

themelios

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

**Themelios: foundation; origination;
endowed institution; solid ground or base**

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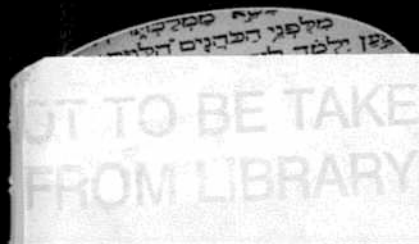
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- 1 Editorial: Some Advantages of Going Dutch
- 5 Developments in Religious Education in England and Wales (Part 2): Methodology, Politics, Citizenship and School Performance
L. Philip Barnes and William K. Kay
- 20 J. Gresham Machen, Inerrancy, and Creedless Christianity
D.G. Hart
- 35 Interpreting the Bible Among the World Religions
Christopher J.H. Wright
- 55 Junction or Terminus? Christianity in the West at the Dawn of the Third Millennium
David Smith
- 69 Index to Articles: Volumes 1-25
- 80 Book Reviews

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REVIEWS

Books for review should be sent to Themelios, 38 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GP.

For the last few years, I have made a point of visiting the Netherlands at least once a year. There is, I believe, something singularly delightful about sitting outside a Dutch cafe in Utrecht or Delft on a warm June day, drinking cold Dutch beer, watching the boats on the canals, and talking with Dutch friends. Holland may never have produced the director of a decent Western, but, if the highest form of art has proved beyond the reach of the most civilised nation on earth, then Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Van Gogh are certainly very useful as consolation prizes.

My love affair with Holland, however, predates my drinking of La Trappe and my strolls along the canals in old Utrecht. The Dutch, after all, saved me from a fate worse than death. As a convert to Christianity from a non-Christian home, my early Christian life was marked more by zeal than by knowledge – and, as Calvin says somewhere, zeal without knowledge is like a sword in the hand of a lunatic. As a result, I confess that my student days were marked more by feats of theological mortal combat with opponents (real and, I suspect, more often imagined) than with any proper attempt to grapple with the deep things of theology and their relationship to my everyday life. The result, of course, was disaster: enduring extended unemployment and living without regular access to church fellowship in the early nineties, I found my faith reduced to a mere trace element in my life; and, studying, then working, within the secular university system, I stood helpless as the intellectual foundations of my thinking (if such knee-jerk conservatism can be dignified with the word) were shaken to pieces.

Yet the Lord is gracious. From about 1995 onwards, my life and faith underwent radical reconstruction, from the bottom up. Many factors contributed – friends, family, church – but, on the intellectual level, nothing was as significant as my re-reading of the various Dutch theologians on my bookshelves.

I had first discovered the Dutch theological tradition as a postgraduate, when reading G.C. Berkouwer (1903–1996) saved me from losing my evangelical faith in the atmosphere of a university where Barthianism was the only systematic theology on offer. Returning years later to Berkouwer, I was impressed by three things: his persistent desire to stand within the tradition of Reformed theology to which he belonged; his desire to engage in polemics with opponents in a manner which was informed, intelligent and, where possible, irenic; and his commitment to the idea that all theology should be doxological and preachable. I confess to regarding his achievements as falling somewhat short of his ambitions: his later works deviate more and more from the tradition in a distinctly Barthian direction, particularly on Scripture and salvation (acquisition of rudimentary Dutch confirmed my suspicions that the English translations are selective, with the more liberal elements left out); his irenicism became more pronounced, to the point where he seemed unwilling to rule any position out of court; and his emphasis on doxology and preaching came to function as a means of sidelining cognitive content for a thoroughly existential approach to truth, in a manner which appears to deviate markedly from biblical teaching. Nevertheless, his ambitions remain those to which we should all aspire, and the best way to prove him inadequate is, of course, not to rubbish his efforts so much as to do better ourselves.

My greatest debt to Berkouwer, however, lies in the fact that it was his work which first led me to that of his predecessor at the Free University of Amsterdam, Herman Bavinck (1854–1921). Bavinck was unequivocally orthodox in a way that Berkouwer ultimately was not; and his work provided me with a model for theological study which helped me to realise that thinking and orthodoxy are not

mutually opposed. Here was a man who was conversant with the historical theological tradition, who was well aware of the significance of the Kantian critique of knowledge for theological construction, who was adept as a systematician and as an exegete, but who also had a heart devoted to the Lord who had bought him.

Bavinck himself was a man more damaged by those who should have been his theological allies than by his foes. 'Ordinary politics *sometimes* has its sordid side; politics in church affairs *always* has' he once remarked. And who would disagree, when we look around today and see how self-important individuals, lacking the talent to make a splash in other spheres, so often destroy the testimony of the church because of their political chicanery and personal ambition? Yet all this makes the gentle but firm quality of the polemical sections of Bavinck's theological work that much more impressive. Most of us, when slighted, feel the need to hit back twice as hard. Certainly the truth needs to be defended, and we must never shrink from that; but we must never use defence of the truth as a means of self-defence or, worse, self-promotion.

Is Bavinck relevant today? Well, in conversation with theological students around the country, it often seems to me that one major problem faced by many is the development of a way of thinking theologically which neither retreats into a ghetto and adopts a 'seek out and destroy' mentality towards every new idea which crosses their path, nor capitulates unconditionally at the first objection to their faith which they cannot immediately answer. Such students need their theological confidence boosted by good role models of a kind provided neither by the tunnel-vision of the specialist scholars who epitomise the fragmented nature of the theological discipline today, nor the platitudes of self-appointed evangelical gurus whose latest blockbuster tells them what they know already. What they really need to do is to read someone like Bavinck, whose theology possesses the following strengths (among others).

First, Bavinck's theology is unashamedly conducted within the context of faith and on the basis that the Bible is the revelation of God. Any theology which does not start from this point, acknowledging human sinfulness, salvation only in Christ, and Scripture as the sole cognitive ground for Christian theology, is, I would suggest, not Christian theology at all but a form of religious philosophy.

Second, Bavinck's theology is rooted in exegesis. I was amazed some years ago when reading a book by (I think) Moltmann, to discover that it was only after fifty pages of theological construction that the first biblical text was cited. Any theology which is not at heart concerned with biblical exegesis is, I submit, not Christian theology at all, but, again, a form of religious philosophy, albeit dressed up in the language of Christian tradition.

Third, Bavinck's theology is informed and intelligent in the manner in which it deals with alternative viewpoints. That we disagree with someone does not mean that we have the right to rubbish them as people. One of the purposes of Christian theology is evangelism, and polemics that are uninformed or uncharitable may well confirm us in our pride but are unlikely to persuade our opponents that there is a better way.

Fourth, Bavinck takes seriously the need to articulate the faith in a manner which respects the historic doctrinal trajectories yet which addresses contemporary intellectual and social patterns of behaviour. This is most important, since there is a difference between a biblical defence of the faith once delivered to the saints and a mindless reaction against anything new. That difference is clear in the work of all great theologians, and Bavinck is no exception.

Fifth, Bavinck's theology is shot through with the fire of personal devotion. This is captured brilliantly in a passage from his Inaugural Address at the Free University:

Religion, the fear of God, must therefore be the element which inspires and animates all theological investigation. That must be the pulsebeat of the science. A theologian is a person who makes bold to speak about God because he speaks out of God and through God. To profess theology is to do holy work. It is a priestly ministrations in the house of the Lord. It is itself a service of worship, a consecration of mind and heart to the honour of His name.

Is this not theological dynamite? Does it not set your heart on fire and push you to pursue your studies with greater effort and commitment? These are the words of a man with real theological vision, not of one driven by some parochial agenda or petty personal ambition; should we not aspire to the same heights? To do anything less is surely to cheat ourselves of spiritual treasure, to deprive the church of those who can help it realise the wondrous nature of theological truth, and, worst of all, to shirk the task which God himself has given us. Should this vision of theology not drive us to our knees again and again in our studies as we realise our own inadequacy for the task and yet Christ's adequacy for all things?

For these five reasons, if no others, we might do worse than choose Bavinck as a model of theological endeavour. Of course, we face new challenges of which he never dreamed, but, were he alive, he would have tried to address these in a manner which honoured the five basic principles outlined above. Evangelical theology faces tough times ahead: the church seems variously determined to prioritise management technique, religious experience, or that nebulous bane of contemporary life, 'relevance', over any notion of careful reflection upon and articulation of its irreducibly doctrinal message and experience; evangelical scholars face a continual temptation to sell their birthright for that proverbial mess of pottage which is a scholarly reputation; and the academy as a whole in Britain crumbles under both its own weight of subdisciplinary specialisation and the continuation of the pernicious business-driven anti-intellectual 'pile 'em high, sell 'em cheap' education policies of successive 'greed is good' governments.

In the current environment, the practical theological needs of the hour are, first and foremost, fearless Christian gospel preachers; and, second, evangelical thinkers – note, I say 'thinkers', not 'scholars' or 'authors', 'thinking' not being a necessary condition of membership for either of the latter two groups – who discern the signs of the times and can contribute intelligently to the defence and propagation of the gospel in the years ahead. This was the task fulfilled by Bavinck in his time. Read him; reflect on what he is doing; consider how the same principles might be worked out in theological studies today. It might just save your soul as it once saved mine; and it might just give you a vision for the role of theologians and theology within the life of the church which challenges the way you work at the moment. Theological students have both a great privilege and a great responsibility because of who they are and what they know. This should excite you, set your hearts on fire, send you out into the world and the church rejoicing in the good news which you, of all people, should know back-to-front and inside-out. Theological study is a moral, an intellectual, and a spiritual challenge, a challenge which men and women like Bavinck accepted in their own day and fulfilled to the best of their ability. It is my dearest hope that all the readers of *Themelios* will accept that same challenge for the future and commit themselves, through, not despite, their theological studies, to the upbuilding and preservation of Christ's church, to the spread of the gospel, and to the glorification of God's name on earth. That is your heritage, that is your responsibility. Now go out and enjoy it.

For further reading

Bavinck's *magnum opus*, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* was published in a definitive four-volume edition in 1928 by Kok of Kampen.

Sections of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* are available in English:

The Doctrine of God, translated by William Hendriksen (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977).

In the Beginning, translated by John Vriend and edited by John Bolt (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999).

The Last Things, translated by John Vriend and edited by John Bolt (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996).

The last two volumes are part of a projected complete translation of the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* being produced under the auspices of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society.

A synoptic compendium of Bavinck's theology, *Magnalia Dei*, which covers the whole sweep of doctrinal *loci*, has been translated as *Our Reasonable Faith* by Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956).

The text of Bavinck's Stone Lectures, delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1908–1909 are available as *The Philosophy of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953).

DEVELOPMENTS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ENGLAND AND WALES (PART 2): METHODOLOGY, POLITICS, CITIZENSHIP AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

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In this the second of two articles on developments in religious education in England and Wales, we focus chiefly on the subject of methodology, and then conclude by reviewing some of the policies relevant to religious education initiated by the current labour government.

Methodological Approaches to Religious Education

The discrediting of confessional religious education in state maintained schools during the late 1960s and early 1970s (for the reasons set out in Part 1) initiated a continuing debate. It is not a debate, however, on the aims and purpose of religious education, as one might have anticipated, for on these there quickly emerged a broad measure of agreement; namely

one: religious education should acquaint pupils with the knowledge and skills to understand religion;

two: religious education should equip pupils with the skills and procedures to assess religion and to respond individually to it; and finally,

three: religious education should contribute to the well-being of society by fostering social harmony and by helping to overcome religious prejudice and discrimination.¹

The first aim is broadly intellectual, learning *about* religion, the second personal, learning *from* religion, and the third social, appreciating and developing religion's positive contribution to society. The subsequent debate in religious education has centred not on the aims appropriate to the subject but on how the appropriate aims of the subject are to be realised in the classroom. What is it to *understand* a religion? How is *religious* understanding

¹ Gaynor Pollard, 'A Rationale for Religious Education', in William K. Kay and Leslie J Francis (eds), *Religion in Education: 1* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1997), 223–51, particularly, 231–39.

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best effected in the classroom? What does it mean to evaluate religion and how does this relate to one's self-evaluation? What contribution can religious education make to advancing tolerance in society? Different answers to these questions and varying degrees of emphasis upon the three aims have resulted in a number of distinctive methodological approaches to religious education. In this section we will consider three different approaches, and assess their strengths and weaknesses. Our focus will be on the intellectual and scholarly sources of the respective positions, rather than on classroom textbooks and materials, though some reference will be made to them.

The Phenomenological Approach

The phenomenological approach to religious education first came to prominence in British education during the late 1960s and early 1970s chiefly (but not exclusively)² through the work and influence of Ninian Smart. In a number of books and articles Professor Smart argued that religious education should eschew confessional aims and instead model itself upon the emerging university discipline of religious studies.³ In his view attention to the logic of religion, reinforced by recognition both of the increasingly secular nature of society and of the need for neutrality in public institutions, justified a 'non-dogmatic', phenomenological approach to religious education. The student of religion, Smart contended, should be acquainted with the multi-dimensional nature of religion as exemplified across a range of religions.⁴ Semi-official support for Smart's position was signalled by his appointment in 1969 to the Directorship of the Schools Council Secondary Project on Religious Education.⁵ The Working Paper produced under his direction, *Religious Education in Secondary Schools* (1971),⁶ unsurprisingly concluded that the phenomenological approach was the approach best suited to the promotion of religious (emphatic) understanding

² The Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education also did much to promote the study of world religions in schools through its conferences and publications; see Terence Copley, *Teaching Religion: Fifty Years of Religious Education in England and Wales* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), 88.

³ The fullest and most influential expression of Smart's position is *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968). L. Philip Barnes is currently working on an article tentatively entitled 'Secularisation, Pluralism, and the Logic of Religion: Ninian Smart and the Phenomenological Approach to Religious Education'.

⁴ Smart identified six different dimensions of religion in *Secular Education and the Logic of Religion*: the doctrinal, mythological, ethical, ritual, experiential and the social. These dimensions were elaborated in numerous works throughout the late nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies; see *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (London: Collins Fontana, 1969) and *The Phenomenon of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1973). In later writings Smart identified a further material dimension, see *The World's Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁵ See Duncan MacPherson, 'Schools Council' in John M. Sutcliffe (ed.), *A Dictionary of Religious Education* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 308-309.

⁶ London: Evans/Methuen Educational, 1971.

in a pluralist, multi-belief society.⁷ Its descriptive nature and its neutral stance towards the truth of religion were believed to distance teachers effectively from the charge of indoctrination, while simultaneously securing for the disciple of religious education a fully educational foundation.⁸

The roots of the phenomenological approach to the study of religion go back to nineteenth century attempts to describe and classify religious beliefs and practices rather than to interpret or assess them from the perspective of Christian orthodoxy.⁹ A neutral stance towards non-Christian religions, beliefs and customs became an essential ingredient in the evolution of the discipline, and in the hands of Gerardus van der Leeuw, one of the twentieth century's leading phenomenologists of religion, became a methodological principle with definite philosophical connotations.¹⁰ According to van der Leeuw, when attending to religious phenomena all prior beliefs, commitments and value-judgements should be bracketed out or suspended. His use of the term *epoche* to describe this process betrayed his indebtedness to the philosopher Husserl, who advocated an act of *epoche* or suspension as a means of gaining direct knowledge of reality. Van der Leeuw also adapted to his own use Husserl's notion of *eidetic* vision (from *to eidos*, 'that which is seen', thus form, shape, essence), the capacity to grasp the 'essence' of experience, so by extension the capacity to grasp the essence of religious phenomena by means of empathy and intuition. This two-fold hermeneutical process, or two-fold 'reduction' (Husserl) became central to the discipline. First, attention is given to the religious phenomenon under discussion with all prior beliefs and assumptions suspended, then in this focused state, the observer enters into the thought world of religion and intuits the meaning of the experience for the believer.¹¹

The influence of a phenomenological (or 'multi-faith') religious education increased steadily throughout the 1970s and early 80s. Its principles were enshrined in numerous textbooks, Agreed Syllabuses and Local Education Authority handbooks. In 1985 an official Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups,

⁷ *Working Paper 36: Religious Education in Secondary Schools*, 21-28.

A sympathetic summary of Smart's position and Working Paper 36 are to be found in Dennis Bates, 'Christianity, culture and other religions' (Part 2); F.H. Hilliard, Ninian Smart and the 1988 Education Reform Act', *British Journal of Religious Education* 18 (1996), 85-102.

⁸ Terence Copley, *Teaching Religion*, 100-105 and 188-90.

⁹ L. Philip Barnes, 'What is Wrong with the Phenomenological Approach to Religious Education?' *Religious Education* (in press), and L. Philip Barnes, 'Ideology, the Phenomenological Approach, and Hermeneutics: A Reply to Professor Lovat', *Religious Education* (in press).

¹⁰ Hans Penner, *Impasse and Resolution: A Critique of the Study of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 40-66.

¹¹ Eric J. Sharpe, 'The Phenomenology of Religion', *Learning for Living* 15 (1975), 4-9; Michael Grimmitt's *What Can I do in RE?* (Great Wakering: Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1973). These two publications did much to mediate the specialist vocabulary and procedures of the phenomenology of religion to the wider educational community.

chaired by Lord Swann, concluded that the phenomenological approach to religious education provided the

*best and only means of enabling all pupils, from whatever religious background, to understand the nature of religious belief, the religious dimension of human experience and the plurality of faiths in contemporary Britain.*¹²

The Inquiry also concluded that the phenomenological approach was an ideal vehicle for advancing tolerance and harmony between different religious groups and communities.¹³

With hindsight it is now obvious that Swann's endorsement of phenomenological religious education represented the nadir of its influence in Britain. Even at the time of the Inquiry's publication important criticisms had already been raised and discussed in the professional literature.¹⁴ In the intervening years these criticisms have been deepened and extended.¹⁵ They can be briefly summarised.

One: The phenomenological approach focuses on the observable phenomena of religion and the external actions of religious believers to the neglect of the spiritual and experiential dimension that provides the motivation and stimulus for religious belief and practice.

Two: There is a failure to address the issue of religious truth or to grapple with the reasons for and against religious commitment even though all pupils are confronted by such questions.

Three: A neutral or non-judgemental stance to religion encourages either religious relativism, the belief that religious truth is relative to one's culture, or religious indifference and scepticism.

Four: The juxtaposition of material from different religions on common themes confuses pupils and contributes to superficial learning.¹⁶

¹² *Education for All: Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups* (London: HMSO, 1985), 518.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 469; cf. Basil Singh, 'The Phenomenological Approach to Religious Education', *Churchman* 100 (1986), 231-48.

¹⁴ Daniel W. Hardy, 'Teaching Religion: A Theological Critique', *Learning for Living* 15 (1975), 10-16; *idem.*, 'The Implications of Pluralism for Religious Education' *Learning for Living* 16 (1976), pp 55-62; Edward Hulmes, *Neutrality and Commitment in Religious Education* (London: Chapman, 1979).

¹⁵ William K. Kay, 'Phenomenology, Religious Education, and Piaget', *Religion* 27 (1997), 275-83; Nicola Slee, 'Conflict and Reconciliation Between Competing Models of Religious Education: Some Reflections on the British Scene', *British Journal of Religious Education* 11 (1989), 126-35; Andrew Wright, *Religious Education in the Secondary School* (London: David Fulton Publishing, 1993), 39-41; Brenda Watson, *The Effective Teaching of Religious Education* (London: Longman, 1993), 44-6; see also note 9.

¹⁶ This subject has been much debated by religious educationalists with inconclusive results, chiefly because until recently there was little empirical evidence of the effects of thematic teaching on classroom learning and experience; see Roger Homan and Lorraine King, 'Mishmash

Five: The subject matter does not relate to the interests and experiences of pupils. Basically there is insufficient engagement with the pupils' questions, concerns and values.¹⁷

Other criticisms could be added, but enough has been said to indicate growing professional disquiet regarding phenomenological religious education's appropriateness and viability. Judged against the generally accepted aims of the subject that we noted at the beginning of this section it enjoys only limited endorsement. A phenomenological approach does facilitate pupils gaining knowledge and understanding of religion, but to what degree and at what depth are matters of concern. More serious still is the accusation that phenomenological religious education neither equips pupils with the skills and procedures to assess religion nor engages pupils' interests and concerns. The phenomenological approach fails to convey the relevance and challenge of religion to personal and social issues. Consequently, a context is created where pupils learn little from religion. Finally, although it is frequently asserted that the phenomenological approach is ideally suited to advancing tolerance and mutual understanding in a multiracial society such as Britain, there is little evidence to substantiate such an assertion. We cannot safely assume that acquiring information about different religions lessens religious and ethnic discrimination.¹⁸

The Experiential Approach

Although Harold Lukes and Douglas Hubrey, writing in the 1960s, stressed the importance of utilising pupils' experience as a bridge to understanding religion,¹⁹ the roots of current interest in the experiential approach to religious education look back to the pioneering research of Sir Alister Hardy, a distinguished Oxford zoologist, into the nature and forms of spiritual and religious experience. Hardy believed that religious experience evolved through the process of natural selection because of its survival value for the individual. In his 1965 Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen, published as *The Divine Flame: An Essay Towards a Natural History of Religion*,²⁰ he argued that there is a form of awareness, different from and transcending everyday awareness,

and its Effects upon Learning in the Primary School', *British Journal of Religious Education* 15 (1993) 8-13. However, the results of a broadly based research project into this issue by D. Linnet Smith and William K. Kay give empirical support to the accusation that theme teaching across a range of religion contributes to pupil confusion and misunderstanding, see Smith and Kay, 'Religious Terms and Attitudes in the Classroom, Part 1 and Part 2', *British Journal of Religious Education* (in press).

¹⁷ Robert Jackson, *Religious Education: an interpretive approach* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997) 10.

¹⁸ Patricia Malone, 'Religious Education and Prejudice among Students Taking the Course Studies of Religion', *British Journal of Religious Education* 21 (1998), 7-19.

¹⁹ Harold Loukes, *Teenage Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1961); Douglas Hubrey, *The Experiential Approach to Christian Education* (London: National Sunday School Union, 1960).

²⁰ London: Collins, 1966.

which is potentially present in all human beings and which plays a positive function in helping individuals to survive in their natural environment. This transcendent awareness, Hardy contended, is the common experiential source of religion. The difference between religions is to be explained by the diversity and range of human cultures through which the same spiritual awareness comes to expression. Accordingly, spirituality is not the exclusive property of any one religion, or for that matter of religion in general. Those who are alienated from religion and traditional religious language may well express their spiritual awareness in unconventional or even secular terms.

Hardy believed that recognition of the widespread occurrence and the distinctive nature of spiritual experience supported his interpretation of the utility of religion, and he devoted the energies and commitment of his later years, following official retirement, to setting up the Religious Experience Research Unit in Oxford and to the collection and recording of first-hand evidence of religious experience.²¹ This work was carried on after his death, first by Edwin Robinson,²² at the renamed Alister Hardy Research Centre, and then by David Hay.²³ Under Robinson's direction the Centre's research and publications began to focus more explicitly on the occurrence and significance of childhood religious experiences and their implications for education.²⁴ This orientation was further developed by David Hay, who headed a research project into religious experience and education at the University of Nottingham. The culmination of this project was the publication in 1990 of *New Methods in RE Teaching: An Experiential Approach*.²⁵

The experiential approach's focus on religious experience is frequently presented as a reaction and necessary corrective to phenomenological religious education's over-concentration upon the external, public phenomena of religion. There is some truth in this interpretation, but the contrast between the two approaches should not be drawn too sharply. This is because Hay and his team of collaborators believe the experiential approach actually expresses and recovers the original form of phenomenological religious education as envisaged by Ninian Smart and as commended by Working Paper 36.²⁶ In the opinion of Hay *et al.*, phenomenological religious education has been misrepresented and misinterpreted by religious educationalists and by popular classroom textbooks.

²¹ T. Beardsworth, *A Sense of Presence* (Oxford: Religious Experience Research Unit, 1977); Hardy draws on this research in *The Spiritual Nature of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

²² Edwin Robinson, *The Original Vision* (Oxford: Religious Experience Research Unit, 1977).

²³ David Hay, *Exploring Inner Space: Scientists and Religious Experience* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982) and David Hay, *Religious Experience Today: Exploring the Facts* (London: Mowbray, 1990).

²⁴ E.g., Edwin Robinson, 'Experience and Authority in Religious Education', *Religious Education* 74 (1976), 451-63.

²⁵ Harlow: Oliver & Boyd, 1990.

²⁶ Hay *et al.*, *New Methods in RE*, 6 and 198.

As originally conceived (and as already noted) the phenomenological approach involved two distinguishable hermeneutical steps, that of suspending critical judgement in attending to religious phenomena and then an act of intuitive awareness, laying bare the essence of the believer's experience. This approach, Hay *et al.* allege, as it came to be practised and taught in schools involved only the first step – a neutral or objective presentation of religious phenomena; with no attempt, as a necessary second step, to go beyond descriptions of religious phenomena to discover the essence of religion in immediate experience. The experiential approach aims to correct this deficiency by providing resources and ideas that enable pupils to enter their 'own and other's personal worlds' and in this way to uncover the experiential roots of religion and spirituality within the self.²⁷ Through self-awareness exercises, guided meditations, and visualisations pupils are taught to explore their own subjective states, and then to use these as a creative resource to gain an appreciation of the nature of spiritual experience and of the way different cultural and religious metaphors can be used to express deep emotions, feelings, and experiences.²⁸

There are strengths in the experiential approach to religious education and in its extension to include the subject of spirituality across the curriculum: the pupil's own experiences are taken seriously; the importance of personal experience in religion and personal learning are stressed; there is an unmasking of secular influences in education and the way in which religion and spirituality have been marginalised; and a word of caution is sounded against content dominated and unduly academic curriculum programmes or syllabuses. But there are also serious weaknesses and deficiencies.

A number of critics have pointed out that the experiential approach is only loosely related to religion.²⁹ Its focus is more on personal experience and self-awareness than religion. The social and corporate dimensions of religion are largely ignored and the false impression is given that the religious believer constructs religion out of his or her immediate experience. This diminishes the role of sacred writings and religious authorities and the way in which they structure and condition experience. The deliberate cultivation of

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁸ The experiential approach has obvious applications beyond the discipline of religious education. Its focus upon personal experience and subjectivity, coupled with the underlying assumption that religious sensibility is a natural element of human experience, clearly opens up possibilities for other curriculum subjects like English, Music or Art to explore. This potential has been recognised by David Hay (one of the authors and the director of the project that produced *New Methods in RE Teaching: An Experiential Approach*) and he has recently, with the publication of *The Spirit of the Child* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), extended his work to incorporate the issue of spirituality across the curriculum, a subject which, as we noted in Part 1, has come to the fore in educational discussion since the 1988 Education Reform Act.

²⁹ Clive Erricker, 'Affective and Effective Religious Education: A reflection on the work of David Hay and his curriculum colleagues', *Resource* 14 (1991), 3-4.

spiritual or religious experience in the classroom also raises questions. Is every pupil capable of religious experience? Are the kinds of experience gained as a result of guided meditations or self-awareness exercises genuinely *religious* experiences? Are they even analogous to religious experiences? More seriously, is it legitimate to self-consciously pursue (presumed) religious or spiritual experiences in the classroom? Is this a covert form of religious indoctrination?

Some writers maintain that the phenomenological and the experiential approaches complement each other: the weaknesses of one are overcome by the strengths of the other and vice versa; the two together providing a balanced picture of religion.³⁰ There may be some truth in this, but in our view any simple marriage of the two approaches would do little to diminish the force of many of the criticisms we have already discussed. In fact, at the very point where the experiential approach is most frequently regarded as providing a corrective to phenomenological religious education, that is, where it exalts the importance of religious experience, it is arguably most vulnerable to criticism. A careful reading of the chief text of experiential religious education, *New Methods in RE Teaching: An Experiential Approach*, reveals a number of disquieting assumptions: one, that religious/spiritual experience has priority over its conceptual interpretation; and two, that the same spiritual experience can be expressed in a variety of different theological and cultural languages. Such assumptions lie behind experiential religious education's endeavour to effect religious experiences by self-awareness and meditation exercises. However, in the light of recent work in the philosophy of language and mind, largely prompted by Wittgenstein's later philosophical writings and his celebrated 'Private-language argument',³¹ these assumptions are at least controversial and at most incoherent.³² Space forbids a discussion of these admittedly complex matters. In this context we may simply record that the weight of philosophical opinion seems to support the view that beliefs condition experience and that our conceptual beliefs provide the framework within which all experience occurs. If this is the case then the experiential approach, as it has come to be interpreted and implemented, is deeply flawed.³³ An appreciation of religious beliefs and doctrines provides the necessary preliminary context for an understanding of the

³⁰ Mark Chater, 'Different Approaches to Religious Education', in William K. Kay and Leslie J. Francis (eds), *op cit.*, 284.

³¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), paragraphs 244-71.

³² The Private-Language Argument has given rise to a large body of interpretative secondary material and to a lively debate on its meaning and implications; see O.R. Jones (ed.), *The Private Language Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1971), and John V. Canfield (ed.), *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein, Volume 9: The Private Language Argument* (New York: Garland, 1986).

³³ Adrian Thatcher, 'A Critique of Inwardness in Religious Education', *British Journal of Religious Education* 14 (1991), 22-27.

individual's religious experience, rather than *vice versa*.³⁴ Furthermore, where beliefs differ, so experiences differ; there is no common religious/spiritual experience underlying the different religions.³⁵

The Conceptual Approach

The Conceptual Approach to religious education is associated with Margaret and Trevor Cooling, and their work at the Stapleford Centre, Nottingham.³⁶ Its point of departure is recognition of weaknesses in both the phenomenological and the experiential approaches to religious education: the former is regarded as failing to capture the interest and imagination of pupils and the latter is regarded as divorcing religious experience from its theological and doctrinal context. According to Trevor Cooling, who has provided the intellectual underpinning of the approach (whereas Margaret has focused more on the production of materials for school),³⁷ understanding religion necessarily involves understanding the theological concepts that (propositionally) distinguish one religion from another and from non-religious philosophies. An appreciation of the role of theological concepts in religion is regarded as providing the key to the interpretation of religion. Cooling contends that a proper understanding of religion is gained only when one comes to appreciate the way in which the practice of religion is determined by religious concepts in the form of religious beliefs.³⁸

An equally important insight according to Cooling is that religious concepts originally had relevance and continue to have relevance only when they relate to human experience. Religious concepts provide a commentary on human experience.³⁹ For example, the religious doctrine of salvation presupposes the human sense of alienation, purposelessness and guilt. To understand salvation one needs to have some appreciation of what it is to feel alienated and separated from God. Successful teaching must find a way of translating religious concepts into forms that make sense to pupils. The notion of alienation from one's parents or of guilt on account of something one had done could serve as 'a bridge between the world

³⁴ Wittgenstein's insights have been applied by Fergus Kerr to religion and theology in *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); also L. Philip Barnes, 'Rudolf Otto and the Limits of 'Religious Description'', *Religious Studies* 30 (1994), 219-30; and Barnes *Religious Education*, (note 9).

³⁵ L. Philip Barnes, 'Relativism, Ineffability and the Appeal to Experience: A Reply to the Myth Makers', *Modern Theology* 7 (1990), 101-14.

³⁶ The Stapleford Centre (UK) is an independent Christian education centre, focusing on providing training for teachers, resources for schools and research into education; see <http://www.stapleford-centre.org/> for more details.

³⁷ E.g., Margaret Cooling, *Christianity Topic Books, 1, 2, and 3* (Norwich: Religious and Moral Education Press, 1991, 1992, 1992).

³⁸ Trevor Cooling, *Concept Cracking: Exploring Christian Beliefs in School* (Nottingham: Association of Christian Teachers, 1994).

³⁹ Trevor Cooling, *Concept Cracking*, 9.

of Christian belief and the world of children's experience'.⁴⁰ In this way Cooling believes pupils can both gain an understanding of religion and come to see its relevance to human experience. Progression in learning is achieved by analysing concepts into their constituent parts (Cooling refers to as 'concept-cracking'), and then systematically exploring the different parts of the main concept at different stages of the pupils' education. The pupil builds up an increasingly conceptual grid of religious doctrine, through which a proper understanding of religion will be realised.⁴¹

There are obvious strengths in the conceptual approach to religious education. Its emphasis upon concepts is certainly in keeping with recent trends within child psychology and the psychology of learning that underline the essentially linguistic and conceptual nature of human understanding.⁴² Its concern with language also means that it is ideally placed to take advantage of recent government initiatives to advance literacy in schools.⁴³ Furthermore, the conceptual approach's stress upon religious doctrines is a necessary corrective to their neglect in much contemporary religious education. Part of the confused legacy of the rejection of confessional religious education has been that religious doctrines have been marginalised and pushed to the periphery of the study of religion in schools. For some educators, the mere mention of religious doctrines unfairly conjures up the picture of an arrogant and dogmatic presentation of religious truth: doctrinal religion is regarded as synonymous with indoctrination.⁴⁴ Cooling's work challenges this perception and goes some considerable way to rehabilitating the study of doctrines and beliefs within religious education. According to Cooling, conceptual religious education develops an understanding of religion by underlining the constitutive role of beliefs in religion. It neither attempts nor facilitates attempts to convert pupils to religion, be it Christianity or any other religion.⁴⁵ Although Cooling illustrates his methodology by reference to Christianity, he insists that it can fruitfully be applied to illuminate the nature and significance of any religion.⁴⁶ In his view a conceptual approach provides a middle way

⁴⁰ Trevor Cooling, *Concept Cracking*, 8.

⁴¹ A conceptual approach to Christianity is employed by Chris Wright in his second level, pupil text-book, *Key Christian Beliefs* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1995).

⁴² A. Demetriou, M. Shayer, and A. Efklides (eds.), *Neo-Piagetian Theories of Cognitive Development: Implications and Applications for Education* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁴³ Department for Education and Employment, *The National Literacy Strategy* (Sudbury: DfEE Publications, 1998).

⁴⁴ This is the view of Antony Flew, 'Indoctrination and Doctrines', in I.A. Snook (ed.), *Concepts of Indoctrination* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), and Tasos Kazepides, 'Programmatic Definitions in Education: The Case of Indoctrination', *Canadian Journal of Education* 14 (1989), 387-96.

⁴⁵ Trevor Cooling, *Concept Cracking*, 25-26. The charge is effectively rebutted by Elmer John Thiessen in *Teaching for Commitment: Liberal Education, Indoctrination and Christian Nurture* (Montreal/Leominster: McGill-Queen's University Press/Gracewing, 1993).

⁴⁶ *Concept Cracking*, 6.

between overtly descriptive approaches to religious education, which neither adequately relate to pupils' experience nor which penetrate to the meaning of religion, and confessionalist approaches that subvert understanding in the attempt to convince and convert.

Despite the undoubted strengths of the conceptual approach to religious education it has also weaknesses and limitations. Although it seems reasonable to conclude that a consideration of the beliefs of the different religions should provide much of the subject matter of religious education, there may be dangers in an over-concentration on religious beliefs in the precise manner that the conceptual approach advocates. One limitation is that if the term 'religious belief' is interpreted according to normal usage, then it would seem to follow that any study of non-belief would be excluded from the discipline of religious education.⁴⁷ This is probably unsatisfactory given the prominence of secularist assumptions within society and public institutions. A study of religious unbelief should be included within the religious education curriculum because it is both a cultural substitute for religion (indeed it may even be argued that unbelief is a form of religion, in that it exhibits many of the same characteristics as religion, for instance it provides a total interpretation of life, atheistic beliefs are often held with the same intensity and certainty as religious beliefs, and so on)⁴⁸ and it frequently provides the horizon of meaning against which religion is interpreted and assessed.

Recognition of the role of assumptions in conditioning how we perceive and assess religion naturally raises the issue of how religion is to be interpreted within an educational context.⁴⁹ Although Cooling is aware of this hermeneutical issue, and to his credit he gives more attention to it than most advocates of other approaches, there is nevertheless a sense in which his interpretation of religion is one-sided. Cooling correctly recognises that there are two poles of the hermeneutical situation: religious beliefs that are the product of a different and typically ancient culture and human subjects with characteristically modern presuppositions, beliefs and concerns. The one-sidedness is that in Cooling's hands priority is given to the religious concepts over contemporary experience. According to his methodology, religious concepts are unpacked into their constituent parts and then related to the world of human experience. The movement is from (ancient) religious beliefs to contemporary experience. But the hermeneutical process is more complex than this. Modern individuals and pupils in schools come to religion with

⁴⁷ As early as 1970 Ninian Smart advocated that the study of religion should include the subject of 'non-religion', 'The Structure of the Comparative Study of 'Religion'', in John R. Hinnells (ed.), *Comparative Religion in Education* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Oriel Press, 1970), 31.

⁴⁸ Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1991), 9-34.

⁴⁹ Andrew Wright's programmatic essay (in two parts) is required reading, 'Hermeneutics and Religious Understanding', Parts 1 and 2, *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 18 (1997), 203-16, and *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 19 (1998), 59-70.

their own particular questions and concerns, and these initially may be quite different from the central theological concerns of the great religions. For example, the aim of Christianity is to put away sin and initiate communion with God. Consequently, the doctrine of salvation is at the heart of Christian faith and the relative importance of other Christian beliefs is determined by their proximity to this theme. The need for salvation, however, may not be obvious to young people or central to their interests. They may be more concerned with immediate issues like employment prospects, family relationships and sexuality. The challenge for religious educators is to show the relevance of religion to these concerns, and then by dialogue and extension to develop connections with more central religious beliefs and values. The religious education curriculum should not be wholly determined by the doctrinal agendas of the different religions. A balance needs to be struck between the theological concerns of religion and the existential concerns of pupils. However, there is no reason why the conceptual approach cannot both preserve the doctrinal integrity of the different religions and respect the integrity of pupils – this means that the questions and concerns they bring to the study of religion are taken seriously.⁵⁰

Let us conclude our remarks on the conceptual approach to religious education by focusing on the extent to which it advances fulfilment of the aims of religious education that we identified at the beginning of this section. Certainly conceptual religious education is successful in furthering pupils' knowledge and understanding of religion. It also provides a context in which pupils may learn from religion. The attempt to relate religious beliefs to the experience of pupils is an essential feature of the methodology, even though we have suggested that the likelihood of pupils interacting and learning from religious perspectives would be further helped if a more sophisticated hermeneutic that assigned greater importance to the interests and concerns of pupils was adopted. Finally, the question of whether conceptual religious education advances tolerance and furthers the social aims of religious education is a matter of dispute, as it is with all the approaches we have considered. Clearly those advocates of both phenomenological and experiential religious education who believe that tolerance is best furthered by drawing attention to the similarities between religions, be they in terms of material or experiential content, will be unhappy with the differences that emerge from a focus on the distinctive doctrines of the different religions. But then there is no reason for believing that religious tolerance and respect for others' religious beliefs and values are best served by diminishing differences and exaggerating similarities. Such a stance ultimately betrays 'the other' by refusing to accept its right to be different and distinctive.

⁵⁰ Andrew Wright, 'Mishmash, Religionism and Theological Literacy: an Appreciation and Critique of Trevor Cooling's Hermeneutical Programme', *British Journal of Religious Education* 19 (1997), 143-56.

Politics, Citizenship and School Performance

Almost immediately after the 1997 general election the new Labour government began to focus on education. It removed money from the assisted places scheme (which had enabled pupils to attend fee paying schools at taxpayers' expense) to nursery school places and the repair of neglected buildings in the state sector. Had the Conservatives remained in power it is possible that the state system would have been fragmented or eroded.⁵¹ With the new government's commitments, the whole system was given a fresh lease of life.

Traditionally the Labour Party had favoured the funding of primary education while the Conservative party had favoured higher education. To some extent this difference continued. The Labour government massively expanded provision so that by 2002 (the date when the next general election is due) 66% of three year-olds ought to be receiving nursery education.⁵² Yet the government also continued the expansion of higher education that had already begun so that, by 2002, a further half-million places ought to be available. At primary level the emphasis was on raising standards through highly concentrated literacy and numeracy hours. The main effect of this almost military drive was to lift the worst performing schools. Throughout the system, primary, secondary and tertiary, a connection was presumed between educational performance and national prosperity through innovative and competitive industry or commerce.

In 1998 the new Standards and Framework Act was passed by the English parliament and, among other things, this gave attention to the status and position of church schools.⁵³ From 1998 onwards a new category of 'foundation' schools was created and many of the schools that eventually ended up in this position were those which had been grant-maintained under the previous Conservative administration.⁵⁴ But religious schools could also opt into foundation status and their religious ethos would be determined and protected by their trust deeds. In addition ordinary county schools became

⁵¹ A view expressed about the right wing of the Conservative party in the days when Sir Keith Joseph was in charge of education by S.J. Ball (1990), *Politics and Policy making in Education: explorations in policy sociology* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁵² A cynical view of this emphasis was that the Labour vote was attractive to lone parents who, if they were looking for work, would welcome the child-minding aspect of nursery education.

⁵³ The whole of Part 2 of the Act was devoted to 'a new framework for maintained schools'. Part 3 dealt with school admissions, Part 4 with miscellaneous provisions like home-school agreements and school meals. Part 5 dealt with nursery education, Part 6 with partnership arrangements in Wales. Part 1 dealt with standards and new Education Action Zones, areas of poor schooling that could be run by business or agencies other than local authorities and with a mandate to do all that was necessary to raise basic standards, including by-passing parts of the national curriculum.

⁵⁴ Grant maintained schools with a church foundation could choose to become voluntary aided, voluntary controlled or foundation.

'community' schools and the position of parents on the governing bodies of these schools was strengthened. 'Voluntary aided' schools, however, which included nearly all the Roman Catholic schools within the system as well as a good proportion of Anglican schools and some Jewish and Muslim schools, were able to retain their legal basis, nomenclature and religious distinctiveness. They were able to offer denominational religious instruction and denominational worship in school time, although all religious provisions were subject to the conscience clause allowing parents to withdraw their children should they wish.

From the point of view of religious groups the most exciting development of the 1998 Act was the possibility that new religious schools might be formed.⁵⁵ The Anglican Church began to consider the possibility of opening new secondary schools and awaited the result of a report by Sir Ron Dearing on the advisability of this. In any case, in some areas it was possible for community schools to close and reopen as voluntary aided schools. In other words the administrative tide was not necessarily running against religious provision, despite the wariness of senior civil servants of an expansion in religious schooling. But, from the point of view of the Treasury, the contribution made by the church to education was welcome. And, given the general philosophy of devolution within the highest ranks of Labour government as well as the generally good performance of religious schools in measures of pupil attainment, it made sense to permit local expressions of preference and concern to be embodied in a strengthened religious sector.

Agreed syllabuses, which were drawn up and monitored by Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs), remained unchanged through all these legislative alterations so that there is a continuous line of development from 1944 through to 1998.⁵⁶ Religious education will continue after the year 2000, even when the National Curriculum has received its 'new look'.⁵⁷ However, within the primary school the inclusion of non-statutory frameworks for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and citizenship are bound to put pressure on the curriculum and may, deliberately or not, reduce time that is normally allocated to religious education. A similar effect may occur with the introduction of citizenship as a foundation subject at key stages 3 and 4. The Labour government remains keen on the notion of citizenship because of the statistics showing the lack of interest in voting among many British young people. Citizenship is thought to be an antidote. Moreover, if citizenship fits in with social, moral, spiritual and social education (SMSC) then it may well encroach upon some aspects of religious education. Indeed, in some schools SMSC is offered instead of religious education which is notionally confined to school

⁵⁵ During the 1990s about 1 new Anglican school per year was formed.

⁵⁶ SACRES are the lineal descendants of the old Agreed Syllabus Conferences brought about by the 1944 Act.

⁵⁷ QCA, *The Revised National Curriculum for 2000. What has changed?* (Sudbury: QCA Publications, 1999).

assemblies. Despite the willingness of inspectors to draw attention to the poor provision of religious education, local education authorities appear to do little about this deficit. Whether the willingness of the Labour government to give local education authorities a role in raising standards (and therefore to protect the importance of local education authorities) will be beneficial to religious education remains to be seen. According to some commentators the only thing that will benefit religious education will be a tough regime of assessment. But who can assess spiritual progress and is inspection able to quantify moral development? For these reasons it is unlikely that assessment will occur and religious education in community schools will have to continue to fight its corner on the basis of the importance of religion within an apparently secular society.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN, INERRANCY, AND CREEDLESS CHRISTIANITY

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When J. Gresham Machen died on 1 January 1937, his former colleague at Princeton Theological Seminary, Caspar Wistar Hodge lamented that the English-speaking world had lost its 'greatest theologian'.¹ Obviously, such sentiments reflected the suddenness of Machen's death and a high regard for his considerable abilities; at the time Machen was only 55 and the widely acknowledged leader of conservative Protestantism in the United States, having written important books in New Testament studies and polemical theology while a professor at Princeton, and then having established amid theological controversies in the Presbyterian Church, USA a new school, Westminster Theological Seminary.² Other fundamentalist leaders such as William Jennings Bryan or William Bell Riley may have rivalled Machen's popularity, but his scholarly achievements and thoughtful arguments had earned him respect from secular intellectuals and conservative churchmen alike. Still, seeing how the United Kingdom could also boast of the contributions from her own conservative scholars – from James Orr to Martin Lloyd-Jones – Hodge's encomium may have struck British readers as another example of Yankee braggadocio.

Since Machen's death, however, Hodge's estimate may look even more questionable. To be sure, within certain sectors British evangelicals continue regard Machen highly, as evidenced by the republication of a number of his books by the Banner of Truth Trust. But because of Machen's association with fundamentalism and, particularly because of his defence of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, his brand of conservative Protestantism appears to raise as many questions as it reinforces historic Christian convictions. This is especially the impression that James Barr created with his critique of inerrancy roughly twenty years ago and given recent

expression in the work of Harriet A. Harris. According to this line of criticism, Machen stands squarely within a theological tradition that unwholesomely appropriated a philosophical position (Scottish Common Sense Realism) that woodenly treats the Bible as a textbook of systematic theology and ignores the book's historical and cultural trappings. What is more, the Princeton doctrine of Scripture, with which Machen identified, turns the Christian faith into a series of scholastic propositions rather than a vital and organic encounter with the true and living God. In Harris' own words, the rationalistic approach to the Bible established by the Princeton theologians and popularised by fundamentalism, 'has resulted in distorted presentations of Christian belief', distortions that gainsay the 'deeper understanding' of the faith that comes through 'participating in the life of the Spirit which has directed the community of believers down the ages'.³ Such a critique might not turn Machen into the worst theologian in the English-speaking world, but it surely denies him the elevated status conferred by Hodge.

Harris and Barr's estimation of fundamentalism contains an element of truth. In David Bebbington's book on British evangelicalism, debates about higher criticism and the accuracy of the biblical narratives played a crucial role in the developments of the 1920s which divided Protestants into rival camps. To be sure, other factors were also influential, such as premillennialism, holiness teachings, and the social gospel. What is more, according to Bebbington the British Protestants who claimed the Bible was free from error were rare. Still, from the Downgrade Controversy to debates in just after the First World War in the Church Missionary Society, the 'central issue' fuelling division was the infallibility of Scripture.⁴ For this reason it was altogether fitting for Machen, given his associations with the Princeton Theology and the fundamentalist controversy, to be invited in 1927 under the auspices of the Bible League to give a series of lectures on biblical scholarship and the defence of the faith.

Tarring Machen with the brush of inerrancy, however, fails to do justice to the profundity of his critique of liberalism, one that won praise from secular intellectuals in the 1920s and from historians since then.⁵ In fact, reducing the arguments of conservatives like Machen to the doctrine of Scripture misses the substance of his argument. As it turns out, the authority and infallibility of the Bible were peripheral to Machen's most important writings against liberalism, namely, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923) and *What is Faith?* (1925). In these books, he staked out the main problems with modernist theology – that is was anti-creedal and anti-intellectual. What is more, stripped of its theological moorings, liberalism became

¹ C.W. Hodge quoted in 'Recent Tributes to Dr. Machen', *Presbyterian Guardian* 3 (Feb. 13, 1937) 189.

² For biographical treatments of Machen, see Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954); and D.G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

³ H. Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 167, 323. Harris leans heavily on James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1977).

⁴ D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), ch. 6, quotation from 217.

⁵ For the reception of Machen's polemics, see Hart, *Defending the Faith*, chs. 4 and 5.

an altogether different religion from historic Christianity. What follows is a summary of Machen's objections to modernism, along with British reactions to his arguments. The wide and warm hearing that he received from British writers suggests that the Princeton critique of liberalism has been too easily dismissed as simple-minded defence of inerrancy. In the end, Machen's brand of Calvinism may not escape the charge of rationalism or scholasticism. However his apology for the intellectual and doctrinal character of the gospel suggests that rationalism and scholasticism may not be as bad as their critics allege.

The Origins of Machen's Fundamentalism

Although Machen had been teaching at the Princeton Seminary (a school with an international reputation for Calvinistic orthodoxy), since 1906, and had recently published *The Origins of Paul's Religion* (1921), when he wrote *Christianity and Liberalism* in 1923 he was a relatively unknown figure in American Protestantism. This book argued against naturalistic explanations of Christianity's origins and had been well received in academic and religious circles. In addition, in 1922 Machen came out with a grammar of New Testament Greek, a textbook with wide circulation at liberal and conservative seminaries alike, because of its pedagogical clarity. Still, despite his scholarly accomplishments, Machen was hardly the sort of figure to attract front page coverage in the metropolitan dailies. That changed, however, with the publication of *Christianity and Liberalism*. The book's thesis – that liberalism was an altogether different form of religion than Christianity – was provocative enough, but what added to Machen's celebrity was the book's apparent breach of etiquette. No one within mainstream Protestant circles had had the audacity to suggest that the American churches' accomplishments were hurting the cause of Christ.

A need for greater recognition could possibly explain Machen's motivation to write *Christianity and Liberalism*, but such an explanation ignores his genuine ambivalence regarding the fundamentalist movement with which his book became so closely associated. Machen stood for practically everything that fundamentalism did not. Where fundamentalists were anti-creedal and anti-clerical, Machen's instincts were confessional and churchly; where fundamentalists had the reputation of being rural and anti-intellectual, Machen thrived in urban and academic settings. What is more, he regarded fundamentalist eschatology (i.e., dispensationalism) as bizarre and extreme, avoided altogether the crusade against evolution even though invited to testify at the Scopes trial, and viewed United States' politics in ways remarkably different from fundamentalists – Machen opposed prayer and Bible reading in public schools and the churches' support for Prohibition because he did not believe America was a Christian nation. And yet, *Christianity and Liberalism* earned him the reputation of being one of America's most outspoken fundamentalists even if he spoke with scholarly accents. In other words, had Machen wanted celebrity this book was not the wisest way to gain it.

The reasons for Machen's writing this book, then, have to do with more than just personal ambition or church politics. One explanation commonly employed is the doctrine of inerrancy. Machen may not have shared fundamentalist views about the origins or end of human history, nor may he have had sympathy with fundamentalist politics, but he did affirm the infallibility and authority of the Bible in ways similar to fundamentalists. For that reason, inerrancy has become the chief way to explain the curiosity of Princeton's Calvinists and fundamentalists teaming in the 1920s to oppose liberals.⁶ The problem with this explanation is that Machen, Princeton's most active participant in the fundamentalist controversy, pays little regard to inerrancy in *Christianity and Liberalism* or other writings. The chapter on the Bible is the shortest in the book and he devotes only two pages to the topic itself. Compared to the extensive treatments of inerrancy rendered by Machen's Princeton forebears, his relative neglect is stunning and throws into question either the importance of inerrancy to the fundamentalist controversy or the scholarly convention of placing the Princeton Theology on the side of fundamentalism.

The anomalies of Machen's fundamentalism become all the more evident in the light of the historical circumstances that prompted him to write *Christianity and Liberalism*. In 1920 he was a first-time delegate to the General Assembly of the northern Presbyterian Church (PCUSA). One of the bigger items on the denomination's agenda was a plan for organic union with the other large denominations in the United States. These ecumenical plans drew momentum from Protestant inter-denominational co-operation during the First World War, but they also culminated fifty years of mainstream American Protestant ecumenism. Ever since the end of the Civil War when northern Protestants had put aside theological, liturgical and ecclesiastical differences for the sake of political union American Protestantism had been heading down a similar co-operative course in order to maintain Protestant hegemony against the dark forces of Catholicism, materialism, atheism, and secularism.⁷ Machen opposed the 1920 plan for church union not so much because he favoured the bogeymen of Anglo-American Protestants but rather because such co-operation disregarded theological conviction in favour of a politicised Christianity. During his time at General Assembly, Machen met other Presbyterians in the Philadelphia vicinity who also opposed the plan. During one of the speaking engagements that resulted from these acquaintances, Machen prepared a talk that became the basis for *Christianity and Liberalism*.

⁶ For the centrality of inerrancy, see Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), ch. 5; and Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), ch. 3.

⁷ See D.G. Hart, 'The Tie that Divides: Presbyterian Ecumenism, Fundamentalism, and the History of Twentieth-Century American Protestantism', *Westminster Theological Journal* 60 (1998) 85–107.

The denominational context of Machen's critique of liberalism has often been lost on students of fundamentalism. The most common reading of *Christianity and Liberalism* is that it was a part of Princeton Seminary's long tradition of polemical theology, specifically its rejection of liberal Protestantism emanating from Germany.⁸ Since Machen studied in Germany and gained first hand knowledge of liberal theological and biblical scholarship, this interpretation is not implausible. What is more, the book provides a definition of liberalism that appears to apply more to the kind of radical conclusions German scholars were reaching rather than the bland and sentimental platitudes that left-of-centre Presbyterian pastors were voicing. For instance, Machen argues that naturalism was at the root of liberal theology.⁹ Since the most prominent liberals in the United States, such as Harry Emerson Fosdick or Shailer Mathews, rarely reduced Christianity solely to naturalistic dimensions, the argument runs, Machen must have been thinking more about his student days in Germany than his experience in the United States when he penned *Christianity and Liberalism*.

But even if few American Protestants formulated their convictions in categories imported from Germany, Machen believed that the moralistic and politically activist character of the mainstream Protestant American denominations stemmed from a theology every bit as radical as the European variety and perhaps more dangerous because of its moderate facade. In the first chapter of *Christianity and Liberalism*, in a defence of the gospel's doctrinal character, he made the point that Christianity is fundamentally about a way of life founded upon a message, as opposed to a religious experience irrespective of propositional truth. Here he appealed to Paul's example in Galatia. Machen wrote:

What was it that gave rise to the stupendous polemic of the Epistle to the Galatians? To the modern Church the difference would have seemed to be a mere theological subtlety. About many things the Judaizers were in perfect agreement with Paul. The Judaizers believed that Jesus was the Messiah; ... without the slightest doubt, they believed that Jesus had really risen from the dead. They believed, moreover, that faith in Christ was necessary to salvation. But the trouble was, they believed that something else was also necessary; they believed that what Christ had done needed to be pieced out by the believer's own effort to keep the Law. From the modern point of view the difference would have seemed to be very slight ... hardly worthy of consideration at all in view of the large

⁸ See William J. Weston, *Presbyterian Pluralism: Competition in a Protestant House* (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), ch. 11, the most recent case of this argument.

⁹ 'The root of the movement is one; the many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism – that is, the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity'. Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 2. He adds that he is not using the word, 'naturalism', in its philosophical sense.

measure of agreement in the practical realm. What a splendid cleaning up of the Gentile cities it would have been if the Judaizers had succeeded in extending to those cities the observance of the Mosaic law ... Surely Paul ought to have made common cause with teachers who were so nearly in agreement with him; surely he ought to have applied to them the great principle of Christian unity. As a matter of fact, however, Paul did nothing of the kind; and only because he (and others) did nothing of the kind does the Christian Church exist to-day ... Paul certainly was right. The difference which divided him from the Judaizers was no mere theological subtlety, but concerned the very heart and core of the religion of Christ.¹⁰

Aside from Machen's defence of the rightful place of polemic and dogma in the church's life, it is hard to miss his barb at Protestant ecumenism's agenda of social reform. American Protestantism, and specifically the northern Presbyterian Church, he believed, was reconfiguring its witness by substituting 'the ethical principles of Jesus' for the doctrines of the 'redeeming work of Christ'.¹¹ And the reason for the churches' move toward the moralism of liberal Christianity was to reinforce the Protestant identity of the United States.

Machen linked liberal theology to a social Christianity more explicitly in his discussion of the afterlife and the worldly character of contemporary preaching. He argued that many Protestant preachers no longer preached an otherworldly gospel, or about the joys of heaven and the agonies of hell, because they had 'very little to say about the other world'. 'This world is really the centre of all [the liberal preacher's] thoughts', Machen concluded. 'Religion itself, and even God, are made merely a means for the betterment of conditions upon this earth'. To prove this point, Machen cited the variety of ways that Americans were turning to the church for help, from Americanising immigrants and resolving the tension between labour and capital, to building a safe and healthy local community. In response to these efforts, Machen wrote:

Whatever may be thought of this attitude toward religion, it is perfectly plain that the Christian religion cannot be treated in any such way ... For if one thing is plain it is that Christianity refuses to be regarded as a mere means to a higher end. Our Lord made that perfectly clear when He said: 'If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother ... he cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:26). Whatever else those stupendous words may mean, they certainly mean that the relationship to Christ takes precedence of all other relationships, even the holiest of relationships like those that exist between husband and wife and parent and child. Those other relationships exist for the sake of Christianity and not Christianity for the sake of them.¹²

¹⁰ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 23–25.

¹¹ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 25–26.

¹² Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 149, 151–52.

Such a defence of Christianity clearly conflicted with American Protestant churches' close identification with the health and well-being of the United States. It also showed that academic forms of liberalism were not so different from the middle-class moralism that prevailed in mainstream American Protestantism.

The antidote to liberalism, then, was not to reassert the infallibility of the Bible, the scientific reliability of Genesis, or the certainty of a literal second advent. In Machen's view, the only proper response to liberalism was to insist upon the historic truths concerning the person and work of Christ. Liberals may have had faulty views about the character of the Bible or unwholesome hermeneutics, but in the end, Machen's most compelling reason for opposing modernism was a general uneasiness with Christ. He wrote,

*Admitting that scientific objections may arise against the particularities of the Christian religion – against the Christian doctrines of the person of Christ, and of redemption through his death and resurrection – the liberal theologian seeks to rescue certain of the general principles of religion.*¹³

Liberalism was a religion of abstractions and principles. But in Machen's estimate, Christianity took concrete form in the historical figure, Jesus Christ, and what he did to redeem sinners. This explains why Machen so emphasised doctrine over against experience or ethics. For liberals doctrine was a temporary symbol of Christianity's essence. For Machen, however, doctrine could not be separated from Christianity because the gospel itself – the statement that Jesus died for sin – was inherently doctrinal because it involved what happened historically and supplied the meaning of the event.¹⁴ By emphasising doctrine this way, Machen was not merely trying to show liberals to be theologically naïve. Something far greater was at stake. If liberals were right that the vicarious atonement was nothing more than the husk of a more abiding truth about God's love and the ideal of self-sacrifice, then the church was without hope since her salvation depended on Christ's perfect obedience, sacrificial death, and dramatic resurrection.

Doctrine, Faith and Salvation

Not too long after the release of Machen's controversial book, the *British Weekly* ran a twelve-part series entitled, 'Fundamentalism: False and True', with contributions from the United Kingdom's leading theological and biblical scholars. The aim of the series was to be constructive and positive; the articles would outline the fundamentals of the Christian religion for the sake of unity rather than division or strife. In the words of the editor, John A. Hutton 'these so-called Fundamentalists will not leave their fellow Christians in peace, but seek to reimpose upon us a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear'. One of the burdens

¹³ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 6.

¹⁴ See Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 121 ff.

imposed by fundamentalists was the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture. Here the editor singled out Machen and his defence of the doctrine in *Christianity and Liberalism*. The infallibility of the Bible was a late addition to the teaching of the church, unknown either to the Reformers or the authors of Scripture. The Bible spoke of 'inspiration and profit', not dogmatic infallibility.¹⁵

Ever alert to rumblings in the press, Machen responded with a letter to the editor that was not printed until the series was finished in early September 1924. His reaction spoke volumes about the relative importance of the doctrine of Scripture to his case against liberal Protestantism. Machen was quick to correct the assertion that the doctrine of infallibility was a 'modern invention'. Jesus, the apostles, the church fathers, and the Reformers all held, in Machen's estimation, to the infallibility of Scripture. Still, as important as this doctrine was to 'any permanency or consistency in Christian belief', to reject it did not make one a modernist. So, for instance, Machen asserted that Bishop Gore denied infallibility but was by no means a modernist. Likewise, Principal Garvie and H.R. Mackintosh, who had written for the *British Weekly's* series denied the 'full truthfulness' of Scripture but still avoided 'the passionate anti-intellectualism and anti-theism' which was so characteristic of modernism.¹⁶

Consequently, the real issue raised by modernism was not the authority or truthfulness of the Bible but the nature of Christianity itself. Was the Christian religion fundamentally subjective or objective? To escape the intellectual difficulties raised by modern thought, Machen argued, liberalism relegated Christianity to religious experience, thereby making the Bible as well as Christian creeds the product of this experience. But by distorting Christianity in this way liberalism made the gospel independent of history. 'The outstanding fact about Paul', he wrote, 'is that he had a message or a gospel about something that had happened a few years before, and that he was interested above all things else in getting the message straight'. As such, Christianity, 'from the beginning', was 'not a way of life as distinguished from a doctrine, or a way of life expressing itself in a doctrine'. Rather it was 'a way of life founded upon a doctrine'. Christianity, therefore, depended upon doctrine. Any effort to escape its creedal character was in effect a denial of Christianity. For that reason, the issue with modernism went well beyond questions surrounding the infallibility of Scripture.¹⁷

Machen's letter may not have persuaded all of the *British Weekly's* contributors, but he gave a good enough showing to receive an even larger British reception a couple years later in the same publication. In 1926, John A. Hutton solicited a series of essays from British and Canadian theologians to respond to Machen's most recent book,

¹⁵ *British Weekly* (June 19, 1924), clipping in *Christianity and Liberalism* scrapbook, Machen Archives, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pa., 116–17.

¹⁶ *British Weekly* (September 11, 1924), from Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 118–19.

¹⁷ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*.

What is Faith? Part of the reason for this extended treatment was Hutton's introduction to Machen in 1925 at a conference in Grove City, Pennsylvania, where the latter had given the lectures that comprised *What is Faith?* According to Hutton, who compared sections of these talks to passages from John Henry Newman's *Apologia*, readers might agree or disagree with the Princetonian's argument, but they always would 'be moved'. Interestingly enough, the forum demonstrated once again that infallibility of Scripture was a side issue to at least one fundamentalist's understanding of the issue raised by liberalism.¹⁸

What is Faith? comprised the second part of Machen's critique of liberalism. In *Christianity and Liberalism* his point had been that despite its effort to accommodate modern learning liberal Protestantism was essentially unscientific. This was because it denied basic facts about Christianity, namely, that historically the Christian religion could be defined by a set of doctrines, from the Apostles' Creed to the evangelical creeds governing the Protestant churches. In *What is Faith?* he extended this analysis by arguing that liberalism was fundamentally anti-intellectual. This was no doubt a startling assertion since the programme of Protestant modernism involved nothing less than rescuing the Christian faith for people whose learning made them suspicious of the Bible's claims. Modernism, then, was designed to be the intellectually respectable version of Christianity. Machen countered by arguing that conservatives were truly intellectual because they respected the content of the Christian faith, while modernists were anti-intellectual because they could neither deny nor affirm historic Christianity but merely spiritualised it.

Hence, the besetting sin of modernism, according to Machen, was reducing Christianity to experience. On the very first page of What is Faith?, he wrote, 'Religion, it is held, is an ineffable experience; the intellectual expression of it can be symbolical merely; ... theology may vary and yet religion may remain the same'.¹⁹

Obviously, such an understanding of religion emptied the Bible and creeds of all definite meaning. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* might mean one thing in the seventeenth century, but the religious experience of modern man could never be content with older 'thought-forms', and so the *Confession* took on an altogether different meaning, depending on the experience of twentieth-century Presbyterians. According to Machen, by making experience prior to doctrine liberals had embraced a form of scepticism that not only prevented ascribing meaning to religious language but also abandoned any notion of fixed truth in religious matters. This strategy might have allowed liberal theologians to dodge the claims of the Bible or the creeds, but it was still intellectually

¹⁸ *British Weekly* (March 4, 1926), from *What is Faith?* scrapbook, Machen Archives, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pa., 24.

¹⁹ Machen, *What is Faith?* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 13.

decadent. For it made superfluous all intellectual labour in biblical and theological studies – not just dogmatics but also higher criticism. Any effort to attach meaning or definition to Christianity was ultimately pointless because what finally counted for Protestant liberals was individual experience.

Machen acknowledged that he was no match for the philosophical origins of liberal Protestantism that extended back to Kant and Schleiermacher, though he did relish the irony of systematic thinkers whose critique of theology ended up destroying philosophy as well. So instead of countering the epistemology of liberalism with a better one, or arguing for the propositional nature of truth, Machen played to his strength, namely the teaching of the New Testament. And here he attempted to show that the Bible did just the reverse of what liberalism claimed; theology preceded experience, not the other way around.

As readers would have expected from a professor at Princeton Seminary, Machen found that the New Testament taught doctrines that Presbyterians had historically affirmed. One of those doctrines was the vicarious atonement, a point that Machen had also defended at length in *Christianity and Liberalism*. The atonement was an important consideration for understanding faith because his larger point was that Christian teaching about faith involved knowledge about the object of faith. So if the Christian believer trusted in Christ, he needed to know something about who Christ was and why he was trustworthy. But knowledge about the person of Christ was not sufficient, according to Machen, because the Bible presented Jesus as much more than an ethical teacher or example. Central to the New Testament message was the idea that Jesus did something to save sinners from guilt and misery. Consequently, the cross and its significance as a sacrifice for sins was crucial to faith in the Christian scheme. In other words, the doctrine of the vicarious atonement was the 'special basis of Christian faith'.²⁰

Machen did not elaborate this doctrine because in his mind it was such a simple teaching that even a child could understand it. But he did spend several pages, as he had in *Christianity and Liberalism*, defending the vicarious atonement from its critics. One of the most interesting of those objections, perhaps because it continues to gain a following, was the argument that by making the vicarious atonement so central to Christianity, Machen was actually guilty of making a proposition, as opposed to a person, the object of faith. As he paraphrased this objection, 'the doctrinal message about Christ is often represented as a barrier that needs to be done away in order that we may have Christ Himself'. Machen answered first by pointing out that this way of thinking was at odds with the New Testament where, for instance, Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3–7 established the basis of the Christian church, namely, that Christ died for sins, was buried, and raised again from the dead. From the very beginning, doctrine was crucial to faith. But in the end, the

²⁰ Machen, *What is Faith?*, 144.

distinction between faith in a doctrine and faith in a person was based on a 'false psychology'. Jesus could not be trusted without knowing something about him. Moreover, Jesus could not be trusted as a saviour from sin unless he bore the penalty for sin. 'The Lord Jesus Christ does us no good', Machen asserted, 'no matter how great He may be, unless He is offered to us; and as a matter of fact He is offered to us in the good news of His redeeming work'.²¹

As Machen tried to make clear in his exposition of Christian faith, doctrine was not something far removed from the personal and practical considerations of believers. Theology was not a creature of professional academics while ordinary Christians revelled in their personal experiences. Rather, theology was tremendously personal because it provided genuine comfort to sinful men and women. The practical nature of systematic theology was especially clear in Machen's exposition of justification by faith. Instead of insisting that this was basis for differences between Protestants and Rome, or the article upon which the church stands or falls, Machen linked it directly to the more intimate question of how an individual becomes right with God. Justification by faith was no abstraction but bore directly upon the eternal destiny of souls. It taught in systematic form that Christ had satisfied all the demands of God's law, thus removing the terror of the law, and that his righteousness was now the possession of the believer through faith. 'We stand', Machen wrote, 'without fear, as Christ would stand without fear, before the judgement seat of God'.²² In fact, the whole point of writing the book was not simply to expose the anti-intellectualism of liberalism or to show that faith in the New Testament could never be divorced from orthodox doctrine. Machen's purpose was much more practical; it was to offer hope to weary and fragile souls. True faith, even if weak, he concluded, 'will bring a sinner into peace with God'.²³ For this reason, Machen's struggle against liberalism, as much as it might have involved Presbyterian Church politics, differing conceptions of truth, or divergent theological emphases, was finally pastoral. He was concerned that liberals were leading people astray.

That concern was especially evident in Machen's exchange with the British theologians and churchmen who evaluated *What is Faith?* in the *British Weekly*. Reactions were cordial but mixed. The most common objections centred on the nature of theological language and the vicarious atonement. J.T. Forbes, for instance, questioned whether faith was as rational as Machen alleged, arguing instead that Jesus' disciples came to faith in Christ more through 'instinctive' than logical categories.²⁴ W.M. Macgregor chimed in by taking issue with Machen's diagnosis of mysticism, countering that Machen made 'now allowance for a kind and a way of knowledge with which mere logic has nothing to do'.²⁵ So too, W.B. Selbie

²¹ Machen, *What is Faith?*, 149, 152.

²² Machen, *What is Faith?*, 164-65.

²³ Machen, *What is Faith?*, 251.

²⁴ *British Weekly* (June 10, 1926), from *What is Faith?* scrapbook, 87.

²⁵ *British Weekly* (May 27, 1926), from *What is Faith?* scrapbook, 52.

wondered if Machen could change with the times. Selbie and Machen might agree about the substance of the gospel – and Selbie thought they did – but disagreed about 'the forms and terms in which it is expressed, interpreted and proclaimed'.²⁶

A willingness to revise and update theological expressions lay behind questions about Machen's emphasis on the vicarious atonement. But here, rather than formulating a new understanding of the cross, critics generally did exactly what liberals faulted Machen for doing, namely, claiming that they were presenting the right interpretation of the New Testament, thereby affirming implicitly the authority and infallibility of Scripture. For instance, C. Ryder Smith argued that a third way existed between the extremes of the vicarious atonement and the example of self-sacrifice, a way taught by the apostle Paul himself.²⁷ A.B. Macaulay also wondered about Machen's insistence upon the atonement. It was one thing to 'vindicate the claim of the intellect' in religious experience, but another to put so much weight on a 'particular theory' of the cross.²⁸ W.M. Macgregor also thought Machen erred by insisting on the vicarious atonement, an error produced by 'his exaltation of the intellect'. This doctrine of the cross might gain the assent of the whole church, it might be the noblest view of God's salvation, but it could 'have no place within the group of things indispensable to Christian faith as such'.²⁹

In this exchange Machen had the last word. In his response to all contributors, at the end of the series, he began by expressing gratitude for the 'generous treatment' he had received from his British colleagues. He was especially glad that he had not been misunderstood. Specifically, the debate had centred on sin, redemption, and the nature of religious truth, not the inerrancy of the Bible, and for this Machen was thankful. In his estimation, the nature of biblical authority was obviously important. But of far greater import was Christian teaching about sin and redemption. Machen conceded in his response that 'forgiveness of sins' was 'by no means the only thing that we have from Christ'. Salvation included other benefits and the experience of grace was not uniform among all believers. Still, by conceding these points Machen would not give up the conviction that without the doctrines of sin and grace, Christianity ceased to exist; it was no longer good news and it departed fundamentally from what it had been historically. 'When the great revival of the Church is finally brought about by the Spirit of God', he concluded, 'we shall find that sin and redemption will be the centres about which men's thinking and feeling will move'.³⁰

²⁶ *British Weekly* (April 1, 1926), from *What is Faith?* scrapbook, 32.

²⁷ *British Weekly* (April 8, 1926), from *What is Faith?* scrapbook, 45.

²⁸ *British Weekly* (July 1, 1926), from *What is Faith?* scrapbook, 82.

²⁹ *British Weekly* (May 27, 1926), from *What is Faith?* scrapbook, 52.

³⁰ *British Weekly* (September 23, 1926), from *What is Faith?* scrapbook, 101.

Back to the Creed

The substance of Machen's critique of liberalism, as evident in this exchange in the *British Weekly*, turned on the question of how sinners become right with a holy and righteous God. Inerrancy was not so much a side issue as a luxury. Having been educated under Benjamin B. Warfield and having defended the historical reliability of the New Testament in his own scholarship, Machen was hardly unaware of the doctrine of Scriptural infallibility or its importance. But to reduce fundamentalism to a particular understanding of the Bible, as Machen's contemporaries did and later historians have done, is to miss a much more basic point, namely, that conservatives like Machen believed liberalism compromised the Christian doctrine of redemption. That is why he believed liberalism constituted an entirely different religion. A faulty doctrine of Scripture, Machen also believed, could lead to other errors. Yet, he acknowledged repeatedly that a flawed understanding of biblical authority did not make one a liberal. If Machen's example teaches anything, it may be that contrary to post-World War II conservative Protestant leaders inerrancy is not the doctrine by which evangelicalism stands or falls. It is an easy target. But if one of Princeton's finest – a group of theologians who could go to great lengths in defending biblical infallibility – could distinguish between the Bible and soteriology, perhaps critics of inerrancy could mimic Machen's theological nimbleness.³¹

Yet, Machen's example stands not only as a warning to critics of inerrancy but also to certain impulses within evangelicalism itself. One of the legitimate points that Harriet Harris makes in her recent book on evangelicals and Scripture is the disparity between evangelical piety and evangelical views about the Bible. On the one hand, evangelicals rest the case for Christianity on an intellectually elaborate defence of Scripture, while on the other hand advocating practices of reading the Bible that make an intellectual appropriation of Scripture optional. To borrow from David Bebbington's categories, evangelical conversionism is at odds in with evangelical biblicism. If the Holy Spirit blows wherever he will, how important is the word of God, even if inerrant? As Harris notes, the most popular forms of evangelicalism, from daily quiet times to Campus Crusade's Four Spiritual Laws, put far greater weight on the believer's subjective reading of Scripture than on the objective material learned from the Bible.³²

By defining faith primarily as intellectual than experiential, Machen avoided the tension between word and Spirit that has afflicted evangelicalism since the eighteenth century. In fact, his critique of liberal Protestantism always had revivalistic evangelicalism

implicitly in view. In a series of talks on Christian scholarship that Machen gave in 1932 under the auspices of the Bible League, he took aim at evangelical and liberal anti-intellectualism. To those who said 'correct opinions about God and Christ' were unimportant compared to simple faith, Machen responded that such simple faith was really not faith in Christ. The pattern of New Testament teaching and example, he argued, was first to 'set forth ... the facts about Christ and the meaning of his death' and then ask the hearer 'to accept the One thus presented' in order to be saved. And to those evangelists who said apologetics was a waste of time compared to the far greater work of saving souls, Machen responded that 'It is useless to proclaim a gospel that people cannot hold to be true: no amount of emotional appeal can do anything against the truth'.³³ The reason for this insistence upon the objective and cognitive character of Christianity was not simply a product of Machen's adherence to Scottish Common Sense Realism, as some of his and the Princeton Theology's critics have alleged.³⁴ The reason had far more to do with the nature of salvation. Did sinners have anything that they could do to make themselves right before God? Or was salvation entirely from a God who made sinners righteous by sending his Son to live a perfect life, die for sins on the cross, and rise from the dead to defeat the forces of sin and death? Machen obviously believed that salvation depended entirely upon the work of Christ. As such, history, doctrine and the intellectual claims of the gospel could not be avoided by appealing to the work of the Spirit or the experience of individual believers. If the deeds recorded in the Bible were not true, then the hope of salvation was truly an illusion. Machen took this connection one step further and argued that if salvation depended upon the mighty acts of God, then doctrine was not simply an extravagance since theology and creeds were simply efforts to systematise what the Bible taught. A believer's salvation may have depended on the work of the Spirit, thus producing conversion. But that work of regeneration was never independent of what the word of God taught. Word and Spirit, as Machen well knew, worked together hand in hand. For that reason, conversion could never be divorced from doctrine which was a systematic summary of Scriptural teaching.

In the end, Machen's defence of the doctrinal character of Christianity and the Bible raises an important question for those who question the Princeton way of reading Scripture. Several years ago, Richard Mouw argued that twentieth-century Protestantism can be broken down into four different schools of thought regarding the essential nature of Scripture. First are those like Machen who read the Bible as essentially a book of theology. Second, pietists read the Bible in order to cultivate 'certain pious ... experiences and habits fundamental to the Christian life'. Third, moralists conceive of

³¹ On the centrality of inerrancy to post-World War II evangelicalism in the United States, see D.G. Hart, 'Evangelicals, Biblical Scholarship, and the Politics of the Modern American Academy', in David N. Livingstone, D.G. Hart, and Mark A. Noll, eds., *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 306-26.

³² Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*, 190-204.

³³ Machen, 'Christian Scholarship and Evangelism', in *What is Christianity? And Other Addresses*, ed., Ned Bernard Stonehouse, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 121, 129.

³⁴ For one of the better critiques of Princeton's intellectualism, see George M. Marsden, 'Understanding J. Gresham Machen', in *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 182-201.

Christianity in essentially ethical categories and look to the Bible for right or wrong forms of conduct. Finally, culturalists read the Bible for wisdom about the transformation of society, from politics and economics to education and art. Mouw admits that these impulses are hardly ever distinct and that some movements within recent Protestantism have exhibited all four methods of interpreting the Bible. He also argues that none is completely correct since each position picks up a genuine and helpful insight into biblical teaching.³⁵

Had Mouw been forced to reckon with Machen in a more extensive way, however, he might have reconsidered his conclusion. For Machen doctrine was not one option, a way of reading the Bible that worked sometimes but failed to do justice to its complete meaning and message. He insisted that any effort to equivocate about the doctrinal character of Christianity as unravelled in the Bible would introduce a different understanding of how God saved sinners. If the Bible taught ethics, experience or how to change society, the responsibility for redemption lay with human effort. But if the Bible taught how God saved his church and theology was simply the systematisation of God's redemptive activity, then salvation depended on God's power and faithfulness, not on man's conduct, feelings or social engineering. For that reason, Machen's defence of Christianity was critical of both liberalism and evangelicalism in its pietist forms. Whether through the historicising endeavours of liberals or the emotional excesses of revivalistic evangelicalism, to the doctrinally indifferent Christianity became essentially the product of human agency. As Machen told graduates of Westminster Seminary in 1931 who were about to enter the ministry of the word,

*You alone can lead men, by the proclamation of God's word, out of the crash and jazz and noise and rattle and smoke of this weary age into green pastures and beside the still waters; you alone, as ministers of reconciliation, can give what the world with all its boasting and pride can never give – the infinite sweetness of the communion of the redeemed soul with the living God.*³⁶

Without that context Machen's defence of biblical infallibility and creedal Christianity no doubt looks wooden, rationalistic and perhaps outdated. But from the perspective of his larger concern to preserve the good news of the gospel, namely, that Christ really did pay the penalty for sin, Machen's argument emerges as one of the more profound made in the twentieth century.

³⁵ Mouw, 'The Bible in Twentieth-Century Protestantism: A Preliminary Taxonomy', in Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, eds, *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 139–62, quotation on 144.

³⁶ Machen, 'Consolations in the Midst of Battle', in *What is Christianity?*, 238.

INTERPRETING THE BIBLE AMONG THE WORLD RELIGIONS

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Introduction

The task

I have been asked to write an overview of basic biblical hermeneutical principles and then to go on from those hermeneutical principles to look at how they relate and apply to the cultural and religious plurality of our world today.

The assumption

I am taking it as given in our community here as an Evangelical Missionary Alliance, that we are not disputing the divine inspiration and authority of the Scriptures; we are assuming that. What we are looking at is the human dimension of the Scripture – the way in which human authors put meaning into what they had to say, and how human readers get meaning out of what they said, because the Bible is of course a human book as well as a God given book.

So, the inspiration of Scripture is not under question; it is rather that which makes our hermeneutical effort worthwhile, because if the Scriptures did not come from God they might still be of great interest to us as a historical document, but it is because of our conviction of their divine authority and inspiration that what we are looking at in this session is actually important and worthwhile to us. So that is our assumption.

The method

How are we going to attack this subject? The basic question that we are asking, at any point in hermeneutics, is: 'What does this text mean as we read it?' And in recent studies of hermeneutics these three focuses (or foci) have emerged: a focus on the *author* (or authors) of the text; a focus on the *text* itself; and a focus on the *readers*. You will find the question in hermeneutical text books: are we having an author-centred approach, or a text-centred approach, or a reader-centred approach? So, we are going to look at these three focuses – authors, texts and readers – and what I am going to try to do then, in each case, is first of all to sketch very quickly some of the *hermeneutical issues* that are relevant at that particular focal point, and then secondly to *evaluate* something of the benefits, and also the potential dangers, of that point if you focus exclusively on that one

centre. But then, thirdly, also to try to observe how the issues of religious and cultural plurality are actually to be found at every one of those focuses. It is not just that we have 'the' text and we all know what it means, so that all we have to do is to try to apply it to a world of religious plurality which we have now got ourselves into – as though we were the first generation of Christians ever to live with religious pluralism. Rather, we actually need to see how this issue of plurality is to be found at every level of the hermeneutical process.

The author-centred focus

Let us begin then by thinking about an author-centred focus of the text.

The hermeneutical process

An author-centred approach believes that the best way to find the meaning of the text is to ask the question: 'What did the author mean to say?' – in the past tense, in his context, when he or she wrote it. That is, fundamentally, the task of exegesis. You are seeking, as far as possible, to discover the author's intent in the text.

That has produced a variety of hermeneutical methods: the well trodden grammatico-historical method, in which you actually try to establish the text itself – what were the original words as best we can work out what was written, knowing that we do not actually have any of the original autographs of the Scripture but the copies of the copies and transmission of the text; then to find out what do those words mean, by lexical semantic study – what did they mean at the time they were used (which may well be different from what they mean in later periods) and so on.

Then there is the study of the *context* in which they were said. We are all familiar with the point that a text must be taken in its context – or better, its contexts, plural, because there is always a variety of contexts for anything that anybody says, and in the Scripture there is the canonical context – that is, what does the rest of this book say? How does this book, say, of Samuel or Kings, fit into the wider Old Testament history? How does it sit within Old Testament canon? And how does that sit within the total Biblical canon? So, one brings to bear all those different contexts. There is the historical background – the events that were going on at the time (this so important, particularly, to understanding the prophets for example), the social issues of culture, economics, politics, society – all the things that are part of the world of the author. Those things need to be understood.

One of the ways in which people try to get at those contexts of the author has been of course through what is now called the '*historical critical method*' – all the tools of critical study which sometimes we may get angry with, or in some cases despise, but which nevertheless we are actually quite dependent on. Even in just reading the Bible in our own language somebody has done some critical work on deciding what was the most likely form of the

original text, and then somebody else has used a lot of critical judgement in doing the translation. So, there is, for example, *source criticism* – the discovery of what goes into the text, the pretext, real sources that are referred to by the authors themselves. For example we know that Chronicles used Kings (it is perhaps still a question whether Luke used Mark, or who used what, and whether they all had something called 'Q'), and then there are very many more hypothetical sources that the critics identify behind the text that we have at the moment. The *form* critics say: 'If you look at the different patterns of the text itself, the way it fits, you can associate those with certain settings in life' – certain contexts in which that kind of literature is generated. And then there are those who study the *redaction* or the editorial process by which all the texts were brought together at different stages, and the reasons and the motivations behind that. All of that study goes into really trying to find out what the author meant when he wrote what has finally become the text before us.

Evaluation

Values

How do we evaluate these author-centred attempts to find meaning? There are quite a number of obvious values in it. It does seem to be the most common sense approach to most ordinary human beings. If you read a piece of writing, you assume that what it means is likely to be connected with what whoever wrote it meant it to mean – that meaning actually starts in somebody's mind when they communicate anything at all. So this approach respects author-intent and says: 'What we've got to try to do is to treat this man, or this woman, as an intelligent human being who meant to say something', and to do our best to discover what it was that he or she meant to say.

There is also an element of objectivity about it, that one can then say: 'Well, at least there is some stable meaning, or a core of meaning in this text which we can try to get at – recover it'. We may not want to guarantee certainty – there will always be room for some disagreement over exactly what the author meant. But there is at least an assumption that we can get reasonably close – some kind of an approximation to what this author, most probably, was meaning to say when he said these words.

That, therefore, sets some kind of controls on the thing. You can set limits and boundaries to assumed meanings. You can read a commentary or hear a sermon and you can at least have some way of evaluating. You think: 'Well, I'm not quite sure if I agree with your interpretation but I suppose it could have meant that – even if I'm not sure it did – but it certainly can't have meant this'. There is a limit to what the text can mean.

Dangers

This is such an obvious way of interpreting the text that we need to be aware that there are also some dangers in it. The following are some.

First of all, the obsession with the origins of the text can sometimes obscure the purpose of the text. One of the interesting factors here is the way in which this has developed within the cultural context of *western exegesis*, because western 'modern' (not just meaning the present day, but for the last two or three hundred years – modernity) interpretation of the text goes back to the same kind of paradigm of understanding which arose during the Enlightenment. This argued that the way to explain anything was to find its causes and to go back to its origins. You do not ask what the universe is *for*, you ask how did these things begin; you look further and further back for a causation, and you lose therefore what is sometimes called a 'teleological' perspective – that is the sense of purpose and meaning to events and objects and phenomena. This scientific search was very much behind what then came to be called 'scientific Biblical criticism' which was that it was being done on the same kind of assumptions as Enlightenment science – that is, you explain things by reducing them to the smallest possible units that you can reduce them to, and you explain them by their causation processes. All readers are familiar with the kind of critical commentaries on the Bible which tell you all about the text, the sources – everything you need to know about how it all came into existence – and then stop. You are left thinking: 'Yes, but what does it actually say? What is it actually for? What is its significance, now that we know all the details of its alleged origin and sources?'

The author-centred approach treats the text like a window. A window exists so that you can see what is on the other side of it. It gives you access to the world on the other side of the window. In the case of a text, this means that the text gives you access to the world of the author. You see through the text to the world he or she lived in and was writing about. But of course if you then treat the window as exclusively that – that the only purpose of it is to enable you to get into the outside world, the world of the author – you may overlook the fact that the purpose of a window is also to let light into your own room. A window exists in order to let the light through, as well as let us see out, and the purpose of the text of course – on a Christian understanding – is that through that text God speaks into our world, as well as us having access to the Biblical world. That revelatory aspect of the text can sometimes be obscured or even just totally ignored by a completely origins-based, author-centred approach to the text.

An author-centred approach can also produce fragmentation – the text is atomised into its smallest unit; you lose the wholeness – and that of course is not just in critical study, it is also the typical evangelical way of handling the Bible in that we cut it up into the smallest possible bits that will fit into a fifteen minute quiet time and, essentially, lose the sense of the wholeness of what the author was trying to say.

Religious plurality

Having sketched in what an author-centred approach to the text means, we need to see the religious plurality of the author's own

world. The Biblical authors did not speak and write in a vacuum. Religious plurality was often a part of their context, just as much as ours. What they meant to say in their world was related to the world in which they meant to say it. So when we read the Bible we do not look at some kind of a sealed up package of fixed meaning and then imagine that all we've got to do is relate it now to our world of plurality. What we need to recognise is that what they meant in their context was also shaped by their engagement with cultural and religious plurality. That has affected the original meaning of the text, and will affect how *we* read the meaning of the text.

Here are a few examples, to explain what I mean by this, where I think an understanding of the meaning of a text is enhanced by actually seeing it in the context in which it was given – the religiously plural context. Most of these come from the Old Testament, which reflects my own field of main teaching and study, at All Nations and elsewhere, but I will bring in some New Testament as well.

The Song of Moses in *Exodus 15* celebrates the triumph of Yahweh in bringing Israel out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. It needs to be seen as a deeply polemical song – that is, it is conflicting with the world view and the claims of divinity which had been made by Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who had been told: 'Yahweh, the God of Israel, says: 'Let My people go!' and who had effectively responded: 'Who? Who is this Yahweh? I don't know Yahweh! I don't know that God! I'm god around here.' The whole story of the Exodus, from chapter five on through to chapter fourteen, is the conflict of the claims of the living God, Yahweh, the God of Israel, as over against the claims of this 'tin pot' god, Pharaoh. After the climactic crossing of the sea, Moses then celebrates the fact that Yahweh is God. We need to emphasise that when it says: 'The LORD is a warrior, the LORD is my God', that it's not just saying, 'God is God, God is Lord, God is sovereign', – it is actually a claim made against the world of Egyptian imperial religion, that Yahweh is God, and Yahweh is King. The climactic verse of that song is: 'Therefore Yahweh shall reign'. The LORD reigns, not Pharaoh or the gods of Egypt. It is set against that context.

Joshua 24:14: 'Choose you today whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.' – A famous chorus, to those of us old enough to remember it. The context says: 'All right, you have to choose Yahweh; that's what I'm urging you to do. But you've got other choices of course'. It says:

Choose you today whether you will serve the gods of the Mesopotamian world from which your ancestors came, or the gods of Egypt where you came out of, or the gods of the Amorites in the land you're going into. You've got all these choices. But, as for me and my house, we're going to choose to serve the Yahweh.

So the choice, the covenantal commitment is made very explicitly in the context of plurality of choice and indeed seems to suggest that that syncretism and plurality was even infecting the people at the time, who were still around.

Hosea, confronting the world of the syncretistic Baal cults – the Canaanite fertility religion, and the way that was being mingled with the religion of Yahweh, the God of Israel, as indeed was the case with Elijah, interestingly, takes the offensive in that conflict by actually drawing from the language and the imagery of the Baal fertility cult – the sexual imagery of male and female and so on – and actually uses it as a way of expressing the relationship between Yahweh and his people, and then uses that to attack them for prostitution and infidelity. But he is doing that whole challenge within the context of a virulent anti-Yahweh religious cult which was basically fertility motivated. He has drawn language from the world of the religious corruption he was attacking.

Isaiah 40 to 55: We sometimes read those great affirmations of the sovereignty of Yahweh: 'The LORD is sovereign', 'the LORD is God', 'I am God', 'I am He', and we are tempted to say, 'Yes, we know that, we sing that, we believe that', and fail to recognise that it was spoken to people who were in exile in the midst of a tremendous, imperialistic, arrogant, religiously sanctioned society of Mesopotamian Babylon in which there were star gods – the astral deities. But these are totally demoted in chapter 40:26: 'Look up at the heavens. What do you see? You see the stars. Who created them?' – 'Oh! So they're only created then. So they're not gods!' You read that text and you just totally ignore that it is actually a challenge to astrology, and every other kind of religion based around astral deities. Or the great state gods, Bel and Nebo, referred to in chapter 46:1 and 2: 'Bel stoops down. Nebo bows down'. They are so weak, they cannot even save their idols. They get carried off into captivity. So the challenge, that this Yahweh is God and no other, is being made in a context, again, in which the people who heard these words were faced not so much with a choice almost, as with an inevitable reality, that they thought that the gods of Babylon were stronger than their God. Yahweh, the God of Israel, had been defeated and beaten. He was 'past it' – he had grown old or impotent. This prophet, these words, are addressing these people to restore their confidence in the living God, in the context of a religious plurality which denied it.

Genesis 1 – the story of creation – also needs to be seen against an even older background of ancient near-eastern mythology, polytheism and astrology. Indeed it totally opposes that complete religious world view by proposing one God who is the Creator of all things, and that even the great light that lights the day – and the light that lights the night – does not even get dignified with a name; because of course, in ancient near-eastern mythology the sun and moon and stars are gods. They are not gods, they are just lights that have been put there by the one living God. There are all sorts of ways in which that creation narrative reflects a conflictual account, a polemical account, with the religious world view of its day.

In the New Testament, there are examples of the conflict with that element within Judaism which rejected the messianic claims of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, and the conflict between the early Christians, even before they were called Christians, and their fellow Jewish believers in the God of Israel, and that conflict is reflected in

the Gospels – in John's Gospel and also in Matthew. There is also the conflict as the Christian mission spread out, reflected in Colossians and other writings of Paul, with the mixture of paganism and early incipient gnostic views and mystery cults, and indeed, possibly even eastern religion. Then of course in a book like Revelation, the sinister background of the threat of emperor worship and the state cult of Rome.

So it seems to me that we will get a closer understanding – a better understanding – of the author's original meaning when we actually take into account the worlds of religious plurality in which they lived, and therefore feel the contrast, feel the way in which these words are being emphasised.

My final point under this section is that part of the importance of paying attention to this 'author's world' view of the texts is to recognise the character of these authors as 'witnesses' – either directly witnesses or indirectly reporting the witness of others – to the actual story of salvation. When we take the text on an author-centred view and regard it as a window – a window on that world – part of the implication of that is that this window gives us access to a real world; that the text is referential – it actually refers to events, stories, happenings that really took place; that in these narratives and in these accounts, and in the worship that was generated by them, God was actually at work in the human world and the Biblical text is a witness to that world.

That is important in preventing us having a/to view the Bible in relation to religion, as merely a kind of quarry for religious ideas which we can then swap with other religions. The Bible is not just a textbook for a religion. It is actually the narrative of the Gospel events by which God brought good news of salvation to the world. So if we ask questions like: 'Is there salvation in other religions?' – that is a very common sort of question that is asked – the Bible I think would deny the validity of the question and say: 'Actually, there is no salvation in any religion. Religion is not what saves you.' What saves is the action of God in human history. God is the Saviour. God has saved us. We are not saved because we are Israelites; we are not saved because we are Christians. We are Israelites, we are Christians, because God has acted to save us.

So, the Bible needs to be presented as the story, the narrative. The 'having happenedness' of the Biblical narrative is very important. And that is one reason why we cannot then simply substitute the scriptures of other faiths for the Bible as, for example, is sometimes urged in the case of the Old Testament. Why can we not regard, say Hindu scriptures or Buddhist scriptures, as alternative routes to Jesus? Well, that would be all right if all we were talking about was Jesus as a religious teacher with some brilliant ideas that are prepared for by other people. But of course the Bible does not present it like that. It says:

This is the story. This is the total picture of what God has done in God's world to bring about the salvation of the human race.

So that, too, seems to me to be an important dimension of keeping a focus on the author-centredness of the meaning of the text.

The text-centred focus

Hermeneutical process

Secondly, there is the text-centred focus. Those who advocate this are saying, and 'Look, the texts that we have in the Bible are artefacts', – that is, they are products of human skill, human literary artistic ability, actually producing writings. So, we need to focus on that text as it is in itself. The metaphor changes a little from the text as a window to the text being more like a painting. You could actually imagine hanging on a wall a painting which looked very like a window and gave all the appearance of being one with trees and a building outside, but actually what you are looking at is not a window but a painting – the product of human ingenuity, skill, art, craft and so on. You are not looking through a window at an objective world on the other side of it, but rather looking at a constructed world – a beautiful artistic world created by the ingenuity of the painter. So, the approach here is to try to say: 'Well, actually, in the end, no matter who produced this text, no matter when it was written, no matter whether we got the sources all right or not, what we have in our hands is a quite remarkable piece of work – a text, a poem, a narrative, a story. It has an existence, it has a meaning which can be appreciated for its own sake, as a piece of literary artistry. Don't try to look through it; look at it.'

That then leads people to explore literary tools of analysis – a literary approach to the text – and often that goes along with what is sometimes called a 'close reading' of the text. That is technical language for people who really try to get into the structures, the words, the patterning and so on, of the text. The following are a few of the aspects of literary approaches to the text itself. There is of course the 'genre' identification which is important for all understanding of literature: 'What kind of literature is this?' When we open a newspaper we instinctively, without thinking about it, identify the different genres that are there: we distinguish the news report (which we hope is reasonably objective) from the editorial (which we understand will have a particular slant – and so we build that into our reading), from the sports news or from the satirical comment of a parliamentary sketch, or a cartoon, or whatever it may be. We identify different genres and we therefore interpret them according to that. We need to do that with the Bible as well – all the time, very carefully.

There are also the literary conventions in understanding how different types of literature actually work in human society and what they do to human beings – how both ancient and modern literature actually achieves its effect upon us. The power of stories, for example, to explain, to motivate, to challenge, to disturb, to involve the reader or listener; to grab our thoughts, our emotions, our feelings, and to initiate a response to lead us in some way. The power of poetry also. Why did the prophets – like Isaiah and so on – write

with this fantastic poetic power and gift? Part of the reason is that poetry both undermines current reality and exposes it for what it is. The prophets were brilliant at writing poems which just held up before people what they were: the poem of a derelict vineyard which was producing bad grapes, used by Isaiah in the midst of a sort of wine festival, to hold up to the people what they were really like (Is. 5:1–7); some of Hosea's poetry, using his language to describe the prostitution of the people; and so on. Poetry has a very powerful way of cutting into reality. But of course it is also a very good medium of envisaging and imagining a better reality. So, when the prophets want to point to the future and to say what God is going to do, they turn to the language of poetry, of figures, of image, of metaphor and so on, in order to create an alternative world of expectation for us. So that is how these things work.

Then, literary approaches look very carefully at narrative art, observing how biblical narrators make use of setting, plot, characters, suspense, irony, perspective, gapping (that is, not saying everything you need to know – letting you do a bit of imagination), patterning, word play and so on. Understanding these techniques and conventions provides a wonderful way of getting into the Bible stories and appreciating them more. And then of course, there are also all the skills of poetic art – economy of language, imagery, metaphor, parallelism, figures of speech, chiasmus and concentricity, climax and symbolism, and so on – there obviously is not space to go into what all those mean, but when people get into a text and start analysing it using those tools, it often brings out all sorts of layers of meaning and significance that have been put in there by the skill, thought, art and craft of the human author to whom God was entrusting the message that was coming through.

Evaluation

Values

How do we evaluate this text-centred focus – as a route to meaning? A number of positive points first of all. I think all readers would all agree that the Bible is great literature. It would probably not have survived in the way it has, and been such a powerful thing that it is, if it had not been. It is literature and we can appreciate it as such.

I think a second value is that literary approaches tend to be more holistic – that is, they tend to look at the whole of a story, or the whole of a book, or the whole of a piece of prophecy, rather than just split it up into all kinds of constituent bits. And yet, at the same time, literary approaches do pay very close attention to the text, and often will find reasons for unevenness in the text (such as repetition or words being used the same way twice). While a source critic would just immediately suggest that it was different authors, different hands at work. The literary critic would say: that there may be an artistic reason for this; we should look more closely. And I would say that such an approach is consonant with an evangelical commitment to verbal inspiration. If we believe in verbal inspiration, we should believe that the actual words the human author chose to use do

matter, including the way he put them and the order in which he put them and so on. It is often quite hard to get students, or even congregations sometimes, to pay strict attention to what the text itself actually says rather than: 'This is what we always thought the text said', or 'We've always been brought up to believe that this is what it means.' But when you take people to a text and say, 'Well, forget what you're just saying. What does the text actually say?' It can often be uncomfortable and yet I think very salutary that we do it. How many people's belief about Christmas is shaped by nativity plays, and nativity mythology, than actually by the text of the Gospels? How many people's sermons on God as the divine Potter are shaped by a hymn: 'Thou art the Potter; I am the clay. Have Thine own way, Lord; Have Thine own way', rather than by an actual careful study of what Jeremiah said in chapter 18? A literary approach forces us to look closely and ask, 'What does the text say?' rather than 'What does our tradition say?'.

The literary approach also helps us to understand that the form of a text can be an important aspect of its meaning, or an important way of getting at its meaning. If you discover, for example, that a text has a kind of concentric arrangement of several points moving into a centre, and then those same points in reverse on the way out, it actually helps you to identify and highlight the central point of the text because it sometimes literally is in the centre rather than at the beginning as a heading. The text may actually be arranged in such a way to emphasise a central point. And other such patterns can be discerned in which the form strongly carries or reinforces the meaning.

Finally, I think this text-centred approach to understanding meaning does help to recognise and genuinely listen to the pluri-vocality. The Bible itself is multi-vocal. There is a constant kind of conversation going on between Bible texts – an internal dialectic of views and perspectives which are sometimes uncomfortably dissonant with each other. It is impossible, for example, to read the Book of Job without hearing sometimes very direct verbal echoes of the teaching of Deuteronomy or the teaching of some of the Psalms, but put under a question mark. There is a very clear question: 'Does this really hold in this situation?' Ecclesiastes seems to do the same. There is the tension between covenant and judgement; between the Psalms that are praising hymns, and Psalms of lament and complaint; between the rejoicing in the presence and sovereignty of God; and the struggling with theodicy, and how do you justify the way God is acting. There are definitely many different voices in the text that we need to listen to. A text-centred focus prevents us from flattening them all out into a single 'timeless message' that has to be extracted from every passage.

Dangers

There are dangers as well, of course, in this approach. Literary approaches to the text can totally ignore history. You just read the story and say: 'It's a wonderful story.' If one asks, 'Well, actually, did

it happen?' you say: 'It doesn't matter whether it happened or not – it's just a good story!' and let the story do its work. There is a danger there. If the fascination with literary art leads us to dismiss the historical question: 'Did it really happen?' then we have problems with the Biblical faith which is actually rooted in history. We may make allowances for 'narrative liberty' – that is, we may be willing to accept that not every single detail in the way a story has been told mirrors precisely 'what actually happened if you'd been there'. It is possible for real history to be told as a good story, and for a good story to be grounded in real history. The 'having happenedness' of the Biblical story is very important and should not be lost sight of when we look at the art by which that story was written.

Another danger is the loss of the overall canonical context that gives meaning to the parts of Scripture as a message. If people lose track of the history behind the sweep of the biblical grand narrative, then the texts are being read without reference to the canon and their place in the story as a whole. Many readers will have seen, in airports and elsewhere, the little Pocket Canon – these individual books of the Bible in the King James Version that are being produced with an introduction by a well known author. They are being presented simply as gems of great literature. That is great, for so they are. But the trouble is of course that when they are just read in isolation like that, people may appreciate them as literature (one hopes and trusts that maybe the Lord will use them in other ways) but they are not being set within the total story and canon of Scripture and its world view.

Thirdly, an unbalanced commitment to this pluri-vocality of texts can result in a kind of infinite, eternal oscillation – that you never get to what the text finally means: 'Is there an ultimate message?' It can lead to a sort of never silenced 'But ...', that no matter what you say, there is always a 'but, there's an alternative view', and if that just keeps going backwards and forwards it is like a computer screen that never settles down; you just wonder when it is ever going to get to what you want. Some kinds of postmodern readings of the Bible fall into this oscillation. You must never make any final affirmation on the basis of a biblical text or tradition, because it will always be counteracted by another one. This seems to me an abuse of the plurality of the Bible's texts. It is the opposite danger to the tendency to flatten the whole Bible out into a single monotone message. This is the tendency never to allow the Bible to say anything with finality at all.

Religious plurality

Now, what about the religious plurality aspect of this focus? It is important to recognise, and I think sometimes evangelical scholarship does not adequately recognise, that the Biblical texts themselves do use religious language, metaphors and symbolism that are drawn from the plurality of religions that surrounded the authors, yet without sharing or without syncretising the world views together. I have already referred to Hosea's extremely daring and bold use of sexual imagery in a context where the precise form of religious

syncretism he was attacking was the very sexually debased cults of the Canaanite fertility religions. Yet he chooses to say: 'Yes, and our God Yahweh also has a wife, but it's not Asherah, it's not one of these female goddesses – it's actually you, his people.' He portrays the covenant relationship using the language and the symbolism of the religion he was attacking. It is a very bold move, and very effective.

There was also the use of Canaanite mythology and symbolism in the language that is used in some of the Zion Psalms – for example Psalm 48, which talks about: '... is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.' – I don't know if any of you ever knew what on earth you were talking about when you sang about 'Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King!' That language is straight out of the Baal epic, because part of Baal religion was that there was a mythological city in the north, on a very high mountain, where Baal lived – it was the city of the great king. What the psalmist has done here is use the language of Baal mythology and say, 'Ah! – but it isn't actually up in the mythologically far north. You can actually walk around it and look at it. It's here! It's Jerusalem! This is the city of the great King!' but it is using the religious language of the culture to actually express the sovereignty of Yahweh.

There is also the use of Canaanite language in Psalm 93: 'The sea has lifted up its voice; the sea has lifted up its sounding breakers; but mightier than the sea, the Lord of hosts is mighty'. That is also using Canaanite epic metre as well as making use of the mythological concept of the sea, and then exalting Yahweh above it all.

There are various Babylonian mythological motifs in Isaiah 40 to 55 – the stars, Rahab and so on. Again, all of them brought in, not in order to say, 'Isn't it wonderful that we've got all these different religions', but actually to say, 'Yahweh, the God of Israel, is supreme over all of them', but using the culture and the language.

One could point to Paul in Athens using Greek poetry and language about God, and yet subverting the world view that it came from; or John's *Logos* – again, a Greek philosophical term with a wide range of meaning that John has used for a Christocentric, incarnational theology.

All this, of course, then raises this age old missiological question of whether, and how far, we can use contemporary surrounding religious cultures, wherever we may be in the world, in order to re-contextualise the Biblical text from its world into the modern religious world, without simply dissolving the text into syncretism. The question is: if the Bible itself could make use of pagan words and symbols, and language and concepts, in order to communicate the message of the living and one true God, then why cannot the Church in mission, or in Bible translation, do the same? But what are the limits? When does that cultural communication and religious forms actually become religious syncretism.

The other aspect of this, of course, is that although the Bible does do that, as a matter of technique, the Bible simultaneously, emphatically rejects the idolatry within those world-views with which it is communicating. Idolatry in all its forms, right through the span of Biblical history, is rejected. You can analyse different levels of idolatry: the Egyptian imperialistic cult of the Pharaoh; the Canaanite fertility religions, Baal in the land; the Babylonian star gods and attempted control of the future for national security. You can see how the Bible interacts and conflicts with all of those, but the Bible rejects them very emphatically. Even if it uses the language, we need to also give place to the theological polemic that goes on.

It is even arguable that the Bible can be regarded as almost a kind of 'anti-religious' book. Religion is never presented in the Bible as the answer to our problems. Even the great texts of Israelite religious expression – the sacrificial language of Leviticus – all of that material does not come with a tag which says: 'This is the way you can get salvation; this is way you can find your way to heaven.' It all comes on the basis of a narrative that is actually saying:

God has already redeemed you, saved you, brought you out of Egypt. Now here is the way in which you live clean and relatedly before him in his presence.

Although there is what we might call a religious world view there, a religious practice, yet in so many other places the Bible undermines any idea that that somehow such religion has a validity of its own. The prophets certainly did that. In Isaiah 1 where the prophet says, 'Get all this religion out of my sight', says God; 'I can't stand it, I don't want it.' Jeremiah 7 says the same to people who are worshipping in the temple; Amos 5 says the Lord despises it; and Hosea 6 of course said that God wanted obedience rather than sacrifice.

So there is a kind of 'anti-religion' voice within the Bible which I think rather stands against an indiscriminate or sentimental sort of inclusivism which says, 'Oh, it would be wonderful if we could just get all the religions together; we would have a much better world.' Well, I think the Bible would say, 'Probably not.' Religion is not the Bible's solution to the human problem. More often than not it is part of the problem itself.

The Bible makes remarkably universal claims in the midst of this religious plurality in relation to the revealing and saving effect of particular events. We need to see the monotheistic meaning of the texts themselves sharply defined because of the plurality that they are denying. So, for example, when Deuteronomy 4:35 and 39 says that, 'You were shown these things', (the Exodus and Sinai) 'so that you would know that Yahweh is God and there is no other', the text in a sense is saying, 'Because, you see, the world does not yet know this truth about the identity of God. Other nations do not yet know that Yahweh alone is God, but you do, because of your experience of his action in your history.' The monotheistic affirmation is made on the assumption that this is a revelation, this is something entrusted to these people, in the context of other faiths that are not to be followed by Israel.

Psalm 33:6-8 affirms that 'The word of Yahweh, the God of Israel, the LORD God, is that word which created the heavens and the waters and the earth' and therefore holds all the people who live on the earth accountable to him. That is vastly universal – it is incredible actually that an Israelite psalmist should make such a claim. The heavens, the stars, the waters, the sea, the earth itself and all who live on it, are all claimed by this One God.

Psalm 24: 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it'. Have you ever stopped to ponder that in its ancient Israelite context? Here is a little people, stuck in the middle of the ancient near-east, with no power, with no greatness, saying, 'The whole earth, and everything in it, belongs to Yahweh, our God' – an amazingly polemical monotheistic claim.

Philippians 2:10 and 11 – the claims made for Jesus, that 'At the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord', is a claim for Jesus, made in its own context, against the worship of Caesar (Caesar is not Lord, Jesus is). But it is made on the basis of quoting a text from Isaiah 45:22-24 which is actually originally a claim for Yahweh in the context of Babylonian pluralism, because God says, 'I have sworn that by me every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that in Yahweh alone are righteousness and strength'. So, the Philippians 2 passage is building the uniqueness of Jesus in the context of Caesar worship (religious plurality of the first century), building it on the foundation of the uniqueness of Yahweh in the context of Babylonian religious plurality in the sixth century BC. Both of these texts derive their sharpness and significance from the plurality of the contexts in which, and against which, they were uttered.

The reader-centred focus

Finally then, the third main focus – a reader-centred focus. A more recent kind of approach, this, in which people are bringing into the foreground the role of the reader (or readers) in the active interpretation.

The hermeneutical process

If so far we have looked under 'author-centred' at the text as a window (through which there is access to the other world – the world of the ancient author), and then, second, under a text-centred approach, we looked at the text as a painting (that is, as a product of human art and skill which needs to be appreciated and understood for its own sake), here we are thinking more of the text as a mirror. What can be seen in a mirror depends on who is standing in front of it. The 'contents' of the mirror, in a sense, reflects who is looking into it or what objects are before it. And so, this is saying that the meaning in the text is not something, as it were, fixed and final in the text – some sort of objective reality. The meaning of the text actually only arises, only happens, in the act of reading. It is when the reader reads that the text means, just as

it is only when you look in a mirror that the mirror reflects you. So, meaning is the interaction then between text and reader.

This approach also reflects the shift from a modernity paradigm of exegesis to a post-modernity paradigm. Under modernity the reader, rather like the scientist, was simply the neutral observer of a fixed reality which was external to himself or herself, 'That is the text. All I have got to do is find out its meaning', just as the scientist would say, 'There is the world. All I have got to do is find out how it came into existence.' An objective 'real meaning', like 'the real world', was assumed to exist, and the task of the interpreter, like the scientist, was merely to uncover it. The more post-modern view is to say, 'Well, actually, even in science the subjective observer is part of the reality under observation and, indeed, may change it in the act of observing it.' And so the myth of the 'objective neutral observer' has been somewhat demoted in newer forms of science and is similarly also being lost in hermeneutics. The reader as subject also is a significant part in the whole process. There is no independent, final, fixed meaning. There can be as many meanings as there are readers.

Now of course, who is 'the reader'? There are many readers of the Biblical text. In fact there are readers implied within the text. Literary studies have thrown this up, that when you read a text there were not only the actual readers who read it; there are the implied readers in the text – those to whom it was, even hypothetically, addressed. For example, some of the prophets, like Amos and others, addressed foreign nations. We do not know whether those nations ever actually heard these words, but they are the implied hearers of these words (the Philistines and so on). Amos is actually talking to the Israelites, but he is calling on the others to hear. Or, in a more metaphorical way, sometimes the authors of Biblical texts treat inanimate objects as hearers: 'Hear, O heavens; listen, O earth, to what I have to say', – the creation as a kind of 'audience' for what is being said. Or, 'Be appalled, O heavens', (the language of Jeremiah) where nature is personified as listening to what is being said. Then, there are the actual original readers – the people who first heard or read the words that the prophet or historian or poet said or wrote. Then there are the later Biblical readers who collected these texts and edited them into books, and built the books into collections, and built the collections into a canon; how did they read these texts? Redaction criticism picks that one out. There is also the whole history of Jewish and Christian interpretation down through the centuries since the Bible reached its final form. Finally there are modern readers in multiple global contexts around our world today.

So, this hermeneutical process is saying, 'We have actually got to take all these "readers" seriously'. We need to recognise that the meaning of the texts does relate to and cannot ignore, who is doing the reading and what they bring to their reading from their own cultural background, presuppositions, assumptions and so on (nobody reads just as a blank sheet – you always read with something else in your mind), and where they are reading, that is, what is their position, both geographically (where they live), their culture, their position within the culture (whether at the top or the

bottom of it), their social, economic, political interests, and so on. All of those aspects of the readers' contexts will affect the way in which the meaning is articulated and applied.

Evaluation

How do we evaluate this reader-centred approach?

Values

There is no doubt, I think, that focusing on the reader has facilitated fresh ways of discovering the relevance of the text in many modern contexts. We talk about 'contextualised theology', and I think it has now become perhaps a more acceptable term than it used to be, provided we recognise that we are all interpreting contextually, because all of us interpret in a particular context! We must get away from the western superiority idea which was that we know the real meaning of the text – and everybody else has contextualised it! That's a bit like saying everybody else has got an accent – 'I'm the one who speaks English correctly'. Western biblical interpretation has no right to assume that all its insights are 'the standard', while those from other continents are 'contextualised'. The West is also a context – and not necessarily a better or a worse context for understanding and interpreting the text of the Scriptures than anywhere else on the planet.

Recognising this has led somewhat to the demise of western hegemony over exegesis and hermeneutics. We recognise the relativity of all hermeneutics, that we all need one another and that, to hear the Bible interpreted and understood and preached by African or by Asian brothers and sisters in Christ, who come to the text as believers, as we do, and then to see perspectives that they are bringing, is often a very enriching thing. So these things have helped.

Attention to the context of the reader has also unleashed the power of the Biblical text into some contexts of conflict or need or injustice. This has been the contribution of liberationist readers, feminist readers, other 'advocacy' stances and so on. We may have problems with where some of those approaches then go, and the way in which the Bible is handled within them. I am not denying that; I have problems with many aspects of such ways of reading the biblical texts. But I think we cannot deny that when people read the text, its meaning for them will relate to whatever agenda is of vital importance to them. After all, on evangelical understanding, the Bible is God's word and it addresses us in any context and in relation to any issue. By the power of God's Spirit, words written in one context will 'mean' new things in radically different contexts as people read them. As Anthony Billington put it, if you read the text as a feminist pacifist vegetarian there are going to be some aspects of the text's meaning that are likely to come through, or that you will observe, which are likely to appear somewhat different if you are a male chauvinist warmongering carnivore.

Dangers

There are of course dangers to this approach which become fairly self-evident and particularly to us as evangelical interpreters. A reader-centred approach can be pure subjectivism if it is not carefully watched. It reverses the priority of author intent. In some cases reader response theory goes so far as virtually eliminating the author altogether – 'It doesn't really matter who said this or what they meant by saying it; what matters is what it means to me. That's all that really counts.' So the reader is prioritised over the author and the authority, therefore, lies not with the author or with the text but with the reader, the reader's self – and that, again, is very reflective of a post-modern kind of world view.

This therefore means that you lose any sense of objective or external controls. If there is no assumption of some fixed or stable core of meaning in the text itself deriving ultimately from the author's intention, then pluralism rules: there is no such thing as a 'right' or a 'wrong' reading, a 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate' reading – some may be better than others but it is difficult to know who has the right to say so.

Religious plurality

How then is the interpretation of the Bible affected by the religious plurality of contemporary readers? How do the multiple cultural and religious contexts of people reading the Bible today affect how they understand its meaning? This is a question as old as the Bible itself. The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, long before the New Testament was written, so that culturally and contextually Greek-speaking people could read them, and it is interesting to observe that those Greek translators found ways of translating Hebrew words into Greek terminology which had all sorts of other philosophical associations, and there are very few Hebrew words left untranslated in the Septuagint – the Greek translation. 'Amen' and 'Hallelujah' are among those that have survived as original Hebrew words, but basically they managed to translate across into language which they knew had other religious meanings, and yet do so with confidence that Greek speaking readers would be able to read and understand the message of the Hebrew Scriptures.

I have put down one or two examples here. I write not so much from personal experience but having talked to colleagues at All Nations who are familiar with these worlds, here are some observations.

The Islamic world

I think all readers will be familiar with the obvious difficulties for Muslims reading the Bible, in terms of such ideas as God as Father, and Jesus as the Son of God. In the Old Testament, the story of the Conquest is a difficult one in relation to Palestinian Arabs, as is the story of Ishmael and Isaac and how that resonates within an Arab/Muslim context. We know that there are areas of the Bible that are difficult for readers with that cultural/religious background.

More subtle difficulties would include the biblical records of the 'sins of the prophets', as they would be perceived in an Islamic view; namely the way in which some Old Testament heroes of faith committed terrible sins: people like Abraham who told lies; Moses who was a murderer (although that can apparently be accounted for in that he committed the murder before he was called to be a prophet); or David's adultery, and so on. What do you do? On an Islamic view, they cannot have done these things – they were prophets. So these narratives, as they are in the Bible, simply constitute evidence in a Muslim view, of Christian tampering with the Scriptures, that the Scriptures have been corrupted to put these things in, and that in reality they did not do these things. Whereas, as Christians, we would read into these stories very comforting evidence of the humanity of even the greatest heroes of faith. We read them as wonderful examples of how even the greatest men of faith sinned and fell and were human like us but could be restored and used by God. That is not the way a Muslim wants to read them.

There are positive aspects too of course of ways in which an Islamic – or particularly an Arab – world-view, and appreciation of various aspects of the Biblical culture, can lead to a deeper valuing of some aspects of the Biblical record. For example, the appreciation of stories, and the way in which stories can function quite subversively in order to get around theological objections. The parables of Jesus are a good example of that. Confronted with a very resistant theological world-view into which he was coming, he did not always just argue theologically, he told very challenging little stories and, through those stories, Jesus was able to subvert what he was being confronted with. Story telling, and story appreciation, is of course a very vital part of the middle-eastern world – Kenneth Bailey has done a lot of work on that.

The following is another very interesting example of contextualisation which Chawkat Moucarray, the Islamics Tutor at All Nations, shared with me. I hold in my hand *The Life of Christ in Eloquent Arabic*. It is a single 'life of Christ', written in Koranic style, which reduces all the four Gospels to one Gospel. This has been produced because one of the problems for Muslims is: 'Why have you got four Gospels? There should only be one.' This publication has been regarded by some as a great example – a very positive example – of contextualising. Chawkat is not so sure, and wonders whether; (a) it undermines the canonical aspect of actually having four Gospels; (b) whether when a Muslim then discovers, 'that this isn't what the Bible says actually', there may arise an even greater suspicion that we have corrupted the Bible anyway and that this is only our way of getting out of the original corruption of the Bible.

The Hindu world

Some Biblical language is very open to misunderstanding among Hindus. One of the exercises we occasionally get students to do at All Nations is to say: 'How do you interpret 1 Peter 1:1, which talks about the rebirth, being "born again" and all of that language, within

a Hindu culture?' For Hindus being born again is no big deal really – you have twice-born people, thrice-born people. The language of 'rebirth' is all understood within the reincarnation world-view. A Hindu does not want to know how not to be born again – and again. How do you explain that kind of Biblical language to that kind of world-view? Can you simply take 'incarnation' and say it's the same as *avatar* (the 'incarnations' of the gods)? Can you take the 'Abide in me and I in you' and 'I and the Father are one' – the Johannine language – and avoid it being understood and read in a Hindu monistic world view as just the 'oneness of all things' So, contextualising has to be done within a Hindu Indian context, and the Apostles did it in their context but there is a great danger that some kinds of theologies do not so much communicate the gospel in Indian dress – or give the water of life in an Indian cup – as basically syncretise the gospel with a Hindu world view altogether and dissolve it.

Africa

I bring in the African independent churches simply because it seems to me (again, talking to people who experience this world a lot) that sometimes there can be a reading of the Bible which is so 'flat' that any part of it is treated as equally authoritative to any other part, and there is not a sense of the progress of the canonical history, and that that has sometimes been exacerbated by the best and well meant translation policy of traditionally translating the New Testament first and then, many years later, in some cases, you come along with the Old Testament. What do you actually learn first in life? You go to primary school first, and the things you learn first are very simple and basic. Later on you get the real truth, the real message. The important stuff comes secondarily. Therefore, people could be misled into thinking that the Old Testament must be the real Bible, much more important than the New, since they got it much later – the more advanced coming after the basic. And so, you can end up with people who take the language, the traditions, the symbolism and the actions of the Old Testament and actually exalt them to a much higher status – and end up with some odd and exotic results.

Challenge

The following are my final challenges. Each of them relates to the three centres that I have looked at: author, text and reader.

First, what can be done to enable readers of the Bible in all contexts to discover, as accurately as possible, the author's original meaning and intent without surrendering to the scholarly, critical elite who will presume to tell us what it all meant. And how can we help readers do that for particular texts without losing the significance and message of the whole text in the midst of critical fragmentation? I would say that a missional reading, or a missiological framework, helps us to get over that because a missiological reading of the Bible insists on asking: 'What is the purpose of God behind all of this? How is the text fitting into God's teleological mission and purpose?'

That gives a sense of wholeness and direction.

Secondly, how can we recognise and liberate the pluri-vocality of Biblical texts? That is, how can we actually listen to what they all have to say in their great variety and inner conflicts, without surrendering the overarching coherent message with a Christological centre and with a sense of eschatological closure, (that one day, what the Bible says will come to pass).

And thirdly, how can we make room for the multiplicity of readers' contexts – religious or otherwise – and especially climb down off the pedestal of western exegetical hegemony without surrendering to subjectivism and relativism and losing any commitment to a stable core of meaning in the biblical texts. How can we take readers seriously without substituting the authority of the reader for the authority of the text?

JUNCTION OR TERMINUS? CHRISTIANITY IN THE WEST AT THE DAWN OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

David Smith

The substance of this article was delivered as the 'Wenham Lecture' at Tyndale House in Cambridge in July 1999. A revised version is included in a book from Paternoster Press under the title Crying in the Wilderness. David Smith is currently Co-Director of the Whitefield Institute in Oxford.

At the beginning of this century the writer Arnold Bennett published a novel with the title *Anna of the Five Towns*. The story concerns a young woman who seeks, without success, to experience religious conversion in the context of traditional Methodist revivalism. Bennett describes how, in a desperate search for a personal experience of God, Anna attends evangelistic meetings only to find that the preacher's appeals leave her cold and unsatisfied. In a passage which probably reflects his own alienation from the evangelical religion of his parents, Bennett depicts Anna trying to imagine what it might be like to be converted, or to be in the process of being converted:

*She could not. She could only sit, moveless, dull and abject ... In what did conversion consist? Was it to say the words 'I believe'? She repeated to herself softly 'I believe, I believe'. But nothing happened. Of course she believed. She had never doubted or dreamed of doubting, that Jesus died on the cross to save her soul, her soul, from eternal damnation ... What then was lacking? What was belief? What was faith?*¹

Bennett's novel was published in 1902 and it contained an implicit warning that traditional Protestant religion was losing contact with a changing culture. However, this warning went largely unheeded; chapels were still well filled and although a few children of believers might, like Anna, go the way of the world, it remained possible to suppose that well-tryed methods of evangelism were adequate to secure a continuing harvest of converts. Indeed, by the end of the first decade of this century the delegates to the great missionary conference in Edinburgh in 1910 could speak with confidence of 'the evangelisation of the world in this generation'.

From our vantage point, nearly one-hundred years after Bennett wrote the words just quoted it seems clear that, with the sensitive antenna of a great artist, he had correctly detected the condition of the British churches even before the cataclysm of 1914–1918 changed the world for ever. The problem for the churches today is no

¹ Arnold Bennett, *Anna of the Five Towns* (London: Methuen 1925), 71.

longer how to respond to a relatively minor slippage in relation to the children of the chapels, *the chapels themselves have gone, or are in the process of going*. The stark reality of the situation facing institutional Christianity at the present time is expressed in the haunting words of a poem entitled 'The Chapel' by the Welsh writer R.S. Thomas. The poem describes the isolated and ugly nonconformist building that had once been ablaze with revival fires but now simply settles 'a little deeper into the grass'. The closing lines recall the religion of those whose amens once rang out from the building, people who were 'narrow but saved; In a way that men are not now'.²

Many theologians and sociologists now warn us that the crisis confronting institutional religion in the western world is one of truly massive proportions. Here is David Mills, an American Episcopalian, who uses almost apocalyptic language to describe the plight of Anglicanism: not only has the fat lady sung

*but the cleaners have left, the security guards have turned out the lights and locked the doors, and the wrecking ball waits outside for tomorrow's demolition work. But even so, a few men and women in purple shirts ... still huddle together in the now dark stalls, chatting excitedly of all the great operas they are going to stage.*³

This prediction of ecclesiastical meltdown is endorsed by the New Zealander, Michael Riddell who says bluntly in a recent book: 'The Christian church is dying in the West'. Believers, reacting as bereaved people often do to a great loss, may deny this reality, bolstered by 'small outbreaks of life', yet it is beyond doubt, says Riddell, that Christianity in the West is afflicted by a terminal sickness.⁴

Now it might be argued that the experience of Christians within the evangelical tradition does not match this kind of gloomy diagnosis. It may be the case that mainline denominational religion is facing crisis, but an Evangelicalism enlivened by the fires of charismatic renewal can point to empirical evidence that contradicts the generally negative assessment of religion in the West. The success of the Alpha Course; the surge of new churches in many parts of Britain; the growth of the Spring Harvest event; or the rise in 'born again' religion in the United States are all indications that a robust Evangelicalism seems to be immune from the trends toward decline and secularisation afflicting more traditional forms of institutional Christianity. Or so the argument goes.

² R.S. Thomas, *Selected Poems* (London: J.M. Dent, 1996), 81. Thomas's work constantly explores the interface between faith and modernity and wrestles with the problem of doubt. See also *No Truce With the Furies* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1995).

³ I regret that the source of this quotation has been misplaced. It was included in an analysis of Anglicanism circulated by the REFORM Group within the Church of England.

⁴ Michael Riddell, *Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West* (London: SPCK, 1998), 1.

I am afraid I view such claims with considerable scepticism. The late Klaas Bockmuehl, himself an Evangelical and a shrewd and wise observer of contemporary cultural trends, said that Christians in general had given very little thought to the challenges posed by secularisation and he noted that Evangelicals were often content 'if they add to their numbers even when the overall state of Christianity deteriorates'.⁵ In fact, the born-again phenomenon in America suggests that it is possible for very considerable numbers of people to profess conversion without such a movement resulting in any significant change in the surrounding culture. In the words of the American theologian David Wells,

*The vast growth in evangelically-minded people in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s should by now have revolutionized American culture. With a third of American adults now claiming to have experienced spiritual rebirth, a powerful countercurrent of morality growing out of an alternative worldview should have been unleashed in factories, offices and board rooms, in the media, universities and professions ... But as it turns out, all this swelling of evangelical ranks has past unnoticed in the culture ... The presence of evangelicals in American culture has barely caused a ripple.*⁶

The reason for this I suggest, is that American evangelicalism no longer possesses an alternative worldview to that which operates at the heart of Western culture. At the beginning of the 1960s the sociologist of religion, Peter Berger, argued that American churches had become prosperous precisely because they provided religious support and sanction for the secular values which dominate everyday work and life in society. In a striking passage Berger observed that a child growing up in a suburban, church-going family in modern America bore 'an uncanny resemblance to the young Buddha whose parents shielded him from any sight involving human suffering or death'. In such a situation, Berger said, the prophets or poets who point to 'the darkness surrounding our clean little toy villages' are regarded as 'candidates for psychotherapy'.⁷

I suggest that the fundamental question evangelicals must consider concerns the core beliefs and values which define this tradition. Has the term 'evangelical' been gutted of its original meaning? Has it become a mere slogan, divorced from the truths and values derived from the gospel of Jesus Christ? Is it the case, as David Wells claims, that evangelicals are among those who are on the easiest of terms with the modern world and so have lost their capacity for dissent?

To raise questions like these is to suggest that evangelicalism is not isolated from the grave crisis confronting Christianity throughout the western world. It must face the fundamental questions which should

⁵ Klaas Bockmuehl, 'Secularization and Secularism - Some Christian Considerations', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 10/1, 1986, 50-51.

⁶ David Wells, *No Place For Truth* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 293.

⁷ Peter Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 48.

be on the agenda of all Christians today. Have the churches of the West, despite a long history in which they have shown the power of the gospel to transform human culture, become a spent force? Is Christianity now doomed to a cultic role, rendered powerless to challenge a dominant culture that is in the grip of hideous idolatries? *Does Christianity in the West face a junction or a terminus?*

A Sociological Perspective

Sociological analysis of religion in the context of modernity confirms the view that it is perfectly possible for religious movements to experience significant numerical growth without this affecting the dominant values and ethos of a secularised culture in the slightest way. Thousands of people may claim to be born-again, yet business goes on as usual. Jesus may be praised as Lord in lively and joyful celebrations on Sunday, but the counter-cultural values of the kingdom he proclaimed seem to be non-transferable when it comes to the realms of education, the media, advertising, business and commercial activity. The term used in sociology to describe this change in the function of religion in modern societies is *privatisation*. We have already noted the work of Berger with regard to religion in America; according to the Oxford sociologist Bryan Wilson, modern religious revivals

*have no real consequence for other social institutions, for political power structures, for technological restraints and controls. They add nothing to any prospective reintegration of society, and contribute nothing towards the culture by which a society might live.*⁸

This may seem a harsh and negative judgement, but it compels us to ask whether there are grounds for hope that Christianity might be capable of transforming and renewing modern culture? What is the concrete evidence which might suggest that the churches of the West can discover the spiritual and intellectual strength required to challenge the fundamental values of a deeply secular society? With regard to the evangelical movement, is it conceivable that this tradition might resist and destroy the monstrous idols that extend their control into every aspect of our economic and social life? And can we really believe that it might be capable of offering the world at the dawn of the third millennium a radically new and hopeful vision of human existence, shaped by beliefs and values that would lay the foundation for a culture characterised by love, compassion, justice and life lived within limits? I suggest that it would be a bold person who answered these questions affirmatively. On the basis of present evidence we might as easily anticipate that churches will survive in Europe only through an increasing syncretism with Western culture which requires them to abandon the possibility of ever again being a force able to transform the world for the glory of God.

⁸ Bryan Wilson, *Contemporary Transformations of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 96.

The Question of Culture

Protestant Christianity has been deeply committed to cross-cultural mission throughout the modern period with the result that the faith of Christ has been successfully transmitted and translated into hundreds of cultures around the globe. Indeed, this has resulted in one of the major transformations of our times in which Christianity has become a world faith with its heartlands no longer in Europe or North America but in those regions of the world once identified as 'mission fields'. Two hundred years ago William Carey and his colleagues were determined to ensure that churches resulting from the cross-cultural transmission of the Christian faith should take recognisably Indian form. Their insistence that the gospel should be *contextualised*, that Indian believers should be encouraged to express both the form and the content of their faith in ways that were clearly Asian, led to tensions between the missionaries and their supporters in Britain. Few Christians today would deny the wisdom and validity of Carey's approach to mission and it is generally recognised that (to quote the Lausanne Covenant) churches should be 'deeply rooted in Christ and closely related to their culture'.⁹

However, while assent may easily be obtained for this principle when it relates to churches in other cultures overseas, the issue becomes problematic and painful when we ask the question: *to which culture do our churches relate?* Or, to put the issue another way, can there be a valid contextualisation of the gospel for Western culture at a point at which that culture is passing through dramatic and far-reaching change? The problem with the chapels described in the poem with which we began is precisely that they seem to belong to another age, to a world that has passed away. William Storrar, describing the challenges faced by the Church of Scotland, suggests that our cultural context is one in which people are:

bewildered by shifting patterns of family and household living, short-term and part-time unemployment, the global media and information highways ... seven day shopping in cathedral-like shopping malls ... and a myriad of other cultural trends.

In this situation, he says, 'the local parish kirk can seem as anachronistic as the traditional high street grocer's shop, the Edwardian music hall or the nationalised coal mine, a relic of another age'.¹⁰

I think in this connection of the church in which I grew up and was nourished in the Christian faith. The building in which we worshipped was erected in the 1880s and was called the Baptist Tabernacle, although anything less like a tabernacle would be

⁹ The phrase is from chapter 10 of the *Lausanne Covenant*. See J.D. Douglas (ed.), *Let The Earth Hear His Voice* (Minneapolis: Worldwide Publications, 1974), 6.

¹⁰ William Storrar's comments were made in a lecture delivered at the University of Aberdeen and published by the Divinity Department. He has developed the theme further in a special issue of the journal *Theology in Scotland* devoted to an analysis of the subject of 'The Future of the Kirk'. See Occasional Paper 2, March, 1977.

difficult to imagine. It was certainly not intended to be portable, a movable sanctuary for a pilgrim people. On the contrary, those who built this enduring tabernacle were not moving anywhere; they had just arrived as respected and valued members of bourgeois society. Today this listed building is overlooked by a massive shopping mall and as consumers pour into the 'Harlequin Centre' every Sunday it is just possible that they may glance at this striking example of our national religious heritage. This building, like so many others, erected in an earlier time to the glory of God, has become a huge obstacle to mission in a post-modern world. Stranded at the edge of a car park serving the consumerist temple which now dominates the skyline, the Tabernacle symbolises the immobility of the church and its captivity to cultural forms perceived as outmoded and irrelevant.

I suggest that the challenge which this cultural context presents to Christian mission is one of the greatest and the most dangerous ever to have faced the church. On the one hand, it should be possible for churches possessing two centuries of accumulated experience and expertise in cross-cultural missionary endeavour to discover faithful and creative ways of ensuring that Christ becomes a living option for a generation shaped by post-modern culture. This is the concern of people like Dave Tomlinson, John Drane and William Storrar who argue that Christianity in the Western world has been so closely wedded to the culture of modernity that 'it is being left behind by the pace of change, and is finding it increasingly difficult to be taken seriously by the new, emerging mainstream Western culture'.¹¹

On the other hand, while a fearful retreat to the ghetto is not an option for faithful Christians, no-one should underestimate the daunting nature of the missionary challenge presented by the Western world today. Frankly, I worry about Christians who treat post-modern culture on very easy terms as though it were a neutral context likely to prove immediately hospitable to the message of Christ. On the contrary, the West increasingly takes on the appearance of a vast cultural swamp which threatens those who wander into it without due regard to its dangers with suffocation and death. The Christian mission has never been a merely human enterprise and those who have struggled to bring Christ into the heart of another culture know well the pain and the perils of this task. Those Christians who rightly take the need to relate the Gospel to the changing culture of the modern West seriously, must also pay attention to the history of mission if they are to avoid being sucked into the bog of a materialist and relativistic worldview. Perhaps it must also be said that, assuming a re-evangelisation of Europe is possible, this cannot be achieved by an evangelistic quick fix employing new technologies; rather it is likely to be a work of generations, perhaps even centuries.

¹¹ The quotation is from John Drane, *Faith In A Changing Culture* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1997), 44. The reference to Dave Tomlinson relates to his controversial proposals in *The Post-Evangelical* (London: SPCK, 1995). The issue is also discussed in detail in David Hillborn's *Picking Up The Pieces: Can Evangelicalism Adapt to Contemporary Culture?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997).

Lessons from History

Surveying the long history of the Christian movement, Andrew Walls observes that it reveals that local and regional churches can wane as well as rise: 'Areas where Paul and Peter and John saw mighty encouragement are now Christian deserts. The Christian heartlands of one age can disappear within another'.¹² The church in Jerusalem provided the first launching pad for cross-cultural mission, yet it was quickly eclipsed by a new centre of dynamic spiritual life and, retreating to a mono-cultural expression of the faith, it rapidly became marginal to the purposes of the Holy Spirit. Or consider the case of North Africa, a region once home to some of the most significant theologians in the history of Christianity is today identified as being at the centre of the so-called 10/40 window, the least evangelised part of the globe.

Thus, history warns us that no particular local tradition of Christianity is guaranteed survival. The same Christ who declared that the gates of hell cannot prevail against his universal church, warned local churches in Asia Minor that he would remove their candlesticks and terminate their existence if they ignored his call to repentance. The conclusion is unavoidable: if Christianity in the West loses contact with the gospel and becomes blind to its captivity within a secular culture then it will be found to be suffering a sickness unto death. In fact, the perplexity experienced by many European Christians today is related to the struggle to come to terms with the fact that the real centres of Christian life and growth are now located in the non-Western world. Long established habits of thought and practice based on the assumption that the churches of the West occupy centre-stage in the purposes of God must be abandoned in the light of this new reality. We now find ourselves standing in the wings, witnessing others take the lead in God's still unfolding drama of redemption. Believers in the Southern Hemisphere are well aware of this change and often enquire whether we really understand its significance. For example, the Chinese theologian Choan-Seng Song has asked a series of questions of us: 'What will the future of Christianity be in the West? How will believers in Europe 'recapture the power of the gospel'? And how will they relate to Christians in the Third World who will surpass them in numerical strength?'¹³

Biblical and theological principles

It would not be an exaggeration to say that a fundamental concern of the great prophets of Israel was to challenge the complacency and pride which resulted from a distorted understanding of divine election and to warn the chosen people that they, no less than the surrounding nations, would experience God's judgement if they

¹² Andrew Walls, 'Christian Expansion and the Condition of Western Culture' in *Changing The World* (Bromley, Kent: MARC Europe, n.d.), 14. This is a quite brilliant discussion of this subject.

¹³ Choan Seng-Song, *The Compassionate God* (London: SCM Press, 1982), 7.

continued to violate the conditions of the covenant. Consider, for example, the bombshell dropped in Jerusalem by Isaiah at the start of his prophecy. He addresses the self-confident citizens of a place regarded as holy and indestructible as 'you people of Gomorrah' and declares that God could not bear their 'evil assemblies' since they concealed godless lives and hard hearts beneath a cloak of religious respectability. (Is. 1:10-17). Much later, when the judgement has fallen, Ezekiel has to confront the insane optimism of people who still live with the illusion that the troubles are temporary and will soon be over. To the exiles who refused to accept reality and tried to comfort each other with the assurance that everything would quickly return to normal, Ezekiel is told to say simply: 'The end has come! The end has come!' (Ezek. 7:1).

The same kind of language is found on the lips of Jesus. Standing in the prophetic tradition he cuts through the façade of religious pretence and warns his hearers that neither centuries of tradition, nor strict adherence to the external duties of religion, can provide protection against the Living God who demands of those who profess to know him love and obedience. Nor are such warnings directed only to the religious establishment. Jesus tells his most intimate circle of followers that whenever a religious tradition becomes lifeless and powerless then, however hallowed and loved it might be, the end is near. 'If the salt loses its saltiness ... it is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men' (Matt. 5:13). At the end of the New Testament, after Calvary and Pentecost, the glorified Christ utters exactly the same warnings to Christian congregations beginning to settle down in the world and making their peace with the dominant culture of Rome. The church at Ephesus, for example, brought to birth a generation earlier in what might be called the fires of revival, is called to repentance and told that it faces a terminus: 'If you do not repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place' (Rev. 2:5).

There is one passage in the New Testament which, it seems to me, speaks to Western Christianity today with peculiar power and relevance. In the letter to the Romans, Paul wrestles with the mystery of the purposes of God in human history and, in particular, the problem of the relationship between fallen Israel and the Gentile church. The language used suggests that Paul realises, even at this early stage in Christian history, that age-old tendencies toward religious pride and an unlovely arrogance toward other people were surfacing among non-Jewish believers. In a text that has received less attention than should have been the case, Paul says to the Gentile church: 'Do not be arrogant, but be afraid ... Consider the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, *provided that you continue in his kindness* (Rom. 11:17-24).

All Change Here!

Where then does this leave us? Are we at a junction or a terminus? Is Christianity in the Western world beyond hope, beyond genuine renewal? Viewed from certain angles the crisis we face seems to be

of such huge proportions that none of the remedies offered in the past promise a solution. Michael Riddell, speaking about New Zealand, says, 'I have lost count of the number of revivalist movements which have swept through my homeland promising a massive influx to the church in their wake. A year after they have faded, the plight of the Christian community seems largely unchanged, apart from a few more who have grown cynical through the abuse of their goodwill, energy and money'.¹⁴

However, the Christian faith bears a message of hope and the God worshipped through Jesus is astonishingly patient, kind and gracious. Jonah had a second chance to respond to this missionary God by recognising the radically new thing that Yahweh was about to do beyond the confines of the elect; Peter had three opportunities to withdraw his protest note against the disturbance caused to his religious world by the missionary priorities of the risen Christ. Moreover, the biblical texts mentioned earlier suggest that in the mercy of God, endings are followed by new beginnings. Beyond the agonies of loss and exile, Israel hears the word of the Lord which says 'Forget the former things ... See I am doing a new thing' (Isaiah: 43:18-19). At the point at which the people of God finally accepted that there was no way back to things as they had been, they were able to receive the divine revelation of something radically new. Is this perhaps the situation in which we find ourselves today? The long era of Western Christendom is over and we live amid the remnants of that period, trying to make sense of our situation and confused and disoriented by the complexity of the changes occurring both in society and in the church. Yet even as we grieve over the fragmented and weakened condition of the churches, can we begin to catch the indications that God is inviting us to participate in something new?

In 1978 Malcolm Muggeridge delivered two lectures at the University of Waterloo in Canada under the title 'The End of Christendom ... But Not of Christ'. The lectures were full of the wit and wisdom that made Muggeridge such a superb communicator and his concluding statement is worth quoting:

*... it is precisely when every earthly hope has been explored and found wanting ... when every recourse this world offers, moral as well as material, has been explored to no effect, when in the shivering cold the last faggot has been thrown on the fire and in the gathering darkness every glimmer of light has finally flickered out, it's then that Christ's hand reaches out sure and firm ... So, in finding in everything only deception and nothingness, the soul is constrained to have recourse to God himself and to rest content with him.*¹⁵

These words offer hope to individuals floundering in a collapsing culture, but what if we replace Muggeridge's reference to the individual soul and apply his analysis instead to the church?

¹⁴ Riddell, *Threshold of the Future*, 14.

¹⁵ Malcolm Muggeridge, *The End of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 56.

Might it not be that the present stage of transition and deep uncertainty concerning Western Christianity provides a providential opportunity for believers to rediscover Christ and the gospel and, in the light of this, to find quite new ways of being the church today? There is a growing body of opinion across all denominational boundaries that the present crisis does indeed offer an unprecedented opportunity to rediscover the true nature of the Christian church and to return to first principles. Might we go even further and suggest that with the collapse of what was regarded as 'Christian civilisation' we may also recover *what it actually means to be Christian*? Jacques Ellul once said that 'Christendom astutely abolished Christianity by making us all Christians' and he went on to claim that in such a culture 'there is not the slightest idea what Christianity is'.¹⁶ The concern to distinguish between 'real' Christianity and its counterfeits in various types of culture-religion has been a central feature of the Evangelical movement, which suggests that this tradition has an important role to play if indeed we are at the edge of a situation in which Western Christianity can recover an apostolic vision of the calling of the people of God in this world.

A Few Modest Proposals for the Renewal of Christianity in the West

Even allowing for the use of the word 'modest' in the heading of this final section of this article, it might seem incredibly arrogant for me to propose some of the steps which might lead toward Christian renewal in the modern West. Let me make it clear that I claim no prophetic insight. Indeed, I struggle constantly to understand the times within which we are called to live and to discover Christian responses that are both faithful and contextually relevant. I confess that this age has more and more seemed to me to be a time when God has withdrawn his presence – which is of course precisely the situation sought and desired by many of the people who shaped Western culture. At such a time as this it may be that the language of the Old Testament psalms of lament can enable us to express and process our feelings of confusion and loss. For example, Psalm 74 is an anguished cry to God at a point at which he appeared inactive and remote – in contemporary language, it was as though God had died so far as his influence at the social and cultural level was concerned. Thus the psalmist cries: 'We are given no miraculous signs; no prophets are left, *and none of us knows how long this will be*' (Ps. 74:9). This sense of aloneness, confusion and of uncertainty as to when the tide might turn again seems to parallel our experience perfectly and (if the analogy is valid) it means that the task of Christian reconstruction cannot be a merely intellectual or academic project; theology in the twenty-first century will need to be done not only in the study or the pulpit, but on our knees with the cry 'Lord, How Long?' on our lips.

¹⁶ Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 36.

However, what does strike me as significant is the fact that more and more voices are heard today outside the church expressing their own laments at the condition of the culture of the West. For example, Michael Ignatieff wrote a preface for the programme for the 1999 series of BBC Promenade Concerts at which some of the greatest works in the classical tradition were performed – among them Beethoven's Choral Symphony and Mahler's 'Resurrection' Symphony. Ignatieff noted that these works are expressions of the faith of their composers in what he called the modern myth of the Ascent of Man – the belief in human progress as the powers of reason were brought to bear 'against the forces of ignorance and the cruelty of fate'. And yet, Ignatieff confessed, 'we are no longer certain that we can believe such stories'. The barbarism around us seems to make nonsense of the claim that our species is marching along a path toward civilisation, with the result that 'it is easy to feel that (in hearing these works) we are listening to the music of our lost hopes and illusions, reaching us like the last light from extinguished stars'.¹⁷

I have mentioned the Psalms of Lament as speaking to us with peculiar power; another passage that appears to have an extraordinary resonance in this context is the parable of the Prodigal Son. We have often read this story in terms of personal lostness, repentance, and reconciliation, but what if it is read in relation to our culture? Is it not the case that our collective experience of life in a far country, with as much distance between the hated father and us as possible, is mirrored here? And might it be that we are approaching a point at which the prodigal 'comes to himself' and begins to devise strategies of return? In 1994 a conference took place on the Island of Capri at which some of Europe's leading philosophers met to discuss the subject of religion. Their conclusions were published in a book edited by Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo. According to Vattimo, the 'the dissolution of the great systems that accompanied the development of science, technology and modern social organisation' – in other words, *the end of modernity* – has created a situation in which philosophy must once again give serious and prolonged attention to the subject of religion. European societies, he says, are faced with a situation in which there is a widespread fear 'of losing the meaning of existence, of that true and profound boredom which seems inevitably to accompany consumerism'. Using language that seems to echo the parable of the Prodigal Son, Vattimo says that at this precise point in history something we thought 'irrevocably forgotten is made present again, ... the repressed returns' and ... in the current resurgence of religion we seem to hear 'a voice that we are sure we have heard before'.¹⁸ Is this the prodigal beginning to 'come to himself'?

I suggest that Christians need to respond to this situation in three ways. First, *we must understand our place in history*. Just as secular

¹⁷ Michael Ignatieff, 'The Ascent of Man' *BBC Proms Programme* (London: BBC Publications, 1999), 8.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (eds), *Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 80.

thinkers are recognising that the myths that have provided the foundation for the project of the Enlightenment are losing their credibility in the light of bitter historical experience, so Christians must come to terms with the end of the era in which their faith and practice was shaped by its long assimilation with Western culture. The point has been well made by the Canadian theologian, Douglas John Hall,

... the Christian movement can have very significant future – a responsible future that will be both faithful to the original vision of this movement and of immense service to our beleaguered world. But to have that future, we Christians must stop trying to have the kind of future that nearly sixteen centuries of official Christianity in the Western world has conditioned us to covet.¹⁹

Recently it has been suggested that the present experience of Christians in the West is similar to that of people in traditional societies in Africa when passing through rites of initiation which enable them to move from one status to another. The anthropologist Victor Turner used the word *liminality* to describe this experience. A young boy, for instance, separated from his mother and isolated in a camp outside the village where he will be prepared for entering manhood, finds himself in a liminal stage in which the old identity has been lost and the new one is not yet conferred. This is a confusing and frightening experience and the first instinct is to return to the familiar status, to go back home and regain the comforting relationship with his mother! And yet this liminal stage is a necessary precondition for growth, it is the passage through which boys become men and discover a new status with fresh responsibilities and new opportunities in life. Just so, the churches of the West seem to be in a liminal state; the old is dying and must be left behind, but it remains entirely unclear from our perspective just what we shall become. Driven to the margins of our culture, reduced in status and dignity, our instincts, like the initiate in the African village, is to cling to the old and the familiar and to maintain structures and patterns of life that have been established for centuries. But, as Alan Roxburgh points out, however uncomfortable this liminal stage may be, it contains the potential for transformation: 'The decisions that are made in this phase shape the future of the group' and for the churches, liminality brings the possibility of rediscovering what it truly means to be the pilgrim people of God.²⁰

The second response I suggest we must make relates to the evolving of *new models of the missionary church*. I once arrived to preach at

¹⁹ Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* (Leominster: Gracewing Publications, 1997), ix.

²⁰ See Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 33. Victor Turner's discussion of the concept of the 'liminal' is in his *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure* (New York: Aldine DeGruyter, 1969).

a church and noticed a rusting metal sign attached to the external wall which declared 'All sittings free in this church'. It was of course a historical relic from the Victorian era and I suppose that few people passing by paid it much attention. What was far more serious however, was the discovery that what went on inside the building had, like the notice outside, changed little in a hundred years. Just across the road was a massive leisure complex with ice rink, swimming pool and the usual features of the postmodern entertainment industry, identified in blazing neon signs as 'The Time Capsule'. I could not help feeling that I too had entered a time capsule, only here the journey was one that took us backwards to a sub-cultural world beyond the comprehension of the young people seeking recreation across the road.

The maintenance of long-established church structures and patterns of worship is sometimes justified by an appeal to the need to be faithful. However, faithfulness that is not accompanied by a willingness to take ground-breaking initiatives to ensure the transmission of the message of Christ to ever new hearers is in fact a path to extinction. We are *not* faithful if we ignore Christ's summons to mission and a retreat to the apparent security of a closed community repeats the failure in mission that has characterised the people of God with monotonous regularity from at least the time of Jonah onwards. Tragically, many churches are dying even as their members assure each other of their faithfulness.

The search for new models of church which are indeed faithful to the fundamental principles of the New Testament while relating in dynamic and creative ways to context of Western societies in the twenty-first century is a task that must be pursued with boldness and courage.²¹

Finally, it must be said that our situation may provide a unique opportunity to *rediscover the fullness of the gospel*. Such a claim should neither surprise nor alarm us since it is evident that our knowledge of Christ is always partial and incomplete. The New Testament speaks frequently of growing and developing in the knowledge of Christ and Paul confesses that whatever we presently see is merely a 'poor reflection' of the ultimate reality which lies beyond human grasp in this world. A knowledge of church history confirms all too clearly the limited and partial nature of our human perceptions of the truth of Christ and the gospel. How was it, for

²¹ The books by Roxburgh and Hall cited above are published in a series entitled 'Christian Mission and Modern Culture' edited by Alan Neely, Wayne Pipkin and Wilbert Shenk. These volumes break new ground and the following titles from the series can be warmly recommended: Gordon Scoville, *Into The Vacuum: Being The Church in an Age of Barbarism*; Kenneth Cragg, *The Secular Experience of God* and Jane Collier and Rafael Esteban, *From Complicity To Encounter: The Church and the Culture of Economism*. The series is published in the USA by Trinity Press International and some volumes have appeared in Britain published by Gracewing Publications of Leominster. Another, rather different approach is Meic Pearse and Chris Matthews, *We Must Stop Meeting Like This* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1999).

example, that William Carey's brother ministers failed to recognise the missionary calling of the church and insisted that the Great Commission had been fulfilled by the apostles? The position they defended now seems absurd to us, yet the illustration prompts the question as to *where our biblical blind spots may be?* Can we be so sure that the traditions we have inherited have expressed the gospel in its fullness, or might it be that they provided a grid of interpretation that has actually prevented us from seeing something crucial to the full expression of the gospel story?²²

Perhaps then this liminal stage through which the churches of the West are passing offers us an opportunity for a theological and spiritual renewal beyond our ability to visualise at present. If so, we shall certainly need to listen to sisters and brothers from the southern hemisphere who already offer us valuable critical perspectives precisely because they speak from a vantage point outside the culture of the West.²³ Indeed, I suggest that this is one of our key resources today and that, whatever the problems of our times, we have an unprecedented opportunity to grasp the something more of the dimensions of the unfathomable love of Christ 'together with all the saints' (Eph. 3:18-19).

²² An example of the kind of questioning I have in mind is provided by Richard Heppie, 'The Gospel, Sanctification and Mission' in *Foundations* 42, Spring 1999, p.3-10.

²³ The voices of sisters and brothers from the non-Western world are becoming increasingly clear and challenging. Consider, for example, two witnesses from the island of Sri Lanka: Vinoth Ramachandra's *Gods That Fail: Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996) is a searching critique of western idolatry – and of Christian complicity, while Ajith Fernando is equally searching in *An Authentic Servant* (Singapore: OMF International, 1999). It is worth quoting the latter: 'Christians from the affluent countries may be losing their ability to live with inconvenience, stress and, hardship as there is more and more stress on comfort and convenience ... Might the West soon disqualify itself from being a missionary-sending region? I think we are seeing some embarrassing examples'.

Index to Articles

Volumes 1-25

Alexander, D.	<i>The Old Testament view of life after death</i>	11.2
Alsford, S.	<i>Women and the kingdom of God: three recent books</i>	14.1
Armerding, C.	<i>Structural analysis</i>	4.3
Austad, T.	<i>Attitudes towards the state in Western theological thinking</i>	16.1
Bailey, K.	<i>Informal controlled oral tradition and the Synoptic Gospels</i>	20.2
Baker, D.L.	<i>The Jubilee and the Millennium</i>	24.1
Baker, D.	<i>Interpreting texts in the context of the whole Bible</i>	5.2
Baldwin, J.G.	<i>Is there pseudonymity in the Old Testament?</i>	4.1
Ball, D.	<i>Some recent literature on John: a review article</i>	19.1
Barclay, J.M.G.	<i>Paul and the law: observations on some recent debates</i>	12.1
Bartholomew, C.	<i>Post/Late? Modernity as the Context for Christian Scholarship Today</i>	22.2
Bartholomew, C.	<i>Quoeth in the Canon?! Current Trends in the Interpretation of Ecclesiastes</i>	24.3
Bauckham, R.	<i>The Relatives of Jesus</i>	21.2
Bauckham, R.J.	<i>'Only the suffering God can help': Divine passibility in modern theology</i>	9.3
Bauckham, R.J.	<i>The rise of apocalyptic</i>	3.2
Bauckham, R.J.	<i>Universalism – A historical survey</i>	4.1
Bauckham, R.J.	<i>Weakness – Paul's and ours</i>	7.3
Beale, G.K.	<i>Did Jesus and his followers preach the right doctrine from the wrong texts?</i>	14.3
Beckwith, R.T.	<i>Intertestamental Judaism, its literature and its significance</i>	15.3
Beckwith, R.T.	<i>The ecumenical quest for agreement in faith</i>	10.1
Bediako, K.	<i>Understanding African Theology in the 20th century</i>	20.1
Bediako, K.	<i>The Willowbank Consultation, January 1978 – A personal reflection.</i>	5.2
Berneburg, E.	<i>Mission theology after San Antonio and Manila</i>	16.2
Biggs, H.	<i>The Q Debate since 1955</i>	6.2
Bimson, J.J.	<i>The origins of Israel in Canaan: an examination of recent theories</i>	15.1

Bishop, S.	<i>Green theology and deep ecology: New Age or new creation?</i>	16.3
Bishop, S.	<i>Introductory resources for the interaction of science and Christianity</i>	19.2
Bishop, S.	<i>Science and faith: boa constrictors and warthogs?</i>	19.1
Bloesch, D.	<i>The sword of the Spirit: the meaning of inspiration</i>	5.3
Blomberg, C.L.	<i>Eschatology and the Church: Some New Testament Perspectives</i>	23.3
Blomberg, C.L.	<i>New Testament genre criticism for the 1990s</i>	15.2
Blomberg, C.L.	<i>Synoptic studies: some recent methodological developments and debates</i>	12.2
Blomberg, C.L. and Wilson, R.W.	<i>The image of God in humanity: a biblical psychological perspective</i>	18.3
Blum, E.A.	<i>Shall you not surely die?</i>	4.2
Bosch, D. and Sugden, C.	<i>From partnership to marriage: Consultation on the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility (CRESR)</i>	8.2
Bray, G.L.	<i>Rescuing Theology from the Theologians</i>	24.2
Bray, G.L.	<i>Can we dispense with the Chalcedon?</i>	3.2
Bray, G.L.	<i>Recent trends in Christology</i>	12.2
Bromiley, G.W.	<i>Evangelicals and theological creativity</i>	5.1
Cameron, N.M. de S.	<i>Dean Burgon and the Bible: an eminent Victorian and the problem of inspiration</i>	7.2
Cameron, N.M. de S.	<i>Talking points: Genesis and Evolution</i>	7.3
Cameron, N.M. de S.	<i>Talking points: Science versus religion</i>	8.1
Carroll, R.M.D.	<i>Context, Bible and ethics: a Latin American perspective</i>	19.3
Carson, D.A.	<i>Hermeneutics: a brief assessment of some recent trends</i>	5.2
Carson, D.A.	<i>Recent literature on the fourth gospel: some reflections</i>	9.1
Carson, D.A.	<i>Selected recent studies of the fourth gospel</i>	14.2
Cartledge, M.	<i>Charismatic prophecy and New Testament prophecy</i>	17.1
Chapman, C.J.	<i>Thinking biblically about Islam</i>	3.3
Cheesman, G.	<i>Dynamic Christology</i>	8.1
Chilton, B.D.	<i>An evangelical and critical approach to the sayings of Jesus</i>	3.3
Clemens, D.M.	<i>The law of sin and death: Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1-3</i>	19.3
Cole, G.	<i>The Evangelical and Scholarship - Personal Reflections</i>	24.1
Cook, R.R.	<i>Keith Ward: Taking leave of God incarnate - a review article</i>	17.2
Cook, R.R.	<i>Postmodernism, pluralism and John Hick</i>	19.1
Cook, R.R.	<i>The psychology of incarnation</i>	5.1

Copeland, P.E.	<i>A guide to the study of the prophets</i>	10.1
Corduan, W.	<i>Humility and commitment: an approach to modern hermeneutics</i>	11.3
Corrie, J.	<i>The gospel as public truth: a conference report</i>	18.2
Cross, A.R.	<i>Historical Methodology and New Testament Study</i>	22.3
Davids, P.	<i>The poor man's gospel</i>	1.2
Davies, D.E.	<i>Dr D. Martin Lloyd-Jones: An Introduction</i>	25.1
Davis, S.T.	<i>God the mad scientist: process theology on God and evil</i>	5.1
Deboys, D., Kitchen, K.A. and Hess, R.S.	<i>Writing the history of ancient Israel: a review article</i>	15.1
Demarest, B.A.	<i>The contemporary relevance of Christendom's creeds</i>	7.2
Dembski, W.	<i>The fallacy of contextualism</i>	20.3
Denton, D.R.	<i>The biblical basis of hope</i>	5.3
Donner, T. S.	<i>Some thoughts on the history of New Testament canon</i>	7.3
Downes, M.	<i>Review Article: Select works of Dr D. Martin Lloyd-Jones</i>	25.1
Drane, J.W.	<i>Methods and Perspectives in Understanding the New Age</i>	23.2
Duriez, C.	<i>The Theology of Fantasy in Lewis and Tolkien</i>	23.2
Dyrness, W.	<i>Mercy triumphs over justice: James 2:13 and the theology of faith and works</i>	6.3
Eden, M.	<i>Comment on 'Vertigo' or 'Imago'? Nations in the Divine Economy</i>	21.3
Elgvin, T.	<i>The Messiah who was Cursed on the Tree</i>	22.3
Ellingworth, P.	<i>Hebrews and the anticipation of completion</i>	14.1
Engelsviken, T.	<i>Ecumenical or evangelical - is there any difference?</i>	16.2
Escobar, S.	<i>Beyond liberation theology: a review article</i>	19.3
Fairbairn, D.	<i>Salvation as Theosis: The Teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy</i>	23.3
Field, D.	<i>Talking points: The divorce debate - where are we now?</i>	8.3
France, R.T.	<i>Development in New Testament Christology</i>	18.1
France, R.T.	<i>Barnabas - Son of encouragement</i>	4.1
France, R.T.	<i>Inerrancy and New Testament exegesis</i>	1.1
France, R.T.	<i>Matthew's gospel in recent study</i>	14.2
Fung, R.Y.K.	<i>The forensic character of justification</i>	3.1
Fung, R.Y.K.	<i>The status of justification by faith in Paul's thought: a brief survey of a modern debate</i>	6.3

Gasque, W.W.	<i>Recent commentaries on the Acts of the Apostles</i>	14.1
Geldard, M.	<i>Why study philosophy of religion?</i>	9.3
Geisler, N.L. and Watkins, W.D.	<i>Process theology: a survey and an appraisal</i>	12.1
Gempf, C.	<i>Pseudonymity and the New Testament</i>	17.2
Gill, D.W.	<i>Jacques Ellul: the prophet as theologian</i>	7.1
Gillett, D.	<i>Shalom: content for a slogan</i>	1.3
Gladwin, J.W.	<i>Work, faith and freedom</i>	12.3
Glaser, I.	<i>The concept of relationship as a key to the comparative understanding of Christianity and Islam</i>	11.2
Glaser, I.	<i>Towards a mutual understanding of Christian and Islamic concepts of revelation</i>	7.3
Glasser, A.F.	<i>Messianic Jews – What they represent</i>	16.2
Goldingay, J.E.	<i>Approaching Daniel: (one of) three studies</i>	2.2
Goldingay, J.E.	<i>The Old Testament and Christian faith: Jesus and the Old Testament in Matthew 1-5 – Part 1</i>	8.1
Goldingay, J.E.	<i>The Old Testament and Christian faith: Jesus and the Old Testament in Matthew 1-5 – Part 2</i>	8.2
Goldingay, J.E.	<i>How far do readers make sense? Interpreting biblical narrative</i>	18.2
Goldsmith, M.	<i>Contextualization of theology</i>	9.1
Gordon, R.P.	<i>Preaching from the Patriarchs: background to the exposition of Genesis 15</i>	1.1
Gray, T.	<i>God does not Play Dice</i>	24.2
Gray, T.	<i>Destroyed For Ever: An Examination of the Debates Concerning Annihilation and Conditional Immortality</i>	21.2
Gray, T.	<i>Systematic Series – A Review Article</i>	25.2
Grogan, G.	<i>New Testament Christology – or New Testament Christologies</i>	25.1
Groothuis, D.	<i>The Postmodernist Challenge to Theology</i>	25.1
Gurney, R.J.M.	<i>Approaching Daniel: (one of) three studies</i>	2.2
Harris, M.J.	<i>Resurrection and immortality: eight theses</i>	1.2
Harris, M.J.	<i>The New Testament view of life after death</i>	11.2
Hart, D.G.	<i>J. Gresham Machen, Inerrancy, and Creedless Christianity</i>	25.3
Hauge, A.	<i>Feminist theology as critique and renewal theology</i>	17.3
Helm, P.	<i>Arguing about origins</i>	4.1
Helm, P.	<i>Asking God</i>	12.1
Helm, P.	<i>A taproot of radicalism</i>	11.1
Hemer, C.J.	<i>Acts and Galatians reconsidered</i>	2.3
Hempton, D.	<i>Evangelical revival and society: a historiographical review of Methodism and British society c. 1750–1850</i>	8.3

Heslam, P.S.	<i>Architects of Evangelical Thought: Abraham Kuypers and Benjamin Warfield</i>	24.2
Hess, R.S.	<i>New horizons in hermeneutics: a review article</i>	18.2
Hess, R.S.	<i>The roles of the woman and the man in Genesis 3</i>	18.3
Hess, R.S.	<i>Recent studies in Old Testament history: a review article</i>	19.2
Hess, R.S.	<i>Studies in the Book of Joshua</i>	20.3
Hess, R.S., Deboys, D. and Kitchen, K.A.	<i>Writing the history of ancient Israel: a review article</i>	15.1
Hill, P.	<i>Comment on Language in God's Economy: A Welsh and International Perspective</i>	21.3
Hingley, C.J.H.	<i>Evangelicals and spirituality</i>	15.3
Holmes, M.W.	<i>The 'Majority text debate': new form of an old issue</i>	8.2
Hughes, D.A.	<i>Christianity and other religions: a review of some recent discussion</i>	9.2
Hughes, D.A.	<i>Two Books on Mission: Review Article</i>	23.3
Hunt, S.	<i>Deliverance: The Evolution of a Doctrine</i>	21.1
Hurtado, L.W.	<i>The Gospel of Mark in recent study</i>	14.2
Hurtado, L.W.	<i>The origins of the worship of Christ</i>	19.2
Jackson, R.	<i>Prosperity theology and the faith movement</i>	15.1
Jensen, E.	<i>The value of women and world view</i>	17.3
Johnston, P.S.	<i>Review article: New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>	24.3
Jones, R.M.	<i>Language in God's Economy: A Welsh and International Perspective</i>	21.3
Kanagaraj, J.J.	<i>The Poor in the Gospels and the Good News Proclaimed to Them</i>	23.1
Kay, W.K., and Barnes, L.P.	<i>Developments in Religious Education in England and Wales: Part 1</i>	25.1
Kay, W.K., and Barnes, L.P.	<i>Developments in Religious Education in England and Wales: Part 2</i>	25.3
Kearsley, R.	<i>Curriculum for credo: the content and aim of the church's teaching task</i>	10.1
Kearsley, R.	<i>Faith and philosophy in the early church</i>	15.3
Keith, G.	<i>Formulation of Creeds in the Early Church</i>	24.1
Kendall, R.T.	<i>Preaching in worship</i>	4.3
Kibble, D.G.	<i>The kingdom of God and Christian politics</i>	7.1
Kidner, D.	<i>The way home: an exposition of Hosea 14</i>	1.2
Kirk, J.A.	<i>Race, class, caste and the Bible</i>	10.2
Kirk, J.A.	<i>The meaning of man in the debate between Christianity and Marxism</i>	1.2
Kirk, J.A.	<i>The meaning of man in the debate between Christianity and Marxism Part 2</i>	1.3

Kitchen, K.A., Deboys, D. and Hess, R.S.	<i>Writing the history of ancient Israel: a review article</i>	15.1
Kuzmic, P.	<i>Christian mission in Europe</i>	18.1
Kvalbein, H.	<i>Go therefore and make disciples ...</i>	13.2
Kvalbein, H.	<i>Jesus and the poor: two texts and a tentative conclusion</i>	12.3
Lam, W.	<i>Tensions in Calvin's idea of predestination</i>	6.1
Lamb, C.	<i>Dialectical ministry: Christian life and mission in the multi-faith situation</i>	9.2
Lane, A.N.S.	<i>Conversion: a comparison of Calvin and Spener</i>	13.1
Lane, A.N.S.	<i>Recent Calvin literature: A review article</i>	16.2
Letham, R.	<i>The hermeneutics of feminism</i>	17.3
Lewis, P.	<i>Caste, mission and church growth</i>	10.2
Lilley, J.P.U.	<i>The Judgement of God: The Problem of the Canaanites</i>	22.2
Lim, D.S.	<i>Trends of theology in Asia</i>	19.3
Lincoln, A.T.	<i>God's lethal weapon</i>	3.1
Livingstone, D.N.	<i>Evolution and Eschatology</i>	22.1
Longenecker, R.N.	<i>On reading a New Testament letter - devotionally, homiletically, academically</i>	20.1
Longenecker, R.N.	<i>'Who is the prophet talking about anyway?' Some reflections on the New Testament's use of the Old</i>	13.1
Lucas, E.C.	<i>Covenant, treaty, and prophecy</i>	8.1
Lucas, E.C.	<i>Some scientific issues related to the understanding of Genesis 1-3</i>	12.2
Lucas, E.C.	<i>God, GUTs and gurus: the new physics and New Age ideology</i>	16.3
Lyon, D.	<i>Secularization: the fate of faith in modern society</i>	10.1
Macleod, D.	<i>The Christology of Jürgen Moltmann</i>	24.2
Macleod, D.	<i>The Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg</i>	25.2
Maier, G.	<i>Three commentaries on Matthew: a review</i>	12.3
Mangalwadi, V.	<i>Five ways to salvation in contemporary guruism</i>	2.3
Marshall, I.H.	<i>An evangelical approach to 'Theological Criticism'</i>	13.3
Marshall, I.H.	<i>How do we interpret the Bible today?</i>	5.2
Marshall, I.H.	<i>Orthodoxy and heresy in earlier Christianity</i>	2.1
Marshall, I.H.	<i>Recent Study of the Pastoral Epistles</i>	23.1
Marshall, I.H.	<i>The hope of a new age, the kingdom of God in the New Testament</i>	11.1
Marshall, I.H.	<i>The present state of Lucan studies</i>	14.2
Mather, A.	<i>Talking points: the charismatic movement</i>	9.3
Mauw, R.J.	<i>Explaining social reality: some Christian reflections</i>	6.2
McConville, J.G.	<i>The Old Testament Books in Modern Scholarship</i>	22.3
McConville, G.	<i>Jeremiah: prophet and book</i>	17.1

McConville, G.	<i>The Pentateuch today</i>	8.3
McFall, L.	<i>Has the chronology of the Hebrew kings finally been settled?</i>	17.1
McGrath, A.	<i>Three Evangelical Voices</i>	22.3
McGrath, A.	<i>Justification: the new ecumenical debate</i>	13.2
Millard, A.R.	<i>Approaching the Old Testament</i>	2.2
Miyahira, N.	<i>A Japanese Perspective on the Trinity</i>	22.2
Moberly, R.W.L.	<i>Sternberg on biblical narrative - a review article</i>	16.3
Moberly, R.W.L.	<i>Story in the Old Testament</i>	11.3
Morris, L.	<i>The emergence of the doctrine of the incarnation</i>	8.1
Moucarry, G.C.	<i>The alien according to the Torah</i>	14.1
Mynors, J.	<i>Guide to bibliographical sources</i>	4.1
	<i>Nairobi Baptist Church Jesus Christ frees</i>	1.3
Nicholls, B.J.	<i>Nairobi 1975: a crisis of faith for the WCC</i>	1.3
Nicholls, B.J.	<i>The exclusiveness and inclusiveness of the gospel</i>	4.2
Noble T.A.	<i>Scripture and Experience</i>	23.1
Osborne, G.R.	<i>The 'rapture question'</i>	2.3
Packer, J.	<i>Hermeneutics and biblical authority</i>	1.1
Packer, J.	<i>The vital question</i>	4.3
Packer, J.I.	<i>Why We Need the Puritans</i>	21.2
Padilla, C.R.	<i>God's Word and man's myths</i>	3.1
Padilla, C.R.	<i>The interpreted word: reflections on contextual hermeneutics</i>	7.1
Parsons, M.C.	<i>Appendices in the New Testament</i>	17.2
Pinnock, C.H.	<i>Building the bridge from academic theology to Christian mission</i>	9.3
Pinnock, C.H.	<i>Karl Barth and Christian apologetics</i>	2.3
Porter, S.E.	<i>Understanding Pauline Studies: Part 1</i>	22.1
Porter, S.E.	<i>Understanding Pauline Studies: Part 2</i>	22.2
Powell, C.	<i>A stalemate of genders? Some hermeneutical reflections</i>	17.3
Price, R.M.	<i>Niebuhr's doctrine of revelation in contemporary theology</i>	7.1
Reid, W.S.	<i>John Calvin: the father of capitalism?</i>	8.2
Riggans, W.	<i>The Jewish reclamation of Jesus and its implications for Jewish-Christian relations</i>	18.1
Riggans, W.	<i>Jesus and the Scriptures: Two short notes</i>	16.2
Ro, B.R.	<i>Theology trends in Asia</i>	13.2
Riggans, W.	<i>The Parousia: Getting our Terms Right</i>	21.1
Rosner, B.S.	<i>The Concept of Idolatry</i>	24.3
Root, J.	<i>Issues for the church in a multi-racial society</i>	10.1

Sandnes, K.O.	<i>The death of Jesus for human sins: the historical basis for a theological concept</i>	20.1
Schnabel, E.	<i>History, theology and the biblical canon: an introduction to basic issues</i>	20.2
Scobie, C.H.H.	<i>New directions in biblical theology</i>	17.2
Scotland, N.A.D.	<i>The Role of Methodism in the Chartist Movement</i>	22.1
Scotland, N.A.D.	<i>Towards an analysis of cult</i>	13.1
Scotland, N.A.D.	<i>The social work of the Clapham Sect: an assessment</i>	18.1
Selfrid, M.A.	<i>The 'New Perspective on Paul' and Its Problems</i>	25.2
Selman, M.J.	<i>Comparative methods and patriarchal narratives</i>	3.1
Sheriffs, D.	<i>Moving on with God: Key motifs in Exodus 13-20</i>	15.2
da Silva, A.B.	<i>The theology of success movement</i>	11.3
Skarsaune, O.	<i>Heresy and the Pastoral Epistles</i>	20.1
Skevington Wood, A.	<i>A bibliographical guide to the study of the Reformation, Part 1</i>	2.2
Skevington Wood, A.	<i>A bibliographical guide to the study of the Reformation, Part 2: Development</i>	3.2
Skevington Wood, A.	<i>The radical reformation reassessed</i>	6.2
Smeeton, D.D.	<i>Hans Küng: architect of radical Catholicism</i>	7.2
Smith, D.	<i>Junction or Terminus? Christinity in the West at the Dawn of the Third Millennium</i>	25.3
Stamoolis, J.	<i>Church and state in South Africa</i>	10.2
Stein, R.H.	<i>Was the tomb really empty?</i>	5.1
Stevens, R.P.	<i>The mystery of male and female: biblical and trinitarian models</i>	17.3
Stevens, R.P.	<i>Poems for people in distress: The Apocalypse of John and the contemplative life</i>	18.2
Stevens, R.P.	<i>Living theologically: toward a theology of Christian practice</i>	20.3
Stone, A.	<i>Three current challenges of the occult</i>	6.3
Storrar, W.	<i>'Vertigo' or 'Imago'? Nations in the Divine Economy</i>	21.3
Stott, J.R.W.	<i>Paul prays for the church</i>	2.1
Stuart, D.	<i>Old Testament prophets' self-understanding of their prophecy</i>	6.1
Sugden, C.	<i>Conferences and the theological process</i>	16.2
Sugden, C. and Bosch, D.	<i>From partnership to marriage: Consultation on the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility (CRESR)</i>	8.2
Summerton, N.	<i>Identity Crisis?: The Nation-state, Nationality, Regionalism, Language and Religion</i>	21.3
Tinker, M.	<i>Purpose in pain? - Teleology and the problem of evil</i>	16.3
Tinker, M.	<i>The priority of Jesus: a look at the place of Jesus' teaching and example in Christian ethics</i>	13.1
Tinker, M.	<i>Truth, myth and incarnation</i>	14.2
Taylor, J.G.	<i>The Bible and Homosexuality</i>	21.1

Tomlin, G.	<i>The Theology of the Cross: Subversive Theology for a Postmodern World?</i>	23.1
Travis, S.H.	<i>The problem of judgment</i>	11.2
Trueman, C.R.	<i>Admiring the Sistine Chapel: Reflection on Carl Henry's God, Revelation and Authority</i>	25.2
Van Seters, A.	<i>God and family: from sociology to covenant theology</i>	5.3
Volf, M.	<i>Doing and interpreting: an examination of the relationship between theory and practice in Latin American liberation theology</i>	8.3
Walton, S.	<i>Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction</i>	21.2
Warfield, B.B.	<i>The Religious Life of Theological Students</i>	24.3
Watkins, W.D. and Geisler, N.L.	<i>Process theology: a survey and an appraisal</i>	12.1
Watts, C.M.	<i>Christian ministry in its theological context</i>	6.3
Webster, J.	<i>Recent work on Barth</i>	7.3
Webster, J.	<i>The identity of the Holy Spirit: a problem in trinitarian theology</i>	9.1
Weeks, N.	<i>The hermeneutical problem of Genesis 1-11</i>	4.1
Wenham, D.	<i>A Historical View of John's Gospel</i>	23.2
Wenham, D.	<i>How Jesus understood the Last Supper: a parable in action</i>	20.2
Wenham, D.	<i>Jesus and the law: an exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20</i>	4.3
Wenham, D.	<i>The Paulinism of Acts again</i>	13.2
Wenham, D.	<i>Spirit and life: some reflections on Johannine theology</i>	6.1
Wenham, D.	<i>The Star of Bethlehem, drawing giraffes, and other good things: a selection of New Testament journal articles 1990-92</i>	19.1
Wenham, G.J.	<i>Approaching Daniel: (one of) three studies</i>	2.2
Wenham, G.J.	<i>The date of Deuteronomy: lynch-pin of Old Testament criticism Part 1</i>	10.3
Wenham, G.J.	<i>The date of Deuteronomy: lynch-pin of Old Testament criticism Part 2</i>	11.1
Wenham, G.J.	<i>Pentateuchal Studies Today</i>	22.1
Wenham, G.J.	<i>Recent Old Testament study, an evangelical assessment</i>	8.2
Wenham, G.J.	<i>The place of biblical criticism in theological study</i>	14.3
White, J.	<i>AIDS, judgment and blessing</i>	15.2
Wilkinson, J.	<i>Five Christian books on AIDS</i>	14.1
Wilkinson, L.	<i>Gaia spirituality: a Christian critique</i>	18.3
Williams, D.T.	<i>Theology in South Africa: The current situation</i>	23.3
Williams, S.N.	<i>Lindsay Brown - An interview</i>	24.1
Williams, S.N.	<i>A Supplementary Word to 'Three Evangelical Voices'</i>	22.3
Williams, S.N.	<i>'That you may believe' An editorial afterword</i>	23.2
Williams, D.T.	<i>The Sabbath, mark of distinction</i>	14.3

Williams, S.N.	<i>Outline for ethics: a response to Oliver O'Donovan</i>	13.3
Wilson, R.W. and Blomberg, C.L.	<i>The image of God in humanity: a biblical-psychological perspective</i>	18.3
Winter, B.	<i>'Seek the welfare of the city': social ethics according to 1 Peter</i>	13.3
Wisloff, C.F.	<i>Recent trends in Roman Catholicism</i>	10.3
Wright, C.	<i>Biblical ethics: a survey of the last decade</i>	18.2
Wright, C.	<i>The Christian and other religions: the biblical evidence</i>	9.2
Wright, C.	<i>The people of God and the state in the Old Testament</i>	16.1
Wright, C.J.H.	<i>Interpreting the Bible Among the World Religions</i>	25.3
Wright, D.F.	<i>Ordination</i>	10.3
Wright, D.F.	<i>Four other gospels: review article</i>	12.2
Wright, D.F.	<i>'Incidentalism' in theology – or a theology for thirty-year olds</i>	11.3
Wright, D.F.	<i>James Barr on 'fundamentalism' – a review article</i>	3.3
Wright, D.F.	<i>Why were the Montanists condemned?</i>	2.1
Wright, N.G.	<i>The Kansas City prophets: an assessment</i>	17.1
Wright, N.G.	<i>Restorationism and the 'house church' movement</i>	16.2
Wright, N.T.	<i>A new Tübingen school? E. Käsemann and his commentary on Romans</i>	7.3
Wright, N.T.	<i>Godliness and good learning: Cranfield's Romans</i>	6.1
Wright, N.T.	<i>The New Testament and the 'state'</i>	16.1
Wright, N.T.	<i>Towards a biblical view of universalism</i>	4.2
Yamauchi, E.M.	<i>Pre-Christian Gnosticism, the New Testament and Nag Hammadi in recent debate</i>	10.1
Yamauchi, E.M.	<i>The reverse order of Ezra/Nehemiah reconsidered</i>	5.3
Review Articles		
Martin, R.P.	<i>Review of theological journals 1975</i>	2.1
Martin, R.P.	<i>Review of theological journals 1976</i>	3.1
	<i>Review of theological journals, 1977</i>	4.1
	<i>Review of theological journals 1978</i>	5.1
	<i>Two review articles</i>	13.2
Guthrie, D.G.	<i>Pseudonymity</i>	
Selman, M.J.	<i>Isaiah</i>	
	<i>Survey of 1979 journals</i>	6.2
Wenham, G.J.	<i>Old Testament</i>	
France, R.T.	<i>New Testament</i>	
Wright, D.F.	<i>Church history</i>	
Pinnock, C.H.	<i>Systematic theology</i>	

	<i>Survey of 1980 journals</i>	7.2
Wenham, G.J.	<i>Old Testament</i>	
France, R.T.	<i>New Testament</i>	
Wright, D.F.	<i>Church history</i>	
Pinnock, C.H.	<i>Systematic theology</i>	
Geisler, N.L.	<i>Apologetics</i>	
	<i>Survey of recent journals</i>	9.3
Wenham, G.J.	<i>Old Testament</i>	
McKnight, S.	<i>New Testament</i>	
Wright, D.F.	<i>Church history</i>	
MacLeod, D.	<i>Dogmatic and systematic theology</i>	
	<i>Survey of recent journals</i>	13.3
Selman, M.	<i>Old Testament</i>	
Wenham, D.	<i>New Testament</i>	
Wright, D.F.	<i>Church history</i>	
	<i>Survey of recent journals</i>	11.3
Selman, M.	<i>Old Testament</i>	
Wenham, D.	<i>New Testament</i>	
MacLeod, D.	<i>Dogmatic and systematic theology</i>	
Wright, D.F.	<i>Church history</i>	
Gladwin, J.	<i>Ethics/social ethics/society</i>	
Hughes, D.A.	<i>Religions</i>	
Davie, M.	<i>A survey of church history articles, 1986–9</i>	15.2
Davie, M.	<i>A survey of church history articles, 1990–92</i>	18.3
Lane, T.	<i>A survey of historical theology articles, 1989–90</i>	17.2
Selman, M.	<i>A survey of OT articles, 1989–1990</i>	16.2
Wenham, D.	<i>Survey of NT articles, 1988 and 1989</i>	15.3
	<i>The Chicago statement on biblical inerrancy</i>	4.3
	<i>Index to volumes 1–10</i>	10.3
	<i>Index to volumes 1–15</i>	15.3
	<i>Index to volumes 1–20</i>	20.3
	<i>Index to volumes 1–25</i>	25.3

Book Reviews

Elisha and the End of Prophetism (JSOTS 286)

Wesley J. Bergen
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999,
200 pp., h/b., £37.50/\$60.00

This is a revised version of the author's dissertation. Its purpose, as set out in chapter one, is to read the Elisha stories as part of the larger narrative Genesis – 2 Kings, and to investigate how they portray Elisha in his prophetic role. According to Bergen, the stories shed a negative light on prophetism in general, granting the prophets only a limited role in the narrative world. Chapter two deals with narratology and the question of author and/or reader-centricity. In his search for methodological guidance, Bergen considers the works of Alter, Sternberg, Miscall, Fewell/Gunn, Culley, Josipovici, Exum and Jobling before settling on Bal, claiming that 'no one else has combined theory and criticism in such a helpful way' (34). The third chapter, consisting of only five pages, considers 'the text' (the reading of which must have priority over assumptions about its production), 'the reader' (Bergen likes his readers 'naively credulous', 39) and 'the reading' (which is understood as the *creation* of a narrative world).

Chapter four, which looks at the Elisha stories proper, comprises roughly three-quarters of the book. Here Bergen seeks to substantiate his claim that the stories portray Elisha (and prophetism in general) in a bad light. Thus, Elisha is presented as a 'wonder worker' whose power is never in doubt but whose miracles are often pointless, since they lack an ethical or

teleological framework. The prophet also does not use his power to accomplish what he had been commissioned to do, i.e. to eradicate Baal worship and to oppose the 'evil kings'. While YHWH is depicted as the source of Elisha's power, their relationship is fraught with ambiguities. The 'sons of the prophets' are cast in an even worse light as a helpless and hopeless bunch, unable to provide for themselves. Bergen concludes by stressing that Elisha does not lead Israel (as did Moses and Samuel), challenge the people to return to YHWH (as did Elijah), or act as conscience to the king (as did Nathan). Instead, Elisha wanders the countryside doing miracles.

While there is some merit in Bergen's negative evaluation of the roles of Elisha and the sons of the prophets, his case is weakened by serious flaws. To start with, numerous grammatical errors and an extremely cumbersome style of writing make this a rather tedious read. More importantly, Bergen's discussion of the hermeneutical and methodological issues is too laconic and largely inadequate, confused and confusing. For instance, in discussing the writers mentioned above, he doesn't really do justice to any one of them.

Although Bergen's reading of the Elisha stories does contain some valuable observations, it too is marred by his resolve to present a consistently negative interpretation of Elisha's role that does not always convince the less suspicious. One example must suffice. Commenting on 2 Kings 2:19–22, Bergen faults Elisha for not dealing adequately with the problem he encounters. While the

inhabitants of Jericho complain about bad water and an unproductive land, Elisha only heals the water. Not accepting Elisha's comment that, by dealing with the water, he has taken care of the whole problem (cf. 2 Kgs. 2:21), Bergen compares Elisha's 'inadequate' response with Agatha Christie's detective Poirot claiming to have solved a murder when he has only caught a thief. Well, try as I might, I cannot see what's wrong with the action Elisha takes.

While there are some things of value in this study, on the whole the Elisha stories deserve a better treatment.

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Ruth and Esther, Feminist Companion to the Bible (2nd Series, vol 3)

Athalaya Brenner (ed.)
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999,
271 pp., £16.95/\$28.50

When I arrived in Britain in 1981 to commence literary study of the Book of Ruth, one NT scholar commented, 'Hmm – hardly of central importance in Biblical Studies!' When I returned to Britain in 1990 to prepare the manuscript for publication nobody was making that sort of comment – by then feminist study was firmly established. Since there are only two Biblical books named after women, Ruth and Esther receive continuing interest from feminist scholars. This is reflected in the rapid appearance of a second Feminist Companion volume – the first on *Ruth* appeared in 1993 and that on *Esther, Judith and Susanna* in 1995. As Brenner observes (13–14), there is no longer a need for feminist critics to justify their discipline and so they feel free to apply the results of biblical criticism to contemporary life situations. Moreover, the scope has broadened considerably as these essays discuss Torah criticism, socio-anthropological questions and so on, not to mention

the impact of general feminist theory and praxis.

The discussion of individual papers must necessarily be cursory. Irmtraud Fischer argues that the book represents an authentic female voice, with Ruth as a 'Feminist' commentary to the Torah. In particular she sees the story as a creative *halakhah* of the laws on the prohibition of Moabites (Deut. 23:4–5) and on the levirate (Deut. 25:5–10). Bonnie Honig considers Ruth as a model émigrée adducing some interesting comparisons from modern studies of the politics of immigration and assimilation. Carole R. Fontaine looks at possible ambiguities in the way medieval Jewish illuminated manuscripts depict the outsider Ruth as a cat, whereas Jewish males are depicted with human heads and women with birds' heads. Ursula Silber reports on a Bible reading of Ruth with a group of rural women in Germany. Offering an important corrective to common assumptions of male dominance because of a focus on the public jural-political domain, Carol Meyers points to the significance of informal female networks in small agricultural communities and considers the role of the neighbouring women in the story of Ruth.

Several 1997 SBL papers offer subversive readings of the relationship between Ruth and Orpah. Laura E. Donaldson considers that Orpah may be a better paradigm for American Indians as she remains faithful to her culture while Musa W. Dube's 'Unpublished Letters of Orpah to Ruth' perform a similar function for African peoples. Judith E. McKinlay applies a hermeneutic of suspicion to Ruth as she considers the story in her own context as a Pakeha (non-Maori) in multicultural Aotearoa New Zealand. Athalaya Brenner offers an interesting comparison between the social place of foreign workers in modern Israel and the position of the immigrant Ruth. This section is rounded out with a response by Roland Boer.

Two papers on mothers and daughters follow. Very few Biblical texts deal with this subject, but Leila Leah Bronner offers a fruitful discussion of such evidence as exists. She notes that no mother has a voice in the stories of rape of Dinah and Tamar. By contrast when a mother (or mother figure) appears with the daughter, as in Ruth or the Song of Songs, then love also appears. Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan compares Black mother-daughter stories with those of the Hebrew Bible. Finally, two papers on the book of Esther by Mieke Bal and Klara Butting complete the collection.

Many women in ministry can be expected to consider some of the questions raised in the Feminist Companions. As a male reviewer, I would say it is particularly important for men who teach and preach the Bible to read and ponder feminist writing, because even today the viewpoint in the pulpit is often far too androcentric.

Murray D. Gow
Kaeo, New Zealand

A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes

Eric S. Christianson
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998,
299 pp., h/b., £49

Michael Fox's work on Ecclesiastes (most recently *A Time to Tear Down and A Time to Build Up*, Eerdmans, 1999) has been very important in getting literary and narrative readings of Ecclesiastes onto the agenda of Old Testament studies. Such approaches offer all sorts of fruitful ways forward. In this very useful book Eric Christianson plunders the resources of narrative theory to probe the meaning of Ecclesiastes, and thereby moves forward the whole discussion of Ecclesiastes as narrative.

The introduction makes the case for applying narrative strategy to

Ecclesiastes, and then Part 1 deals in five chapters with the frame narrator's strategy. Like Fox and Tremper Longman (*The Book of Ecclesiastes*, Eerdmans, 1998), Christianson sees the frame narrator as presenting Qoheleth and his teaching, but also as distancing himself from Qoheleth's views and in particular from his epistemology. There is also an excursus on *hebel* which Christianson translates (with Fox) as 'absurd'.

Part 2 deals in three chapters with the narrative strategy of Qoheleth. Christianson sees the 'Solomonic guise' as more deeply embedded in Ecclesiastes than is usual, and he rightly pursues the literary implications of this. There follows a detailed discussion of Qoheleth and the self and of Qoheleth's quest. A postscript on Qoheleth and the existential legacy of the Holocaust concludes the volume.

Christianson argues that for Qoheleth life is absurd, but that the redemptive moment in Qoheleth is his helping readers to live with joy in this context. Christianson is more sympathetic to Qoheleth than to the frame-narrator, but an exploration of the implied author in Ecclesiastes reminds us that the text invites us to explore the relationship between the frame narrator and Qoheleth.

Personally, I am not sure that 'the absurd' is Qoheleth's conclusion, or that this is the right way to translate *hebel* - cf. Ogden, *Qoheleth* (Sheffield, 1987) for an alternative view. However, this is a very useful book and gives a good idea of just how fruitful in-depth application of literary (narrative) theory to a book like Ecclesiastes can be. It brims with ideas and insights, and one hopes that this direction in studies of Ecclesiastes will be taken further.

Craig Bartholomew
Cheltenham

Troubling Jeremiah (JSOTS 260)

A.R. Pete Diamond, Kathleen M. O'Connor & Louis Stulman (eds)
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999,
463 pp., h/b., £50/\$85

Since Duhm the Book of Jeremiah has been the object of multifaceted investigation. Indeed, the whole range of exegetical methods employed by OT scholars has been attested the history of its research. This symposium reflects the broad range of Jeremiah studies at the turn of the millennium. However, it does not offer a complete overview, since conservative or evangelical perspectives are hardly mentioned.

Most of the contributions to this volume were originally presented to the Composition of Jeremiah Group at the annual meetings of the Society for Biblical Literature. Overviews of recent research and evaluations of it are given towards the end of the book. It would be more helpful for the reader if the excellent survey of L. Perdue (320-38) appeared at the beginning.

Part I of the book contains academic, technical essays. These illustrate the comment of W. Brueggemann in Part IV: 'scholarship has moved decisively from diachronic to synchronic ways of reading' (405). Attention is given to rhetorical analysis, feminist interpretation, etc., while questions of history and the historical Jeremiah are neglected, even though Perdue and L. Boadt (339-49) stress their importance. Thus the book reflects post-modernism, where meaning is determined not by the author but by the readers, who are themselves shaped by many different voices and influences. Does this approach not reflect the difficulty of finding coherence in the Book of Jeremiah itself?

There are other ways of reading Jeremiah, notably the more historical-theological approach of W.L. Holladay, D.R. Jones, J.G. McConville and others. However, this is sharply

criticised by R.P. Carroll, who talks of 'simplistic assumptions ... [which] border on a fundamentalism in the reading of ancient texts' (437).

A clue to the interpretation of Jeremiah may be found in Jeremiah 3:1-5, where the urgent question is whether God will return to his people. In the course of the Book it is answered positively (e.g. 32:26). The feminist essays on Jeremiah 2 and 3 offer a different view: the abandoned husband, God, casts away his wife once and for all.

Those engaged in detailed Jeremiah studies must certainly consult this book. Yet the main part of it reflects a post-graduate, academic discussion which is not of great help for exegesis in the context of the Church.

Hetty Lalleman
Ysselmuiden, The Netherlands

The Transformation of Torah from Scribal Advice to Law (JSOTS 287)

Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999,
200 pp., h/b., £35/\$57.50

Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley tackles the difficult but important question of how we should understand Biblical law. Her thesis is that Torah was originally the work of élitist theoreticians operating from the royal court. She is certainly correct to highlight the links between law and wisdom (the etymology of the noun 'Torah' itself is 'instruction' or 'teaching'). In this respect the book is a welcome move away from the 'legislative' approach to Biblical law that has tended - anachronistically - to project Western, positivist ideas of law onto the Biblical text. Unfortunately, the argument that Biblical law has its origins in scribal reflections is wholly at variance with the narrative context of the giving of the law. It is also at odds with the evidence in the text that Biblical law was not only understood outside

scribal circles but was meant to be applied by the general population.

McKinley approves Patrick's claim that the proper hermeneutic for the OT is one that allows the text to be 'the best text it can be'. In the case of Biblical law McKinley claims, this is achieved 'through the reader's projection of him or herself into the role of a judge seeking solutions' to legal problems (52). But before we can project ourselves into the sandals of an ancient Israelite judge, we have to engage in an historical reconstruction of ancient Israelite legal praxis. How were legal rules understood in Israelite society and how might that understanding have been used to resolve disputes? Did the ancient Israelites use general principles or concepts to solve legal problems or did they use customary, narrative images of what is right? Who were the judges in ancient Israel? Were legal disputes resolved by formal judges and courts, or were they dealt with, so far as possible, by the people themselves using 'self-executing' rules? And so on. Unfortunately, the author wholly fails to reconstruct such a praxis from the texts. Consequently, she fails to consider how ordinary Israelites – and not just scribes – might have made sense of Biblical law.

McKinley takes advantage of the disjuncture between Biblical ideology and social reality to claim that there is no necessary connection between the text and actual social practice; viz. Biblical law is purely a literary confection and nothing else. However, a more balanced view would be that, although the laws of the Hebrew Bible give only a partial view of the norms of ancient Israel, they are nevertheless a primary source for reconstructing the ideals and practices of that society. The texts are literary constructions that represent, to a greater or lesser extent, the law as actually practised. McKinley relies heavily on a highly controversial approach of Calum Carmichael that sees Biblical law as simply a series of esoterically coded

allegorical allusions. McKinley shows no awareness of the criticisms made of this eccentric method and, instead, sweepingly asserts that 'the determining relationship [in biblical law] is that between law and narrative and not that between law and practical life' (106).

The author disparages Jackson's approach to Biblical law as being of 'limited worth' (108) whilst drawing upon his work elsewhere (notably chs 3 and 4). She overlooks Jackson's proposition, developed in regard to the Book of the Covenant, that the laws were directed to the people as a form of teaching to be implemented by them directly. Having wedded herself to a particular 'non-legislative' view of Torah, McKinley finds an analogy with the ancient Indian idea of *dharma* (a type of moral obligation), although she gives no adequate reason why this acts as a valid resource for comparison.

McKinley succeeds in identifying the problems associated with the legislative approach that has tainted Biblical legal studies for too long. But she is wide of the mark in identifying an alternative. Meantime, Bernard Jackson's forthcoming Sheffield volume *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law* promises a further round in the debate of how we should understand Biblical law.

Jonathan Burnside
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**Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts:
Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication.**
(JSOTS 283)

Kelvin G. Friebe
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999,
535 pp., h/b., £60/\$90

This revision of the author's 1989 dissertation essentially consists of two intermingled parts. There is first a thorough exegetical examination of the sign-acts performed by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and secondly a rhetorical

analysis of sign-acts in general and these prophetic sign-acts in particular.

The opening chapter argues that the sign-acts described were actually performed by the prophets, rather than being merely literary fiction, and that their intent is not magical but persuasive. Obviously, both points are crucial to the legitimacy of Friebe's approach. If the sign-acts were never performed, then no nonverbal communication took place. Likewise, if their intent was merely informative or magical, then rhetorical analysis is misplaced. Friebe makes a strong case in both regards, drawing helpfully on a wide range of parallels from ancient Near Eastern and Greek sources.

The second chapter, which forms the bulk of the book, provides the detailed exegesis of each sign act, along with its rhetorical impact in terms of arousing interest (Attention), transmitting the message (Comprehension), immediate impact on the audience (Acceptance) and longer term results (Remembrance). The exegesis is thorough and judicious, well worth consulting in its own right. For example, on the question of Ezekiel's dumbness, Friebe argues convincingly that it was a literal, voluntary refraining from all non-prophetic conversation during the initial seven year period of Ezekiel's ministry, and represented the shamed silence which the people should have had before God. This unusual behaviour would attract people's attention, and its ambiguity would invite them to ponder its meaning. Such an indirect approach avoided the potential alienation of direct indictment (though Ezekiel rarely seemed concerned about alienating his hearers). The message would also be reinforced continually over the seven year span, whenever the silent prophet was encountered.

The remaining two chapters analyse the sign-acts as rhetorical acts of nonverbal communication. This

rhetorical analysis is less helpful than the detailed exegesis. At times, Friebe states the obvious, such as 'a source of high credibility is more immediately persuasive than a low credibility source' (418). At others, he wants to have his cake and eat it. Thus he lauds the prophet's choice of totally incongruous acts as an aid to message retention (456), but also thinks that the use of common objects or acts would ensure constant reminder of the sign (458). When both the bizarre and the routine serve as memory aids, it is unclear how a forgettable sign act could ever be performed! If he had been raised on a weekly diet of eminently forgettable children's addresses, in which routine objects were regularly used to illustrate gospel truths, he might not have been so swift to assume that every broken pot would remind the clumsy housewife of the prophet's proclamation!

More attention could have been given to the distinctions in nonverbal rhetorical style between the two prophets, and between them and prophets of other eras. Why did these particular prophets use this method of communication so fully, in contrast to others? Also, Friebe concludes that, had the pre-586 BC audience responded to the two prophets, the outcome of history might have been different. But this goes against Ezekiel's perspective from the very start of his ministry, that the fall of Jerusalem was a foregone conclusion. Nonetheless, this book will still be a valuable resource to every student of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

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One Bible, Many Voices

S.E. Gillingham
London: SPCK, 1998,
280 pp., £15.99

The subtitle of this book describes it as 'different approaches to Biblical studies', and that is a fair summary of its contents. It documents the emergence of most of the significant scholarly approaches to the Bible over the last 200 years or so, and intersperses descriptions of them with illustrations of how their various methodologies might be applied in practice to selected texts. As such, it is a valuable introduction to the current state of the art in Biblical studies for students and others who may be looking for some kind of general orientation. Not only is there discussion of the nature of the canon itself, but the distinctive contributions of theological, historical, and literary approaches are carefully explained, often supplemented with interesting factual information. So, for example, if you have no idea of the difference between classical Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant interpretations, or you know nothing about Rashi, Reimarus, or Augustine, this book will give you clear guidance on all these topics, together with many others. Indeed, that is undoubtedly one of its major strengths.

Readers of this journal will likely find other aspects of this book less satisfying. The author's overall conclusion seems to be that both the Bible itself, and the range of possible readings of it, are so hopelessly diverse that to imagine there might be anything that remotely looks like a normative approach (or even one that might command the allegiance of significant numbers of people) is a pointless exercise. Gillingham's conclusion is that 'an appeal to pluralism' is the way forward. By itself, of course, that could mean absolutely anything, and though she protests that 'an appeal to pluralism

does not then mean accepting everything about postmodernism' (247) it is clear that the underlying ideological base is precisely the kind of philosophical deconstructionism applied to Biblical studies most stridently by scholars such as D.J.A. Clines and K.W. Whitelam. Like them, she assumes that all Biblical interpretation is not only socially constructed but also motivated by the personal ambitions for power of those who do the interpreting. From this point of view, it matters little whether one employs theological, historical or literary insights, for they all 'easily emerge as a subtle form of control' (246 - a statement made about fundamentalism, but the same thing, in different words, is said about everything else). On this understanding, questions about matters such as truth are dismissed as too naive to be worth asking, though the opinion that the ideology of control is all that motivates Biblical interpreters itself becomes an absolute and unquestioned truth claim. I find myself unable to accept the cynical view of human nature that lies behind this approach, for I do not believe that, in general, those who have spent (in many cases) a lifetime studying the Bible - whether with conservative or liberal understandings - have been at all concerned about the aggrandisement of power. In the vast majority of cases where the Bible has been misappropriated and used as an instrument of oppression, it has not been Biblical scholars who have done this, but politicians and economists. Ironically, on those occasions when scholars have given their support to this, it has usually been through their uncritical advocacy of the wholly specious claim made here that they have 'an approach as academically rigorous and as free from any particular theological or confessional agenda as any other academic discipline' (xiv) - a viewpoint which of course is not value-free at all, but

operates as a kind of coded message in favour of liberal secularism.

In keeping with this viewpoint, Gillingham concludes that, in effect, there is no such thing as a consistent or universalised message in the Bible, so maybe I ought not to be surprised at the somewhat eclectic way in which she discusses actual texts. It is still worth noting, though, that the detailed examination of the book of Psalms occupies a full 25% of the book, while the Gospels and other NT writings are mentioned only briefly. Moreover, everything seems to be turned into a problem here (the chapter on historical criticism begins with a veritable catalogue of them: the problems of myth, contradiction, miracles, religious language, and historical Jesus). The overwhelming impression left in my mind was that, in spite of enormous expenditure of energy and creativity, Biblical scholarship - of whatever sort - has left us with more questions than answers.

In fairness to the author, it has to be said that the chaotic picture she paints probably does reflect the scholarly turmoil that now characterises much Biblical study, particularly in relation to the Old Testament. But I suspect that most readers of this review will already be well aware of that, and would prefer a guide who will help them to deal with it within a framework of constructive criticism, rather than one who simply documents it.

Should you read this book? Despite my criticisms, I think so. It does contain an enormous amount of information that will help readers understand the context in which academic study of the Bible is now taking place, and provide a general orientation for the beginner. But read it for what it is: an account of how some significant thinkers have tried to understand the Bible, from a variety of viewpoints. All of them are white Westerners, as far as I can see, so don't expect to learn about Asian,

African, or South American perspectives (even when liberation theology features, which is not often, only Western commentators on it are quoted). And you will most certainly be disappointed if you are looking for anything remotely like a normative hermeneutical or theological framework within which to understand the Bible as Christian Scripture. Though the preface informs us that part of the book's purpose is to help readers in 'understanding and using the Bible' (xiv) I am left asking, 'using it for what?' - and I don't think I got an answer to that.

John Drane
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Chronicles and Exodus. An Analogy and its Application (JSOTS 275)

William Johnstone
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998,
331 pp., h/b., £46/\$75.

This book consists mainly of inter-related essays which originally appeared in a variety of journals and collections from about 1980. The essays have been lightly edited, and follow a lengthy introductory chapter outlining the author's concern and method. The background to the study is the far-reaching changes in the past generation in Pentateuchal studies, owing to dissatisfaction with both the traditional form of the Documentary Hypothesis and Noth's theory of a Tetrateuch and Deuteronomistic History prefaced by Deuteronomy.

The analogy in question is the relation of the post-exilic Book of Chronicles to the exilic Books of Samuel and Kings. Just as Chronicles incorporates large parts of Samuel-Kings into its own composition, so too, the author argues, the present form of Exodus is a post-exilic Priestly redaction based on an exilic Deuteronomistic version still embedded within it. The earlier redaction may be recovered through

comparison with the reminiscences of the exodus preserved in Deuteronomy and by subtraction of the Deuteronomistic material.

The relation of Chronicles to Samuel-Kings can of course be readily gauged by a synoptic comparison of these two works, from which the Chronicler's redactional moves are plain. Johnstone's great contribution here is to offer a sustained interpretation of Chronicles as a theological (even 'midrashic') essay which evaluates the Davidic monarchy in terms of the 'Levitical doctrine of guilt and atonement'. Chronicles is a 'holiness' redaction of Israel's history, whereas the earlier Deuteronomistic History understands that history in terms of the Sinaitic covenant. This argument is worked out in Johnstone's recent two-volume commentary (1997), and the essays collected here, especially chapters 2-6 on the relation of Chronicles to the Pentateuch, provide a very valuable complement to that work.

The next section of this collection (chs 7-12) applies the Chronicles analogy to Exodus. These essays explore the relation of parallel passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy which describe the giving of the Law, the Decalogue, the Passover, 'signs and wonders', and Israel's progress through the wilderness. In each case, closely worked textual and thematic arguments are used in a cumulative case for the author's double redactional theory, which he commends over more complicated rival explanations as the most economic account.

Johnstone sees the same theological shift between his reconstructed first form of Exodus and its final form as he sees between Samuel-Kings and Chronicles: a 'D-writer' using the category 'covenant' was followed by the 'P-writer' using the category 'holiness'. In the last part of the book ('The View Beyond') these categories are connected with the Pauline doctrines of justification and

sanctification. Both Exodus and Chronicles in their final form are seen as eschatological works in which Israel, though technically back in the land, is theologically still 'in exile' and is therefore admonished over how it should live in anticipation of God's final consummation.

This is a challenging book which requires a great deal of attention and linguistic competence to follow the author's detailed literary arguments, as well as the extended interaction with other scholars. Undergraduates would not naturally turn to this work, although they could profit from the essays on Chronicles as a supplement to the author's commentary. Scholars who take a more conservative view of the nature and dating of Deuteronomy and P would certainly differ with the methods and conclusions here. While Johnstone properly insists on the role of Israel's institutions and liturgy in the formulation of its foundational traditions of origins, this comes at the cost of treating the exodus as a process historicised by the cult rather than an event, with Moses himself no longer a figure of history. Biblical theology needs a stronger foundation than this.

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The Story Goes ... The Stories of the Torah

Nico ter Linden

London: SCM Press, 1998,
viii + 296 pp., £14.95

This is a delightful book, written for the layperson by a well known Dutch preacher (and translated by John Bowden). It is a series of reflections, even devotions, on mostly the narrative of the Pentateuch, with a few legal texts as well. Its popularity is seen in that the original Dutch version, published in 1996, has sold over 150,000 copies.

The appeal of the book is found in the warm, humorous and respectful way that ter Linden approaches the Pentateuch (thought to have originated in exilic times). There is Christian piety coupled with an appreciation for the humour of scenes and rabbinical stories. It is gently thought provoking and highly engaging. The book comprises seventy-four short chapters on selected passages, mostly from Genesis, some from Exodus, and a handful from elsewhere. There are no references within the body of the text, and few endnotes, so the book reads easily. Some verses are quoted in full. There is little by way of direct application to the reader. Rather the book teases out ideas in the story, creates pictures, makes interesting observations and notes intriguing connections with other passages of Scripture.

It is as a preacher that I appreciated this book the most. Stories come alive with words that keep your attention, and often bring a wry smile. Sometimes imagined conversations are reported, usually with witty or unexpected words. For example, the chapter on Genesis 40 begins with Joseph saying to the cupbearer and baker, 'Good morning, did you sleep well?' Sentences are often short and crisp, with a gentle, dry humour that at times verges on the ironic, if not sarcastic. 'The new baker of course; the old one was hanged two years ago.' When Joseph has his brothers imprisoned in Genesis 42, we read, 'They're innocent, but of course these things happened sometimes', alluding to Joseph in the well. When Balaam is under pressure to curse Israel, God tells him, 'It's not on!' When the famine breaks out in Genesis 12, ter Linden writes: 'Nice of God!'

Theological reflection in the book is at a light, almost suggestive level rather than in depth analysis. Examples include the relationship between faith and fatalism in Genesis 18 and a brief reflection on the swift movement from

enjoying freedom given by God to exercising autonomy from God in Exodus 32. Some connections are made with other passages, often the gospels, which provide useful food for thought. For example, the Ten Commandments find resonance in the Beatitudes and Lord's Prayer. Themes running through Genesis are also observed well, such as the interplay between firstborn and other children, the theme of deception in the Jacob stories and reversal of fortunes in Jacob and Joseph stories. My favourite section was a delightful comment about Calvin who 'was a great divine, but unfortunately somewhat deficient in romantic feelings'. This assessment is prompted by Calvin's comment on Genesis 29, that Jacob would only have kissed Rachel after telling her his name!

There are a few errors, e.g. Joseph's name instead of Jacob's (120) and vice versa (175), and Rebecca's instead of Rachel's (124). Nevertheless, the creative telling of the stories in the Pentateuch by ter Linden has much to commend it. This is not a book for the scholar seeking exegetical accuracy. But for the preacher seeking to bring the Torah to life, as well as the Christian seeking to think more about these stories, this is an appealing book.

Paul A. Barker

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Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis (JSOTS 288)

Diana Lipton

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999,
241 pp., h/b., £46.50

This monograph addresses the nature and function of the patriarchal dreams in Genesis. As Lipton reminds her readers, such a work is long overdue. Previous research has treated the topic only as part of a

much larger whole. Actually, Lipton's focus is even narrower than her title suggests, for she largely ignores the Joseph narrative and confines herself to universally accepted dream passages in the Abraham and Jacob narratives, namely Genesis 20:1-18; 28:10-22; 31:10-13 and 31:24, as well as providing a detailed justification for including Genesis 15:1-21. The book breaks new ground methodologically by attempting a detailed close reading of the final form of passages (rather than hypothetically reconstructed originals), read against the background of relevant ancient Near Eastern texts.

There is much to commend in this book, not least the breadth and variety of its observations. For example, Lipton argues that Jacob's dream in Genesis 28:10-22 is concerned largely with the issue of temple building. This might be difficult to maintain simply by studying the text in isolation, but Lipton makes a number of suggestive connections with the Gudea Cylinders, supported by post-biblical readings of the passage. In discussing Jacob's dream of the speckled flocks (Gen. 31:10-13), she engages sensitively with the imagery of the dream, suggesting that 'the animals that featured in Jacob's deceit are now involved in the proof of his merit' (139). She argues that Laban's dream (Gen. 31:24) is integral to its context, and rightly takes issue with Westermann's influential but doctrinaire assertion that it has no function in its current setting. At a more general level, she provides an illuminating excursus on the relationship between dreams and divination in the OT.

Nevertheless, I have a few quibbles. Lipton concludes that all of the dream narratives she exegetes share common motifs. The dreams are received in a period of anxiety or danger; concern descendants; indicate a change of status; highlight divine involvement; refer to

relationships between Israelites and non-Israelites and are concerned with absence from the land. She concedes that these themes are not unique to dream passages, but claims that they 'are surely the best examples of texts that combine all these themes to create a sense of perpetual divine stage-management' (224-25). This is debatable. For example, the programmatic call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), read in context, contains all of these motifs, certainly conveying a sense of divine stage-management, and there is not a dream in sight.

More space needs devoting to the dreams of the Joseph story. These are alluded to from time to time, but they receive no in-depth treatment. Perhaps Lipton is right to state that stylistically and theologically they belong to a different class. But I for one would like to be shown in more detail why this is the case. Their cursory treatment is all the more odd given Lipton's concern to deal with the final form of the text. Finally, not all will be convinced by the slick manoeuvre that takes us from text to historical context. The content of the dreams might well be particularly relevant to those living in exile, as Lipton argues. That this indicates that the dream passages achieved their current form during the exile, as she also holds, makes relevance dictate origin – a dangerously subjective move.

Nevertheless none of these criticisms should detract from the fact that this book provides a step forward in the study of dream passages in Genesis, and in other OT texts. All future work in this area will need to refer to this stimulating study.

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A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar

*Christo H.J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé,
and Jan H. Kroeze*
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999,
404 pp., h/b., £50

This reference grammar is purposely designed to facilitate its usefulness, since it is written from the perspective of those who have completed an introductory course in Biblical Hebrew and are engaged in translation and exegesis. Its most distinguishing feature is its didactic structure, presenting Hebrew grammar with overview and clarity. It takes users beyond introductory knowledge, but not into the very depths of specialist studies.

This work is intended to be of an intermediate nature. So, although structured similarly to its forerunners, the grammars of Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, Richter, Waltke-O'Connor and Jouon-Muraoka, it does not go into their detail. A positive effect of its comparative brevity (404 pages) is that scholars well-versed in the larger grammars could profit from its condensed summaries, e.g., the excellent section on Focus particles (311-20).

Another positive feature of this reference grammar is the glossary of linguistic terms, 'the metalanguage' (351-69). Here one finds, for instance, a definition of the term Precative Perfective ('The precative perfective refers to a rare *semantic* use of the *perfect form* to make a request in prayers'), for which one looks in vain in Crystal's Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics, but which is an essential element of biblical linguistics (cf. Waltke-O'Connor). There are also indexes of subjects, Hebrew words and OT texts. These features give this grammar an advantage in teaching and learning over the other larger standard grammars mentioned. Simplicity is always difficult, and in this field terminological confusion abounds. So it is very satisfying to have clear definitions given from a

basis of common knowledge, without privileging any particular linguistic theory.

The ambition to be innovative has been set aside for didactic purposes. This is not an excuse for ignorance: explanations do not hinder curiosity and good directions for further study are given. Also, a 'next volume' is contemplated, covering intersentential relations, text types, speech-acts and sociolinguistic conventions. By its very appearance this would be innovative, and would invite critical evaluation. The need for such a second volume is perhaps even greater than for the first, and its production is warmly encouraged. The awareness of text-linguistic/discourse analytical matters, matters of genre, and communicative dimensions (semantics and pragmatics), while not developed in the present volume, suggests that it will not become outdated as research in these areas continues.

Augmenting the Hebrew font size in future editions would add favourably to its readability. One wishes wholeheartedly that this fine work will reach its large target readership.

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1 and 2 Chronicles (A Mentor Commentary)

R.L. Pratt, Jr
Fearn: Christian Focus, 1998,
512 pp., h/b., £24.99

The Mentor series of commentaries, of which this is the third volume to appear, is not yet widely known. This situation is not helped by the fact that the volumes contain no description of the series. However, on the evidence of this particular contribution, they offer a middleweight and straightforward approach to exegesis designed for the Christian reader. This commentary is based on the NIV and requires no previous knowledge of Hebrew.

The introduction briefly discusses the Chronicler's purpose: 'to give his readers a true historical record of Israel's past' (11). However, Pratt explicitly deals with theological issues rather than historical ones. No fewer than 28 major themes are summarised, though it is unclear how or why particular themes have been chosen, or what their relationship is to each other. The themes are classified into three groups: the People of God (themes 1-3), King and Temple (themes 4-9), and Divine Blessing and Judgement (themes 10-28).

The themes are discussed in the context of two distinct audiences. The first is that of original Israelite readers, who are assumed to have lived in the post-exilic period at some point between 515 and 390 BC. No further attempt is made to identify them or their circumstances, nor is there any awareness that the evidence requires a choice between a late sixth century date and the Ezra-Nehemiah period. The suggestion that the Chronicler wrote originally 'to direct the restoration of the Kingdom during the early post-exilic period' (13) indicates some preference for an earlier date, but the implications of this claim are not followed up. The author's second audience comprises 'contemporary Christian readers'. The term 'contemporary' might suggest a concern for the modern period, but what is really meant is the time of the New Testament. Each of the 28 themes is developed in terms of the work of Christ, the period of the church, and the final consummation of the kingdom of God. While such a Christian perspective is helpful, it is questionable whether one can deduce the contemporary significance of OT ideas solely by demonstrating how they are treated in the NT.

The commentary proper is characterised by a concern for literary structure and for theology. Each section of text is analysed in great detail as to its literary shape, though

repeated reference to symmetrical patterns in the biblical text does not always inspire great confidence about the precision of this exercise. Detailed lists of differences between Chronicles and Samuel-Kings are also provided, with a view to highlighting the Chronicler's distinctive theology. The theology itself centres on the United Monarchy of David and Solomon. These kings represent an ideal form of monarchy to which post-exilic Israel should have aspired, based upon the kings' outstanding moral character, Israel's unity under them, and the priority they gave to the temple and its worship.

This volume will be most useful to those who want a careful explanation of the Chronicler's contribution to biblical theology written from an evangelical perspective. The concern for theological issues reflects a healthy concern in line with the interests of recent scholarship, though emphasis on Israel's responsibilities and the achievements of their kings seems to minimise the Chronicler's focus on the promissory nature of God's covenants. More significant is the complete absence of any reference to any other work on Chronicles. There is no bibliography, index or footnotes. Whether this was done for economic or other reasons, it leaves the impression that this is an isolated piece of work. This would be unfair, since the author clearly incorporates some recent scholarly insights on Chronicles. On the other hand, those who wish to ask more searching questions or engage in debate about the text will need to supplement their reading in other ways.

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Ancient Israel, From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple (2nd edition)

Hershel Shanks (ed.)
Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999,
xxiii + 356 pp; p/b., \$19.95., h/b., \$27.95.

The first edition of this book appeared in 1988, and was reviewed by me and others in *Themelios* 15/1 (Oct. 1989), 25-28. This version is 90 pages longer, and the colour plates, maps and charts are revised and increased. In most chapters the text is largely the same, with some omission, rearrangement, and introduction of fresh material. Chapter 5 was extensively rewritten.

In this second edition there are undoubtedly gains and losses. First, the bad news. Chapter 1, the Patriarchs (Hendel revising McCarter), shows almost no improvement over its disastrous precursor; my 1989 criticisms remain valid throughout. There are gross untruths, e.g. my treatment of patriarchal names was not based on 'random finds' (300, n. 23) but on systematic analysis of several thousand names (cf. *Them.* 15/1, 25), the Egyptian and Assyrian texts of page 12 are irrelevant to the patriarchs (*Them.* 15/1, 26), and much else. As a factual guide, the chapter is worthless; it merely showcases a nineteenth-century mind-set in modern clothes. Chapter 2, Israel in Egypt and the Exodus, was first competently done by Sarna; now Hershel Shanks has spoilt it. Important Egyptian-related evidence on the plagues and the Tabernacle has been removed. Massive factual blunders have been added, e.g. the famous Canaanite war-scenes of Sety I (1290 BC) and the Moabite war of Ramesses II (1272 BC) magically become war-scenes of Thutmose III, 15th century BC (48, 50)! And there is worthless speculation for good measure: no ritually-unclean Hebrew could ever have seen the 400 Years

Stela of Ramesses II at Tanis. If re-erected there, it was hidden away in inner temple courts, where no foreigners were welcome. But in fact it and other stelae from Raamses were most likely used-up in foundations at Tanis, and were seen by nobody until the last 100 years! Hence this stela has nothing whatever to do with the 400 years from Jacob to Moses. In the first edition chapter 3, Settlement in Canaan and the Judges, Calloway bravely struggled with mutually incompatible views of the Joshua-Judges period and of the two books, but the result was highly unsatisfactory. Miller has equally bravely updated this chaos, usefully in part, but is just as unable to produce a valid synthesis. And his quoting Ahlström regarding the spelling of 'Israel' on Merenptah's famous stela is a major blunder. That stela bears a highly accurately written text, and the determinative (people, not place) is precisely correct.

Now the (mainly) good news. Chapter 4 on the United Monarchy, revised by its author (Lemaire) is a judicious review, appropriately updated, and rightly yields nothing to minimalist fantasies. Chapter 5, Horn's Divided Monarchy, has been largely rewritten, and vastly improved and updated by McCarter, the biggest and best change in the book. It is not faultless; he is wrong to follow Goedicke's outdated and erroneous paper on So as Sais (town) instead of Osorkon IV (king) - contrary to McCarter, such names are abbreviated: e.g. Shosh for Shoshenq; Osorkon losing its 'O' or its 'n'. While rightly rejecting two campaigns by Sennacherib, he fails to cope with Tirhaqah's role (see my *Third Intermediate Period in Egypt*, 1996 ed.). Chapters 6, 7 and 8 on the Exile and Return (Meyers revising Purvis), the Hellenistic age (Levine) and Roman rule (Satlow revising Cohen) are useful updates of what were originally quite good presentations, though the Nabateans are still missing in chapters 7 and 8.

In sum, chapters 1-3 are still too badly flawed, and chapters 4-8 are relatively good updates. The work still remains a curate's egg: good in most parts, poor at the start.

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Job (Westminster Bible Companion)

James A. Wharton

Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1999,
viii + 191 pp.

This new study of Job is engagingly written with a lightness of touch and many shrewd comments. The aim of the series is 'to help the laity of the church read the Bible more clearly and intelligently'. Thus the introduction is brief (11 pages), as are the bibliographies (11 items). Wharton gives a running commentary on the text of Job, following the canonical order except for the Eliphaz speeches, which he oddly but helpfully takes together.

Wharton's introduction raises helpful issues such as the name of God and the term 'servant of God', but also makes some dubious assertions, e.g. that Job is marginal to the Biblical revelation. He fails to do justice to the massive treatment of creation and providence at the heart of the book's theology, and shows little sign of interaction with commentators like Andersen and Hartley with their much richer portrayal of links with the rest of the OT.

His comments on chapters 1 and 2 show a certain flatness and lack of imaginative engagement. He fails to do justice to the role of Satan, assuming that he is no more than a minor prosecutor, and ignoring both the dramatic tension of the heavenly court scenes and the later striking imagery of powers of evil (e.g. chs. 3:8; 18:14; 41).

Wharton rightly points out that much of what Eliphaz and the

others say stands comfortably within the tradition of mainstream wisdom. But he fails to see that what he regards as a positive and hopeful ending (22:23-30) is in fact completely obscured by coming at the end of increasingly negative and vicious condemnation. Similarly, like many other commentators, he fails to discern the function of chapters 24-28 as a summarising chorus, culminating in the Wisdom poem and concluding this major section. This leads him to exaggerate the isolation of chapter 28, thus ignoring the linking *ki* (28:1) and the many deliberate echoes of earlier speeches.

His desire to avoid Christian interpretations leads to a failure to engage in depth with the resonances of 19:25-27. He argues that if Job requires a *go'el* then he is indeed a sinner in need of redemption. But Job has never claimed sinlessness; rather he has protested innocence of specific guilt which would result in such dreadful sufferings. This is not to deny the cluster of grammatical and syntactical obscurities in the text, but it is not on this basis that Wharton makes his assertions. Much better is his analysis of chapters 29-31, which is one of the best parts of his book and shows an acute sensitivity both to detail and the flow of thought. Similarly, his discussion of the Elihu speeches shows a fine awareness of their importance in giving human wisdom a last run for its money.

Much less satisfactory is Wharton's treatment of the divine speeches. The magnificent cataract of images in the first speech is hardly nodded at, and the massive theological implications if Behemoth and Leviathan are indeed supernatural figures is left unexplored. The epilogue is treated with little realisation of its profundities (e.g. 'the restoring of fortunes of v. 10 perhaps echoing language of return from Exile').

To conclude, this volume offers some insight and food for thought. But it is not a best buy, lacking depth and

range of engagement, and should be used to supplement rather than replace the standard commentaries.

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Jesus of Nazareth – Millenarian Prophet

Dale C. Allison

Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998,
xii + 255 pp.

Allison prefaces the three substantial chapters of this book by explaining that they are the outcome of an aborted project to write a comprehensive study of the historical Jesus, and describes them as 'fragments that have fallen from the ruins of a project that the builder has abandoned'. This means that this is probably not the place to begin an acquaintance with Life-of-Jesus research. At the same time, Allison's writing is so fresh and provocative that those who have some acquaintance with the subject matter will find reading this book a stimulating experience.

Allison begins with a discussion of the Jesus tradition. A significant portion of this chapter is devoted to consideration of J.D. Crossan's distinctive method of dating and classifying ancient sources. Allison commends Crossan for his concern for method but believes that his proposal is severely flawed. His detailed discussion raises important cautions regarding the value of statistical analyses in the search for authentic Jesus tradition. In fact, Allison believes that much of the search for the history of tradition is ill founded, and that a more valid method of approach to the Gospels is the construction of an overall interpretative framework within which as much of the data as possible makes sense. In Allison's view, the correct framework is that of the apocalyptic prophet.

The first chapter is followed by a 'detached note' on 'Some Common

Features of Millenarianism'. This is an intriguing sociological discussion of movements throughout history and from around the globe. This note illustrates Allison's comparative 'history of religions' approach to the study of Jesus.

Allison begins his second chapter on the eschatology of Jesus, with a discussion of E.P. Sanders and M. Borg. Evangelical readers may well find his provocative statements less than convincing: 'eschatological thinking is not (maybe about this Albert Schweitzer was wrong) *Konsequent* or consistent about anything' or '[Jesus'] poetic mind roamed in a mythological world closely related to that of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a world alive with fabulous stories ... and fantastic images ... That world did not celebrate logical consistency as a virtue' (115).

Allison also deals with Jesus' view of the resurrection of the dead, the restoration of Israel, and the great tribulation. He discusses the issue of the imminence of such events in Jesus' thinking, and in doing so dismisses the view that imminent expectation is representative of the sort of Christian prophetic utterances which have been incorporated into the Jesus tradition. However, as he defends these sayings as authentic tradition, he concludes that Jesus expected the eschatological events to take place within his own lifetime. This leads on to a discussion of the nature of the language of cosmic catastrophe. Allison tends to regard such language as literal, though with the mediating comment that 'The literal and the symbolic need not be sundered' (164).

The final chapter is substantially shorter than the previous two, and presents a case for Jesus to be regarded as a 'millenarian ascetic'. Allison draws on Gospel material relating to wealth and, more extensively, sexual desire. Allison is aware of how unpalatable an ascetic Jesus is to much contemporary

thinking about Jesus, both popular and academic, and appears driven to demonstrate how different Jesus was from modern expectations.

Allison has an attractive writing style, and his prose contains numerous literary echoes and allusions for those with eyes to see. This aids the reader's concentration in the midst of rather technical argument. Allison's challenge to see Jesus in terms of his own time and culture rather than the reader's is valid and must be heeded. Yet, as an evangelical reader, I came away from this book dissatisfied with Allison's approach. Too much is given away. The poignant and plaintive tone of Allison's closing words suggests that his thoroughgoing eschatological prophet may not, in the end, bring us face to face with the Jesus who was worshipped as 'Lord'.

In short, this book is thought-provoking and contains useful exegetical discussions, but is not the best place to begin studies on the historical Jesus. 'On the other hand, readers of this journal who wish to wrestle with Allison's ideas may be interested to consult the extended discussion (fifteen pages) of Allison's book in Ben Witherington's excellent recent volume, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999).

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**Challenges to New
Testament Theology**

Peter Balla
Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998,
xiv + 279 pp.

This revised version of the author's University of Edinburgh PhD thesis tackles a subject that has recently come to the fore in academic circles. Several theologies of the New Testament have been published in recent years (including significant

new works by Stuhlmacher, Hübner and Strecker, plus the translation of Schlatter's two-volume work). However, the concept of 'New Testament Theology' has also been vigorously challenged by the Finnish scholar Heikki Räisänen, notably in his book *Beyond New Testament Theology* (1990).

Balla takes Räisänen as his debating partner, and, in the first chapter, he takes up discussion of whether historical investigation of the NT must be entirely detached from the theological task. In order to do this, he draws heavily on the work of W. Wrede who argues that the two approaches must indeed be entirely independent. Balla concludes that study of the NT should indeed be an historical enterprise, but that this does not mean that theology may not be studied. NT theology may examine the theological content of the NT by historical methods.

The second chapter is an examination of early Christian writings in response to the view that there was no clear distinction between orthodoxy and heresy or between canonical and non-canonical writings in the early church. Balla enters into extended conversation with W. Bauer and H. Koester, and argues that while the historian should examine all available evidence (whether 'canonical' or not), it is nonetheless true that valid distinctions may be made between groups or 'trajectories'. This issue is developed in chapter three with an investigation of whether the early Christians had a 'canon'. Balla covers a lot of ground here, from the analogy of the OT canon, through the status of the Temple Scroll at Qumran, to the genre of the NT writings.

In chapter four Balla asks, 'What does theological diversity mean for NT theology?'. While recognising diversity in the various writings which comprise the NT, he nevertheless concludes that the kind of developmental theory proposed by F.C. Baur is untenable and must be

rejected in favour of 'a basic, creed-type theology to which all those Christians adhered, whose writings are gathered in the New Testament' (209).

In the final chapter, Balla picks up some general issues and looks at the work of several key players in the field of NT Theology, including B.S. Childs, R. Morgan, H. Hübner and P. Stuhlmacher.

This book is fundamentally a study in methodology. There is a great deal of analysis of the writings of various exegetes and theologians, but very little exegetical analysis of biblical texts (although Balla does include a few exegetical excursions in his book). The range of scholars with whom Balla interacts, and the breadth of topics covered leads to a somewhat scattered feel to the book. However, the clear table of contents allows the reader to negotiate the book relatively simply.

The publisher's blurb on the back cover suggests that this book could serve as a textbook for courses on this subject. There is certainly a place for such a textbook, and Balla's book has much to offer in this respect, but the substantial citations of untranslated German which pepper the text will make it hard going for most students working below doctoral level. Perhaps a future edition might provide English translations in the footnotes, or a more popular edition with the quotations in translation might be produced so that this valuable study will not be inaccessible to so many readers.

Yet, as it stands, this is a wide-ranging study that contains a lot of valuable discussion of this important topic. Balla has made an important case for regarding NT Theology as a valid object of historical study.

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**Traditions as Rhetorical Proof:
Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians
Coniectanea Biblica (NT series 29)**

Anders Eriksson
Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International 1998,
xiii + 352 pp.

This is a worthy successor to some of the more important volumes in this Coniectanea Biblica series, including for example Holmberg's *Paul and Power* and Übelacker's *Der Hebräerbrief als Appell*. Indeed two of the advisers for this Lund University thesis were B. Gerdhardsson, with his special concerns about tradition, and W. Übelacker, with his expertise in rhetorical analysis. Although very many who write on rhetorical criticism seem to be doing little more than trying to cash in on a current fashion which is being overworked, the present work makes a genuine and constructive contribution to our understanding of Paul's use of rhetorical strategies and to the role of his appeal to shared traditions in 1 Corinthians. Some treatments of rhetoric in the NT are as very good as many are very bad. Eriksson is well aware of those approaches which reflect a postmodern concern to avoid epistemology and truth-claims by reducing everything to mere strategies of persuasion concerning which the biblical specialist need only describe and relish the pluralism of strategies. Equally he is well aware of the attacks by such writers as Litfin on those who want to assimilate Pauline proclamation into mere arts of persuasion. Eriksson has a mature grasp of ancient classical literature and of Pauline studies which allows him to identify Paul's uses of rhetorical strategies without for one moment suggesting that Paul's argument constitutes no more than strategies of persuasion regardless of truth-claims.

In his chapter on developments in rhetorical criticism Eriksson carefully draws out the differences between those approaches which focus mainly

on *elocutio* (for instance E. Norden); those which expend much energy on structure or *dispositio* (for instance H.D. Betz); and those which often more usefully return to the issue of valid argumentation or *inventio*, even if also with some concern for the former. Like S. Pogoloff, he is well-aware of a Rorty-like postmodern attitude that claims to replace 'interpretation' (which entails epistemology and issues of truth) by 'rhetoric' (which may describe mere performance in exclusively pragmatic terms of successful strategies). Eriksson's sensitivity to this together with his insistence (with Pogoloff and Mitchell) that rhetorical strategies shed light on the nature of Pauline communication, not least with Corinth, enhance the value of this study. Further he approaches tradition not as a study of the pre-history of the traditions which have entered the text, but as shared common ground with the addressees which perform various roles and functions within the specific contexts of Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians. Any initial scepticism about whether this book breaks fresh ground dissipates as the reader proceeds to its end.

Of eight identified traditions in 1 Corinthians, Eriksson devotes an entire chapter to each of five: (1) the theological or credal tradition 'One God ... One Lord ...' (1 Cor. 8:6) in the context of food offered to idols (8:1 - 11:1); (2) the tradition of the words of institution of the Lord's Supper (11:23-25) in the context of rich and poor at the Lord's table (11:17-34); (3) the acclamation of Jesus as Lord (12:3) in the context of claims to be 'aspiritual' (12-14); (4) the tradition of witness of the resurrection (15:3-5) in the context of a theology of the resurrection of the dead (15); and (5) the Aramaic tradition of the coming of the Lord (Maranatha, 16:22) in the context of the peroratio of 16, which Eriksson compares with Überlacker's work on Hebrews 13. These traditions

represent common ground for argumentation. In this respect they constitute atechnic proofs ... not dependent on the speaker's oratorical ability, his art or *techné* ... The traditions ... constitute the common ground ... and can therefore be appealed to as the facts of the case (33). Aristotle included in this category of atechnic facts of the case (i) witnesses (cf. witnesses to the resurrection in Paul); (ii) contracts (cf. covenantal dimensions of the Lord's Supper); and (iii) oaths (cf. pledges, confessions, or acclamations of Jesus as Lord). Only atechnic or artistic (cf. pragmatic, instrumental) categories come under the notion of sheer performance alone.

We may illustrate Eriksson's arguments with reference to the tradition about the Lord's Supper (his ch. 5, 174-96). The rhetorical genre is basically deliberative but with epideictic components. 11:17-22 constitute a *refutatio* of Corinthian claims to be maintaining the tradition. The deliberative rhetoric is reversed: it is precisely not 'for the better' that they meet (11:17). The common tradition establishes that the Lord's death and its proclamation provides the test of faithfulness to what constitutes 'the Lord's Supper. By dividing rich from poor, they are tearing apart the solidarity of the new creation established by Christ's death. A series of underlying enthymemes (major and minor premises which are not universally demonstrable, but axiomatic within given traditions) set up structures in which some premises are presupposed which others are overt, serve to throw into relief the question 'what constitutes a real *kyriakon deipnon*' (184) 'Their behaviour at the Lord's Supper ... should be a proclamation of his death' (86). Nevertheless because their behaviour undermines the unity of the redeemed, the *celebration becomes 'tearing apart his body' and hence they are 'liable for the death of the Lord' (11:29; 189-90). The logic of

Paul's thought has often escaped interpreters ... 'Some of your are under judgement' (191 and 192). The key point (against for instance E. Castelli and A.C. Wire) is that the *narratio* and *confirmatio* demonstrate that ethos rests not in Paul's apostolic authority as a speaker or rhetorician, but in the tradition or gospel which is shared. Epideictic rhetoric links such observance of the tradition with honour and commendation in contrast to judgement. If we miss Paul's heavy enthymematic argumentation and perceive this as a mere strategy of persuasion (cf. Wire) we shall miss the thrust of the text.

This careful and constructive book takes further the useful studies of Pogoloff (1992), M.M. Mitchell (1992) and Moores (1995) to utilise rhetorical study judiciously to serve exegesis. It breathes a different air from those who use 'rhetoric' as a pretext for escape from issues of truth and rationality in order to locate Paul exclusively with a world of rhetorical strategies which serve only interests rather than truth.

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Johannine Ecclesiology

Johan Ferreira
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998,
246 pp., h/b., £46.00

This book is the result of a PhD dissertation with M.S. Lattke at the University of Queensland. It does not offer a comprehensive study of Johannine ecclesiology. Ferreira focuses on exegetical and terminological aspects of John 17 which he regards as 'the Gospel's most significant statement on ecclesiology'. The study is intended as a contribution to Johannine theology, not to its social history. Nevertheless, 'the historical situation of the community will be important as it throws light on the theological concept'.

The opening overview of the history of research consists of three parts: (1) fairly short remarks on general issues like authorship, sources, religious milieu, christology, readers and purpose; (2) a short summary of research relating to the Johannine community (the contributions of Culpepper, Cullmann, Martyn, Brown, Wengst and Onuki are mentioned - these works display significant differences in detail, but Ferreira nonetheless accepts their general approach of reconstructing the community behind the Gospel rather uncritically); (3) reflections on specific contributions to Johannine ecclesiology (e.g. by Käsemann, Schnackenburg, Dahl, Pancaro, Painter and Minear). Ferreira observes a developing consensus that sees ecclesiology in John as closely related to christology and therefore as a major theme in this Gospel. However, since he often finds discussions of Johannine ecclesiology to be distorted by the application of Pauline ecclesiological categories, he seeks to break the mould by asking different questions: 'Does John have an ecclesiology? And if so, what is the essence of this ecclesiology?' His focus is on 'the concept that the Fourth Gospel has of the community of those who believe in Jesus as a distinct entity.'

The study proceeds with a chapter on the context and structure of John 17. Here Ferreira distinguishes between John 17 as a prayer and the function of this prayer within the literary context of the Farewell Discourses in John. As a prayer, John 17 consists of four shorter prayers that reflect the structure of the Jewish 'law-court prayer', serving apologetic and didactic purposes in the *Sitz im Leben* of the struggle of the Johannine community with the synagogue. Concerning its *Sitz im Text*, Ferreira sees John 17 as the last addition made to the Farewell Discourses in the process of repeated redactional revisions, showing 'the reflection of the Johannine community regarding

its struggle with the synagogue and the threat of internal dissolution'. Within the Farewell Discourses the prayer has a paraenetic function for the community: 'it addresses the community's stance vis-à-vis the synagogue, the world, and fellow believers. Moreover, the prayer encompasses the past, the present and the future. John 17 is therefore a theological overview of the community's place in the world'. Furthermore, since the prayer emphasizes that the community must continue the mission of the Son for the salvation of the world, Ferreira emphasizes its 'ecclesiological concerns', and characterises this as a "christological ecclesiology" in the sense that the Johannine community is *Christus prolongatus*. This conclusion is supported by an extensive exegesis of John 17, including special sections on the concepts of life, cosmos, election, truth, and the oneness motif in John. Two final chapters focus on the concepts of 'glory' and 'sending'. 'Glory' is seen against the background of OT and Qumran traditions, emphasizing both similarities ('glory as the revelation of God's judgment and salvation'; 'the revelation of glory is a crucial event of salvation history'; 'The revelation of God's glory is seen as coming through an individual'; 'the idea of a "hidden" glory'), and differences between those traditions and John (emphasis on the day of glory as a day of judgement in the Scrolls against the emphasis on salvation in John; the cross as the prominent place of the revelation of glory in John; future orientation in the Scrolls against the emphasis on realised eschatology in John). The sending motif is explained as a confluence of two traditions: the OT prophetic tradition that was then developed by John with the help of 'sending' terminology. Whether one finds this part of the study persuasive will depend largely on one's view of the dating of Gnostic sources and their relationship to John's Gospel.

In general terms Ferreira's study is persuasive. His strong emphasis on the close relationship between the mission of Jesus and the mission of the community as the essence of Johannine ecclesiology confirms the results established by others before him. However, having elaborated many parallels between Jesus' mission and the community, Ferreira seems to be inconsistent in his summary. He suggests that in John 'the community only has meaning as it continues the sending of Jesus. Therefore, the community of believers is not the new Israel, nor a new eschatological community whose existence announces the arrival of the eschaton. John does have a concept of salvation history, but it stops with, or is absorbed in, Jesus. The Johannine Jesus is the new Israel, or God's final act in history. The community is important only because it is *Christus prolongatus*, that is, it is one with Jesus in terms of function.' One might ask, if Jesus is the new Israel and if the community's only significance is in their status as *Christus prolongatus*, why is the community not the new Israel also? To this reviewer it would be most natural to see the community as the new Israel precisely because of its status as *Christus prolongatus*. Once this causal relationship is acknowledged, new interpretative possibilities open up which are worth exploring (e.g. is there a christological redefinition of the concept of 'people of God' in John's Gospel?). Thus, Ferreira's focus on the christological essence of Johannine ecclesiology, i.e. the close relationship between the missions of Jesus and the community, is a valuable contribution which will hopefully be explored further in Johannine studies.

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Jesus and the Doctrine of Atonement

C.J. den Heyer

London: SCM, 1998,
xi + 144 pp., £9.95

I have found this book refreshing, irritating, and challenging – for reasons which I will explain in a moment. The author, a New Testament professor in the Netherlands, explores the tensions between what a historian may confidently affirm about the historical Jesus and the doctrines later formulated about him; between the fact that Jesus died as a victim of Roman power and the Christian conviction that his death enables our reconciliation to God.

He summarises in chapter 1 key features of the life and mission of Jesus. In the following eight chapters he works through most of the New Testament's references to the significance of Jesus' crucifixion, demonstrating the variety of images with which the writers found meaning in his death. Finally he reflects on how far Christians today may affirm the classical interpretations of Christ's death which have been developed from the New Testament teaching.

The book is refreshing in the clarity of its presentation. If only some other books on the atonement were half as readable as this! Professor den Heyer decided to leave all his scholarly books in his bookcase and write the book with only the Bible, a dictionary and a concordance open in front of him. There are no footnotes, only a vivid and stimulating text.

But that is where the irritation comes in. What do I do when he offers an interpretation which I suspect is inadequate, or for which I want to know the evidence? With no footnotes to fill in the background or point me to more detailed discussion, I am constantly left feeling that his presentation is one-sided when there is much that could be said on the other side. For example, in the chapter on Jesus' own understanding

of his death the evidence of the Fourth Gospel is quickly dismissed. There is a tentative admission that in the 'ransom saying' of Mark 10:45 Jesus may have seen his own suffering as a 'dying for many'. But there is no mention of the possibility that Isaiah 53 might have informed Jesus' understanding. The references to 'servant' simply express the idea that Jesus 'lived (and died) for others'.

The challenge comes in two parts. First, it comes in the realisation that many other popular books, by people of all shades of theological opinion, pose the same dilemma as this one. Readers of this journal will have read many books which present a particular viewpoint in a popular, accessible style without footnotes and without much discussion of other people's perspectives. We need books of this kind, because theology is too important to be left to the specialists. But how can one write such a book with integrity, in a way which presents the author's viewpoint without giving the impression that other views aren't serious options to be considered? If footnotes are inappropriate, maybe one way forward is to include a page or two at the end which explain where fuller discussion, or different perspectives, may be found.

Secondly, the book is challenging precisely because it proposes interpretations of the New Testament's reflections on Christ's death which I would want to question. There's nothing like a contrary viewpoint to make you grapple with what you really think and why. For himself, Professor den Heyer reaches the conclusion that 'Jesus' life and death had an "exemplary" character' (134). Even though I find this disappointingly inadequate, I remain grateful to him for thought-provoking study.

Stephen Travis

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Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ

William Horbury
London: SCM Press, 1998,
234 pp., £17.95

This is a tremendously important book. Three things in particular make it so: one, the topic itself is supremely important for any notion of New Testament theology; two, the author is eminently well placed to publish a monograph on this subject and three, he brings together an enormous amount of relevant primary literature and adds tremendous scholarly insight. The book is the result of Horbury's long preoccupation with messianism in Second-Temple Judaism. It is true that some of the ideas presented here have been published before, but the beauty of this book is precisely that the wisdom contained in it matured over time and by continuous exposure to the perceptive criticisms of other eminent experts. This is not the sort of book that throws caution into the wind for the sake of flying a high kite (excuse the mixing of metaphors!).

The topic is tackled under four headings: one, Messianism and the Old Testament; two, The Prevalence of Messianism in the Second-Temple Period; three, The Coherence of Messianism; and four, Messianic Origins of the Cult of Christ. All this is prefaced by an Introduction that sets the tone: it was particularly messianism which formed the link between Judaism and the gentile acclamation of Jesus as Lord. A main plank in Horbury's strategy is to show the line of continuity in paying homage to the messiah which connects the Septuagint, the Targums and the rabbinic writings. Yes, by the time of early Christianity there were Greco-Roman parallels to messianism in the shape, for instance, of the ruler cults. And yes, Jewish messianic thinking had been influenced by the Greco-Roman world. But such Jewish thinking – which finally accounts for the attribution of the relevant

christological titles to Jesus – has a long Jewish ancestry, in fact, a pre-exilic one. If Horbury is right we have here a strong foundation on which to explain the growth of the 'Christ cult'.

Chapter one examines the terminology and origins of Jewish messianism and suggests that such messianic thinking even influenced the formation of the Jewish canon. It concludes with a brief discussion of Jewish messianic prototypes such as Moses and David. Chapter two is essentially a reply to the suggestion that messianism was dormant throughout much of Second-Temple Judaism. Quite the opposite: it was prevalent. Specialists in both Testaments have consistently underrated the significance of messianism during this period. This can be demonstrated even without recourse to the Qumran documents. Of course, Horbury* also discusses Qumran, but not until having established the core of his thesis on the basis of older traditions and texts. Chapter three acknowledges the variety in messianic conceptions which one encounters in the texts. Yet Horbury concludes that the often-cited 'exception' – namely the expectation of a divine transcendent messianic figure – was anything but the exception. Chapter four revisits the messianic origins of the Christian movement by focusing on angel-christologies and praise of Jewish rulers in relation to the worship of Christ. Horbury concludes that the principal New Testament titles for Jesus demonstrate the strong impact of Jewish messianism on the Christian movement and that this impact can also be shown with reference to Jewish angel terminology.

I suspect that most *Themelios* readers will welcome Horbury's argument. Not many books are 'musts' – but this one certainly is. It may not be revolutionary, but the thesis defended by it is historic. If I had to add a note of criticism it would be that, given the

publication date, one would have expected Horbury to make reference to some important books on the origins of christology published in the mid-90s. Instead he seems to have concentrated more on the slightly older secondary literature. Having said this, his handling of the primary material is impressive. And that, I suspect, is what counts in the final analysis.

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The Epistle to the Romans (NICNT)

Douglas J. Moo
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996,
xxvi + 1012 pp., \$50

This is the completion in one volume of what Moo began in the Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary Series for Moody Press, with Romans 1–8, published in 1991. Moo has essentially retained what he did in that first volume, although in a very different format and with some updating, and has now provided commentary on the second half of the book. Moo's pledge of a syntactical diagram of the Greek text in the second volume of the original commentary is not fulfilled. We must be content with his three page analysis, which combines epistolary form (letter opening and closing) and a theological outline (four major theological points). In the new commentary, he adds an introductory section on text and translation.

There is much of merit in this commentary, especially for readers of *Themelios*. They will undoubtedly appreciate the close attention to the text, the interaction with a range of scholarly literature, the addressing of major issues in current Pauline and Romans scholarship, and, perhaps above all, the high regard for the text that the author clearly displays and the conservative (in fact, in many instances Reformed) conclusions

that are often reached, though virtually always with reasons and argumentation. There are a number of points where I agree with Moo – in fact, the vast majority. These include, for example, his view of Paul's situation at the time of writing, his belief in the integrity of the letter with all sixteen chapters being sent to Rome, an audience of mixed Jews and Gentiles, and a desire to appreciate the non-occasional nature of Romans. Regarding his exegesis, I agree that Romans 1:16–17 is the theme of the letter, that 1:18 – 3:20 describes the universal reign of sin, that the genitive in 3:22 is an objective genitive (not a subjective one), that 3:21 – 4:25 is concerned with justification by faith, and that Romans 7 is probably concerned with Paul, at least in part (although I would not use the same kind of logic and labelling that he does). Moo also includes three excurses. The first is on righteousness language in Paul, where he reinforces a traditional Reformed perspective on such language. I would wish to spend less time on arguing from an OT perspective on this, but would agree with much of what he says regarding the importance and conceptual framework of such language. The second is on Paul, 'works of the law', and first-century Judaism. Here Moo takes on a number of recent perspectives in Pauline studies, including both how to interpret Romans 2, and the idea that some might be justified by doing the law, and the so-called New Perspective on Paul represented by the work of Sanders, Dunn and others. While recognising that these scholars have forced the academic community to re-think a number of issues, Moo, rightly I think, calls into question their viewpoint. He suggests that early Judaism was more legalistic than recent scholarship has wanted to suggest, and that Sanders' reconstruction of the Judaism of the time might not be entirely accurate. The third excursus is on Paul's 'with Christ' language. Although there is some ambiguity whether this is

a word study or a theological conceptual study, Moo is right to note the forensic dimension in Paul's linkage between Adam and Christ.

There are also, however, a few things that I would disagree with Moo on, not because I think that Moo is necessarily wrong, but because I disagree with the perspective from which he interprets the particular verses and issues. One is in terms of his textual criticism. Moo seems to end up supporting the Nestle-Aland text in the vast majority of instances, although not always on clear lines of evidence, often going contrary to the weight of the witnesses. He often appeals to contextual reasons, but I do not find all of these grammatically convincing. This leads to my second criticism. Moo seems to lack any kind of a systematic understanding of Greek grammar. As a result, on numerous occasions he appears to be appealing to certain linguistic terminology simply because it supports the exegetical case that he is making, while on other occasions he dismisses such categories with words of caution. Thirdly, in a number of instances, I would have to disagree with Moo's exegetical conclusions, simply because I read the evidence differently. On Romans 7:7–25, on the use of the 'I', I agree with Moo in large part, but his references to past and present tenses and his use of a temporal framework to establish his position, is to my mind not entirely convincing or consistent. In many instances it is Moo's theological considerations that are decisive for his exegesis. For example, regarding the importance of reconciliation in Paul, after citing a limited range of evidence, Moo dismisses its centrality for Pauline theology. I would agree, but this does not mean – as he claims – that it should be dismissed as being peripheral in Romans.

In conclusion, there is much of use here to exegetes, especially those of a conservative theological perspective. The citation of secondary literature

is very full and generally reliable. Of course, one will always wish to search further, since there are major sources that are not cited at all. But overall, this is a commentary that can be recommended, if for no other reason than it is unashamed of its position and represents it well.

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Forgiveness and Reconciliation. Biblical and Theological Essays

C.F.D. Moule
London: SPCK, 1998,
xi + 242 pp., h/b., £25.00

Forgiveness and Reconciliation collects together 13 essays from the former Cambridge New Testament professor, all previously published between 1956 and 1995 but hitherto relatively inaccessible. Four essays address 'the theology of forgiveness', while the bulk of the others concern themselves with aspects of NT Christology and exegetical issues in the 'Jesus-Traditions' of the synoptic gospels.

Let it be said at once that there is more profound common sense and wisdom in this book than in many weightier NT volumes, and the reason, I think, is not hard to find. The subtitle of the book (although confusingly given on the title page as 'And Other New Testament Themes') highlights its abiding methodological merit: this is New Testament interpretation harnessed throughout to *theological* concerns and interests. Recent writers, notably Francis Watson, have made a strong case for breaking down the dividing wall of hostility between biblical studies and theology. Moule undermines it from the NT side; arguing that taking the NT itself on its own terms drives exegetes 'to plant a bewildering footstep beyond the frontier of their own discipline and in the area of dogma'.

For example, Moule explores the meaning of 'in Christ' in the New Testament. He suggests that the NT writers do not intend the phrase as equivalent to our more popular notion of being in the presence of the Spirit of God, but actually envisage 'in Christ' as true in a spatial sense. How could this be? Perhaps we have confused 'personal' with 'individual', and Christ as a person redefines our notion of what a person is. The idea may now be familiar from the work of theologians like Colin Gunton, but here (originally in 1983) it is presented primarily as an attempt to do justice to the NT texts. Similarly a 1987 article probes the 'gravamen' (accusation; grievance) against Jesus and suggests that the most plausible historical thesis is that it was his own (Christological) self-understanding as personally fulfilling God's plan for Israel which lay at the heart of his opponents' hostility.

Several other chapters likewise explore ideas which stand in continuity with Moule's significant 1977 volume, *The Origin of Christology*, wherein he argued that Christology arises out of the nature of Jesus rather than out of any process of divinisation (or 'evolution'). In particular, two studies suggest that the synoptic gospels do not seek to present fully post-Resurrection evaluations of Jesus, with Luke-Acts providing the much-needed control on such a thesis.

The same balance of theology and exegesis characterises the opening section on forgiveness, which begins with a reprinted chapter from his 1977 book. Then in 'Preaching the Atonement' he suggests that the biblical language of sacrifice is most effectively communicated today in language of 'expense': costly forgiveness requires a response of costly repentance. The following chapter explores limits to the metaphor of 'triumph', suggesting that triumphalism results from a failure to balance triumph with suffering. The final essay in the section promotes

restoration of offenders over retribution. The concern throughout is to 'analyse realistically the structure of any reconciliation between persons'. Moule is willing to examine forgiveness as a human transaction without subsuming it immediately under the rubric of atonement. Again, even where others may now proffer similar conclusions (such as Gregory Jones' major treatment of forgiveness), there is much to learn from observing how substantive theological concerns are carried and clarified by thorough NT scholarship. Moule's style and influence may well be seen in the work of recent writers such as N.T. Wright, seeking depth in a discipline too easily given to the bland or merely fashionable.

A closing essay on 'The Holy Spirit and Scripture' is a judicious analysis of exactly what could be meant by the language of 'inspiration' when applied to the Bible. Never afraid to follow wherever the biblical evidence leads, Moule's parting shot might provoke some constructive self-evaluation in the evangelical constituency. It is one more reason to offer this collection a warm welcome.

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Courting Betrayal: Jesus as Victim in the Gospel of John (JSNTSS 161)

Helen C. Orchard
Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998,
294 pp., h/b. £50.00/p/b. £16.95

The book is based on a PhD thesis finished under the supervision of David Clines at the University of Sheffield. It consists of a narrative investigation of the character of Jesus as victim. It is therefore not a direct contribution to christology. It nevertheless both presupposes and reinforces a 'low' christology of John's Gospel. This becomes clear in the first two chapters, in which Orchard presents the tension between 'high' and 'low' christology as the major

problem of John's presentation of Jesus. She locates her study in the context of liberation theology, referring to authors such as Jon Sobrino, Leonardo Boff, Sheila Collins, Rebecca Chopp and Georges Casalis, and agrees with them that theology and especially christology cannot be neutral: 'Every Christology is partisan and committed' (Boff). The motif of violence and Jesus as victim links this theological context both with the text of the Fourth Gospel, and with the historical context of the community behind this Gospel: the historical context of an 'oppressed' community in conflict with Judaism is described by summaries of the works by J.L. Martyn, R.E. Brown, D. Rensberger and M.W.G. Stibbe. There is an impressive list of textual references to various forms of violence against Jesus: fifteen instances of actual or intended severe physical violence, four instances of direct physical harassment, nine instances of direct verbal harassment, twenty instances of statements of indirect opposition and discrimination, seven instances of death threats against Jesus. Thus, the Fourth Gospel fits a pattern which Orchard infers from her reading of liberation theologians: '... victims commonly choose a messiah who is also a victim True liberation of the oppressed necessitates that the liberator too be oppressed' (24). This perspective in turn influences Orchard's view of the process that led to the Fourth Gospel's presentation of Jesus: whereas e.g. Brown thinks that the community is rejected and persecuted by non-Christian Jews like Jesus was, Orchard reverses the direction of influence: 'The Johannine Christians have created as their representative a Jesus who like them is rejected, persecuted and not of this world' (63). Orchard opens up the possibility of reading John as a two-level drama. In the process the picture of Jesus is viewed by Orchard exclusively as a creation of the community and there is no reflection on the relationship between this and

the reality which Jesus actually faced. I have to admit to being dissatisfied with what seems a rather one-sided approach.

The major part of the study (chs. 5-10) goes through the whole of the Gospel, focusing on every aspect of the text that contributes to the presentation of Jesus as victim. The exegesis Orchard presents can on the one hand be welcomed in that it confronts the reader with numerous aspects of suffering Jesus had to endure throughout his ministry. Thus the study provides much evidence to balance those approaches to John's presentation of Jesus that overemphasise the victorious Jesus as a divine figure. On the other hand, the exegesis is at times too obviously driven by the desire to find the motif of violence and Jesus as victim everywhere - this leads to some unconvincing exegetical decisions (e.g. the treatment of the footwashing episode in ch. 8).

The most challenging part of the thesis consists of Orchard's perception of Jesus' self-cognisance as a victim. Utilising insights from victimology as an offshoot of criminology, she looks for evidence that shows Jesus' participation in his own victimisation, finding it for instance in Jesus' offensive behaviour in his encounter with Nicodemus or in John 6, which is structured by Orchard along the lines of Jesus' (mis-)behaviour: he challenges (6:26-34), alienates (6:35-42), angers (6:43-52), repulses (6:53-60) and repels his listeners (6:61-66). Although Orchard is careful not simplistically to blame Jesus for his own fate, the thrust of her argumentation suggests that she might be sympathetic to this view. This perception of Jesus as someone who was 'asking for it' (265), who 'appears to collude with his oppressors' (264) opens up a lot of difficult questions that deserve to be tackled seriously. Thus Orchard's study might stimulate someone to pick up and address these issues.

That would have to include theological assessments of some questions which Orchard's postmodern approach excludes: is there a relationship between Jesus' behaviour and his absolute truth claims? If so, does this relationship render his behaviour even more suspect, or is there any justification for it? What are the consequences for liberation theology? Is a picture of a Jesus who 'asked for it' and who not only endured but embraced violence, emphatically to be rejected as a model for those who are already oppressed? Should they stand up to their oppressors? If not, what are the alternatives? Orchard's study is provocative. She puts pressing questions on the agenda of those who refuse to do NT exegesis without an interest in contemporary relevance.

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Divine Revelation

Paul Avis (ed.)
London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997,
viii + 215 pp., £12.95

This book contains eleven essays which seek to examine in various ways and from very different viewpoints how divine revelation has been and is understood in theological reflection and discussion. While some essays no doubt would be useful for a first year student of theology, some will not be understood easily at that level. I seriously doubt that the essay by Gabriel Daly ('Revelation in the Theology of the Roman Church') or that by Paul Avis, the editor, ('Divine Revelation in Modern Protestant Theology') would be regarded as 'accessible' for lay Christians of all denominations' as the cover suggests.

The essays tend to be quite technical and several will require some degree of philosophical training if they are to make sense. However, for people with a little such background, all the essays will make interesting reading. Some offer a very useful overview and

summary of approaches to and the history of the subject that they tackle. Apart from the two above, also notable is a useful essay by Terence Penelhum on 'Revelation and Philosophy'. Here the writer starts (unfortunately) by speaking of Aquinas' view of revelation and taking that as the 'traditional' basis. He then shows very briefly but clearly how various philosophers attacked this view of revelation with an overview touching on the views of Spinoza, Newton, Butler, Hume and so on. For a student beginning such studies the essay does help to provide a perspective on what people were saying, and how they differed from or attacked the more traditional view of revelation.

The book opens with a Foreword by the editor. Here he summarises well the prevailing assumptions of all the writers and indeed accurately reflects the problem of Divine Revelation for modern theologians. He says this: 'The consensus is that we do not have direct, unmediated access to this original revelation; it is mediated to us through a body of literature - the Bible - that reflects the thought forms of its time and is itself the product of a complex process ...' (vii). Of course, even this begs great questions as to why we might look at the Bible at all for Divine Revelation, and where the revelation of God in creation fits. Some of these questions are discussed in later essays but not in any great detail. Strangely, the final essay ('Revelation Reaffirmed' by William J. Abraham), which surely should have been the first essay logically, is the most helpful in analysing for us why modern theologians find themselves in the state that they do. Here there is some attempt to reclaim the ground for a 'Christian account' of divine revelation. Here alone in the book is a strong statement about the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of our receiving divine revelation. And yet even here Abraham seems to be saying that the prime work of the Holy Spirit in such revelation is all at the reception end of the revelation. One

wonders why the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in the discussion both about how the revelation is 'sent' and the means chosen by which the revelation is 'sent' (creation, Bible, Jesus etc.).

The opening essay by James Dunn ('Biblical Concepts of Revelation') is, to my mind, the best. It is the only essay that goes to the heart of the biblical material and seeks to analyse some of the particular means by which the divine revelation is received in Scripture (dream, vision, apocalypse etc.). My frustration through this article was simply what was *not* discussed. How do these constituent parts of divine revelation hold together in what we know as Scripture? Do they hold together? If they do, what does that add to our understanding of Revelation seen in its individual parts?

Richard Bauckham's essay on 'Jesus the Revelation of God' is also worthy of careful study. It is one of the few essays which seeks to deal with specific issues of epistemology, which is surprising given the book's title. This essay provides an analysis of three ways in the modern period in which the revelation of God in or through Jesus has been understood. The third option, which speaks of Jesus revealing the unique presence and action of God, is then developed by Bauckham. Again this is a complex essay but a very useful one, showing ways of moving beyond some current debates and arriving at a more distinctively Christian and biblical view of Jesus as the revelation of God. The avoidance of any male pronouns when talking of God results in a prose that is, in places, utterly tortuous (for example, we read whole pages like this: '... God not only gives Israel her identity as God's people but also gives Godself God's own identity as Israel's God ...' Fortunately, this style is not uniform in the essays.

Anyone looking for a more traditional or evangelical approach to divine revelation will be disappointed by

this book. Likewise anyone looking for quick help and easy answers to some very complicated issues of epistemology will not find them here. It is a somewhat disappointing book but probably an important read for those beginning studies in the subject at college or university level.

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By The Renewing of Your Minds, The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine

Ellen Charry
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997,
245 pp., £37.50

By the Renewing of Your Minds was released in paperback in October 1999 and deserves a reintroduction as a fine academic book that seeks to narrow the gap between the lectern and the learner; the pulpit and the pew; the head and the heart. Ellen Charry is Margaret W. Harmon, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. Coming to embrace the Christian faith as an adult has marked Charry's work with a passion and persuasiveness that is as refreshing in style as it is rigorous in scholarship.

Her premise, undergirded with careful historical data, is that doctrine is intended to be pastoral and that theology at its best is inherently a part of spirituality. Right thinking theology makes for a right living (virtuous in the classic sense) church. Charry makes her case for aretogenic theology through carefully exposing the pastoral intention of the church's great theologians from the Biblical narrative in the Gospels, Paul's canonical school of theology, through the patristic work of Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, and Augustine of Hippo. She continues to make her case dealing with Anselm of Canterbury, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Julian of Norwich. Her summary of Calvin as a pastoral theologian is

'must' reading for anyone who under-appreciates the concerns of the Genevian's heart for God's people.

Her historical work creates a respectable platform for her final chapter on 'Sapiential Theology'. What the reader learns in getting to this part is well worth the time it takes to get there. The final chapter is simply hard to put down. After a substantive review of her historical thesis, she presents 'limited conclusions' for the task of Christian doctrine. She argues that today's theologian has the same aretogenic purpose as those in her historical litany, never forgetting 'that God was seeking to draw people to himself for their own good'. She maintains that each theologian, then and now, must seek to 'unfold the mystery of God in order to bring people to know and love him and to live accordingly'. She asserts that 'Christians have suffered at the hands of theologians who lost sight of God's respect for us even in our sinfulness, and portrayed God as implicitly approving of our suffering and self-abasement'.

In an astonishing sentence that mitigates against the politically correct atmosphere of academic tolerance which turns a blind eye to inconsistency and irrational inclusiveness, Charry declares, 'Those who conclude that the Christian tradition is useless or irredeemable harmful cannot in good conscience be Christian theologians'. She continues her argument with passion.

In a culture in which moral categories are empty, to link truth and goodness seems precarious. If goodness has no clear content, how can one argue that goodness is a norm of truth? But Scripture as a whole – and the Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, and the story of Jesus Christ in particular – should protect Christians against the moral neutrality of our day.

Charry's book will contribute to the very thing she wants to see revived in

the education of the church's theologians, from scholastic ivory towers to Sunday schools in the local church, theologians thinking of themselves as 'pastors helping people find their identity in God'.

Embedded in Charry's careful academic argument are common axioms and colloquial phrases that wake the reader up while wading through seventeen centuries of Christian theology. I think she sprinkled non-academic language throughout her text to illustrate her commitment to unite head-heavy theology with the readers heart. When I asked Ellen about this observation – to test its legitimacy before including it in this review – she smiled broadly and exclaimed, 'Oh, you noticed! Yes, exactly. Theology is good for us, who we really are and how God really loves us.'

By the Renewing of Your Minds will contribute to Paul's concern that we will once again discern the will of God as good for us, acceptable and perfect for himself. Theology may once again serve the pastoral function of being good for the people of God.

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Karl Barth's Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological and Human: Towards an Ethic of the Family. Issues in Systematic Theology, Volume 4.

Gary W. Deddo
New York: Peter Lang, 1999,
440 pp., \$66.00/£40

Dr. Gary Deddo has done theological students and educators a great service by producing this book. It is a meticulous and well-organised study, evident primarily in Deddo's willingness to summarise his work as he goes along and to note important patterns and parallels in Barth's thought. As a result, the entire book is

seamlessly woven together and comprises an organic whole. I will be turning to it frequently both as a research student whose interests are in Trinitarian theology and as a parent!

Deddo's theological perspective is congruent with Barth's and he offers no substantial critique of Barth's thought; only minor recommendations for clarification and expansion.

The book itself is composed of four parts: Part One deals with the manner in which Barth theologically grounded his anthropology and ethics. Here we are introduced to his Trinitarian and Christological thought. Part Two, entitled 'Humanity as Co-Humanity: Being in Covenantal Relations One With Another' deals specifically with the contours of Barth's theological anthropology. Parts One and Two comprise an excellent commentary on Barth's Trinitarian, Christological and anthropological thought and are worth the price of the book alone. Part Three deals with Barth's thought in relation to issues arising from the parent-child relationship, specifically the theological and ethical implications of procreation and child rearing. Part Four is devoted to Deddo's own constructive proposals through critical engagement with other theological and non-theological approaches and by addressing issues of contemporary relevance to the North-American context.

As a participant in the North American context myself I found Deddo's critique of James Dobson, an extremely influential Christian psychologist and spokesperson for the American family, particularly interesting. Using Barth's theological framework as a critical grid he examines Dobson's views on the purpose and goal of parenting, the nature of the child and parental authority, and the purpose and dynamics of discipline.

Dobson, representing the 'pragmatic

/moralist' approach to the family, does not fare well. After reviewing Dobson's presuppositions regarding the quality and mode of the parent-child relationship Deddo concludes that 'for Dobson the parent-child relationship is in large part a variety of operant conditioning effected by the parent on behalf of the child' (296). That this mechanism can produce pragmatic results is due to the fact that it is based upon the dynamics of creaturely reality and is therefore applicable not only to humans but also to dogs and frogs. But we are not merely creatures, we are also persons created in the image of God, and as such this technique is by definition unable to foster the personal responsibility and maturity that are meant to characterise genuinely human relationships. Deddo concludes therefore that 'there is no specifically Christian content to Dobson's suggestions' due to the fact that 'such procedures call for no human encounter, no covenant fellowship, neither seeing eye to eye, hearing and speaking, nor giving and receiving in gratitude, responsibility and freedom' (297). Dobson's proposals ultimately falter on the fact that they work from a rationality that is neither Trinitarian nor Christological and subsequently run counter to a logic that is genuinely human.

Deddo's reflections on the theological and ethical implications of procreation and adoption are excellent, as are his comments on the identity of the child as a child of God and the significance of gender in the parent-child relationship. It can only be hoped that this book will be required reading for a future generation of ministers, theologians, and family therapists and that its insights will be integrated into many works oriented toward a more general readership. This is really where the fruit of Deddo's work is most needed.

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Encyclopedia of Christianity, Volume I, (A-D)

Erwin Fahlbusch
Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans,
Leiden/Boston/Koln: Brill, 1999,
xxxviii + 893 pp., £50.00/\$100.00

This is the first part of the five-volume *Encyclopedia of Christianity*, which will undoubtedly become a major reference work for many years to come. The encyclopedia is a translation of the third revised edition of the German *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon: Internationale theologische Enzyklopädie*, with significant enhancements and additions. These include articles on most countries of the world, including former Communist countries which have gained their independence since 1989, the latest statistical information on religious affiliation in each country, seventy additional biographical articles on prominent figures in church history and many expanded or new articles on topics of particular interest to English-speaking readers.

The aim of the encyclopedia is, as the publishers state, to present Christianity in its global context, its ecumenical context, its sociocultural context and its historical context. A wide range of contributors has been assembled, although given the origin of the work, the majority are German. Similarly a wide cross-section of traditions is represented in both writers and articles. Thus in volume one the 465 articles include Abortion, Action Theory, Alexandrian Theology, Anchorites, Anselm, Anti-Semitism, Apostolic Churches, Argentina, Assurance of Salvation, Atheism and Ave Maria, without even venturing beyond A. On the basis of one volume it is impossible to assess the overall balance of articles, but it does seem that coverage of the subject areas is good, with minor cavils due mainly to the reviewer's personal biases.

As far as the content of the articles is concerned, many are straightforwardly factual and avoid

controversy. This is most obvious in articles dealing with philosophical terms (such as Deontology) and ecclesiastical practices (such as Anaphora). Articles on various Christian denominations and organisations are written from a generally sympathetic standpoint, and this feature is also evident in articles on other religions and movements. Thus the article on Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh makes no mention of the highly controversial aspects of the movement which he founded. The material on ethical issues shows rather more diversity of approach, with the article on Abortion giving a balanced presentation of all sides of the controversy, whilst that on the Death Penalty takes a clear stance against capital punishment.

The length of the articles varies considerably, usually reflecting the importance of the subject, but some differences are not readily explicable. Why, for example, should five and a half pages be given to a (strongly conservative) piece on Birth Control, whilst Abortion receives two and a half pages? The reason is not at all obvious, and stronger editorial control should probably have been exercised in such instances. In fairness it has also to be said that there are not many cases where this is so. The scope and complexity of some of the subjects covered also presents difficulties for the authors of articles. Buddhism, for example, is extremely difficult to describe clearly and concisely, and the treatment is consequently highly compressed. Other subjects which suffer from such treatment include Aristotelianism and Critical Theory, with both articles assuming a fair amount of background knowledge on the part of the reader. The broad scope of some subjects and the specialised nature of some academic disciplines means that a number of articles are divided among several authors. Usually this does not present significant problems, but occasionally one section of an article contradicts a later section. This is noticeable in two conflicting views of the New Testament

material in the article on Church Government.

The treatment of biblical books and subjects almost inevitably provides more scope for controversy, with the authors' presuppositions showing through more clearly. Hugh Williamson provides a balanced treatment of Chronicles, and the article on Acts is generally satisfactory, although the bibliography consists entirely of German works. On the other hand, the article on Daniel speaks in terms of 'fictive history' and legend, and gives the work a Maccabean date, without ever mentioning the possibility that some may believe on scholarly grounds that the book was written by the historical Daniel in Babylon and records historical events. The article on the Decalogue speaks in terms of the evolution of the Decalogue over a long span of history and finds conflicts between the Exodus and Deuteronomy accounts. A number of articles express a view of Scripture which many evangelicals will find unacceptable.

The articles on theological subjects often treat Scripture as a record of evolving human religious insight rather than as a revelation originating in God. In the article on Angel, for example, belief in cherubim is ascribed to the influence of Canaanite religion, whilst the article on Antichrist finds the origins of this belief in the second generation of Christians, not among the apostles. There are several extended treatments of major subjects such as the Church and Christology. The article on Christology, with five different authors, attempts a wide coverage of the subject which includes Orthodox and Roman Catholic perspectives. A considerable amount of useful material is well presented, but it does not appear that any of the authors believes that a significant contribution to Christology has ever been made by an evangelical theologian.

On the basis of volume one, it can be

said that the encyclopedia will be an indispensable reference work for a long time to come. The statistics in the articles on individual countries will of course date rapidly, and some are no doubt already out of date. Nevertheless the usefulness even of these articles will remain substantially undiminished. It is a work to be read critically, offering as it sometimes does a clearer insight into the world of scholarship than the world of the Bible, but *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* promises to be a place where readers (and reviewers) can consume many happy hours pursuing subjects from one article to another.

W. David J. McKay

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Calvin and the Sabbath

Richard Gaffin

Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications - Mentor, 1998, 173 pp., \$15.95

Calvin's position on the sabbath is complex. It has long been recognised that there is a difference (in emphasis at least) between his teaching in the *Institutes* and in his exegetical writings. Richard Gaffin examines this teaching carefully, passage by passage, in two substantial chapters on 'Theological and Confessional Writings' and 'Exegetical Writings and Sermons'. These chapters are sandwiched between brief chapters on '[Medieval] Background' and 'Other Reformers and Reformation Creeds'.

His exposition of the *Institutes* is very fair. He concludes that there is no significant difference between the (first) 1536 edition and the (definitive) 1559 edition. Calvin sees the primary purpose of the Sabbath as typifying our spiritual rest from works. This purpose comes to an end with the coming of Christ. The Sabbath commandment also provided a set day for public worship. This need remains, but which or how many days

of the week is a matter of indifference. The Sabbath commandment also teaches the duty of employers to give their employees time of rest.

Given his own views, Gaffin is very fair in setting out Calvin's position. I do, however, have three minor quibbles. First, Gaffin fails to draw attention to what, for me, is one of the most remarkable elements of Calvin's teaching. In the *Institutes* Calvin never makes mention of any obligation today oneself to rest from employment - only the need to provide rest for one's employees. This is a remarkable omission and shows just how far Calvin was removed from later Reformed sabbatarianism.

Secondly, Gaffin highlights Calvin's general statements about the moral law and deduces from these that 'the commandment, as an element of the Decalogue, applies to all people in every age' (45-47). But this is not so much to argue from the general to the particular as from the general in defiance of the particular. Calvin explicitly states that the fourth commandment is different from the others in this respect (2:8:28). Gaffin's case assumes an identity between the moral law and the Ten Commandments, which Calvin never states. Even if he had stated it in general terms, he makes it quite clear in his exposition of the fourth commandment that parts of it at least do not belong to the moral law. Gaffin argues from Calvin's teaching about the eternity of God's moral law, while Calvin explicitly states the fourth commandment is at least in part a typical ceremony that has been abolished (2:8:28,31). This clear teaching cannot be neutralised by appeal to general statements about the moral law, which Calvin explicitly states not to apply in this instance. Calvin, following the New Testament writers, did not make the mistake of simply identifying the Ten Commandments and the moral law.

Finally, in 2:8:34 Calvin rejects the view that the moral part of the

commandment is the fixing of one day in seven, while the ceremonial part (which particular day) has been changed. Gaffin objects to the idea that these words contain 'a condemnation of the view later set forth, for instance, in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*' (43). On what grounds does he object? Because Calvin was opposing medieval teaching at this point. No one in their right mind would claim that Calvin had the *Westminster Confession* in mind when he wrote, but that the view which he condemns was later espoused by the *Westminster Confession* is not so easily dismissed.

The final chapter begins with a summary of Calvin's position in the form of nineteen propositions. Apart from the first two, which claim that the Sabbath is part of God's eternal moral law, these are fair. There then follows an evaluation of Calvin's position in which the author presents his own view of the Lord's day as the weekly Sabbath. This is built upon his view of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance, an idea which Calvin did not take sufficiently seriously, he feels.

Gaffin is to be commended for his careful exposition of Calvin and for his taking care to distinguish clearly between Calvin's view and his own. In my opinion it is the former that is more faithful to the teaching of the New Testament.

Tony Lane

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Pauline Images in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow

Larry J. Kreitzer

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 241 pp., £14.95/\$23.00

Academic study of film is a huge growth area, and a popular choice amongst students. Interdisciplinary work is also growing, and Kreitzer is one amongst a group of theologians

turning their sites wider. He has already written on both the OT and the NT in film, but the added ingredient to his approach is that actually it is a three-way discussion – between Scripture, fiction, and the film accounts produced of those stories. In doing this, Kreitzer produces work which is not merely, 'What parallels can we see between the Bible and films?', but rather a fascinating discussion between different worlds touching on universal human themes.

In this volume, he chooses the following four stories with which to pursue this discussion – *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Dracula*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Each is allowed to interact with a particular theme or themes from Pauline theology (sin and salvation, looking in a glass darkly, communion imagery, and liberation from slavery). Following this interaction, Kreitzer then pursues the fictional narrative and the biblical theme through two films of the book in question. The choices of films vary between the well-known and obscure, and spans a good breadth of time, nationality, and film styles.

Without a doubt this work is fascinating. There are important questions to be asked of the role of Christianity in culture, and of course the figure of Paul looms large in that debate. As Kreitzer clearly demonstrates, that discussion works both ways. Biblical themes illuminate key ideas in literature, such as Crusoe's conversion as a type of religious conversion similar to Paul's Damascus road experience. Kreitzer illustrates how Defoe uses this device throughout the story, and how the film versions have then variously interpreted this. On the other hand, these interpretations then speak back to the interpretative process within the Church and others – perhaps the vampire obsession with blood guides many people's understanding of communion as the life-blood, rather than vice-versa.

Kreitzer is to be praised for a highly readable and original work. Yet the great shame is that he never wrestles with the very important hermeneutical questions involved. Which way is the flow going, or does it not matter? Are we constantly allowed to re-interpret, a hermeneutical circle between scripture, fiction, film, and back to scripture, or are there constants? Related to this, is the question of the purpose of this discussion. It cannot be denied that this discussion is great fun. Yet does it help us understand the text better, understand culture better, perhaps even offer apologetic devices? All these and more may be praiseworthy and helpful, but it is unclear which Kreitzer is aiming at. Whatever his response to this, I look forward to Kreitzer developing and taking his work further, and wrestling with some of these important issues.

Tony Gray
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Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader

Abraham Kuyper edited by James D. Bratt
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998,
xiv + 498 pp., £29.99

Abraham Kuyper was, in his day, a giant in every field to which he turned his hand: theology, church, politics, journalism, social criticism, and should be ranked as one of the most significant men of his generation. It is a shame, therefore, that the amount of material, primary and secondary, which is available in English relating to this man is very small. Nevertheless, the centennial of Kuyper's famous Stone Lectures (published in English as Lectures on Calvinism) led, among other things, to the publication of Peter Heslam's delightful monograph, *Creating a Christian Worldview* (Eerdmans) and this volume of selections from the writings of Kuyper which are, as yet, not widely available to the English-speaking world. They reveal the many

faces of the man and James Bratt is to be warmly thanked for his services to the church in compiling such an insightful collection.

Behind the selections stands the world of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the social level, industrialisation effected such a dramatic transformation of European society that no-one of public stature could possibly have ignored it. As in Britain, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels described and analysed the changes they saw going on around them from a materialist perspective, so Kuyper sought to offer a Christian, specifically a Reformed Christian, perspective. Thus, in this collection we have his early attack on the uniformity which the pragmatic industrial society imposes on its members, as well as reasoned contributions to debates on the importance of manual labour, wage control and social engineering. In a world in which a national educational curriculum not only affects schools but will, sometime soon, affect university education as well; in which originality in the pursuit of anything other than profit is discouraged; and in which personal freedom means little more than the opportunity to run up credit card debts, I found many of Kuyper's observations on nineteenth century Dutch society to have a strangely contemporary ring (see, for example, his prophetic comments on the disastrous idea of high-rise flats on page 27). We may disagree with Kuyper's analysis, but the important thing to note is that Kuyper at least attempted a specifically Christian critique of the culture of his times.

Of his theology, there is sufficient material here for the novice to gain a good grasp of the basic constructive principles of his approach, with the essays on common grace, sphere sovereignty, and evolution being most noteworthy. Most important, however, is his 1871 essay entitled 'Modernism: A *Fata Morgana* in the Christian Domain'. Alongside Machen's *Christianity*

and *Liberalism*, this stands as one of the major orthodox statements on liberalism and is of relevance not just to historians but also to our contemporary situation. Kuyper's approach is different to that of Machen, analysing both the cultural roots and the perennial attractiveness of modernism. Having been for a while a modernist himself, he is well-qualified to speak on the topic. The essay should be read and reread, and I cannot begin to do it justice here. Nevertheless, a number of observations are apposite. First, unlike many contemporary theologians who claim the Kuyperian mantle, Kuyper makes it crystal clear that modernism, while it may use the language of orthodoxy and pay lip service to its creeds, in reality has nothing in common with orthodoxy other than its outward form. There is, in Kuyper's view, a basic antithesis between Christianity and liberalism. Second, modernism has no real substance: it places human reason at the centre of its scheme and generates a system that is ultimately nothing but talk about human psychology. Third, it is supremely intolerant of orthodoxy and yet scarcely ever engages with intelligent expressions of that orthodoxy, preferring instead to take cheap shots at caricatures and the lunatic fringe. Fourth, while sneering at the orthodox, it is, perversely, utterly parasitic on orthodoxy, on its churches, on its outreach, on its institutions, on its traditions, and on its money. Sound familiar to any theology students out there? Read Kuyper, and think on ...

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God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann

Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (eds)
Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998,
xv + 350 pp., £19.99

This attractive volume contains a collection of twenty essays in honour of Walter Brueggemann's sixty-fifty birthday, plus 'A Prompt Retrospect' on the theology of the Old Testament written by Brueggemann himself and a twenty-page bibliography of his writings. The first section of the book is entitled 'Engaging Brueggemann's Theology', in particular concerning his understanding of God (Gottwald, Fretheim, Blumenthal). Then follow five essays on 'God in the Torah' (Barr, Lee, Crenshaw, Patrick, Moberly), six on 'God in the Prophets' (Gunn, Clements, Terrien, O'Connor, Rendtorff, Trible) and six on 'God in the Writings' (Miller, Westermann, Clines, Balentine, Linafelt, Beal).

Many of the essays engage with two programmatic articles on 'A Shape for Old Testament Theology' published by Brueggemann in 1985 and there are frequent references to other Brueggemann works, including his *Theology of the Old Testament* (1997) which turned his 1985 programme into a *magnum opus* (reviewed in *Themelios* 25.1: pp. 89-90). The themes of those two articles - 'structure legitimisation' and 'embrace of pain' - recur throughout the book, almost like a refrain, as the theologians gathered for this celebration of post-modern OT theology present their contributions. The second theme is particularly prominent, with treatments of human laments and divine tears, and reflections on suffering as diverse as the Holocaust, the dispossession of Maoris in New Zealand and genocide in former Yugoslavia.

Few readers will agree with all that is written here, and some will disagree with much of it. Most of the authors assume a post-modern approach to

the Bible and effectively discount other more traditional approaches. However it is provocative writing, and all who want to reflect more deeply on the meaning of the OT at the turn of the millennium will find ample food for thought. I used some of the essays in a postgraduate OT seminar during the past semester where they provoked a lively discussion. Although two or three essays are rather disappointing, there are many that will repay careful study.

To close, here are a few quotations to give something of the flavour of the work.

Thinking the unthinkable, saying the unsayable, and praying the unprayable had a curious effect on me. It strengthened my faith. Truth really is the seal of God and living this truth was good - for God, for the Jewish people, for the covenant, and for me. (Blumenthal)

As an exercise in hermeneutical complications, the whole matter is of great interest. (Barr)

Pharaoh's daughter ... must cross dangerous social and ethnic boundaries to help, regardless of her father's pervasive policy. Her radical action cannot be overstressed. (Lee)

Putting the Bible in the hands of the Maori, argued many settlers, was a dangerous thing. These 'savages' could not be trusted to read it the right way. . . . The Bible was a subversive document. (Gunn)

There is ... an openness on God's part, an expectation that the intercession will have an impact, an invitation to shape the future. Such praying may seem audacious ... But that seems to be just what the deity expects of the prophetic intercessors, that they will really make the case that appeals to the heart of God and effects a merciful response. (Miller)

The suffering of the poor is a human problem, created by humans and soluble, if it is soluble at all, by

humans. To collapse the social problem into a theological one, to make it God's problem, is ... an abdication of responsibility. (Clines)

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On Being a Theologian: John Macquarrie

John Macquarrie, edited by John H. Morgan
London: SCM, 1999,
viii + 232 pp., £12.95

Many students have either struggled with or revelled in Macquarrie's *Principles of Christian Theology*. His *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* is a landmark study in Christological thought, and his groundbreaking work on existential theology set forth the works of Heidegger and Bultmann for a new generation. John Macquarrie, Emeritus Lady Margaret Professor of Theology in Oxford, is certainly no lightweight when it comes to theology.

However, for readers of *Themelios*, his existentialist programme in theology has taken him a long way beyond the biblical revelation. This must not mean that his thought be ignored, for, as this book illustrates, he has wrestled with some of the great thinkers of the enlightenment, and some of the most influential theologians in the modern period. He has made these people accessible, and developed their thought in important directions. Thus this book is a helpful mix between autobiography, historical anecdotes, and theological writing, giving a clearer picture of Macquarrie.

This work is not essential reading, but provides insight into a period of British and American theology that saw the growth and fading of an existential liberalism. Nevertheless, it does remind us evangelicals that these existential questions must still be dealt with, as must many of the ecumenical issues that Macquarrie raised through his long career. It also

offers a fun little window into the world of Oxford theology!

Tony Gray
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The Didache

Kurt Neiderwimmer
Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press,
Hermeneia, 1998,
xxvii + 288 pages, h/b., \$52.00

Neiderwimmer's commentary on the *Didache* is the third *Hermeneia* Commentary on the Apostolic Fathers. These are early Christian writings close in time to the writing of the NT. Although theologically distinct from the canonical writings by virtue of standing outside the canon, historically they are close to them and therefore of great help for NT interpretation and the reconstruction of Christian origins.

First published in 1883, the *Didache* is a document of about the same length as Galatians, but there can be little certainty as to its date, its purpose or its provenance. There are also significant questions about the integrity of the text; different parts of the *Didache* appear to contradict each other, and scholars have presented different theories as to how it was edited over time.

Fundamental to Neiderwimmer's analysis is his source critical approach, which posits a strong distinction between the Didachist's source and his own redaction and expansions. Neiderwimmer sees the text as the work of one compiler, the Didachist, who was an early second century Jewish-Christian church leader, possibly a bishop. He may have written around 120. He had sources which he compiled, expanded and interpreted to produce a kind of book of rules to order the life, worship and leadership of his local church community.

Neiderwimmer views the Didachist as fundamentally conservative. He

preserves and protects old traditions but applies them to the developing current situation of his community. In so doing the Didachist is keen to reconcile differences, and Neiderwimmer uses this to explain apparent contradictions in the text over the eucharist, for example, and the reception of itinerants.

There are four sources, possibly very ancient, and they preserve the archaic traditions of a particular local community. These sources are (1) an originally Jewish text, the Two Ways, an exhortation for the reader to choose the way of life and not the way of death; (2) a (written or oral) archaic liturgical tradition concerning baptism and the Eucharist; (3) a (probably written) archaic tradition concerning how to receive itinerant charismatics; and (4) an apocalyptic description of the end time, the ending of which is lost.

The Didachist's own contribution may be seen primarily in his concern to Christianise the material with which he works. Thus for example it is the Didachist who by a redactional insertion at 7.1 turns the Jewish Two Ways tradition into baptismal catechesis, and who adds Jesus tradition.

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The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform

Roger E. Olson
Downers Grove, IL/Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1999,
652 pp., \$34.99/£16.99.

'The telling of history is the retelling of stories.' With these words Roger Olson alerts the readers of *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* that the story referred to in the title consists of many stories. In both cases, 'story' refers not to 'fiction or fable' but rather to the historical 'narrative' of the church

in general and its beliefs in particular (13). Olson employs story as the literary motif for his history of Christian theology, dividing this narrative into parts with titles such as 'The Opening Act' (2nd century), 'A New Twist in the Narrative' (16th century), and 'The Centre of the Story Falls Apart' (18th - 19th centuries). As is evident also in the preface and introduction to the book, Olson's intent is to write a history of theology in one of the contemporary languages of today, 'story'.

At the same time, while seeking to write a history of theology that speaks today's language, Olson does not unthinkingly overturn reasonable historical judgements in the interests of contemporary ideologies. He writes, '... there does exist a line of influential Christian thinkers and ideas between the New Testament and today, and ... even though this line is open to debate, correction and revision, it is not merely a collection of "dead white males" identified by a powerful elite within the church to support the dominance of a certain group of leaders.' Referring to the fact that there were not church mothers in reasonably comparable numbers to the church fathers, he states, 'The fact there were not is a scandal for the church but not justification for revisionist histories that invent them' (18-19). The result of this combination of contemporaneity and freedom from contemporaneity is a clear and very readable history which introduces the reader to the major persons, events, movements and ideas which have shaped the theological heritage of Christianity. (Those interested in a survey of church history which intentionally seeks to include historically 'under-represented' peoples may wish to consult Mark Ellingsen, *Reclaiming Our Roots: An Inclusive Introduction to Church History*, 2 vols. [Trinity Press International, 1999-].)

As is often the case in comprehensive histories of theology, a large, but not

disproportionate, number of pages (approximately 250 out of 585) is devoted to the earliest centuries of the church (2nd - 5th centuries). The reader is introduced to the major figures, events, heresies (yes, Olson is not afraid to use the term), and beliefs which shaped early doctrinal development. Here, as elsewhere in the book, Olson's passion is for and his focused attention is on the thought, the theology, of the church, rather than on the historical-cultural contexts. The story he tells is an historical one, yet the major plot line is, as it should be in this book, the story of theology, not of history.

While many readers may identify Olson's intentionally narrative, story-telling tone as perhaps the most significant characteristic of the book, there are two other commitments which have equal, if not greater, impact on his interpretation of the history of Christian theology. Olson's narrative recounts the story of theology as one consisting in 'tensions, conflicts and controversies'. This goes beyond merely granting to selected heresies their places in the history of orthodoxy. Rather, this consciousness of conflict pervades the narrative. 'Every belief ...', Olson writes in the introduction, 'arose because of a challenge.' And, for Olson this observation is not simply an analysis of the course of the development of theology, but it is a testimony to the historical, this-worldly nature of Christian belief: '... every major Christian belief arose for pressing, practical reasons'. A second important hermeneutical key for Olson is soteriological belief. The motivating force of Christian theological reflection, and the interpretive key to understanding it in its totality, is what Christians believe about God's redemptive intentions and work. Consequently, what Christians believe about, for example, Christ's redemptive person and work and the ways in which human beings do or do not co-operate with God in his redemptive work

(Olson refers to differing views on this point as synergism and monergism), constitute recurring themes in the plot.

Olson has succeeded very well in providing a comprehensive yet appropriately detailed (i.e., not shallow) introduction to the history of Christian theology which will leave its reader well informed. His style is accessible, and, unlike many others who claim to be writing for lay-people and beginning students, he gives clarifying attention to vocabulary and technical terminology. The reader who wishes to move on from this introduction will have to look elsewhere for bibliography, as one is not included.

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The Holy Spirit

John Owen, Abridged by R.J.K. Law.
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998,
viii + 208 pp., £3.50.

This volume is the latest in a series of abridgements of the writings of John Owen which have been commissioned by the Banner of Truth in recent years. The idea is to place the essence of Owen's theology into the hands of those for whom his original prolix, technical and sometimes opaque prose may well prove too daunting. This particular book summarises volume 3 of the nineteenth century Gold edition of Owen's works, containing the first five books of his massive study of the Holy Spirit.

The significance of Owen as a theologian can scarcely be doubted, and he is arguably the greatest theologian England ever produced. That he was airbrushed out of theological history after 1660 by an Anglican church for whom aspirations to social status and political influence have always been more important than biblical fidelity says far more about the parochialism of the English

establishment than any mediocrity inherent in Owen's theology. His grasp of patristic, medieval, and Reformation theology, of ancient, medieval and renaissance philosophy, his acuteness as an exegete, and his profound understanding of the theology of those with whom he disagreed, specifically the Catholics and the Socinians, meant that, by the standards of his day, he had no peer. In addition, like all great theologians from Augustine to Pannenberg, his thought defies reduction to one or two big ideas: his constant dialogue with the biblical text, with the broad Christian tradition, and with contemporary intellectual trends, meant that his work possessed a poise and balance from which we might all learn.

Therein, I believe, lies the problem with the current volume. While it is a useful summary of Owen's theology, Owen it most emphatically is not. The very nature of Dr Law's task requires that references to other great thinkers are omitted, that subtle arguments are simplified or removed, and that the constant dialogue with theological tradition and trends is conspicuous only by its absence. The result is a nice summary of one strand of Reformed thinking on the Holy Spirit and, if the book serves to encourage individuals to grapple with the original texts, then it has served a very useful purpose and is to be welcomed. Indeed, if you want to introduce a non-theological friend to Reformed theology, this book provides a most appropriate way of doing so. Nevertheless, for readers of *Themelios*, Owen should fulfil a much broader function in showing us how biblically faithful theology can be done in a manner which is truly catholic and in no way obscurantist. Only the originals can do this, because only there is Owen's method to be found in action. Even in the current climate of government-inspired cultural illiteracy, those few who have not bowed the knee to the dumbed-down Baals of modern

education and still subscribe to *Themelios* should wrestle with the real thing, which is, by the way, still in print and available from Banner of Truth.

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Earthshaping Earthkeeping: A Doctrine of Creation

John Weaver
London: Lynx Communications (SPCK), 1999,
xx + 172 pp., £12.99

This book's title initially leads one to expect that it is a theological discussion of environmental and ecological issues. However, while it certainly includes this, the book is actually much more wide-ranging, and is in fact (yet) another exposition of the interaction between the sciences and theology, this time by a geologist turned Baptist minister, currently Director of Pastoral Training at Regent's Park College, Oxford. For John Weaver, 'we explore the meaning and purpose of the world and universe, of which we are a part, through Scripture, church tradition and science' (ix).

So, Part 1 examines the biblical creation stories, in their Ancient Near Eastern cultural context, and asks what sort of God is revealed. Somewhat surprisingly, the exposition of Genesis is articulated assuming a sixth-century BC composition, and J and P sources (chs 1-3). However, this does not adversely influence the theological conclusions, many of which may be affirmed without hesitation. Here Weaver draws particularly on Wenham, Westermann, von Rad, Brueggemann, Atkinson and Ellen van Wolde. There are some very brief New Testament reflections (43-45).

Part 2 concentrates on the 'stories of science' - the mainstream scenarios of cosmological, planetary, chemical and biological evolution (presented

essentially as factual) - along with such issues as boundary questions and apparent design, and again asks what sort of God is being revealed.

Part 3 'tries to make sense' (x) of the stories, bringing them together in a holistic understanding of creation, with an appreciation of the transcendent and immanent Creator God who calls us into a covenant relationship of worship and care for the planet.

For Weaver, the order of the Genesis creation week may be related to the cosmological and geological history of the earth (31-32, 105, 155 note 19). Here he refers back to his rather similar-looking volume *In the Beginning God: Modern Science and the Doctrine of Creation* (Regent's Study Guides 2, 1994).

Following a now well-worn path, Weaver resists the 'conflict myth' and asserts the complementarity of science and theology (81-84). The question "How?" of science directs our rational minds to ask "Why?", a question that belongs to philosophy and theology' (92). Science addresses theology with respect to: the nature of physical reality; the beginning and end of the universe; and the ability and limits of the human mind in understanding creation (102). Theology addresses science with respect to: a holistic view of the universe; answers to boundary questions; and the all-encompassing will of God (104). The methodologies of science and theology are 'not totally different' (107). There is a fleeting acknowledgement that science involves interpretation, personal commitment and judgement in the search for truth about objective reality (100).

In itself, then, this book is an attractive, concise presentation of a variety of important topics in the complex interaction of the sciences and Judaeo-Christian theology, from a broadly evangelical perspective. As such, it makes a useful introductory

text for those new to this challenging discipline.

However, when considered alongside the numerous other publications on the subject now available, Weaver's contribution offers very little fresh material, despite its own style and emphases, and hardly 'fills a waiting niche' as is claimed by a cover commendation. That niche is already overcrowded by works by the likes of Polkinghorne, Peacocke, Ward, Barbour, Berry, Van Til, Wilkinson and McGrath, to name but a prominent few. In this respect, Weaver's book may add to what free market theorists would call 'choice', but arguably only serves to expand a 'multiplicity of sameness'.

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Law and Gospel: Philip Melancthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia

Timothy J. Wengert
Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997,
231 pp., £19.99

This volume belongs to the series, *Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought* which is being produced by Baker in the USA and Paternoster in Britain under the general editorship of Richard A. Muller. The series is itself most welcome for bringing to the attention of the wider scholarly public various facets of Reformation and Post-Reformation thought which have been all but neglected until now. This volume fulfils this purpose admirably, highlighting the development of the thinking of Luther's deputy, Melancthon, on the relationship between those classic Lutheran categories, law and gospel, in the course of a particular debate which was ongoing in the 1520s and 1530s.

The book focuses on the dispute between Melancthon and John Agricola. As such, it would appear to

form a complementary volume to Wengert's other monograph, *Human Freedom, Christian Righteousness* (OUP, 1998) which deals with connected themes in the context of Melancthon's exegetical debates with Erasmus. Wengert is a pupil of David Steinmetz and the Paternoster volume reflects all of the strengths associated with those trained in Reformation studies at Duke. Careful attention is paid to Melancthon's biblical exegesis, both in the context of contemporary events and against the background of medieval Catholicism; in addition, Wengert accents the practical purpose of exegesis in the sixteenth century. While today's exegetes may think their task is done when the canonical intention of the given text is laid bare, for Melancthon, as for Agricola, the task was not complete until the word of God had been brought to bear on the world around them. This is where the dispute developed: the question at its heart was, does the gospel precede or follow repentance? In other words, do you repent because you realise that God has been good to you in Christ, or because you have been brought to the edge of despair by the demands of the law, at which point the promise of the gospel intervenes? Not surprisingly, the conflict erupted not simply in the context of exegesis but in the context of ecclesiastical pedagogy. The question was one of how the Lutheran gospel of grace could be communicated to the masses in a manner which they could understand and which would not simply lead them to a radically defective antinomian understanding of grace. Melancthon had opted for a cautious approach that used the language of medieval piety but in a Lutheran manner; Agricola regarded this as subverting God's grace and pushing theology back to the works righteousness of Rome. This difference triggered the long running debate that was to reveal more and more radical differences between the theologies of the two men as the years went by. Remarkably, their friendship

survived for a long time throughout the polemical exchanges, though it was ultimately to founder in a sea of bitter recrimination.

The book is significant as offering a compelling interpretation of the means by which such distinctive and important Melancthonian positions, such as the third use of the law, the role of the human response in salvation, and the forensic nature of justification developed. That Wengert roots these developments within the context of actual controversy, discontent among students at Wittenberg, and the need for the Reformers to catechise the laity, makes the volume all the more welcome. Such a path need not necessarily lead to a radical historicist relativisation of theology; rather, it should enhance our own understanding of the tradition to which we belong. Theological ideas are historical actions; thus, not all apparently dogmatic or exegetical problems can be solved simply with dogmatic and exegetical categories. Intellectual historians have long known this; those unconvinced of the truth or usefulness of this insight might do worse than read Wengert on Melancthon.

Carl R. Trueman
University of Aberdeen

Changing Values: How to find moral truth in modern times

David Attwood
Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999,
204 pp., £9.99

Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems

Michael Banner
Cambridge: CUP, 1999,
xvi + 325 pp., £13.99.

These are two books, both highly commended, for anyone interested in Christian ethics. Attwood deliberately

writes at a popular level, whereas Banner does not share this aim. Nevertheless both authors prize clarity over the confusion, not necessarily recognised, that reigns in the field of discussion, both in and outside the church. A clarity, furthermore, that both take as defined for the Christian ethicist in the givenness of the gospel to which all moral enquiry must refer.

Attwood seeks to outline a Christian moral theory, that is therefore reasonable and authoritative; allowing 'us to distinguish between genuine moral dilemmas, and ordinary moral confusion or moral wilfulness' (3). He contrasts his approach to modern 'values' language of everyday morality which 'obscures the nature of moral truth', which holds to 'an outlook where morality is decided upon, and chosen, rather than reasoned' (13). This of course is the question-begging position that Attwood establishes and seeks to explain and defend in the course of the book. For the reviewer there were times when the book seemed to be less than clear of its destination – but final reflection allows that this should be seen as a strength in the light of the lack of clarity Christians have in the area of moral reasoning. (A caution to critics would be that the path of explanation does not necessarily entail a commitment, one way or another, to an epistemology in ethics which precludes the deeper ontological questions, i.e. there is simply no need to run and hide when the author starts referring to Aquinas and Natural Law; nor gasp on finding the chapter on 'The Bible and Christian Ethics' at number twelve out of fourteen.)

Attwood patiently, progressively yet rigorously builds up a map of Christian ethical theory by way of local reconnoitring sorties to some less than well-charted heights and the murkier hollows. His defence of an ethical theory which has a place for rules (ch. 8) is careful and clear,

within a growing theological framework which takes up the biblical themes of creation, covenant and the kingdom of God. In the light of the claims of the book his closing chapters on 'The Authority of Conscience?' and 'Christian Moral Witness' are pertinent precisely because they tackle, albeit briefly, two clear stumbling blocks in popular Christian thinking about morality. Attwood delivers a succinct exposé of a modern individualist misappropriation of conscience that would elide deliberation from the process of moral reasoning with regard to so-called 'matters of conscience'.

In his last chapter Attwood alludes to the danger Christians fear of appearing 'sectarian' in their public witness to moral truth. This will provide us the bridge to discuss Banner's collection of essays, for it is a charge he addresses.

The reviewer is, however, bound to pause warily before engaging further, not least because, not far into his introduction, the author laments the bleak state of affairs amongst 'self-professed practitioners of Christian ethics' of which the reader will only be ignorant if 'he or she has thus far been spared that important rite of passage, becoming a reviewer of books' (xi). This must be a metaphorical shot across the bows of the reviewer!

But, with much to gain collectively, we proceed. The book opens with a chapter based on Banner's inaugural lecture at King's College, London, entitled 'Turning the world upside down – and some other tasks for dogmatic Christian ethics'. This sets out the author's manifesto: 'that the task of Christian ethics is to understand the world and humankind in the light of the knowledge of God revealed in Jesus Christ, witnessed to by Scriptures, and proclaimed in the creeds, and that Christian ethics may and must explicate this understanding in its significance for

human action through a critical engagement with the concerns, claims and problems of other ethics (xi). In this essay, to substantiate the claimed merits of our link between the books, the author deals with the charge of sectarianism put to such a project. In particular we find an answer to the question: 'Does dogmatic ethics deprive Christianity of a public voice?' (35). Although Banner has no qualms that the Christian word of prophetic rebuke may often be the mode of address in the public realm (yet still, it is noteworthy, like the prophets, a word into a particular situation aiming at reform). But the Christian ethicist need not concede that this is the only mode of address available.

The further nine chapters in the book forcefully illustrate this clarity of insight into the intellectual tools at hand which the pluralist 'non-sectarian Christian' voice has little substantial grounds for employing. Indeed, part of Banner's argumentative strategy is to illustrate just how a Christian response to contemporary moral problems is 'framed' (meant in both senses) by terms of debate that the Christian does not need to begin to accept, or at the least should examine and understand before entering the fray. This is a criticism he puts to the instinctive pro-life arguments constructed in terms set down by a pro-choice agenda. So, what, on the first reading, may look like an unexpected misprint illustrates the challenge to our frame of thought: 'But in seeming to concede the requirement laid down in the *pro-life* argument, and in meeting it with an assertion of the right to life, important Christian convictions are in danger of being lost' (116, my italics).

Throughout, the pretension to hegemony of consequentialist moral reasoning is unmasked and challenged, whereby, for example, Banner comments on 'how "how" precludes why' (184), in essays on the

subjects of euthanasia, abortion, health care and resources, environmental ethics, biotechnology and treatment of animals, family in the light of new reproductive possibilities, and lastly, two treating of sexual ethics. It should be noted that Banner's work set as out here is sometimes taken directly from contemporary public debate, in his role as a member of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution; previous chairmanship of the HM Government Committee of Enquiry on the Ethics of Emerging Technologies in the Breeding of Farm Animals, and current chairmanship of the (UK) Home Office's Animal Procedures Committee.

Readers may find Banner's heavy quotation of Barth a little laboured at times. Could we not have been pointed to Genesis as well as the *Church Dogmatics* in non-quoted reference to the Fall (243)? Thus further exemplifying the good practice found elsewhere in the volume that the exegete needs (and can) exercise ethical responsibility (rather than contemporary intellectual imperialism) in handling a text (278, n.16 contd.). The plea therefore is insubstantial, but further, we will find applied, in the wider reference to sources throughout (church) history, an important principle which evangelical practitioners would do well to learn: 'the task of the Christian moralist is always and ever the same, and what changes are only the conditions in which this task is to be accomplished ... if the contemporary Christian moralist properly recognises that he or she labours alongside others such as Augustine and Benedict and Vitoria (if only as an under-labourer), particularity of time and place should not, I hope, present a bar to understanding, let alone disagreement'.

Finally, at the end of an extended review, it seems appropriate to commend a third title to students who are willing to be stretched, the author

of which is credited by both Attwood and Banner, as a formative influence on their thought, namely, *Resurrection and Moral Order* by Oliver O'Donovan. (Leicester: Apollos, 2nd edition, 1994, £22.99).

Andy Draycott
Canterbury

Exploring New Religions

George D. Chryssides
London: Cassell, 1999,
x + 405 pp., £18.99

As Religious Studies applies itself to wider fields of interest, the study of the 'new' religions has progressed and become a part of many courses. This textbook offers an introduction to the field, from an author who knows the area extremely well (having written an authoritative work on Sun Myung Moon). After a well-structured discussion of methodological issues (including important questions of approach and definition), he sensibly deals with the suicide cults first of all. The rest of the work then looks at new religions which spin off Christianity, those which build on Eastern religion, and those that follow neither in particular. There is a final chapter that deals with the counter-cult movement.

There is much to commend this work. On two accounts it excels. Firstly, as a text book it is clear and methodical without being hard work or boring. It should establish itself as a leader in the field for a long time. Secondly, for evangelicals it offers a fresh and helpful balance to the excesses of the counter-cult movement. Whilst not being naïve to the fact that the new religions can be dangerous, Chryssides never goes beyond the evidence, and is always careful to treat other religions with sensitivity from a position of knowledge, rather than ignorance. It is of course not an evangelical book written against the new religions, but as an introductory book which will help evangelicals

engage at a sensible level it is invaluable. Too much rhetoric has been voiced without sufficient engagement. This work will help correct that.

Tony Gray
Leicester

Understanding the Holocaust: An Introduction

Dan Cohn-Sherbok
London: Cassell, 1999,
xxviii + 291 pp.

This well-known authority on Jewish and Holocaust studies here offers an excellent introduction to an issue of continuing importance. Holocaust theology has become a theological discipline in its own right, raising questions of enormous proportions for any theologian, whatever their outlook. Yet here Cohn-Sherbok provides the necessary background information to make such theology and study sensible.

The history he provides naturally focuses on the history of the German occupations and projects to take over and exterminate the Jewish people. However, he is careful enough to paint in the picture of the longer history of anti-Semitism, and the events leading to the rise of Hitler, the growth of the nationalist party, and how Hitler came to have such authoritative power. The middle of the book focuses on the war waged against Polish Jews, and then progresses with the move to the camps, the gas chambers, experiments, and the holocaust against other groups. Finally, Cohn-Sherbok discusses the post-war reaction to the Holocaust, the Nuremberg trials, and the revisionist history of the Holocaust deniers. Finally, he points towards the issues faced by those with religious belief once they confront this dreadful history.

The author is to be congratulated for providing an accessible and clear

introduction to a difficult and emotive topic. Whilst any attempt at theodicy must go much further, Cohn-Sherbok has provided a tool for such theological work, and a survey worthy for any historical, political or sociological student.

Tony Gray
Leicester

What Price Prejudice? Christian Antisemitism in America

Frank E. Eakin, Jr
Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1998,
viii + 211 pp., \$9.95

Sharing Shalom

Philip A. Cunningham
and Arthur F. Starr (eds)
Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1998,
120 pp., \$7.95

These books are among studies sponsored by the Stimulus Foundation, whose aim is to facilitate better communication between Jews and Christians. They both reflect the post-Holocaust climate in which Christians have begun to acknowledge the complicity of earlier generations of believers in anti-Semitism. Because of this they insist that Christians must take initiatives in forging new and better relations with their Jewish neighbours. Justifiable emphasis is laid on understanding Jewish perspectives on religion and on history, and practical strategies are recommended for this.

Eakin in his book acknowledges that the USA has as yet, little to compare with the European experience of anti-Semitism, but he believes the churches must not be complacent. To this extent he is justified, not least because a significant Jewish presence in America is a comparatively recent phenomenon. His own reasons for watchfulness, however, are disturbing. He finds the roots of anti-Semitism in the NT itself,

especially when it lays most blame for the death of Jesus on the Jews. He believes the gospels do not accurately reflect the period of Jesus himself, but have been coloured by antipathy between the emerging Christian movement and more traditional elements in Judaism. Here he is largely following, though with much less detail and sophistication, the thesis of Rosemary Ruether in her influential book *Faith and Fratricide*.

No one could quarrel with Eakin when he says that parts of the NT oppose Judaism. But while he does occasionally allude to the diverse and changing character of Judaism, he makes little use of this important insight. He does not mention times when there have been clashes over the parameters of Judaism, a consideration of significance today since many Orthodox Jewish communities would shun the sort of fraternal links Eakin recommends between Jews and Christians. Nor does he consider the possibility that early Jewish Christians may have debated with their fellow Jews as to their true legacy from God as set out in their Scriptures.

Eakin also collects and comments on recent statements from leading American denominations on the Jews and Judaism, with special prominence being given to a hitherto unpublished statement of The Presbyterian Church, USA in 1987. This is the most useful and original part of his book.

Sharing Shalom is essentially a practical book giving a detailed programme for interfaith dialogue between Jews and Christians. It is particularly designed for locations where Jews and Christians are worshipping in close proximity. But not everyone will agree with all the objects of such dialogue. It goes beyond the promotion of mutual understanding or even working together on social goals. It sees the dialogue as part of a common pilgrimage of faith since it is assumed

that both Jews and Christians have equally valid approaches to God. Thus, questions of the identity of the Messiah are pushed to the side, and it is taken for granted that Jews and Christians can work together to promote a messianic kingdom of peace, justice and love. (Eakin, who personally holds this position, recognises that even among the more liberal denominations this is still a bold step to take.)

When one of the Jewish contributors to *Sharing Shalom* declares, 'Almost all Christian denominations have recognised that Judaism's covenant with God endures and are engaged on significant interfaith dialogue with Jews', we should recognise both the unparalleled opportunity now that Christian triumphalism is largely dead and at the same time the dangers of an inadequate assessment of Judaism. In fact, we face a challenge more demanding than that offered in these books - to love our Jewish neighbours as ourselves without playing down the real theological differences between us. Effective dialogue, for its part, can hardly ignore such fundamental differences; otherwise the participants will not begin to understand one another.

Graham Keith
Ayr

Good News About Injustice: A Witness of Courage in a Hurting World

Gary A. Haugen
Downers Grove/Leicester: IVP, 1999,
200 pp., £7.99

This is a volume that witnesses to the rediscovery of two biblical truths in our generation - that God is concerned about injustice and the priesthood of all believers. For too long evangelicals lived as if God is unconcerned about the terrible things that human beings do to each other or have been paralysed by a feeling of impotence. This is a volume that helps

us on both counts; it stirs our conscience and shows us what can be done.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, 'Taking Up the Challenge' focuses on injustice and some examples of Christians who have worked for justice in God's name. In the first chapter the author writes about his shattering experiences in Rwanda, not long after the genocide of 1994, where he was directing the UN's investigation, gathering evidence for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda - a good place to begin writing about injustice and the greatest challenge to any possibility of good news. Chapter 2 deals with the need to cultivate an awareness of injustice in the world and of God's concern for justice. Chapter 3 tells the courageous story of the struggle for justice of three North American Christians.

The second part, 'Hope amid Despair' provides, in four chapters, a theological foundation for Christian action on behalf of those suffering injustice. Each chapter deals with a truth about God - that he loves justice and hates injustice (ch. 4); that he has compassion on those who suffer injustice (ch. 5); that he judges and condemns those who perpetrate injustice (ch. 6), and that he seeks active rescue for the victims of injustice (ch. 7).

In the third part we have some practical instruction as to how to go about rescuing the oppressed. Before launching into practicalities, Haugen deals with those difficult questions that come into our minds when we face injustice. Then there are four chapters dealing with the 'Anatomy of injustice', 'Investigating the Deceptions', 'Intervening for the Victims' and 'The Body of Christ in Action: What We All Can Do'.

This is a very readable book that is strongly rooted in the Bible and the author's experience of combating

injustice. For those who are already convinced that God is concerned about injustice but who often feel paralysed when faced with it, the practical section of this volume is a great boon. Here can be found an excellent analysis of the character of injustice and the practical steps which can be taken to combat it. This is where the good news comes to the fore – and the very good news of the last chapter is that it is not just experts that can do something. We can all be involved.

The volume comes with a strong recommendation from John Stott who provided a 'Foreword'. I agree with his assessment: 'I defy anybody to emerge from exposure to this book unscathed. In fact, my advice to would be readers is "Don't! Leave the book alone!" – unless you are willing to be shocked, challenged, persuaded and transformed.'

Dewi Hughes

Theological Advisor, Tearfund

Pathways to Wholeness: Pastoral Care in a Postmodern Age

Roger Hurding

London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998,
464 pp., £12.99

In *Roots and Shoots* (1986), Roger Hurding provided succinct accounts of the schools of twentieth century psychotherapy and discussed four pathways, advocated by Christians, through the forest of counselling. This book has a similar two-part structure but it paints on a much broader canvas of theology and philosophy, as well as psychology. The pathways have been rearranged and expanded to five. It reflects the growing self-confidence of pastoral theology as an academic discipline relating to the practice of pastoral care.

In Part I Hurding surveys the territory. How do we become mature or whole as human persons? The ultimate goal and the process

are both important. Postmodern thinking has emphasised our stories as particular people in particular communities journeying through a landscape shaped by a variety of traditions of thought. Interpretations are important and Hurding tackles both the hermeneutics of the text and of 'the living human documents'. He weaves in expositions of Biblical themes like completeness, pilgrimage or hope. He includes scenes from his own remarkable story of overcoming sickness and cameos from his casebook as a counsellor. In the main, however, this is the college lecturer, briefly alluding to an array of writers from Lao Tsu and Plato, through Schleiermacher, to Moltmann and Derrida. (The index of names occupies five pages of very small print.) Brueggemann is clearly his favourite biblical scholar. A crucial motif is, 'a map is not the territory'. Our intellectualising can never fully represent life's complexities. Between modernism's autonomous knowing and Nietzsche's rejection of objective knowledge, Hurding seeks a middle way. He is attracted to Ricoeur's view of a revelation with multiple meanings and voices. Donald Capps has translated this into a pastoral hermeneutic in which the pastor's actions may disclose more, or different, meanings than the pastor's intentions.

The five pastoral strands in Part II are biblical counselling, healing ministries, pastoral counselling, spiritual direction and social transformation. Hurding is particularly well placed to give an account of these approaches, as they have been experienced in evangelical circles in Britain. A biennial conference at Swanwick has kept practitioners in conversation with each other for fifteen years. He avoids taking an adversarial approach and attempts to let the strengths of each stand, while indicating where others would want to probe a particular tradition. To biblical counsellors he wants to say that the Bible contains subversive

'little stories' as well as the overarching big picture. With charismatic healers he raises current dilemmas over true or false memories and questions about what can be attributed to demonic powers. He warns spiritual directors of a danger of a gnostic tendency where there is over reliance on the work of Jung. Evangelicals trained in pastoral or relational counselling may be alarmed at the extent to which he links their approach with the liberal tendency, though he protests he is not using his labels in a dismissive or stereotyping way. Hurding's own background lies in this form of counselling and he welcomes the way writers like Oden and Atkinson have been bringing trinitarian and covenantal theology to bear on the practice.

Students at the start of a pastoral ministry may find that anxiety over which map to use hinders them from giving attention to the range of voices Hurding is offering for reflection. It is a book that will repay study by those who have engaged on some strand of the journey.

Vera Sinton

Oxford

The Intrareligious Dialogue, Revised Edition

Raimon Panikkar

Paulist Press, N.Y., 1999,
160 pp., \$19.95

Panikkar has been writing in the field of inter-religious encounter and understanding for many years. This book is itself a revision and elaboration of a work published nearly twenty years ago. Additional material makes it a new book. It is attractively produced and provides a summary statement of Panikkar's vision. In some ways the earlier material is brought up to date (sexist language has been rooted out) though in other ways little has changed (there is still

no direct interaction with his critics).

Panikkar is a warm writer with a sincere devotion to his theme. In essence, he argues that for too long dialogue has been polarised between rational debate and sentimental encounter. He describes these two forms of dialogue as 'interreligious' in contrast to his own 'intrareligious' suggestion. While acknowledging the important differences between religions, Panikkar finds the basis of dialogue to lie in our common experience of being human. It is at this level of common humanity that we are able to find a meeting of minds, significant understanding and a position from which to explore our differences. Interreligious dialogue is valuable as far as it goes but Panikkar proposes 'intrareligious' understanding as a broader framework in which religious people should engage more holistically with each other. 'Intrareligious' dialogue emphasises that the encounter should be seen primarily as a meeting of people rather than as a meeting of religions.

In order to set forward this thesis, Panikkar does battle with the concept of neutrality in dialogue. 'Epoche', with its method of bracketing personal beliefs out of the encounter, has been a disaster. It has asked the participant in dialogue to 'jump over his own shadow' (80). Neutrality is a hopeless category because it fails to take seriously the primary status of religious belief. However, this promising point sits uneasily with Panikkar's rejection of apologetics, dogma and theological convictions from having any place in dialogue. Regarding apologetics he notes that it 'has its function and its proper place, but not here in the meeting of religions' (62). Though personal beliefs are not to be suspended, Panikkar argues that 'dogmatism is not needed and that even dogmas are on the move' (142). He wants to allow dialogue participants to retain their absolute convictions and yet he curtails what relevance those

convictions may have. His conclusion that 'authentic dialogue is a search for truth' (145) is hard to tie together with his dismissal of apologetics and doctrinal convictions. If apologetics have no function or place in the search for truth then it is difficult to imagine what function apologetics could ever have.

Surely dialogue is possible for those with absolute convictions? The role of absolute Christian commitment in dialogue has been given increasing attention among Christians but Pannikar dialogues little with alternatives to his own version of pluralism. Though the book is shot through with Christian sentiments, language and scriptural references (he prefaces the book 'The sermon on the mount of intrareligious dialogue'), the book displays a loyalty to some higher reality than Christian revelation. While there is something attractive about his eloquent demand to move beyond simple interreligious conversation, from a theological point of view the failure to interact with critics of such methodology is disappointing. Given that most of the material is rewritten with the benefit of fifteen years discussion on this very subject such a failure is inexcusable.

Christopher Sinkinson
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Transforming the World? The Social Impact of British Evangelicalism

David W Smith
Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998,
xiv + 146 pp., £14.99

This powerful and provocative book challenges the legacy of some of evangelicalism's heroes. Smith's thesis is that the evangelicalism of the Great Awakening was, what he calls, 'world-transformative Christianity'. The lordship of Christ over all of life meant both personal conversion and social transformation. This biblical vision, inherited from the Reformation and Puritans, was the reason behind

its success. And it is the persistent abandonment of this vision that has led to decline of Christianity in Britain.

The evangelicalism of the eighteenth century revival thrived among the poor. The Victorian evangelicalism of Charles Simeon and William Wilberforce sought to extend its appeal to the ecclesiastical and political establishments. This, says Smith, led to the eclipse of its world transforming tradition. Wilberforce, for all his social reform, argued against any change in the structure of British society. The Clapham Sect set out to ensure both the form and content of the message were inoffensive to the privileged. The second generation of Methodist leaders followed the same route. Moves for political change within Methodism were suppressed in pursuit of social respectability.

A growing theological entrenchment characterised by fundamentalism and apocalyptic eschatology led to widespread social disengagement or political conservatism. Evangelicals tried to reach the working classes with meetings in secular buildings or emotion-led revivalism. But, divorced from any world-transforming vision or an apologetic that engaged with modern thought, such attempts only touched the already converted.

In a key paragraph Smith says: 'It is hard to avoid the conclusion that, in the form it took at Clapham, evangelicalism came perilously close to being a religious ideology in the Marxist sense of that term. If this conclusion is correct it has serious implications in relation to secularisation: in its Wilberforcian form evangelicalism may have achieved the success it sought in renewing the Establishment, but a high price was paid for this if, by identifying the Gospel with an élite culture and a deeply conservative approach to domestic politics, it alienated the growing numbers of people who were now challenging

the patriarchal structures of British society and calling for radical social reforms. Without intending it, the movement associated with the Clapham Sect may have been a significant factor in the long-term decline of religion in the United Kingdom' (19).

Smith identifies other voices within the tradition – often now neglected. Evangelicalism had a profound impact on political dissent. But these voices did not prevail and often turned in frustration to the secular labour movement.

The best history is often polemic and Smith is no mere chronicler of the past. What he perceives as the growing crisis of Western culture offers evangelicalism an opportunity for the renewal of mission, but only if it can regain its world-transformative vision. The Lausanne Congress of 1974 was a watershed, but evangelicalism faces other temptations: to retreat into an irrelevant fundamentalism or the easy triumphalism which mistakes numeric growth for genuine discipleship.

As we grapple with the challenges of postmodernity there are those who suggest that evangelicalism is inescapably a modernist expression of Christianity. What Smith shows is that, while much of evangelicalism has been high-jacked by the modernist relegation of religion to the private sphere, evangelicalism's authentic voice offers a challenge to modernism and a biblical alternative to the vagaries of postmodernity.

If there is a disappointment in the book it is that Smith asserts rather than proves his claim that the evangelicalism of the Great Awakening was world-transforming. He fails to show the intentionality of its profound social impact. Indeed he acknowledges John Wesley's deep political conservatism and anti-democratic sensibilities. Wesley's opposition to Calvinism, argues

Smith, was motivated by his suspicion of the social transformation to which its all-embracing view of life led.

Tim Chester
Tearfund, UK

Book Reviews

- Bergen, Wesley J.
Elisha and the End of Prophetism (JSOTS 286) Karl Möller
- Brenner, Athalya (ed.) **Ruth and Esther, Feminist Companion to the Bible (2nd Series, vol 3)** Murray D. Gow
- Christianson, Eric S. **A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes** Craig Bartholomew
- Diamond, A.R. Pete, O'Connor, Kathleen M. & Stulman, Louis (eds) **Troubling Jeremiah (JSOTS 260)** Hetty Lalleman
- Fitzpatrick-McKinley, Anne **The Transformation of Torah from Scribal Advice to Law. (JSOTS 287).** Jonathan Burnside
- Friebel, Kelvin G. **Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication. (JSOTS 283)** Iain M. Duguid
- Gillingham, S.E. **One Bible, Many Voices** John Drane
- Johnstone, William **Chronicles and Exodus. An Analogy and its Application (JSOTS 275)** Brian Kelly
- Linden, Nico ter
The Story Goes ... The Stories of the Torah Paul A. Barker
- Lipton, Diana **Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis (JSOTS 288)** Laurence A. Turner
- Merwe, Christo H.J. van der, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze
A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar Bo-Krister Ljungberg
- Pratt, R.L. Jr
1 and 2 Chronicles (A Mentor Commentary) Martin J. Selman
- Shanks, Hershel (ed) **Ancient Israel, From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple (2nd edition)** K.A. Kitchen
- Wharton, James A. **Job (Westminster Bible Companion)** Bob Fyall
- Allison, Dale C.
Jesus of Nazareth – Millenarian Prophet Alistair I. Wilson
- Balla, Peter **Challenges to New Testament Theology** Alistair I. Wilson
- Eriksson, Anders **Traditions as Rhetorical Proof: Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians Coniectanea Biblica (NT series 29)** Anthony C. Thiselton
- Ferreira, Johan **Johannine Ecclesiology** Rainer Behrens
- Heyer, C.J. **den Jesus and the Doctrine of Atonement** Stephen Travis
- Horbury, William
Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ Thorsten Moritz
- Moo, Douglas J. **The Epistle to the Romans (NICNT)** Stanley E. Porter
- Moule, C.F.D. **Forgiveness and Reconciliation Biblical and Theological Essay** Richard Briggs
- Orchard, Helen C. **Courting Betrayal: Jesus as Victim in the Gospel of John** Rainer Behrens
- Avis, Paul (ed.) **Divine Revelation** Paul Gardner
- Charry, Ellen **By The Renewing of Your Minds, The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine** Robbie F. Castleman
- Deedo, Gary W. **Karl Barth's Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological and Human: Towards an Ethic of the Family. Issues in Systematic Theology, Volume 4.** Eric G. Flett
- Fahlbusch, Erwin
Encyclopedia of Christianity, Volume 1, (A-D) W. David J. McKay
- Gaffin, Richard **Calvin and the Sabbath** Tony Lane
- Kretzler, Larry J. **Pauline Images in Fiction and Film: On Reversing the Hermeneutical Flow** Tony Gray
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