

# Themelios

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## Contents

### **Editorial**

#### **The vital question**

*Jim Packer*

#### **Preaching in worship**

*RT Kendall*

#### **Jesus and the law: an exegesis on Matthew 5:17–20**

*David Wenham*

#### **Structural analysis**

*Carl Armerding*

### **Book Reviews**

Robert Norris, "Editorial," *Themelios: Volume 4, No. 3, April 1979 (1979)*: 83.

## Editorial

Theological study is both diverse and yet integrated in its component parts. By this we mean that there are many wide and various aspects to the study of theology, but that all inter-relate, and must interact.

In this edition of *Themelios* something of the diversity of theology is reflected for we have five very different contributions, and yet there remains a basic uniting element.

At the same time there are various levels of studying theology, as is obvious from the fact that there is much written that few if any can understand. The difficulty in a journal such as ours is knowing just where to pitch the articles to meet the needs of those embarking on theology, and yet to be a resource to those seeking answers to difficult problems. To maintain a value we must seek to meet both areas of need, and at the same time keep the fact of the practical issues before us. In this edition of the journal I think we have been as comprehensive as it is possible to be.

In republishing the substance of a lecture given by Dr Packer at the 'Islington Conference' we draw attention to the continuing debate about Christological questions. Dr Packer's contribution offers a succinct analysis of many of the modern positions and offers both a critical re-appraisal of traditional positions, and the possibility of a way forward.

Dr Kendall's article brings to the attention of those who are likely to forget that theology is a tool for those engaged in a practical life of ministry. It is not difficult to see the relation of preaching to the whole theological enterprise, yet often it is an emphasis that is sadly neglected. Here Dr Kendall raises the immensely practical task of preaching and assesses its place in worship.

David Wenham, in his contribution, with proper exegesis sheds new light on the understanding of the problematic passage in Matthew 5:17–20 where the whole question of the 'Law' is raised. It is appropriate that a journal such as ours should deal with scripture as well as carrying articles about it. It is a necessary bias that we should tend towards the needs of those who are handling the Bible and act as a resource to those who are seeking answers to difficult questions. In this area Dr Amerding's article on 'Structural Analysis' provides a useful tool and gives penetrating insight into this whole area of concern.

Our final article is an introduction to a statement that has been produced in Chicago on the question of 'Inerrancy'. The debates in recent years have been confused and the complicated issues raised have led to a great deal of acrimony. In this statement we have a firm position outlined and yet it is presented with an irenic spirit, conscious that not all will agree with what is said, but laying down in a clear and precise way articles that can be debated and defended. It emerged from a joint consultation of many prominent British and American scholars. The document is in three parts, only two of which we are carrying, the third is an exposition of the whole thing which is too long for us to publish.

I am confident that our readers will find as much of interest and variety in this issue as I have, and that it will help stimulate to further thought.

# The vital question

Jim Packer

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*This article is reprinted from a longer contribution in 'The Churchman'. We wish to thank that journal for their permission to reprint.*

Christology is in dispute today, and the differences under discussion are crucial. The question is whether the man Christ Jesus was and remains God in person or not: whether God incarnate is, as one recent book maintains, an item of factual truth (see *The Truth of God Incarnate*, ed. Michael Green, Hodder and Stoughton: 1977) or, as another book has urged, a notion with the status of a non-factual myth (see *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick, SCM: 1977). We may excuse ourselves from trying to state in positive terms just what a myth is, for those who use this category of explanation do not seem to be fully agreed among themselves on that; suffice it for our purposes to say that myth is in one way or another an imaginative declaration of personal significance or communal vision which does not correspond to, or rest on, public, objective, cosmic, space-time fact. So the issue is whether, as a matter of public, objective, space-time fact, Jesus Christ was a divine person—the Word made flesh without ceasing to be God's Son, which is what John affirms explicitly in the famous fourteenth verse of the first chapter of his gospel—or whether, despite what John and other New Testament writers, notably Paul and the writer to the Hebrews, thought and taught, Jesus was not God become man and ought to be accounted for in other terms.

This is as far-reaching an issue as can well be imagined. On it hangs your view both of God and of salvation. Take the matter of God first. We need to realize that, as the doctrine of the Trinity is not an idle fancy or speculation about God in the abstract but a specific claim about our Lord Jesus Christ, so the doctrine of the Incarnation is not an idle fancy or speculation about Jesus in isolation but a specific claim about God. For what the doctrine of the Trinity says is that the relationship of Jesus the Son to the Father and the Spirit, which

the gospels depict and the epistles affirm, is a revelation of that endless fellowship of mutual love and honour which is the final, definitive description of God's eternal reality. And what the doctrine of the Incarnation says is that the Triune God loves sinners, and therefore in unity with God the Father and God the Spirit God the Son has come to us where we are and identified wholly with the human condition in order to save us. All the works of the Trinity external to the Godhead are undivided, says the old tag (*omnia opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*): so it needs to be understood that, as indeed the gospel records make very plain, the Son became human at the command of the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the joy of loving union with both; and that when in His cry of dereliction on the cross Jesus testified to godforsakenness at conscious level, at a deeper level the togetherness of the Godhead remained intact. That Jesus knew this, even if for those three dark hours He could not feel it, is surely clear from His first and last words on the cross: 'Father, forgive them', and 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit' (Luke 23: 34, 46).

Denial that the Incarnation is fact, however, undercuts the whole of this. On the one hand, it takes away at a stroke all grounds for supposing the Trinity to be fact (as clear-headed myth-men like Professor Maurice Wiles cheerfully admit). On the other hand, it constitutes a denial that, when mankind was perishing in sin, and had forfeited God's favour and provoked His wrath, the Father loved the world enough to give His only Son to become poor so that we might be made rich, and to bear unimaginable agony in enduring the sinner's death so that we might know righteousness and life. There is no escaping this point: what non-incarnational Christologies say is that, contrary to what Christians always thought and what their liturgies and hymns have hitherto expressed, God did not come in person to save the world after all; for whoever Jesus was, and whatever He did, He was not God. Putting this point biblically, Paul's great statement that the Father 'did not spare his own Son' (the verb speaks of the cost to the Father) 'but gave him up for us all' (that verb speaks of the cost to the Son), is being denied; and the effect

of this denial is to rob us of all warrant for embracing Paul's glorious inference—'will he (the Father) not also give us all things with him?' (Rom. 8:32). In other words: deny the Incarnation, and Jesus' death, just because it is not now the death of God's Son and not therefore the most costly gift God could bestow, loses its significance as the guarantee of every other gift that God can devise. This is a heavy loss which, one feels, should make advocates of the new Christology pause and reconsider.

What, now, of the link between the Incarnation and salvation? Here the basic point is that if we are going to deny that Jesus was God incarnate, we cannot ascribe to Him any mediatorial ministry involving anything which it takes God to do. How much, then, do we stand to lose of the Saviour's ministry as we have hitherto understood it? The answer of the New Testament from its own standpoint, and equally of the protagonists of 'humanitarian' Christologies from theirs, seems to be: practically all of it. For both objective reconciliation through Christ, and personal renewal in Christ as its consequence, will have to go.

Take reconciliation first. Paul tells us, if I read him right, that God's reconciling work in Christ took the form of a substitutionary sacrifice in which 'for our sake he (the Father) made him (the Son) to be sin who knew no sin' (2 Cor. 5: 19, 21): that is to say, our sins were imputed to Christ as the personally innocent and sinless sacrificial victim, according to the typical Old Testament pattern, and He died under God's curse in our place. 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become'—the natural rendering would be, 'by becoming'—'a curse for us' (Gal. 3: 13). The curse is, of course, the sentence of spiritual death, the appropriate judicial retribution. But if Jesus Christ had not been God incarnate, He would have been simply a man in Adam; and in that case, however Spirit-filled and godly He was, He would not have been personally sinless, for no child of Adam is. How then could He have been our substitutionary sacrifice?

Again, if the substitutionary sacrifice goes, the free gift of justification that is based upon it goes also. When, in the verse (2 Cor. 5: 21) which we started to quote above, Paul said that for our sake the Father made the Son 'to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God', he linked reconciliation and justification together as two aspects of what Luther called the 'wonderful exchange' whereby our penal liability has passed to Christ and been dealt with on the cross; while His righteousness, that is His acceptance by the Father, which was maintained by His

perfect obedience, is now extended to us for the taking. If we do not see our justification as based on 'the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood' (Rom. 3: 24f), it is not justification according to Paul that we are talking about: we have lost his frame of reference. A non-incarnational Christology, however, seems to make this inevitable.

Again, the New Testament sees our subjective renewal—that is, according to Paul, our co-resurrection with Christ—as taking place 'in Christ', through life-giving union and communion with the risen Lord. But those who insist that Jesus was no more than a godly man are naturally sceptical as to whether His resurrection, if indeed it happened, could in reality be the vitalizing archetype of ours. It is really impossible on a non-incarnational basis to make anything of that present rising with Christ which baptism proclaims, or of waiting for 'a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself' (Phil. 3: 20f). So on this basis renewal in Christ, as the New Testament presents it, must also be given up, as must that fellowship with the living God, in the power of the Spirit whom He sends, which is the distinctive and essential feature of New Testament devotion; and now very little of New Testament salvation remains, as you can see.

Both pro- and anti-incarnationists (not all the latter, but most) affirm the uniqueness of Christ. They do it, however, in contrasting ways, and it is instructive to compare the two kinds of accounts.

(1) All mainstream Christian traditions since the patristic period (the evangelical included) have followed the lead of the New Testament writers, whose presentations of Jesus—though seemingly independent, apart from the Synoptic evangelists, and at verbal and conceptual level quite distinct—harmoniously converge upon the 'two-nature' Christology, and the account of mediation built on it, which is set out in the fourth gospel and the letters to the Colossians and Hebrews. On this view, Jesus' uniqueness, that is His one-and-only, once-for-all quality, appears at two points: first in His divine-human person, and second in His mediatorial work as, in Barth's phrase, God for man and man for God. Take the two separately.

In the constitution of His person, Jesus is 'God plus': the second person of the Godhead who through being born of Mary became the subject of all the physical and psychological awarenesses that make up distinctively human experience. This does not, of course, mean that He experienced

everything that actually happens to each one of us (He did not, for instance, experience marriage or old age); not does it mean that it was into fallen human experience, of which disordered desire is a constant element, that He entered. All we can say is that His human experience was of such a comprehensive kind as to enable Him to understand and feel with us in all situations, as Hebrews 2: 18 and 4: 15 tell us He does. A question arises about His knowledge while on earth: though sometimes He knew facts at a distance, and seems always to have been utterly and immediately clear on spiritual issues, there were times when He showed ignorance, and it has been suggested that rather than put this down to play-acting (as the Fathers sometimes did) we should posit some pre-incarnate self-emptying of divine powers—in this case, of the capacity to know whatever He willed to know, the capacity which we call omniscience. This *kenosis*-theory is not, however, easy to make fit the facts (because Jesus knew, not only so little, but also so much); not is it easy to make sense of in its own terms (because it sound like a di- or tri-theistic fairy story rather than Trinitarian theology). It seems better to explain Jesus' ignorances in terms not of an induced ability to know but rather of dependence on His Father's will and unwillingness to call to mind facts which He knew that His Father did not direct Him to have in His mind at that time. The paradigm for this view is Jesus' own statement that 'the Son can do nothing of his own accord' (John 5: 19).

I wish I could go on here to speak at length of Jesus' mediatorial ministry as our prophet, priest and king; of the solitariness, permanence and power of that ministry; and of His solidarity with both His Father and us, a solidarity which He indicated in deceptively simple terms by saying, according to John's gospel, that He and His Father are 'in' each other, and that His people live 'in' Him and He 'in' them (Jn. 14: 11, 15: 4, 17: 23, etc.). But time does not allow that.

(2) The non-incarnational account of Jesus' uniqueness places it entirely in His *impact*: that is, in the instrumentality of His example to bring about effective identification with, and experience of, the 'Jesus way' of life—whether this is analysed at the level of feeling (Schleiermacher) or of ethics (Ritschl, Harnack, Albert Schweitzer), or of openness to God and self-understanding (Bultmann, Bornkamm and their successors), or however. Jesus on this view is 'man-plus': plus, that is, a unique sense of God and unique, God-given, insight. But His significance for us is wholly as a revelation of godliness rather than of God. Teacher

and brother-man and example to us He may be, but Son of God and Saviour He is not: and one cannot think it surprising that myth-men like Dennis Nineham and Don Cupitt are prepared to wonder aloud whether, even as teacher and example, Jesus has very much real importance for us today.

Whence does such thinking—such painful thinking, to many of us—derive? From three obvious sources. Source one is hermeneutical arbitrariness (interpretive individualism, if you like) whereby, with Bultmann, scholars treat apostolic witness to Christ as myth despite the apostles' own constant insistence that they are declaring historical fact and revealed truth. Source two is historical scepticism whereby, following Deism ancient and modern, scholars assume that God never does anything genuinely new, despite sustained biblical proclamation to the contrary; so that they discount miracles, and particularly what C. S. Lewis calls 'the grand miracle', namely the Incarnation, as necessarily non-factual. Source three is philosophical dogmatism whereby they affirm *a priori* that God the Creator cannot take to Himself the nature of created man, despite New Testament declarations that He has actually done so. One can understand non-incarnationists wishing to affirm this hazardous *a priori* (for hazardous it is: how could anyone possibly prove it? How can one show it to be even plausible?). Certainly, any denial that God came in person to save will sound less shocking and impoverishing when based on a confident assurance that incarnation could not have happened anyway, in the nature of things. But surely setting limits to God in this way is really the acme of crass and even suicidal irreverence. Ecclesiastes pronounced woe on the land whose king is a child (Eccles. 10: 16), a child presumably in matters of statecraft and government. It is hard to refrain from pronouncing similar woe on the church whose theologians and teachers, however technically accomplished and sophisticated in speech, are children in understanding; and that is the point we seem to have reached. I am sorry to have to speak like this, but lest my words should be thought intemperate and unwarrantable I would like to refer you to E. L. Mascall's recent magisterial essay *Theology and the Gospel of Christ*, which makes this precise point by sustained argument and with devastating conclusiveness.

What shall we say to these developments? I have three things to say concerning them as I close.

First, I fear that we must interpret the situation in which university theologians go into print with the effect—however unintended—of denying the Lord who bought them, as a tragedy of judgement

on us all for long-standing Laodiceanism and unconcern about revealed truth. On the personal level, we echo Stephen Neill's charitable comment that irrational factors touch the minds of the best and most well-meaning of men, causing us all sometimes to take up with theories and ideas which are objectively crazy and disastrous. Living in glass houses as we all do, we had better be careful with our stones. We note that a number of those who now challenge the Incarnation came out of university Christian Unions, where hurtful forms of obscurantism, insensitiveness and group pressure have sometimes been known to operate; and we lay our hands on our mouths. But behind all that lies the fact, for fact it surely is, that we are living through an era which spiritually is like that of Jeremiah: a time in which consciences are calloused, sin—the 'gay' life-style, for instance—can pass as virtue, shame for shortcomings is scarcely felt, and minds, even the ablest, over and over again are unable to distinguish things that differ. That this frightening time is one of judgement, bringing loss of strength, expense of spirit and waste of good throughout the church's life, seems too plain to be denied. Statistically, financially, spiritually, theologically, the Protestant churches in our country appear to be dying on their feet. Please do not tell me that the charismatic movement and the increased and increasing numbers of evangelical clergy and laity, as compared with twenty years ago, have changed all that: for they have not. These things are merely new ripples on the surface of a pond whose waters continue to drain away. Whether they will ever amount to more than that we do not yet know. At present, our complacent way of talking to each other about the future comes through as a spiritual death rattle, just as at another point on the spiritual and theological front non-incarnational Christology also does. Realism compels us to recognize that judgement, theological, moral and spiritual, has overtaken English Protestantism; and to see the humanitarian scaling down of Jesus Christ to someone who is no longer the divine Saviour whom we need, as a symptom no less than a cause of what is going on.

Second, I urge that in these bleak conditions we must consider carefully who our true allies are in the defence and confirmation of the gospel.

Third, I urge that, as those who define evangelical identity in terms of a New Testament-based faith in Jesus Christ as God incarnate, our prophet, priest and king, our wisdom and our righteousness,

our Lord, our life, our way and our end, we should watch like hawks against any fragmenting of the seamless robe of scriptural testimony to Jesus' person and place. One of the theological failings of our age is our habit of isolating individual doctrines for treatment and reconstruction without weighing the full consequences of that reconstruction for the rest of the body of divinity. But Christian theology, both in Scripture and in our own minds, is an organism, a unity of interrelated parts, a circle in which everything links up with everything else; and if we are clear-headed we shall keep in view the long-range implications of each position when evaluating it. We have already seen how humanitarian Christology demolishes the received doctrines both of the Trinity and of salvation, and the same is true of the doctrine of the church as the new humanity in the Lord. The worship of Jesus Christ alongside the Father, to which the New Testament leads us, the Christian's saving relationship with Him and the church's corporate solidarity with Him in His risen life, all assume that He died as an effective sacrifice for our sins, rose again as proof that His atoning work was done, reigns here and now and will one day return to judge the living and the dead. None of this can be convincingly affirmed if His divine-human glory as God incarnate be denied. It really is not true that the less you set yourself to defend of New Testament Christology, the easier it will prove to defend it. On the contrary, if you take away any of its component bricks, and particularly the reality of the Incarnation, which is the keystone of the arch, the whole structure falls down. Clarity of thought requires us to acknowledge that only when the whole New Testament story concerning Christ is told in all its parts will credibility attach to any of it. If the Incarnation is denied, the whole New Testament account of Jesus the Christ should certainly be categorized as mythological fantasy (we may agree with the humanitarians on that). But then there is no reason why it should any longer claim our interest; the proper place for it then would be the dustbin. We need to realize the interlocking and inter-dependent character of the truths concerning Jesus, to see that divided they fall, and to make it a matter of deliberate care to tell the whole story—man's creation and fall; Christ's incarnation, atonement, resurrection, reign, and future return—when bearing testimony to the Son of God in this clashing, confused and disordered age.

# Preaching in worship

R T Kendall

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A deacon once told me the following story. A young minister accepted the call to his first pastorate on a year-by-year basis. During his first year he preached virtually the same sermon every Sunday morning. At the end of the first year he fully expected that his congregation would not extend a call for another year. To his surprise (and delight), he was given a unanimous re-call. But during his second year his preaching did not improve; it was the same sermon with little variation. He knew now that his time was up. He candidly admitted to his wife that they had better be prepared to move. But, lo and behold, another unanimous re-call. He tried bravely to produce better sermons during his third year, but he knew that the congregation knew that the content of his preaching was the same old thing. This time both he and his wife were actually beginning to pack their belongings as re-call time arrived. They were going to hold no grudge toward their congregation and leave with dignity. But to their astonishment the congregation gave them a unanimous recall for the third year in a row.

The minister courageously called the senior deacon to one side. 'Look,' he said, 'you know and I know that I am not much of a preacher. I have preached the same sermon every Sunday for three years, and yet you keep giving me unanimous recalls. What is going on?' 'Oh,' replied the senior deacon, 'the answer to that is quite simple. We never wanted a preacher in the first place.'

When I agreed to write this article on 'Preaching in Worship' (meaning the worship service in church), I immediately thought of this story. As a matter of fact, I have thought of this story many times since I came to England in 1973. I don't know of any church over here that accepts a minister on a year-by-year basis but I have been around long enough to know that this story ominously relates to a condition in Britain that I find very painful. I refer specifically to the low regard for preaching in British churches.

You may ask how I know there is such a low regard for preaching over here. I answer, because so little time is given to it in the worship services. And yet this fact did not hit me with force until a student from Oxford, who attended the little church of which I was pastor in Lower Heyford, said to me, 'I enjoy your long sermons.' I immediately apologized for preaching so long, but she soon made it clear that she really meant that as a compliment. She pointed out that she was used to twelve-minute sermons and that she was surprised that anybody ever preached for as long as forty minutes. I realized for the first time there was a *quantitative* difference between most of the clergy over here and myself.

Since then I have been more aware of the worship services over here, and have attended as many different churches as possible. I have come to see precisely what this student meant. I have heard many sermons that lasted longer than twelve minutes and some that lasted less (the record is two minutes!). But in nearly every case the preaching has come through to me as but a PS at the end of the service.

My purpose here is not to be critical of any minister, neither would I want to be understood as saying that the long sermon *per se* is a good thing. Some ministers can say more in twelve minutes than many can in forty, and some twelve-minute sermons are far too long.

I want to make the case that preaching must be central in worship. The length of a sermon in one sense is irrelevant, but if it is carried out with dignity I should think it will likely be regarded as 'long' by contemporary standards. It will merely 'happen' to be long.

Why? Because it is more important to worship God *immediately* and directly than second-hand. I regard the best hymns and the best prayers as but second-hand worship. When I read a prayer or sing a hymn, God's word is *mediated* to me via an instrument; someone else probably wrote under an *immediate* awareness of God's presence. I, no doubt, can be deeply moved as I re-live what someone else undoubtedly felt. But the sense of God's presence in such a case is but mediate and indirect.

'The Testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy'

(Rev. 19: 10). Whatever else this fascinating verse means, it shows that the witness of Jesus Christ is to be *fresh* and *alive*. The time was when it was mandatory by parliamentary law that a certain Prayer Book had to be followed in Divine Worship. This ensured that conformity and uniformity would stay intact. For preaching was dangerous. Thus it was felt that men and women could get enough of God by the Prayer Book. It was but a way to quench the fires that spread over Europe as a consequence of the Great Reformation, which resurrected preaching from the dead. The time came that it was not illegal not meticulously to follow the Prayer Book, but by then nobody was worried that preaching would do any great harm. And it didn't.

By now the church has become so lifeless and irrelevant that nobody worries if there is a fanatical preacher like John Bunyan here or there. Few today outside take notice of the church generally or preaching particularly. But this is because preaching particularly became so shallow and boring that it lulled the church to sleep. It was once feared because it was dangerous; it is now feared because it is dull.

There is a widespread notion that preaching in the traditional sense is irrelevant for today's generation. I am sympathetic with this mood to some extent. I'd much prefer dialogue to most monologues I've heard. And who wouldn't prefer guitar-strumming, or holding hands in a circle, or dancing, to what is most readily available today? The vogue approach to worship is at least an attractive alternative to the affected tone and mannerisms of so many clerics.

Preaching became irrelevant because preachers did not know what to preach. Preaching is preaching only when it is the Bible that is expounded. But as a robust conviction in the Divine inspiration of Scriptures has diminished, so has preaching. A preacher is at home in the pulpit only when he is at home in God's Word. But when the Bible becomes but a human book to him, preaching itself becomes a threat.

Preaching should be central in worship that men may hear God speak immediately today. Men may read hymns and prayers at home. When these are used at church they should be but heart-preparation for the sermon. If the prepared preacher speaks to the prepared heart in the pew then spontaneous combustion should take place in worship every time. For that is what preaching should produce in a worship service. It is not hymns that men and women should come to church for; it is not prayers; it is not music; neither is it merely fellowship.

It should be to receive the testimony of Jesus.

I know a minister in Louisville who got on the band wagon (which was passing through Kentucky a few years ago) and started preaching that preaching is irrelevant. He actually preached against preaching. (The only thing more ridiculous than that was a minister I know who preached against watching television on television.) The Louisville preacher had a vast number of converts in his congregation; they quit coming to hear him.

The contemporary notion that traditional preaching is largely irrelevant has apparently caught on, for fewer come to church today than at any time in living memory. But what is truly at stake here is that yesterday's clergy emptied the churches and today's clergy are sometimes endeavouring earnestly to find some justification for their existence.

The trend toward 'contemporary worship' will pass as rapidly as the countless theological fads that have come and gone in this century.

Men and women today do not want preaching partly because they haven't heard it. The reputation of preaching is at an all-time low and this reputation is by no means improving.

Is there hope for reversing the trend? YES: by taking seriously the Bible from cover to cover. You may want to reply: but that is simplistic and naive. I say, it is not. I am persuaded of the power of Scripture to re-vitalise the church. When men and women—whether students or elderly—see that the minister himself *really believes* that Bible he holds in his hands, they will believe it too. And when *they* believe it, it begins to affect their lives.

You may ask: but cannot God speak today apart from the Bible? The answer is, He could but He doesn't. And anybody who thinks he is speaking God's Word who isn't preaching the Bible is a fool. Preaching and the Bible are joined together by God's decree; most people need preaching to enable them to understand the Bible; and a man who preaches without it is a disgrace to the name of Christ.

Preaching is central to worship, then, because it is God's instrument by which He speaks immediately to men. Preaching is not a religious experience for the preacher. If it were, then preaching would be no more powerful than a hymn or a prayer by which one may feel something second-hand. Preaching is the instrument by which nothing is lost in the transmission between the Transmitter and the receiver. One does not listen to the radio second-hand; one hears it immediately. That is like true preaching. Thus when one hears the preacher expound God's Word with authority, one forgets the preacher (as one forgets a radio) and



hears *God*. This is why preaching is central to worship. And when this is recovered in the church today, we will not have to use gimmicks or anything else to draw crowds.

You will say: 'But you are presenting the ideal, and where is it to be found?' I answer, 'You are right.' I am presenting the ideal. Why should I talk about anything else? The ideal is the only thing that will attract men and women to our churches. As for its unavailability, that is no excuse for us to make it less than central in worship. We have removed it from its rightful prominence in Divine Worship because we have accepted liturgy as ideal; we have imputed inspiration to yesterday's prayers and poetry and have placed a vote of no-confidence in preaching to arrest us and change our lives today.

Have we forgotten that preaching was *God's* method for saving men? 'For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe' (1 Cor. 1: 21). Have we outgrown God's method? The Apostle Paul did not want Titus to outgrow this method, for, although eternal life was God's promise from the beginning of the ages, it was to be manifested 'through preaching' (Titus 1: 2-3).

Why preaching? Why was this God's method? Answer: because God wanted *men* to pass on what Jesus began. There is the apocryphal story that when Jesus went back from earth to heaven the angels asked him, 'Is your work finished?' He replied, 'It's finished.' 'How then will your work go on?' 'Through those the Father gave me and those that believe on me through their word.' The angels then asked Him, 'What if that fails?' Jesus replied: 'I have no other plan.' The Apostle Paul said that God has 'committed unto us the world of reconciliation' (2 Cor. 5: 19). In other words, it is to us to whom the responsibility of spreading the Gospel is given.

You will say: 'Then anybody can spread the Word by word of mouth and surely that is preaching.' I agree. The genius of the early church was that men and women went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8: 4), and the Apostles were left behind (Acts 8: 1). But those who were so equipped could do so because they were well taught. Take for example Philip's adroitness in handling the Word (Acts 8: 26-40). Philip was the product of great preaching. How many Philips do you know?

But today's generation of Christians are so anaemic and superficial that most conversions nowadays may be regarded (almost) as accidental. I have been stunned again and again over the shallowness of the average Christian student at

college or university level. If the knowledge of their chosen field were commensurate with their knowledge of Christianity and the Bible, they *wouldn't even pass!* But one cannot be too hard on them, for the depth of learning and teaching from many pulpits suggests that many ministers know their Bibles little better. If they do, their sermons often don't show it. And if their sermons *did* show it, they would surely want to give much, much more time to preaching than they generally do.

If preaching were made central in worship throughout Britain, there would be time allowed for the people in the pew to learn. Learn. 'Take my yoke upon you and *learn of me*,' said Jesus, 'and ye shall find rest unto your souls' (Matt. 11: 29). There would also be time to think. Think. 'If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *think* on these things' (Phil. 4: 8). Christianity ought to teach a person how to think. But when liturgy makes the sermon the PS, then men are encouraged to remain as ignorant and stupid as men were generally during the Middle Ages.

You may say: 'If preaching were made central in the way herein suggested, people would quit coming to church.' I answer: 'They have already quit coming.' You may say: 'People don't want long sermons.' Answer: 'The church exists, not to give people what they want but what they need.' You may ask: 'What if people sleep through the sermon?' Answer: 'They probably sleep through short ones anyway. Long ones would force the minister to be sharp and interesting enough to hold their attention.'

I am certain that the appalling ignorance of today's Christian student is traceable to the (lack of) preaching in the typical Divine Worship service.

You may now say: 'Suppose I did agree with you. What can I do about it?' I answer: 'Take one other person with you to your minister and tell him tactfully and kindly you would like preaching to have a more prominent place in the worship service.' He may well be very pleased that you feel this way. He may be the first to agree with you and will be encouraged to do what he secretly wished to do anyway, namely, preach better and longer sermons. Any minister worth his salt will be delighted to know there are those in his congregation that desire to know the Bible better. You may also discover there are not a few others in your congregation that feel precisely as you do. (After all, most people who go to the trouble to make their way to church these days probably have some rather strong convictions.) God may indeed use you to turn things right around. Who knows? You may be an instrument of the Holy Spirit to make your

congregation a place to which non-Christians may come and be converted!

What about fellowship? Is not Christian fellowship more important than anything else in the church? I answer that Christian fellowship is a subsidiary effect of true worship. Christian fellowship is centred on Jesus Christ. The more we know of Christ—who He is and what He did—the more we will love one another and the richer fellowship in the church will be. There is no greater folly than building a church around fellowship when that church does not make the Gospel central. For a church is nothing but a religious club (without much religion) when the Gospel is not central. And I do not see how the Gospel can be said to be central when the preaching of that Gospel is not central; for that Gospel is to be known by preaching. Fellowship, then, is that which follows sound preaching. 'And they (three thousand souls that had been converted) continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine *and* fellowship' (Acts 2: 42). Note the order: first, doctrine; secondly, fellowship.

I should like now to put down what I believe true worship is: the response of the mind, heart and will to the preached Word and the Holy Spirit. But this raises a question. If the preaching of the Word does not *begin* the service, how can one worship before the sermon comes along? I answer that (1) one may not be worshipping indeed until the sermon comes but merely seeking to worship; or (2) that one's worship in the first part of the service is carried along by the momentum of a previous message from God; and (3) that worship is something that should be the warp and woof of one's being twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and not merely in a church building.

Preaching, therefore, is to be central *in* the worship service because it is central *to* worship. The worship of God in the sanctuary must be centred on preaching because it is preaching that produces the kind of response in us that may be truly called worship. Worship is a way of life. If we hear God speak second-hand in church, our lives outside church will be sub-standard. If we hear God speak immediately, we are thus not dependent upon another's experience but only the pure word of God. It is the sharp, two-edged sword (Heb. 4: 12) that must operate upon our hearts. It begins in the mind, that we may apprehend; it continues in the heart, that we may be persuaded; it then affects the will, that we may live obediently in the real world. That is true worship but worship which can be precipitated only by the immediate and direct Word from heaven.

It should be noted that I added above 'and the Holy Spirit' in my definition. If the Spirit does not accompany the preached Word, preaching will indeed be boring, irrelevant and ineffective. And I add that it is (alas) possible for the preacher to spend thirty or forty or fifty minutes giving an exposition of the Word and be deadly dull. I suspect that yesterday's clergy emptied the churches for this reason, namely, that they assumed that sheer exposition of the Scriptures was sufficient. That the people yawned during their arid performances did not bother them. We pay for their folly today.

What is needed, then, is preaching that is expository but also on fire. If it is on fire without being expository, it is likely that the net result will be the same as being expository without the fire, namely, an emptied church. There must therefore be both. As Jesus put it, 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God' (Matt. 22: 29). It is not one or the other; it is both.

Paul said to Timothy, 'Thou hast fully known my doctrine' (2 Tim. 3: 10). The question is, do we? Do we know Paul's doctrine? It was Paul's doctrine that gave St Augustine his greatest impetus; it was Paul's doctrine that helped St Anselm shape his doctrine of the atonement; it was Paul's doctrine that turned the world upside down in Luther's day; it was Luther's exposition of Paul's epistle to the Romans that made John Wesley say, 'I felt my heart strangely warmed' and he subsequently became a mighty instrument of God in both England and America. We today need to be immersed in Paul's doctrine. For it is the understanding of justification by faith that opens up the whole of Jesus' teachings.

Preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit will do this. It will give us an understanding of the whole of the Bible. When this happens, our lives will be transformed from week to week. Those outside the church will take notice of us and enquire of us, 'What makes the difference?' We may then take them to church to hear the life-changing word that still heals the hearts of men and women.

Back in the 1930s the Marxists were scoffed at minority. They were to be found in isolated pockets here and there in this country. When accosted they would simply reply, 'But time is on our side.' Would to God they had been wrong. But as I write these lines, England is torn apart with brutal strikes in every direction. The soul of Britain is filled with fear. The church is powerless to do anything about it.

My convictions to be found above I believe point to the only solution. We need to hear a word from

beyond, an undoubted Word from God. But we have forgotten God; indeed, Britain has rejected God and God's way. God speaks through preaching, but we have so lost faith in His method that we have relegated it to nearly nothing in our worship. We cannot worship God if we play oneupmanship with Him by bypassing the way He has ordained.

If indeed the churches of Great Britain would

come before God with weeping; if indeed the services of Divine Worship in this country would make preaching central; if indeed the ministers of the Gospel would preach the Word under the anointing of the Spirit, this nation would be healed. In the meantime, when men laugh and scoff at our antiquated method, we can confidently reply, 'But time is on our side.'

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# Jesus and the law: an exegesis on Matthew 5: 17-20

David Wenham

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The very strong statements about the continuing validity of the Old Testament law ascribed to Jesus in Matthew 5: 17-20 have caused great difficulty to many Christian interpreters. Some have felt that they are in contradiction to Jesus' more liberal attitude to the law<sup>1</sup> attested in Mark's Gospel (and elsewhere); others have wondered how they can possibly be reconciled with the teaching of Paul, the writer to the Hebrews and others, who suggest that the Christian is at least in some senses freed from the law.

A common solution to these problems is to ascribe the views expressed in Matthew 5: 17-20 to the Jewish Christians of Matthew's church rather than to Jesus. But this solution, however plausible it may seem, is not without objection on critical grounds,<sup>2</sup> and it is in any case no final solution for the person who wishes to interpret Matthew 5: 17-20 as part of the Word of God.

How then can we make sense of these verses? Dr Robert Banks has made some important suggestions on this, which, if accepted, would go a long

way to answering our question.<sup>3</sup> His views in general on Jesus' view of the Old Testament law are summed up by the editor of *Themelios* as follows: 'Jesus did not "expound" the law, nor did he "abrogate" it, or even "radicalize" it. The law was not, as such, any more the object of his attention than the traditions. His own new teaching moves on a plane above and beyond the law. The question is not Jesus' attitude to the law, but the law's relevance to *him*. It points forward to him, and in that sense it is fulfilled in his coming, and particularly in his teaching. "It is only in so far as it has been taken up *into* that teaching and completely transformed that it lives on" (p. 242). Even the decalogue does not remain in force as "eternal moral law". Only the teaching of Jesus has that status.'<sup>4</sup>

This general position is in accord with and is supported by Banks' detailed discussion of Matthew 5: 17-20. Among the points made by Banks, the following are particularly important (and controversial): in v. 17b., 'I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them,' Banks argues that the Greek word translated 'fulfil', *plerosai*, should not be interpreted to mean 'establish'; rather it means

<sup>1</sup> For example, about the sabbath.  
<sup>2</sup> The partial parallel in Luke 16: 17 should prevent us from quickly concluding that these verses are Matthean.  
<sup>3</sup> In *JBL* 93 (1974), pp. 226-242 and in his book *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), which was reviewed in *Themelios* Vol. 2, No. 1 (1976), pp. 29, 30. The present writer has been able to consult only the *JBL* and *Themelios* articles when writing this. [The relevant section of the book (pp. 203-226) is in fact a virtually unaltered reprint of the *JBL* article—Ed.]  
<sup>4</sup> *Themelios*, art. cit., p. 29.

to 'fulfil' all that the law pointed forward to, and thus to transcend and replace the law. The law, like the prophets, pointed forward to Christ, and now that Christ has come the law is included in and superseded by him.

In the following verse (v. 18), which speaks of not an iota, not a dot, passing from the law until all is accomplished, Banks takes the phrase 'until all is accomplished' to mean 'until all is fulfilled in Christ' (in the way described already). Once Christ has come, the law is replaced by His teaching. V. 19 warns against relaxing 'one of the least of these commandments', and Banks takes this to refer to Jesus' commands, not to the Old Testament law.

On the basis of such exegetical arguments Banks can conclude that Matthew 5: 17-20 is not concerned to teach the abiding validity of the Old Testament law so much as superiority and authoritative character of Jesus and his teaching.

### Objections to Banks' view

Banks argues carefully, and aspects of his interpretation are attractive. But his exegesis of Matthew 5: 17-20 is open to serious questions.

(1) V. 17. Banks' argument that *plerosai* should be interpreted to mean 'fulfil and transcend' rather than 'establish' is not entirely convincing. We may agree with Banks that *plerosai* is normally used in Matthew to mean 'fulfil' (especially of the fulfilment of prophecy), and that quite possibly that thought is present here in Matthew 5: 17—not only the prophets, but also the law are seen as pointing forward to Jesus and as finding their fulfilment in him. But whereas Banks believes that Matthew's thought is that of 'fulfilling and so transcending', the context suggests rather than the thought is that of 'fulfilling and so establishing'. The contrast in v. 17b, 'I came not to abolish but to . . .,' favours this view: 'abolish—fulfil/establish' are a more natural pair of opposites than 'abolish—fulfil/transcend'. And the subsequent context also favours this interpretation: the fact that Jesus is the fulfiller of the law leads on to the practical 'therefore' of v. 19: Jesus' followers are to uphold not abolish the law.<sup>5</sup>

(2) V. 18. The clause 'until all (literally all things) is accomplished' is taken by Banks to mean—until all the law's demands and expectations are

fulfilled, *i.e.* until the coming of Christ. The weakness with this interpretation is the preceding parallel clause 'until heaven and earth pass away'; this clause clearly suggests that the law's validity is until the end of time. Banks argues on traditional grounds that this earlier clause means simply that it is extremely difficult for the law to pass away. But that is not exactly what it says: in Matthew's version the clause is a statement of time 'until . . .', and, even if we allow a measure of rhetorical exaggeration, it clearly suggests that it will be a very long *time* until the law passes. The clause 'until all is accomplished' may be correctly interpreted to mean 'until all that the law points forward to is fulfilled';<sup>6</sup> but the parallel 'until' clause and also the wider context in Matthew (and in Jesus' ministry) suggest that the reference is to the long-term future (*i.e.* the Second Coming) not to the near future (*i.e.* to Jesus' earthly ministry).

(3) V.19. Banks' interpretation of this verse is the weakest point in his exegesis: as France comments, it is improbable 'that Matthew could have allowed the term *entolai* (= commandments) to follow so closely on a reference to the Old Testament laws in verse 18 and yet expected it to be understood in a quite different and, in his Gospel, unique sense.'<sup>7</sup> It is not necessary to add much to that comment,<sup>8</sup> except to say that something similar might be said about Banks' whole exegesis: despite his careful detailed work on the individual verses, is hard to read the Matthean paragraph as a whole and to accept Banks' conclusion that it is not a statement about the abiding validity of the law, but rather a statement teaching the prophetic and and provisional character of the law of Jesus' transcendence over it.

We might go on to question Banks' general thesis about Jesus' attitude to the law: his view that 'the law was not, as such, any more the object of his attention than the traditions'<sup>9</sup> and his argument that 'It is only so far that it has been taken up *into* that teaching and completely transformed that it lives on'<sup>10</sup> seems debatable at least: it would be unusual for a Jew of Jesus' day not to have the law as a major objection of his attention, and, although Jesus was unusual and revolutionary in many ways, it is arguable that he does continue to give the law an important place in his teaching and thinking

<sup>5</sup> So Banks. Compare Matthew 1: 22, 24: 34, 26: 56.

<sup>7</sup> *Themelios*, art. cit., p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> We may note a further link between v. 17 and v. 19 in the verbs *katalucin*, and *luain*.

<sup>9</sup> *Themelios*, art. cit., p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, quoting *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition*, p. 242.

<sup>5</sup> Banks, of course, has a different interpretation of v. 19. It is possible to argue that *plerosai* simply means 'establish' here and that it does not have the more usual Matthean connotation of 'fulfilment'. The absence of *pleroun* as a translation of the Hebrew *qum* in the LXX is scarcely a decisive point against this. H. Ridderbos understands the verse to mean that Jesus 'maintained and interpreted in its radical sense' the law and the prophets (*Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975, p. 285).

(e.g. Mk. 7: 9f., 12: 28f.).<sup>11</sup> The same is even more clearly true of Matthew.<sup>12</sup>

### Jesus' self-defence

If, then, Banks' explanation of Matthew 5: 17-20 seems unconvincing, what are we to make of these verses? Do they express a rigorist attitude to the law, at variance with Jesus' known teaching elsewhere? I don't think so. The key to the interpretation of the verses seems to me to lie in a recognition of the context in Matthew's gospel and also of the probable context in Jesus' ministry. In Matthew 5 the preceding context in v. 16 is a call to good works, and the subsequent context in v. 20 and the verses that follow is a comparison of Jesus' standards of righteousness with those of the scribes and Pharisees. Matthew's concern then in this section of his gospel, and indeed elsewhere, is for righteous living. It is not unlikely that Matthew is answering a Jewish accusation that Jesus' way represented a departure from Jewish moral standards and a destruction of the law; so Matthew emphasizes Jesus' righteousness and his condemnation of *anomia* (e.g. Matt. 13: 41; 25: 31f., etc.).

If that is the Matthean context, much the same may have been the original context in Jesus' ministry. People were, I suggest, comparing Jesus' revolutionary life and message with the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees, and their charge was that Jesus was a libertarian who was abandoning the high standards of the Old Testament law, for which the scribes and Pharisees stood so firmly. We know for certain that this accusation was made against Jesus because of his freedom towards the sabbath law and because of his friendship towards the sinners and outcasts (Matt. 9: 10f.; 11: 19).

In this context Matthew 5: 17-20 makes sense. V. 17 is itself phrased as a denial of the accusation: 'Think not that I have come to abolish the law. . . .' Banks regards the phrase 'Think not. . . .' as a rhetorical device strengthening the following posi-

<sup>11</sup> Banks would not deny that the law has a significant place in Jesus' teaching and thinking, and I would, of course, not deny that in New Testament theology the law comes to have a secondary place to Christ and that our relationship to the law is now only through Christ. But Banks' view that the law has passed away except as continued and transformed in Christ is to my mind too negative a way of expressing the truth; I would prefer to say that the law continues as eternal moral law, though now only as a part of the full and perfect revelation of Christ.

<sup>12</sup> e.g. 23: 3, 23. Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1977), pp. 246f. on Matthew's 'Jewish Christianity' and on the exegesis of the whole passage.

Although I have disagreed with Banks' exegesis in certain respects, his discussion remains of the greatest importance, and I have not been able to do justice to many aspects of his argument in this short comment.

tive statement;<sup>13</sup> but there must surely be some slight implication that some people could think that Jesus was abolishing the Old Testament. Jesus says: No; in fact he came to 'fulfil them'—in the sense 'fulfil and so establish'. Jesus came not to denigrate or displace, but to uphold the Old Testament revelation.<sup>14</sup>

In vs. 18, 19 Jesus goes on to stress the divine authority of the Old Testament law: as the Word of God it must all stand 'until heaven and earth pass away'<sup>15</sup> or (to describe the same period in different words) 'until all is accomplished'. Jesus then points out the consequence that follows from this: that to ignore or to teach others to ignore parts of the law will meet with disapproval in the kingdom of God. Jesus' new message of the kingdom of God does not mean the overthrow of the Old Testament law; on the contrary, it is maintained.

Having thus decisively denied the charge that he is teaching a lax attitude to the law and to morals, Jesus in v. 20 goes positively on to the offensive, claiming (on the contrary) that the standards of the kingdom are actually far higher than those of traditional Judaism: indeed you will not even enter the kingdom, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. The verses that follow expound this daunting statement, showing how Jesus' understanding of the law is again and again more radical and demanding than that of the Pharisees: Jesus' standard is in fact nothing less than perfection (v. 48).

To sum up the thrust of these verses then: Jesus rejects the charge that he is a law-breaker who is lowering standards by asserting his endorsement of the Old Testament and by claiming that his standards are actually higher, not lower, than those of the supposedly pious defenders of the law, the scribes and Pharisees.

### The continuing validity of the OT law

If this is the thrust of what Jesus is saying, then there is surely no great problem in reconciling this with Jesus' teaching elsewhere. There is plenty of evidence of Jesus' high view of the Old Testament as a whole, as well as of the law in particular; he saw it as the authoritative Word of God.<sup>16</sup> There is also plenty of evidence for the radical and demanding nature of Jesus' ethics: going with the gospel of free forgiveness is a demand for a total commitment far deeper than much Jewish observation of

<sup>13</sup> And he compares 10: 34.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Romans 3: 31.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Isaiah 40: 7, 8.

<sup>16</sup> See J. W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (London: IVP, 1972).

the law.<sup>17</sup> There is also no great problem in reconciling the main thrust of the verses with the teaching of Paul and other New Testament writers, who share Jesus' view of the Old Testament and who call for the same standards of perfection from those who are in Christ.

But what then of those New Testament passages that teach that the Christian is free of the Old Testament and other ceremonial law (e.g. Mk. 7: 19)? The simple answer to that is that this passage (Matt. 5: 17-20) is not a detailed statement concerning every single aspect of the Christian's relationship to the Old Testament law; its scope and frame of reference are more limited. As I have argued, the purpose of these verses is to answer the accusation that Jesus is an antinomian who favoured a lowering of moral standards; and the question of whether or not the Old Testament food laws should be binding on all is not here in question.<sup>18</sup>

It is true, of course, that there is a *prima facie* contradiction between v. 19 with its insistence on maintaining even the least of the law's commands, and the statements in Mark and Hebrews about foods being clean and about the old covenant passing away. But if we are right to insist that Matthew's concern is with Jesus' general attitude to the Old Testament law and in particular to ethical standards,<sup>19</sup> then this is not in conflict with the views of Mark or the author of Hebrews, neither of whom can properly be accused of destroying the law and the prophets or the moral standards of the Old Testament.

In arguing this I am coming near to reviving the traditional distinction between the moral and the ceremonial law, which Christians have so often used to explain their ambivalent attitude to the Old Testament law. Matthew's concern in these verses, I have suggested, is primarily at least, for the moral law, which is upheld by Christ, whereas Mark and the writer to the Hebrews are concerned

with the ritual and ceremonial law, which they believe is fulfilled in Christ and in the new covenant in such a way that Christ's followers need no longer observe it. Modern scholars have argued that the distinction between the moral and ceremonial law is not one made by the New Testament and is of doubtful validity. Banks himself seems to try to avoid the distinction by insisting that the whole of the law and the prophets are fulfilled in and superseded by Christ.

In one general sense we may accept Banks' view: Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament (the law and the prophets), and he has certainly superseded the law in the sense that our relationship to God is now through Christ, not through the law. But Christ has not fulfilled and superseded the law in the sense that all Old Testament law ceases to be binding on a Christian. No; we have to distinguish those laws, which may be said to point forward to Christ and which are therefore unnecessary after his coming (e.g. the ceremonial laws according to Hebrews) and the moral laws, which do not so obviously point forward to Christ (though they were explained more fully by him) and which continue to be binding eternal moral truths for the Christian. These moral laws are 'fulfilled' by Christ in a very different sense from the ceremonial laws: they are not superseded, but rather are included in the new Christian framework of reference. So, although the New Testament may not spell out the distinction between the moral and ceremonial law, in practice it seems to recognize it.<sup>20</sup>

That does not mean that when Matthew records 5: 17-20 he is consciously limiting his statement to the moral law; no, his statement is a broad one about the law and the prophets in general. But still he is looking at the whole law from a particular angle, with the question of the moral law and Jesus' ethical standards at the front of his mind.<sup>21</sup> Had we been able to press Matthew with questions as to the relevance of this passage for the question of the Gentiles and the Old Testament ritual laws, he would probably have said that he had not been thinking of that question at all. But he might also (with no inconsistency, I suggest) have gone on to accept that the ritual laws, though no less divine and authoritative, have been fulfilled by Christ in the sort of way suggested by Banks, and so that they are not binding on Gentile Christians in the way at first sight suggested by 5: 19.

<sup>20</sup> So Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, p. 284. His whole discussion of the matter is valuable.

<sup>21</sup> The same point might be made in reverse about statements such as Hebrews 8: 13: the writer does not mean that all aspects of the old covenant, including the ten commandments, are obsolete.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. later in the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>18</sup> Was it ever a question in Jesus' teaching and ministry? Mark 7: 19b is the evangelist's comment. Certainly Jesus set himself against the distorting scribal interpretations of Old Testament laws, but he did not speak out on the question of Gentiles and the Old Testament food laws. Had he done so, the church would not have had so much difficulty over the issue.

<sup>19</sup> The following verses in Matthew (and indeed Matthew's whole gospel) suggest that this was his main concern. It would be hard to prove from Matthew that he would have insisted on Gentiles keeping all the ritual and ceremonial laws, though these had a place (Mt. 23: 23). But see Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 247f. Dunn's argument is that Matthew has Judaized Mark 7, whereas it is possible to argue that at some points at least in Matthew 15 (e.g. v. 24) Matthew retains the earlier form of words which Mark has modified for his Gentile readership.

# Structural analysis

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Since the mid-1960's, a new star has risen on the horizon of biblical scholarship in the form of structuralism or structural analysis. As a literary rather than a historical discipline, the new structuralism has challenged biblical studies at the level of its most cherished assumptions. For well over a century, it has been assumed that truth from scripture derives from the intent of the writer as he addressed his own world in space and time. Only historical research could unlock the secrets of tradition history and composition, and ultimately the theological meaning of the text. Structural analysis by its very definition seeks meaning at another level. Deliberately eschewing historical and diachronic research, the structuralist claims to find in the writing itself, in the relationships of words and themes, the key to interpretation. His focus has shifted to synchronic research in an attempt to look at the text as a given whole in all its internal and external relationships, and in an attempt to

objectively assess the values inherent in the material.

Since the method arose quite independently of biblical studies, and because its assumptions are alien to the latter, one might expect the seed to find no fertile soil, but this has not been the case. In fact, many of the notable figures engaged in research of a more historical nature have welcomed structural research as an exciting new dimension to their own work.

The reasons for this phenomenon are no doubt complex. The attractiveness of novelty cannot be discounted, although to argue that the trend is but one more evidence of a thirst for hearing some new thing is in itself too facile. Perhaps the response expresses dissatisfaction with the results of historical research; a basic interest in history, so long the foundation of western intellectual endeavour, has been severely challenged during the sixties and early seventies, and perhaps the new search for meaning at a nonhistorical level reflects the philosophical trends of that era. In addition, biblical studies have recently faced a certain challenge from the secular departments of the university, particularly those of sociology, anthropology,



linguistics, and literature. That the methodology of these disciplines should have a profound influence is perhaps inevitable, and the new interest in structure may be characteristic of a coming age of religious studies.

### The Discipline

Modern biblical studies in structural analysis owe their origin to developments in linguistic theory which followed the publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* in 1915.<sup>1</sup> De Saussure and those who follow him argue that language reflects certain universal patterns, or structures, which in turn reflect universal orders within the human brain. All narrative is an expression of these deep structures, and the task of the student is to discover the nature of these patterns. In the years since 1915, and particularly since the Second World War, various forms of theory and application have emerged in an attempt to define and develop these basic ideas.

Prominent in biblical scholarship is the name of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Although himself interested primarily in primitive mythology, Lévi-Strauss has exerted a profound influence on others who have in turn applied his method to the biblical literature. In its fullest application, the work of Lévi-Strauss and other anthropologists and linguists requires a more sophisticated knowledge of linguistic theory than most biblical researchers can ever hope to command, but attempts to apply portions of the method to both Testaments have been made. In all of this activity, the debt to Lévi-Strauss and other theorists such as Roland Barthes and Roman Jakobson must be acknowledged.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Spivey lists three assumptions which govern the discipline: (1) appearance in human conduct and affairs is not reality; (2) reality is structured; and (3) the structure is code-like.<sup>3</sup> Regarding a text or its content as the appearance, the structuralist will seek the deeper structure which may reflect reality. Lévi-Strauss employs the analogy of geology, in which a basic and fundamental substratum runs beneath the surface of the landscape. Similarly, there lies beneath the world of discourse and rationality 'a category at once more important and more valid, that is, the meaningful'.<sup>4</sup> In the terminology of de Saussure, the text or

individual (*parole*) is governed by a code (*langue*), and it is this code which the endeavour seeks, for it is at this level that reality may be approached or apprehended.

While all structuralists would agree *inter alia* that such a structure exists, they are less agreed regarding its shape or nature. For Claude Lévi-Strauss, following the Prague linguist, Roman Jakobson, the basic aspect of human thought is found in the concept of binary opposition. All language, learning, and development is thus subjected to a pervasive Hegelian dialectical analysis. Noam Chomsky, among others, has rejected this as an oversimplification,<sup>5</sup> and Lévi-Strauss himself has apparently had doubts about comprehensive nature of the paradigm. Using the model of the traffic light, he now finds that although red and green are binary opposites, the yellow light mediates between the two. In the same way, human expression, though essentially formed on the binary model, incorporates at many levels various integrating or mediating elements.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, the structuralist often begins with a rather definite world-view which in turn colours his assumptions upon approaching the text. Both Barthes<sup>7</sup> and Lévi-Strauss,<sup>8</sup> for example, express their dialectical structures in a Marxist-Freudian analysis. Thus, even before looking at a given method, one must inquire as to what philosophical presuppositions might pigment the approach of the analyst.

Basic to the method, though still a matter of debate, is a concern for synchronic rather than diachronic research. The timeless, universal structures are pursued, not the ways in which meaning has been discovered in the past. A structuralist with a strongly antihistorical bias, like Lévi-Strauss,<sup>9</sup> shows the tendency most clearly in his preference for 'myth' over the study of historical narrative, for it is in myth that the historical dimension most readily gives way to the universal and the timeless. Whether such an approach can ever be reconciled or viewed as complementary to historical research remains an open question. The majority of biblical scholars who espouse literary structural methods are inclined to think that synchronic and diachronic research are two sides of

<sup>1</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in general linguistics* (1915; ET New York, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> See J. W. Rogerson, *Myth in Old Testament interpretation*, BZAW (New York, 1974), ch. 8; R. Jakobson, *Int.* 28 (1974): pp. 146-147.

<sup>3</sup> Outlined by D. MacRae in R. Boudon's *The uses of structuralism* (ET London, 1971), p. ix, and cited by Spivey in *Int.* 28 (1974): p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> Spivey, p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> J. Lyons, *Chomsky* (London, 1974), pp. 84f.; cited in Spivey, p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Spivey, p. 140. Cf. Rogerson, p. 105; Jakobson, p. 156.

<sup>7</sup> Spivey, p. 137.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in H. C. White, *Semeia* 3 (1975): pp. 100, 113, 120.

<sup>9</sup> Spivey, pp. 143-145.

the same coin,<sup>10</sup> although a question has been raised as to whether the new approach might not, by definition or default, exclude historical concerns.<sup>11</sup>

On the positive side, there is undoubtedly much to be gained by taking a fresh look at the text itself, at its internal and external relationships, and at its effect on hearer or reader. A brief survey of work on OT passages, to follow in a moment, will show the gains in understanding which have been derived, and it would appear that nothing done by a biblical scholar exhibits the kind of antihistorical bias which is integral to the anthropological system of Lévi-Strauss. The question is not whether this kind of synchronic research might be useful; compared to much of the arid irrelevance and speculation of recent form-critical endeavour, it shines the more brightly. More to the point is a question as to whether the recent work, when separated from the antihistorical world-view of the semiologist, can be called structuralism proper.

### Method

The first question which must be answered by the prospective practitioner, then, is whether he intends his structural analysis to truly grow out of the system which we have described as structuralism. At this point, biblical scholars fall into various categories. Daniel Patte represents those few who have made an attempt to understand and reproduce the system of French linguistic science.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, R. C. Culley attempts to apply some insights from the method, but confesses that he is not ready to radically reevaluate the question of history, and opts for a less stringent analytical method which does not assume the broader framework of structuralism proper.<sup>13</sup>

### *Patte's application of Greimas' narrative structure.*

For Greimas' narrative is that which evokes the value 'narrativity',<sup>14</sup> and in his structure, six 'hierarchically distinct elements' are distinguished. These are sequence, syntagm, statement, actantial model, function, and actant.<sup>15</sup> The terms and their definitions are highly technical, presupposing a reasonably sophisticated knowledge of linguistic theory.

First, the narrative is viewed as a series of sequences:

- initial sequence (related to the final)
- optional disrupting sub-sequence
- one or several topical sequences
- 
- 
- a final sequence (related to the initial).<sup>16</sup>

The sub-sequence, when present, explains how the initial sequence is opposed or disrupted: in this case, one or more of the topical sequences is concerned to show how the opposition is overcome in order to fulfill the initial sequence. In the parable which Patte employs to illustrate the method (Lk. 10: 10-35), the action of the man going down to Jericho forms the initial sequence, and that of the robbers a disrupting sub-sequence. The initial sequence sets the agenda for the rest of the narrative. Here, topical sequences about priest, Levite, and Samaritan follow to fulfill the initial sequence: the first two fail and the third succeeds.

Second, each sequence breaks down into a succession of three narrative *syntagms*, namely, a *contract* syntagm, a *disjunction/conjunction* syntagm, and a *performance* syntagm. In simplified form, the syntagms represent individualized actions of a stylized nature, and these make up the sequence. For example, the act of compassion is the contract syntagm, the approach to the wounded man is the element of disjunction/conjunction, and the remainder of the Samaritan's actions collectively represent the performance syntagm.

Third, each syntagm is broken down into narrative *statements*, each of which may be compared to a basic sentence with a bare subject and predicate: someone (or something) performs an act to carry out the syntagm. In the performance syntagm of Patte's example, the narrative statements would include 'bound up his wounds', 'poured on oil and wine', etc.

Fourth, each such action is assigned to a technical category of description called a *function*, such as arrival, departure, conjunction, disjunction, acceptance, refusal, confrontation, etc. Those in the Good Samaritan include acceptance (he had compassion'), and conjunction ('and went to him').<sup>17</sup>

Fifth, the roles of those who perform (or are acted on by) the various functions are classified in one of six *actantial roles*, or *actants*. These are Sender, Receiver, Subject, Object, Helper, and

<sup>10</sup> E.g., D. Patte, *What is structural exegesis?* (Philadelphia, 1976), p. 85.

<sup>11</sup> Spivey, pp. 143-145; J. Barr, *The Bible in the modern world* (London, 1973), pp. 63-65.

<sup>12</sup> Patte, in *What is structural exegesis?*

<sup>13</sup> R. C. Culley, *Int.* 28 (1974): p. 169.

<sup>14</sup> Cited by Patte, p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37. For a list of Greimas' major related publications, see Patte, pp. 36 (n. 2), p. 86.

<sup>16</sup> Adapted from Patte, p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> Patte, pp. 40-41. Patte here cites the discussion by Jean Calloud, *L'analyse structural du récit. Eléments de méthode. Tentations de Jésus au désert* (Lyon, 1973), pp. 16-17; ET *Structural analysis of narrative* (Philadelphia, 1976).

Opponent, and all of these are implicit or explicit in each narrative. (The person who manifests, or performs, a given actant may be called the *actor*.) At various points in Patte's example, the Samaritan is found in the role of the Subject, the wounded man that of the Receiver, his welfare that of the Object, the robbers that of the Opponent, and the oil, wine, and donkey that of the Helper. The Sender is in this case unknown, unless viewed as providence or a similar force.

Sixth, the relationships among the various functions and actants are described by building an *actantial model*, and at this point the first level of the structural analysis has been completed.

It will be seen that use of such a model, even at the level of simple analysis, requires a measure of training in the method. But what is required at this level is little compared to the next. The exegesis is now carried into the realm of mythical structures, and ultimately to a semantic analysis, and for these Patte turns to the model provided by Lévi-Strauss.

#### *Patte's application of Lévi-Strauss' mythical structure*

Mythical exegesis aims to uncover the 'deep structures' operating in the unconsciousness of the myth. Lévi-Strauss begins by grouping together all the mythological texts of a given culture, for he believes that a basic myth is expressed in them as the sum of all its variants.<sup>18</sup> To find the basic mythical structure, he reduces the events of these stories to short sequences called *mythemes*, each of which may be represented by the formula  $F_x(a)$ , and read, 'a function "x" is linked to a given subject (or state) "a"'.<sup>19</sup> Groups of mythemes are isolated in a given text, and from the grouping of related mythemes, Lévi-Strauss derives new mythemes which denote in broader terms what several constituent mythemes had implicitly expressed.

Patte applies the methods of Lévi-Strauss to Paul's theological argument in Galatians 1: 1-10.<sup>20</sup> Admitting that in form it is very different from myth, he nevertheless finds that in the theological argument the basic unit is still the mytheme, in this case the short Pauline phrase which must be expanded to find its value. Thus the phrase 'Paul an apostle' is really two mythemes standing in opposition; 'Paul as the common man' and 'Paul as an apostle' make up one broad mytheme which incorporates the two into a fundamental opposition. 'Proclamation by Paul' moderates between 'Gala-

tians as slaves to an evil aeon' and 'Galatians as Christians'. The resurrection mediates between the dead Jesus and the risen Lord, and so forth. From these mediated oppositions the basic mythical structure emerges, and, in this case, 'the gospel as teaching' and 'the other gospel' opposition is seen as fundamental to the whole. The person of Paul, his experience, and his argument are seen as mediating the various oppositions. But the basic code is in the oppositions, and Patte suggests that the method will lead to a number of as yet unexplored 'hermeneutical possibilities'.<sup>21</sup>

By this time it will be seen that true French structuralism remains the province of only select initiates. Whether or not there is a universal myth, and whether it can be reduced to simple formulae, will remain an open question to most students of the biblical literature. Meanwhile, however, this review of Patte's application has perhaps illustrated the method such that one may understand why most biblical scholars have looked for modifications or alternatives.

#### **Other Applications**

*R. C. Culley.* Without agreeing to the presuppositions of structuralism, Robert Culley feels the method should go beyond the stylistic or rhetorical criticism. An earlier article illustrates what structural analysis on these terms might look like,<sup>22</sup> and a fuller expression of his ideas appears in two later works. Of these, a short article analyzes three groups of brief biblical stories<sup>23</sup>, while a monograph combines questions on a common framework or structure in miracle stories with a concern for the oral development of those accounts.<sup>24</sup>

The former may be used to illustrate his method. First, Culley follows Lévi-Strauss in juxtaposing all examples of a type within a given body of literature, although since some types overlap, the groups will not always appear homogeneous. Culley is aware of this, and is also clear that 'these labels are not meant to indicate genre',<sup>25</sup> for his concern is not with origin but with structure. Having grouped his stories, Culley proceeds to (1) 'see what relationships can be detected among the stories within the groups', and to (2) 'see what relationships can be seen among the groups themselves'.<sup>26</sup> In the miracle stories he finds the common pattern 'problem/miracle/solution', while in the seven deception

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>22</sup> Culley, *Int.* 28 (1974): pp. 165-181.

<sup>23</sup> Culley, *Semeia* 3 (1975): pp. 3-13.

<sup>24</sup> Culley, *Studies in the structure of Hebrew narrative*, Semeia Supplements (Philadelphia/Missoula, 1976).

<sup>25</sup> Culley, *Semeia* 3 (1975): p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural anthropology* (ET Garden City, New York, 1963), p. 213; cited by Patte, p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> Patte, p. 55, following Lévi-Strauss, p. 207.

<sup>20</sup> Patte, pp. 59-75.

stories the pattern is 'problem/deception/solution'.

Culley's alignment with structuralism proper is more explicit in the next step. In moving from the surface to the deep structures (though he does not use the terminology), he finds a fundamental opposition between life and death in each group, and proposes a mediation of some kind in each story.

Somewhat questionable is Culley's finding of death as a major motif in each. The seventh, the floating axe-head narrative of 2 Kings 6: 1-7, has only (in Culley's words) 'a vague association with death because it shares a pattern with the other stories'.<sup>27</sup> In groups II and III of Culley's analysis, the 'death' structure is also forced: Lot's two daughters (Gen. 19: 30-38), and Tamar (ch. 38), are faced with childlessness, which 'can be understood as a form of death'.<sup>28</sup> At this point Culley stops, but we are left with the feeling that his analysis, on the level of ultimate meaning, has become as subjective as that of Edmund Leach, of whose work he once wrote a perceptive critique.<sup>29</sup>

R. Polzin. Unlike many of the newer structuralists, Robert Polzin is not slow to criticize form and source analysis as 'counterproductive',<sup>30</sup> and he employs structural categories more than some of his colleagues.

In his study of the Book of Job, Polzin seeks to establish 'three elements which we would consider fundamental to a structural analysis', namely, the *framework*, the *code*, and the *message* of the book,<sup>31</sup> and he relates these categories to the structural distinctions of A.-J. Greimas and Roman Jakobson.<sup>32</sup>

In establishing the *framework*, Polzin first divides the discourse into its largest sections on the basis of *functional units*; he finds four of these in the story corresponding to *movements* which mediate some conflict or contradiction. In a second step (described but not illustrated), he would employ a *paradigmatic pattern* thus isolated in order to move into the deep structures and discern the *code*, in the world of *langue* where the universals of human behaviour are to be found. In determining the *message* as a third step, he would 'treat those aspects of the book (besides its components and its system) which must be known before its message(s)

can be grasped'.<sup>33</sup> While the code involves universal invariables, the meaning is external to the text and relates to the world at large.

A second work by Polzin examines three accounts of the occasional unusual relationship of the patriarch's wives to a local ruler, as found in Genesis 12, 20 and 26.<sup>34</sup> Here Polzin rejects form and source analysis, and again proceeds by three steps of his own.

The first looks for *transformations* from one version of the story to the next and also within each version, both in the basic 'story-line' as unfolded in Genesis, and in the role of the relationship itself from one version to the next. When these have been diagrammed structurally, the next step seeks to formulate the *structural laws*, presumably now at the deep structure, though they still operate at the level of the story itself. A third step relates the various transformations to one another, such that those about receiving blessing, for example, are related to transformations concerning the way in which mankind discerns the will of Yahweh.<sup>35</sup>

Polzin's article, which provides a fine example of thematic (or stylistic) analysis, stops at what the linguist would call the surface level. The variants and invariants are precisely catalogued and set over against one another, but little in the analysis goes beneath the surface structure to the deeper realities hinted at in his earlier work.

Culley and Polzin are cited because they represent OT scholars who adopt certain structural methods. Culley is typical of a group which would openly reject the philosophical framework of structuralism, but still use some of its synchronic methods; and attempt to relate structural exegesis to diachronic research, especially to form criticism. Polzin, although beginning with a philosophical disavowal of structuralism, more openly espouses its tenets in his methodology. In some ways, his attempt to be a true structuralist is the more thorough, for he clearly bypasses all historical research. But even Polzin does not go all the way: his finished product is closer to what has increasingly come to be designated *rhetorical criticism*, and we now turn our attention to that development in biblical studies.

### Literary Approaches

To describe the kind of literary approach which operates *sans* structuralist philosophical presuppositions, James Muilenberg has proposed the

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Culley, 'Some comments on structural analysis and biblical studies,' Uppsala OT Congress paper (1971), published in *VT Sup.* 22 (1972): pp. 129-142.

<sup>30</sup> R. Polzin, *Int.* 28 (1974): p. 183; his comments here address in particular the way these disciplines have been applied to the book of Job. See also his sharp criticism of Klaus Koch's *Formgeschichtliche* analyses (of Gen. 12, 20, and 26) in *Semeia* 3 (1975): pp. 81-83.

<sup>31</sup> Polzin, *Int.* 28 (1974): p. 187.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187, n. 9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>34</sup> Polzin, *Semeia* 3 (1975): pp. 81-98.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

term *rhetorical criticism*.<sup>36</sup> Without rejecting either form research, or an interest in the original author or setting, Muilenberg goes on to affirm that

What I am interested in, above all, is in understanding the nature of Hebrew literary composition, in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole. Such an enterprise I would describe as rhetoric and the method as rhetorical criticism.<sup>37</sup>

This enterprise is some distance removed from that of the followers of Lévi-Strauss, and much closer to that of scholars like Culley and Polzin. Muilenberg's method requires the user to (1) define the limits or scope of the literary unit using its literary features; and (2) 'recognize the structure of a composition and to discern the configuration of its component parts . . . and to note the various rhetorical devices that are employed'.<sup>38</sup> A stress on literary features replaces the binary oppositions of Lévi-Strauss, while the absence of a theory of code and deep structure further puts this approach in a category different from that of the French structuralist. These differences, however, should not prevent one from observing the similarities that remain, especially as they relate to the methods employed by biblical scholars.

Muilenberg and his students have not been alone in calling for a literary approach to biblical exegesis. Edwin Good has argued for a strict separation between source and literary analysis, reserving the latter term for an enterprise more like Muilenberg's rhetorical criticism.<sup>39</sup> James Barr has also taken up the question by critiquing several continental and British movements, and suggesting that questions of theology and meaning must be combined with any literary approach;<sup>40</sup> he cites the works of Luis Alonso-Schökel as a model for such discussion.<sup>41</sup> Yet another name—'Total Interpretation'—has been suggested by Meir Weiss, an Israeli scholar who looks at structural analysis as a literary approach to Hebrew poetry.<sup>42</sup> Finally, David Robertson's recent *Fortress Guide* appears to have eliminated historical and theological categories al-

together in favour of viewing the Bible as 'imaginative literature'.<sup>43</sup>

### Pentateuchal Studies

This brief survey of related studies in the Pentateuch will begin by looking at the work of two structuralists proper—Roland Barthes and Edmund Leach; and will then sketch the contributions of three OT scholars—Paul Beauchamp, J. P. Fokkelman, and G. W. Coats.

*Roland Barthes on Genesis 32: 22-32.* The short essay 'La lutte avec l'ange',<sup>44</sup> by the literary critic Roland Barthes, provides a good place to begin, for it may be read in conjunction with a helpful critique which has been published by Hugh White.<sup>45</sup> Without openly espousing any kind of source or form analysis, Barthes approaches the story of Jacob and his opponent as a type of myth or folklore in which the patriarch is opposed at the river by some form of genie. He discovers two possibilities of reading which could, as White points out,<sup>46</sup> parallel Gunkel's sources, but Barthes views these discrepancies, not as options from which an original must be selected, but rather as two equally valid ways of reading. As a result, two different but complete structures are distinguished.

Building on the symbolic aspect of this ambiguity, he turns briefly to the structural theories of Greimas and Propp for a deeper level of significance. It is only at this level that Barthes would call his work *structural analysis*; for the earlier phase he uses the term *sequential analysis* or even *textual analysis*, and follows methods not alien to the world of biblical studies. But in applying structural theory, the task is no longer to understand a particular narrative but to relate it to a universal set of values expressed in the worldview of the structuralist. The struggle with the angel passes from the world of biblical revelation to the world of universal mythology, and the latter, not the former, is viewed as the realm of meaning.

*Edmund Leach on Genesis 1-4.* Perhaps the most celebrated foray into Pentateuchal studies by a structuralist came in 1961 when the Cambridge social anthropologist Edmund Leach wrote his first essay applying the methods of Lévi-Strauss to the Genesis account of the Garden of Eden.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>36</sup> J. Muilenberg, *JBL* 88 (1969): pp. 8-9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> E. M. Good, *JBL* 92 (1973): pp. 288-289.

<sup>40</sup> J. Barr, *BJRL* 56 (1973): pp. 10-33.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31. For a short list of Alonso-Schökel's relevant publications, see *ibid.*, p. 31, n. 1.

<sup>42</sup> M. Weiss, 'Die Methode der "Total Interpretation"', Uppsala Congress paper (1971) published in *VT Sup* 22 (1972): pp. 88-112. Cf. Barr, *BJRL* 56 (1973): pp. 24-25.

<sup>43</sup> D. Robertson, *The Old Testament and the literary critic* (Philadelphia, 1977).

<sup>44</sup> R. Barthes, in *Analyse structurale et exégèse biblique*, ed. F. Bovon (Neuchâtel, 1971); ET R. Barthes et al., *Structural analysis and biblical exegesis*, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series 3 (Pittsburgh, 1974).

<sup>45</sup> H. C. White, *Semeia* 3 (1975): pp. 99-127.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>47</sup> Published in Edmund Leach, *Genesis as myth and other essays* (London, 1969).

Leach begins by setting aside all source analysis, philological research, and sequential analysis of the text in an immediate search for the deep structures of Lévi-Strauss, namely, the pairs of binary oppositions mediated by other elements in the myth. By this arrangement along paradigmatic lines, an entire series of such pairs emerges, and the basic structure of Lévi-Strauss' world-view is vindicated. Whether or not this kind of analysis contributes anything to biblical scholarship, however, is a question related to the broader issue of Lévi-Strauss' view of the structure of reality, to be taken up again below.

*Paul Beauchamp on Genesis 1.* We turn to the work of a professor of OT who is also at home in French structuralist thought. While Paul Beauchamp's *Création et séparation*<sup>48</sup> owes a great deal to the literary methodology of his Rome teacher Luis Alonso-Schökel, reviewers have rightly discerned its affinities to that of Lévi-Strauss in its emphasis on the opposites of unity and separation. Here, however, the similarity to Leach's work ends. Beauchamp's lengthy first chapter is devoted to the surface structure (called the 'literary composition') of Genesis 1, in which the ten words and the seven days of creation form a framework for discussion of various themes—particularly that of separation—in a variety of contexts. While the analysis contains overtones of subjectivity in its widespread discovery of the motif, the theme is never pressed as a key to the ultimate structure of reality. Nor is Beauchamp uncomfortable with questions of a diachronic nature. Chapter Four of his book attempts to find not merely a sociological but an historical milieu for Genesis 1, and, if his conclusion that it relates to that of the Chronicler is not fully satisfactory, other material in the work is a great deal more so. Upon finishing the book, one feels that the great foundational chapter in Genesis has itself been the object of study.

*J. P. Fokkelman.* In his helpful preface to *Narrative Art in Genesis*,<sup>49</sup> J. P. Fokkelman explains both presuppositions and method. 'Narrative art' is the key to interpretation because it was the key to composition, even in texts with a religious and historical base. By means of a 'stylistic and structural analysis', that is, a study of the text as a literary work of art, both literary and theological conclusions can be drawn.

In the Tower of Babel story (Gen. 11: 1-9), the key to the narrator's art is found in the pun on 'Babel' in v. 11. This word-play is seen as 'a gate to

the story and primarily to its sound stratum'.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the narrative 'occupies a special position in OT narrative art by the density of its stylistically relevant phonological phenomena which are closely connected or coincide with remarkable verbal repetitions'.<sup>51</sup> With the direction thus set, Fokkelman finds two competing symmetries, one parallel and one concentric. In the hands of Barthes, this might have provided the basis for an elaboration of the phenomena of universal conflict and ambiguity, but Fokkelman develops the meaning in another direction. The unit is a biblical theology in miniature, a story of crime and punishment, *hubris* and *nemesis*, a balance between God and man.<sup>52</sup> A stylistic analysis which exposes the basic forms of symmetry and the use of phonological phenomena here combine to provide the key to meaning.

*G. W. Coats.* Turning to another work on Genesis, G. W. Coats' *From Canaan to Egypt*,<sup>53</sup> we find both similarities to and differences from Fokkelman's work. Coats is much more evidently a form critic (part of his task is to settle by structural means the question of sources in Gen. 37-47), but his approach is literary, and his first chapter is an extended study of the literary features of the story. Again, symmetry is important, although here the building blocks are generally a little more extended than the phrases or words with which Fokkelman works. The story 'as it was preserved in the MT'<sup>54</sup> is assumed as an object of study, and questions of plot and development are applied to the whole. After demonstrating the structure and development of a unified plot, Coats concludes that the present story is the product of a literary artisan, probably (as was argued by von Rad)<sup>55</sup> from the era of Solomon.<sup>56</sup> Another chapter brings together questions of meaning, drawing on the structural studies of the opening chapter to some extent, but much more dependent than Fokkelman on resolving questions of historical setting and function.

### Summary and Conclusions

By way of critique, I wish to concentrate on a few of the basic hermeneutical issues, and by-pass for the moment some important secondary questions

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>53</sup> G. W. Coats, *From Egypt to Canaan: structural and theological context for the Joseph story*, CBQMS (Washington, 1976).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, rev. ed. (ET Philadelphia, 1972), p. 435.

<sup>56</sup> Coats, pp. 78-79.

<sup>48</sup> P. Beauchamp, *Création et séparation* (Paris, 1969).

<sup>49</sup> J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative art in Genesis* (ET Assen/Amsterdam, 1975).

of method. I would first like to clarify what we mean by structural analysis as opposed to other approaches, and then review problems of meaning raised by the definition.

In its strictest sense, structural analysis is that form of textual or exegetical work performed by one whose view of reality is defined by structuralism. Conversely, 'style criticism' or 'rhetorical criticism' might better describe that concern for stylistic research which does not build on French structuralism. True structuralism is a comprehensive, antihistorical way of looking at reality, and structuralists like Paul Ricoeur have rightly questioned the mixture of historico-literary criticism and structural analysis which has become increasingly common in some biblical studies.

Perhaps the most important questions involving the use of structuralism are raised in the area of meaning. It may be helpful, then, to review the claims made for structural methods, and compare them to historical and evangelical hermeneutics. I here confess to having no expertise in epistemological debate, but in view of the foregoing discussion, a provisional response might be offered.

*Structuralism.* Meaning is found in the universal structures of reality. On the cover of a book of essays entitled *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis*,<sup>57</sup> there is a quote from Georges Crespy.

In the beginning was the structure. It was everywhere in the world and the world was organized by it.

It was in the minerals, in the crystals which always showed the same arrangement of their facets.

It was in the plant kingdom where the leaves are distributed along the stems and the veins along the leaves with an invariable regularity.

It was in the animal kingdom where physiological systems are connected to one another according to a schematic diagram whose programme was determined in the gametes.

It was in the rhetoric, skilled in decomposing the discourse into its parts.

The statement has been historicized along the lines of the prologue of the Gospel according to John. But is the structure a fact of history, a discoverable feature of what Christians understand to be the world? Is Crespy's attempt to place the structure in a historical setting, that is, to postulate a beginning, an element alien to the system?

Structuralism does not see history as the realm of the meaningful. It looks rather for the 'universal human mind',<sup>58</sup> and this category, it has been

argued, is antihistorical by nature.<sup>59</sup> It seems to me that most biblical scholars who are attracted to structuralism have not been sufficiently willing to face this claim, though structuralists from Lévi-Strauss to Ricoeur have repeated it. Unless the Bible is to be seen as (mere) myth, rather than a record of the unique redemptive acts of God in the history of a particular people, I am not sure that the hermeneutical structures of the new analysis even apply.

*Historicism.* Meaning is found at the level of an original text. Heir both to the Reformation and the Enlightenment, today's 'Protestant Literalism'<sup>60</sup> has assumed that the meaning of a given text is to be found in what its author intended to say, given an understanding of his historical, cultural, and linguistic milieu. The meaning is univocal; the key to unlocking it lies in a historically based, scientific study.

To such a situation, structuralism affords new possibilities.<sup>61</sup> The discovery of symbol, the promise of meaning at a level other than the obvious, the role of the Receiver as well as that of the Sender, all these offer hope for new kinds of meaning.

*Theological hermeneutics.* If we are uncomfortable with the vague promises and alien philosophies of structuralism, perhaps we should be equally so with the historicist option, though for different reasons. The former reduces meaning to a set of structural absolutes known only to certain philosophers and in many instances at variance with the unique role of Scripture as a witness to God's *unusual* structure of reality. But the latter, by separating questions of meaning from literary research, has also lost a vital dimension. I would like to suggest a historical-literary-theological analysis as a valid corrective. Evangelical scholarship cannot cut itself loose from what the text meant in a given space and time, for the historical nature of the faith requires this dimension. However, as Robert Polzin, J. P. Fokkelman, and others have shown, the literary structure of the text has often been ignored. This structure, no less than the historical setting, may be a conveyor of meaning. This kind of literary analysis carries with it no antihistorical philosophical baggage. A theological exegesis will set the historical-literary analysis in a framework of both biblical and historical theology.

For an OT text, this naturally includes the whole range of biblical theology, but I would like to

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-145.

<sup>60</sup> Norman Brown, in *Love's body* (New York, 1968), p. 212; cited by Spivey, p. 143.

<sup>61</sup> Spivey, p. 143. Cf. Barr, *The Bible in the modern world*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>57</sup> Data in note 44, above.

<sup>58</sup> Spivey, *Int.* 28 (1974): p. 143.

suggest a further dimension. Brevard Childs has recently revived, for a Protestant audience, the science of tradition, that is, the history of the use of a given text in church and synagogue.<sup>62</sup> I know this is a rather un-Reformed thing to say, but I would suggest that we might benefit more from this kind of backward look than from some of the more inward reflections of current semiology.

There is much that is attractive about the new

<sup>62</sup> See, e.g., B. S. Childs, *Exodus* (Philadelphia, 1974), pp. 23-25; 40-42; 84-87, etc. Cf. *idem*, *Biblical theology in crisis* (Philadelphia, 1970), pp. 164-183, on Exodus 2: 11-22 as a test case.

hermeneutical presence, particularly to evangelicals who have often felt burned by the rationalistic historicism of OT scholarship since Wellhausen. But I would remind you: we have a great concern about the vested interest in history as the arena of God's redeeming activity. If we are attracted to structuralist exegesis at all, let us be so for the right reasons. It is not simply a handy way to circumvent a given documentary hypothesis, but rather an entire system of hermeneutics. Our response, no less than the structuralist challenge, must address this larger issue.

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