganism has the same potency that he found in *Beowulf*. The potency is also there in C.S. Lewis's own great exploration of pre-Christian paganism, *Till We Have Faces*.³⁹ This novel strikingly reveals the imaginative and theological affinity between the two men.

In Lewis's story, Princess Psyche is prepared to die for the sake of the people of Glome, a barbaric country somewhere to the north of the Greeklands. In the story Lewis retells an old classical myth, that of Cupid and Psyche, in the realistic setting of a historical novel. It is set several hundred years BC. The story is told through the eyes of Queen Orual of Glome. Having heard a legend in the nearby land of Essur, similar to the myth of Cupid and Psyche, she seeks to set the record straight. The gods, she claims, have distorted the story in certain key respects. She recognizes herself and her half-sister Psyche in the newly sprung-up legend. The gods, she said, had

called her deep love for Psyche jealousy. They had also said that she saw Psyche's Palace, whereas Orual had only seen shapes in a mist, a fantasy that momentarily resembled a palace. There had been no evidence that Psyche had married a god and dwelt in his Palace. Orual therefore recounts her version of the story, being as truthful as possible. She had a reader in mind from the Greeklands, and agreed with the Greek demand for truth and rational honesty.

The short second part of the novel – still in Orual's voice – continues a few days later. Orual has undergone a devastating undeception, whereby, in painful self-knowledge, she has discovered how her affection for Psyche had become poisoned by possessiveness. In this discovery, which allows the restoration of a true love for Psyche, was the consolation that she had also been Psyche. She had suffered on Psyche's behalf, in a substitutionary manner, bearing her burdens and thus easing her tasks. By what Charles Williams called 'the Way of Exchange', Orual had thus helped Psyche to be reunited with her divine husband. With the curing of her poisoned love, Orual in a vision sees that she has become herself beautiful. She has gained a face in becoming a full person. After this reconciliation, the aged queen Orual dies, her narration ending with her.

In this tale, two loves, affection and eros, are especially explored. Another motif is that of substitution and atonement. Psyche is prepared to die for the sake of the people of Glome. Orual is a substitute for much of Psyche's suffering and pain. Psyche herself represents a kind of Christ-likeness, though she is not intended as a figure of Christ. Lewis wrote, in explanation, to Clyde S. Kilby:

*Psyche is an instance of the anima naturaliter Christiana making the best of the pagan religion she is brought up in and thus being guided (but always 'under the cloud,' always in terms of her own imagination or that of her people) towards the true God. She is in some ways like Christ not because she is a symbol of him but because every good man or woman is like Christ.*⁴⁰

This limitation of pagan imagination comes out in the ugly figures of Ungit and the Shadow-brute, deformed images of the brighter Greek deities of Venus (Aphrodite) and Cupid. The truth that these poor images are trying to glimpse is even more beautiful, free of the vindictiveness of the Greek deities. Psyche is able to see a glimpse of the true God himself, in all his beauty, and in his legitimate demand for a perfect sacrifice. Thus Lewis, like Tolkien, endorses insights of paganism.

The pattern of nature and grace, as exemplified in Lewis and Tolkien, is a fundamentally pre-modernist one. Both men were medieval scholars, and belonged imaginatively to that period. However, these kinds of enterprises, with their profound sensitivity to patterns, are rare in contemporary Christian

thinking and imagining.⁴¹ Because the source of our authority is an ancient book, such thought and imagination has primarily a pre-modernist orientation. Yet, of course, it needs to be thoroughly contemporary.⁴² The success of Tolkien and Lewis as contemporary Christian writers must be taken seriously by all concerned with communicating Christian faith today. In this article, I have sought not to address the theological questions involved in the enjoyment of fantasy by Tolkien and Lewis. But I trust it has been a stimulus – to thought and imagination alike – leading perhaps to more important issues, often overlooked.

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- * This article is adapted from papers given at the following conferences: 'The Tolkien Phenomenon', the University of Turku, Finland, May 1992, and 'Fantasy and the Human Spirit', Wheaton College, Illinois, USA, September 1994.

¹ *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, ed. W.H. Lewis (London: Bles, 1966), p. 260.

² J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Mythopoeia', in *Tree and Leaf* (London: Unwin Hyman, 2nd edn, 1988).

³ This is not to diminish the importance of related events that may be going on in the unseen world, as in the vision of Elisha's servant (2 Ki. 6:15-17). Symbols are necessary to capture such visions. John, for instance, drew upon the symbolic language of Daniel and Ezekiel (Dn. 10:1-9; Ezk. 1:26-28; Rev. 1:12-16) to describe the glorified Christ in the book of Revelation.

⁴ See Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction* (London: Faber, 2nd edn, 1952).

⁵ Colin Manlove, *Christian Fantasy: from 1200 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 5.

⁶ C.S. Lewis set out some key ideas in an essay entitled 'Bluspels and Flanansferes', in his book *Rehabilitations* (1939). There are a number of suggestive ideas here, many of which Lewis developed and refined in later years, leading to his definitive statement about literature, *An Experiment in Criticism*. We may summarize some of the basic ideas as follows: (1) There is a distinction between reason and imagination as regards roles – reason has to do with theoretical or conceptual truths, imagination has to do with the very conditions of truth. (2) There are standards of correctness, or norms, for the imagination, held tacitly and universally by human beings, just as there are for the mind. (3) There was originally a unity between image and reality which reflects an objective state of affairs. The idea of an ancient unity of consciousness is relevant here – what Barfield called 'original participation'. (4) The framing of truths in propositions necessitates the employment of metaphors supplied by the imagination. Language and thought necessarily rely upon metaphor. This is as true in scientific as in religious or in ordinary discourse. Imagination is a maker of meaning, a definer of terms in a proposition, and as such is a condition of truth.

⁷ J.R.R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', in *Tree and Leaf*, op. cit.

⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, 'A Secret Vice', in *The Monsters and The Critics and Other Essays* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 219.

⁹ For example, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* came number one in two readers' polls in 1997, one conducted by Waterstones' bookshops and the other by the Folio Society.

¹⁰ For a study see Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978).

- ¹¹ C.S. Lewis, Preface to *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947).
- ¹² Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', op. cit., p. 24.
- ¹³ C.S. Lewis, 'On Stories', in *Of This and Other Worlds* (London: Collins, 1982), pp. 35f.
- ¹⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Bles, 1940), p. 6.
- ¹⁵ Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', op. cit., pp. 62, 63.
- ¹⁶ See Lewis, 'On Stories', op. cit., p. 35.
- ¹⁷ See Lewis's speculations in Chapter 10, 'Heaven', in *The Problem of Pain*, op. cit., and 'The Weight of Glory', in *Screwtape Proposes a Toast and Other Pieces* (London: Collins Fontana, 1965).
- ¹⁸ See Colin Duriez, 'Joy', and related articles in *The Tolkien and Middle-earth Handbook* (Tunbridge Wells: Monarch, 1992).
- ¹⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).
- ²⁰ C.S. Lewis, 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children', in *Of This and Other Worlds*, op. cit., p. 65.
- ²¹ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, op. cit.
- ²² Acts 17:6-31.
- ²³ For further information, see Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1936), and Herman Dooyeweerd, in *The Twilight of Western Thought* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1960).
- ²⁴ See Francis Schaeffer, *Escape From Reason* (Leicester: IVP, 1968).
- ²⁵ For more on socio-cultural paradigms, see T.S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
- ²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).
- ²⁷ John Calvin, *Genesis*, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), p. 92.
- ²⁸ 'Natural theology', in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Packer, Ferguson and Wright (Leicester: IVP, 1988).
- ²⁹ Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', op. cit.
- ³⁰ Lewis, 'On Stories', op. cit., p. 38.
- ³¹ Tolkien rightly distinguishes between improper and proper escape – the flight of the deserter and the escape of the wrongly imprisoned (Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', op. cit.), p. 56.
- ³² Lewis, 'On Stories', op. cit., p. 31.
- ³³ J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), Letter 131.
- ³⁴ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 66.
- ³⁵ Tolkien, *Letters*, Letter 181.
- ³⁶ J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics', in *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, op. cit., p. 18.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 26.
- ³⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (London: Bles, 1956).
- ⁴⁰ *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, p. 274.
- ⁴¹ The importance of these kind of patterns or paradigms cannot be overestimated, because they concern the fundamental problem-solving and social orientation of a culture. The depth of such patterns is only partly captured by the more familiar concept of a world-view (as in, for example, the excellent study by James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Leicester: IVP, 3rd edn 1997).
- ⁴² John Stott's *The Contemporary Christian* (Leicester: IVP, 1992) argues the case forcefully for being both biblically faithful and contemporary.

"That You May Believe: An Editorial"

Stephen Williams

In this issue of 'Themelios', both Steve Motyer's Guest Editorial and the extract from David Wenham's booklet have focused on the Gospel of John. Irrespective of the detailed state of contemporary scholarship, and despite any protests from conservative scholars, many still have the impression that John is a comparatively unreliable source for the life and teaching of Jesus, if we want actual happenings and spoken words. The interpretation of John is important if we want to preserve the traditional christological and trinitarian teaching of the Church. But we should also note that John is the most epistemologically self-conscious of the Gospel writings, indeed, of all the New Testament documents. There is a marked and sustained interest in believing and in knowing – the grounds for our believing and the causes of our knowing. The structure of a religious epistemology that is informed by the Bible comes to light with peculiar clarity in this Gospel.

'...These [things] are written that you may believe...', says John, and tells us in whom and for what purpose we must believe. Following so closely after the words 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed', John's eternal evangel at first sounds like an invitation to a faith that does not depend on sight. It is not. Our faith does not depend on our sight, but it does depend on the sight of others. Were that not the case, John's concern to document the thoroughly empirical grounds on which faith arose would be hard to understand. We must clarify three points here.

1. In saying that our faith depends on what others saw (and heard) we are talking about its logical structure, not of individual psychology and subjectivity. Faith is doubtless formed and fostered in a variety of ways corresponding to the stages of life, yet it derives its objective justification from its grounding in testimony received and accepted. This is fundamentally testimony to what is seen and heard. No Gospel writer attends to the empirical basis of faith more than does John.²

2. In speaking of faith 'depending' on the sight of others and of the 'basis' of faith, one is not saying that seeing and hearing constitute faith or that they guarantee faith. Believing is other and more than seeing and hearing; seeing and hearing may not generate faith. Nor is faith principally regarded as the most rational or logical of steps to take on the basis of what is seen and heard. The empirical constitutes a *sign* not a *demonstration* of the truth of Jesus Christ, although those who receive the sign have some explaining to do, if they fail to follow where it leads.

That You May Believe

3. In referring to faith based on, while not equated with, or very strictly entailed by, what others saw and heard, one is not presuming that hearers of the word occupy some neutral ground, so that the intellect naturally attends to the testimony and faith takes its flight equally naturally. John consistently draws our attention to what is called the *volitional* element in faith. That is, the will of the person, the disposition of the heart, the spiritual openness of the hearer all help to determine what is attended to, what is received, what is believed.

These three things need to be kept in mind as we speak to others that they may believe. They can be glossed as follows.

1. Enormous sophistication has gone into academic biblical studies over the last centuries. We must certainly be alert to the varieties of literary genre, the subtleties of apostolic craftsmanship, and the whole range of disciplines and informed speculations that inform the field of NT, including the study of the Gospels. But it remains a stubborn fact that the authors show every intention of issuing reports of empirical happenings, not, of course, from some allegedly neutral standpoint, but from the perspective of faith. It is not untutored and plebeian innocence, but a matter of solidly scientific observation, to say of this witness what has often been said of the claims of Christ: it is either badly muddled, tortuously deceiving or substantially reliable.³

2. If the witness is credible, we are dealing with evidence that demands a verdict, rather than a compelling logical demonstration. But that is no surprise. Informed personal commitment, not strict logical demonstration, is the goal of the witness. Logical demonstration engages only the faculty of reasoning; it fastens on to that to which reason must or must not assent, not what the person must or must not do. Faith is not quite like grasping the last proposition in the chain of deductions, like a train that moves on from one stop to another until it arrives at the terminus. Rather, it contemplates what is signified on the basis of the sign, and is finally confronted with the life that is the light of man.

3. If we insist that belief and knowledge in things religious have to do with the will and the disposition of the heart, this is not a case of special pleading, nor an indication that arguments have run out of steam. On the contrary, such an insistence is consistent with other facets of human experience. Of certain realities, Baron von Hugel once said:

We get to know such realities slowly, laboriously, intermittently, partially; we get to know them, not inevitably nor altogether apart from our dispositions, but only if we are sufficiently awake to care to know them, sufficiently generous to pay the price continuously which is strictly necessary if this knowledge and love are not to shrink but to grow. We indeed get to know them - in

*proportion as we become less self-occupied, less self-centred, more outward-moving, less obstinate and insistent, more gladly lost in the crowd, more rich in giving all we have, and especially all we are, our very selves.*⁴

These words lead us to recall a sentence written by Nietzsche, one of the most strident and effective critics of Christianity in the modern era. 'What is now decisive against Christianity is our taste, no longer our reasons.'⁵ Perhaps some will quarrel with the 'now': has it not always been so, and is that not presupposed in what is said about the volitional aspects of believing? Perhaps so. But does the relation of taste to reason and to the possibilities of faith remain constant? Can a generation not be peculiarly addicted to taste or to a peculiar taste? And do tastes change? At any rate, we must be as sensitive to the perceived or real ethos, fragrance, flavour of our Christianity as to its logic, grounds and rationale.

The times they are a-changing. The pressures of pluralism and relativism; widespread moral anarchy; the intrusive presence of technologies, managerial styles and sensory stimuli, mean that the paths of the mind appear to be more varied, less predictable, less clearly delineated than some of us have ever found before. Good can come of this in our sharing of the faith, for we are forced to get to know persons as persons and not treat them as geometrically-calculable animated spiritual and intellectual packages.⁶ At the same time, we may fail to gauge the extent and the angle of people's alienation from the gospel. The logical structures within which we think through our own faith must be derived, as far as can be, from the gospel and the Scriptures. Hence our reference to John. But we need to understand the detailed morphology of human lives in the late second millennium, as well. '...He knew what was in a man' said John, of Jesus (2.25). It has been well remarked that Jesus did not just know what was in mankind; he knew what was in the man in front of him.

In his *Ethics*, written many decades ago, Bonhoeffer refers to Soloviev's story of the Antichrist where the heads of the persecuted churches, in the last days before the return of Christ, 'discuss the question of what is for each of them the most precious thing in Christianity.' The decisive answer is:

*'Jesus Christ Himself. Only he who shares in Him has the power to withstand and to overcome. He is the centre and the strength of the Bible, of the Church, and of theology, but also of humanity, of reason, of justice and of culture. Everything must return to Him; it is only under His protection that it can live. There seems to be a general unconscious knowledge which, in the hour of ultimate peril, leads everything which desires not to fall victim to the Antichrist to take refuge in Christ.'*⁷

This is a fine christology and encouraging vision, but what do we make of the last sentence? How much 'unconscious

knowledge' will we discover today? Do we find nothing in the end? Or is there something worse than the void? Just what do we have to drill through to find it? Or can we find a route that avoids the drilling? The questions admittedly strike a rhetorical note; they are actually quite humdrum, we may say, and a little exposure to the Scriptures will provide some answers. We certainly should mine the Scriptures for answers and this is a mine which will ever yield a greater wealth than we imagined possible. What became flesh, John tells us, is the Word through whom the universe was created, in whom it finds its coherent meaning, from whom emanates all human wisdom for, as other biblical authors will remind us, the Word and Wisdom are one.

Faith, then, humbly grounded in the report of unlearned and learned folk alike, is equally poised to contemplate the high reaches of reality in worshipping thought and to enter into the minutiae of the neighbour's circumstance in loving service. It labours incessantly that the world may believe. If its labour is a labour of love, its love's labour will not be lost.

¹ John 20.31, although there is a textual variant.

² We are thinking here of the presentation of the Gospel as a whole; Luke, of course, has a celebrated early announcement that critical research of empirical testimony is the basis of the ordered crafting of his own account (1.3)

³ That is, Jesus was, spoke, and acted, as reported. Reference to 'substantial' reliability in this context does not, of course, preclude belief in detailed reliability. I do not see how our heightened sensibilities about literary genre etc. forces us to modify this simple schema very much.

⁴ F.von Hugel, 'On the Preliminaries to Religious Belief and on the Facts of Suffering, Faith and Love' in *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Dent, 1924) p. 104.

⁵ *The Gay Science*, tr. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974) III.132

⁶ This is not to deny, however, that attitudes can be trans-culturally remarkably homogeneous.

⁷ New York: Macmillan, 1965, p.56

**House of God or House of David:
The Rhetoric of 2 Samuel 7
(JSOTSS 164)**

Lyle Eslinger
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994,
hb., £22.50.

One of the more obvious tensions in the books of Samuel and Kings concerns the royal line of David. In 2 Samuel 7 God gives David a promise, seemingly unconditional, that 'your house and your kingdom shall be sure for ever before me' (v. 16). However, later developments progressively call in question God's commitment to David's line: restatements of the promise in which conditions are attached (1 Ki. 2:2-4; 9:4-5); the split into Northern and Southern Kingdoms after Solomon's death; and the final catastrophes of the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles.

One strand in contemporary biblical scholarship essentially dissolves the tension by ascribing unconditional and conditional views of the Davidic covenant to different editorial layers in Samuel and Kings. Eslinger's study of 2 Samuel 7 follows a different tack altogether: God never made an unconditional promise to David. Previous scholarship, he argues, has largely ignored the rhetorical texture of 2 Samuel 7. First and foremost, the chapter is an extended dialogue, an exchange of viewpoints: David proposes building a temple for God, hoping to secure his descendants'

future (v. 2); God rejects the proposal and instead makes a promise to David which appears to give him all the security he wanted but is really as rigidly conditional on human obedience as the Sinai covenant (vv. 5-16); David's response (vv. 18-29) attempts to reinterpret God's words in his favour, as a promise with eternal validity (unconditional, therefore), but he succeeds in deceiving only himself. There are parallels, Eslinger argues, between this chapter and 1 Samuel 8, where the Israelites first request a king: both passages describe an attempt to seek protection from the terms of the Sinai covenant, and in both passages God seems to give in, but in fact concedes only what he intended all along.

Eslinger mounts an intricate case, based on a close reading of 2 Samuel 7. He finds a pervasive slipperiness in God's and David's words, reflecting the basically deceptive intent of both parties: God seems to offer David much more than he in fact does; David appears to accept God's terms, but then attempts to persuade God that he has committed himself further than he in fact has. Both God's and David's words (which Eslinger analyses by means of numerous diagrams) prove, on closer examination, to be honeycombed with devious redefinitions and qualifications, saying one thing and intending another. Neither God nor David

emerges in a flattering light from this study: God blends authoritarian pronouncements with deceit; David is self-seeking and fawning.

This book evoked a mixed response in me. Eslinger is good on the question of synchronic versus diachronic readings: an unusual feature of the book is that it includes an exchange of views on this point between Eslinger and A. Campbell. He is also right to point to echoes of the Sinai traditions in 2 Samuel 7: perhaps previous approaches which spoke of a Davidic covenant standing over against the Sinaitic covenant were misguided. But the detailed argumentation underlying Eslinger's characterization of God and David in 2 Samuel 7 generally left me unconvinced. Reviewing the chapter, I do not find intent to deceive in either party: David makes a proposal; God responds, replacing David's proposal with his own; David responds with thanks, nowhere going beyond what God has himself said. In general, rather than seeing 2 Samuel 7 as a re-run of 1 Samuel 8, I find considerable contrasts between the two episodes: the tone of 2 Samuel 7 and the preceding chapters seems to me more optimistic than 1 Samuel 8; and 2 Samuel 7:15 explicitly contrasts Saul's fate and that of David's descendants, a point Eslinger attempts to minimize (pp. 59-63), but in my view unsuccessfully.

In short, a skilful presentation of an implausible case.

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The Friendship of the Lord

Deryck Sheriffs

Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996,
363 pp., pb., £17.99.

There can be no doubt that there is all too often a gap between those matters which are of concern to academic biblical scholarship, and those which are of concern to the average Christian in the pew. As an examination of scholarly books and journals will soon make clear, academic biblical scholarship is very largely concerned with issues concerning the background, development and interpretation of the biblical literature. The average Christian in the pew, by contrast, is largely concerned with spirituality, the practical question of what it means to live a life pleasing to God in today's world.

There can also be no doubt that the gap between the concerns of biblical scholarship and those of the average Christian is unfortunate for both sides. Any study of the Bible which does not eventually explain more clearly what it means to live a God-fearing life fails to reflect the purpose for which the Bible was written (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Conversely, any form of spirituality that is not rooted in rigorous and detailed

study of the Bible runs the risk of being based on the ideas and aspirations of the contemporary world rather than on the truth about God and what he requires of us.

The strength of *The Friendship of the Lord* is that it attempts to bridge the gap between spirituality and academic biblical study. Deryck Sheriffs teaches the OT in an academic context at London Bible College, and as he says in the preface to his book, he believes that the '... goal of holding academic studies and life concerns together can be achieved if there is a will for it'. Dr Sheriffs clearly does have the will for it, and in *The Friendship of the Lord* the two are held together in a helpful and stimulating fashion.

On the one hand, he goes through a series of biblical texts ranging from Genesis 1 to Ecclesiastes, looking carefully at their literary structure, the meaning of the original Hebrew, and how they both reflect and differ from the Middle Eastern culture of their day. To give just one example, in his chapter on 'The Daily Rhythm of Life', he looks at the use of the language of solar imagery in Numbers 6:24-26 and Psalm 84:10-11 and explains how this both reflects the language used to describe royal favour in the Ancient Near East and implicitly challenges the importance given to kings in that culture: 'The priestly blessing acknowledges Yahweh as the source of all life and well being. If it is

Yahweh who is the source of well-being, the king is secondary.'

On the other hand, he also looks equally carefully at what these OT texts have to say to us today, considering them in the light of the NT and the issues facing us in today's world, and looking at crucially important topics for spirituality such as 'Walking with God', 'Facing Mundane Reality' and 'Guilt and Restoration'. On the last of these, for example, he looks at three 'penitential' Psalms (Pss. 51, 32 and 38) and compares and contrasts them with contemporary Mesopotamian prayers of confession. As a result of this comparison he concludes that the Psalms reflect a view of guilt and restoration centred in relationship with God which can provide us with a realistic understanding of guilt that will enable us to tackle the false guilt induced by ritualism, legalism, and exaggerated claims about faith healing and demon possession.

Sheriff's attempt to bring together the academic study of the OT and contemporary spiritual issues is, as I have indicated, laudable in intention and generally stimulating and helpful in practice. Nevertheless, I think it has three limitations.

Firstly, it is clearly a book for those who already have a good working knowledge of OT studies. I suspect that the ordinary Christian in the pew who picked up this book

looking for spiritual guidance would sink very rapidly. It would be good if Dr Sheriffs could be persuaded to write a more popular version for a wider readership.

Secondly, the weight of the book is undoubtedly on the side of OT studies. Although there are numerous spiritual insights to be found, I felt they tended to get a bit lost in the minutiae of exegesis and the explanation of the OT's cultural background.

Thirdly, I was surprised that the prophets did not get more of a look in. The only really extended engagement with the prophetic literature was a study of Jeremiah's Confessions. Obviously Dr Sheriffs would not be expected to cover the entire OT in detail, but surely an OT spirituality should say something about the prophetic perspective(s) on what it means to live rightly before God?

Overall, I think that this is a book that those who already have a good knowledge of the OT and want to think in more detail about the spiritual issues it raises will want to buy and read. However, more work still remains to be done in this area, particularly at a more popular level.

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**Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife
in Biblical Theology**

Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr

Leicester: IVP/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996,
200 pp., £12.99/\$18.00.

Raymond Ortlund speaks with a timely voice to the Church living in a society obsessed with sex. He presents a fine exposition of the biblical theme of the harlot as a metaphor for God's people when they reject his covenant love in order to be loved by others.

Ortlund's exposition of the sanctity of marriage, from Genesis, provides the necessary context in which the biblical metaphor of spiritual whoredom is to be properly understood. He identifies the exclusive nature of the human marriage relationship as exemplary of God's demand that his people worship him alone. Because God is the perfect 'husband', sin, both sexual and otherwise, is a betrayal of relationship with him. The metaphor of spiritual adultery is, therefore, an appropriate characterization of sinful people.

In subsequent chapters, Ortlund apologetically uses graphic language to trace the theme of spiritual harlotry through selected passages in the Pentateuch, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Ancient Israel became an adulterous wife by entering into political treaties with pagan nations instead of trusting in Yahweh alone, yet God continued to promise a

future reconciliation, his marriage with them. Ortlund explains one incident of Israel's harlotry this way:

... The bloodshed of Jezreel constitutes spiritual whoredom ... [It] was whoredom toward God because it evidenced a 'whatever it takes' attitude of thrusting oneself forward at the expense of others. Spiritual adultery entails more than religious offences; whenever God is not trusted fully and obeyed exactly, including in the realm of politics, his people deny the adequacy of his care and protection, so that they fend for themselves, on their own terms. (p. 52)

The motivation for spiritual unfaithfulness identified by Ortlund is a timely warning for the evangelical Church today:

The spiritual answers and resources offered in the covenant seemed unreal in the face of visible dangers. ... The people failed to make meaningful connections between their theology, history and worship, on the one hand, and their real-life problems, on the other hand. (p. 48)

Ortlund's biblical theology of harlotry bridges the Testaments by explaining how Jesus Christ fulfils God's long-suffering promise to be reconciled with and sanctify his harlot-bride. Jesus Christ is the divine husband, whose own blood forever removes the stains of his bride's previous harlotry. The Church in spiritual

union with Christ perfects the long-promised marriage between Yahweh and his chosen people. Ortlund expounds several passages from the NT, such as 2 Corinthians 11:1-3, Ephesians 5:31-32, and several from Revelation, to show that the necessity of personal moral purity, both sexual and otherwise, follows from the spiritual reality of one-spirit union with Christ.

An appendix provides Ortlund's response to feminist interpretation of the harlot metaphor.

Unfortunately, he chooses to interact with two of the more radical feminist interpreters, Athalya Brenner and Fokkeli van Dijk-Hemmes, who understand the harlot metaphor to be ancient pornography motivated by the misogynist intent of the biblical writers. Such a viewpoint is so far removed from evangelical Christian sympathies that Ortlund's critique of it is not likely to be of central concern to his presumed audience. One wishes that he had chosen to interact with interpreters who share more of his fundamental convictions. His response to Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes is a fine critique of the radical subjectivism of postmodern hermeneutics that informs feminist interpretation in general. However, van Dijk-Hemmes raises an often overlooked point that the nature of this biblical metaphor allows male readers to identify with the righteous wronged husband rather than with

the female harlot, escaping the force of the text that indicts the male kings and priests who led ancient Israel into spiritual harlotry. The issue of gender identification in Bible reading deserves more attention in evangelical hermeneutics.

Ortlund's sound exegesis of this easily misunderstood biblical theme provides insight into the profoundly intimate nature of the Church's relationship with God, and exposes sin in any form as a violation of the ultimate one-spirit marriage with Jesus Christ.

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**How to Read the New Testament:
An Introduction to Linguistic and
Historical-Critical Methodology**

Wilhelm Egger

Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996,
232 pp.

Wilhelm Egger's volume represents yet another call for biblical scholarship to integrate and complement the well-rehearsed methods of historical criticism with the best tools of modern linguistics. Utilizing the famous Saussurean dichotomy of synchronic/diachronic, Egger divides his book into two major sections covering various levels of linguistic analysis (synchronic study) and a summary but helpful review and application of the better known historical-critical methods (diachronic study). The emphasis, however, is placed squarely

upon synchronic analysis, which takes up roughly the first one third of the book. The author's rationale for this choice seems unquestionable, namely, that only after systematic linguistic analysis of a text has been carried out will apparent 'gaps' or 'stitches' be explainable by recourse to sources.

Having touched upon preliminary issues such as text and communication theory and translation (chs. 2-6), Egger launches into his survey of four levels of linguistic analysis, representing steps to be followed in order in the study of the biblical texts: linguistic-syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and analysis of genres, each accompanied by an application in a specific NT text. At this point, the author's refusal to 'promote any one linguistic theory' (see also the introduction by Boers) begins to detract from the overall coherence and clarity. Though the entire 'synchronic reading' section is helpful as an introductory survey of various linguistic methods and their possible application to NT texts, its four sub-sections appear insufficiently connected with each other, and their relation to the historical-critical methods introduced later is unclear. On one hand, Egger's distribution of his material, together with his explicit statement as mentioned above, reveal the pre-eminent place he wishes to give to linguistic analysis; on the other hand, among

his criteria for selecting linguistic methods is that they be 'connected' to the traditional historical-critical approaches (p. 11). The issue of the level of independence and priority of linguistic analysis is never clearly resolved in Egger's volume. Further, the somewhat disjointed way in which the four levels of linguistic analysis are treated is difficult to accept in light of recent successful models of discourse analysis within which semantics, syntax and pragmatics are inseparable (see e.g. M.A.K. Halliday, *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London: Edward Arnold, 1985)).

Scholars not acquainted with modern linguistic methods of the kind introduced in Egger's book are bound to enquire regarding the pragmatic benefits of such new approaches. More specifically, the question will be raised: If linguistics can add to our understanding of the biblical texts, then linguistics scholars must be able to point out to us significant features we have missed because of our lack of understanding of the workings of the Greek language. From the standpoint of results, Chapter 9 of Egger's volume ('Semantic Analysis') seems to have the most to offer. Thus, Egger shows that carrying out a complete inventory of the 'meaning lines' in a text reveals the presence of key points in the text, and keeps the reader from noticing only certain

elements. The author's discussion of transitivity and narrative analysis in the same chapter is no less fruitful. Much less productive, however, is Egger's treatment of 'Pragmatic Analysis' (ch. 10) and 'Analysis of Textual Genres' (ch. 11). In the former chapter, Egger identifies as textual functions only those that are explicitly referred to by the biblical writer (e.g. distinguishing addressees in 1 Cor. 7, a request in Philemon 8-10, etc.). In Chapter 11, Egger's findings in regard to the *Sitz im Leben* of Mark's Gospel are not at all the result of linguistic analysis, but rather of redaction/tradition criticism.

The mentioned criticisms aside, *How to Read the New Testament* offers the reader a helpful introductory-level sampling of some of the better-known linguistic methods being successfully applied to the NT, as well as a useful summary of most of the traditional historical-critical approaches.

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The Graeco-Roman Context of Early Christian Literature (JSNTSS 137)

Roman Garrison
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997,
123 pp., hb., £24.50/US \$40.00.

The title of Roman Garrison's work might lead the reader to expect either a heavyweight historical

survey of the world in which early Christian literature came into being or an index of resources for exploring that world, like Everett Ferguson's helpful *Backgrounds to Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). What we have instead is a slim monograph exploring a number of suggestive themes which have the potential to illuminate the ambivalent relationship between early Christian texts and the literary culture of the Graeco-Roman world. Thus successive chapters look at sexual attitudes in Paul and the cult of Aphrodite; Jesus' 'eating with tax-collectors' and the symposium tradition; 'last words' in the Gospels and in 'hellenistic Roman drama'; political concord in Plutarch and in I Clement; the will of God and the pagan idea of fate; the love of money in Polycarp; misunderstandings of the kingdom; and the 'athlete' metaphor in the Stoics and in Paul. It is a fascinating agenda, and Garrison makes a number of interesting juxtapositions not only with the more obvious philosophical traditions (Plato, Musonius Rufus, Epictetus) but also with the big themes of Greek epic and drama: Achilles on the inevitability of a fated death and Hippolytus as a type of innocent suffering. Ultimately, however, the total result is disappointing. Too much of the book comes across as a series of 'intriguing parallels' (p.23) without a coherent theoretical framework: 'no

particular thesis is being defended; it is enough to have the reader consider possibilities' (p.26). If there is a programme, it is 'to call attention to the social and even linguistic setting of early Christian literature' (p.26); but Garrison is not the first to make this (in itself excellent) proposal, and his book takes little account of the important strides that have been made in the last twenty years in working towards a more precise and detailed map of the complex relationships which connect early Christianity to the cultural world of the Greeks and Romans. Bibliography is patchy, with some good material (*e.g.* on the symposium theme in ch. 3), but there is too much reliance on older secondary literature (students need more critical guidance here). Even where the relevant literature is cited, it has not always been allowed to affect the text (*e.g.* in ch. 2, where the author cites Murphy-O'Connor but does not engage with his critique of the consensus view on cult prostitution in Corinth; Will Deming's *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy* (SNTSMS 83; Cambridge University Press, 1995), which is highly pertinent here, was perhaps too late to be included). The text contains an alarming number of editorial infelicities (*e.g.* repetition on pp. 11/27, 96/98) and errors, especially in the use of Greek words within English sentences (*e.g.* p. 38, where $\acute{\alpha}\theta\eta\iota$ $\epsilon\pi\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{o}\alpha\varsigma$ is treated as if it were $\acute{\alpha}\theta\eta$ $\epsilon\pi\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{o}\alpha\varsigma$; or pp. 98-101,

where ἡγκράτεια seems to be used interchangeably with ἀδωτάρκεια; p. 99 n. 21 Diogenes Laertius 2.24 describes Socrates as ἀδωτάρχης, not ἡγκρατῆς).

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The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World (BST)

John R.W. Stott
Leicester: IVP, 1994,
432 pp., pb, £12.99.

This contribution to the Bible Speaks Today series of expositions is destined to be a classic of its type. In the preface Stott argues that the BST volumes should have three strengths: a serious engagement with the text, an applied focus, and a readable style. In the exposition he then proceeds to deliver the goods on all three fronts. The clarity of his exposition is admirable, with numerous apt citations from a range of writers, and an orderly approach. Romans is divided into 28 manageable portions and each one of these is presented in a comprehensible manner, with preachable pegs everywhere. The very first passage gives a good example of this: headed 'Romans 1:1-6: Paul and the Gospel', it has the subheadings 'The origin of the gospel is God', 'The attestation of the gospel is Scripture', 'The substance of the gospel is Jesus Christ', 'The scope of the gospel is all

the nations', 'The purpose of the gospel is the obedience of faith', and 'The goal of the gospel is the honour of Christ's name'.

Throughout the exposition, and without labouring them, Stott helpfully addresses a wide range of contemporary issues raised by the text of Romans. Here is readily understood exposition without too many frills, perfect for putting into the hands of someone preparing Bible studies on Romans, and useful for borrowing outlines for talks or sermons.

In a helpful preliminary essay Stott sets forth the primary framework of his exposition: Romans as a statement of the truths of the gospel of grace, understood in continuity with the Reformers. Stott interacts critically with Stendahl, Sanders, and the new perspective on Paul, arguing that there are sufficient reasons in 4 Ezra and the later Rabbinic literature to suspect that popular self-righteousness could have characterized Jews in Paul's day and thus have been the basis for Paul's antithetical remarks (rather than pride in Jewish national identity). Although the controversy between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome is said to 'be heard rumbling throughout Romans', the tendency here, and more especially in the exposition proper, is to emphasize general theological truths. Indeed, other than a change of mind on Romans 7,

the exposition throughout seems solidly Reformed in orientation. (In *Men Made New* Stott took the view that the person depicted in 7:14ff. was a mature, believing Christian; here he acknowledges the weaknesses in the traditional Reformed view and opts for a compromise position: the person is an OT believer, regenerate but lacking the Spirit).

Students and preachers will thus find this exposition provides a simple introduction to Romans and a valuable stimulus to exposition. They will also be aware of the weaknesses of this sort of volume, which can turn the turbulent torrent of Romans, and the battlefield of contemporary scholarship, into an ordered calm. More than once the mischievous thought popped into my mind that Stott may be clearer than Paul. Innumerable points of controversy are resolved in tidy fashion, often using good judgement and incisive argument, occasionally succumbing to the preacher's favourite tool when faced with two or three alternative views: forging a view which combines them all (e.g. on 'righteousness of God' on p. 63). What emerges is certainly safe and sound, but one misses something of the struggle and the passion to which Stott alludes in his preface and which were clearly present in the lifetime of study reflected here, but which have actually been masked by the air of

measured calm that pervades the exposition (but not the apostle's original composition). Obviously, there is more to Romans than can be contained even in the biggest and best Bible Speaks Today.

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Preface to the Study of Paul

Stephen Westerholm
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997,
xii + 128 pp., pb., \$13.00.

Biblical scholars, like scholars in any other field, can easily fall into the trap of writing only for one another. By training and experience, we become familiar with the 'discourse world' of modern technical scholarship – a world with its own assumptions about methods and techniques and its own peculiar technical language. And so even well-read, intelligent Christians find our books difficult to understand, while for the unbeliever they are all but incomprehensible.

Stephen Westerholm recognizes and laments this problem. And his *Preface to the Study of Paul* seeks to do something about it. Specifically, Westerholm is out to bridge the gap between the 'horizon' of the apostle Paul and the 'horizon' of the modern non-Christian. To do so, Westerholm recognizes, one must attack the issue at the level of world-view. Paul articulates his understanding of God, reality

and salvation from within a Judaeo-Christian world-view that few unbelievers share anymore. To make Paul's vision intelligible to the sceptical postmodern, bored with 'religion' and all its trappings, some serious spadework at the level of world-view is necessary. So in *Preface to Paul* Westerholm works through Paul's greatest theological letter, Romans, trying to make the apostle's basic ideas clear to the modern reader by laying bare the assumptions that lie behind his argument.

We may take Chapter 3, 'War Against Goodness' (pp. 20-31), as a typical example of Westerholm's approach. Here he is dealing with Paul's discussion of human sinfulness in Romans 1:18-32. Many commentaries on Romans would simply plunge into the details of the text. But Westerholm realizes that the whole idea of 'sin' is as foreign to our modern Western world as the horse-drawn carriage, so he begins with analogies that might help the reader get an idea of the biblical notion of sin. In several brief vignettes from modern life, he portrays the notion of self-gratifying behaviour. Ashley and Chrystal, for instance, ignore the needs of the people they have been sent to help as social workers while engaging in trivial conversation with one another. Brandon, growing up to treat everything as existing for his own pleasure, ends up raping a

girl. Here, Westerholm argues, is a kind of self-centred behaviour that all people innately condemn as 'wrong'. And it is not a matter simply of breaking rules; what Ashley, Chrystal and Brandon demonstrate is behaviour that fails to take into consideration 'the reality of a world much bigger than themselves' (p. 26).

Westerholm then moves to the book of Proverbs, demonstrating that, here again, the essence of 'wrong' behaviour consists in failing to take God and his created world into account. Finally, then, we are ready for Romans 1:18-32. Westerholm gives no verse-by-verse interpretation; rather, he notes simply that Paul here also portrays human behaviour as wrong because it fails to recognize the place of God and the created order. Paul speaks in this section not about breaking laws but about insulting the person of God and about actions – such as homosexuality – that involve 'seizing the gods of the created order on one's own terms' (p. 30). And so Westerholm concludes: 'we choose our own actions. But we do so in a world in which there are appropriate responses to the reality that confronts us and others are that inappropriate. There is right and there is wrong, there is good and there is evil. And which we do makes a profound difference' (p. 31).

I think that Westerholm accomplishes his purposes well in this chapter – and,

indeed, throughout the book. *Preface to the Study of Paul* is an excellent introduction, for the contemporary unbeliever, of many of the most important of Paul's theological teachings. And Christians can also profit from the book's fresh portrayal of well-known theological themes. There is something refreshing about a book on Romans without a single reference to another scholar!

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Unveiling the Apocalyptic Paul: Paul's Interpreters and the Rhetoric of Criticism (JSNTSS 127)

R. Barry Matlock

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, 361 pp., £43.

Before any criticisms of this book are registered, it should be mentioned that it is a highly worthwhile study that deserves scholarly attention. It has two distinct parts: a tracing of the history of concern for 'apocalyptic/apocalypticism' in Pauline studies from Albert Schweitzer to Ernst Käsemann, and a discussion of the concept of apocalyptic/apocalypticism itself. Matlock's approach is informed by modern philosophical hermeneutics, and much of the clarity that he brings to the topic seems to stem from the principles he has drawn from this area and its key proponents, such as Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Matlock's critique of modern discussion of apocalyptic/

apocalypticism, following largely in the steps of Christopher Rowland's work, is decisive and scathing. He draws embarrassing attention to the circularity of 'apocalypticism' as a category of thought that is supposedly drawn from 'apocalypses', and then the designation of works as 'apocalyptic' that display features of 'apocalypticism' (which are not the apocalypticism of the original documents that gave rise to the concept of 'apocalyptic'). His conclusion (following others) that 'apocalypticism', if it will be a helpful category for interpretation, needs to be drawn from the 'apocalypses', is telling. The use of such a category in the investigation of Paul's eschatological expectations, although time-honoured and virtually hallowed in Pauline studies, is in need of much redefinition, as, indeed, is the entire concept of 'apocalypticism'. The discussion of this topic in specific terms, as well as critique of the modern use of 'apocalypticism' to interpret Paul (in figures such as J.C. Beker), is by far the most rewarding part of the book (pp. 247-316) and is, indeed, that section with which scholarly discussion of the topic will now have to contend. The lack of a positive solution to the problem on Matlock's part will be seen by many as unfortunate, but it is to be hoped that Matlock's further work will address this shortcoming.

Now, unfortunately, to some

criticism of this fine project. Although the book review is not always the place to speak of such matters as style and the use of language, Matlock's long-winded and florid style must be noted. Two things in specific should be mentioned (and forgiven by those who make use of this study).

(1) Quotations in the book are consistently much too long – running to over a page of single-spaced, indented material – and almost never necessary (he tends to sum up the salient points both before and after the quotations). (2) Matlock's writing style is very florid in places. These items do not detract from the value of the book, but they do make it harder to navigate through the superfluous pages. The length of his accounts of various Pauline scholars' use of apocalyptic, coupled with his idiosyncratic referencing style (he tends simply to cite page numbers in the body of the text) mean frequent backtracking and confusion while reading. (He even seems to have been able to drive the press to print an entire excursus of several pages in small type, a practice for which Sheffield Academic press is not known.) A final difficulty with the book is the rather sharp criticism of J.H. Charlesworth (see esp. p. 282). Deserving or not, the manner of stating the criticism is unworthy.

Again, however, I must reiterate that, for all the frustrations of reading this study, it is of the highest

quality. Students of apocalyptic and/or Paul will ignore it at their peril.

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Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God

Gordon Fee
Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996,
xv + 208 pp., pb.

This is largely a popularized and abbreviated version of *God's Empowering Presence* (Hendrickson, 1994/Paternoster, 1995). It is aimed at the reader who has not studied theology in an academic context and looking for information rather than raising questions. The author has a gift for making even the obvious significant: for example, hymns which are addressed to God also convey teaching material (p. 161); tongues are directed towards God, and Paul holds their private used in high regard (p. 169). There is a welcome reticence about some issues: whether a 'message of wisdom' is a 'spontaneous expression of Spirit-wisdom ... can never be known' (p. 168). Whether 'tongues' constitute an actual earthly language 'is a moot point, but the overall evidence suggests no' (p. 169). Indeed, whether today's 'charismatic phenomena' replicate the NT descriptions of the Pauline churches is also 'moot – and probably irrelevant. There is simply no way to know' (p. 170).

These are brave admissions from someone who acknowledges a Pentecostal background and sympathies. Similarly, baptism in the Spirit is part of the whole experience of becoming a Christian. Hence it might seem petty to quibble with such statements as 'there is not a hint of a worship leader' (p. 154); 'Praying and prophesying ... represent the two primary focuses of gathered worship' (p. 155); and 'through baptism believers *re-enact* [my italics] their association with Christ' (p. 202). But were none expected to 'chair' worship gatherings, as synagogue patterns might lead us to expect? Did not the OT serve as Scripture for the Church against which praying and prophesying could be tested? It is surprising that Christology does not have a higher profile in defining what Paul counts as being 'spiritual': the 'body' controlled wholly by the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:44) will reflect the image of Christ (15:49). But for the most part this is a helpful, clear and readable book based on a close study of Paul.

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The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts

Craig S. Keener
Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997,
xxi + 282 pp., hb.

I have *greatly* enjoyed some of Craig Keener's writings, and so accepted with alacrity the invitation to review this expanded rewrite of his 1991

Duke University doctoral thesis (on John). Essentially, his position is as follows:

(1) The Judaism out of which the NT sprang had two strands of pneumatology, which remained largely distinct: the 'Spirit of prophecy' and the purifying Spirit. The latter is attested to rather rarely, being found especially in the few texts reflecting Ezekiel 36:25-27 (*Jubilees*, parts of the Dead Sea Scrolls), though also in *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Virtually universal, however (including in other parts of the works just mentioned), was the view that the Spirit gave prophecy and revelatory wisdom/insight/knowledge. Rabbis thought this gift had ceased in Israel; other circles admitted the continuation of prophecy, but regarded it as rare. Virtually no parties any longer thought of the Spirit as empowering mighty works.

(2) Turning to Mark, 1:8-13 is above all paradigmatic for the pneumatology of the Gospel. Jesus' Spirit-baptism (a pattern for that of believers) reveals the Spirit as the presence of the kingdom of God in (a) empowerment for mission (esp. witness; cf. 13:11), (b) the power of mighty works against Satan (1:12-13 provides the base for the exorcistic power of 3:28), and (c) the ability to participate in suffering and the cross (for the baptismal voice, interpreting the descent of the Spirit to Jesus, addresses him as the suffering servant). Mark thus combines the two strands

within Judaism, the Spirit of prophecy and the Spirit of purification – and he adds the forgotten ‘Spirit of power’.

(3) Matthew extends the Markan emphases and also adds that the Spirit is paradigmatically the source of healing miracles of compassion, and the spread of justice to the Gentiles (12:18-21).

(4) John focuses on the Spirit above all as the cleansing power of new birth (i.e. mainly as the eschatological ‘water’ of the Spirit, in polemical antithesis to Jewish water rites; this in Jn. 3, 4, 7, 10 and 13), although he also develops the Jewish ‘Spirit of prophecy’ in his portrait of the Paraclete/ Advocate in the farewell discourses and in 20:22.

(5) Acts, by contrast, emphasizes the Spirit largely (but not exclusively) as a continually renewable *donum superadditum* of empowering for prophecy and proclamation.

There is much in the main ‘plot’ of this book to commend it, and a lot more in the fine detail. But this book also invites critical questions concerning its scope and argument.

Concerning scope, it seems an extraordinarily lumpy mattress: great detail on minor points of significance; too little on major areas (at the extreme, the Baptist’s ‘apparel and diet’ gets as much room as the whole of Luke’s Gospel – about a

page). Given its title, we might have anticipated a far more even treatment of the witness of the evangelists. Luke–Acts, which represents a quarter of the whole NT and (as everyone admits) has a special interest in pneumatology, should surely have received more than a mere eleven pages of text (and those are largely devoted to the Pentecost account). And the important Spirit/Paraclete teaching in John 14–16 is only mentioned in a few (scattered) sentences. What makes this disparity the more incongruous is that almost half the pages of the work – and far more than half the words – are devoted to endnotes, often of relative inconsequence.

With respect to the fundamental argument, I would have to disagree with Keener. The strands in Judaism’s eschatological hope concerning the Spirit were not separate. For Judaism the one ‘Spirit of prophecy’ (rightly understood) could combine them (see my *Power from on High*, Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, chs. 3–5). For example, the Spirit resting on the variety of ‘messianic’ figures was quite widely understood by Judaism (reflecting on Is. 11:2–4) to be both the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge (= Spirit of prophecy), but – as that – simultaneously the Spirit who would promote the ‘fear of the Lord’. This latter is Keener’s ‘Spirit of purification’; so 1 Enoch 62:1–2 can even refer to this endowment as

the 'Spirit of righteousness'; the same was true in both messianic and non-messianic contexts at Qumran. In this quite widespread Jewish tradition, the same 'Spirit of prophecy' was also the Spirit of might/power to deliver from enemies. While I am not sure that Mark specifically relates the Spirit to 'purification' or the life of suffering (the baptismal voice refers to Is. 42, not Is. 53), Luke, John and Paul each present simple (albeit profoundly christological) developments of this multiple-stranded 'Spirit of prophecy' in Judaism's hope, and they do so without bifurcating the gift into (e.g.) initial purification and later empowerment.

This book has plenty of good points to mull over, but overall I was a bit disappointed.

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Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament

Richard L. Longenecker (ed.)

Grand Rapids, Mi./Cambridge: Eerdmans,
1996, 308 pp., pb, \$25.00/£16.99.

'Make disciples of all the nations' (Mt. 28:18-20) has been understood as the heartbeat of Christ's commission for the Church of all ages. We see clearly in the Gospels the disciples of Jesus gathered around him, learning from him the essence of discipleship. We also see clearly in the book of Acts newly converted

disciples receiving this teaching from Jesus' first disciples. Yet when we turn to the books of the NT that speak directly to the life of the earliest churches (the epistles and Revelation), we find a striking absence of the term 'disciples' (*mathētes/mathētai*). Given this phenomenon, can we find patterns of discipleship in the NT that connect the teaching and practices of Jesus and his earliest disciples with the life of the earliest church? Not many works on discipleship have addressed this phenomenon directly.

A symposium at McMaster Divinity College in Ontario, Canada, set out to do so. The result is *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, edited by Professor Richard Longenecker. This collection of essays by scholars involved in the symposium aims to present solid biblical scholarship that addresses personal application for readers as they seek to be better disciples of Jesus Christ, since, in the words of the editor, discipleship lies at the heart of all Christian thought, life and ministry.

As one might expect from a collection of essays, a variety of exegetical methods are employed, especially in the discussion of the Gospels and Acts. This includes a biblical, theological examination of themes in Mark (Larry Hurtado), a literary approach to Matthew's disciples (Terence Donaldson), a redaction-critical analysis of

discipleship in Luke's Gospel and Acts (Richard Longenecker) and a lexical perspective of discipleship terminology (Melvyn Hillmer). This collection of methods can be somewhat confusing to the uninitiated, and some of the working presuppositions might be questioned (*e.g.* Hillmer's rejection of traditional authorship of the Johannine materials), but these chapters highlight standard methodologies employed in the Gospels. Although there is nothing really groundbreaking here, these essays accent the general conclusions that have been reached in discipleship studies in the Gospels and Acts in the past 40 years.

The task in approaching discipleship in the Pauline letters and the rest of the NT is different. In the first place, because the explicit terms for disciple/discipleship are absent, one must make a case for the existence of this phenomenon. From there one must determine whether discipleship in the epistles/Revelation is the same as, different from, or unrelated to that found in the Gospels/Acts. What is the relationship of 'discipleship' to the Christian life generally? Is it only one aspect of it, or is it co-extensive with the Christian life? While there is no direct, extended discussion of these questions in this volume, each author operates under certain assumptions.

On the one hand, some acknowledge the absence of disciple terminology but

readily find patterns of discipleship in these writings that either parallel or connect directly with the form of discipleship found in the Gospels. This surfaces in such themes as 'holiness' (Jeffrey Wiema, p. 98), 'imitation' (Linda Belleville, pp. 121, 140–41), the 'cost of relationship to Jesus' (William Lane, p. 204), 'the shape of Christian existence' (Peter Davids, p. 225), 'following Jesus' to heaven (Ramsey Michaels, pp. 248–9), and 'following victoriously and obediently the risen Christ' (David Aune, p. 283). What might have been clarified more fully in these chapters is the connection between any particular theme and other themes, and to the whole of discipleship and the Christian life.

On the other hand, some suggest that discipleship in Paul is different from that found in the Gospels. This may be because Paul does not draw upon the Gospels, but rather draws upon a broad understanding of discipleship found throughout the ancient world, *i.e.* the religious and moral purpose of achieving 'likeness to God' (Ann Jervis, pp. 144, 161). Or it may be because the post-resurrection era calls for a distinctively new pattern in which Christ's followers now, instead of following Jesus around the countryside, pattern their lives on Christ by 'imitating his thoughts and actions'. In so doing Paul intentionally avoided disciple terminology (Gerald Hawthorne, pp. 165–7).

Two essays provide a more comprehensive approach. Michael Knowles demonstrates that discipleship in the post-resurrection era can be summarized in the Pauline expression 'in Christ'. The emphasis is not upon merely gaining correct understanding or adopting correct behaviour, but more fully involves 'being renewed' to gradual conformity to the image of God and full humanity as represented by Christ (Knowles, pp. 180–81, 200–01). Richard Longenecker makes links between the era of Jesus and his disciples and that of the early church by defining discipleship generally as 'authentic Christian existence', and discipleship teachings concern 'Christian self-understanding and practice ...' (p. 5). These latter approaches rightly see discipleship as the holistic relationship initiated by Jesus in his early ministry that is the foundation for the post-resurrection relationship with him. One could wish that this comprehensive understanding of discipleship was used more explicitly to give general guidance to all the essays.

The attempt to apply the scholarly material to present-day life is perhaps more uneven. Some chapters (e.g. Donaldson, Longenecker, Hillmer, Belleville, Davids) offer important implications for present disciples of Jesus Christ, while acknowledging the hermeneutical difficulties of moving from the first-

century setting, time and culture to the present. However, roughly half of the chapters, while giving a clear statement of what discipleship entails in their respective NT book, do not offer any clearly articulated bridge to present application, contrary to the editor's stated goal for the volume.

Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament strikes out in a significant manner to display the essence of discipleship from most quarters of the NT. (Some crucial NT books are omitted, such as the Pastorals, which would have brought other themes, such as mentoring, into the discussion). It demonstrates convincingly that explicit disciple terminology and forms prominent in the Gospels and Acts (e.g. 'disciples' following Jesus around) are implicit in related terms and forms in the epistles and Revelation (e.g. believers who are 'in Christ', 'following' and 'imitating' Christ). It accomplishes its intended goal, at least in part. As to its scholarship, Professor Longenecker assembled a fine symposium of scholars to display these discipleship patterns, some of whom have addressed discipleship themes in their scholarly works for many years. Readers will have to supply personal application more than the editor may have intended, but for a scholarly overview of the issues this is a helpful volume, and essential reading for those

wanting a serious exploration of patterns of discipleship in the NT.

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Philosophical Idealism and Christian Belief

Alan P.F. Sell

Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995,
338 pp., £35.00.

Professor Sell seeks to fill a definite 'gap in the market' with his book on some important thinkers in the Idealist tradition who flourished in the early years of this century in Britain. His aim is to give an account of their life and thought and to explore their connection with Christianity. While it is clearly true that the philosophical movement of absolute Idealism, like the seeds that fell on rocky ground, where they had not much soil, sprang up but withered quickly in the sun, displaying too little rootage to do more than impress briefly, nevertheless it did give rise to interesting thinkers who deserve to be retrieved and heard.

The figures chosen are those who straddled philosophy and theology, all seeking to baptize insights gained from Hegelian metaphysics. The motif running through the narrative of these thinkers is whether such metaphysics really is an ally of the Christian gospel, or whether, like the instruments of darkness in Macbeth, all it does is to 'tell us truths, win us with honest trifles, to

betray us in deepest consequence'.

Sell comes across as a sympathetic expositor of all seven British Idealists: T.H. Green, Edward Caird, J.R. Illingworth, Henry Jones, A.S. Pringle Pattison, C.C.J. Webb and A.E. Taylor, a nice mixture of Scots, Welsh and English, with a particular focus on Oxford. We hear of the characters and careers of the cast, and in an interesting fashion which seeks to draw the reader into their thought by the historical route and generally succeeds well. Occasionally one feels that details are included unnecessarily: for example, one wonders whether we need to know that Clement Webb was a member of Marston Parish Council). Generally we have a judicious and carefully researched presentation of life and thought, which makes the work interesting to both historians and to students of theological philosophy.

The first two chapters set out the intellectual background of the seven and sketch their lives. These chapters are packed with names and incident, much of it enlightening and providing a helpful context. As regards Sell's treatment of the intellectual provenance of British Idealism, I wondered whether the English Platonist strand was given sufficient place as a contributory factor. The third and fourth chapters take a more thematic approach and examine the Idealists'

treatment of God and the absolute, and ethics and society, perhaps the two most significant themes we would wish to be selected.

At the heart of the idealists' discussion of God and the absolute, is the difficulty of defending the notion of a personal or relational Judaeo-Christian God with the absolute, which, as the purer Idealist philosophers of the day, Bradley and Bosanquet, pointed out, must be beyond our knowledge and fellowship. Sell quotes Bradley: 'The absolute cannot be God because in the end the absolute is related to nothing' (p. 120), and Bosanquet rejecting Webb's doctrine: 'Surely, personal intercourse must be with what is one among others and ultimate reality must be what is all-inclusive' (p. 145). (As little as Sell resists mentioning Webb and Marston Parish Council can I resist reminding cricket lovers that Bosanquet invented and named the googly or, as the Australians call it, the 'bosie'.) John Macquarrie's modern doctrine, in rejecting the I-Thou model of revelation, uses similar Hegelian reasoning today. The theme dealt with in this chapter through the seven, as they interact with their critics, is well worth while and loaded with quotation, perhaps too much so at times.

The problem of evil and sin as mediated by the Hegelian tradition is perhaps the other great tension with

Christian theology. The issue here is that of the smoothly ascending gradation of matter to mind and spirit, as found for instance in Edward Caird's work, over against the rugged biblicist and evangelical insistence on the terrible division introduced by sin, the wound that cannot be covered – save by the blood of the cross. Hegel nauseated Kierkegaard for this reason, and likewise James Denney and P.T. Forsyth interpreted reconciliation as a result of the great moral act of the individual Christ on the cross, and not as a process at work generally in the universe. Few issues can be of such importance to Christian theology, and again the book is worth reading for raising and pondering this through these Idealists. At the end of the day the synthesis does not really hold because of just this fault-line at the scandal of particularity and 'the old rugged cross', notwithstanding the very Anglican effort to deploy the doctrine of the incarnation to unite God with man metaphysically.

We are more used, these days, to perusing such issues through Kierkegaard and Barth, Schleiermacher and Coleridge, Bultmann and Pannenberg. It is good to be taken through these permanently important themes in the thought of these neglected seven British Idealists, who regarded themselves as thoroughly Christian first and foremost rather than merely speculative metaphysicians, and whose

lives revealed this.

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The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann

Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg, Thomas Kucharz (eds.)
Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B.
Eerdmans, 1996,
316 pp., \$35.00/£22.99.

This *Festschrift* honouring the 70th birthday of Professor Jürgen Moltmann of Tübingen University is a delight to read for all students of serious and substantive theological reflection. Few if any other theologians have done as much as Professor Moltmann to shape the discipline of theology in the second half of this century and his influence is demonstrated by this *Festschrift* whose contributors read like a 'Who's Who in Theology' from many different countries and theological perspectives.

Miroslav Volf, the primary editor of this volume, was himself a graduate student of Moltmann's during the 1980s when Volf taught in Yugoslavia before becoming Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. He has organized the essays around the theme of the 'future of theology', with each essay being a proposal for the normative shape of the discipline in the 21st century. The three subdivisions of the book are organized loosely into the categories of 'challenges',

'perspectives' and 'themes', but the assignment of particular essays into different categories is not exact since many of the 'perspectives' and 'themes' give challenges and perspectival articles suggest themes. Needless to say, such a diverse collection of authors have considerable disagreements over the shape of that future. Evangelicals will agree more with some perspectives than with others.

Among the most central challenges of the future for theology is the pluralism not only of what Volf calls 'social worlds' (p. x), but of theologies themselves. This fact leads to both the promise of more authentic dialogue and the adventure of exploration along new paths, but it also brings the threat of an 'anything goes' quagmire. Contributors like Douglass John Hall, Dorothee Soelle and John Cobb Jr acknowledge the threat, but place more emphasis on the promise. On the other hand, contributors like Stanley Hauerwas, Johann Baptist Metz and Wolfhart Pannenberg see the threat as larger than the promise, even though they acknowledge the latter. Volf, Nicholas Wolterstorff and Paul Ricoeur are among the most balanced in weighing these possibilities. Similar diversities are displayed concerning the challenges of the progressive marginalization of theology in public discourse and the further alienation of the discipline from the life of the

Church. To this are added the numerous challenges of a whole line of significant issues that concern the life and happiness of millions. Ought theology to avoid being issue-driven? Or are issues like gender, race, poverty and ecological survival to be among the topics of sustained theological reflection? Do such issues (singly or together) require a radical rethinking of classical theological *loci*, or would attempts at minor adjustments or even a simple retrieval of genuine Christian tradition be more appropriate? All of these are issues that have been important to Moltmann's work, and the essays challenge all to rethink their own perspectives.

In the course of his long theological career, Jürgen Moltmann has taken seriously the perspectives of liberation theologies (Latin American, African-American, South African, Asian, feminist), evangelicals (who have taken longer to engage with his work, especially in the US), Anabaptist Mennonites, Roman Catholics, mainline ecumenical Protestants, and postliberals. Many of these same interlocutors are among the contributors to this *Festschrift*, but one of the drawbacks is that some of their essays do not interact substantively with Moltmann's work, either to praise, critique or advance. James H. Cone's essay, 'Martin, Malcolm, and Black Theology', repeats essays

that he has published in several other places. Further, despite the fact that both Cone and Moltmann have drawn repeatedly on each other's work over the years, Cone's essay does not show that Moltmann has any significance for Black Theology, nor *vice versa*. By contrast, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel both show the significance of feminist themes for Moltmann and of Moltmann for feminist themes. Ruether's essay is among the most balanced of her presentations in several years.

Evangelicals will be more comfortable with some of these essays than others, but 'comfort' is not always the best guide to the best reading material in theology. Working through these perspectives is rewarding for all who take the theological task seriously. It is helpful to have read some of Moltmann's major works prior to reading this *Festschrift*, but it is not absolutely necessary. The volume could serve both as a good introduction to Moltmann's work and to much of the contemporary theological scene. This is one evangelical theologian who hopes fervently that Jürgen Moltmann continues to be active in his theological output for several more years.

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Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell

Thomas F. Torrance

Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996,
xii + 330 pp., hb., £24.95.

This book grew out of a chapter which Professor Torrance had been asked to write for a volume to commemorate the 150th anniversary of New College, Edinburgh. His remit was to write a brief history of Scottish theology from the Reformation to the Disruption. As he prepared and wrote, however, the project developed beyond the scope of his original remit. Soon it became a full-scale book covering the whole history of Scottish theology. Or did it?

Let me begin with a fable:

'Once upon a time there was a young gardener named John. Unhappy with the methods of the gardeners of his day, he looked in old books and tried the ways of the gardeners of yore. And behold, he found that these methods worked and his fame spread through many lands.

Away to the north, in a small land where the mountains were high and the seas were wild, there were six gardeners, all named John, who followed the methods of the first John. And soon the flowers in that land grew tall and straight amid the blue skies and the sunshine. But ere long new gardeners came along who abandoned the ways of the first John. These men were named William

and Samuel and David and James. And these men did reintroduce the methods which the first John had abandoned, and soon the flowers grew weak and twisted and bent.

But after many days had past, behold, another John came to that small land in the northern seas, and he called the gardeners to go back to the ways of the first John. The gardeners were angry and did cast John out of the garden, but some listened. After many more days, back in the land of the first John, a gardener named Karl watched his weak and twisted and bent flowers and knew not what to do. Then he tried the ways of the first John and behold, everything became beautiful in the garden. And this Karl knew how to write words and before long he made many great books and the whole world heard of the ways of the 'gardeners of the first John'.

Back in the small country in the northern waters there were few who followed the ways of the first John, but there was one old gardener named Tom who told of his days as apprentice to Karl and called all gardeners everywhere to follow the old ways.'

Professor Torrance's book is simply a scholarly development of this fable. It has a single, predictable message: the theology of John Calvin was received in Scotland by the writers of the Scots Confession, especially John Knox. This

'older Scottish tradition' was incarnational and inclusivist, like Athanasius, and held to a universal atonement, like Calvin. Unfortunately there was a return to a scholastic theological model through the creation of federal theology by High Calvinists such as Perkins, Rutherford, Dickson and Durham, a conditionalist, legalist and contractual theology which emphasized limited atonement and led to every conceivable problem, particularly the lack of assurance among Christians. John McLeod Campbell, recognizing this error, restored the 'older Scottish tradition' and suffered the consequences.

The problem with both the fable and the book is that they do not reflect reality.

In order to authenticate the 'older Scottish tradition' Professor Torrance has to reinvent Knox by arguing that he was quite different in theology from those who followed him. Indeed he says, 'like Calvin, he stressed that predestination has to be understood strictly in *Christ alone*'. Professor Torrance goes on to give the impression that Knox's doctrine of predestination was somehow different from that of later Calvinists and from that of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. In fact, if anything, Knox's treatise on predestination is even more 'Calvinistic' than that of the *Confession*. It is certainly not the christological reinvention of the doctrine as espoused by Barth and by Torrance.

After Knox, Professor

Torrance has a chapter on John Craig, John Davidson and Robert Bruce – but no mention of Andrew Melville, whom James Walker says, in a classic book on Scottish theology, 'was second to none in learning and hardly second to Knox in power and influence'.

After a chapter on Rutherford, Dickson and Durham, in which he is surprisingly kind to Rutherford despite his general view of Rutherford's theology, there follows a chapter on 'The Westminster Tradition' which one would have to protest has more rhetoric than argument. The chapter is redolent with expressions like 'hardline Calvinist', 'Scholastic theology', 'formidable Protestant scholasticism', 'rigid dogmatism', 'biblical nominalism', 'federalized and logicalized system of Calvinism'. He even accuses federal theology of 'Nestorian dualism' and 'Arian and Socinian heresy'. By way of contrast, the 'older Scottish tradition' manifests 'spiritual freshness', 'freedom' and 'evangelical joy'. The next chapters cover Robert Leighton, and James Fraser of Brae, demonstrating that they were in line with the 'older Scottish tradition'.

When Professor Torrance then comes to Thomas Boston, he again engages in reinterpretation. His analysis of Boston is seriously flawed through a desire to demonstrate that Boston 'fell in with' (p. 205) the doctrinal system of federal Calvinism, while in reality his theology

was in marked contrast to that system and represented a protest against its very heart and foundations. For example, he says that for Boston 'the Incarnation was essentially a saving event' (p. 210), implying that Boston shared Torrance's view of incarnational redemption, which he did not. He also says that, in relation to the covenant of works, 'Boston evidently realised that there is no clear warrant for this in the book of Genesis. However he regarded it as implied and so accepted the traditional teaching about it' (pp. 214-15). Not so - Boston was quite convinced that Genesis 2 provides a solid foundation for belief in a covenant of works.

The following chapter is entitled 'Eighteenth-Century Presbyterianism' and is devoted largely to the 'Marrow' controversy and to the deepening divide between evangelicals and moderates. Professor Torrance argues that the 'Marrow' controversy was evidence of a 'deep cleft' which had opened up in the Church between the 'evangelically earnest' and the 'formally Calvinistic'. He concludes that there were now 'two traditions, the older Scottish tradition and the hyper-Calvinist tradition, which had set in with the imposition of the rigid framework of an abstract federal theology upon the authorised teaching of the Kirk' (p. 243). Once again we note the biased language. The astonishing thing,

however, is that Torrance places the 'Marrow' men, who were all federal Calvinists, within the 'older Scottish tradition'!

It is when Professor Torrance comes to the nineteenth century that his selectivity becomes most striking. He devotes a chapter to George Hill and Thomas Erskine of Linlathen and then a concluding chapter to John McLeod Campbell. But what about William Cunningham, James Buchanan, George Smeaton and James Bannerman? Surely these men are among the greatest of our Scottish theologians and yet they do not even rate a mention in the book - apart from the negative use of one quotation from Cunningham.

None of the above comments should be taken to imply that the book is not stimulating. It is. Nor should it be thought that this is not a challenging contribution to the study of Scottish theology from a particular perspective. It is. But it fails in its stated aim of providing an 'account of the development of Scottish theology from the Reformation to the nineteenth century'. It is, rather, partisan and polemical.

Professor Torrance has written a fine exposition of his central thesis, namely, that there was an 'older Scottish tradition' which can be traced to Calvin and which stands in direct opposition to federal Calvinism. It is not, however, a comprehensive and rigorous study of the history

and development of Scottish theology. There remains a need for such a book – but this is not it.

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Fact, Value, and God

Arthur Holmes
Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, Leicester:
Apollon,
1997, 180 pp., £19.99.

The family of questions around which this book revolves includes: What is the relation between fact and value? Are they essentially unrelated, or are fact and value interdependent and separable? Arthur Holmes attends to these questions by undertaking a historical journey that begins with the pre-Socratic philosophers and ends in the nineteenth century with J.S. Mill and Nietzsche. Along the way he visits not only a selection of philosophers but a few theologians (including Luther and Calvin) as well. God is a constant companion on Holmes's journey: first, because, as he says, 'he wants to explore the fact-value connection in the larger context of metaphysical and theological views' (p. vii); and secondly, because one cannot undertake an historical exploration of the fact-value connection in Western philosophy without including God as a critical point of reference. If one has read other works by Holmes (e.g. *Contours of a World View, Shaping Character*), one will not be surprised by

his conclusion in *Fact, Value, and God*, that we do not live in a value-free universe and that ultimately fact and value are inseparably united in their common Creator. What Holmes discovers throughout the history of Western philosophy are four distinguishable approaches to the fact-value connection. These are as follows. (1) The 'maximalist position' (the Greeks, Kant, Hegel), in which fact and value are linked intrinsically, even teleologically, in the cosmic order of things. (2) The 'mediating position' (Descartes, Hume, Reid), in which fact and value are rooted in and a function of the passions or moral sentiments. (3) The 'minimalist position' (Hobbes, Mill, Bentham), in which value is a function of hedonistic psychology, of human experiences of pleasure and pain. (4) The 'moral skeptics' position (Nietzsche), which rejects 'any fact-value relation at all. With no God and no natural moral order we are left in a value-free world' (p. 174).

The value of this work lies not only in its accessible treatment of a single issue in ethics – the relation of fact and value – but also in the clear and concise introduction it provides to the history of Western philosophy, especially ethics. Both novice and expert, students of theology as well as students of philosophy, can benefit greatly from this readable study. However, Holmes is not always entirely

reliable in his assessment of these philosophers and their approaches to the fact-value relation. Nietzsche, for example, does not reject 'any fact-value relation at all'; nor does he abandon us to a 'value-free world'. Although Nietzsche's transvaluation of Western values threatens to stand Christian values on their head, this is not the same as a value-free world, a world free of any fact-value relation. If anything, Nietzsche's 'perspectivalism' (there are no facts, only the interpretation of facts), about which Holmes has a fair amount to say, endows all human knowledge of the world, with value-laden judgements. Furthermore, although this is a fine and worthy book to digest, its value is somewhat limited by the fact that Holmes's study comes to a rather abrupt halt in the nineteenth century, leaving readers to wonder about attempts by twentieth-century philosophers to sort out the fact-value connection. Holmes admits that his 'work is selective' (p. viii); but by omitting the twentieth century entirely he is too selective, so much so that the ends of the threads he is weaving are left frayed and dangling. Holmes does explain that he includes Mill and Nietzsche 'in order to introduce the empiricist and non-cognitive bases for ethics that dominate the twentieth century' (p. viii). But ethics in the twentieth century surely cannot simply be abandoned to empiricism and non-cognitive ethics, especially in the second half

of the century. Indeed, even an examination of the earlier and later views of Wittgenstein regarding fact-value relations provides the reader with a glimpse of the rich diversity of ethical reflection that we inherit and for which we are responsible. Holmes's fine book, accordingly, should be supplemented by a treatment of ethics in the twentieth century: I recommend Alasdair Macintyre's *Short History of Ethics* as an accessible work that includes a brief analysis of ethics in the first half of the twentieth century, or the more advanced *Twentieth-Century Ethical Theory* by Steven Cahn and Jeram Haber.

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The Association of Evangelicals in Africa: Its history, organisation, members, projects, external relations and message. Missiological Research in the Netherlands Series no 13

Christian M Breman

Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1996,
xxii + 602 pp., pb.

This mainly historical study is a PhD thesis describing in great detail the activities of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) since its creation in 1966 to the mid-1990s. Part One of this thesis is entitled *History and Structure*. It deals firstly with an historical account of the creation of the AEA from its roots in the North American evangelical missionary

movement, with biographical sketches of its major leaders in three periods characterised as *Foundation* (1966-1973), *Expectancy* (1973-1977) and *Expansion* (1978-1996), and an account of the six General assemblies from 1969 to 1993. The study then describes the organisation and structures of the AEA, including its various departments, officers and committees, and commissions and special projects. It proceeds to give details of the various national bodies throughout Africa which constitute AEA's full members, associate members and other members. The last chapter in Part One describes the projects of AEA, with particular attention given to theological education and the two graduate schools under AEA's auspices, Bangui Evangelical School of Theology and Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology.

Part Two of the thesis is shorter, more systematic and interesting, entitled *External Relations and Message*. It begins by discussing the relationship and the debates between AEA and other international evangelical movements, Pentecostals and Charismatics, the ecumenical movement, the Organisation of African Instituted Churches and the second Pan African Leadership Assembly (1994). The second chapter focuses on the theology of AEA's General Secretaries Byang Kato and Tokunboh Adeyemo, and that of

Associate General Secretary Daidanso ma Djongwe. Reasons for the quite significant differences between Kato and Adeyemo are suggested, although these differences are minimised. The study then sketches various AEA periodicals and other publications. The final chapter consists of a summary of the thesis with some reflection on its main characteristics and suggestions for further research. The last 150 pages deal with twelve appendices of official AEA documents and addresses, and a full bibliography with bibliographies of its main leaders (Downing, Kato, Adeyemo, Diadanso and Tienou), lists of AEA Publications and other sources and literature.

One could hardly wish for a more extensive study of this organisation or one more meticulous in its information, and this book is bound to be definitive in this regard. The author has succeeded in gathering every conceivable piece of information on the AEA, and the book serves as a useful reference work for further research. The thesis, however, suffers from three main drawbacks. (a) It is far too long, with too much unnecessary detail. (b) The author's use of English has not been adequately edited. (c) There is little theological or missiological reflection and interaction, as the study tends to get bogged down in descriptive details instead of looking at the wider issues with which AEA is involved.

It is for this reason the Dr Adeyemo comments in his Foreward (p. xviii): 'One does not get such a forceful dimension of AEA's holistic ministry in Breman's book. Perhaps the author's serious sickness at the time might have accounted for the inadequacies of this enormous study, a veritable goldmine of information.' The four years of field study and other research work done in Africa was considerably extensive, spanning three countries and including interviews with many people and organisations. This is an original and exhaustive study which breaks new ground in helping our understanding of the complexities of the Christian church in Africa.

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Has God Many Names? An Introduction to Religious Studies

Dewi Arwell Hughes
Leicester: Apollos, 1996, 255 pp., £14.99.

Bearing in mind this book's evangelical publisher and the similarity of the title to John Hick's short collection of essays, *God Has Many Names* (1980), one could be forgiven for assuming that this is a conservative discussion of Christian theology and religious plurality, the principal aim of which is to anathematize pluralist philosophies. The main title, however, is a little misleading, the subtitle being far more indicative of the book's content. Although

the book is a discussion of the 'story of attempts to understand, interpret and explain the reality of religious plurality' (p. 13), it is not primarily a history of specifically 'Christian theological' attempts to do this. It rather traces the history of the modern study of religions from the nineteenth century to (almost) the present day. This is something that most students of theology and religious studies are likely to find both interesting and beneficial. Certainly I would argue that a grasp of the issues raised and discussed by Dr Hughes, a former Religious Studies lecturer at the University of Glamorgan and now theological adviser to TEAR Fund, is necessary for an informed understanding of the discipline.

This remarkably comprehensive survey is divided into three parts. The first part is an introduction to 'the intellectual foundations of Religious Studies'. The second part moves into the twentieth century and considers 'various approaches to religion that are still current, and which have been built on the foundations [discussed in Part One]'. The third part is a critical discussion of 'a number of basic issues', of which the principal ones are (a) the question of authority in religion, (b) mysticism, and (c) the idea that there is a single Absolute worshipped by the world's religions. Within this overall

framework, there are sections discussing the ideas of Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Müller, Otto, Comte, Darwin, Frazer, Freud, Durkheim, William James, E.O. James, Marett, Weber, W.C. Smith, van der Leeuw, McKenzie, Ninian Smart, Levi-Strauss, Leach, Marx, Campolo, Berger, Jung, Eliade, Aldous Huxley and Hick. Along with these there are more general discussions of anthropology, religious experience and the nature of religion.

The book's comprehensiveness and accessibility are among its most obvious strengths. For the 'interested layperson' and theology/religious studies student it is a well-structured introduction to thinkers, movements, concepts and issues in the history of religious studies. Terms and difficult concepts are carefully explained by a scholar who clearly knows his subject well. Apart from Eric Sharpe's now rather dated classic, *Comparative Religion: A History* (1975), I cannot think of a comparable volume that will serve the student as well as Dr Hughes's does. As such it is to be commended for filling a gap in introductions to the discipline.

However, unlike Sharpe's book, some discussions are perhaps a little too brief. When one considers that within 31 pages (pp. 24–55) he manages to discuss the sometimes rather complex thought of Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Müller, Otto, Comte, Darwin and the anthropologists,

Frazer, Freud, Durkheim, and the functionalist school of social anthropology, it is surprising that he produces as much useful material as he does. Although there are fuller discussions in the book, his treatments of Wilfred Cantwell Smith (pp. 81–95) and Mircea Eliade (pp. 155–71) being particularly notable, the more advanced reader may find the speed at which he races through important thinkers, movements and issues a little frustrating.

Having said that, this is principally an 'introductory' volume with the needs of students in mind. As such, and as one who would have greatly valued it as an undergraduate, I warmly commend it – although it is a pity that the publishers did not have its increasingly hard-up readership in mind when they decided on the price.

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The Gaggling of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism

D.A. Carson

Leicester: Apollos, 1996, 640 pp., £14.99.

Donald Carson, a highly respected evangelical biblical scholar, has put the Christian world in his debt by producing this huge volume covering many aspects of the key problem of pluralism. It is written in a very accessible style so as to appeal to the widest possible

readership, which would range from concerned church people to undergraduates in theology and also in cultural studies generally. He paints with a very broad brush, a shaving brush at times! – but his aim is to cover a huge span of biblical and cultural material.

There can be little doubt that Carson has chosen to go for the ‘big issue’. His thesis is that pluralism, made into an ideology, has neutered the Christian message as a truth claim, thus gagging God. His robust method of reply is to appeal to the Bible, taking into account the fact that pluralistic relativism has, rather like a computer virus, infected that hard disc by overstressing its diversity at the expense of the unity which alone makes diversity possible.

Carson appeals, more specifically, to what he calls ‘the plot-line’ of the Bible, and this forms the subtext of much of his work. This is a very sensible approach which seeks to uphold the cognitive content of Scripture, but in a way appropriate to its literary type and especially its narrative mode. Resisting Pinnock’s attack on ‘propositionalism’, Carson argues that there is a cognitive content to revelation, but this is of the interpretive, rather than a quasi-logarithmic, type. Carson, with several others concerned with hermeneutics, such as Vanhoozer in Edinburgh, is helping

orthodox Christians considerably in this regard. Poetry entails the cognitive as well as the emotional: ‘Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds’ actually means something that we can understand, as well as tugging at our heart strings. In essence, such is Carson’s view of how Scripture provides the mind with comprehensible content, and with this we can follow, albeit in a broad fashion, its ‘plot-line’, its basic drift and shape, at the very least, in ‘narrative’ theological fashion.

With this synopsis of the book’s aim and biblical method, we can track through its main sections. There are four parts: hermeneutics, religious pluralism, Christian living in a pluralistic culture, and pluralism within the evangelical camp. The book in a sense comes round in a circle, starting with the Bible and the challenges of relativizing hermeneutical gagging of the plot-line, through the roots of religious pluralism as an ideal, into the practicalities of responding to Western culture, and ending in the evangelical family where pluralistic ways of thinking are evident and enervating. The book can be seen as both theoretical and practical.

Part One identifies our situation as being a hermeneutical morass, made all the more glutinous by postmodernist deconstruction of texts as the primary way of reading. Western culture

is now gripped by a philosophical pluralism, a hard doctrine of how things are and should be. This goes way beyond 'empirical pluralism', the recognition of diversity of lifestyles and peoples in great cities, and beyond 'cherished pluralism', the gladness at rich diversity. Pluralism has become, in postmodernity, a kind of razor insistent on cutting away claims of universality. Tolerance as an ideal presupposed a core value or culture, but this has been displaced by an absolutist doctrine of pluralism.

Carson, always claiming to offer bold mapwork rather than detailed expositions, takes us through the deconstructionist thought of Derrida and Nietzsche. One of the delights of his book is the way he has, through painful exposure to its assaults, learned to play back the deconstructionist critique on itself, unmasking its 'real motives' as a bid for cultural imperialism and domination. The book is worth its very reasonable price simply for this lesson, and many an undergraduate in many an arts faculty should be armed with this response in the face of such aggression – one might turn the blade even more and say in the face of this kind of cultural 'fundamentalism'.

The subjective nature of this Western phenomenon is demonstrated, and we are led to Kant again, surely a correct suggestion, to gain insight into the anthropocentric construction

of reality and thence to Nietzsche's stripping away of the Protestant morality Kant desperately wished to keep, leaving us naked in the public square, to use a striking *bon mot*, and getting increasingly cold. I am not so sure that Descartes can be blamed quite so fiercely, but he is part of the story.

The impact of this hard pluralist dogma is shown in that key band of Western officialdom: the media, academe, the bureaucracy. As this review is being penned, Mr Blair claims to be 're-branding Britain', entertaining Jacques Chirac in 'minimalist' conditions on top of a dominating tower block overlooking the deprivation of the East End of London, to the bemusement of the locals and risking a very high 'cringe factor': the reconstructed elite imposing a new taste on the irritatingly backward-looking British. Carson's points can be illustrated with ease from the daily news. Another amusing cameo could be British Airways' tail fins being multi-cultural, abolishing the British logo of identity completely in favour of an interesting and stimulating *mélange*: core identities are suspect and dominating (let the reviewer be forgiven British examples!).

Objective truth has disappeared from this stage, indeed the stage may be spinning round. Carson examines the attempt of Stanley Fish and Hauerwas to handle the hermeneutical problem by claiming that

interpretation can only be done in reference to a community (see p. 76 for the famous example of a text, left chalked on a board in a linguistics class, being interpreted by a poetry class!). Carson tackles this with great sense and articulates what many wish to say, that communities can abuse texts as much as do individuals, as the whole tradition of anti-Semitism shows. *A fortiori* this is so in Roman Catholic cultures, which make community-led interpretation the key hermeneutical principle. Carson holds that the plot-line of the Bible is clear, and that God has accommodated himself to this subtle yet simple mode of self-revelation, in a way which fully respects human freedom – in accord with a key tenet of postmodernist rejection of domination. The postmodernist ends up in a boring kaleidoscope where all colours are the same, in effect, since we cannot judge between them. All we can judge is the attempt to judge, a point made so brilliantly by Peter Berger in his *Rumor of Angels* three decades ago.

Part Two takes us into an examination of the plot-line of revelation, the defence of the cognitive aspect and fundamental clarity of the whole Bible, fully acknowledging the diversity of Scripture now so emphasized by modern study. Liberals miss the plot-line, fundamentalists miss the diversity inherent in it. Carson quotes Kevin

Vanhooser: 'Between absolute knowledge and relativism, there lies the alternative of poetic and interpretive rationality' (p. 189), hence the message of the Bible is not to be gagged. This sensible methodological apologia is followed up by a bus ride through vital loci of the plot-line: God, *imago dei*, fall, redemption. We get much quotation, too much were the book not aimed so widely, and even get Father Brown cited alongside Derrida and *Time* magazine. But this adds to the book's readability.

'God is a construct of the imagination which helps to tie together, unify and interpret the totality of experience', according to the postmodern Gordon Kaufmann (p. 222), but not according to Carson. Quite the reverse we might say: we are constructed in the image of God whose objective revelation and redemption alone make sense of the world and our experience of it. That fits the plot-line much better! Carson's exposition might be summarized with reference to Irenaeus of Lyons, who made the basic connection between the Hebrew God of creation, Adam and the second Adam, OT and NT: that is the shape of the Christian plot, simple yes, but inexhaustibly rich for the thinker. I hope, in fact, that Carson and Thomas Oden link hands in their common task of restating the plot, Oden with his patristic orientation which

complements Carson's. Hick is particularly well treated in this part of the book, as generally are the topics of inclusivism (soft and hard versions), exclusivism and pluralism. Again the book is easily worth its price for this examination of Christianity and other religions.

Part Three takes us into the cultural criticism of the West, its individualism, hedonism, subjectivism and loss of core vision. For more on this I commend O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*. How should Christianity conduct itself in the landscape of ideological pluralism, and ideology almost *defined* in terms of its desire to free society from the bonds of the Judaeo-Christian ethical tradition? Any religious tradition should be celebrated – except the mainline Christian one which is dominating and a threat. Such questions are wrestled with intelligently. Carson looks at problems in the realms of education, ethics, economics, and the relevance of the gospel to the public domain.

Part Four identifies relativism inside the evangelical world as a major problem, related to a loss of confidence in Scripture as having a plot-line at all, and a move towards an experiential evangelical emotionalism. Carson argues that the full plot-line needs to be unfolded, in today's culture especially, in order to preach Christ. That is, with Irenaeus, we need to explain the message of God and

creation, fall and human need, in order to make Christ comprehensible – the framework is vital. He gives a fascinating example of a missionary friend in India whose preaching of Jesus led to many accepting him, but not to many new Christians – the Hindus in question merely patched Jesus into their existing cultural framework. The missionary left and returned, this time expounding God and Christ, leading to fewer but deeper converts and to numbers of church communities. That story bears considerable thought: how many young people do we know who have indeed 'made a commitment' but never come to church and are isolated atoms of faith, afloat in the shallows of our unstable culture?

Carson rejects modern annihilationist teachings which exclude the doctrine of hell in some form, as failing to fit the plot-line. Here his discussion was perhaps not quite so telling as in other places, for the plot-line of God the creator can be brought to the aid of the conditionalist case consistently with Carson's approach. But the point that Christians must draw lines in an age when this is deeply unpopular and indeed even immoral, stands as undeniably true and necessary however much it may render evangelicals less than fashionable.

While agreeing with Mark Noll that evangelicalism has become anti-intellectual, Carson thinks the deeper problem is the lack of

biblical formation of the Christian. One must agree here: for example, if the figure of Jesus is plugged into a New Age type of system, then the gospel vanishes – again Irenaeus had it right, in his argument with the Gnostic syncretists. We do need the plot-line. This is so also for spirituality, a point made in detail in a useful appendix.

Carson gives us a big book but not an intimidating one. Its tone and manner ensure its ease of reading. The reader will gain exposure to a vast range of Christian sources and to key contemporary ones. The achievement in putting together so compendial a work is great. This will sell well among undergraduates, and it might be an ideal present for a teenager embarking on studies of any kind. It will be taken up by the bewildered Christian in the vortex of our culture, whose 'centre', as Yeats put it, 'cannot hold'.

Tim Bradshaw

Regent's Park College,
Oxford

The Toronto Blessing (Latimer Studies 53/54)

Martyn Percy

Oxford: Latimer House, 1996, 75 pp., pb.

Few readers of *Themelios* will not have had some kind of contact with the Toronto Blessing (TB), and few will not have asked the question whether it is, as those involved claim, a movement

instigated and sustained by God. In the view of many, one of the strongest positive evidences for the Blessing, particularly in its early days, was its apparent lack of alternative explanations: if TB's strange phenomena were not caused by human beings, nor by the devil, they must have been caused by God. Yet, as time has passed, alternative explanations have been produced.

In this book, Percy seeks to describe, and so explain, what has taken place in Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship over the last three years in terms of sociological analysis. He believes that the theory of social exchange makes sense of much that has gone on. For example, as people travel to Toronto, some over great distances and at considerable cost, they require (presumably without consciously realizing it) some kind of 'exchange' on their investment. Then, once there, according to Percy,

they sing about the power and intimacy of God, hear testimonies of it, listen to it preached, and then finally get to experience it themselves. In effect, they reap what they sow.

Furthermore, the rhetoric of the Toronto Airport Vineyard is the rhetoric of self-surrender, reinforced by the pervasive metaphors of 'fire', 'water' and 'rain' and the call to 'soak up' and 'marinate in' the Blessing. Percy's point is

that this creates a pressure for some sort of exchange for the self-surrender, and so people 'receive' a fresh input of God's power.

For those, like Percy, who regard themselves as relatively neutral observers of TB, and particularly for those who are interested in sociological analysis, social exchange theory may offer a helpful explanation of how human beings so happily take part in the bizarre behaviour involved.

Unfortunately, though, for much of the time Percy offers more assertion than proof, and so for those involved in TB the book will be unconvincing. They will feel that, although the human side of the TB phenomena might be explained sociologically, nevertheless the Holy Spirit is involved. And that is the issue they (and with them many of those who have decided not to get involved in TB) consider most important.

This is where the other part of the book comes in, a part I have not mentioned thus far. Presumably in order to hedge their bets a little, the editors of the series Percy's study appears in have put what they call a 'Responsive Foreword' by Nigel Scotland at the beginning. Scotland argues that, while Percy offers a number of helpful insights, he fails to recognize that his account is only partial, and in any case amounts to 'a dogmatic unverifiable personal opinion' in its assumption that because an alternative explanation has been found

for parts of TB, the power of God can nowhere be involved. 'Could it not be the case', Scotland asks, 'that the TB is something like the Church of England, good in places?'

Leaving aside the question of whether the editors have been fair to Percy in supplying such a critical 'Responsive Foreword', and so directing readers how to read the study, Scotland does raise the key question, namely, how are we to assess TB theologically and thus decide if and how God is involved? After all, one could apply social exchange theory to the rise of early Christianity, but would the explanations it furnished tell us whether God was involved or not? Despite being part of a series of theological studies, Percy offers no help in this, and readers will need to turn elsewhere should they want it. This is hardly surprising since, as Scotland rightly says, Percy 'does not seem to entertain even the remotest possibility that religion could be other than a social construct'.

I would not advise readers to expect much help from Scotland on the key question, however. In essence, he takes the same line as others who are positive about TB, namely, that neither the 'bad things' about TB nor alternative explanations like Percy's prove that God is not involved, while the 'good things' indicate that he is. This approach is popular because it appeals to the idea that good fruit can only

be produced by a good tree; which, of course, is perceived to be a highly biblical idea. In my view, this is highly simplistic and, perhaps more importantly, misconceives the Bible's teaching. It is simplistic because the TB, like almost any other religious movement, is bound to be accompanied by both good things and bad things. It misconceives the Bible in its assumption, for example, that Jesus' teaching on how to judge a person's character ('by their fruit you shall know them') can be applied to the assessment of religious experiences and movements ('by some of their effects you shall know them').

In the end, Percy's book is useful in a limited way, but those who wish to consider the issues pertaining to theological judgements about the TB will need to turn elsewhere.

Mark D.J. Smith
Leicester

BOOK NOTES

Guide to Contemporary Culture

Gene Edward Veith

Leicester: Crossway, 1994, 256 pp., £7.99.

The terms 'postmodernism' and 'postmodernity' abound in academic circles these days, their popularity undiminished by the fact that they can prove difficult to define or that they can be regarded as misnomers, best replaced by the more pedestrian 'late modernity'. Still, whatever is afoot, this book offers a guide to contemporary culture under the rubric of postmodernism. It is divided into four parts, dealing with postmodern thought, art, society and religion. It is written 'for the church as a whole, and not for academic specialists', and includes both a description and a Christian response. Its wide range should help readers form a general, not merely piecemeal, judgement on some typical features of the age in which we live.

Strategic Church Leadership

Robin Gill and Derek Burke

London: SPCK, 1996, 96 pp., £9.99.

This brief and expensively priced book comes from the pens of a Professor of Theology in the University of Kent and the former Vice-Chancellor of the University of East Anglia. Targeted specifically at church leaders, it seeks to contribute to arresting the decline of churchgoing in Britain by some fresh

thinking about strategic church leadership. The university experience of both authors, though different from each other, is not incidental to this volume, for it is argued that certain management skills developed within that institutional framework are effectively applicable to church life. Although the Church cannot be handled as though it had not distinctive institutional features, strategy is important, and the concluding chapters on strategic planning, ownership and outcomes wind up a discussion which begins with 'Strategic Leaders in the Acts of the Apostles'.

Forbidden Revolutions: Pentecostalism in Latin America, Catholicism in Eastern Europe

David Martin

London: SPCK, 1996, 96 pp., £7.99.

The author is a well-known sociologist of religion, and this is what lends weight to what otherwise comes over as an impressionistic account. But the book is deliberately crafted in this way, revised on the basis of the F.D. Maurice Lectures given some years ago at King's College in London. For a fuller picture, one certainly must turn to the books listed for further reading, but what we have here is thought-provoking and instructive. Not only is the information of interest to those concerned for these two areas of the world, it contains material of far wider concern, on the

form of Christian influence in society. For those who think that Christians underestimate the social effects of a Church which is sociologically marginal but alive, and capable of pervading the ethos of a society, David Martin's study will provide welcome support.

Stephen Williams

Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life. Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East 7

Karel Van der Toorn

Leiden: Brill

1996, vii + 491 pp., hb., Nlg 238.50/\$149.50.

Van der Toorn continues his investigation of Israelite religion in its ancient Near Eastern context. See his earlier study of women in Israelite religion reviewed in *Themelios* 21.1. The first two parts consider the broader Semitic context of family religion in Syria and Babylonia. The third part turns to Israel. With the rise of the Israelite state, there emerged both a national religion and a family religion, the latter centred around the ancestor cult. For van der Toorn, the prophetic reaction to the politics of the Northern Kingdom, followed by its collapse (c. 722 BC), led to the loss of belief in the state deity as well as a diaspora that cut families off from their ancestral burial places. In this context the Deuteronomists flourished and were able to promote a

belief in the sole deity, Yahweh, that allowed for both family devotion as well as a faith that would survive the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem. This is an intriguing thesis which need not be proven in every detail for it to provide elements of a possible interpretation of popular religious life in ancient Israel.

Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative

Weston W. Fields

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, JSOT, 1997, 288pp., hb., £40/\$60.

Fields examines the motif of the 'stranger' in the stories of Lot in Sodom (Gn. 19), the Ephraimite in Gibeah (Jdg. 19-21), and Rahab in Jericho (Josh. 2). He seeks to identify the purposes or values conveyed. These three stories portray two guests who in some way have hospitality extended to them although they are objects of hatred by the citizens of the town. Motifs include safety in mountains, danger in the night, the sexual harassment of strangers, and the destruction of a city by fire. The political polemics of the biblical writers against nations (Ammon and Moab) and tribes (Benjamin) lie behind the stories of Lot and of Judges 19-21. Finally, Fields examines the Sodom tradition and its use by the prophets as an example of wickedness and judgment. This is a valuable catalogue and discussion of each of these motifs in their

occurrences throughout the Old Testament.

The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch: Studies in the Psalter III

Michael D. Goulder

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, JSOTS, 1996, 378 pp., hb., £47.50/\$70.00.

Goulder's earlier contributions to the Psalms, produced by the same publisher, includes his study of the Korah psalms which he located in a northern Israelite annual festival at Dan, and his study of Psalms 51-72, attributed to David, which Goulder sees as a series of psalms reflecting specific incidents in David's life. The present volume uses the Psalms attributed to the 'sons of Asaph' (Psalms 50, 73-83) as a basis for studying their tradition which Goulder locates in Bethel in the 720s B.C. during the time of the annual autumnal festival. The difficulties of applying psalms to specific events in Israelite History remains, as well as the problem of collecting and interpreting allusions to the Asaphites from a variety of biblical texts and genres.

The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel

Cornelis Van Dam

Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997, xxiv +296 pp., hb., \$34.50.

This volume reviews the history of discussion of these mysterious implements by which the high priest (and others) in ancient Israel

determined the will of God. A comprehensive summary of the relevant texts and their interpretation is also provided in the discussion. Van Dam suggest that the meaning, 'perfect light', should be applied to the terms, Urim and Thummim, and that they functioned through some sort of appearance of light, perhaps as in a special reflection through a gem. The gradual disappearance of this device is considered and the emphasis upon God's revelation through his word in Scripture emerges. There is no doubt that it will now be useful to have this handy summary of the available textual evidence and discussion.

Prophets and Paradigms: Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker

Stephen Breck Reid ed.

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, JSOT 229, 1996, 242 pp., hb., £35.00/\$55.00.

This Festschrift includes fourteen contributions by as many authors. In keeping with the interests of the honouree, some concern matters related to form and tradition criticism. Many of the essays address various prophetic texts and themes and a number of these consider ways in which prophetic texts developed and evolved in ancient Israel, often from political and ideological motives of editors (Davies, Melugin, Ben Zvi, and Gottwald). Others use sociological (Ramírez on Amos) or religious (Overholt on Elijah and Elisha)

methodologies. Non-prophetic texts considered include Genesis 2-13 (Gitay), Pentateuchal ritual materials (Gorman), Proverbs 1-9 and Job (Boorer), and Psalm 50 (Reid).

Richard Hess

BOOK REVIEWS

- Lyle Eslinger* **House of God or House of David: The Rhetoric of 2 Samuel 7 (JSOTSS 164)** P.E. Satterthwaite
- Deryck Sheriffs* **The Friendship of the Lord** Martin Davie
- Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr* **Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theolog** Karen H. Jobes
- Wilhelm Egger* **How to Read the New Testament: An Introduction to Linguistic and Historical-Critical Methodology** Gustavo Martin-Asensio
- Roman Garrison* **The Graeco-Roman Context of Early Christian Literature (JSNTSS 137)** Loveday Alexander
- John R.W. Stott* **The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World (BST)** Peter M. Head
- Stephen Westerholm* **Preface to the Study of Paul** Douglas Moo
- R. Barry Matlock* **Unveiling the Apocalyptic Paul: Paul's Interpreters and the Rhetoric of Criticism JSNTS, 127** Brook W. R. Pearson
- Gordon Fee* **Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God** Anthony C. Thiselton
- Craig S. Keener* **The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts** Max Turner
- Richard L. Longenecker (ed.)* **Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament** Craig L. Blomberg
- Alan P.F. Sell* **Philosophical Idealism and Christian Belief** Tim Bradshaw
- Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg, Thomas Kucharz (eds.)* **The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann** Michael L. Westmoreland-White
- Thomas F. Torrance* **Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell** A.T.B. McGowan
- Arthur Holmes* **Fact, Value, and God** James Gilman
- Christian M Breman* **The Association of Evangelicals in Africa: Its history, organisation, members, projects, external relations and message. Missiological Research in the Netherlands Series no 13** Allan H. Anderson
- Dewi Arwell Hughes* **Has God Many Names? An Introduction to Religious Studies** Chris Partridge
- D.A. Carson* **The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism** Tim Bradshaw
- Martyn Percy* **The Toronto Blessing (Latimer Studies 53/54)** Mark Smith



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If coming by train

Take the train to KITZBÜHEL (a few go straight through to Kitzbühel; you may need to change at Wörgl) and take the bus to the Schloss.

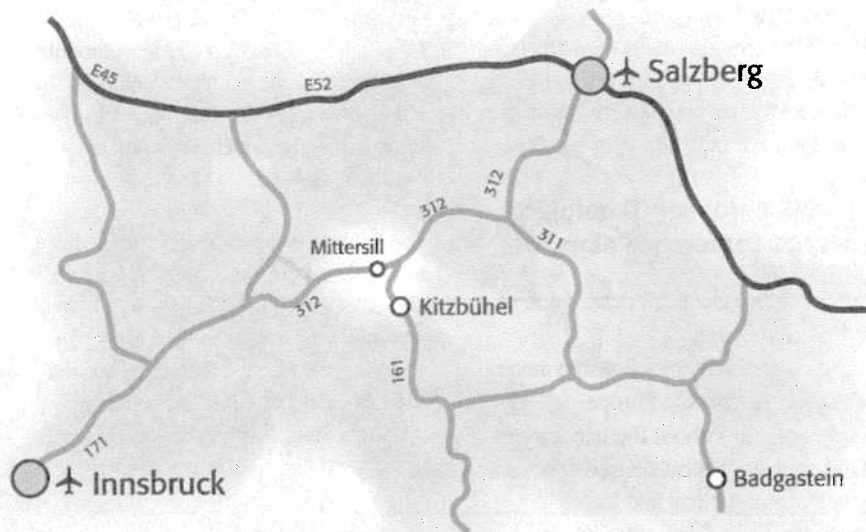
From the East take the train to ZELL AM SEE and then the narrow-gauge railway (infrequent) or bus from outside the train station to Mittersill village.

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Salzburg has the airport nearest to Mittersill. But the one at MUNICH is larger and has the better connections. From the airport take the airport bus or S-Bahn to Munich train station and then take the train to Wörgl & KITZBÜHEL (as above).

By air via Salzburg
Take No 77 bus to Salzburg Hauptbahnhof. Trains are not as frequent as from Munich, but the journey is shorter and there is no border to cross.



SPEAKERS

LECTURER

Ove Conrad Hanssen (Norway)

He is an ordained minister of the established Lutheran Church of Norway. Former student chaplain of NKSS, he has a Teol. dr. from the University of Lund, Sweden, and is Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in New Testament at Stavanger School of Mission and Theology.



EXPOSITOR

Christopher J. H. Wright (England)

Having studied at Cambridge, he served as a minister before teaching at Union Bible Seminary in Pune, India. He is currently Principal and lecturer in Old Testament at All Nations Christian College, and has written a number of books on Old Testament ethics, and a recent commentary on Deuteronomy.



The International Fellowship of Evangelical Students links together over 100 student movements that are committed to Christian witness in higher education and to encouraging students to serve the Lord, the church, and society. IFES movements are committed to the evangelical faith, are non-denominational, are led by nationals, and work together to advance the cause of the gospel worldwide.

COST

(In Austrian Schillings)

Conference Fee	2380	AS
Booking Fee	300	AS
Total	2680	AS

The non-returnable booking fee is payable in advance. The conference fee is payable on arrival at the conference, although if you wish you can pay the balance of the fees in advance. The fee includes three meals a day, accommodation and morning coffee. You would be advised to bring some extra money for books, refreshments, etc.

This cost also includes a free year's subscription to the IFES journal *Themelios*, an international theological journal for undergraduate students.

BOOKING

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English and German will be the main language, using simultaneous translation. Other languages may be available but this must be arranged in advance with the conference. Please contact the secretary if this is required, otherwise we cannot guarantee translation.

PROGRAMME

The programme consists of a series of lectures and bible expositions which will explore the main theme and compliment each other. The programme also includes small fellowship groups, seminars, workshops, a question panel, time for prayer and worship, and a conference service. There will also be plenty of time in the programme to interact with our speakers.

FURTHER INFORMATION

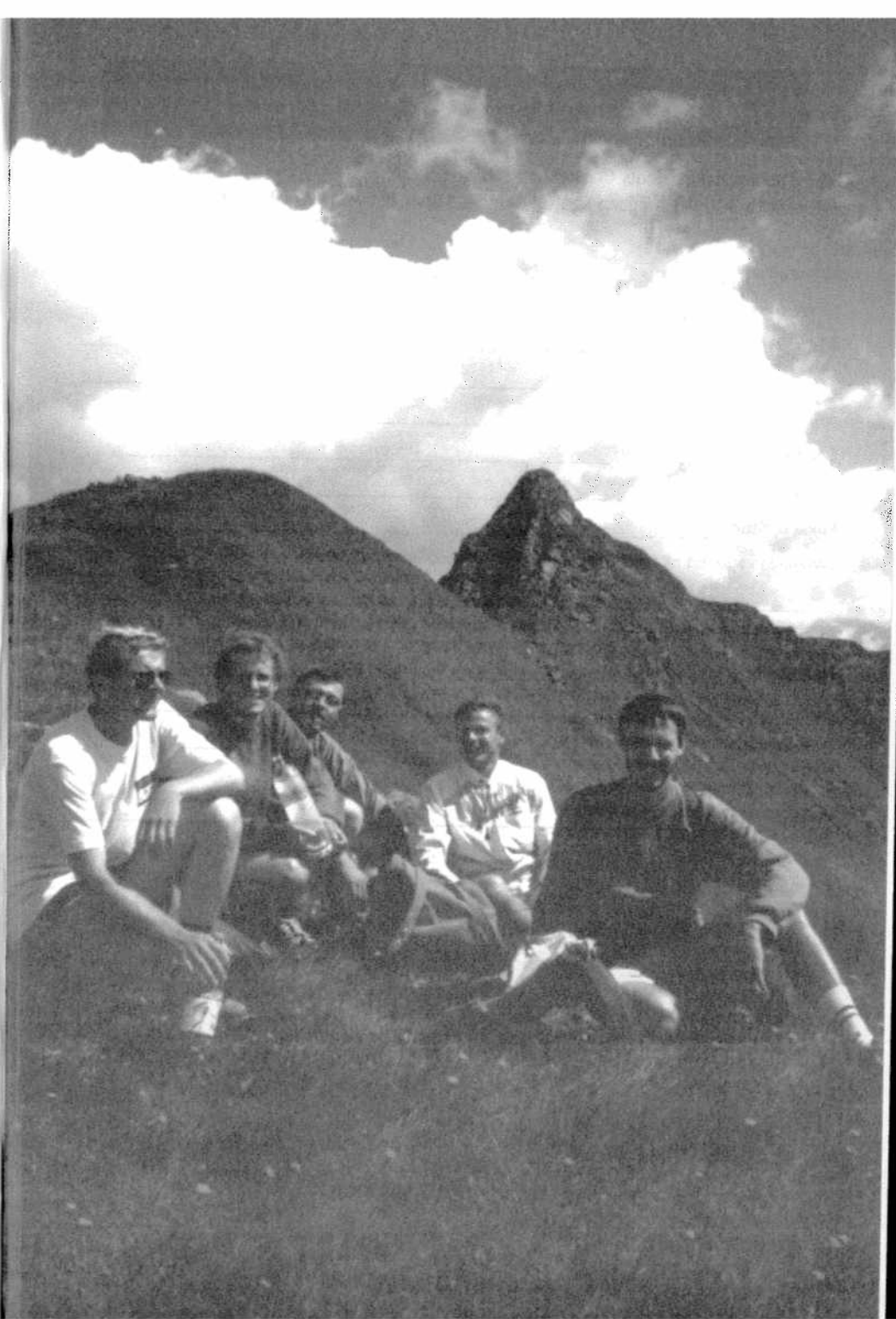
Contact either Schloss Mittersill:
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(Telephone: 06562-4523)

or the secretary of the planning committee:
Tony Gray, RTSF Secretary, 38 De Montfort
Street, Leicester, LE1 7GP, England
Tel: (44) 116 255 1700
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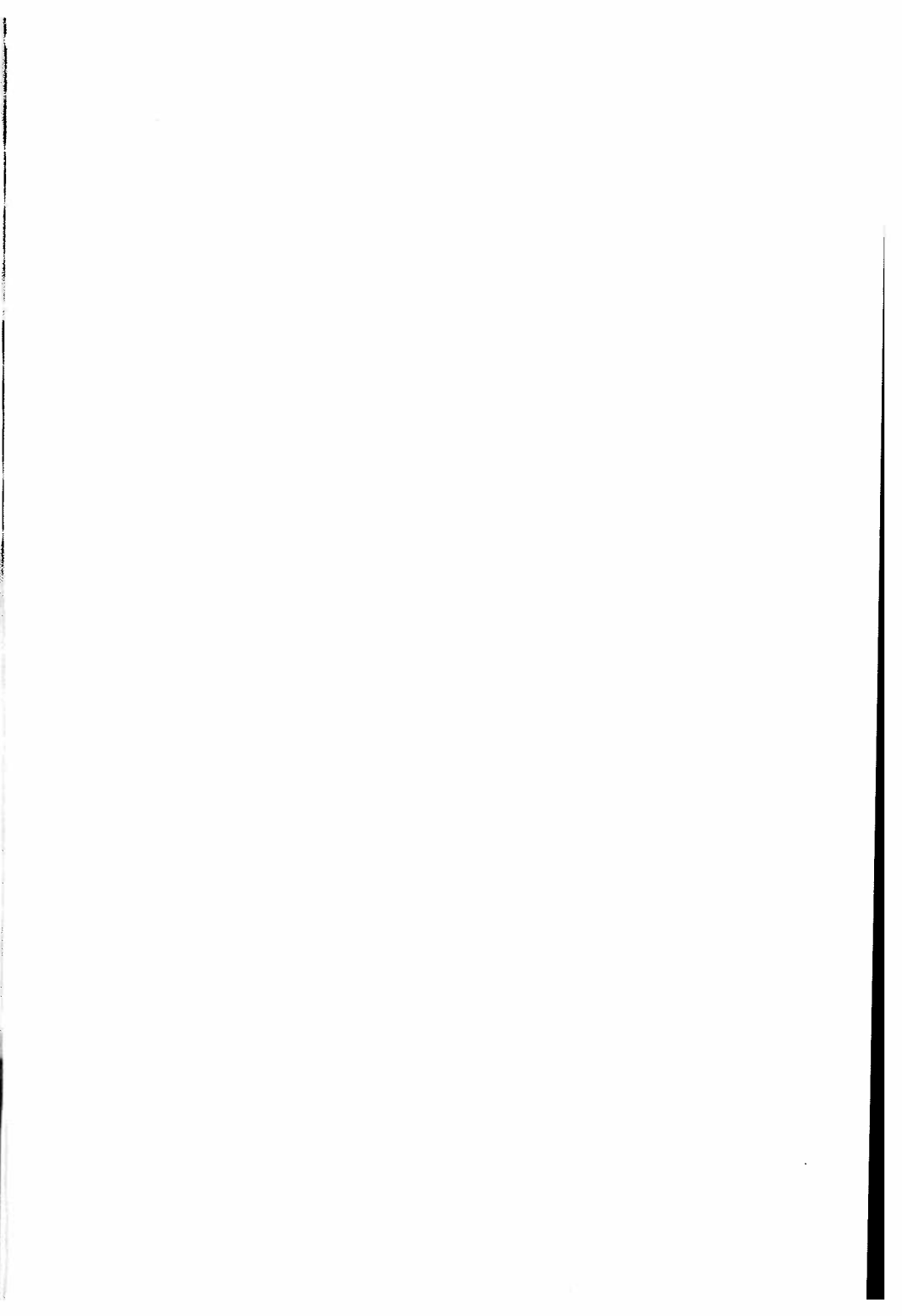
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with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone'
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(Professor of New Testament Exegesis at the University of Aberdeen)

