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Editorial: Profiting from Crime

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DEC 29 1998

We regularly hear that ours is a time when the moral consensus has broken down. Words like 'fragmentation' and (that weary word) 'pluralism' and that wearier-word still 'postmodernism' are bandied about in that connection. However, a Martian visitor to Earth might well conclude that ours was a world of surprising moral unanimity. What government does not profess to hate injustice, side with peace, seek the material well-being of its citizens? The rhetoric is the rhetoric of presumed common moral values. Alongside that, there is condemnation. Not only is crime condemned, but so is profiting from crime. We think specifically here of the writing of books or giving of interviews for the media which rake in cash for the people in question, but do so on the back of some particularly disgusting criminal act. We shake our heads in disapproval that anyone should profit from crime in this way and surreptitiously peek to see what we can see. So we are united not just in our moral values, but in our moral performances as hypocrites as well.

Hypocrisy is an uncomfortable accusation and an uncomfortable truth about ourselves, because it is often so broad, so deep and so pervasive. One of the greatest Christian leaders of our day occasionally quotes some words by the great Scots minister, Alexander Whyte: 'If you knew my heart, you would spit in my face'. If anyone is exempt from hypocrisy, it is this leader (who shall remain nameless); so when he said it, he was not being hypocritical and must have meant what he said. I suppose that if we had the honesty to think that way about ourselves and our relation to others, it would transform our self-image and (spontaneously, unconsciously) alter our self-presentation. In particular, what about the accusation of hypocrisy because Christian theologians profit from crime? It is a criticism that I heard made recently, though it may have been a rendition and paraphrase of some well-known aphorisms of an earlier day. 'You believe that Jesus died a criminal death, do you not? You believe that he was tortured on the cross. That is the basis of your theology. Theologians make a living out of the death of a crucified Jew. They profit from crime. You claim that the death was a cruel expression of human sin. But you get your salaries from it. You are hypocrites who profit from crime'.

It may not be very difficult to pick holes in this argument. But it may be far more difficult to consider whether there is some truth involved in it. For us theologians: one thinks of all the ambition in which we can get embroiled; the desire to gain a reputation; the striving for positions and the bitter and recriminating disappointment which attends our failure; the itch to publish and have one's name on the printed page, in the public gaze. Theological students can give their own twist to that tale. Christian leaders and Christian non-leaders of all stripes can devise their own parallel lists. Our egos restlessly press on to be recognised experts on and defenders of the truth about shed blood. Maybe it is a temptation with some peculiar features for those who use the label 'evangelical'. Because 'evangelical' is meant to guarantee a sound theology and a sound theology means glory to God alone, what we do, we tell ourselves (while admitting that we are guilty of some self-gratifying ambitious peccadilloes on the side) must be to God's glory. Perhaps, though, we are self-deceived. And perhaps, then, the accusation of profiting from crime brings us up sharp. And perhaps, again, if we see it that way, it will help us repent of it and try to flee from it.

Doubtless, we can overdramatize this matter; the gulf between profession and practice is, after all, universal. But the business of gearing one's life to the fact of a death died invites special reflection. One difficulty is that we often have a theology of the atonement without a lively sense of the historical fact of the death

of Christ. However, those who draw theological attention to the earthly life, ministry and death of Christ can, of course, get immersed in all this just in terms of ideas and objects of intellectual reflection. There is certainly no guarantee this way of renewing a proper sense of the cross of Christ. Another difficulty is the concentration of the mind on the atoning work of a cross long vanished from the earth at the expense of concentrating on the high priestly intercession in the present of the one who was once on that cross. We dwell more on the 'it was' than the 'he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins' (1 John 2.2). And that brings us to a point made forcefully by the Reformers, one that we need to recapture today so that we do not profit from crime.

Theology as something which is 'coram deo' is associated particularly with Luther, probably. 'Coram deo' means 'before God' and it indicates something immensely important about the ethos of theological work. It extended vitally to Luther's thinking about justification. So, in dealing with the question of whether the believer's works could be free from the taint of sin, Luther directed his protagonist in *Contra Latomum* to picture himself before the judgment-throne of God. There, in that presence, could one point to any deed one had performed and claim it was free of any sinful trait? My point here has not to do with the proper theology of justification, where controversial issues in relation to Luther appropriately arise. It has to do with the atmosphere that surrounds the theological enterprise when there is a pervasive consciousness of theology *coram deo*. We find the same consciousness in Calvin, including in his treatment of justification. In naming Luther and Calvin we but name the two most famous Protestant theologians; a multitude of other names could be added from the days of earliest Christian theology to the present, through all confessions and denominations.

In all our efforts to purify ourselves from questionable motivation in the practice of theological work, we are also hampered by increasing cynicism. There has for some time been a shift in what counts as virtue and what counts as vice. What used to be humility is now widely regarded as lack of self-confidence; what used to be self-restraint is regarded as unhealthy suppression and so forth. The common thread in these shifts seems to be a philosophy of being true to oneself, and what the self is like seems to be less important than being true to it. On the face of it, this does away with hypocrisy. At least what you see is what there is. But, in fact, what happens is that cynicism is encouraged. One now bothers less about the rights and wrongs of the matter. I can afford to be more blatant and patently aggressive in the pursuit of self-gratification. The breach between the centre of our theological attention, Jesus Christ, and the tendency to profit from crime, simply becomes less important. And that means that something even more dangerous than hypocrisy is taking form. Rampant godlessness has no need of hypocrisy; it proclaims the absence of deity, the absolute of self-determination, and off it goes in open pursuit of its ends. Hypocrisy is at least a sign that there is something out there - God, others, society or tradition - to which one is accountable. Cynicism is the denial of anything outside the self which is worth taking into account, other than for pragmatic reasons.

This may all seem like rather tasteless moralizing and far-fetched in relation to the theological task. Moralizing is certainly not the aim. And if it is often far-fetched, one would be relieved to know it. But the greatest privileges carry the greatest dangers. Theological reflection is a privilege. It is possible because God has given himself as a subject for our thought. There must, therefore, be attendant dangers. Surely theologians who root their work in the work of Christ must recognize that amongst the greatest of these dangers is that we profit from crime. At the moment, there is a majority opinion, if not a social consensus, that people should not so profit. Perhaps that is already changing. One wonders whether theologians will change with it, and not worry too much about profiting from crime.

THE EVANGELICAL AND SCHOLARSHIP – PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Graham Cole

Graham A. Cole is Principal of Ridley College, University of Melbourne. We are very grateful for the opportunity to publish in Themelios this contribution based on a lecture.

It was back in the late sixties and I was seated in St. Andrew's Anglican Cathedral in Sydney. I was a new Christian who was eager to hear a church leader who had been imprisoned for many years by the Soviets for his faith. Pastor Wurmbbrand spoke passionately about the underground church. I never forgot what he said about ministers with DDs. He said that a DD either stands for Doctor of Divinity or Doctor of Darkness. That was my first hint that not every Christian was persuaded that a theological education, let alone research, was a good thing. Other experiences soon followed. When it became known at my church that I intended to do theological study at a theological college, rather than a bible college, I was admonished that I would lose my faith. Indeed one dear lady wrote a forty-page exercise book full of warnings and Scripture passages in an attempt to dissuade me. I was experiencing what J.A.T. Robinson described as 'the fearfulness of the fundamentalist' rather than 'the conservatism of the committed.'

Given criticism such as the above from within the evangelical constituency how then is the evangelical to relate scholarship to his or her evangelicalism? The question is a complex one and admits of a number of dimensions. What do I mean by evangelical? What do I mean by scholarship? Other questions need to be asked: What is the context of scholarship? What tensions come in its wake? How do scholarship and spirituality relate to one another? What is the value of scholarship?

Let's then turn to some definitional issues raised above. For what is evangelicalism?

Some Defining Characteristics of Evangelicalism

An historian of evangelicalism (at least in Britain) and an evangelical theologian of note have described evangelicalism as a movement with at least four defining assumptions. Bebbington and McGrath argue that evangelicalism is bibliocentric.² The Bible has been and is integral to evangelical epistemology. They further argue that the movement has been and remains crucicentric. The cross has been central to the evangelical construal of Christianity. Still further, they claim that evangelicalism has been and is conversionist in aim. Evangelism and evangelicalism go together. Lastly, for both evangelicalism has been and continues to be activist. Evangelicals believe in and practice compassion.

In my view the above defining characteristics are necessary for defining evangelicalism, but they are hardly sufficient. What has happened to the great Reformation catch cries like 'Grace alone' and 'Faith alone'? What has happened to the article of the standing or falling church, to use Luther's way of framing the issue? In other words where is justification by grace alone through faith alone? Bebbington's and McGrath's lists bring the questions asked above.

A theological definition of evangelicalism turns Bebbington's and McGrath's 'assumptions' into imperatives. After all, theology is a normative discipline and not simply a descriptive one. The evangelical believes that the Bible ought to be the final authority for any theological proposal. The evangelical believes that the cross ought to be central to any construal of Christianity. The evangelical believes that conversion ought to be the aim of evangelistic proclamation and witness. The evangelical believes that the Christian life ought to be a matter of the hands and feet and not merely the head. Lastly the evangelical ought to believe that salvation is a matter of grace, not merit. As the classic, eighteenth century hymn from Augustus Toplady puts it: 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.'

Be that as it may, whether the list is the Bebbington or the McGrath one, or my expanded one, we need to note that the pursuit of scholarship is not a defining characteristic of evangelicalism. When historically considered, rescuing the perishing rather than publishing the seminal has been the evangelical's desideratum. Of course, that observation does not foreclose the question of whether the pursuit of the scholarly is consistent with evangelical convictions nor, more fundamentally, whether the pursuit of the scholarly is consistent with a biblical worldview. Indeed evangelicalism is a movement that crosses many institutional forms, of which some have exhibited a deep commitment to the life of the mind such as Old Princeton Christianity (e.g. J. Gresham Machen) and such as in Dutch Calvinism in the Kuyperian tradition (e.g. Abraham Kuyper himself) to give only two examples.³ In my view, the pursuit of the scholarly can be grounded in the biblical pursuit of wisdom, but that is another story.⁴

But what exactly is the pursuit of the scholarly?

The Concept of Scholarship

At this juncture of the discussion a distinction might to be useful. There is a difference, in my view, in between being learned and being scholarly.

Being learned is about knowing a field of scholarly inquiry (e.g. Trinitarian studies). G. Campbell Morgan, a noted preacher of earlier this century, suggests somewhere that new ministers ought to keep up with a field of scholarship to preserve the

momentum of their theological studies. For me as a young minister it meant my reading all I could on the Sermon on the Mount, whether in article or commentary or monograph. I found the advice excellent as the exercise kept up my Greek and my reading. As a result I became more learned in an area, but the practice did not make me a scholar.

Being scholarly assumes being learned but goes beyond it. The scholar not only knows a field (*e.g.* Gospel studies), he or she also contributes to it. Contributions may be direct. The scholar publishes in the field or forms a research team that publishes in the field. But contributions may be indirect. The scholar by teaching, supervision and modelling may prepare new generations of scholars as well as help to increase the numbers of the learned. Whether the contributions are direct or indirect, the scholar endeavours to work in a methodologically self-conscious way with proper attention to whatever academic conventions prevail at the time (*e.g.* footnotes).

Contributing to a field may take one of two forms. Scholars may ask internal questions of the field or they may ask external ones. What's the difference? The debate in Australia over whether the country should remain a constitutional monarchy or become a republic provides a good illustration. An internal question would be: 'Assuming the monarchy is retained how could it be made to work better in Australia's interests?' One answer might be that the Queen tours the world as the Queen of Australia for one month of the year promoting Australian trade interests. An external question would ask: 'Why have a monarchy at all?' The external question prompts us to think outside the square.

Scholarship needs to ask both sorts of question. At times, therefore, scholarship, especially when asking external questions, may appear iconoclastic, but necessarily so. A good example is the classic work of James Barr on the semantics of biblical language. As a consequence of his work an approach to reading the Bible for a so called distinctive Hebrew way of thinking was stopped in its tracks.⁵ However, thinking outside the square may also be very constructive as with Brevard Childs' canonical criticism.⁶ To be constructive, Childs need not be right. What he provided were new questions to open up a field to fresh exploration and his own work to criticism. Richard Bauckham provides a more recent example. He and others raise questions about the current NT scholarly paradigm that the each of the four Gospels had a particular community of readers in mind: the Markan community, the Matthean community, the Lukan community and the Johannine community. In contradistinction, Bauckham with others asks whether the Gospels may have been written with all Christians in mind.⁷ This is no refinement of the current paradigm (by asking internal questions), but a challenge to it (hence an external question).

Importantly, however, when scholars pursue their questions they do so in particular social and historical settings. Scholars, unlike angels, live in bodies. The evangelical in pursuit of scholarship needs to be aware of the challenge of context.

The Context of Scholarship

Most evangelical scholars work in a double context: the academy (code word, Athens) and the church (code word, Jerusalem). The academy is the world of scholarly publication, conferences, and for some, a university department. The church is where they worship, perhaps preach, perhaps write at a popular level, and for many, the context in which they teach in a seminary or Bible college.

There have been, historically speaking, three ways that Athens and Jerusalem have been related by Christians, as a subset of the more general issue of how Christians are to relate to their culture. These three ways are those of accommodation, repudiation and engagement. The first of these two ways I will touch on briefly, before concentrating on the third.

The way to accommodation allows Athens, not Jerusalem, to set the agenda. A contemporary scholar who embodies this approach is Don Cupitt of Cambridge. I recall a lecture of his at the university during which he stated that he changed his theology every three years as a matter of principle. These days an anti-realist postmodernity sets his agenda. The way of repudiation is as old at least as the days of Tertullian of the early Christian era. For him Jerusalem always sets the agenda, Athens never. Jerusalem ought not to have dealings with Athens, the church with the academy as he famously argued.⁸

The way of engagement, however, is committed to Jerusalem, but open to learning from Athens. At times the evangelical will say 'No' to Athens, but at other times 'Yes.' In the language of Augustine, the way of engagement is ever ready 'to spoil the Egyptians', that is to say, appropriate for the service of Christ any wisdom to be found outside of revelation.

Calvin was even more positive about Athens as a series of rhetorical questions in the *Institutes* shows. His lucid prose is difficult to improve upon and so I quote in extenso:

If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonour the Spirit of God. For by holding the gifts of the Spirit in slight esteem, we condemn and reproach the Spirit himself. What then? Shall we deny that the truth shone upon some of the ancient jurists who established civic order and discipline with such great equity? Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their fine observation and artful descriptions of nature? Shall we say that those men were devoid of understanding who conceived the art of disputation and

*taught us to speak reasonably? Shall we say that they are insane who developed medicine, devoting their labour to our benefit? What shall we say of all the mathematical sciences? Shall we consider them the ravings of madmen? No, we cannot read the writings of the ancients without great admiration. We marvel at them because we are compelled to recognize how pre-eminent they are. But shall we count anything praiseworthy or noble without recognizing at the same time that it comes from God?*¹⁰

If the above represents the 'Yes' of Calvin's engagement with culture then his criticism of Plato's doctrine of recollection in the previous section of the *Institutes* reveals the 'No.' Calvin's 'No' is even more strident when discussing whether human reason can discern matters of the kingdom – especially the way of salvation. Here Calvin is emphatic: '... the greatest geniuses are blinder than moles!'¹¹ On this view, Jerusalem always, but with Athens sometimes the response is 'Yes', sometimes 'No'.

The present article assumes the way of engagement in the Augustinian-Calvinian tradition. However, the way of engagement brings a certain tension in its wake.

The Tension of Scholarship

The tension is that of the dialectic (in the sense of debate) between faith and reason. Inside the evangelical scholar's head is both Anselm and Socrates: the believer and the questioner respectively.¹² If Anselm stands for 'faith seeking understanding', then Socrates stands for the dictum 'that the unexamined life is not worth living' and for that other dictum of 'following the argument wherever it might lead'. If Anselm is the archetypal Christian thinker, then Socrates is the archetypal western thinker.

In practice for the evangelical scholar the presence of the Anselmian and the Socratic together means believing amidst questions, while following the argument wherever it may lead. The evangelical scholar should not be surprised by any of this. Not everything has been revealed and some matters await eschatological clarification (Dt. 29: 29 and 1 Cor. 13:9–12). There is an epistemological humility that is entirely appropriate to believing scholarship and consistent with asking questions.

But to be practical there are three tools to help address the internal debate between faith and reason. The first is the A.F.L. box (Awaiting Further Light). I have always found it useful to have some mental space reserved for ongoing questions awaiting answers or better answers than the ones I already have. Over the years I have seen many such questions resolved after a time. The second tool is that of a *pensées* journal (or thoughts journal) which helps preserve the questions in a clear form. As questions arise jot them down in an exercise book and review them periodically to see if they have been addressed.

For me a long standing question both in my A.F.L. box and pensées journal has been as to why God has created such a vast universe if humankind is so central to the story. God's creativity appears prodigal. One answer that I eventually came to has to do with the variety of values. Some values are intellectual like truth, some are moral like goodness and some are aesthetic like beauty. Perhaps the vastness of creation and the diversity within it has aesthetic value for God. A few years ago at a university seminar, I heard another answer from John Polkinghorne who was first a noted physicist then a noted theologian.¹³ Polkinghorne argued that the elements that make up the human body were once forged in the stars. Without a universe of such a scale and history we would not be here to speculate about it. Here then is a scientific answer to complement my philosophical one. Again all such answers are provisional ones, as they are not revealed from on high.

The third tool is a more sophisticated view of commitment than many evangelicals appear to entertain.¹⁴ As a young Christian I was taught that to question was to doubt, to doubt was to fall into unbelief and to fall into unbelief was to fall away from Christ. So don't question. It is as though Christian commitment reduces to belief in certain facts. This view of commitment poses special difficulties for those evangelicals who are doing doctoral work. A key dimension of doctoral work is learning to be Socratic (if they have never learnt to be so before) as integral to the very exercise they are engaged in.

The view of commitment that I was taught fails on philosophical analysis. Philosophically analyzed, to be committed to X is to believe that X is a fact of some kind, to believe that X has value of some kind and to behave accordingly, that is to say there are certain practices that are integral to commitment. For example, if am committed to a political party I believe that the party exists, that it is worth supporting and I vote for it at elections. And so if I am committed to the gospel as understood by evangelicals (and by all major historic Christian denominations) then I believe that Christ is risen, that his resurrection does matter and I pray in his name as my mediator because he is alive from the dead. However, my studies may lead me for a time to question the resurrection doctrine both as to the factuality and nature of the resurrection. To so question may be an expression of unbelief, but it may also be an expression of an intellectual integrity that is God honouring because it honours realism and truth. If it is the latter, then to both ask questions and pursue answers does not necessarily mean that I am no longer committed to Christ. I still pray in his name and meet with his people because of the value I have found in believing in him as death's conqueror. I also deploy my A.F.L. toll and use my journal. Why? Because that which has been found to have value ought not to lightly or peremptorily be given up. My experience over thirty years has been that the answers, satisfying answers, do come as in my quest for an answer to the scale of the universe question. My understanding of life in the

groaning creation (Rom. 8:18–25), however, leads me to expect that some of my questions won't be answered in this life.

The context of scholarship does bring its tensions as the Anselm and the Socrates inside one's head both believe and question. Yet the context of academy and church is not the ultimate one.

The Ultimate Context: Evangelical Spirituality and Scholarship

The Christian lives *coram Deo* (before God) in all of life's pursuits, including that of scholarship. Essential to any spirituality are the practices (regular patterns of activity) that flow from the beliefs and values that are espoused by the adherent. Christianity is no exception. For the evangelical pursuing scholarship the practices of an evangelical life are vital. For once the practices go, evangelical theology begins to make no sense. But what practices?

The practices I have in mind are many. They include the following: reading the Bible for personal transformation and not merely for information, hearing transformative preaching that is biblically based and addressed to the conscience, praying to the Lord of the harvest for the progress of the gospel in the world, fellowshiping with others in the body of Christ, witnessing to Christ as circumstances allow and giving to mission. Of the list, which is not exhaustive, but representative, petitionary prayer is of particular importance. What we are prepared to pray for and, indeed, if we are prepared to pray at all, provide the real diagnosis of where our hearts are because our prayers reveal what we truly value. Furthermore, our prayers show where our heads are, revealing as they do what is our real understanding of the nature of God and his relationship to the world: that is to say, whether we really are theists who believe in the living God of Scripture.¹⁵

The pursuit of the scholarly may lead to the neglect of the evangelical practices as discussed above. In my observation, when that occurs, over time a theological shift takes place to make sense of a lifestyle without them. Indeed, in some cases we find that the Christian faith itself, in any shape or form, is abandoned as the scholarly community replaces the church, and the Scriptures are reduced to solely an object of scholarly attention and no longer read as a means of grace, and prayer becomes meditation only or ceases altogether.

The Value of Scholarship

Scholarship has at least three values for the evangelical engaged in it. The first is personal value. To develop a critical rationality that knows how to sort out the valid and the invalid, the sound and unsound in argument, to develop an ability to weigh evidence judiciously and to theorize responsibly is to grow in the skilful use of a God-given talent. To push back the

boundaries of knowledge (the constructive task) or to clear away undergrowth that is in the way (the iconoclastic task) can be extremely satisfying at the personal level. So too can be the enjoyment in working on a project as one of a team or leading the team. Likewise teaching the next generation of scholars or passing on the findings of scholarship to those who want to be more learned can be deeply rewarding. Above all, enjoying the sense of using a God-given gift in the service of him and others can bring great contentment.

Evangelical scholarship can also have value for the church. (By 'evangelical scholarship' I mean scholarship pursued by evangelicals within the framework of an evangelical theology). This is obviously so, as commentaries are written, theologies propounded, original languages explored, to name but a few examples. But even apparently arcane research may prove serendipitous. I spent much time researching the theological utilitarianism of the eighteenth century and the philosophical-theological system of the Anglican divine, William Paley (1743-1805) in particular. The Paley project has yielded, and continues to do so, its share of academic articles. However, in the nineties an excellently written book appeared in the Australian context on the nature of Australian Anglicanism.¹⁶ The book drew attention to the notion of classical Anglicanism that adopted the three-fold appeal to Scripture, tradition and reason as its method and to the incarnation as its central doctrine. As I read the book I could not help but think of Paley, one of the foremost theological thinkers of eighteenth century Anglicanism, for whom Scripture and reason, but not tradition were 'co-ordinate authorities' and for whom individual eschatology was the centre piece of his system. Paley did not fit the model. On further reflection neither did evangelical Anglicans for whom Scripture is the norm of norm which rules those other norms of tradition and reason and for whom the atonement is central. So I entered the lists on the basis of research done for an entirely different reason and which I never would have guessed would have its relevance to the issue of Anglican self-understanding in the late twentieth century Australian context.¹⁷

Lastly scholarship feeds the academy as both internal and external questions are pursued, as paradigms are refined or even replaced by better ones. Evangelical scholars join that great conversation and debate that has been going on at least since Socrates' time on the real, the true, the good and the beautiful. Even postmodern scholarship is no exception with its covert commitments to the truth of conceptual relativism and the value of personal freedom. Scholarship then has value for the academy and in providing that value, the evangelical scholar participates in the fulfilment of the cultural mandate, as some call it, which is grounded in the Genesis story (Gn. 1: 26-28 in particular).

Conclusions

How we view scholarship and the evangelical is a subset of the wider issue of how we regard the evangelical and culture. Some have adopted the way of repudiation. Athens never, Jerusalem always, they maintain. An increasing number are adopting a much more welcoming stance towards Athens (or, should I say Paris?). Once, such evangelicals would have been called liberal evangelicals, but these days they are called open evangelicals.¹⁸ The present writer, standing in the Reformed tradition of evangelical scholarship with its Augustinian and Calvinian roots, has argued for Jerusalem always and Athens sometimes as a biblical world and life view is brought to bear on the academy. This is the way of engagement.

I have also argued that inside the evangelical scholar's head is the ongoing debate between the Anselmian and Socratic outlooks (responsible believing and indefatigable questioning, respectively). The result is a tension that needs to be addressed practically by adopting the tools of the A.F.L box, a *pensées* journal and a more philosophically sophisticated understanding of commitment.

Most importantly, I argued that all of life, including the pursuit of scholarship accordingly, is lived *coram Deo* (before God) and if we are to remain evangelical then certain key practices should be our *habitus* like hearing transformative preaching that is biblically based and applied to the conscience. A practice that is especially important is petitionary prayer as it reveals our understanding of and commitment to the living God of biblical revelation who answers prayers unlike idols in their impotence (Is. 46:7).

Lastly, Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote: 'He who begins by loving Christianity better than Truth will proceed by loving his own sect or church better than Christianity, and end by loving himself better than all.'¹⁹ The pursuit of scholarship may have many values (personal, ecclesiastical and academic). None is greater than truth. And the pursuit of truth, at whatever level, by the evangelical scholar is service before God for the people of God to help avoid the particular pit of self-preoccupation and delusion that Coleridge had in mind.

¹ J.A.T. Robinson, *Can We Trust The New Testament?* (London and Oxford: Mowbrays, 1977), especially pp. 6, 25.

² See D.W. Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism' in A.E. McGrath (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia Of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford/Malden: Blackwell, 1997), p. 183 and A.E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford/Cambridge: Blackwell, second edition, 1997), pp. 121-22.

³ For J. Gresham Machen see his 'Christianity and Culture' in *Princeton Theological Review*, 11 (1913) and the discussion of him in George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and*

- Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 182–201.
 For Abraham Kuyper see his *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931).
- ⁴ Key parts of that story are whether the writer of Proverbs used the Egyptian source *Amenope* and the extent to which wisdom in Israel fitted into Ancient Near Eastern wisdom. For a recent discussion of the issues see R.N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (Leiden/New York/Koln: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 6–22.
 - ⁵ J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: SCM, 1961). Brevard Childs wrote of Barr's work that 'Seldom has one book brought down so much theological superstructure with such effectiveness.' See Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), p. 72.
 - ⁶ B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979).
 - ⁷ See Richard Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
 - ⁸ See J. Stevenson (ed.), *A New Eusebius* (London: SPCK, 1970), p. 178.
 - ⁹ Translated D.W. Robertson, Jr., *On Christian Doctrine: Saint Augustine* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), Book Two, XL, pp. 75–76.
 - ¹⁰ John T. McNeill (ed.) and translated by F.L. Battles, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London: SCM, 1961), pp. 273–274.
 - ¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 273, 275.
 - ¹² For an example of this tension as experienced by an evangelical scholar see John Goldingay, 'The Ongoing Story of Biblical Interpretation' in *Churchman*, Vol. 112, Number 1, 1998, pp. 14–16.
 - ¹³ For a recent book on the science and faith interface by John Polkinghorne see *Serious Talk: Science and Religion in Dialogue* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995).
 - ¹⁴ For this analysis I have adapted the work of Roger Trigg, *Reason and Commitment* (Cambridge: CUP, 1973).
 - ¹⁵ I am struck by the Lukan report that Jesus taught his disciples to pray like John the Baptist had done (Lk. 11:1–4). I suspect that the key pastoral questions that many evangelicals would ask would be: 'How is your Bible reading?' and 'Are you in a small group that is studying the Bible?' The question all too seldom asked would be: 'Are you still relating to God in prayer?' The failure to disciple the people of God in prayer may be the biggest pastoral weakness in contemporary evangelicalism.
 - ¹⁶ See Bruce N. Kaye, *Church Without Walls: Being Anglican in Australia* (North Blackburn: Dove, 1995).
 - ¹⁷ See my 'Paley And The Myth Of "Classical Anglicanism"' in *Reformed Theological Review*, Vol. 54, September-December, 1995, No.3, pp. 97–109 and Bruce Kaye's spirited reply "'Classical Anglicanism" A Necessary Point Of Departure' in *Reformed Theological Review*, Vol. 56, January–April, 1997, No. 1, pp. 28–39.
 - ¹⁸ The identification I owe to Goldingay, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
 - ¹⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection: Moral and Religious Aphorisms* quoted in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, Third Edition, (Oxford/New York/Toronto/Melbourne: OUP, 1990), p. 157.

THE FORMULATION OF CREEDS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

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This article is based on a paper given at the 1997 session of the Scottish branch of UCCF's Historians' Study Group.

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The whole age of the early church is often considered as a credal age. This is misleading if we think in terms of the definition of a creed as set out by J.N.D. Kelly – a fixed formula summarising the essential articles of their religion and enjoying the sanction of ecclesiastical authority.¹ Such statements appear only toward the end of the third century. But if we think of the church as beginning with simple confessions of Jesus and graduating to formalised credal statements, then the early church is of great interest. We can see a process of development at work, though it has to be said that we lack evidence for some of the key stages in that development.

The NT was axiomatic for the thinking of the early church. There were no other parallels for it to follow. It recognised that NT religion was decidedly confessional. This was intrinsic to the historical events which lay at the heart of the gospel message. Before his crucifixion Jesus bore testimony both before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate. He was the faithful and true witness. He witnessed the good confession.

At the same time Peter and the other disciples failed to confess their Lord in the hour of darkness, despite their assurances that they would stand by him. In Peter's case he even denied him three times. That was seen as a serious but not unforgivable fault. On the contrary, the same disciples as had failed their Lord were shortly to be emboldened by the Holy Spirit to bear witness in hostile surroundings to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus – the sign that God had designated him both Lord and Christ.

The NT Scriptures will not allow us to see these as special events connected with a unique set of circumstances. A pattern is set for the dynamics of Christian belief at all times. Thus, the apostle Paul can designate verbal confession alongside a genuine belief in the heart as marks of salvation. He says, 'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.'² For Paul Christian faith can be no secret or private affair. A sincere believing heart will always be mirrored by lips that confess the truth about Jesus. Where persecution was soon to be a common experience for Christians, it was

inevitable this element in the Christian religion should be highlighted.

It is Christ's own testimony to the truth that forms a paradigm for believers to follow, the only difference being that they do not bear testimony to themselves but to Jesus as Lord. This emerges from the fascinating passage in 1 Timothy where Paul reminds Timothy - 'Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ...'³ There is some debate among scholars as to the context in which Timothy made his good confession. His baptism or his ordination are the most likely suggestions. I would prefer the suggestion of baptism, because the NT lacks a clear concept of ordination and because a reference to baptism would fit better the practice we know did emerge in the first centuries of the Christian church. If this view is correct, the implication would be that Timothy is being encouraged by Paul to remain faithful to the confession he made at baptism in potentially much more difficult circumstances. As we shall see, the emphasis on the baptismal confession was to be a very powerful idea in the church at least from the late third century, if not before.

This is not the only passage in the NT where it is indicated that baptism entailed some profession of faith on the part of the adult being baptised. We may have to be wary about the case of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, since Philip's terms ('if you believe with all your heart, you may be baptised') and the eunuch's response ('I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God') exist only in a western recension of the text, which Richard Hanson dates from c. 120 AD and which he believes reflects the emerging position in the western church.⁴ Nevertheless, this probably represents the early formalisation of a general practice.

We do find better evidence in the cases both of Lydia and of Paul himself. It is clear that Lydia had been interrogated by Paul as to the sincerity of her faith; for she could say - 'Since you have judged me faithful to the Lord, come and stay in my house.'⁵ Paul in one of the accounts of his conversion reports that Ananias enjoined him, 'Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'⁶ Interestingly, it is left to the young convert to choose his own words in addressing Christ in prayer. Though no elaborate preliminaries were required at this stage, baptism was not administered indiscriminately. After all, Jesus' words which we call the Great Commission link baptism to discipleship and to instruction.

There was, however, no standard baptismal creed, no standard formula of interrogation. Ananias' words to Paul would even

suggest some initiative was left to the convert to address the Lord Jesus in appropriate terms. We are not at a stage of a standardised liturgy or of set baptismal vows.

Baptismal Interrogations

Baptism was not the only, but was probably the most important context in which the distinctive beliefs of the Christian church in the early centuries would be highlighted. Though our evidence for baptismal practice is patchy, certain trends stand out. By the second century it had become customary to use a triple immersion in baptism (to correspond to each of the members of the Trinity); we do not know exactly why this was. It does, however, help to explain why from the fourth century, if not before, Trinitarian questions were keenly debated in the church. Around the same time the persons being baptised were required to assent publicly to appropriate questions about their faith. A typical procedure would follow the lines set out in the *Apostolic Tradition* ascribed to Hippolytus – ‘And when he who is to be baptised goes down into the water, let him who baptises lay his hand on him saying thus, “Dost thou believe in God the Father almighty?” And he who is being baptised shall say, “I believe”. Let him forthwith baptise him once, having his hand laid upon his head. And after this let him say, “Dost thou believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who was born by the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary, Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and died, and rose again on the third day living from the dead, and ascended into the heavens, and sat down at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?” And when he says, “I believe”, let him baptise him a second time. And again let him say, “Dost thou believe in the Holy Spirit, in the holy Church, and the resurrection of the flesh?” And he who is being baptised shall say, “I believe”. And so let him baptise him the third time.’

At this period the person being baptised is not expected to recite any creed. He is simply to assent to his belief in the Triune God, as outlined in Jesus’ own words in Matthew 28. And yet the words of the officiant are already going well beyond those laid down by Christ. If we were to put together the content of his three questions, we would produce a mini-creed, along Trinitarian lines.

A further insight into attitudes to baptism from these early centuries is provided by Justin Martyr from his First Apology. In this work Justin did have a vested interest in emphasising that Christians were bound by a strict moral code. Nonetheless I think we can accept his comments that at baptisms the whole congregation, especially those being baptised, were reminded of the serious moral demands made of all who claimed to be Christ’s disciples. ‘All who are persuaded and believe that the things which are taught and affirmed by us are true, and who promise to be able to live accordingly, are taught to pray, and beg God with fasting, to grant them forgiveness of their former

sins, and we pray and fast with them.⁸ It is notable that Justin has included in the preliminaries to baptism an undertaking that the candidate will conform his or her conduct to the ethic required by the gospel. This moral thrust reappears in the sequel to the baptism – 'But after thus washing him who has professed and given his assent, we bring him to those who are called brethren, where they are assembled together, to offer prayers in common both for ourselves, and for the person who has received illumination, and all others everywhere, with all our hearts, that we might be permitted, now we have learnt the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, that we may obtain everlasting salvation.'⁹ In those churches known to Justin the link between baptism and obedience to the commands of Christ was treated very seriously. At baptism this was not simply impressed on the new Christians; an opportunity was taken to remind Christians of longer standing of their duties in this respect and of the need to plead for God's help in leading a life worthy of the profession they had made. We should note that if anyone was to be baptised, that entailed a promise or a vow that was stressed frequently thereafter. While Justin highlights the moral implications of this vow, we may be sure that it also involved fidelity to basic Christian beliefs, not least at a time when Christians were liable to be martyred for the name of Christ. Faithfulness to baptismal vows was to remain a constant emphasis throughout our period; it was to take an unusually precise character with the emergence of distinct baptismal creeds.

The Baptismal Creed

From an early stage baptism was preceded by catechetical instruction. We may suppose that in time this developed along standard patterns. We cannot say exactly when a creed in the formal sense was first associated with such instruction.

By the latter half of the third century, however, a tendency emerged within the church which was to enhance the role of a formal creed in the actual baptismal ceremony and its immediate preliminaries. Baptizands who had at one point been required to assent to three simple questions were now required to affirm a creed as an integral part of the ceremony. We do not possess the evidence to say how and why this change took place. We can say that the new procedure was known as the 'rendering' of the creed (*redditio symboli*), the climax of the catechetical training which preceded baptism. At some advanced stage in their instruction the catechumens received the creed from the lips of the bishop himself (*traditio symboli*).¹⁰ It was then the task of the catechumens to memorise and eventually to reproduce the creed, normally in the course of the baptismal service. Perhaps we can describe this as a liturgical enactment of Paul's assertion – 'It is with your heart you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess

and are saved.' This could be understood to imply a chronological order. First they heard and believed; at a later stage they declared their faith with their own lips.

Surprisingly perhaps, the candidates for baptism were discouraged from being too open with the creed they had received. There was a reluctance even among bishops to put this creed in written form, in case it should fall into unhallowed hands. Cyril of Jerusalem puts it this way to the baptizands – 'Already you stand on the frontier of mystery. I adjure you to smuggle no word out; not because the things you are told are not worth the telling again, but because the audience is not fitted to take them in... When, by what you experience, you grasp the sublimity of the things that are being taught, then you will know for yourself that catechumens are not fitted to be told them.'¹¹ This reserve over the doctrine of the church was to be described in later centuries as the *disciplina arcani*.¹² It was at its height in the fourth and fifth centuries, but the practice lapsed thereafter when infant baptism had become the rule and correspondingly the catechuminate had lost much of its significance.

There are many factors which may have contributed to this development. Toward the beginning of the fourth century Christianity took a quantum leap forward in terms of its political status. This did not, however, imply ready acceptance of Christian beliefs in society as a whole. It did, however, ensure that the church would rouse much curiosity in Graeco-Roman society – a development that might have alarmed some Christians who were happier with the model of a martyr church that stood totally apart from wider society. One reaction would have been to insist on a more rigorous and at the same time a more formalised entry system. Otherwise people might enter the church for undesirable motives or with a seriously defective knowledge. From a different perspective, some sensitivity was understandably felt about the general unbelieving public handling those items of the Christian faith which were most precious to believers – notably the Lord's Prayer, the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist as well as the creed.¹³

Besides, this was a time when the concept of monarchical episcopacy reigned supreme. With increased numbers coming forward as catechumens, many bishops no longer had the time to cover the whole process of instruction personally. If they effectively controlled the content of the creed at the local level and the catechumens received this creed directly from them, that at least enabled the bishops to maintain some semblance of control over the instruction of young believers.

The creeds in question were deliberately kept brief. The creed, which we now call the Apostles' Creed and is sometimes despised because of its brevity, is simply a provincial variant or descendant of one of the baptismal creeds in common use at

Rome. The brevity of such creeds meant that believers with the poorest memories could grasp them. Memorisation was considered important for more important reasons than the *disciplina arcani*. After all, some who joined the church lacked the leisure or the ability to read the Scriptures, to say nothing of the fact that a grasp of the whole of Scripture would take time. What they required was a brief summary of key doctrine. Besides, for the faithful to commit the creed to writing would have been a disincentive to their learning it. It would not have been so written in their heart that they could turn to it in the ordinary circumstances of life. For this is exactly what they were encouraged to do. The creed was intended as a precious possession to last the believer throughout his life. It was a treasure store from which he was encouraged to draw comfort each day. This high view of the baptismal creed is eloquently put by Niceta of Remesiana, writing about 400 – ‘Beloved, persevere in the tradition which you have learned. Be true to the pact you made with the Lord, to the profession of faith which you made in the presence of angels and of men. The words of the Creed are few – but all the mysteries are in them. Selected from the whole of Scripture and put together for the sake of brevity, they are like precious gems making a single crown. Thus, all the faithful have sufficient knowledge of salvation, even though many are unable, or too busy with their worldly affairs, to read the Scriptures. And so, beloved, whether you are walking, resting or at work, whether you are asleep or awake, let this salutary confession be ever in your hearts. Let your soul be ever in heaven...’¹⁴

The creed, then, was a badge of the Christian’s identity as a child of God. He was to make it part of himself so that he could rejoice in his salvation. This was emphasised by the place it had in the pre-baptismal liturgy. The reciting of the creed followed immediately after the abjuration of Satan – normally a fourfold renunciation of Satan, his works, his pomp and his worship.¹⁵ Then the baptizands turned in the opposite direction and professed their faith. Clearly this was intended to provide the believer with a model of his transition from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. Both the renunciation of Satan and the rendering of the creed implied a pledge – in the one case that there would be no return to the ways of darkness and in the other that he would hold fast to the faith. The latter was taken very seriously and in some places at least involved a written signature. Thus Basil of Caesarea can speak in these terms of his own baptismal profession. – ‘Take the profession of faith we made when we first entered the Christian life when departing from idols we came to the living God ... Whoever does not keep to it in all circumstances and does not attach himself to it as a sure protection throughout his life, makes himself a stranger to God’s promises, contradicting his own written profession which he put on record when he pledged his faith.’¹⁶ Basil was not unique in this respect. Cyril of Jerusalem has an unusual but revealing way of describing his action on imparting

the baptismal creed. He likens it to the entrusting of money to someone for safe keeping – ‘Preserve them with godly fear, lest the Enemy spoil any of you through your conceit, or some heretic misrepresent any of the things you have had delivered to you. Faith, you see, is life cash paid over the counter (which is what I have now done) but God requires you to account for what you have had: as the Apostle says, “I charge thee before God, who quickeneth all things, and before Jesus Christ, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession that ye keep without spot, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” this faith committed to you. A treasure of life has been committed to you, and at his coming the Master looks for the deposit.’¹⁷

I need hardly add that this implied that baptizands had to go through a course of instruction on the baptismal creed and its significance. They were not supposed to memorise these baptismal lectures as such, which would normally be delivered by the bishop.¹⁸ That only applied to the creed. But they were expected to attend carefully through the whole course of lectures. If I may again refer to Cyril of Jerusalem, he declared that while sermons were beneficial, they were not to be equated with the course of baptismal instruction. The odd sermon could be missed without much harm, but it was quite a different matter with the baptismal lectures. They were like the foundations of a building. If part of the foundation was neglected, then the whole edifice which was built upon it would be unsound.¹⁹

Cyril also regarded the creed and the accompanying lectures as equipping believers with weapons to fight against pagans, Jews and heretics.²⁰ Basil too, in the passage I have recently quoted, regarded the creed as a ‘sure protection’. The world outside the church was regarded as a very dangerous place spiritually, and the creed was emphasised as one of the most valuable means of protecting believers, especially those young in the faith and those who had no access to the Scriptures for whatever reason. Of course, the creed could degenerate into a talisman – rather as some modern Muslims use words from the Q’uran without understanding them. But at this stage in the church’s history this would be safeguarded by the extensive course of instruction the believer was expected to undergo.

The Rule of Faith

In the second and third centuries there was another area of church life where credal statements emerged in embryo quite independently of baptism. This concerns the Rule of Faith, a concept which first appears in Irenaeus.²¹ It is unlikely, however, to have originated with him, since many shared his underlying idea of a common faith possessed by the true church wherever it existed – including those areas outside the Roman Empire where believers might not possess the written Scriptures. When Irenaeus spells out what he considers is entailed by the Rule of Faith, he does not detail his sources. It

is most unlikely that these included a written creed, though they might have involved aspects of regular catechetical training. The same applies to the Rule of Faith in other writers. There may be a broad similarity from one writer to another; but at the same time there are individual variations, even idiosyncrasies. Thus Irenaeus included his recapitulation doctrine, while Tertullian affirmed that Jesus preached a 'new law' and Origen included both the authority to allegorise the Scriptures and his own perspective on the contentious issue of human free-will.²² Significantly, these men wrote at a time when political circumstances and geographical isolation restricted the opportunities for Christians from different parts of the world to check their understanding of the Christian faith against one another. They might well have been surprised to find that their own emphases were not echoed everywhere.

Moreover, the Rule of Faith did not necessarily fulfil the same function in each author. In Irenaeus it was used vaguely of the standard of truth against which all doctrine must be measured. In Tertullian, however, there are grounds for identifying a more precise usage. Gerald Bray has pointed out that in the second century Roman jurists had developed the term *regula* (rule) in the context of legal interpretation. Wherever a particular statute seemed unclear, a Roman judge could clarify its meaning by consulting the *regulae*. Of course, the law always remained supreme; but the *regulae* could fulfil a prescriptive as well as descriptive function. One jurist by the name of Paul described this role - 'A *regula* is that which explains briefly what the matter is. The law must not be deduced from the *regula*, but the *regula* is determined by what the law is. By means of the *regula* therefore, a short summary of things is passed on ...' With Tertullian we find a parallel role given to the *regula fidei*. It was a summary of the law (i.e. Scripture). Not only was it a key to the interpretation of Scripture; it was an authoritative summary of its teaching.²³

Other writers would not have thought of the Rule of Faith as a clarification exclusively of Scripture. It would have covered unwritten traditions as well. But virtually everyone would have agreed with Tertullian in describing it as 'una omnino est sola immobilis et irreformabilis' ('absolutely one, alone incapable of alteration and reform').²⁴ Origen, a leading figure in the Greek theological tradition, who was keen to speculate in uncharted areas, affirmed his own version of the Rule of Faith, but in his most detailed account (at the start of his work *On First Principles*) he distinguished areas where no ecclesiastical consensus had been established and so there was room for pious speculation. For example, he asserted that it was part of the church's Rule of Faith to believe in the existence of the devil and other evil angels, but the church had never authoritatively spelt out what they are or how they exist.

At first sight we might think that with his use of the Rule of Faith Origen was groping towards the later distinction between

the essentials and the adiaphora of the faith. And perhaps he might profitably have advocated such a distinction. But in fact Origen related this distinction much more controversially to his view of different sorts of believers. God, he believed, had spoken in the plainest terms in parts of Scripture to the simplest of believers, but there were deeper truths which could be grasped only by more spiritual or advanced believers. The Rule of Faith embraced, therefore, the more basic truths. Anyone who wanted to make significant spiritual progress had to advance well beyond this, though never in contradiction to it.

The Rule of Faith was never a hard and fast formula. Those who referred to it did not feel bound to a particular form of words or even to the same complex of ideas. Irenaeus, for instance, cites it in several different forms, which use different shapes, different selections of detail, and different stereotyped phrases, but which cover broadly the same ground.²⁵

The Rule of Faith did help to pave the way for the more precise definitions we call creeds. It was natural that some of the traditional phrases which appear in the Rule of Faith should form the building blocks for creeds. It was also an obvious development that if appeal was made to the Rule of Faith to counter heresies, the church should in time look to more formal creeds to fulfil the same purpose. But combating heresy was not the primary function of the Rule of Faith. This would have existed even if the churches had not had to contend with heresy. Its major role was to assert the identity of the one church of God, scattered as it was throughout the world. It was a badge of identity for all believers – a summary of those items they needed to treasure as their spiritual inheritance. This again was intrinsic to formal creeds, especially to those creeds which were given to believers at baptism.

The fourth century and the Arian crisis

The fourth century was a watershed in more ways than one for the church. Not only did it see the end of the age of outside persecution and the beginning of imperial patronage. But it also affected the relations of Christians to one another. One symptom of this is the development of creeds as tests of orthodoxy. In a sense this usage was not entirely new. As we have seen, this was implicit in the baptismal interrogation which preceded the use of declaratory creeds at baptism. Indeed, canon law decreed that if a man came to the catholic church from a heresy, he was to be asked what baptismal interrogation he had received.²⁶ If this was correct, there was no need to rebaptise the man. If, however, the questions were deemed inappropriate, his baptism was considered invalid. In short, the baptismal questions were meant to ensure the baptizand had the correct faith. Similarly, the later declaratory creed at baptism was intended to ensure that even the youngest or the simplest of Christians should be preserved in the true faith.

Where heresy troubled the church, it was natural for the leaders to look for a credal subscription to guarantee orthodoxy. As early as c. 180 some such procedure had been adopted by the presbyters of Asia in an interview with a patripassian heretic called Noetus.²⁷ Then in 268 in a more serious case six bishops who assembled at Antioch to deal with the adoptionist heretic Paul, Bishop of Samosata, constructed a joint letter including a statement of faith. This was not technically a creed, but a lengthy document emphasising those areas of faith where Paul was deemed to be suspect. It bore a resemblance to the Rule of Faith. The six bishops were confident that their doctrinal excursus represented the views of all Catholic churches and so they felt at liberty to condemn anyone who disagreed with it as 'outside the ecclesiastical rule'. They asked Paul to join in their subscription to the letter.²⁸

Perhaps it is only because of the paucity of evidence from before the fourth century that we do not have other evidence of the same phenomenon – the subscription of credal statements or letters as guarantees of someone's orthodoxy. We can view this as a simple extension of the Rule of Faith. Anyhow, these would have been confined to a fairly local level. The fourth century, however, saw the advent of imperial patronage for the Christian church. There was freedom, even encouragement, for Christian leaders from a wide area to meet from time to time. If this had not occurred, the Arian Controversy, which took centre stage for the most part of that century, might well have been restricted to Egypt and the surrounding provinces. It began after all as a dispute between Bishop Alexander of Alexandria and one of his presbyters, Arius.

For their part, the Emperors after Constantine (with the exception of the short reign of the pagan Emperor Julian) saw it as their business to do everything possible to maintain ecclesiastical unity. They would not deny the existence of heresy, but there was a tendency to minimise its impact. It was always assumed (in accordance, let it be said, with the church's own official teaching) that heretics were talented but perverse individuals who set themselves against the general tenor of the church's teaching. All that was necessary was to unmask the distance of the heretic from the mainstream of the ecclesiastical doctrine. Besides, in the early days of imperial patronage at least, everything possible was done to ensure the reconciliation of the heretic. It was in part the Emperor Constantine's insistence on restoring Arius to fellowship just two years after the Council of Nicaea that meant that the so-called first ecumenical Council did not eradicate from the church the major problem it had been convened to solve.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that it was the Emperors who pioneered the new role for certain creeds as tests of orthodoxy. When Constantine became Emperor of the East in 324, he found the ecclesiastical scene in turmoil because of the dispute between Arius and Bishop Alexander. Already

ecclesiastical procedures were in force to cope with a serious doctrinal difference; quasi-credal statements were being issued to which others were supposed to agree on pain of excommunication. In the early weeks of 325, without any imperial directive, a council met in Antioch to elect a successor to the deceased occupant of this important see. They took the opportunity to set out an anti-Arian position in an extended credal statement.²⁹ They even excommunicated three bishops (including the famous church historian Eusebius of Caesarea) who refused to subscribe to this statement, though the way was left open for these men to change their minds at the forthcoming 'great and hieratic synod'.³⁰

As it turned out, when the great synod did convene at Nicaea, Eusebius was able to establish his own orthodoxy by setting forth the baptismal creed of the church at Caesarea. He introduced it in these words – 'As we received from the bishops before us, both in our catechetical instruction and when we were baptised... so also we believe now and submit our belief to you.'³¹ It is true that Eusebius also included a brief explanation of each of its clauses, which he achieved without any controversy. According to Eusebius' own account the Emperor Constantine was the first to testify to the orthodoxy of his statement. In this undemanding way Eusebius had established his own orthodoxy. Perhaps this is not surprising given Eusebius' own prominence (he was probably the most learned bishop of his day) and given the Emperor's avowed concern for ecclesiastical harmony.

The same Council also had more tricky business – dealing with those whom Bishop Alexander had identified as heretics. This it endeavoured to do through the Nicene Creed.³² We know too little about the details of this Council to say how this creed was devised or where it originated. Perhaps it was a baptismal creed to which certain anti-Arian clauses and anathemas were added. We just do not know. There can, however, be no doubt that this creed was a distinctly anti-Arian statement.³³ This emerges from the following points –

- (1) the clarification *from the substance of the Father* to explain what was entailed in the Son being begotten from the Father.
- (2) the words *the true God from true God*.
- (3) the clause *begotten not made* – which ruled out the view of Christ as a creature.
- (4) the phrase *of one substance with the Father*.
- (5) the series of anathemas, most of which target statements which Arian writers had been known to make.

Given the tenor of the Nicene Creed, it may surprise us that only two of the bishops (Libyan supporters of Arius) refused to subscribe to it, and were exiled for their failure to co-operate.³⁴

That so many bishops did subscribe was due in part to the general atmosphere where it was clear that refusal carried the threat of imperial punishment, and in part due to the attitude of the Emperor Constantine, who in his desire for harmony ensured that explanations were given of the language of the Nicene Creed in order to remove most of the major misgivings about it. Eusebius of Caesarea even tells us that the Emperor in person offered an assurance as to what the key word *homouosios* did *not* mean. Significantly, he did not say what it did mean. Thus, some ambiguity remained on this key word.

But what was the status of the Nicene Creed? We have seen that it was not the only creed which was used at the Council. Eusebius of Caesarea offered the baptismal creed of his own church as a token of his own orthodoxy. It was accepted as such, but Eusebius had also to subscribe to the Nicene Creed. A similar procedure was to occur with the restoration of Arius about two years later. Arius offered his own creed, which Kopecek describes as obscure and evasive on all those points on which Nicaea had spoken clearly and decisively, but exactly the same might be said for all baptismal creeds at this point.³⁵ At the same time Arius was required to indicate his agreement with Nicaea. Perhaps we can conclude that the Nicene Creed was not meant to oust baptismal creeds; it was brought in to deal with troublesome new ideas which threatened the unity of the church. It was unclear at this stage whether the Nicene creed was intended to supersede, to complement or simply to clarify the standard baptismal creeds. For many it probably did not matter since they would have thought that the immediate crisis provoked by Arius would soon be over. The Emperor Constantine was one such person. In effect he took the view that it was possible to outlaw wrong doctrine and at the same time to rehabilitate those who had originally been responsible for canvassing that wrong doctrine. In the long term, however, this procedure proved naive though such was the prestige among Christians of the first Christian Emperor that no one was prepared to say as much.

So far I have mentioned nothing about Nicaea being the first ecumenical council. This omission is deliberate. It was only in retrospect that the idea of an ecumenical synod carried weight. Indeed, Constantius II, one of Constantine's sons and his major successor, was responsible for an ecumenical council of his own in 360 which outlawed some of the main features of the Nicene Creed. In fact, it rejected all previous creeds, and forbade the formulation of new ones in the future.³⁶ A synod which assumed to itself such grandiose authority was suspect. Indeed, at this stage we can say that an ecumenical council had little intrinsic authority. Certainly, the idea of the ecumenicity of the church had long been influential, and so it was to remain throughout the period of the early church. The Catholic faith was that which was believed always, in all places and by everyone, according to the famous words of Vincent of Lerins. But, as was increasingly recognised, a large council did not of

itself guarantee the expression of the mind of the whole catholic church.

The Council of Nicaea certainly had an unusually large gathering of bishops, probably between 250 and 300 of them.³⁷ The weight of numbers, including a significant representation from the west of the Roman Empire, did accord it some influence. To this should be added the imperial authority of the Emperor Constantine. While he did not stifle debate, the conclusion was undoubtedly influenced by his desire for as broad a harmony as possible. It is significant that while Constantine was alive, no attempt was made to overthrow or replace the Nicene Creed, but not long after his death these attempts began in earnest. Initially at least, the prestige of the Nicene Creed was bound up with the personal influence of the Emperor who had convened the Council. If that had remained the case, we would have to say that reverence for the Nicene Creed was a clear instance of Caesaropapism. But the Creed was in fact subject to sustained attack over the period from 340 to 360, not because it was felt to have been forced on the church by the Emperor, but because it was believed in some quarters to have given countenance to the heresy of Sabellianism (or modalism).

The process of finding an alternative creed to affirm an acceptable position on the Trinity was long and tortuous. In the end it proved unsuccessful. Ironically, it was only through this trial and error process that the Council of Nicaea and its associated creed achieved their special status.

Assessing the creeds

It is worth considering in more detail why these alternative creeds were unsuccessful. At one level we can pinpoint political factors. The process of creed-making was hijacked by a group of court bishops who were prepared to ride roughshod over the views of large sections of their fellow bishops and invoke civil punishments on those who stood in their way. Moreover, they were at the very least sympathetic to men who were avowed Arians. Only one of their creeds specifically endorsed Arianism, but it raised such an outcry that its originators had quickly to backtrack.³⁸ They preferred to set forth creeds that were tolerant rather than prescriptive of the Arian position. For example, the position for which they secured imperial favour in the 'ecumenical council' of 360 simply said that 'the Son is like the Father, as the divine Scriptures say and teach.' Only the most radical and outspoken of Arians – and there were a few such – could have quarrelled with this anaemic statement. It soon became clear that this formula was a *carte blanche* for Arian or Arianising statements to be made from the pulpit. This, combined with a general revival in overt Arianism in the period from 350, established the idea that Arianism was a heresy of sinister power and durability. Not all would have agreed with Athanasius and seen Arianism as the great

apostasy that was destined to befall the church before the end of the age.³⁹ But bitter experience did mean that Arianism was viewed as an unusual threat to the apostolic faith. And this inevitably heightened the status of the Nicene Creed as it was well known that the creed had been designed to combat Arianism.

I have argued that the Council of Nicaea and its creed attained special authority only after the passage of time. The same may be said of the second ecumenical council (that of Constantinople of 381) and the creed which is associated with it – the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.⁴⁰ For one thing this council had much less of a claim than the Council of Nicaea to be described as truly ecumenical. It had scarcely any western representation, and had only some 150 bishops who agreed with its conclusions.⁴¹ An even greater problem surrounds its creed. For the next seventy years few, if any, authors allude to it. In fact, when it was produced at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, its existence surprised many of the participants. Because of this the weight of scholarship was for some time opposed to its connection with the Council in 381; it was felt that this Council had endorsed the Nicene Creed without issuing a new creed. But now, through the work of J.N.D. Kelly, these doubts have been largely laid aside, as it is recognised that at this period creeds were described as Nicene if they contained the key elements of the Nicene Creed.⁴² They did not need to reproduce its *ipsissima verba*. They could even develop peculiarities of their own as local circumstances and particular challenges dictated.

What probably happened at Constantinople was this – the Council reaffirmed in the strongest terms the Nicene Creed and in some context issued the creed C as a sign of its agreement. It is quite possible that C was already a baptismal creed to which the Council made a few additions as it saw fit. The most notable of these additions would be the clauses describing the Holy Spirit. In the early Arian controversy the status of the Spirit had not been an issue, but the situation had greatly changed after 360 when those who were at one in their hostility to Arianism were divided on the Spirit.⁴³

It was only at the Council of Chalcedon (itself to be ranked as an ecumenical council) that the creed C was acknowledged separately from N and so acquired prestige in its own right. And yet the bishops assembled at Chalcedon who (as I have said) had been previously unfamiliar with C were somewhat grudging in the status they gave to it. They gave the impression that they would have preferred in an ideal world to be content with N; but faced with the existence of C, they had to accord it some honour. This is what they wrote – ‘We decree that the exposition of the right and blameless faith of the 318 holy and blessed fathers, assembled at Nicaea in the time of the Emperor Constantine of pious memory, should be pre-eminent, while the decisions of the 150 holy fathers ... should also hold good.’⁴⁴

The Council of Chalcedon also felt bound to say why the Council of Constantinople had gone beyond the original Nicene Creed. Clearly they thought that only very special circumstances would justify this. So they said that the Council 'has decreed primarily that the creed of the 318 holy fathers should remain inviolate; and on account of those who contend against the Holy Spirit, it ratifies the teaching subsequently set forth by the 150 holy fathers assembled in the royal city concerning the essence of the Spirit, not as adducing anything left lacking by their predecessors, but making distinct by Scriptural testimonies their conception concerning the Holy Spirit against those who were trying to set aside His sovereignty.⁴⁵ They were very sensitive about doctrinal innovations to the apostolic faith. Clarifying some points in the creed was one thing; introducing new items was quite another. The bishops at Chalcedon had an immediate motive for their stance. They were resisting (successfully as it turned out) the call of the Emperor of the day to bring out a new creed to counter the current errors of Nestorius and Eutyches. Instead, they confined themselves to a Definition of the faith, which was designed to explain the correct sense of the Nicene Creed. That, incidentally, is why the Chalcedonian Definition, arguably the most important christological statement in the history of the church, has never been regarded as a creed.

The creed C may have had obscure beginnings. It was, however, destined to have a glorious future, its significance extending to the present day. Within a comparatively short time of the prominence first given to it in 451, it had become virtually the sole baptismal creed for all the eastern churches.⁴⁶ For a time it even became the baptismal creed for Rome and other churches in the West.⁴⁷ The development in the East is hardly surprising. There were moves toward uniformity in the baptismal creeds of the east. The creed C was well suited to this because of the general acceptance it met in both East and West. Besides, it was better suited than N for a baptismal creed. It had references to the church, to the remission of sins and to the resurrection of the dead which were found in earlier baptismal creeds, but not in N. The one significant feature of N which is omitted in C, the anathemas, had become out of place. Indeed, if they had been given prominence, they might have publicised Arian notions which were now long dead.

The liturgical use of C was not confined to baptisms. In a revolutionary development it was introduced into the eucharist, first in the east and somewhat later in the west. Here it did not displace an earlier creed, but marked an innovation. Ironically, the introduction of this practice can be attributed to the Monophysites in 476, who were opposed to the Chalcedonian Definition and were attempting to show themselves more orthodox than the official Orthodox. Despite these inauspicious beginnings the practice persisted.⁴⁸ Indeed, in many churches it persists to this day. In the Orthodox Church, for example, C is

read or sung at every celebration of the Eucharist and also daily at Nocturns and at Compline.⁴⁹

It is not difficult to say why this development proved popular. The old practice must have appeared strange whereby believers should hear the faith at baptisms, which generally meant once a year. This will have suggested that the creed was appropriate for the beginnings of the Christian life and not thereafter. Clearly this was unfortunate; the creed C was well-fitted to edify the mature as well as the young believer. Besides, creeds need not be confined to instruction; they have their place in the celebration of the church. At the same time we should observe that the place given uniformly to C in the eucharist is evidence of a widespread feeling that the age of doctrinal development was over. This was particularly true of the East. The church had escaped the lure of the worst heresies and could rest secure in the product of the saints of the fourth century. This may be regarded either as an assured faith or an arrogant complacency.

Before we leave C, I should add that it has reasonably been described as the one truly ecumenical creed. I suppose many would assume that this title should go to the Apostles' Creed; but that is a mistake. The Orthodox churches do not attach a special status to it, because it was not recognised by any ecumenical synod and because it was essentially a western baptismal creed.⁵⁰ C does in Eastern Orthodox circles represent the product of a general council. It also has authority in the west, but here at some point a small but significant addition was made. I refer to the filioque clause. Whereas C has the Spirit proceeding only from the Father, the western version has a double procession.⁵¹ This was to be a major reason why attempts to heal a growing breach between the western and eastern churches in the Middle Ages failed. Incidentally the Reformers liked C (in its western form) and gave the creed a new lease of life by translating it into the vernacular.⁵² In Anglican churches too it has been highly regarded; it was, at least until recently, the creed used at every celebration of the eucharist.

Types of conservatism

I wish now to pursue further a point which emerged in connection with the Council of Chalcedon. There we noted the reluctance of the bishops to formulate a new creed or even to suggest that the Nicene fathers might have omitted anything in their formulation of the apostolic faith. Our first instincts might be to question the wisdom of such a position. Does it not overlook the very real possibility of new and unexpected challenges to the Christian faith? Is there not a limit to the explanations which can be added to an old creed? Isn't it a clear example of trying to pour new wine into old wineskins? I believe such a reaction would be perfectly valid, but it is the job of historians to ask why this was.

One reason was undoubtedly the experience of the mid-fourth century when one council after another tried to establish the apostolic faith. This activity was judged to have a disastrous pastoral effect; it paved the way for agnosticism about the Christian faith within and outside the church. It was also considered that it had been promoted by clergy who were Arians at heart, and who were determined to render the Nicene Creed null and void. Such judgments had the result of boosting the status of the Nicene Creed.

Here we must recall that the creed into which a believer was baptised was the creed he was expected to profess throughout his life. It made no difference if the believer concerned became a bishop. Indeed, these vows may have been repeated at ordination. Thus very good reason was needed if a change was to be made to the creed. And yet at the Council of Nicaea, as far as our limited sources go, no one quarrelled with the principle of a new creed. Perhaps it was self-evident that the emergency situation with the church in turmoil called for extraordinary measures. By the 350s, however, the situation had changed immeasurably. Constantine and the great majority of the bishops who had been present at Nicaea in 325 were dead. Constantine's own standing had become very high because it was accepted that he had died in the faith, being baptised in his final illness. It also meant that there were hazards in bishops seeming to go against what their predecessors (whom they would describe as their fathers in the faith) had agreed at Nicaea.

This emerges from a fascinating account by the church historian Socrates of debate at the Council of Seleucia in 359, one of that notorious series of councils convened to reach agreement on the faith. Socrates tells us that Acacius, bishop of Caesarea, the successor to the famous Eusebius and one of the leading eastern court bishops, said – 'Since the Nicene Creed has been altered not once only, but frequently, there is no hindrance to our publishing another at this time.' This did not meet with general assent. One opponent, Bishop Eleusius of Cyzicus, replied, 'The Synod is at present convened not to learn what it had no knowledge of, nor to receive a creed which it had not assented to before, but to confirm the faith of the fathers, from which it should never recede either in life or death.' Socrates goes on to make some observations of his own, which have particular interest for us. He points out that when Eleusius talked of 'the faith of the fathers', he did not mean the Nicene Creed, but a creed published at a Council of Antioch in 341. Socrates argues that Eleusius is hoist on his own petard. His arguments are very revealing – 'How is it, O Eleusius, that you call those convened at Antioch "the fathers", seeing that you do not recognise those who were their fathers? The framers of the Nicene creed ... have a far higher claim to the title of "the fathers"; both as having priority in point of time, and also because those assembled at Antioch were by them invested with the priestly office. Now if those at Antioch have disowned

their own fathers, those following them are unconsciously following parricides. Besides, how can they receive a legitimate ordination from those whose faith they pronounced unsound and impious? If those, however, who constituted the Nicene Synod had not the Holy Spirit which is imparted by the imposition of hands, those at Antioch have not duly received the priesthood: for how could they have received it from those who had not the power of conferring it.⁵³ We must, of course, regard this as an expression of a personal viewpoint by Socrates, and yet he cannot be putting forth an altogether unrepresentative position at the time when he was writing – a decade before the Council of Chalcedon. It is clear from Socrates' frequent references to spiritual fathers and from his use of the emotive word 'parricides' that great stress was laid on the faith that was passed on by the bishop to the baptizands. Anyone who tried to go against that faith was guilty of serious sin. Especially if he was a bishop!

We might say – what about doctrinal development? Did not the patristic period see such development? Was not the Nicene Creed a supreme case in point? I have to agree, and would point out that the fourth century saw the emergence of an extreme form of doctrinal conservatism in the east, as a result of the prolonged Arian crisis and the unhappy attempts at new creeds which disfigured the middle of the fourth century. It came to be accepted for a variety of reasons that the Nicene Creed was a bulwark not only against Arianism but against all heresies. This is surely a remarkable claim for such a short statement of faith. There was also an implicit recognition that Arianism was the heresy of heresies.

Since the western churches had been less troubled than their eastern counterparts by Arianism, they did not assign it such a high place in their thinking. They did see Arianism as a heresy but only one of many. Hence they were more open to new doctrinal challenges. The Athanasian Creed, for example, which despite its name is a western product from about the mid-fifth century, gives as much weight to christological as to Trinitarian theology, thus reflecting the debates on Nestorianism in the east.⁵⁴ It is also new doctrinal challenges which most concern Vincent of Lerins, who was obsessed with the question of how to distinguish the true faith from heresy and has left us with the most extended treatise on the subject from the early church. For many years his work was axiomatic in Roman Catholic thinking.⁵⁵ Here I simply observe that while Vincent regarded Arianism as a serious error, he did not conclude that since the Catholic Church had found an antidote to it, that would suffice against all future heresies. Indeed, so strongly did Vincent believe that novelty was of the essence of heresy that he was almost bound to foresee the advent of further heresies.

Vincent reflects a different sort of conservatism which had taken root in the western church. He would recognise a process of doctrinal development – not grudgingly but enthusiastically.

He insisted that this was marked by genuine progress and not change. His favourite analogy for this healthy growth was that of a human body. The growth of religion in the soul should be like the growth of the body, which in the course of years unfolds and develops, yet remains the same as it was.⁵⁶ Vincent firmly believed that the Catholic Church had seen healthy growth – The Church of Christ, zealous and cautious guardian of the dogmas deposited with it, never changes any phrase of them ... It devotes all diligence to one aim: to treat tradition faithfully and wisely; to nurse and polish what from old time may have remained unshaped and unfinished; to consolidate and to strengthen what already was clear and plain; and to guard what already was confirmed and defined. After all, what have the councils brought forth in their decrees but that what before was believed plainly and simply might from now on be believed more diligently; that what before was preached rather unconcernedly might be preached from now on more eagerly; that what before was practised with less concern might from now on be cultivated with more care?⁵⁷ We would have to say that this is an idealistic picture – worryingly idealistic because its author believed he was reflecting reality. But there was no doubt that Vincent's outlook was that of the mainstream of western church life.

Vincent did not mention the baptismal creed or indeed any sort of creed in his treatise.⁵⁸ This may reflect a more flexible and less idealistic attitude to the baptismal creed than in the east. It was accepted that this creed should be short so that even the least able could memorise it. This meant that the baptismal creed had limitations, and these were frankly recognised at times. In this recognition of its limitations the west differed from the east and it was to its advantage to do so.

As evidence for this I would point to Augustine of Hippo, who while still a presbyter in 393 wrote a work entitled *De Fide et Symbolo* ('On the Faith and the Creed') for a gathering of bishops.⁵⁹ As well as expounding the creed in detail, Augustine gives some rationale for its proper place in the life of the church. Augustine likens the creed to the milk required by young Christians, but argues there is need too for deeper instruction suited to those who are ready for solid meat.⁶⁰ That meat can be provided by a more detailed exposition of the creed. Augustine clearly does not intend to confine the creed to catechetical instruction. It has a place for mature believers. Besides, heretics can take advantage of the conciseness of the creed to introduce their own errors.⁶¹ The way to avert this is again by exposition of the creed, though Augustine is enough of a traditionalist to hope that this will heighten rather than diminish the status of the creed. He avoids any suggestion that the creed as he knows it is inadequate. The creed has become the starting-point for a deeper investigation of a range of Christian truths. From one who was keen to push the bounds of Christian understanding as far as could legitimately be done, this was a helpful way of approaching the baptismal creed. He

saw his procedure as fulfilling the biblical text (Is. 7:9) which he read as *Unless you believe, you will not understand.*⁶²

Augustine had provided a framework in which the western churches could anticipate further developments in understanding the implications of the faith they had professed at baptism. And I suppose that continues to the present day if we consider how many treatises are still written on the Christian faith based on that ancient baptismal creed we call the Apostles' Creed.

By contrast the eastern churches by the fifth century had tended towards a position where their official creeds had become virtually sacrosanct. Or perhaps a better way of putting it would be this – they regarded creeds almost as Protestants are taught to view Scripture, as though they were ultimately handed down from God and nothing was to be added to or subtracted from them. In the special place they assigned to N and to C, they in effect said that Arianism had posed a unique challenge to the Christian faith which no subsequent error could repeat. We may well ask – does Arianism merit to be considered in this light?

Appendix 1

The Creed Of Nicaea - as drawn up at the Council of Nicaea (325) and commonly designated N.

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father,

only-begotten, that is, from the substance (ousia) of the Father, God from

God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one

substance (homoousios) with the Father, through Whom all things came into

being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and

our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered

and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead;

And in the Holy Spirit.

But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and, Before

being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of

nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration

or change – these the Catholic Church anathematises.⁶³

Appendix 2

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed - probably endorsed at the Council of Constantinople (381) – often misnamed the Nicene Creed and commonly designated C.

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into existence, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the

Scriptures, and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, of Whose kingdom there will be no end;

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified, Who spoke through the prophets;

in one holy Catholic and apostolic Church.

We confess one baptism to the remission of sins; we look forward to the

resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.⁶⁴

¹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, 1960), p. 1.

² Rom. 10:9–10.

³ 1 Tim. 6:12–13.

⁴ R.P.C. Hanson, *Studies in Christian Antiquity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), pp. 27–52.

⁵ Acts 16:15 – here the translation is my own.

⁶ Acts 22:16.

⁷ Chapter 21 as translated by Kelly, *op.cit.*, p. 46

⁸ Justin 1, *Apol.* 61:1–2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 65:1.

¹⁰ Kelly, *op.cit.*, pp. 32–34.

- ¹¹ *Procat.* 12. The translation from this and other passages of Cyril is that of William Telfer in the *Library of Christian Classics* vol. IV (London: SCM, 1955).
- ¹² This term was first used by the Protestant scholar Jean Dail in the 17th century – Kelly *op.cit.* p. 168.
- ¹³ Kelly, *op.cit.* pp. 168–71.
- ¹⁴ Niceta *De Symbolo* pp. 13–14. The translation is that of Gerald G. Walsh in the *Fathers of the Church* series vol. 7 (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1949).
- ¹⁵ Kelly, *op.cit.* 33–35.
- ¹⁶ Basil, *De Spir Sanct.* 26.
- ¹⁷ Cyril, *Cat. Or.* 5:13.
- ¹⁸ Some catechetical orations survive by John Chrysostom from his days as a presbyter in Antioch. Not all such talks, therefore, need have been given by the bishop.
- ¹⁹ *Procat.* p. 11.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- ²¹ Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1984), p. 102.
- ²² For a brief summary and comparison of these writers and their Rules of Faith see the table in Frances M. Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (London: SCM, 1992), pp. 10–11.
- ²³ Gerald Bray, *Holiness and the Will of God* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1979), pp. 102–3. The quote from the jurist Paul occurs in *Ad Plautum* xvi.
- ²⁴ *De vir. vel.* 1.
- ²⁵ Young, *op.cit.*, p. 9.
- ²⁶ Cf. the 8th canon of the Council of Arles (314).
- ²⁷ Kelly, *op.cit.*, p. 206.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 207.
- ²⁹ For this council see R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), pp. 146–51. I will refer to this book as *SCDG*.
- ³⁰ Kelly, *op.cit.*, p. 208.
- ³¹ Recorded in Socrates *H.E.* 1:8.
- ³² I use the phrase 'Nicene Creed' here to refer to the original creed of Nicea, commonly designated N.
- ³³ For recent discussion of the creed see Kelly, *op.cit.*, pp. 234–54; Hanson, *SCDG*, 152–72; and Rowan Williams, *Arius – Heresy and Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1987), pp. 68–71.
- ³⁴ Socrates, *H.E.*, 1:9.
- ³⁵ Thomas A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* (MA, Cambridge: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), p. 57.
- ³⁶ Kelly, *op.cit.*, p. 294.
- ³⁷ Williams, *op.cit.*, p. 67.
- ³⁸ This creed was issued by a council in Sirmium in 357 and was soon called the Blasphemy of Sirmium by its opponents – for details see Kelly, *op.cit.*, pp. 285–86; Hanson, *SCDG* pp. 344–45.
- ³⁹ Athanasius, *Htstoria Arianorum* pp. 74, 77.
- ⁴⁰ Sometimes (mis)named 'The Nicene creed' and commonly designated 'C'.
- ⁴¹ Hanson, *SCDG*, pp. 806–7.
- ⁴² Kelly, *op.cit.*, pp. 296–331.
- ⁴³ Kelly, *op.cit.*, pp. 339–44; Hanson *SCDG*, pp. 734–90.
- ⁴⁴ Kelly, *op.cit.*, p. 330.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Kelly, *op.cit.*, pp. 344–46.
- ⁴⁷ Kelly, *op.cit.*, pp. 346–48.
- ⁴⁸ Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ*, p. 117.

- ⁴⁹ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 210.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ Kelly, *op.cit.*, pp. 358-67.
- ⁵² Kelly, *op.cit.*, p. 276.
- ⁵³ Socrates, *H.E.* 2:40.
- ⁵⁴ Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ*, pp. 175-91.
- ⁵⁵ *Vincenti Comm.* 2.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 23. The translation is that of Rudolph E. Morris in *The Fathers of the Church Series Volume 7* (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1949).
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁸ I have to qualify this with the observation that Vincent's work survives in a truncated form, and so a reference to such creeds cannot absolutely be excluded. But given the tenor of the surviving portion of his work, I think such a reference unlikely.
- ⁵⁹ This is conveniently edited with an English translation by the Dutch scholar, E.P. Meijering, *Augustine: De Fide et Symbolo* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1987).
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- ⁶² English translations now read 'Unless you believe, you will not be established' or something similar.
- ⁶³ The translation is that of Kelly, *op.cit.*, pp. 215-16.
- ⁶⁴ Translated by Kelly, *op.cit.*, pp. 297-98.

LINDSAY BROWN: AN INTERVIEW

Lindsay Brown is General Secretary of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) since 1991. Prior to that he served as IFES Regional Secretary for Europe and staff worker for UCCF. In this piece he talks to Stephen Williams about theology in the world wide student work.

SW Lindsay you have been General Secretary of IFES for ... I've got this figure of seventeen years in my head for some reason!

LB Actually, seven years, but I started working as Regional Secretary in 1982, almost seventeen years ago, and then I became General Secretary in 1991. It feels like seventeen years Stephen!

SW Has that been a period of growth for IFES on the whole?

LB Yes, I think it has been a time of remarkable growth, particularly because of the political changes in the late 1980s in the formerly Communist world, which opened up opportunities for Christian witness in the student world, not only in post-communist countries, but also in some countries that had a more totalitarian system of government. Nepal would be a case in point where there was a very small student work before about 1989. In that Hindu kingdom students saw demonstrations on television in Eastern Europe and went on to the streets and called for greater democracy. King Birendra opened the situation up politically, so Christian witness was able to expand considerably from 1990 onwards in a situation where there had been significant repression beforehand. I would guess that since 1989 we have been able to begin student work in somewhere between 25 and 30 countries around the world, the majority of which had a Communist background. Before then it was very difficult working in those countries, including Russia, Ukraine, Central Asian Republics, Belarus, Albania etc.

But even before 1989, under the previous General Secretary, Chua Wee Hian, student work in the eighties expanded in a number of countries around the world, including in Southern Africa, countries like Angola and Mozambique where work began in the midst of civil war. So there has been probably more accelerated growth since 1989, but there was steady growth occurring before then.

SW In these places, has there often been a rich evangelical or theological inheritance to draw on, or have people found themselves making their own way afresh, as it were, and having to work out the application of biblical truths in contemporary situations without really much of a background?

LB I think that the latter has been the case in most post-communist States. If we take Russia for example, there are several things to note about the cultural and theological

background at the time of the changes in 1989 and following.

Firstly, it was virtually impossible from the 1920s onwards for evangelical Christians to study any academic course in university, whether it was theological or otherwise. So though you had people who had the academic ability, almost none of the people in positions of leadership in the Church, as pastors or elders, had formal academic or university training.

Secondly, there was very, very little literature available in the Russian language before 1989. There were probably only in the region of about sixty or seventy evangelical books available at that time, the majority of which tended to be the translations and testimonies of books that were felt to be helpful to people in the West, and publishing was carried on in a rather piecemeal fashion by Western individuals or agencies, translating occasional books here and there; but very little work of theological note was available from an evangelical perspective. What was available was material published from the Russian Orthodox background, but in terms of an evangelical contribution, there was a minimal amount available, and very, very few commentaries. Most of the books tended to be biographical books of Western individuals like Nicky Cruz or Corrie Ten Boom. So at the level of formal theological training and at the level of literature – two of the keys, I would say, to the formulation of theological perspective in a culture – the church in Russia really was very, very weak. In contrast, there is a very different situation in China; many books have already been published in Mandarin and in Cantonese in Taiwan, Hong Kong and other Southeast Asian countries. There are many able Chinese theologians teaching in Seminaries and Bible Colleges outside of China too. There is a much greater corpus of literature and theological training available to help the church. This wasn't the case in Russia before 1989 and added to that, of course, very few Western Christians who had theological stature as theologians spoke Russian or understood Russian, so even when the gates opened, very few people from outside of the culture were able to go in and teach through the medium of the Russian language.

So people have been trying to find their way forward since 1989. In Russia several small scale publishing houses have started up. Several small Bible Colleges or theological institutions have begun to take root, but things are still at the very initial stage, and I would say there is evidence of some tension in the evangelical community, probably between younger converts, some of whom are students or even some individuals who are in academic positions in universities, and many of the church leaders who come from humble roots and are godly men, but are not used to grappling with some of the major theological or intellectual issues of the day. So there is some tension between the rising generation and the already existent one.

SW *Can you tell me more about that tension? Is it tension in terms of personality, to some extent, and approaches and ways*

of holding to certain Christian truths, or is there actually conflict of opinion here, so that the evangelicalism of that younger generation is theologically different? Is it that kind of tension?

LB Well, I think one of the areas in which the tension is most evident is in the whole area of the development of what we might call the Christian mind, by which I mean an attempt to apply Christian truth to every area of society. Something happens in a culture when the church and the culture are highly restricted. It seems to me that if a church is restricted in its forms of worship or its activities for a lengthy period of time, what tends to happen almost imperceptibly, is that the church leadership tends towards legalism, perhaps adding additional definitions of what it means to be a Christian to the core of the faith, (e.g. not wearing ornaments, such as rings or earrings, or not drinking any alcohol, or these kind of micro-ethical issues which are secondary). So legalism tends to build up over a period of time in some of those churches which are restricted by the State. When new believers come in then to that situation, they sometimes struggle to identify these restrictions with the new-found faith they have experienced personally and find in the Scriptures with its emphasis on liberation in Christ. So tension can occur at that level.

And then if you have a diet of teaching which tends to overly spiritualise stories in the Bible, not expounding passages in the context of the whole book, and not seeking to apply the gospel to the workplace or in the area of our sexuality, the sciences, the arts and so on, you tend to find a church which is quite restrictive and where new believers are frustrated in not seeing the relevance of the gospel to every area of life. But that's a hangover from living under a totalitarian system, and perhaps from a lack of training and equipping of some of the leaders.

SW *Let me see if I've picked up correctly what you are saying here. It seems to me that you are encouraged by many of the developments among people of the younger generation for at least three reasons, if I've got it right. One is that they are developing a Christian world view in their thinking. Secondly, they seem to be able to distinguish quite well primary from secondary issues, unlike what sometimes happens under more restrictive situations. Thirdly, and I would like you to comment on this, they have a wider conception of what salvation in Christ means, than some of the other generations, by the sound of it. Is that correct?*

LB It is a patchy situation; it's perhaps more complex than what you have said might lead some to feel. I wouldn't want to state overly negatively the contribution of Christians in restricted environments, but there is a downside to it as I've highlighted. It wouldn't be true either to say that all Christians since 1989, in these situations, have been much stronger in those few areas you summarised. But in general, I think those are lessons that the church is beginning to learn and apply since perhaps 1989 and some of the younger generation coming

through, particularly students and young graduates, are seeking to work in some of these areas, but it does sometimes evoke a cultural tension and perhaps a theological tension in churches where you still have some in positions of leadership whose notion of what constitutes an evangelical lifestyle is perhaps narrower than the New Testament would lead us to believe.

SW *You have obviously had very wide experience over a number of years, and it is interesting that with all your knowledge of the differences in these situations, you find several features in common. Can I move on to some common questions, because I have heard you say before now, that there are two dominant issues for IFES theologically, aren't there? The question of pluralism (the question of other religions) and the question of nationalism. Now I heard you say that a few years ago; is that more or less still the case? Are these the two dominant issues?*

LB No doubt there are other issues too, but it seems to me that these are two of the key issues globally at the moment. I think that it is very evident that the issue of nationalism has presented a big challenge to the church in recent years, and in my mind in a global village where people's national identity is undermined, and where they feel less secure faced by market forces and other things which undermine national identity, they tend to become more defensive of their national roots, and this has led of course to inter-tribal warfare in a number of countries around the world. We are fully acquainted with ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia and the same kind of thing in tensions between Hutus and Tutsis in both Rwanda and Burundi. In both cases, in both those latter two countries, unfortunately some church leaders were even implicated in the fighting. I expect this is going to be a problem in a number of other places in the years to come.

As far as the question of pluralism and its close relative, syncretism, is concerned, this of course has been a major issue for some years. I think particularly in the West we see it manifested, especially since the sixties, in the growth and influence of Eastern mysticism, particularly from the Indian sub-continent and its emphasis on syncretism. More recently, the growth of Islam in the liberal West has led people, with the growing number of immigrants in places like Britain, France and Germany, to perhaps play down the distinctiveness of Christian claims with the aim of hoping that these different cultural groups can settle down and live harmoniously together. But I think this challenge will expand even further in years to come. We can see it there in Africa, not so much with Islam and Eastern mysticism, but with the resurgence of interest in African traditional religions and the attempt by some theologians to wed biblical truth to African traditional religion. Some theologians are grappling with the issue of how they can develop a theology which is African in a way which is distinctive

from perceptions of Western forms of theology. In our work, many of our leaders are concerned to reflect on how we can develop a form of theology which is both African and evangelical, so actually in the last years we have begun publishing houses in both French-speaking and English-speaking Africa, with the deliberate aim of encouraging some of our capable graduates to write books, which seek to apply biblical truth to African problems, because even books written in English or French from the West don't actually touch the nerve of what are the key issues in Africa as a whole.

So I believe that one of the key ways forward is in the encouragement and the promotion of Christian writers and Christian literature, who really seek to apply biblical truth to the cultural context in which they are serving and working in Africa and elsewhere. So syncretism and pluralism I think are issues right across the world, manifesting themselves in different ways.

SW *Is it the case that when you ask questions about pluralism and other religions you can draw on an evangelical heritage of thought, but with something like nationalism it is much harder to do that and we have to do our thinking afresh? Is that correct or is that a misapprehension on my part?*

LB Well, it's very interesting – as you know, Stephen, we had a group dialoguing in Wales just a few years ago on this whole issue of working towards an evangelical theology which had a positive approach to ethnic or national identity without leading to full-blown nationalism. As we tried to grapple with this issue, we looked around for a corpus of literature from other cultures, where theologians had done some thinking on the whole question of a biblical approach to nationalism, and for me one of the most striking things about the exercise was the scarcity of literature available on this subject. There were very few books in English and we hardly found anything available in other languages. I would say that I have noticed in the last five to ten years a growing body in literature in French from the African context, particularly from writers in Rwanda and Burundi and other countries which have been touched by this problem. There are some young bright theologians reflecting on and writing about a biblical approach to nationalism. Some more literature is becoming available now, but until the last few years there has been very little available.

SW *It seems to me, and I wonder how you would react to this, that because the Reformation had to do with differences in doctrinal theology rather than ethics or moral theology, evangelicals with their roots broadly in the Reformation, have seemed to concentrate on doctrinal theological issues because those are the distinctives of evangelicalism, so that really because issues in social ethics did not divide Catholicism and Protestantism in the Reformation and because evangelicals have often, I think, concentrated on the distinctives, there has been a*

neglect in the whole area of thinking through issues in ethics, because that would be an ecumenical kind of enterprise. Would that seem right to you?

LB I think that is a very helpful and fresh summary. Actually I have to confess I haven't seen it quite that way before. What did intrigue me was a visit to Rwanda and Burundi last December, when I talked with some of the key young leaders about this issue. They felt as they looked back at the East African revival over the last fifty years or so, that there had been a fatal flaw in perhaps the way some of the early missionaries worked. They felt that many of these early missionaries had rightly emphasised the necessity of man being reconciled with man, but they did not always follow through, because of their determination to preach the gospel evangelistically. Thus they did not seek to help the new believers to see the ethical implications of the gospel in terms of reconciliation between man and man, or man and woman, so that you had many people who professed faith in Christ, but who nevertheless harboured resentment against their neighbour from other ethical backgrounds. That probably fits in with what you have said about the Reformation context in Europe several hundreds of years ago, because there the battle I suppose was over the whole question of clarifying where the Roman Church had gone wrong in terms of its understanding of the core of the gospel, but perhaps we needed to go on from there to see how we can be not just light in society but also salt as well. In this century I think a number of evangelicals have really tried to help us in this respect. I understand from Oliver Barclay's important book on evangelicalism in Britain over the last fifty years that the phrase 'Christian Mind' was used by Professor Lamont from Scotland in the 1930s. But others like Harry Blamires, John Stott and Samuel Escobar have popularised the phrase 'the Christian mind' much more and I think helped us perhaps on a global scale, most notably through the Lausanne Movement, but also since then, to really try to work harder at applying Christian truth at the level of ethics as well as doctrine.

SW *Lindsay - what you have said on the basis of your experience is extremely helpful. Can I ask you a more personal question? I know you have been involved for a number of years in this work, one way or another. Has your own interpretation of evangelicalism changed or developed, expanded at all perhaps because of your sensitivity to the need to contextualize the gospel in different countries, or has it basically remained unaltered?*

LB I think my passionate commitment to the authority of Scripture and to the necessity of having a primary commitment to evangelism and the proclamation of the gospel, has remained unchanged. At the same time it's probably true to say that given my own background, I came into the work with a fair degree of suspicion about the importance of seeking to apply the gospel in the area of social involvement and issues such as justice and

human rights and so on, partly because some of my inheritance is the tensions in the British church in the early part of the century over the respective roles of evangelism and social concern in terms of Christian witness. I think as I have dialogued, particularly with evangelical Christians working in Latin America and Africa, and also to some extent with some folks from East Asia from the Philippines who lived under President Marcos, and others more recently who lived under President Suharto in Indonesia, I have come to see that it is well-nigh impossible for Christians only to proclaim the necessity of reconciliation between man and God and not to spell out the implications for the gospel in terms of concern for our neighbour at the level of human rights, at the level of concern for people when they are in the mire of poverty. I like the balance of Charles Spurgeon, the famous Baptist preacher who said: 'If you see a tramp in the street, by all means give him a tract, but put it in the middle of a sandwich.'

For me the challenge is to maintain the commitment to sitting under the authority of Scripture and passionate proclamation of the gospel in an undimmed fashion, while at the same time, seeing that these other aspects of testimony and witness are vitally important. I suppose I like Jesus' model in the Scriptures, where he preached to the five thousand and then he fed them; maybe I was, as an evangelical in the 1970s, like the disciples at that time, who said after he had preached to them: 'Now send them away'. I think Jesus gently tried to help them to see that gospel preaching has primacy, but you must care for people's physical needs as well and feed them. And it doesn't seem to me that there is a sharp separation of that combined mandate in the Scriptures, and Latin American Christians and Asian Christians and, to an increasing degree, African brothers and sisters, are helping me in this respect. When I talked with some of the leaders of the work in Africa, as they review student work over the last forty years, they are beginning to ask themselves this. 'Why if we have some of the biggest student movements in the world, as in Nigeria for example, where there are more than 30,000 students who are involved in the IFES movement, why are we having such a minimal impact in our society? Why aren't we having a deeper impact at the level of government, formulation of policy, and so on?' They are coming increasingly to the conclusion that maybe they have been involved in proclaiming a gospel which has emphasised reconciliation between God and man, but hasn't gone further in applying the Scriptures at an ethical level. Maybe they have proclaimed the light of the gospel but not sufficiently the saltiness of the gospel and now they are saying not that it's one or the other, but we must do both passionately under the authority of Scripture.

SW *In saying that I'm sure you believe you're recapturing not just a biblical theology and message, but also an evangelical inheritance which had been lost. Can I ask you one final question Lindsay? As IFES goes on, we pray in the blessing of God, into*

the new millennium, what changes, if any, do you foresee, and is there anything that you would especially like to see within IFES which you could share with us in this interview?

LB Well, I think that some of the major challenges of the future are these. Our calling when we first began fifty years ago was to pioneer evangelical evangelising indigenous movements in every country in the world. Now evangelical movements exist in 140 countries; there remain 27 without student movements. More than 20 of those have Islamic governments, so obviously one of our greatest challenges must be how to develop indigenous evangelical student work in the Muslim world. That is probably likely to remain a challenge for some years to come, because where the church does take root, it tends to grow slowly. I think the second challenge would be relating to the whole question of ongoing renewal of vision. As movements get larger, as we have in terms of expanding to many different countries, and as movements get older, they tend to become rather flabby and lose their focus on essentials. We have always emphasised our primary goals as being those of evangelism or bearing witness to Christ in the university, secondly *formación*, a Latin-American word for the formation and development of the individual in all areas of Christian lifestyle and ministry. Thirdly, there is cross-cultural mission. What tends to happen as a movement gets older is that it loses the focus on evangelism and cross-cultural mission, so we need to emphasise the need for constant renewal in the area of evangelism and mission. I have already mentioned helping other movements to think through how to make a deeper impact on their cultures in terms of the application of Christian truth to every area of life. I like the statement of Abraham Kuyper that great theologian,

"There is not one centimetre of human existence, to which Christ, who is Lord of ALL, does not point, and say," that is mine!"

SW *Thank you, Lindsay. And let me say how much I and many, many others have appreciated and been very grateful for your tremendous personal contribution through IFES to our Christian witness in the modern world.*

THE JUBILEE AND THE MILLENNIUM

Holy years in the Bible and their relevance today

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The end of the second Christian millennium is an appropriate time to examine the significance of the holy years which acted as landmarks to divide periods of history in the Bible, in particular the *sabbatical year* (every seven years) and the *jubilee year* (every fifty years), and to reflect on their meaning for us as we prepare to celebrate the year 2000.

The sabbatical year

Terminology

Hebrew uses two distinctive terms in connection with the sabbatical year, namely *šabbat* ('rest', cf. Gn 2:2-3; Ex. 23:12) and *šemiṭta* (*š-m-t*). The verb *š-m-t* in Exodus 23:11 means to 'let (the land) rest' by leaving it fallow in the sabbatical year; whereas in Deuteronomy 15:1 *šemiṭta* means to 'cancel' a debt. Driver (1902) and Craigie (1976) suggest that this verse only legislates for the deferring of debts during the sabbatical year, not their cancellation, but it would appear from the following verses that cancellation is intended (so von Rad 1966b; Clines n.d.). Comparison with practice in Mesopotamia points to cancellation rather than deferment (Weinfeld 1995: pp. 167-68). Josephus and the rabbinic interpreters agree that it means cancellation of debts, and that is the understanding in NIV, NJB and NRSV. Presumably the repayment of debts would be scheduled to be complete by the sabbatical year, and cancellation would only be necessary in the case of a poor person who was genuinely unable to repay.

The agrarian context

In the 'Book of the Covenant' (Ex. 21-23) there are two regulations concerning the sabbatical year, one about agriculture and one about slavery.

First, the regulation concerning *agriculture* is found in Exodus 23:10-11:

For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unploughed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. (NIV)

For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard. (NRSV)

The land is to rest in the sabbatical year, by lying fallow, just as human beings and animals rest on the seventh day (Ex. 20:9–10).¹ During that seventh year, the produce of the land which grows of its own accord becomes the property of the poor, not of the owner of the land, and the owner of the land is expected to eat the produce which has been put aside from the previous year (cf. Lev. 25:20–22).² A seven-yearly rest would no doubt increase the fertility of the land, but that is not the main purpose, rather a side-effect. The main purpose is to honour God as the ultimate owner of the land (cf. Lev. 25:2, 23) and to show concern for the needs of the poor.

Secondly, although *slavery* was not abolished in ancient Israel, a number of regulations were designed to limit its effect. In Exodus 21:2 we read:

If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything. (NIV)

When you buy a male Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, but in the seventh he shall go out a free person, without debt. (NRSV)

When someone became bankrupt in the ancient world, he was often forced to sell himself or his children into slavery in order to pay his debts (cf. 2 Ki. 4:1–7; Ne. 5:5). So it is stipulated that an Israelite³ who is impoverished to the extent of becoming a slave of another Israelite may only be held for a maximum of six years before he is released.⁴ In other words, he is not a slave in the full sense of the word but enters into a working contract as a bonded labourer ('hired worker', NIV) for a limited period of time (cf. Lev. 25:39–43). This regulation is quite different from that which applied to foreign slaves, who were usually enslaved for life (Lev. 25:44–46).

In Exodus 21:3–11 the regulation is elaborated further. It is interesting that the author envisages the possibility of a slave preferring to stay with his master rather than to become free (v. 5). This seems to imply that Israelite slave-owners treat their slaves humanely, so a slave who is unable to live independently (e.g. because of disability or old age) might well be better off by staying in the family of his master.

The urban context

In Exodus and Leviticus, in the context of an agrarian economy, the sabbatical year is prescribed as a year of rest for the land

and freedom for Hebrew slaves. In Deuteronomy 15:1-18 the regulations for the sabbatical year are formulated again for a new context, that of a trading economy which is more urban in nature. (Perhaps we could see this as an ancient example of contextualisation.) There is one new stipulation, then some of the former regulations are repeated in more detail and with some variation. It would seem that Deuteronomy 15 is intended for a later time in the history of Israel, when the people are living in towns and the gap between rich and poor has begun to get wider.⁵

The new stipulation in Deuteronomy is that at the end of seven years all debts of fellow Israelites are to be cancelled (vv. 1-3).⁶ This stipulation is formulated using the term *šemitta* ('remission, cancellation') which is used in Exodus 23:11 with reference to leaving the land unplanted during the sabbatical year. The object of such a radical provision is presumably not to encourage people to be negligent about the repayment of their debts, but to provide a way out for poor people who have tried to repay them but been unable to do so.

In an ideal situation, it is recognised that there should not be any poverty among the people of God, if they are faithful and obedient to him (Dt. 15:4-6); but this legislation is directed towards an actual situation – where there is poverty – rather than the ideal, and so it is essential to provide protection for the poor (v. 11). It is the duty of an Israelite to help a poor person by means of a loan, as much as he needs, even though the sabbatical year is near and the possibility of being repaid is relatively slim (vv. 7-10; cf. Lev. 25:35-38; Lk. 6:34-35).

In verses 12-18 the regulation concerning the liberation of a Hebrew slave (Ex. 21:2-6) is repeated and expanded. In Deuteronomy the same regulation applies to both male and female slaves (15:12), whereas Exodus has a different regulation for females (21:7-11).⁷ The slave is described here as *ah* ('brother, fellow'), a term not found in the earlier regulation, and the freed slave is to receive part of the produce which resulted from his work (vv. 13-14). This regulation is based on the conviction that God has released his people Israel from slavery in Egypt, and therefore they must be willing to free their slaves (v. 15).

This celebration of the sabbatical year is linked in Deuteronomy 31:9-13 with the reading of the Law every seven years. When a covenant was made in ancient times, an official document was usually kept in a mutually agreed place and read publicly from time to time. So also the Law, as the official document of the covenant between God and Israel, was to be read regularly to the whole people of Israel; and the time specified for this was in the sabbatical year.⁸

Observance

The observance of the sabbatical year – which included rest for the land, freedom for Hebrew slaves and cancellation of debts for the poor – should have functioned to reduce the gap between rich and poor which developed after Israel settled in Palestine. However it was obviously not easy to put into practice a law which benefited the poor at the expense of the rich, since those with power and influence in society would inevitably oppose it (Amit 1992: pp. 50–53).

Sadly, it seems the sabbatical year was not consistently observed in OT times.¹⁰ Indeed Israel's failure to keep the regulation about rest for the land is mentioned as one of the sins which resulted in their eventual exile from the promised land (see Lev. 26:34–35, 43; 2 Ch. 36:21). There is no direct evidence of its observance before the Exile, though it may have been observed in some periods, e.g. in the reign of Josiah (cf. Kaufman 1984). We have only one instance of slaves being liberated, towards the end of the monarchy, when Jeremiah reminded the people of Judah to free their Hebrew slaves (Je. 34:8–22). Apparently they were not in the habit of doing this, since they needed a prophecy to persuade them to do so, and not long after the liberation took place they changed their minds and took the slaves back again! Only after the exile do we find a record of the remission of debts in the seventh year taking place, by Nehemiah, which was accompanied by rest for the land (Ne. 10:31). Similarly, the reading of the Law to the whole people is only mentioned once, towards the end of the OT period, by the priest Ezra (Ne. 8).

The jubilee year

Terminology

Two distinctive Hebrew terms are used in connection with the jubilee year, namely *yobel* and *deror*.

Most scholars consider the word *yobel* to originate from the trumpet made from a sheep's horn that was sounded at the beginning of the jubilee year (Lev. 25:9; cf. Ex. 19:13; Jos. 6:4–5). North (1990) disagrees, linking it instead with the verb *y-b-l* ('lead back, lead forth', Is. 55:12; Je. 31:9). This suggestion is supported by the translation of *yobel* in the Septuagint as *aphesis* ('liberation'), and Josephus gives its meaning as 'freedom'. But whatever its etymology, it is clear enough that the primary reference of the word *yobel* is to the Israelite observance of the fiftieth year (Lev. 25:10).

The word *deror* is related to *anduraru* ('liberation') in Akkadian, and in the OT means 'liberation' or 'freedom', particularly in the context of the jubilee year (Lev. 25:10; Is. 61:1; Je. 34:8; Ezk. 46:17).¹¹

Legislation

The jubilee legislation is set out in Leviticus 25, preceded by a summary of the regulations for the sabbatical year (vv. 2-7). After seven cycles of seven years (v. 8), the fiftieth year is designated as an extra sabbatical year, a sort of 'super-sabbatical' (v. 10):

Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan. (NIV)

You shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. (NRSV)

In that year liberty (*deror*) is to be proclaimed for (almost¹³) all inhabitants of the land (v. 10a). As in the sabbatical year, no sowing is to take place on the land during the jubilee year (vv. 11-12). Moreover land which has changed hands is to be returned to its original owner (vv. 10b, 13), except in the cities (vv. 29-30). In the socio-economic situation of the city, a house and the land on which it stood can only be redeemed in the first year after it has been sold, and if it is not redeemed in that time then it becomes the permanent property of the purchaser. This exception does not apply in the levitical cities (vv. 32-34), because those cities are the only land they possess (Num. 35:10).

This regulation apparently means that two sabbatical years are to be observed in succession (the 49th and 50th years), which raises the question of whether it would be feasible for the land to remain unplanted for two successive years. One suggestion is that the jubilee year is in fact the forty-ninth year, which by inclusive reckoning is called the fiftieth year (e.g. van Selms 1976; Hartley 1992: pp. 434-36). Inclusive reckoning, which counts the first and last element in a period of time, was certainly common in ancient Israel (cf. Jn 20:26, where 'eight days' is the inclusive reckoning for a week, and the NT tradition that Jesus rose again 'on the third day', which was two days after he had been crucified). Another suggestion is that the fiftieth year is an intercalary 'year', inserted in the calendar to harmonise the lunar year with the solar year, and its length is just 49 days (cf. Lev. 25:8; see Hoening 1969; Wenham 1979). Its function would be comparable to the additional day inserted every leap year in the Julian calendar. But even if the correct reckoning is uncertain, there is no lack of clarity about the social measures which are to be taken in the jubilee year nor about its theological meaning.

One of the most important themes in the understanding of the jubilee year is freedom, and Ezekiel actually refers to it as the 'year of freedom' (Ezk. 46:17, NIV). The people of Israel have

been freed by the Lord God from slavery in Egypt and thereafter must not be enslaved by anyone, because they have become God's own slaves (Lev. 25:39, 42, 55). Leviticus 25 stipulates that if an Israelite is impoverished to the extent of becoming a bonded labourer to another Israelite (vv. 39-40), then in the jubilee year he must be freed from that bond and return to his family and property (v. 41). And if he should sell himself to a foreigner or temporary resident (v. 47), that could only be permitted on the condition that he and his family retain the right of redemption (vv. 48-52). So he also has the status of a bonded labourer, even though in practice that may not be very different from being a slave (v. 53). If he is not redeemed earlier, then in the jubilee year he must be allowed to go free without payment (v. 54).¹³

All the regulations for the sabbatical year also apply in the jubilee year, but the distinctive characteristic of the jubilee is the restoration of land to the owner designated by God when Israel took possession of the promised land (Schaeffer 1922: pp. 68-98; Ginzberg 1932: pp. 369-74). Land which has been sold should be redeemed at the first opportunity by the closest member of the family (Lev. 25:24-25; cf. Ruth 4; Jer. 32:7-10), and if that does not happen the person who sold the land retains the right to redeem it himself later on if he becomes able to do so (vv. 26-27).¹⁴ But if neither of these provisions succeeds in restoring the land, in the jubilee year it must be returned to its original owner (v. 28).¹⁵

This regulation effectively means that land in ancient Israel was not to be sold, but simply leased until the jubilee year (cf. vv. 15-16). Thus anyone who became poor and was forced to 'sell' his land, would receive it back at the latest in the fiftieth year. There was a theological basis for this: the land belonged to God (Lev. 25:23; cf. Ex. 15:13,17). He had given it to his people Israel (Gn. 15:7; Ex. 6:3; Lev. 20:24; 25:38; Dt. 5:16), and they lived there as temporary residents, not absolute owners (1 Ch. 29:15; Ps. 39:12; cf. Heb. 11:13). The land was distributed to each tribe and clan when Israel entered Palestine (Jos. 14-21), in accordance with God's command to Moses (Num. 26:52-56; 34), and therefore the inheritance of one person must not be taken over by another (cf. 1 Ki. 21:3). This attitude is clearly different from that of the previous inhabitants of Palestine to the land. Abraham, for example, had bought burial land from Efron the Hittite (Gn. 23) and David bought land to build an altar from Arauna the Jebusite (2 Sa. 24:18-25). This was no problem to them, because it was understood simply as a commercial transaction.

This also had the corollary that a daughter who inherited land (cf. Nu. 27:1-8) must marry within her own tribe (Nu. 36:1-12), so her portion of land would not become the property of another tribe (v. 7). If a woman were to inherit land, then marry outside her own tribe, that land would become the property of her husband's tribe and not be restored in the jubilee year (Nu. 36:3-4).

The main purpose of this legislation, according to Wenham (1979), was to prevent bankruptcy and to reduce the gap between rich and poor which began to appear during the monarchy. This was not done simply by appealing to the rich to become benefactors and give some of their surplus to the poor; the concept of jubilee included a legal mechanism to order property rights in accordance with social justice (Sider 1978: p. 80). In particular, every poor person was entitled to receive back his patrimony in the fiftieth year; and if he had become a bonded labourer, then he must be freed without any redemption payment so that he could return to his own family and land.

It may seem that the regulations for the holy year in Israel were unrealistic from an economic point of view. Indeed the biblical writers anticipated some would object to such radical legislation (Lev. 25:20; cf. Dt. 15:9). Radical improvements to the situation of the poor cannot happen without loss on the part of the rich, because levelling is necessary if all people are to have enough. In spite of what is often said by the proponents of prosperity theology, faithfulness to God does not necessarily lead to wealth in the worldly sense (cf. Jackson 1989; Herlianto 1992; Nicholls 1996). Nevertheless the regulations for the holy year are accompanied by a promise applicable in this world, that those who keep them will be blessed by God with security (v. 18) and an adequate harvest (v. 19). The promise is elaborated in Leviticus 26:3-13 and Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

Scholars disagree about the origin of the jubilee institution and whether the regulations concerning it come from Israel's early period or from after the Exile.¹⁶ There are clear parallels in ancient Mesopotamia, in particular the royal decrees for the establishment of *andurarum* ('liberation, release', cf. Hebrew *deror*) and *mitarum* ('justice, equity') which were proclaimed from time to time by kings who wanted to show favour to their people (Weinfeld 1995: ch. 4, 8; cf. Lemche 1976; 1979). These decrees could include such measures as cancellation of debts, freedom from slavery, the return of mortgaged property and amnesty for prisoners. So the provisions of the jubilee year were not unprecedented in the ancient Near East, but the idea of observing it on a recurring basis every fifty years appears to have been distinctive to Israel. Mesopotamian kings might institute reforms and show favour to their subjects if it pleased them, but the people of Israel were expected to take specific measures to promote social justice and equality at the times appointed in the law, whether or not it happened to suit them (cf. Hallo 1977: pp. 15-16).

Observance

As in the case of the sabbatical year, we need to consider how far the jubilee year was in fact observed regularly in ancient Israel. De Vaux (1961: pp. 175-77) is of the opinion that this is an idealistic regulation which was never carried out in practice.

whereas van Selms (1976) believes the jubilee year was observed but only irregularly. Westbrook (1991: pp. 38–52) concludes that the jubilee regulations reflect an institution which was observed from time to time, as also was the case in ancient Mesopotamia, but not regularly every fifty years.

It must be admitted that there is little evidence in the OT for the observance of the jubilee year.¹⁷ In the historical books it is not mentioned, except perhaps in 2 Kings 19:29. In the prophetic writings there are only three references; Isaiah 37:30 (= 2 Ki. 19:29), Ezekiel 46:17 (about the future, not Ezekiel's own time) and Isaiah 61:1–2¹⁸. On the other hand, as Hartley points out (1992: p. 429), the jubilee was only to be celebrated every fifty years, and so there would not be any reason to mention it unless a particular event took place during the jubilee year (and only then if that fact was considered significant).

The Pseudepigrapha contains a book called 'Jubilees', written in the second century BC; but the jubilee idea is only used in it to divide world history into periods of seven times seven years, and the book contains no evidence that observance of the jubilee year was a current reality at that time. Josephus refers to the jubilee year but does not make it clear if the institution was actually observed (Fager 1993: p. 35). Jewish tradition, as preserved in the Talmud, assumed that the sabbatical and jubilee years were observed regularly in Israel until the Exile; but after that the jubilee year became irrelevant because the Judeans no longer lived on their original family property as assigned when they first entered the promised land (Safrai 1972; Fager 1993: p. 36). The church fathers, on the other hand, tended to interpret the jubilee allegorically or messianically (*ibid.*).

It would appear that the jubilee year was not observed regularly in ancient Israel. However, the values enshrined in the institution were clearly important for the people. They understood land as family property, on the basis of their conviction that the land was given by the Lord God to his people. Therefore they were reluctant to buy and sell land, though no doubt it did happen on occasions; and there are several examples of the redemption of family property in the OT. Also the principle of freedom for each member of the people was important in ancient Israel, even though it was not always a reality and in practice some Israelites became slaves and bonded labourers. Whether they were freed at specific times, as stipulated in the regulations for the holy year, we cannot be certain.

The year of the Lord's favour

Isaiah 61

Apart from the sabbatical and jubilee years, there is also what is described in Isaiah 61:1–2a as 'the year of the LORD's favour'.

In this text, the prophet reinterprets the jubilee year eschatologically:

*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour
and the day of vengeance of our God.(NIV)*
*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God. (NRSV)*

The messianic age¹⁹ is described as 'the year of the LORD's favour' (v. 2a), an idea which draws at least some of its inspiration from that of the jubilee. One of the prophet's tasks is to 'proclaim liberty' (*qara deror*, v. 1c), a distinctive phrase found in the jubilee regulations (Lev. 25:10).²⁰ In the messianic age, according to the prophet's message, the poor and oppressed will be freed from their suffering (Is. 61:2b-9). The expression 'day of vengeance of our God' seems to indicate that freedom for the oppressed will be accompanied by judgement on the oppressors (cf. the 'day of the Lord' in Amos 5:18-20 and Joel 2:28-32). What is more, in accordance with the principle of 'restoration' in the jubilee year, ruined cities and deserted habitations will be restored (v. 4).

Isaiah 58

A similar idea is found in Isaiah 58:6:

*Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? (NIV)*
*Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?
(NRSV)*

The expression *šallah ḥopšim*, translated 'set free' here, is different from *qara deror* in the previous text, but its meaning is almost identical. Although the prophet does not specifically mention the jubilee year, there are many similarities between Isaiah 58 and the jubilee regulations, as shown by Hanks (1983: pp. 99-103; cf. Weinfeld 1995: p. 18). In particular:

- the prophecy of Isaiah 58 is opened with the simile of a trumpet (v. 1), and the jubilee year is to be announced by

blowing a trumpet (Lev. 25:9)²¹;

- the theme of Isaiah 58 is true fasting (vv. 3–6), the only fast legislated for in the Law is the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29–31), and the jubilee year begins precisely on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 25:9)²²;
- Isaiah 58:5 refers to a fast day as 'a day acceptable to the LORD' (yom raon ladonay), whereas Isaiah 61:2 describes 'the year of the LORD's favour' (senat raon ladonay) – in other words, the year of raon (jubilee year, Isa. 61) will be opened with a day of raon (Day of Atonement, Isa. 58);
- Isaiah 58:7 urges people to provide shelter, food and clothes for the poor, and not to close their eyes to the needs of their fellow Israelites, matters which are also mentioned in the regulations for the jubilee year (Lev. 25:35–37, 47–49);
- in Isaiah 58:13–14 there is a directive about the Sabbath, and the jubilee year is a sabbatical year;
- Isaiah 58:14 promises the restoration of the people of God to 'the inheritance of your father Jacob' after the Exile, a promise which fits very well with the theme of restoration of family property in the jubilee year.

Clearly Isaiah 58 takes up the idea of the jubilee and develops it as a challenge to the people of Israel who want to be free from the oppressor but are unconcerned about freedom for underprivileged members of their own society.

In a just and prosperous society as envisaged in this prophecy, there will be no more slavery or oppression (vv. 6, 9). On the contrary, the needs of the hungry and the oppressed will be satisfied (vv. 7, 10). The 'ancient ruins' will be restored (v. 12; cf. 61:4). All of this will be based on *ṣedaqa* ('righteousness, justice') and the presence of the good Lord (vv. 8, 11).

Luke 4

According to the New Testament, the messianic age has begun with the coming of Jesus Christ, as he himself declares in his first sermon recorded by Luke, in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk. 4:16–21). Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1–2a, with an insertion from Isaiah 58:6²³, and announces that the prophecy about 'the year of the Lord's favour' has begun to be fulfilled that day.

Trocmé (1973: ch. 2) argues that Jesus in his speech in Nazareth was proclaiming a jubilee year (cf. Strobel 1972). He reckons AD 26–27 as a sabbatical year and suggests it was on the Day of Atonement (10 Tishri) that year (i.e. September/October 26) that 'Jesus announced the complete restoration of the jubilean practices in Israel' (p. 39). How far this can be reconciled with other indications of the dating of Jesus' ministry according to the gospels is uncertain (cf. Marshall 1978: p. 184). Even more uncertain is whether

Jesus was proposing an immediate enactment of the jubilee laws, as Trocmé claims, involving 'expropriating the lands of the wealthy and liquidating the usurious system from which the ruling classes lived' (p. 30). The lack of evidence in the gospels for Jesus' involvement in politics and economics, and his refusal to interfere in a dispute over the ownership of property even when one of the parties appealed for help (Lk. 12:13-14), indicate rather that Jesus was using the jubilee idea metaphorically (cf. Willoughby 1995).

Rodgers (1981) interprets the proclamation of 'the year of the Lord's favour' as 'an eschatological use of the theme of the Jubilee legislation, which rests on the principles of release, restitution and freedom for all who trust in the Lord' (cf. Seccombe 1982: pp. 54-56). She further argues that the purpose of Jesus' ministry, according to Luke, is the salvation of the lost by means of the forgiveness of sins, and that this is 'an entirely spiritual concept'. In other words, Jesus did not advocate political and economic reforms, but 'came to suffer and to die and on the third day to rise from the dead so that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His Name to all nations'. Thus 'the year of the Lord's favour' came 'in Him'.

Perhaps the truth lies in between the extremes of understanding Jesus' speech as a literal proclamation of the jubilee, to be enacted by immediate social reforms, and of interpreting it in a purely spiritual way which limits its reference to the forgiveness of sins. Arias (1984) suggests that the jubilee should be seen as a 'paradigm of the kingdom action in the world', as both an 'expression of hope' and a 'critical approach to things "as they are"'.²⁴ Nolland (1989: p. 202) puts it thus: 'It encompasses spiritual restoration, moral transformation, rescue from demonic oppression, and release from illness and disability'.

Other allusions

When Jesus answered John the Baptist's question about his identity, he alluded to his fulfilment of Isaiah 61:1-2a and other prophecies (Lk. 7:22//Mt. 11:5; cf. Ringe 1985: pp. 45-48). During his ministry Jesus taught a number of principles from the legislation for the sabbatical and jubilee years, including the cancellation of debts (Lk. 6:35; 7:41-42; Mt. 18:23-34²⁵), sharing of material possessions (Lk. 12:33; 18:22; cf. 19:8; Acts 2:44-45; 4:34²⁶), and trust in God for day to day needs, rather than in human ability to plant and reap (Mt. 6:25-34//Lk. 12:22-31).

However a complete fulfilment of the prophecy of 'the year of the Lord's favour' must await the second coming of Christ. At that time the last judgement will take place, which is the subject of Jesus' last sermon in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt. 25:31-46). One of the emphases of that sermon is on attitudes to the poor,

developing some of the themes of Isaiah 58:7. At the end of time, there will be a reversal of fortunes when the rich become poor and the poor become rich (cf. Lk. 6:20-26; 16:25; Jas. 5:1-8).

The jubilee in the OT looks back to the divine liberation of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Lev. 25:38,55) and the gift of the promised land as a place of rest and to be their inheritance (cf. Dt. 12:9). Its predominant themes are freedom, restoration and rest (cf. Lev. 25:10-12). In contrast, the prophecy about 'the year of the Lord's favour' – both in Isaiah and Luke – looks forward, to 'the time of universal restoration' (Acts 3:21, NRSV), which will happen in 'new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home' (2 Pet. 3:13, NRSV).²⁷

Theological reflection

Three major themes have emerged from our study of holy years in the Bible, namely *rest*, *freedom* and *restoration*. Let us now take these themes one by one and reflect on their relevance today. Some of the practical suggestions I mention can be based on wider OT data, including the very first chapter of Genesis, but the three themes I identify here emerge from the particular data I have examined. Although many of my suggestions are familiar, I believe them to be faithful to the biblical materials.

Rest

One of the most basic elements of the meaning of sabbath is 'rest'. According to the story of creation, God rested on the seventh day because he had finished his work (Gn. 2:1-3; cf. Ex. 31:17); and mankind is expected to take regular rest on that day too (Ex. 16:22-30; 20:8-11; 23:12). It is a 'holy day' (Gn. 2:3), set apart from ordinary working days (cf. the modern word 'holiday'). The sabbatical and jubilee year regulations also include the idea of rest, in particular for the land (Ex. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:2-5,11; cf. 26:34-35).²⁸ For six years the land serves mankind, but in the seventh year it is allowed to rest.

In this way men and women acknowledge that they do not have any absolute right over the land (cf. Tsevat 1972: pp. 453, 455). They may not exploit the land indiscriminately for their own profit, driven by the pressures of consumerism, because they have been permitted to live there and enjoy its produce as a blessing from the owner of the land himself, the Lord God (Ex. 15:17; Lev. 25:23; Dt. 8:7-18). As the psalmist says, 'The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it' (Ps. 24:1, NIV).

What is our attitude towards the land today? For many people born and brought up in towns and cities, that may seem a strange question. The only time they think about land is when they buy or sell property, and even then their interest may well

be in the house more than the land on which it is built. But even with increasing urbanisation, a very large number of people in the world still live on and depend on the land, as farmers; not a few city-dwellers have made their fortunes by the exploitation of the land, or have become landless and migrated to the city in the hope of better fortune; and all of us still eat food grown on the land. So we cannot ignore the land, however urbanised we may be.

If we own agricultural land, we could put the OT regulations about rest in the seventh and fiftieth years directly into practice, although it would seem that rarely happens nowadays. Generally alternative methods are used to ensure the continuing fertility of the land: crop rotation and the use of natural or artificial fertilisers. If a piece of land is used for housing or industry, of course it is impossible to allow it to 'rest' in certain years. In any case, it is obvious that often it is not practical to apply these ancient regulations literally, and we need to work out an appropriate contextualisation in the modern world.

We may begin by suggesting that the idea of 'rest' points towards restraint in the exploitation of the land, indeed of the whole environment. The sabbatical and jubilee year institutions invite us to accept the produce of the land as a gift from God, rather than as an absolute human right. The natural world was made by God, just as we are, and deserves respect as something of great intrinsic value. Also we should consider our children, and their children, who will have to live in the environment that we are busy polluting today.

We can show respect for human beings and outlaw slavery, for example by setting maximum working hours and a minimum wage. So also the environment should be treated responsibly, by observing certain limits, not exploited mercilessly. We do not have the right to bleed natural resources dry, so that the land becomes a desert. To take just one example, the vast rain-forests are God's creation, not private property that can be cleared at human whim without considering the impact of doing so on the balance of the whole environment. The demand for wood and paper in more wealthy parts of the world has depleted resources in the Amazon and elsewhere. But the West does not have a monopoly on destruction of the environment. In 1996 there were major floods in Jakarta and those who suffered most were the poor living in the shacks by the River Ciliwung and in other areas prone to flood. It was reported that one cause of the floods was the felling of trees in the hills of Puncak, south of Jakarta, to build luxury villas, golf courses and so on. *Suara Pembaruan*, one of Indonesia's most respected newspapers, published a report in July 1996 indicating widespread illegal lumbering, with the authorities apparently turning a blind eye. In one Sumatran nature reserve, there were five sawmills processing illegal lumber! In 1997 forest fires raged through vast tracts of Sumatra and

Kalimantan, causing smog in much of South East Asia, apparently caused by developers wanting to expand their plantations in the cheapest way possible, choosing to burn trees rather than make use of them, and then unable to control the fires at the onset of the dry season.

Perhaps we need to develop a theological ecology, in which the conservation of natural resources is based on the conviction that God created them and God has the right to determine how they are used. A corollary of this, on the basis of love for God and for neighbour as the two great commandments, would be that we aim to leave the world in good condition for the enjoyment of future generations. Such a theological ecology has an entirely different foundation from an economic ecology, which is only interested in conservation as a means to make even more profit from the natural world. Lamy (1994) expresses this difference in his contrast between *homo imago dei* and *homo economicus*.²⁹

However the theme of rest is not only relevant to the subject of ecology. According to Deuteronomy 12:9–10, the people of God were to be given 'rest' when they entered the promised land.³⁰ Rest meant that their wandering in the wilderness had come to an end and Israel could enjoy security, even though surrounded by enemies. In Psalm 95:7b–11 this theme appears again together with a warning to the people not to harden their hearts as their ancestors had done in the wilderness and as a result failed to enter the 'rest' which God had promised them. Hebrews 3:7 – 4:11 takes up the same theme and interprets it eschatologically. The writer exhorts Christians also to try to enter the place of rest which God has prepared for them.

What is meant by that rest and how can we enter it? Jesus explains it as follows (Mt. 11:28–29):

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*³¹ (NIV)

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (NRSV)

On the one hand, 'rest' may be experienced now by everyone who becomes a follower of Jesus and finds 'rest for the soul', even though they still live in a world which is full of uncertainty and far from secure. However Jesus' invitation should also be understood in the context of the whole Bible, and that understanding will be incomplete if it does not mention the land and city longed for by the faithful witnesses in the OT (Heb. 11:16), that is our heavenly place of rest. This eschatological rest will only become a reality when that

'gentle and humble' Lamb becomes 'Lord of lords and King of kings' (Rev. 17:14) and those who 'die in the Lord' can 'rest from their labour' for ever (14:13). That will truly be rest!³²

Freedom

When the people of Israel left their slavery in Egypt they became a free nation. This freedom was given by the Lord God, as recalled in the prologue to the Israelite constitution (Ex. 20:2). Because of that, they were forbidden to oppress the weak within their own society (Ex. 22:21 – 23:9) or to enslave fellow Israelites (Lev. 25:38–42). Unfortunately in the ancient world, as in the modern world, there were always those who tried to control and restrict others, and so reduced their freedom.

One of the great themes of the sabbatical and jubilee years in the Bible is freedom. The people of God should be able to enjoy the freedom which he has given them, and if that is not the case then action must be taken to restore that freedom. A number of measures with that in mind are associated with the holy year. One of the most important is the liberation of slaves and provision of capital so that they can make a new start as free men and women. Parallel to that, if debtors are unable to repay their debts by the time the holy year comes, then the debts are to be cancelled so that they are freed from a burden that it has become clear they are unable to shoulder.

As mentioned above, Jesus inaugurated the messianic age by announcing the arrival of 'the year of the Lord's favour', as an eschatological reinterpretation of the jubilee year. He declared good news to those who were suffering, promising that they would obtain freedom (Lk. 4:18b):

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners ... to release the oppressed. (NIV)

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives ... to let the oppressed go free. (NRSV)

Yet sadly, until comparatively recently, the church in many places paid rather little attention to the needs and rights of the weaker members of society. The gospel was understood as a heavenly message about spiritual salvation, and not seen to be relevant to the oppression that is so widespread in this world. Sometimes the church was on the side of the oppressors or even became an oppressor itself. In the 19th century, a number of figures in the English evangelical movement became involved in the struggle for social justice, such as Wilberforce who pioneered the abolition of slavery and Shaftesbury who fought for the rights of factory workers, particularly children and women. Then towards the end of that century liberal theologians in America developed what has often been called 'the social gospel', as they demonstrated the relevance of Jesus' preaching to the exploitation of workers and other social problems.

The 20th century in Latin America saw the beginning of the 'liberation theology' movement, which noted the political aspects of the exodus from Egypt and the gospel of Jesus, and also various other kinds of political theology (black theology, theology of revolution, etc.). Liberation theology was certainly a new development in the history of Christian theology, though perhaps there is some similarity with Jewish messianic theology at the time of the New Testament, which looked for the coming of a saviour who would act in the political arena to free the people of God from Roman power.

Our study of the holy years should remind us that the Bible does not only promise better things in heaven for the oppressed ('pie in the sky when you die') but encourages concrete action to bring them freedom from suffering in this world. Hopefully today Christians from different theological backgrounds can agree that the gospel is not only concerned with spiritual matters but also with the affairs of this world.

However we should note that the Greek word *aphesis*, translated 'freedom' (NIV) or 'release' (NRSV) in Luke 4, usually refers in the Bible to forgiveness of sins (i.e. release from the punishment for sin, e.g. Lk. 3:3; 24:47). Jesus did not only preach a gospel of liberation from suffering in this world (the horizontal or socio-economic aspect) but also - what is eschatologically even more important - liberation from sin in this world and the world to come (the vertical or spiritual aspect). So also the mission of the church today should include a holistic witness to the gospel, not concentrating exclusively on its social or its spiritual aspects. Our aim should be that every person may experience true freedom, free from oppression and free from sin, now and for always (Jn 8:36; Rom. 6:18; 8:21; 2 Cor. 3:17).

How can this be actualised today in our 'global village'? Many things can be done. In Indonesia, for example, political prisoners have been released and working conditions for factory workers have been improved. This sort of thing can only happen as a result of much hard work behind the scenes by people working for justice and equality. Probably more needs to be done in both of these areas, but there are also other oppressed groups of people who have been relatively ignored, such as the 'workers' in brothels who are often virtually slaves, and the physically handicapped beggars who are put on the streets by their own families or others who then take most of their 'income'. Christians today should be taking the lead in working for improvements in the social and political spheres, bringing freedom to those who are deprived and oppressed, following the example of Wilberforce and others like him in previous centuries. We need to fight the human lust for power over other human beings which shows itself in so many shapes and sizes, including direct control of individuals (slavery in its various modern forms) and nations (power-politics), and also

indirect exploitation by means of trade (monopolies), economics (international debt), culture (fashion, the media) and so on.

But in all this we should not forget the need for self-examination. As we condemn the obvious injustices in the world at large, we ought to check carefully that we ourselves are not involved in oppression and exploitation, directly or indirectly. If we are an employer, how do we treat our employees? If we run a business, how do we treat our customers? If we work in the civil service, are we really serving the needs of society or primarily lining our own pockets? Whatever work we do, do we pay our taxes with integrity? Do we look down on other people, by male chauvinism or militant feminism, racial discrimination or religious bigotry? And even if we do nothing to oppress or exploit others, we might ask what we actually do to help powerless members of society – the homeless and hungry, old people living alone and single parents, street children, beggars and pedlars – so that they may be freed from poverty and fear. It is easier to criticise the oppressors than to acknowledge that our own lives may need changing, but dare we claim that we have no sin (Mt. 7:3; Jn 8:7)?

Restoration

The third key theme in the biblical idea of a holy year (specifically the jubilee) is 'restoration', in particular the restoration of land. Because the land belongs to God, who divided it fairly when Israel entered Palestine, the rich must not expand their estates by buying land from the poor (cf. Is. 5:8). If in extreme circumstances someone is forced to sell their land, this may only be done on a leasehold basis with the owner retaining the right of redemption at any time; and in the jubilee year any unredeemed land is to be restored to its original owner. So the jubilee year, if put into practice, should help to remove inequalities in society and give a new start to those who have become poor and lost their land or even their freedom.

The relevance of the jubilee idea to the problem of accumulation of land in the hands of a relatively small land-owning class today is clear enough. For example, in certain areas of Indonesia, I have heard that businessmen from the cities come and make attractive offers to simple country people who are prepared to sell their land. The people are happy, because they have cash in their pockets from the sale, but do not realise that the payment they have received is far below the real value of the land. Also, attracted by the opportunity to make a quick profit, they have not considered the implications of giving up property which could have provided food for their family for many generations. Another method used by those devoted to the pursuit of wealth at all costs is to enter an area and pay local inhabitants to destroy their own environment, for instance by felling trees in the forests. The labourers get a reasonable wage and do not complain, but the businessman makes much more

profit and the long-term loss to the environment is incalculable. From a legal point of view, the land does not change hands in this case, but its wealth has been plundered and it becomes of little value to its owner.

We are called to realise that the earth and everything in it belong to God (Ps. 24:1), and we have no right to treat the earth as though it were our private possession. Although there are no verses of Scripture to define boundaries of land in our modern-day world, the principle of division according to need (Num. 26:54) – rather than desire or power – is surely a good one which we should endeavour to apply today. Ordinary landowners could be given some protection from the expansionism of the rich and powerful by appropriate legislation. Even more radical measures will be needed to reverse the trend and begin a move towards equality, so that land may be divided more fairly between its inhabitants. It won't be easy, but change is possible! For example, Milgrom (1997) mentions that the percentage of farmers in South Korea owning their land, rather than working as tenants, increased from 50% to 94% between 1952 and 1954.

The idea of restoration in the biblical jubilee focuses particularly on land ownership, but need not be limited to that. Isaiah 35 describes the liberation of Israelite exiles in Babylon and their restoration to their own land; it also envisages restoration of the environment (vv. 1–2, 6b–7; cf. above: section on *Rest*) and health (vv. 5–6a). In the NT, Luke uses the term *apokatastasis* with reference to the end of time when God will restore 'everything' (Acts 3:21).

Perhaps we feel helpless, when we see rampant greed and the inability of the poor to oppose it. It would seem ancient Israel faced the same problem in connection with the sabbatical and jubilee years: they were a good idea, but the rich did not want to take a cut in their salaries and profits so that others would have enough. Nevertheless we cannot remain silent. The prophetic voice of the church is needed to censure the greed of people who exploit their fellow human beings, beginning with those who sit in pews on Sundays and going on to address all who treat other people as means of making money rather than as God's creatures who were made to be loved. Yet perhaps even more important is for Christians to live in accordance with the gospel, following Jesus' directive *not* to accumulate treasures on earth (Mt. 6:19; cf. 5:40–42; 19:16–26; Lk. 3:11; 12:13–21; 19:8–10) and working towards equality in salaries, opportunities and privileges. To quote the Chinese proverb, it is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.

Postscript

It is uncertain how far ancient Israel followed the seven and fifty-year cycles for the holy years, and in any case it would be

quite unrealistic for us to revive them now in any literal sense. However we do celebrate anniversaries (every year), silver and golden jubilees (25 and 50 years respectively) and centenaries (100 years), and presently the whole world is looking forward to celebrating the millennium (1000 years). Often such occasions are treated as opportunities for extravagant parties; how much better it would be if we made them times for reflection and renewal, reviewing what has gone wrong in the past and taking specific action to put it right!

As we have seen, the biblical idea of the sabbatical and jubilee years includes three great themes: rest, freedom and restoration. How about making these our millennium themes? Can we challenge both the church and the world to celebrate the year 2000 by:

- resting from exploitation of the environment;
- striving for liberation of the oppressed and the poor; and
- taking measures to promote equality in ownership of land and other material wealth?

One initiative in this direction has been taken by the Jubilee 2000 Campaign, in their call for the cancellation of international debts. The text of what Jubilee 2000 hopes will be 'the world's biggest petition', to be presented to leaders of the richest countries at the G7 Summit in 1999, reads as follows:

- We, the undersigned, believe that the start of the new millenium should be a time to give hope to the impoverished people of the world.
- To make a fresh start, we believe it right to put behind us the mistakes made by both lenders and borrowers, and to cancel the backlog of unpayable debts of the most impoverished nations.
- We call upon the leaders of lending nations to write off these debts by the year 2000. We ask them to take effective steps to prevent such high levels of debt building up again. We look for a new beginning to celebrate the millenium.

Similar initiatives could be taken by Christians in relation to other major issues, such as the environment, fair trading, ethical investments, modern forms of slavery and so on. At the same time we should remember that it can be easier to tell others what to do than to do it ourselves. We must be careful to 'practise what we preach', and ensure that in our personal lives we act with integrity and compassion to those in need around us.

Finally, we should remember that the meaning of a *holy* year will only be truly understood if it points us to God as the Creator of heaven and earth, who invites us to take part in his great work of sustaining the world, until the time when he

makes all things new (Rev. 21 – 22). If we maintain this prophetic and eschatological perspective, and commit ourselves to translating these ideas into action, then we will be able to make the year 2000 *our* holy year.

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- ¹ It is unclear here whether the intention was for the sabbatical year to be observed simultaneously throughout the whole land, or separately according to when a particular piece of land was taken possession of, but comparison with the following verse suggests that it was fixed on a national basis (cf. Dt. 15:1, 9; 31:10-11). Ginzberg (1932: pp. 352-354) suggests that it was originally fixed separately by different land-owners, but in due course became fixed.
- ² This regulation is elaborated further in Lev. 25:2-7, and there it would appear that the owner of the land was allowed to collect the produce of the land which grew of its own accord, as could the poor, so that effectively all the people of Israel returned temporarily to the nomadic life-style which had been theirs before they entered the promised land (Wenham, 1979: p. 318).
- ³ The exact meaning of the term 'Hebrew', and its relationship to the group of people called Habiru in the ancient Near East, has been long debated (see Thompson 1974: pp. 189-190; Astour 1976; Lemche 1992). It is generally used in the OT in a somewhat derogatory sense, almost always by others in referring to the Israelites rather than by the Israelites concerning themselves. In this context it seems that the reference is to an Israelite slave (Childs 1974: cf. Dt 15:12; Je. 34:9). Perhaps the word 'Hebrew' is used since the idea of an 'Israelite' being a slave was abhorrent.
- ⁴ According to de Vaux (1961: p. 173), the six years were counted from when the person began to work for his master; but it may also be understood to mean that all people in this category were released simultaneously in the sabbatical year, i.e. every seventh year as observed on a national basis.
- ⁵ There are very different views of the development of ancient Israel's social and economic structure (e.g. Robinson 1932: pp. 355-67; de Vaux 1961: pp. 164-67; Gottwald 1976; Bendor 1996), which cannot be discussed here. I am assuming that there was a

movement from a relatively egalitarian society based on the family during the early period of the settlement in Palestine to one with much greater differentiation in wealth and weaker family bonds during the divided monarchy.

- ⁶ There are precedents in Mesopotamia for such remissions of debt (Weinfeld 1995: pp. 162–68).
- ⁷ Apparently the rationale for this was that the female slave was sold by her father as a concubine and so she became a (relatively) permanent member of the creditor's family (Childs 1974; Durham 1987). As such she had certain rights (vv.9–10), and in certain circumstances she could also be made free (vv. 8, 11).
- ⁸ For a detailed study of debt-slavery in Israel and the ancient Near East, see Chirichigno (1993). I am unfortunately unable to discuss the interpretation of the relevant laws within the confines of this article.
- ⁹ It is difficult to be sure whether the whole Law, or only part of it, was to be read; also whether it was envisaged that all Israel would gather in one place at one time, or whether just representatives would attend. For a discussion, see Thompson (1974).
- ¹⁰ On the observance of the sabbatical year after Old Testament times, see Rothkoff (1972) and Wacholder (1976). In modern Israel the institution is continued by orthodox Jews and the next sabbatical year will fall in the year 2000/01 (Jewish year 5761).
- ¹¹ For a thorough discussion, see North (1978).
- ¹² This does not include foreign slaves purchased on the slave-market (vv. 44–46).
- ¹³ This regulation is rather difficult to harmonise with Exodus 21:2–6 and Deuteronomy 15:12–18. The liberation of Hebrew slaves was prescribed for the sabbatical year in Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 15, whereas in Leviticus 25 bonded labourers were liberated in the jubilee year. For a discussion of various interpretations, see Hartley (1992: pp. 431–33). However that may be, the principle of freedom for the people God is clearly enunciated in all these texts.
- ¹⁴ For a thorough discussion of the redemption of land in ancient Israel, see Westbrook (1991): chapters 3 and 5; cf. Milgrom (1995).
- ¹⁵ In Leviticus 27:16–24 there is a regulation about land which has been 'consecrated', i.e. handed over to the priests so that its produce might be used for the maintenance of the temple. Without discussing the details of this regulation (on that, see Wenham 1979), suffice it to say that in general the principle of restoration of land to its original owner in the jubilee year also applies in this case.
- ¹⁶ See Schaeffer (1922: pp. 93–95); Ginzberg (1932: p. 381); de Vaux (1961: pp. 176–77); van Selms (1976); Wenham (1979: p. 318); Westbrook (1991: pp. 38–52, 55–57); Amit (1992: pp. 55–59); Wright (1992: p. 1028); Hartley (1992: pp. 427–30); Fager (1993: pp. 25–34); Weinfeld (1995: p. 177); cf. Wacholder (1976).
- ¹⁷ Of course the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. There is no account in the OT of the people actually celebrating the Feast of Weeks, and the NT contains little evidence of the practice of holy communion, but that does not necessarily prove that these festivals were not celebrated by the ancient Israelites and early Christians respectively.
- ¹⁸ This last text will be discussed below. Jeremiah 34 also uses the term *deror* (vv. 8, 15, 17) but it would seem that the sabbatical year is intended there, or perhaps an extraordinary measure outside the cycle of holy years.
- ¹⁹ Note the use of the word *masa* ('anoint') in v. 1.

- ²⁰ The words are translated the same in NRSV, but in NIV Leviticus reads 'liberty' whereas Isaiah reads 'freedom'.
- ²¹ Hartley (1992: p. 447) points to a connection between the jubilee and the messianic era in the symbolism of the trumpet, which is to be sounded when the exiles return to worship God in Jerusalem (Is. 27:13) and when the Messiah enters the holy city in triumph (Zc. 9:9-10, 14-16). He also suggests that the NT takes up this imagery in its proclamation that the return of Jesus Christ will be announced by a trumpet (Mt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52).
- ²² It is not entirely clear what it means for the jubilee to start on the tenth day of the seventh month, but we do know that there was more than one way of calculating the 'year' in ancient Israel: e.g. a religious year beginning in the spring (1 Abib/Nisan. cf. Ex. 12:2; Dt. 16:1; Est. 3:7) and an agricultural year beginning in the autumn (1 Ethanim/Tishri. i.e. the 'seventh month' of the religious year; cf. Ex. 23:16; 34:22; 1 Ki. 8:2; Gezer calendar). Perhaps we may compare this with the modern academic and financial years, the church year and other religious years, which often do not coincide with the calendar year. Cf. Hoenig (1969: p. 231); Vanderkam (1992).
- ²³ The words 'to release the oppressed' are found in v. 18, apparently taken from Is. 58:6. Some interpreters believe that later Christian interpreters inserted these words, but Hanks (1983: pp. 98-104) argues that the linking of the two prophecies originates with Jesus himself. Cf. Lk. 7:22, an adaptation of Is. 35:5-6 with an insertion from Is. 61:1.
- ²⁴ Sloan (1977: p. 166) concludes that the vision of jubilee 'served primarily for Luke the theological function of a paradigmatic, OT Vorbild of the present/future eschatological salvation of God that has been inaugurated by and will be consummated through Jesus the Christ'.
- ²⁵ Trocmé (1973: pp. 42-43) argues that the Lord's Prayer refers to the remittance of debts. In many modern translations Mt. 6:12 reads 'Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors' (NIV; NRSV; cf. NJB) rather than the traditional 'Forgive us our trespasses'. It is true that the primary meaning of the Greek word *opheil_ ma* is 'debt', but used in a religious sense it refers to 'sin' as a 'debt' (*BAGD*) and that this is the meaning in the Lord's Prayer is clear from the parallel passage in Lk. 11:4 which uses the word *hamartia* 'sin'. A different view is put forward by Ringe (1985: pp. 77-80), who argues that *both* debts and sins are referred to in the prayer.
- ²⁶ The first part of this verse is similar to Dt. 15:4, which is part of the legislation for the sabbatical year.
- ²⁷ For a detailed study of 'the year of the Lord's favour' in Luke, see Sloan (1977).
- ²⁸ See Andreassen (1972: pp. 104-13, 213-25).
- ²⁹ For theological discussion of the problems of ecology, see Osborn (1993), Hallman (1994) and Nash (1996).
- ³⁰ See also Dt. 25:19; 1 Ki 8:56; cf. 1 Ch. 22:9; 2 Ch. 6:41. Cf. von Rad (1966a); Andreassen (1972: pp. 221-25).
- ³¹ Jesus uses the word *anapausis* 'rest' in these verses. The same word is used by the writer of Hebrews for the place of rest which God has prepared for his people.
- ³² On the concept of 'rest' in Judaism and the NT, see also Lincoln (1982).

Joshua

Charles Price

Crossway Bible Guide, Crossway, Leicester, 1997,
184 pp., pb., £4.99.

The words Bible Study Guide accurately describe this book. It seeks to make the contents of the book of Joshua accessible to today's church, and is targeted mainly at Bible Study Group leaders. It also has preachers and individuals in view.

The book is a valuable source of ideas. Especially helpful are its relevant references to other passages in Scripture, such as Genesis 12 and Hebrews 11. In addition, the handling of passages likely to raise questions such as the commendation of the lying prostitute Rahab, or the miraculous damming up of the river Jordan, is useful. The discussion of the killing of seemingly innocent people even referred briefly to Genesis 15:16 – I would have liked more on this.

However, the book is not a full-blown commentary, and perhaps understandably in a book of this size, I found only limited coverage of some themes that might have been useful. Insights from archaeology are addressed as if there were no variant views. The difference in perspective between Joshua and Judges regarding the success or otherwise of the conquest is not raised. Also, the book follows the current fashion of referring to Joshua as history (p. 19), whereas it used to be known as part of the former prophets; I suspect we have lost something important here.

I regard this book as a well-constructed tool. All tools can be used for both good and bad purposes. Imagine a group of new converts who wish to study Scripture together, but who lack an obvious leader. This book would

be excellent in getting them started. They could lead in turns, passing the book from member to member.

However, at the same time, there are features of this approach which trouble me. These concern the extent of the unravelling of enigmas in the Biblical text, and the proposed applications of its mysteries for today. Scripture tells us that new-born babies need to be spoon-fed, true, but this kind of feeding is stated to be inappropriate for adults (Heb. 5:12–14). While some limited expert opinion may be helpful for inexperienced house group leaders, do most of us really need our spiritual food as pre-packaged as this? Indeed, Jesus only spoke to the people in parables (Matt. 13:34), and God's normal means of communication through his prophets is by means of riddles (Num. 12:6–8). In the light of these statements, are we wise to invite an expert to clarify, explain and apply the Bible's teaching in such detail, in a form that Bible Study group leaders can adopt, and then pass on to others to absorb?

My own experience of Bible Study groups is that they are most fruitful when the members share their own meditations on the Biblical text. This involves the leaders precisely *not* providing answers, although they could have some tentative thoughts up their sleeves for an emergency. After all, God's opening words in the book of Joshua told him not to expound the law to others, nor to hear the law expounded by others, but rather to meditate on it himself (Jos. 1:8).

My concern is that in effect, the task of meditating on Scripture has here been done for us by someone else. Indiscriminate reliance on this approach could actually hinder people in today's church from learning to hear

from God through Scripture for themselves.

If, in the words of the song, you need somebody older and wiser telling you what to do, then look no further than this well-written book. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it should be used sparingly.

David F Pennant,
Woking.

Word Order Variation in Isaiah 40–55: A Functional Perspective *Studia Semitica Neerlandica*

Michael Rosenbaum
Assen: Van Gorcum, 1997,
xii + 264 pp, \$63.

This Brandeis dissertation (written after the author had also studied at Fuller Seminary, I am proud to say) applies some insights from linguistics to Isaiah 40–55. I can only claim expertise in Isaiah, not in linguistics, and can therefore only express a judgement on whether the linguistics are illuminating, not whether they are true. The answer to that first question is certainly they are.

While the study of Hebrew grammar and syntax is an age-old enterprise, in another sense it is quite a young discipline. Dr Rosenbaum begins by noting that specific aspects of it are quite neglected in the standard works. One is the significance of word order. In English, at one level 'she went home' and 'home she went' have the same meaning, but they have different connotations. On the other hand, sometimes word order is determined by practical considerations; for instance, we may hold a complicated phrase for the end of a sentence, not to emphasize it but to aid clarity by giving as much possible information early on about where the sentence is going.

In large part Dr Rosenbaum's study is concerned to nuance that statement, to categorize the various kinds of significance which may attach when the standard word order is varied, and to categorize the basis on which there appear other elements in a sentence other than mere verbs, subjects, and objects. You see, that last clause was an example of holding back the subject because it was complicated, in the hope of helping the reader follow the sentence.

In English as in Hebrew, we sometimes give words unexpected positions in a sentence in order to signal closure (as in 'home she went'), and Dr Rosenbaum notes many usages of such kinds in Isaiah 40 – 55. In studying these chapters I have often looked for explanations such as emphasis when words occur in unexpected positions, but I now see that I was often on the wrong track, and I am having to rewrite some footnotes. The subject may precede the verb simply because the subject changes (for instance) and the variant word order is a way of helping the reader. Sometimes close attention to word order and other aspects of poetics, especially the working of parallelism, directly aids exegesis and points to unsatisfactory understanding represented in English translations.

For example, I became convinced that 40:15 means 'Even the nations are accounted like a drop from a bucket, like dust on scales'; the first colon is not an independent noun clause, as English translations assume. On the other hand, I was not convinced about the abolition of other noun clauses which turned (e.g.) 48:17b–18 into 'I, Yahweh, your god, who teachers you for your benefit, who leads you to the path which you should walk – if only you had paid attention to the

path which commands ...'. I find it hard to imagine an audience familiar with noun clauses hearing the words thus.

Word order is a way of helping an audience, rather than silent readers, if (as I believe) even Second Isaiah expected to be heard rather than read. Dr Rosenbaum rightly emphasizes the need to recognize that the syntax of verse is different from that of prose, as it is in English. Might one also need to allow for the difference between verse designed to be read and verse designed to be heard, or did everything belong to the latter category?

I enjoyed this pioneering book, though it is of course hard work if you do not have a grounding in linguistics and, of course, it requires a knowledge of Hebrew.

John Goldingay

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The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40-66 (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament)

John N. Oswalt

Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans
Publishing Company, 1998),
xviii + 775 pp., \$48.00.

This volume is the welcome completion of the work begun with *Isaiah 1-39* (1986). The two volumes are in turn the successors to the three volume commentary in this series by Edward J. Young (*The Book of Isaiah*, 1965-72) which is still in print. Young's commentary was stalwart conservative work, recognized widely for the expertise in Assyriology which its author brought to bear on his exegesis.

Oswalt does not endow his work with a specialized linguistic knowledge, as Young did. He

stands rather in the tradition of older writers like Calvin and Alexander, whom he cites extensively. The commentary has extensive bibliography and notes, as well as indexes of Hebrew words, and other indexes for Scripture references, subjects treated, and authors cited. Oswalt is well aware of other commentators such as Whybray and Westermann, and speaks of their contributions in the introduction, but cites them in the commentary only in passing. He does not build on their work, or indeed on the methods of research used this century: historical criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, or new literary criticism. He places his commentary in the line of traditional commentaries that view the work as a unity written by the prophet Isaiah in the 8th century BC. In view of their common perspective on the book, it is surprising that he uses the work of J. Alec Motyer (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*, IVP, 1993) so little.

Oswalt recognizes that chapters 1-39 address the 8th century, chapters 40-55 the exile of the 6th century, and chapters 56-66 the returned people after the exile. He welcomes the current tendency to recognize the interrelationship of writings from all parts of the book to each other. Whereas many writers working on this development think of various writers at work on the book, Oswalt maintains a single 8th century author (p. 5), but he does not labour the point.

Most scholars take a diachronic approach, seeing the book as the product of a long period of tradition and redaction. (See the excellent survey of scholarship on the structure of chs. 40-66 on pp. 12-13.) Oswalt's approach is synchronic, looking at the structure as a literary work

composed in a single era. He does not try to explain how the work got from the 8th century down to the 5th century when the canonical Scriptures were being collated and published. Oswalt makes a case for seeing chapters 40 – 66 as the necessary complement to chapters 1 – 39 using the analogy that '2:1-5 and 4:2-6 provided the other side of the picture for 2:6 – 4:1 and 5:1-30' (p. 7).

Oswalt moves over into preaching occasionally, reflecting his Free Methodist background. At the same time he can read back into OT settings NT applications. A case in point is the description of the servant of Isaiah 53 as 'substitutionary self sacrifice', 'the Servant gives himself up to Yahweh' (p. 10). Substitution is established in the text. Self sacrifice is not. At the bottom of the page, the words 'free grace' reflect more the theology of the commentator (and Paul in Galatians) than the actual vocabulary of Isaiah.

But this is to quibble. Oswalt has captured the majesty, the theological power, and the great vision of these chapters from Isaiah and interprets them accordingly. The teachings about God are given appropriate attention. But the evidence of the people's sin and their failure and refusal to respond to God (chs. 49:1-4; 50-51; 57-59; 66), so pronounced in Isaiah, tends to be muted here.

Evangelical seminary or undergraduate students using this commentary will have an excellent introduction for interpreting and a stimulus for preaching Scripture. This must rank as one of the best commentaries available for their use. Postgraduate students will appreciate it for its comprehensive coverage as they also seek deeper introductions into other research methods. The commentary contains

a complete new translation with detailed notes. This provides a dimension to the interpretation which the use of an existing translation would not allow. Robert Hubbard, the current General Editor, is to be congratulated for the new energy and vision he has brought into the NICOT series and to be encouraged to move on toward a complete coverage of the OT. John Oswalt's complete commentary is a solid work in the series.

John D.W. Watts

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The Opponents of Third Isaiah. Reconstructing the Cultic History of the Restoration

Brooks Schramm

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995,
216 pp., hb., £30.

In this revision of his doctoral dissertation (supervised by Jon D. Levenson), Schramm adds another critical voice to the debate sparked by Hanson almost twenty years ago in *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (1979). He begins with a survey of the debate over 'Third Isaiah' since 1892, when the German scholar Duhm coined the term. This includes an extensive discussion of the proposal by Torrey and others to consider chapters 40 – 66 as a unity rather than two collections. Schramm then outlines the historical background of the restoration community as the political and social context of Third Isaiah.

Hanson argued for the existence of two rival groups with different restoration programmes within the post-exilic Judahite community: the Zadokite priests, in control of Jerusalem (the *hierocrats*), and the Levites, excluded from service in the temple (the *visionaries*). For Hanson, Third Isaiah was

written by the dissenting *visionaries* as an attack on the cultic religion of the Zadokite priests and the theology behind it (the Pentateuch and Ezekiel 40–48). This raises two questions for Schramm: the qualification of Third Isaiah as 'dissident literature', and the claim that Third Isaiah attacks the cultic theology of the Pentateuch. Discussion of these questions along with an exegesis of Isaiah 56–66 forms the heart of the book. Finally, four appendices deal with the dating of the Pentateuch, the Judaite presence in Mesopotamia, the genealogies for Ezra in Ezra 7:1–5 and 1 Chronicles 5:27–41, and the nature of the traditional, official religion of Judah and Jerusalem.

Schramm's treatment of Isaiah 56–66 is often stimulating. He demonstrates that Hanson exaggerated tensions or dichotomies between different prophets, and basically revised the old argument of two distinct religious mentalities in the OT: the law versus the prophets. A conflict between visionary (prophetic) and hierocratic (priestly) elements is 'an issue of relative inconsequence'. What is fundamental in the cultic polemics of the Hebrew Bible is 'the battle with the traditional, syncretistic cult of Yhwh, a battle in which the priestly, Pentateuchal tradition and the prophetic tradition fought on the same side!' Third Isaiah was not a dissident attacking Zadokite cultic religion, but sided with the Zadokite priests in their opposition against the traditional, syncretistic cult, and his theological position is complementary to that of the book of Ezra.

Schramm's own position is problematic in its treatment of the oracles denouncing different forms of religious syncretism (57:3–13; 65:1–7, 11–15; 66:3–4, 17). Hanson considered them

symbolic or metaphorical, but for Schramm they are real accusations. This leads him to postulate the continued existence of such practices, including fertility rites and child sacrifice. Thus 'the traditional, syncretistic cult of Yhwh' (the worship of Yhwh along with other deities) existed well into the post-exilic period. This is controversial, to say the least. One therefore expects to find a discussion of whether there is supporting evidence outside Isaiah 55–66. However, the issue does not receive proper treatment, either in the exegesis or in the chapter on the historical background of the society of restoration Judah.

Overall, this book is a welcome contribution to the study of Isaiah 56–66. It provides a useful survey of scholarship, a summary and critique of Hanson's work and an interesting interpretation of Isaiah 56–66.

Wolter Rose

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The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1–24, New International Commentary on the Old Testament

Daniel I Block

Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1997,
xxii + 887 pp., hb., \$48.00/£32.99.

The book of Ezekiel needs all the commentaries it can get, both because in its magnitude and detail it is a difficult book to understand and because it rewards the investment of keen study. So it is good to get the first of two fat volumes from the word processor of Daniel Block, the product of thirteen years of research, we are told. There are insightful academic resources around, which have been profitably used. The footnotes reveal how diligently Block has

used his large bibliography. He is well known for earlier work on ancient Near Eastern theology, which has stood him in good stead for appreciating an exilic book so open to its Babylonian environment.

In the Introduction he has a good section on the theology of Ezekiel, which clearly means for him something of abiding significance. I liked his scheme (a sketch) of the four pillars of theological orthodoxy Ezekiel had to oppose and redefine, Yahweh's covenant with David, residence in Jerusalem, ownership of the land, and covenant with Israel. There are some wise words on the use of Ezekiel's restoration oracles for the future of Israel and the church (pp. 56-57). This theological interest emerges clearly in the commentary. At the end of each exegetical passage there is a section on 'theological implications', which leads into generalizations that bridge book and reader.

In many respects the volume is a model, especially in its scrupulous attention to detail. It appears in a series which largely represents a more conservative perspective and self-consciously opposes itself to 'critical scholarship'. This commentary out-Greenbergs Greenberg in a holistic approach to the text. Book and prophetic author are identified, except for an editorial contribution in 1:2-3, and there is a flat reading of each passage in terms of its present temporal context. Block brochures, rightly in my view, the possible role of Ezekiel as editor in the case of the nicely named 'promissory notes' or 'foreshadowing' passages like 11:17-21 (pp. 24-25), but in his commentary he claims that they are pre-586 oracles ('post-586' on p. 343 is clearly a slip for pre-586) rather than, say, post-586 oracles deliberately inserted into an edition of older messages meant

for his later exilic audience. The introductory section on text (pp. 41-42) reveals that the commentary is based on the Hebrew text, though occasionally the LXX is preferred, e.g. in 8:2, while a conjectural emendation is adopted in 3:12. Despite a host of textual notes relating to the LXX, the nettle of a strikingly deviant text is not really grasped, and the argument of preference for a harder reading is often used unfairly in my view. This is a fashionable position to take, but for that reason is to be viewed with caution. The quest for the earliest possible text is an evangelical necessity. Nevertheless, this commentary has its own strengths in abundance and offers the reader not only a review of different positions but generally a balanced presentation of exegetical worth.

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The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: Introduction and Annotated Glossary.

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*Kelley, Page H., Daniel S. Mynatt, and
Timothy G. Crawford*
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1998,
xiv + 241 pp., pb.

The study of the Hebrew text as a source for understanding and interpreting the OT Scriptures owes an immense debt of gratitude to the Masoretes, who carefully copied the text and left us an enormous treasury of information about it. Much of this information is reproduced in the United Bible Society's *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* or BHS. (The same was true of the older edition of Kittel, and will be the case with the projected new edition.) However, the student who uses this standard scholarly edition is

bewildered by the many notes to the side and beneath the biblical text, written in Aramaic and abbreviated. Other than a few of the most common references in the side notes, most Hebrew teachers and their students avoid serious study of this amazing resource. This is partly not their fault: there has been no convenient resource for introducing the student to this information. That serious omission has now been remedied by the late Professor Kelley and two friends and colleagues who saw his project through to completion. In one sense this book is easy to review: it is a necessary resource that has no comparable rival.

The opening chapters introduce the background and history of the Masora's development. Rudimentary references to Masoretic concerns already occur in the Talmud but not even the Babylonian Talmud, mentions the vowel signs. Kelley dates these references between 600 and 750 AD. The notes of the Masora should be dated slightly earlier with recognition that they grew in the following centuries. There is a brief history of the ben Asher and ben Naphtali traditions with some note of their differences. Kelley follows Goshen-Gottstein in minimizing the differences between the two. He also feels that Maimonides was influential in the rise and dominance of the ben Asher tradition as it developed over the centuries. The chapter concludes with a brief history of some of the most important Medieval and modern scholars who worked on the Masora.

The chapter on proto-Masoretic matters considers such items as inverted nuns, suspended letters, and the *tiqqune sopherim* (scribal emendations) that Kelley asserts (with some degree of certainty) appeared in the Hebrew text that the Masoretes first received and

used. These, along with the *Qere* and *Ketiv*, indicate the degree of sensitivity and labour in the careful preservation of the pre-Masoretic manuscripts.

Chapter four discusses the Masoretic notes in the *Masora parva* (= Mp; the notes printed in the margins of the BHS). Examples are given of how to relate them to the Hebrew biblical text, how to interpret them, and how to study further by connecting them to the appropriate materials in the *Masora magna* (= Mm) beneath the Hebrew biblical text. The notes are discussed according to types for both Mp and Mm. Then specific verses are presented with their Masora notes translated and discussed.

The second half of the book is a glossary of the Aramaic words and abbreviations that occur in the Masora notes. Each includes a translation as well as examples of verses where the term occurs in appended notes. The volume concludes with a bibliography and Scripture index.

The whole volume is clearly written and will provide an essential guide for all students of this topic, so closely related to the text of biblical Hebrew that we use for the OT. One might have wished for the inclusion of a page reproduced from the BHS that could then be used to illustrate the position on the page as well as the nature of the Mp, Mm, and circles in the MT itself. It would also have been helpful to include mention of the computer search programmes in the section on concordances (p. 4). However, the study of this book can be commended for a better understanding of the Hebrew Bible and for an appreciation of those who worked so hard to vouchsafe its text for future generations.

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The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative

Revell, E.J.

Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos
Publishing House. 1996,
433 pp., pb., £29.90.

What is meant by 'The Designation of the Individual'?

When Abner asks: 'Am I a dog's head belonging to Judah?' (2 Sa. 3:8), he is not really asking a question and waiting for a reply. Rather, by this expressive usage, Abner (more specifically the narrator) ensures that his words have greater impact than if he had said something like: 'In my position, I have the right to do as I please'.

Expressive usage in the designation of the individual has to do with the choice of one term or one clause instead of another. The author describes and analyzes the way individual characters are referred to or addressed, in a corpus consisting of Judges, Samuel and Kings (excluding the poetical passages). His approach is synchronic, with the assumption that variation is deliberate and likely to carry meaning. The text as it stands is treated positively, heuristically presupposing usage to be self-consistent. Source criticism is not allowed to thresh the texture into small pieces before the investigation starts. Revell wisely lets the terms 'marked' and 'unmarked' apply to the use of a form in a particular context, and not to the form itself.

The bulk of the material concerns designation of rulers (David, Saul, Solomon, kings of the southern and northern kingdoms, and foreign kings), of priests and prophets, of named and unnamed individuals, and of God. As an introduction the author paints the socio-linguistic background of how the Israelite society was structured in relation to how its members are

designated. An overview of the use of nominal and pronominal designations also gives the needed linguistic background for what follows.

The present reviewer found the chapter on Deference and Distance especially interesting. Here, in the treatment of Modal, Interrogative, and Declarative clauses, the author develops the insights of Brown and Levinson (1987), on Politeness demonstrating how speakers have to go through a web of pragmatic and socio-linguistic concerns before an inferior can address a superior. Here the reader is guided to a fuller understanding by means of designations in context.

Revell's language is clear and consistent, and he displays bravery in offering distinct definitions at the beginning of sections. Everyday life observations help lead into the subject, such as the usage of French 'tu' and 'vous': to use 'vous' to a friend where 'tu' would be the norm denies the existence of that friendship. Thus for Michal to address her husband as 'King of Israel', a term employed by foreigners, expressively reflects her scorn.

This valuable reference-standard monograph is also supplied with indices of subject and of biblical and epigraphical sources.

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Jesus the Messiah – A survey of the life of Christ

Robert H. Stein

Leicester: IVP, 1996,
290 pp., hb., £12.99.

'The time is ripe for a new account of the life of Jesus'. This is the claim made on the dust cover of this book by Robert Stein, a bold

claim, since there are, it seems, a number of books that deal with the life of Jesus in one way or another, and thus there needs to be a justification for another one. Perhaps one with a specifically evangelical thrust has not been attempted for some years, and so Stein feels that such a venture would have value.

His book is divided into two main sections of unequal length (45 and 216 pages respectively). In Part One, the shorter section, 'Key issues in studying the Life of Christ', Stein discusses what he thinks are important matters to reflect on before embarking on a full appraisal of 'The Life of Christ' in Part Two.

In the former, the first chapter ('Where you start determines where you finish') looks at the role of presuppositions in studying the life of Jesus, and in particular what sort of approach one should take to the supernatural and miracles in such a study. Noting that many 'Lives of Jesus' take a non-supernatural approach, Stein argues that it should be on the basis of evidence that this matter ought to be resolved, not 'on the basis of an arbitrary decision that eliminates God from acting in history' (p. 23), and that 'an openness to the supernatural' is a reasonable starting point. He then discusses the various sources for studying Jesus' life - non-Christian (pagan and Jewish) and Christian (extra biblical and biblical). Finally, he looks briefly at various chronological issues (the birth of Jesus, the beginning of his ministry, its length and the date of Jesus' death and resurrection). The first chapter is a particularly useful one for clearly enunciating some important issues and arguing for the importance of not neglecting the supernatural in examining the life of Christ, which will not find favour with everyone

but which certainly demonstrates the effects of presuppositions on any research.

Stein then spends the bulk of the book examining in detail the various aspects of the life of Christ. It is a full and comprehensive account, in which he faces a large number of challenges to the reliability of the gospel accounts and generally gives possible and often cogent responses. He occasionally oversimplifies (e.g. I wondered how fair it is to say that an openness to the supernatural is *the* methodology for study the lie of Jesus (pp. 13-14) - clearly it is important, but so are other factors). But generally, given the scope of the book, Stein deals fairly with disagreements and challenges to his position.

Again and again I noted helpful discussions on a range of topics - e.g. God's fatherhood - is it universal, does it reflect a male-dominated world view? (pp. 132-134), Jesus' understanding of his mission (pp. 150-154) and the significance of the Last Supper (pp. 205-213). I was often enlightened and stimulated as Stein not only responded to issues but also drew out spiritual teaching (e.g. on Jesus' ethical teaching, pp. 134-139). The matter of harmonisation and its place receives judicious consideration and justification (e.g. on the Trial in ch. 17 and the Resurrection in ch. 19) - not all would agree with this method, but Stein makes appropriately nuanced comments which are worthy of consideration.

This is a useful and valuable book not so much because it says things which are highly original, but because it contains within one cover a mass of discussion and information on the wide variety of topics which cover the life of Christ. A possible drawback is that Stein does not really interact specifically with scholars by name

and there is a complete absence of footnotes (although there is a generally up to date bibliography at the end of each chapter). Stein justifies this by saying that 'the problem of adequately footnoting a life of Christ and doing extensive work in the secondary literature is so great that one wonders if such a work could ever be written' (p. 10). However, I think it would have been helpful to have given some indication of major scholars and books/articles which take particular positions – it gets a little tedious to keep saying, 'Some would argue ... but it may be responded ...', without giving more specific detail. This would have considerably enhanced the book's usefulness.

So overall, a clear and well-written book, specific in where it is coming from and unafraid to tackle issues that the text itself throws up, as well as questions raised by scholars who start from a different perspective. A good basis to build from, while also enlightening and informative in and of itself.

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Jesus the Messianic Herald of Salvation

Edward P. Meadors

Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995,

xi + 387 pp., pb.

One only has to take a glance at the first page of this book, where five lines of text are followed by thirty lines of footnotes containing untranslated Greek and German, to recognise that it is not for the fainthearted. In fact it is a revision of a PhD thesis completed in 1993 at the University of Aberdeen under the supervision of Professor I. Howard Marshall, and bears all the hallmarks of a technical thesis. This is not a criticism of the book,

of course, but the reader who picks up this brightly covered volume with such an inviting title should know that what awaits him or her is very demanding indeed.

The subject of the thesis is rooted in the belief that the gospels of Matthew and Luke were written using two sources, Mark and Q. The question then arises, Do these sources have compatible perspectives on Jesus? Meadors' answer is, yes they do.

The first chapter surveys the previous discussion of the relationship between the christologies of Mark and Q, from the evaluation of H.J. Holtzmann that both were christologically compatible through to the work of B. Mack which suggests radical disagreement. Meadors states that the 'purpose of this book is to make a fresh comparison of the Q material with the Gospel of Mark in order to determine whether the two are compatible christologically' (p. 14).

Chapter two is devoted to a discussion of the 'Q Community' hypothesis, as represented by scholars such as S. Schultze, M. Sato and J. Kloppenborg. Meadors finds each reconstruction inadequate, primarily because there is simply insufficient evidence. He concludes that 'it is far from certain that there ever was an isolated distinct Q community' (p. 35).

Meadors proceeds to consider the character of Q's christology. Firstly, he discusses whether Q presents a wisdom christology. The familiar passages Luke 7:30–35, 10:21 and 11:49–51 are examined briefly, along with several important strands of Jewish wisdom tradition. Then Meadors deals with the possibility that Q portrays Jesus as a prophet in a way that challenges Mark's account. In the course of his discussion, he emphatically rejects the view that prophecies from the

lips of Christian prophets found their way into the Jesus tradition.

Chapters five and six deal respectively with the Danielic background to Q, and the appropriation by Q of the distinctive Danielic theme of the Son of Man. Meadors' discussion firmly establishes the Jewish background of the Q material.

Chapter seven is a very substantial discussion of the kingdom of God in Q, and is followed up by a comparison with the treatment of the same theme in Mark. Meadors concludes that Q presents Jesus as the embodiment of the power of God, the kingdom of God, and that 'Mark and Q are consistent with one another in their respective uses of 'the kingdom of God', the most important theme which they share' (p. 293).

A final chapter discussing whether Q belongs to a second sphere of Christianity (the answer is no) is followed by a summary, plus two appendices dealing with material from Acts and Paul.

As one would expect in a volume such as this, there is a full bibliography plus indices for references to canonical and non-canonical literature, and modern authors.

Throughout this book the reader will find helpful exegesis of the Synoptic Gospels which is valuable even if he or she remains entirely unconvinced by the Q hypothesis. This volume is an example of cautious interaction with Q scholarship which yields positive and constructive results. The publishers are to be commended for making this important volume available in an affordable paperback edition.

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Elgin

The Things Accomplished Among Us: Prophetic Tradition in the Structural Pattern of Luke – Acts

Rebecca L. Denova

Sheffield Academic Press, 1997,

260 pp., hb., £40 (£20 if ordered by 'scholars'
direct from the Press).

The study of the use of Scripture in Luke – Acts continues to attract scholarly attention. After investigations of 'proof from prophecy' (P. Schubert), 'promise/fulfilment typology' (N.A. Dahl), and 'proclamation from prophecy and pattern' (D. Bock), all of which tended to concentrate on explicit citations from the OT, Denova turns her attention to the way in which the actual narrative is shaped by scriptural allusions and other literary devices in such a way as to demonstrate 'that everything foretold by the prophets concerning "the last days" has already "been accomplished among us"' (p. 20). 'Luke – Acts is a story that looks back to the ancient events concerning Israel, understood as predictions of the future, and applies this material to the literal interpretation of recent events' (p. 25). The purpose of this demonstration is so that Luke, a Jew(!), might 'persuade other Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was the messiah of Scripture and that the words of the prophets concerning "restoration" have been "fulfilled"' (p. 231).

The author is generally sympathetic to the approach of J. Jervell who holds that Luke envisaged the restoration of Israel by the salvation of a remnant to which repentant Gentiles would be added. The main interest of Luke is in the ingathering of the exiles of Israel and the Gentiles are of secondary importance. This shift of attention away from the inclusion of the Gentiles offers a major re-reading of the plot of Acts.

A considerable part of the book is devoted to clearing the way for the author's proposal (we have to wait to p. 106 for the end of the preliminaries!). Her subsequent treatment in a sense falls short of full proof, since she has room to offer only a selection of discussions of texts in Luke – Acts (otherwise she would have had to write a full commentary); it is also argued that once Luke has established a typology for one event, it can be assumed that the same OT background will apply to subsequent repetitions of the motif without the need to evoke it specifically. Indeed, at one point (p. 112) the author comes perilously close to assuming her thesis and so arguing in a circle.

A significant element in the thesis is the establishment of Luke's typological use of the OT on the basis of allusions rather than the citations, and this extension of enquiry is one of the ground-breaking aspects of the thesis. In particular, the Book of Isaiah has provided the basic structure for the book, and the author indicates a number of cases where specific fulfilments may be seen.

But this leads to the problem of the thesis. For example, a Jonah/Nineveh typology is explored for the material in Acts 27 – 28. It follows that 'the goal of Paul's journey in Acts is Rome because of the Jonah/Nineveh association' (p. 110) and that Luke does not require the circumcision of the Gentiles because there is no scriptural precedent for it (p. 192). Moreover, it is not always clear whether Luke has found fresh meaning in Scripture in the light of events or has rewritten the events to make them conform with Scripture. The enquiry throughout is on the literary, narrative level, and while we are told that this does not necessarily question the historicity of what is told in the

story, there seems little doubt to me that in fact it does so rather frequently. The author claims that we often cannot get back behind Luke's narrative to 'what happened', and the rather grudging admission (p. 223) that Luke has some specific information about Paul and his journeys(!) indicates that she is working from a sceptical position (not surprisingly in view of the claimed late date of composition – post-Josephus). Literary approaches are currently attractive to many scholars, but there is a risk of attributing material to literary factors which is properly to be explained by historical factors and of adopting an approach which threatens the historicity of the narrative.

When this and other weaknesses in the discussion (such as the failure to use works in German, including the commentaries by Schneider and Pesch) are acknowledged, there is nevertheless a high degree of acute and original observation in this book that calls for careful evaluation. If there are some 'misses', there are also some interesting 'hits', but a brief review cannot list them. This is an able book which has produced a fresh thesis in a well-worked area.

Howard Marshall

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The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary.

Ben Witherington III,
Grand Rapids, Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998,
xlvii + 875 pp. \$35

Ben Witherington, professor of NT at Asbury Seminary, the premier North American United Methodist institution, has already distinguished himself as one of the most prolific younger evangelical scholars of our day. This latest

offering I believe is his longest book to date and it offers an outstanding summary of scholarship on Acts. There is scarcely anything relevant and recent that Witherington has not read and included in his bibliography. Particularly useful are his frequent digests of the most salient findings of the five volumes thus far in print from the Cambridge-based Tyndale House project, *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*.

While the book, like its predecessor on 1 and 2 Corinthians, is called a socio-rhetorical commentary, it is much more than that, being also a compendium of discussions of just about any kind of question one might want to ask of the text of Acts. These include, in particular, repeated robust defenses of the historicity of disputed portions of the narratives of Acts, especially in light of classical historiography, issues of harmonizing apparent contradictions between Acts and Paul or between Acts and Josephus, and issues of source criticism, literary criticism, theology and even geography.

Still, it is true that social and rhetorical questions receive special attention. Witherington is abreast of the growing 'cottage industry' of studies of the NT texts in light of the ancient Mediterranean culture of honour and shame, dominated by patron-client relationships and the reciprocal favours such relationships demanded. He also divides every speech in Acts into what he believes are its constituent elements according to the forms of ancient Greek rhetoric and discusses the function of those speeches according to the standard classifications of forensic, deliberative and epideictic speech.

A hundred-page introduction to Acts forms one of this commentary's great strengths. Detailed discussions demonstrate the historical genre of Luke - Acts,

especially via comparisons with Polybius and Epporus. Careful analysis of what ancient historians, including Thucydides, said about speeches, debunks the notion that most felt free simply to make up what they thought speakers would have said on various occasions. Witherington defends Lukan authorship but thinks a date in the 70s or 80s more likely than one right at the end of the events with which Acts concludes. Theophilus is the primary audience of the work (Witherington mostly ignores the question of a larger Christian community or communities behind Theophilus) and its patron, perhaps having come out of the synagogue(!). Luke is a Gentile, however, writing with primarily Gentile, even universalistic concerns. But despite Paul's repeated turning from Jews to Gentiles, even at the climactic end of Acts, Luke does not view the Christian mission as ever absolved of the responsibility to evangelize Jews. In both the introduction and the commentary proper, Witherington repeatedly stresses the parallels between Jesus, Peter and Paul in Luke's two-volume work and frequently includes detailed discussions of the chronology of events.

A short review can barely scratch the surface of exegetical highlights, but the following are of special note. Witherington sees no consistency in patterns of Christian conversion or initiation and so has no difficulty with the seeming diverse models in Acts as to when the Spirit comes *vis-a-vis* belief and/or baptism. He alternately assumes that Acts does not address the baptism of children (a second- or third-generational issues in the history of Christian) or that household baptisms may provide precedent for infant baptism. Siding almost entirely with Craig

Hill (vs. Martin Hengel), he believes that the Hebrew–Hellenist divisions of Acts 6 are exclusively ethno-linguistic and not theological. Thus Stephen does not represent a more radical theological departure from Judaism than the Twelve; his speech is not defending his objectionable ‘liberalism’ but a counter-indictment of the disobedient Jewish leaders of his day.

The reason Paul departed from his usual practice of evangelizing major urban centres when he left Cyprus for Pisidian Antioch may have nothing to do with his health (as Gal. 4:13 suggests) but because of Sergius Paulus’ family connections in that portion of Southern Galatia. The Apostolic decree identifies four elements that all could have been found in the idolatrous worship of pagan temples, hence the prohibition against them. Throughout the portions of Acts dealing with Paul’s travels, numerous incidental details question the notion that Paul’s letters are to be preferred to Acts as primary source material for reconstructing the historical Paul. (Conversely, Paul’s epistles are at least as overtly theological and thus as potentially ‘biased’ as Luke’s Acts.)

The ‘we-sections’ of Acts include much more circumstantial and vivid detail than do most of the other sections of the book and are less dependent on ‘set speeches’, thus supporting their origin in Luke’s first-hand participation in Paul’s journeys at these points. Witherington well captures the strategic timing of Paul’s appeals to his Roman citizenship as related to what proves in the best interest of the gospel more generally rather than what is most convenient personally. He stresses the climactic role of Acts 20 with its sermon by Paul to the Ephesian elders in Miletus and notes how it contains the greatest number of parallels to the rhetoric of Paul

as disclosed in his epistles, not surprising since it is the one sermon of Paul in Acts addressed exclusively to Christians.

In his closing chapters, Witherington provides particularly helpful insights from the recent work by Tajra on Paul’s trials and by Rapske on Paul’s imprisonments to help us understand these episodes against their social and rhetorical backgrounds. By the time we reach the end of Luke’s narrative, with its nuanced portraits of Roman and Jewish authorities (not monolithically good and bad, respectively, as many have argued), we realize that Luke is writing not to legitimate Rome to the church or the church to Rome but ‘to legitimate the faith to new insiders’ (p. 810). Twenty-six small print excurses punctuate the commentary with helpful treatments of such varied issues as Luke’s use of the OT, his Christology, the social status of the earliest Christians, the origins of the synagogue, background to the God-fearers, and so on. Two appendices treat the ‘earliness of Galatians’ and ‘salvation and health in Christian antiquity’.

It is unusual to see Greek words throughout the book printed not only without accents but also without breathing marks. There are a fair number of typos, particularly among Greek and German material (see, e.g., pp. 393, 491, 514). In one three-page spread of the bibliography (pp. xxxi–xxxiii), I counted five. H. Tajra’s name is misspelled consistently throughout the book as Tajara. On p. 607 the comparison between American and international usage of ‘first floor, second floor’ language seems backwards. On p. 157, the last line before the excursus seems to be missing a verb.

Theological students who want a comprehensive, up-to-date overview

of Acts research from an evangelical perspective will find it here. Scholars who wish to continue asserting that Luke's theological concerns or literary artistry run roughshod over his historical accuracy must refute Witherington's detailed argumentation. For someone who can handle the massive amount of information in this volume and wants a 'one-stop shopping' item on Acts, this is it!

Craig L. Blomberg
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Paul Between Damascus and Antioch. The Unknown Years

Martin Hengel & Anna Maria Schwemer,
London: SCM, 1997,
530 pp., pb.

This book is a follow up to Hengel's *The Pre-Christian Paul*. It is a remarkable achievement of historical depth and scholarly erudition which squeezes every last drop of information from the relative paucity of extant evidence for the context and the life of Paul between his conversion and the end of his Antioch based ministry. The reader is treated to a wealth of information concerning Damascus, Arabia and the Nabataeans, Tarsus and Cilicia and finally Antioch, a moving tapestry into which the life of the apostle is finely woven. To this is added four excursuses, the most useful of which is that dealing with proselytes and Godfearers, where a middle way is steered between the polarised positions of Martin Goodman and Louis J. Feldman.

The major burden of the study is the importance of this period in the development of early Christianity and Paul's own thought and mission to the nations, which, it is argued, began within days of his conversion, not much later. Therefore, Antioch is not the seed-

bed of any putative 'Hellenistic' Christianity, and the evidence pertaining to the Damascus-Antioch period disallows much on which the thesis of a separation between Palestinian Jewish Christianity and (post-) Antiochene Hellenized Christianity is based. Other influential theses and scholarly assumptions, that, for example, Luke is thoroughly tendentious and historically unreliable or that the time in Arabia (Gal. 1:17) and the geography of Paul's travels in this period are without theological and eschatological significance, are shown to be historically wrong-headed and erroneous.

As we have come to expect from the older of the two authors (Hengel), the historical inquiry is not only sound and level-headed, it is also seasoned with imaginative and original suggestions. Several factors, however, militate against the usefulness of this book. Hengel responds almost entirely to older, German scholarship emanating from the (first) history of religions school which was championed by Bultmann and his pupils. Interaction with European and North American discussion, which in the last twenty years has set the agenda in Pauline studies, is minimal. There is a remarkable lack of attention to the new perspective on Paul: a passing rejection of one minor brick in E.P. Sanders' edifice (p. 382 n. 522) and no interaction at all with the likes of Dunn, Hays and Wright who have taken the new perspective in a decidedly constructive direction after Sanders' deconstruction. The work is *historically* strong, but *theologically* weak and, from this reviewer's viewpoint, the adherence to the pre-Sanders view of Pauline theology will soon seem very dated.

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Paul as Apostle to the Gentiles: His Apostolic Self-Awareness and its Influence on the Soteriological Argument in Romans

Daniel J-S Chae

Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997,
xiv + 378 pp., pb., £24.99.

This book contains the results of work undertaken at London Bible College for which the author was awarded a PhD degree by Brunel University in 1995. The work has been revised for publication in the Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs series.

The thesis of the book is that in Romans Paul argues for the equality of Jews and Gentiles, an argument Paul mounts for the sake of the Gentiles and which springs from, and is controlled by, his self-awareness as apostle to the Gentiles. It comes as no surprise that Chae believes Romans 15:14-21 (where Paul links his purpose in writing Romans to his apostolic calling) is the interpretive key to the letter. Paul says he has written boldly (vis-a-vis contemporary Jewish beliefs) about the equality of Jews and Gentiles.

The greater part of the book is devoted to careful exegetical work on chapters 1-11, conducted in conversation with a wide range of secondary literature. In 1:18-3:20, Chae argues, Paul demonstrates the equality of Jews and Gentiles in sinfulness which leads the apostle to make an indictment of Jewish complacency. In 3:21-4:25 Paul argues that, just as Jews and Gentiles are equal in the matter of sin and judgment, so they are equal in the matter of justification. By this means Paul demonstrates that Gentiles are also included in God's justifying grace. Chae interprets 5:1-8:39 as an exposition of the equality of Jews and Gentiles in their new status in

Christ. His treatment of this section of the letter is quite brief because it is not central to Chae's thesis. The section, 9:1-11:36, receives the greatest amount of attention and constitutes, in my opinion, the most valuable contribution made in the book. Chae argues that Paul's focus in these chapters is still upon the equality of Jews and Gentiles, in this case their equality in God's plan of salvation. Chae rejects post-holocaust interpretations of Romans 9-11 which argue that it is God's faithfulness to ethnic Israel that Paul emphasises, in favour of his own view that these chapters undermine Jewish complacency and affirm the Gentiles' new status in Christ in order to bring about a balance. All this springs from Paul's self-awareness as apostle to the Gentiles. Paul asserts boldly that the full number of the Gentiles will be saved before 'all Israel' (interpreted as 'all believing Israel') is saved, thus reversing the earlier Jewish priority in mission.

The strong points of Chae's work, in this reviewer's opinion, are: (i) his demonstration that Paul's insistence upon the equality of Jews and Gentiles in sin, justification, their new status in Christ, and in God's salvific plan is a bold defence of the Gentiles' equal share in God's grace; (ii) his argument that all this is coloured and controlled by Paul's self-awareness as apostle to the Gentiles. This is a fine book, exhibiting an ability to carry out independent exegesis while interacting with a wide range of contemporary studies of Pauline theology. It is a book from which all students of Paul's letter to the Romans will benefit.

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The Theology of Paul the Apostle

James D.G. Dunn

Grand Rapids and Cambridge, Eerdmans, 1998,
xxxvi + 808 pp., \$45.00

On the back of the book jacket, Graham Stanton calls this 'Dunn's best book so far' and I tend to agree. The Lightfoot Professor of Divinity in Durham and author of such key works as *Christology in the Making*, *Jesus and the Spirit*, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, and major commentaries on Romans, Galatians and Colossians has now drawn on his years of study to compile a comprehensive theology of Paul that should instantly take its place as the best available in the literature.

Dunn follows the general outline of Romans (a reminder of how much biblical and systematic theology has been influenced by Paul's choice and sequence of thoughts in that one letter) and integrates key texts from the other Pauline epistles (leaving Ephesians and the Pastorals to one side as pseudigraphic) into that framework. Ample bibliographies, footnotes and indexes demonstrate a wealth of interaction with the secondary literature, yet the main text of each chapter remains clearly anchored in the exegesis of Scripture itself and proves eminently readable.

Not surprisingly, Dunn writes as an enthusiastic participant in the 'new look on Paul', frequently stressing as he has in previous writings that a key distinction between Paul and first-century Judaism (and particularly between Paul and the pseudo-Christian 'Judaizers') was not freedom versus legalism but universalism versus ethnocentrism, especially involving the famous 'badges of national righteousness' of sabbath,

circumcision, Torah, dietary laws and temple. Thus 'Paul and the Law' is treated in no less than three major places in a sequence of topics that otherwise follows relatively predictable: 'God and Humankind', 'Humankind under Indictment', 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ', 'The Beginning of Salvation', and so on.

The strengths of Dunn's volume are too many to enumerate. I find myself in agreement over and again on most of all the key elements, few of which are new to evangelicals abreast of discussion. Important distinctives and/or emphases include: anchoring Paul solidly within the Jewish monotheism of his day, yet redefining it to make room for Jesus; preserving Israel as the elect of people of God despite their divided response to the revelation of Christ; convincingly defending the 'I' of Romans 7:14-25 as including Paul's theology as summed up especially in the ministry of reconciling people to God and to each other; distinguishing original sin from the original guilt and focusing on the social emphasis of Paul's vice lists; identifying the pervasive Scriptural foundation for Paul's thought, both in quotations and in allusions; viewing Paul's hermeneutics as thoroughly Christocentric with the cross at the heart of his theology, interpreted as an atoning sacrifice (*hilasterion*); highlighting the Lordship of Christ as referring to him as ultimate master not merely God; appealing to divine Wisdom as the background for the doctrine of pre-existence; noting the distinctively Christian definitions and emphases on 'grace' and 'love' pointing out the covenantal background to 'the righteousness of God'; showing that *pistis Christou* more likely means 'faith in Christ' rather than the increasingly popular

'faithfulness of Christ': aptly balancing Paul's blend of charisma and authority, freedom and leadership, within his ecclesiology; stressing the non-sacramental nature of baptism; understanding Paul's ethics within his 'already but not yet' framework; gleaning from modern sociological insights, particularly into the church of Corinth; and recognizing that there are no great signs of 'development' in what is a fundamentally coherent theological system of Pauline thought.

Those inclined to see in Dunn's previous works an overestimation of the significance of first and last Adam-Christology, of 'Wisdom' as background for Paul's thought more generally or of *nomos* as unrelentingly referring to Torah will probably raise the same criticisms here. But Dunn has not ignored his critics; he responds to them graciously, and even on so central and controversial a topic as Paul's understanding of the Law *vis-à-vis* Judaism, Dunn's views now seem more nuanced—stressing for example, that the reformation emphasis on justification by faith versus works in general is not denied by his approach. It is just that Paul's warnings against legalism are given sharper historical focus by the more immediate and pervasive issues of nomism and nationalism. The only topic seemingly addressed in entirely inadequate detail is Dunn's summary rejection of the 'perseverance of the saints' – a rejection treated as a corollary of the conclusion that conversion must be interpreted within the 'already but not yet' framework of life between the ages.

There is also the strange tendency for Dunn and his editors to allow sentence fragments to proliferate throughout the book. Some of this is undoubtedly stylistic, but it is still disconcerting to see on page

after page 'sentences' such as 'A response, not a defence' (p. 164) 'Not a conversion from one religion to another' (p. 179), 'Which also means ...' (p. 206), 'In which case it is of some interest ...' (p. 304), 'To exercise final judgement' (p. 310), 'And also transformation ...' (p. 329–30), or 'Likewise from commerce' (pp. 329–30). In one 28 page spread, I counted six of these (pp. 536–64). In a world in which increasingly few English-language writers can unerringly distinguish between complete and incomplete sentences, modelling this kind of use of fragments for whatever reason seems pedagogically self-defeating.

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Making the Christian Bible

John Barton
London: Darton Longman & Todd 1997,
xi + 100 pp., pb., £8.95

There can be no question that the issue of how the Christian Bible came to be put together is not one that engages the interest or attention of most Christians. Most Christians, it would seem, just accept the Bible as a given without enquiring as to the reason why and by whose decision it contains the books that it does.

This lack of interest in questions concerning the formation of the Biblical canon is somewhat surprising because this is a subject that ought to interest every thinking Christian, particularly those of an Evangelical persuasion. This is because if the traditional Christian claim, especially dear to Evangelicals, that the Biblical books carry God's own authority, is to have plausibility, a convincing explanation has to be given as to why these books in particular should be seen as having this status.

The fact that Christians ought to be interested in the reasons for the formation of the Biblical canon means that they should be interested in the new book by John Barton. Barton, who is the Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at Oxford University, has written a number of technical books on the canon, and in this latest work he attempts to answer in a more popular way two key questions. First, how and when did the various books in the Bible come to be written? Second, how were they collected together to form the 'Scriptures' of the Old and New Testaments?

His answer to how the Biblical books were written is that while some of them, such as Paul's letters or OT books such as Ruth or Jonah began life as books even in our sense, as the writing of one specific person with a message to impart', many of them are composite works made up of disparate sources brought together over a long period of time. He also argues that the Biblical canon itself emerged over a long period of time and long usage was the key reason for books being considered as holy and therefore included in the canon: '...The date or authorship of the books, or both, were pleaded as reasons for sanctity. But in practice a perception that the books had been used since time immemorial was the real reason.'

Professor Barton's book is extremely well written and easy to follow and can be highly recommended to anyone looking for a good introduction to a moderately critical view of the Bible and its composition. However, I would suggest that from an Evangelical point of view it has three important weaknesses.

1 Many of the critical opinions about the Biblical books which he puts forward, such as the

composite nature of the Pentateuch and the book of Isaiah, the non-apostolic authorship of all four of the Gospels and their late date, and the pseudonymous character of some of the Epistles have been shown by Evangelical scholarship to have very serious weaknesses such that a more traditional approach is to be preferred.

2 He does not take note of the very strong case made by Roger Beckwith in his very important work *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (SPCK/Eerdmans 1985) that there was an established Jewish canon of Scripture in the first century corresponding to our OT that was taken over directly by the early Church.

3 He does not engage with the all important theological question about how the existence of the canonical scriptures forms part of the pattern of God's self-revelation, or with the point made long ago by John Wenham that the Christian attitude to the Biblical canon is (or should be) rooted in Christ's own acceptance of the OT as the word of God, and in the authority he gave to the Apostles.

Professor Barton's book is therefore certainly a book worth reading, but, for the reasons I have just outlined, certainly not a book to be read uncritically or to be accepted without serious reservations.

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Invitation to the Bible

Stephen Barton

London: SPCK 1997,

X + 166 pp., pb., £8.99

Until recent times it has been generally accepted in Christian theology that because the Bible was inspired by God and is therefore God's word to us it follows that it carries absolute and unquestionable authority. However, the increasing emphasis on individual autonomy that has been a feature of Western thought since the enlightenment has led to a widespread reluctance to accept traditional sources of authority when they conflict with people's own individual convictions about what is right and wrong. The Bible has not been exempt from this development of thought, and as a result its authority has also been called into question.

It is this situation which is the starting point for Stephen Barton's *Invitation to the Bible*, which began life as module on the interpretation and use of the Bible for the former Aston training scheme in the Church of England. He notes that biblical texts such as the repudiation of homosexuality in Lev 18:22 or Jesus' call for the renunciation of family ties in Lk 14:26 leads some people to:

...respond to the Bible as if it is a type of *hate-mail*. Instead of considering the possibility that such 'hard' tests might be an invitation to look more closely for a deeper meaning able to be located in a wider context of religious faith and practice, they can only see them as the hate-mail of a malicious and vengeful God.

Dr Barton's answer to the question of how we can read that Bible so that it speaks to us not as hate mail, but a 'love letter' from God, is that we need to read it in a way

that is rooted in love for the triune God of whom the Bible speaks, is shaped by the orthodox theological tradition, and takes place in the context of the life of the Christian community.

This basic thesis of Dr Barton's is a sound one, and in fact represents the way of reading the Bible which has normally been accepted in the Church since the controversies with the Gnostics back in the second century. He is also, I think, correct to stress that we must take the genre of the Biblical texts into account in order to interpret them properly, and what he has to say about the meaning of particular texts, as in his account of the legislation regarding the Sabbath in chapter four, or his overview of 1 Corinthians in chapter nine, is often helpful and illuminating.

However, this having been said, I think that there are a number of important problems with the details of his approach to the Biblical material.

Firstly, I think he is wrong historically in what he says about the concept of Biblical infallibility being a nineteenth century Protestant invention (it is in fact the view of the Bible accepted by all shades of Christian opinion until very recent times), and in his assertion that 2 Tim 3:16 does not point us towards this idea.

Secondly, I think he accepts too readily the conventional critical view of the Bible, as in his description of the fall narrative as 'myth' in chapter four, and his scepticism in chapters five and six concerning the detailed historical accuracy of the Gospels, and the possibility of harmonising their accounts of Jesus' life and ministry.

Thirdly, I didn't feel that he gave enough weight to the principle that Scripture itself is its own best interpreter. For example, in

chapter three he argues that the unity of the Old and New Testaments is a judgement of faith made by the Church rather than something which can be learned from the Bible itself, and in chapter four he rejects the normative nature of the interpretation of the fall narrative in Genesis 3 given in 1 Tim 2:14.

Fourthly, I am concerned that he gives too much weight to the present context as the key to correct Biblical interpretation. His favoured picture of Biblical interpretation as a 'performance' akin to the performance of a Shakespeare play or a Beethoven Symphony 'where true interpretation involves a group of people doing a performance, and where the meaning of the text or score will vary somewhat from one performance to another depending on who is performing, and what the circumstances are', seems to me to capitulate too much to the prevailing post-modernist scepticism about the idea that texts do have an objective meaning of their own, and to raise acute difficulties about the meaning of truth in this context. If the truth of our interpretation is not governed by the original and objective meaning of the Biblical text then what is it governed by? How is the truth of an interpretation determined?

Overall, I think this is a book that is worth reading, both for the good points it contains, and also as a stimulus to further thought about the issues he raises. However, for the reasons noted above, I would not recommend it as a basic text for those wanting a reliable guide to reading the Bible. I would recommend them to look instead at G.D. Fee and D. Stuart *How to read the Bible for all its worth* (Zondervan 1981).

Martin Davie
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Doctrine of Humanity

Charles Sherlock
Leicester, IVP, 1996,
303 pp., pb., £14.99

Sherlock is an Australian Anglican, a former lecturer at Ridley College, Melbourne, and now editor of the weekly *Church Scene*. This book's footnotes feature biographical snippets for many of the theologians mentioned. The practice is one reflection of the author's determination to attend to social and cultural context as he addresses questions about humanity. He aims especially to take seriously what is valuable in current discussion, not least in the Australian context, of ecology, cultural plurality and gender. The result is unusual insight at points, for example in chapters on 'Being a Woman' and 'Being a Man', but this is marred by too much sub-sociological generalisation about what is the case today.

The book follows volumes on God, providence, Christ, the Church, and the Holy Spirit in IVP's 'Contours of Christian Theology' series. Its material is clearly organised. Its first part ('Focus 1') comprises three chapters on the doctrine of the image of God. The first two consider OT and NT texts respectively. Sherlock's interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 wisely combines the 'royal' and relational readings which are too often treated as though opposed. His careful exegesis of Pauline texts on 'the image of God renewed in Christ' places emphasis on three-fold reconciliation of humans with God, one another and non-human nature. Surprisingly, he does not draw explicitly on Pauline scholarship of the last two decades, although some similar positions emerge. He engages mainly with other anthropological studies, including those by

McDonald, Anderson and Hughes. The third chapter is a semi-thematic semi-historical survey of interpretation of the image of God motif in Christian thought.

The rest of the book consists of two linked parts (foci 2a and 2b), the first of which discusses human beings as a kind, 'The human race', and the second the individual human being who belongs to the kind, 'The human person'. The first covers a great deal in a short space and the result is not really satisfying. Of three chapters in this part, the first addresses human life in society, with a focus on economic issues; attention to how corporate structures can be sinful is helpful. The second describes human beings in relation to non-human nature drawing valuably on Douglas J. Hall and Moltmann. The third is on human culture and includes suggestive discussions of marriage, language ('a sacrament of meaning', Sherlock proposes) and humour.

The most extended treatment in the book's third part (2b) is of sex and gender (but not of sexual morality). Sherlock's discussion of these begins after thin material on human dignity, freedom and rights, issues which require conceptual rigour lacking here. It is evident that he has given much greater attention to the topics of female and male, and feminine and masculine. He has, he explains, long been involved in conversation with groups of men and women about these. He brings out differences in women's and men's experiences, including of self-perception and of sin. The book's last chapter, 'The Whole Person', discusses body, soul and spirit, the author both rejecting clear distinctions among these and affirming the heuristic value of making such. It closes with thought-provoking comments on the five human senses. There are

two appendices, on theological understandings of the transmission of sin and on inclusive language.

While the book is, in sum, patchy, it is valuable for beginning investigation of many of the issues it covers. It may be a virtue that it has less historical and systematic material than its inclusion in the series might lead one to expect. Yet those already familiar with theological anthropology will find surprising its non-mention, among Protestant theologians, of Pannenberg. Those familiar not only with Protestant work will find its lack of attention to the large body of Roman Catholic writing on humanness (for example currently by Germain Grisez) a missed opportunity. Sherlock seems unaware of the attempt in O'Donovan's *Resurrection and Moral Order* (IVP, 2nd edition 1994) to present the basis for a clearly evangelical conception of human well-being which draws on some of the resources of the eudaemonist catholic tradition. A chapter giving attention to those resources in a book of this sort could prove particularly illuminating for students.

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Agenda for Educational Change

John Shortt and Trevor Cooling, eds.
Apollos/IVP Leicester, 1997,
304 pp., pb., £14.99.

Just as knowledge isn't what it used to be, so the contributors to the first five sections of this book argue that education should be different too. Twelve evangelical scholars from Australia, Canada, the USA and the UK combine to advance the cause of the transformation of education.

So what is on the agenda for educational change?

Firstly, the recognition that knowledge and faith which once were kept in separate compartments are now seen to belong together. All knowledge involves faith. Consequently the curriculum itself conveys some faith stance(s), and so the key question is: whose view, or faith, shapes it?

Secondly, how can Christians influence public policy in a society of 'directional plurality'? Should Christians argue for Christian schools or common schools? There are some tensions between the contributors on this question for some arguments tend to the case for Christian schools, but Cooling mounts a robust defence of the common schools recognizing the limits within which Christians who teach in these schools work. Common schools cannot be responsible for nurturing children in their primary culture but provide opportunities for encounter with different views. This helps children clarify their understanding of their own culture. Deakin concludes this section with a theological rationale for structural pluralism. For some reason she discusses the rights and responsibilities of parents, children and the government, but not the teachers.

The third subject on the agenda is a Christian understanding of the person. Some of the consequences of adopting a Christian vision are spelled out. This view is said to be far from the actual experience of young people and suggestions are made which could transform this situation. One aspect of this is the use of assessment which Hill subjects to a searching evaluation. He concludes that the present system denies many children 'the right to equality of educational opportunity and maximisation of their personal abilities'.

On the curriculum itself Wilkins argues that a Christian view of life provides a more stable base from which to establish the basics than the public consensus of a particular time. Thiessen then argues for a Christian curriculum which provides a guide to the transformation of the common curriculum with which it overlaps on the grounds of common grace. Both Thiessen and Smith in his earlier article are sensitive to the complexities of modern hermeneutics and the consequent difficulties of working out a Christian vision from scripture. They both employ Wright's analogy of an incomplete Shakespearean play in which the fifth act is being played out now in the light of the first four acts and what is known of the author. This gives a dynamic but not totally satisfactory connotation to the authority of scripture.

Hill returns with a second essay to critique the idea that education is reduced to schooling and Barns explores the implications of new media technologies to shape us as people and communities.

The sixth section of the book contains four reflections, from another evangelical, another Christian tradition, a non-religious perspective and a non-Christian (i.e. Muslim) perspective. These express appreciation and some surprise at what counts as an evangelical view. The Muslim, not surprisingly, outlines an Islamic approach. Finally in a very significant postscript Shortt comments on worldviews, presuppositions and critical realism in a pluralist world.

This is a significant volume of essays in a carefully planned survey of education at a critical time for education, and not only for the UK. The teaching skills of the editors are admirably deployed in

the commentaries introducing each section. Anyone interested in the cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism will find that transition illustrated and subjected to Christian critique on one significant aspect of our national life.

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Bioethics – A Primer For Christians

Gilbert Meilaender
Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997;
120 pp., pb., £5.99

I initially approached this book with more than a little scepticism. Could any book of only 120 pages comment meaningfully on a dozen of the days most prickly bioethical issues? The subtitle 'A Primer For Christians' was surely a euphemism for 'We've Bitten Off More Than We Can Chew'. This view was compounded when the introduction to the book (written from an American perspective) contained a factual error about the grounds under the 1967 Abortion Act for an abortion in the UK.

As I read on, however, I increasingly warmed to the book. Despite, perhaps because of, the brevity I found myself thinking more deeply about the issues covered than I had for some time – even if I did not eventually agree with all of the points presented. I was struck by the subtle changes that accompany the shift from talking about procreation to talking about reproduction. I thought some interesting and utterly plausible nightmare scenarios were presented in the chapter on prenatal screening, and the chapter on refusing treatment helpfully untangled the web surrounding when it is and when it is not appropriate for a doctor to withhold a potential treatment,

and indeed for the patient to decline a proposed regime.

There was one chapter, on human experimentation, where the author, echoing uncritically something he had read in the New York Times, made big play of the fact that only 2 or 3% of adults needing treatment enter themselves for randomised trials where there is a possibility that they will receive a placebo rather than the drug under development. This was contrasted with the fact that 60% of children suffering from cancer are treated in clinical trials and taken to show that we are willing to play more fast and loose with the lives of others than we are with ourselves. This is an unfair comparison because participants in paediatric oncology trials rarely, if ever, receive a placebo.

For the most part the arguments in the book are put pragmatically from a Christian viewpoint, rather than being explicitly theological (I counted only nine Bible references in the work). That the theology is assumed rather than spelt out is not necessarily a bad thing (the benefits of brevity have already been discussed). There were nevertheless times, notably in the author's apparent rejection of organ donation, that I wished we could see more of the invisible skeleton on which the argument was being fleshed out.

Given the content of the book, it might better have been called 'Medical Bioethics', because all of the material covered is directly related to the ethics of humanity in the face of changes in medical science. Inevitably there were other issues which I would like to have seen under discussion. Even under the tight criteria of the book, we might have had mention of the prospects of xenotransplantation (the human use of animal organs) and the impact of

genetically-modified foodstuffs – two areas where we may yet have a chance to be pro-active rather than re-active. A wider definition of bioethics could usefully have seen coverage of other aspects of genetic engineering, animal experimentation, even the appropriate use of the medicines we do have in the face of increasing antibiotic resistance.

In short, this is a flawed yet helpful read. It is a good starting point for those who have not given much prior thought to issues of bioethics but, by its own admission and design, it is not an exhaustive treatise on the subject.

Chris Willmott
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Word on the Box

David Porter Editor,
Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1997,
109 pp., hb./pb., £9.99/£6.99

We have much to thank David Porter for in his ability to blend a variety of lectures into a relatively coherent account of how senior level broadcasters are reflecting on change in British Broadcasting.

The book consists of five main lectures ranging from the role of Public Broadcasting, News, Ratings, Information Technology and Religious Broadcasting. The lectures were originally given as the London lectures, under the sponsorship of the Institute for Contemporary Christianity. Robert McLeish offers a theologically grounded analysis of servanthood and leadership. He applies this to the world of the media arguing that we get the media we deserve and that the media is both a servant and a leader. 'They meet unsuspected needs so providing a service, but they also exercise leadership in creatively taking me somewhere I've not been before.' (p. 19).

Justin Phillips examines our continuing fascination with what some here call 'wall to wall news'. Increased competition, globalisation, rising costs, technology and changing audience demands are all put in a Christian perspective which stresses truth. The dangers of emotion-driven selection – 'If it bleeds – it leads' (p. 44), trivialisation and loss of quality make sobering reading.

Graham Mytton, after twelve years in audience research for the BBC World Service, analyses the shift in management culture from a belief in what was being done to being driven by audience share. This leads to a focusing on the question of public service broadcasting and the moral concerns both at its heart and in its history and development.

Alan Rogers offers an account of the age of information with the subtitle 'The Electronic Classroom'. He is concerned about the role of values in the broader education canvas varying from video, CD ROM to television. Whether the media lead or reflect the values of society is considered. He ends with a plan and promise based on what the ill-fated ARK2 (a planned Christian Broadcaster) was designed to do. Its failure is all our loss.

The final essay is from the pen of Tim Dean, who focuses on the nature and content of religious broadcasting. From his 'insider' experience, he sets forth the advantages and limitations of religious broadcasting both in the public service setting and from a confessional, independently funded base. He highlights the often quoted danger that the BBC Religious Department has or will become the BBC Ethics Department.

There are some excellent nuggets to be mined, but the spoken word does not always easily translate

into the written word and there is no sense of development from and between the lectures. Perhaps more attention to common ground or significant differences either within each essay or by some editorial reflection would have made what is interesting and informative even better value.

E. David Cook

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Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West

Mike Riddell

London: SPCK, 1998,
194 pp., pb., £12.99.

'I think this is the call of God to the Western church at the end of the second millennium: to change or to die.' (p. 2) So Mike Riddell begins this work on the state of the Western church at the end of the twentieth century. This church is so dry, irrelevant and shrinking that it is facing death. Only a radical re-thinking of what it is to be church will suffice. Acts 10 serves as a paradigm whereby the early church found itself on the edge, and so began to live 'outside the box' in which it had placed itself.

In the course of this lively and provocative book, Riddell takes a look at Scripture, apathy, holiness, spirituality, and of course post-modernism. To speak positively of the book, Riddell is radical and creative, and he writes with an enthusiasm and passion often lacking from such works. He rightly identifies many issues facing the church, and calls Christians to take their faith to those excluded from our structures, with our middle class values, apathy, over-rationalistic faith. His emphasis on community is a much needed call, and the ending of the book, giving accounts

of various radical communities, is informative and challenging. Riddell is certainly on a mission.

Unfortunately, there is a great sense of baby and bath water throughout. Most of his discussion on the Bible is based on Tomlinson's *The Post-Evangelical*, and although Riddell helpfully isolates the dangers of the classical evangelical approach, twentieth century theology (and the challenges of liberalism that have been seen in the UK at least since the World Wars) makes his analysis over-simplistic. If only it were so easy to claim that the Bible is not the word of God, but rather *contains* the word of God. As for the 'cerebral captivity of the Bible', there are many involved in the academic study of the Bible who not only study but live it. Moreover, they remain committed to living the Bible story which both is and becomes the Word of God.

Similarly, yes there are churches which thrive on power, but not all. Yes, some people take separation from the world too far, but not all – many are holy yet involved (the biblical image of ambassadors could have been more helpfully explored). It is a shame that the old issue of incarnation versus inculturation is never thoroughly dealt with by Riddell. Similarly, in his account of post-modernity, an exploration of the relationship between symbol and story, and story and meaning, would have been constructive. There are some dubious statements made in the book – that pre-Reformation creeds were 'narrative and fiduciary', whereas those post-Reformation are 'abstract and contentious' (p. 112); that we must drop the 'them' and 'us' categories from mission, despite the Scriptural categories of light, darkness, belief, unbelief etc.; that the empty cross of Protestantism portrays docetism (p. 123); that truth is not propositional, but rather personal

(p. 155) (as if such a separation were possible); that the Spirit can be played off against Scripture (p. 172); and that relationships are in contradistinction to the imparting of information (p. 174).

In general Riddell does well to recognise some of the weaknesses of the evangelical church. Yet *some* must be the operative word, for these problems are some problems for some churches in some situations. In being a prophet of doom, there is much danger in over-generalising, and in attacking a Christianity that many of us in lively, relevant and thriving churches will not recognise. There is no doubting that the church must do much to ensure its relevant and truthful witness in a Post-Christian West. Riddell has alerted us to the task, but it is doubtful whether he provides the right path forward.

Tony Gray
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The Church Comes Home: Building community and mission through home churches

Robert and Julia Banks
Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998,
viii + 260 pp., pb.

Robert and Julia Banks see the home as the natural base for the church. They argue that non-home churches fail to provide adequate community life. Most churches are too big to offer the family commitment, mutual care and accountability necessary for community; 'most (members) have only a limited knowledge of one another' (p. 31). Ministry from the front suppresses participatory worship. The authors look back to the model of Acts 2:46: 'in the larger temple based meeting there was teaching by the apostles and broader fellowship with other believers. In the smaller house - or

apartment based meeting they praised God and ate a common meal' (p. 27). 'Considering the size of average first century houses ... there were probably twelve to fifteen meeting in the 'church in the house' and no more than sixty to eighty as 'the whole church' (p. 29). Paul's approach to 'church' is described as homelike, holistic, participatory and outgoing: characteristics best nurtured in groups of no more than twelve adults or about twenty in total (with children). A church with house groups is not adequate; the small groups should be transformed into home churches. Instead of a sermon, each member of the group can contribute. An 'agape meal' is central. Members may have differing views of its significance: they could come from all denominational traditions (p. 9). Outsiders may join in the meal (p. 42), as may children. Members choose the how, when and where of baptism: some may want infant baptism, others believers' baptism (p. 187). There is no need for formal leadership. Suitably gifted people may be seen (informally) as the 'pastoral core' of the group; 'gate-keepers' are mentioned (p. 182), but no definition provided.

A church too big for a home is too big. Churches should start small; the authors once started a home church with five adults and three children, and prayed that God would send no more for a few months while they got to know each other deeply enough: 'rather like a young married couple deciding not to have children immediately ...' (p. 116).

A growing church should plant another one. Home churches should sometimes meet with others. 'Home church based congregations' are a 'cluster of independent home churches that meet together regularly and have some common objectives' or else a

local church 'made up mostly of home churches'. Relatively little space is given to precisely how these wider groups of home churches function.

The strength of this book is the commitment of the authors to community life: members giving practical, emotional and spiritual support to one another. The chapter on church history traces the importance of small groups in the past. This has been comprehensively done by Richard Lovelace (*Dynamics of Spiritual Life* Paternoster, 1979) whose more subtle treatment shows that genuine community has been experience within a variety of church structures (cf. Lovelace p. 167). There is one chapter on the Biblical evidence: a more thorough argument is found in *Paul's Idea of Community: The early house churches in their original setting* (R. Banks, Eerdmans, rep. 1988). Here Banks argued that the appointment of elders in the Pastoral Epistles were 'the first tentative steps away from Paul's idea of community' (p. 198).

The remaining eight chapters are based largely on testimonies of home church members. Individuals find traditional churches lacking communal life: they find home churches to provide it. Many questions remain. There is no clear definition of what a church is. Questions about orthodoxy are seen as unhelpful, the only basis seems to be 'a common experience and love of Jesus Christ' (p. 186). Why are there no testimonies from members of churches with thriving small groups? Such testimonies might well reveal that the best features of home churches (genuine community and every member ministry) are also to be found in non-home churches where there is spiritual vitality.

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The Biblical Kierkegaard. Reading by the Rule of Faith

Timothy Houston Polk
Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997,
xiii + 232 pp., pb., £15.99

Discussions of biblical hermeneutics these days are prone either to sink under their own theoretical weight and never arrive at the biblical text, or to be pressed up so close against that text that they do little more than provide academic jargon for self-legitimation. Taking his cue from Kierkegaard, Polk navigates between these two extremes, and mounts a compelling argument for rehabilitating the old Augustinian 'rule of faith' as a cornerstone of modern (and non-modern) biblical reading.

His hermeneutical argument is essentially this: the text of the Bible is a given, but what matters is what we do with it, or more technically how we construe it. Construal is an essentially imaginative activity which is inseparable from wider questions of who and where we are as readers, and the particular imaginative construal at issue here is the decision to read the Bible as the Word of God, in an attitude of loving expectancy that it will search us out and reveal God to us. Of course, once we accept that construal is an interpretive activity performed by readers in a variety of ways, there arises the pressing question of how we might evaluate these differing construals. Are we not simply back at a somewhat naive use of scripture which, experience tells us, can be just as distorting and self-legitimizing as liberating or empowering?

Polk argues that the key to evaluating different construals is to read according to the 'rule of faith', the historic doctrine that (loosely) everything should be read as pointing to God's love for us and

our loving response. In short: yes one could read the Bible in pretty much any fashion, but this divine-human love relationship is to judge every other reading. In this way we are propelled on to the hermeneutical circle where we find the biblical text requiring this same love of us: a love which is willing, if necessary, to cover over a multitude of textual sins (from patriarchy to politics; from submission to slavery).

Polk finds in Kierkegaard's repeated appeal to this hermeneutic a particular case of Stanley Fish's view that it is the interpretive community which decides how a text is to be construed. But, as the repeated appeal to Kierkegaard shows, this does not render this view 'postmodern', as if that word meant anything. One thinks of A.K.M. Adam's recent suggestion that 'non-modern' might be a helpful interim label for this kind of thinking. Polk links his proposal with Childs' canonical approach, Lindbeck's intratextualism (David Kelsey's *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* is a constant presence in the background), and the insights of speech act theory, thus providing a formidable array of approaches to set against the 'unloving' face of historical criticism.

Aside from its hermeneutical merit, a strength of the book lies in its repeated close engagement with particular texts, both of Kierkegaard and the Bible. The former are exemplary close readings; while the latter focus on various parables of love, as well as extended engagements with James and Job. Particularly with James, Polk demonstrates how the givenness of the text combines with the supreme importance of imaginative construal to make the Bible come alive as Word of God. Where theological hermeneutics has often attacked historical criticism on

theoretical grounds but has found it harder to articulate particular instances of insight into biblical interpretation, Polk scores heavily on both counts. *The Biblical Kierkegaard* is a significant hermeneutical contribution which will reward those who find that the work of theology and of interpretation is all too often impersonal and loveless.

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Faith in the revolution. The political theologies of Muntzer and Winstanley

Andrew Bradstock

London, SPCK, 1997,

xiii + 210 pp., pb., £17.50.

This book comes in three parts which are quite distinct from each other, although they are held together by the overarching theme of political theology. The first part is a review of the life and thought of the sixteenth-century revolutionary Thomas Muntzer, about whom so much has been written, not least by modern Marxists. Muntzer's close association with the first generation of the German reformation, as well as his approval of the peasants' revolt as the harbinger of the coming kingdom of God, have made him particularly fascinating, and Dr Bradstock guides us through the current state of Muntzer research in a way which is both clear and convincing. Among much else, we learn how he was influenced by the German mystic Johannes Tauler, and how he drew on the apocalyptic traditions associated with the name of Joachim da Fiore, without adopting them fully or consistently. Muntzer comes across as a visionary influenced mainly by the book of Daniel, which may help to explain the political turn which his activities later took. Dr Bradstock

is determined to emphasize that Muntzer never advocated violence as such, but was driven to it by the way in which the German princes put down their peasants.

The second section of the book is a study of Gerrard Winstanley, the seventeenth-century leader and theorist of the 'Diggers', a primitive communist movement which was suppressed before it could attain the dimensions of Muntzer's revolt. Winstanley is portrayed as a man of radical leanings who was always on the fringe of the church, whether in its established or in any of its many dissenting forms. His social and political ideas apparently developed mainly in the light of his personal experiences during the difficult 1640s, and it is an open question as to whether his profession of Christianity was any more than a conventional form of words. Had he lived even fifty years later, some have suggested, he would have abandoned his religious vocabulary altogether, since it was hardly necessary to his programme. This may be unfair, Dr Bradstock hints, because Winstanley may have been pushed towards his radical politics precisely because of his Christian convictions, even if there is little doubt that they resulted in a form of secularisation.

The third section is a theoretical study of political theology which asks whether Christianity has anything unique to contribute in this area. If Biblical eschatology cannot be consistently applied to human realities, what can Christians do in the social sphere? This has been hotly debated in modern times, and widely different answers have been given. Dr Bradstock believes that Christians ought to be involved in movements of social transformation, and he concentrates on the liberation theology of Latin America. As a result, this section has a rather dated feel to it - it is rather like a

throwback to the 1960s, when Marxism and the emerging third world revolution were causing upheavals on university campuses around the world. Almost all the writers whom Dr Bradstock mentions belong to that era, but it has to be said that the world has moved on since then. Oddly enough, one name missing from this discussion is that of Jacques Ellul, surely one of the most prolific and penetrating critics of the whole phenomenon, and a declared (protestant) Christian to boot.

One is left with the feeling that the common thread linking Muntzer, Winstanley and the modern Christian social revolutionaries is their middle-class origin. To them the world of the peasantry is essentially foreign, and thus easy to idealise. Christianity provides a useful quarry for their ideas and vocabulary, but it has not transformed their thinking very deeply. In particular, the doctrine of original sin, which must surely be the foundation of any truly Christian social theory, is notable by its absence from their thought, and Winstanley (at least) explicitly rejected it. Perhaps he had to, before the kind of revolutionary theology he subsequently adopted could even be conceived. Dr Bradstock does not answer this question, but at least his research shows that revolutionary eschatology, however dependent on the Bible it may be, is not a viable way forward for Christians in the political sphere, in this or in any age.

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Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church

William R. Barr (ed.)

Grand Rapids/Cambridge, Eerdmans, 1997,
xviii + 553 pp., £25.99/\$39.00

As the editor, who is Professor of Theology at Lexington Theological Seminary in Kentucky, states in his Preface: 'This symposium/anthology is an attempt to give a more inclusive account of the contributions Christians from various parts of the world are making to theological understanding in our time.' (p. xi). In pursuit of this goal, Barr has assembled not only academic essays but also songs, stories and accounts or rituals, all reflecting the diverse ways in which theology is currently 'done' in the worldwide church. The range of contributors is impressive, with among others, Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Evangelicals and Liberal Protestants presenting their various points of view. Most are either theological teachers or missionaries, and although the USA is by far the predominant force, there are representatives from China, South America, Europe, the South Pacific, India, Hong Kong, Nigeria and South Africa. Few could quibble with the wide range of Barr's selection.

The book is divided into 6 sections, broadly following the traditional divisions of systematic theology; Constructing Theology from Diverse Perspectives, Enlarging our Understanding of God, Humanity within the Fabric of Creation, The Significance of Jesus Christ, The Church and the Christian Life, Christian Hope.

The format followed in each section is the same - a brief introduction to the subject, between five and seven essays of varying length, then an extensive bibliography entitled 'Some Further Contribution

to the Discussion'. Like the selection of contributors, the bibliographies are representative of a wide range of points of view. It should be borne in mind that all the essays have previously been published elsewhere, usually in academic journals, and even though they address various issues within the subject of their section, they do not in any sense interact with each other and so do not constitute a 'discussion'.

The seven essays in the first section, Constructing Theology from Diverse Perspectives, provide a fair sample of the kind of material assembles in this anthology. The first piece, entitled 'Divine Revelation: Intervention or Self-Communication?' by Roman Catholic theologian Frans Josef van Beeck, analyses interpersonal communication as dynamic encounter and interaction, in order to provide insights into the concept of revelation as God's personal self-communication. These supplement traditional views of revelation as content (ideas and propositions). In subsequent essays Carol Christ provides some basic insights into feminist theological method in terms of 'embodied thinking'; John May from a conservative evangelical viewpoint argues that revelation thought of as the conveying of objective knowledge of God underlies the volitional and relational aspects of faith; Orthodox theologian Verna Harrison draws on iconography to make comparisons between artistic and conceptual modes of expression. The last three essays broach the issue of contextualisation. Romney Moseley from a Caribbean perspective, Kan Baoping from a Chinese background, and Harvey Conn, who sounds some necessary warning notes, from a North American Reformed perspective shaped also by missionary experience in South Korea.

At the level of providing an introduction to the wide variety of theology currently being pursued in the worldwide Church, both for theological students and also for readers with some background in theology, this book should prove very serviceable. The essays are well chosen and ample encouragement to read more widely is provided. The title of the book, however, speaks of 'constructive theology' and at this level more problems arise.

What exactly is to be constructed and how may it be constructed from such a diversity of pieces? In an introductory essay entitled 'Re-forming Theology in the Global Conversation' Barr argues that 'Today and in the years ahead Christian theology will need to be developed through interaction and conversation among Christians around the world, and with those of other persuasions in the world community'. Few would disagree with at least the first part of this statement, but how it may be carried out, given the diversity of starting points and authority-sources used, is highly problematical. As Barr points out, a theology rooted in a particular context implants the gospel more deeply in the hearts of people, and he is well aware at the same time of the dangers of cultural captivity and provincialism. He wishes to avoid the relativism which accepts all options and is unable to make any initial judgements, but it would seem that until the issues of the source and norms of theology have been addressed and some measure of agreement found, the way ahead is unclear. The theologians in this book, who of course cannot represent all the options currently on offer, are at many points moving in very different directions. It would be difficult not to conclude that we have assembled here pieces from several different jigsaws which can

never be fitted into a single coherent picture. It may well be that that situation has to be accepted as unavoidable. A close reading of 'Constructive Theology' will allow the reader to come to his or her own conclusions.

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The Context of Scripture. Volume I: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World.

William W. and K. Lawson Younger, Jr, eds
Leiden: Brill, 1997,
xxviii + 599 pp., hb., \$175.00.

This volume forms the first in a series of three that will reproduce in translation many of the important texts from the ancient Near East that are relevant to the study of the OT. The three volumes contain three different groups of texts: canonical compositions, monumental inscriptions, and archival documents. Although it is not always clear how these distinctions are made, the first volume contains many familiar texts written in Egyptian, Hittite, West Semitic languages, Akkadian, and Sumerian. Each of these language groupings is further divided according to whether the texts presented have a divine, royal, or individual focus. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr. provided assistance on the Hittite material and Robert K. Ritner helped with the Egyptian texts. The two editors, Hallo and Younger, deserve our gratitude for all the work that they have done.

Each text is presented with an introduction that often discusses the type of literature and the physical context of where the text occurs. A translation follows. These are usually done by experts in the relevant field. A reading of

the translations suggests that they are generally reliable. This has two types of notes attached to it. There are footnotes that deal with questions of text and translation. There is also a centre column on each page in which relevant biblical references are cited for purposes of comparison with words or expressions in the text. Many different translators worked on the texts included. Indeed, some translations are borrowed from previously published works. There is wide variation in the length and detail of the introduction, footnotes, and the centre column Bible references. Some texts have little or no reference to comparative biblical materials. Nevertheless, the overall impression is one of considerable advancement on J.B. Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Part of the reason is that because most translations have been made more recently and the selection of texts reflects the 1990s rather than the 1960s. The substantial inclusion of Hittite material is a welcome innovation. In addition, much greater attention is given to the notes and to possible biblical parallels.

It is a pleasure to discover many of the important West Semitic texts included in this volume, such as the Ugaritic myth, ritual, epic, and rephaim texts. Recently published material from Emar is also found here as well as Idrimi's biography, the Hittite instruction texts, and the Hymn to Aten. Even the Prayer of Nabonidus from the Qumran scrolls finds a place. Many of the significant texts found in Pritchard's volume occur once again in this volume. Texts such as the legal collections of the second millennium BC do not appear although they may appear in the second volume since (in at least some cases) they can be understood as monumental

inscriptions. However, one wonders whether the numerous recent texts, both cuneiform and alphabetic, found in biblical sites such as Aphek, Hebron, Hazor, Beth Shan, Dan, and Ekron, will make it into the following volumes. The Dan and Ekron texts might because they are monumental inscriptions, but the others are isolated letters and administrative texts; neither archives nor monuments.

However, this is an important achievement and it should provide the twenty first century with an updated equivalent of Pritchard's volume. Like its predecessor, the three volume set will likely be too expensive for the average student or even teacher and one may hope for an abridgement that will make many of these texts more accessible to others who wish to study the ancient world of the OT. The volume itself should find a place in all libraries where the study of the Bible as a serious pursuit is encouraged.

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The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence, Interest and Ideology from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement

D.G. Horrell
Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1996,
395 pp., £27.50.

The sociological study of the Pauline corpus can be said to be one of the fastest growing trends in all of NT studies. The seminal works in the early 1980s by scholars such as G. Thiessen and W. Meeks have stimulated a wide variety of studies, some more fertile than others. Certainly the most fertile area within the Pauline corpus has proved to be 1 Corinthians, which has

produced no fewer than some fifteen significant doctoral theses involving Paul, the Corinthians, and the social sciences, and a variety of commentaries, such as my own *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Paternoster, 1995). Into this already well-trod track comes the revision of the doctoral dissertation of D.G. Horrell, done at Cambridge in 1993 under the supervision of Andrew Chester.

Horrell sets out in the first two chapters, which are methodological in character, how he intends to approach the subject, namely by following the suggestions of the social theorist Anthony Giddens, and in particular Horrell seeks to use Giddens' structuration theory. For readers unfamiliar with this particular theory, it involves not a particular sociological model but the investigation of a body of material over a period of time, seeking to see how certain basic resources and rules of a community are applied and then reapplied as situations change. Rather than applying a static model such as sect theory, Giddens' approach is to suggest that there is a process of change and adaptation always going on in a living community and so one needs to see how the community's resources and rules are used in this situation of flux. This in fact leads to some significant results when Horrell examines first the canonical Corinthian letters and then the somewhat later letter of Clement to the Corinthians, usually called 1 Clement. He is able to show, I think convincingly, that while Paul himself is engaging in a social critique of some of the dominant values of the culture, trying to get his socially higher status Christians to adopt a more Christ-like model of living and relating to those less fortunate, Clement on the other hand seems

to be simply endorsing the existing social values of the culture and seeking to create peace in the fragmented Corinthian community by baptizing the existing social status quo, urging quietism and good behaviour in relationship to the dominant social institutions of the Roman world including government and the traditional patriarchal household structure. Horrell is again, I think, quite right to conclude that while Clement's work is aptly described by Thiessen's term love-patriarchalism, the work of Paul himself is not fairly described by this term. Indeed Paul is busy deconstructing some of the major assumptions of his patriarchal world, including the assumption that women should not be active participants in Christian worship and ministry.

Horrell's work, however, is not without its flaws. There is especially the problem that despite his desire to use Giddens' analytical approach he never does the proper background work to make such an analysis of 1 Corinthians convincing, for he does not deal with the resources and rules that Paul is drawing on. He says nothing of consequence about Paul's use of the Jesus tradition and other early Christian traditions in 1 Corinthians, and so he does not demonstrate how and in what way Paul is appropriating and reapplying his Christian theological and ethical resources. Indeed, valuable as the analysis in chapters 3-5 is as a sort of summary of the state of sociological discussion of this Pauline material (which in itself makes the book worth reading as a precis of the subject, though there is nothing particularly new here if one is already conversant with the relevant literature), actual contact with Giddens and his theory really does

not become apparent until Horrell tries to show the developments from 1 Corinthians to 2 Corinthians 10 – 13 and then to 2 Corinthians 1 – 9 (he thinks these are two separate letter fragments written in this order) and then on to 1 Clement. The analysis of 1 Corinthians suffers for not being read in light of the aforementioned background traditions. Good contextual exegesis of 1 Corinthians does not in itself constitute a social analysis à la Giddens,

Themelios readers will perhaps find it a little too convenient that Horrell argues that 1 Corinthians 14:34–36 is not Pauline, a conclusion that better facilitates his portrait of Paul as a social engineer. Yet it must be said that a proper reading of these verses in their immediate literary context could have led to the conclusion that Paul is simply correcting an abuse by some women, not laying an all-encompassing prohibition, as 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 makes clear he was not. The fact that some Western manuscripts move these verses to the end of the paragraph, is no argument for their omission, as no manuscript of the Pauline corpus omits these verses. Transposition is an argument for lack of understanding by an editor of how verses fit a context, not a sufficient argument for interpolation. The theory of several fragments in our present 2 Corinthians is also not uncommon but it also has no textual basis, and Horrell does not deal at all with the rhetorical arguments which suggest that 2 Corinthians is a unity, nor does he adequately deal with the arguments that suggest that 2 Corinthians 10 – 13 must follow 2 Corinthians 1 – 9 to make good sense of this material, as most scholars would maintain.

Horrell's analysis of 1 Clement is telling and convincing and in itself makes the book worth reading. He shows how indeed the more radical teachings of Paul (and behind him of Jesus) have been domesticated for the sake of peace with the world and unity within the community. The re-patriarchalization of the church is already in full swing when this document is written, and the loss of eschatological sense of how the gospel transforms the world's structures is telling.

This book is indeed a technical monograph, full of Greek and scholarly discussion, but it is also a worthwhile study, even for the student just wanting to get a taste of what the sociological study of Paul's writings is like. There is a very ample bibliography as well for further study. Horrell has made a useful contribution to the discussion of our most well-known of Pauline congregations – the church at Corinth, and he has shown something of how its social problems continued to recur, not least because once the apostle passed away, it was down to the local leadership to carry things forward. Not surprisingly they did not always grasp the more socially radical and world-changing vision of the Apostle. I would commend this book to upper level college students and those pursuing master's degrees or divinity degrees at theological college. They will discover that this line of approach to Paul is fertile, not futile.

Ben Witherington III

Asbury Theological Seminary

Preaching the Hard Sayings of Jesus

John T Carroll and James R Carroll
Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody,
Massachusetts, 1996,
174 pp., pb.

This book is an unusual joint project, in two significant ways. Firstly, it is a father-and-son co-operative endeavour. James Carroll, the father, has been a Presbyterian pastor over more than 50 years, in three major US congregations. John, his son, is Associate Professor of NT at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond. More importantly, this book is an attempt to bring together the disciplines of academic study and biblical preaching, as from their individual areas of expertise the co-authors reflect on the meaning and relevance of some difficult passages in the teaching of Jesus.

The first three chapters of the book deal with sayings that are harder to 'swallow' than to understand, exploring themes such as 'the scandal of grace' (the Good Samaritan, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the Prodigal Father), the demands of discipleship (the cost of grace) and the offence of judgement (the unforgivable sin, the final banquet, the rich man and Lazarus). The focus then moves on to sayings where *our* linguistic and cultural distance is the problem (the dishonest steward, the friend at midnight), and the book concludes with passages 'in which Jesus appears as an all too human figure' (facing the future, the cross and separation from his father).

Approaching the central themes in Jesus' teaching, the authors have opted for depth rather than breadth. There is little treatment of the texts in relation to their contexts, in the gospel narratives, for example. The authors make clear this is not their methodology,

nor do they attempt 'to offer any definitive interpretations of the texts we explore', since the sayings 'resist reduction to a single meaning'. Their aim is to stimulate a variety of contemporary responses, to help the preacher grapple with the meaning of the saying in its first-century setting and communicate its message today.

For each passage, the same process is followed. The scholar son provides his own translation and addresses the key questions of exegesis, entitled 'an interpretation'. The preacher father then moves us 'from text to sermon', providing in effect an extended sermon outline, with illustrative material and applicatory suggestions. Each section ends with a bibliography and extensive end notes (mainly exegetical).

It is an interestingly different concept, but does it really work? The interpretative sections provide a well-documented survey of the range of scholarly opinions on offer, within a broadly conservative spectrum. There are particular insights into Palestinian first-century culture, of the sort we have come to value in Kenneth Bailey's work, which illuminate some of the problems in the parables. What seems to be lacking is any overall theological cohesion with regard to either the authority of Scripture or of Christ's words, as we have them. So, we are left with the prevailing impression that the hard sayings cannot really mean what they say. For example, in the section dealing with divorce, we are offered the suggestion that Christ's strong words are 'another example of Jesus' characteristic use of exaggeration to challenge beliefs and practices ... a hard saying to be taken seriously, but not to be pressed literally'. Similarly, in dealing with Christ's prophecies of the end of time, both authors seem

happy to solve the problems by the expedient 'Jesus was mistaken'.

The sermons are more a matter of taste. They belong to the genre of American exhortation to positive thinking and action, supported by many cultural, historical and literary allusions, and not a little devotional poetry. The underlying theology seems to be clearer and more robust, but the content is largely framework thinking that could be applied to a variety of similar texts. There is little exegetical particularity as a cutting edge, to make us really sit up and take notice—more to comfort the disturbed, than to disturb the comfortable. The overall effect of the book is polished, accomplished and confident. There are many good things in it, but in the end, one is left with the feeling that the hard sayings have been domesticated.

David Jackman

Director, Cornhill Training Course, London

**From Christ to the World:
Introductory Readings in
Christian Ethics**

*Wayne G Boulton, Thomas D Kennedy, and
Allen Verhey*
Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1994,
542 pp., pb., £18.99.

Those who teach courses in Christian ethics no longer need to require four to five books for an introductory course in order to cover the necessary topics. Editors Wayne G Boulton, Thomas D Kennedy, and Allen Verhey have provided *the best* collection of readings in Christian ethics available in English. Here in one place are classic readings from Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle, Martin Luther, Francis of Assisi, and John Calvin.

Intermixed with these classic voices are contemporary voices ranging from Walter Rauschenbusch to James Gustafson, from Margaret Farley to Stanley Hauerwas, Pope John Paul II to Reinhold Niebuhr to Carol Robb. Catholics, mainline Protestants, evangelicals, two Eastern Orthodox Christians, and even one Jewish political philosopher, are all represented. Feminists and traditionalists, pacifists and just war theorists, teleological, deontological, virtue, and narrative approaches, are placed in written conversation. Further, the quality of the excerpts is uniformly high, many of them precisely the essays one would want to have students read.

This wonderful reader is organised in three major sections with several subsections or chapters under them, and multiple readings in each subsection. Under the major section of *Sources of Christian Ethics*, there are sections on 'Scripture and Christian Ethics', 'Tradition and Christian Ethics', 'Philosophy and Christian Ethics', and 'Science and Christian and Ethics'. In the second section of *Features of Christian Ethics*, the editors have given us excerpts in 'The Forms of Christian Ethics', 'The Norms of Christian Ethics', and 'The Contexts of Christian Ethics'. Finally, in the *Issues of Christian Ethics*, the text surveys 'Christian Sexual Ethics', 'Christian Medical Ethics', 'Christian Political Ethics', 'Christian Economic Ethics', and 'Christian Environmental Ethics'.

One could use *From Christ to the World* either as the main (or only) text in an introductory Christian ethics course, or as a supplementary reader. The former option is aided by an extensive introductory chapter by the editors, biblical excerpts, and

'Try it Yourself' case studies scattered throughout the book. In the latter use, the book would make a good supplementary text not only for introduction courses, but also courses in the history of Christian ethics, courses in various ethical topics or approaches, or even courses in the history of Christian thought. It is difficult to see how such a work could be improved. I recommend it enthusiastically.

Michael L Westmoreland-White
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Louisville, KY

Power and the Church: Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition

Martyn Percy
London: Cassell, 1998,
239 pp., pb.

Following on from his *Words, Wonders and Power*, Percy offers another volume of essays brought together under the heading of 'power and the church'. That church and power go together is no new thesis. Percy's novelty is both in how he looks at power in the church, employing much modern sociological analysis, and what he looks at, primarily fundamentalism and revivalism.

Often collections of essays fail to come together as a whole, yet the body of this work follows common themes, even if two of the essays seem slightly out of place (one examining the concept of 'ambassadors' as a paradigm for the early church, the other considering forms of bureaucracy in the Church of England). Perhaps the most challenging essay considers the context of the gospel miracles, and the fact that the subjects of most of the miracles were the disadvantaged (although Percy could have made more of the

eschatological implications of this for the kingdom of God).

One of Percy's objectives is to avoid using the theme of power as a metanarrative, and so escape any post-modern critique. Such an aim is laudable, for there is much more to the narrative of theology and church than power. Power, and the way we understand its operation, is a tool by which we can investigate and highlight the relationships between people and ideas within the church. Yet, instead of using the metanarrative of power to make ultimate judgements, Percy consistently uses the metanarrative of liberalism. For example, he critiques evangelicalism for being a movement which is 'simply a religion of calculated psephology, rather than a correspondence with the spirit of truth' (p.213); he attacks fundamentalists who abuse power, saying that power should be about generation, rather than coercion; he provides good reasons why revivalism may be exhibiting certain social and psychological phenomena, but as a theologian allows for no discussion considering whether the 'rain' in the Toronto blessing might have some origin in heaven. All of these are at least some examples of the weak methodology of an otherwise fascinating book. Percy consistently makes value judgements concerning power - on what basis?

There are a number of points of minor criticism. In defining fundamentalism, he himself agrees that his definition becomes drastically close to boiling it down to 'mere' Christianity, yet maintains that fundamentalism is different in that it is fundamentalistic in attitude - counter pluralism, modernism, etc. Yet surely many classically liberal theologians could fit this

bill. Percy misses the point concerning evangelical's denial of the label of fundamentalism in the light of Barr's work. It was not primarily because they disliked the terminology, but because they thought Barr's critique lacked an informed historical perspective. Similarly, Percy's observation may be true that most evangelicals work in evangelical ghettos, but two points must be made. Firstly this may happen for the defensible reason that a church completely inculturated in the academy loses its very reason for being. Secondly, many other sections of the church are guilty of the same accusation. Percy seems to ignore the claims of post-liberalism that scholarship should be done within the community of faith, not merely seeking out the self-congratulations of the academy.

Percy is at his most insightful when analysing the relationships within fundamentalist and revival movements. Unfortunately, he seems all too often to be guilty of throwing the baby out with the bath water. True, some

fundamentalists may love the power of controlling truth, more than the people they serve, but some fundamentalists (Mother Theresa?) do not. Some charismatics may lack theological development, but others are working hard to produce theological reflection (see the recent offerings of Tom Smal and Nigel Wright). Some fundamentalists and revivalists cannot avoid determinism and predestination, but others can (Roger Forster, for example).

Percy has written a highly engaging and fascinating book. For those interested in the sociological approach to contemporary church movements, this is a must. Percy is guilty of sweeping statements and unwarranted judgements at times, yet the work is always provocative and enlightening. However, this is by no means the last word on the subject, and should act as a stimulus to dig deeper into a vitally important topic.

Tony Gray
Leicester

BOOK NOTES

Luke – The Crossway Classic Commentaries

J.C. Ryle

Nottingham: Crossway, 1997,
319 pp., pb., £10.99

Colossians and Philemon – The Crossway Classic Commentaries

J.B. Lightfoot

Nottingham: Crossway, 1997,
142 pp., pb., £8.99.

Continuing a series republishing classic commentaries, these two editions bring the work of competent scholars and teachers to a new audience. Ryle's commentary on Luke is in-depth and encouraging, written with beautifully constructed sentences. Lightfoot, careful as ever in his study of words and their setting, establishes the Colossian correspondence in the context of the heresy faced. Modern commentaries obviously contain a wealth of new material, relevant to the academic discussion of today, which these lack. Yet as a place to find inspiration and insight into the gospel and the epistles, these are excellent.

Skilful Shepherds. Explorations in Pastoral Theology.

Derek Tidball

Leicester: Apollon, 1997 (2nd edition),
368 pp., pb., £16.99

A reissue of a work originally published in 1986. Although this lacks substantial revision, it is worth bringing to attention as it still stands almost alone in the field as being both an academic and practical introductions to this vital subject. Exegesis is high on

the agenda, and in application Tidball avoids the temptation to systematise and fall into sweeping categorisation. A helpful resource for any ministry.

'I believe'. Exploring the Apostles' Creed

Alister McGrath

Leicester: IVP, 1997,
149 pp., pb., £4.99

For those new to theology, or exploring the need of theology and its relationship to faith, the Apostles' Creed, and this exploration of it, would be a helpful starter. McGrath makes good use of both explanation, biblical texts, and questions and application. Nothing new here, but a good example of how to communicate theology into a church context.

When Kumbaya Is Not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry

Dean Borgman

Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997,
241 pp., pb.

This brave attempt to bring theology and youth work together is to be commended for its sensible and reasonable approach. Although dominated by US examples, it is nevertheless sensitive to a wide range of issues. The theological groundwork is done carefully, with a good exploration of biblical and cultural hermeneutics. It was a welcome surprise to find humour discussed as one of the elements of youth culture, and the discussion of sex and sexuality in the context of youth work is realistic. A good theological tool for those in this area of ministry.

Tony Gray

Leicester

- Mike Riddell* **Threshold of The Future:
Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West** Tony Gray
- Robert and Julia Banks* **The Church Comes Home:
Building community and mission through
home churches** Sharon James
- Timothy Houston Polk* **The Biblical Kierkegaard.
Reading by the Rule of Faith** Richard Briggs
- Andrew Bradstock* **Faith in the revolution.
The political theologies of Muntzer and Winstanley** Gerald Bray
- William R. Barr (ed.)* **Constructive Christian
Theology in the Worldwide Church** W. David J. McKay
- William W. and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., (eds)*
**The Context of Scripture. Volume I:
Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World** Richard S. Hess
- D.G. Horrell* **The Social Ethos of the Corinthian
Correspondence, Interest and Ideology
from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement** Ben Witherington III
- John T. Carroll and James R. Carroll*
Preaching the Hard Sayings of Jesus David Jackman
- Wayne G. Boulton, Thomas D. Kennedy, and Allen Verhey*
**From Christ to the World: Introductory
Readings in Christian Ethics** Michael L Westmoreland-White
- Martyn Percy* **Power and the Church:
Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition** Tony Gray

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D A T E S O F C O N F E R E N C E

8th-10th January 1999

MAIN SPEAKER

Don Carson, Lecturer in New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, whose recent books include *The Gagging of God* and *The Inclusive Language Debate*. Professor Carson has written widely on the issue of Biblical Authority, having edited two volumes with John Woodbridge on the issue.

OTHER SPEAKERS

Carl Trueman, now lecturing in historical theology at Aberdeen University, and editor of the student journal, *Themelios*. Carl's doctoral work looked at the Puritans. **Paul Gardner**, a parish minister in Cheshire, is well known for his part in addressing this current pressing theme.

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