

Themelios

An International Journal for Pastors and Students of
Theological and Religious Studies

Volume 6

Issue 1

September, 1980

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Spirit and Life: Some Reflections on Johannine Theology

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1. Introduction

John's gospel is one of the most wonderful books in the New Testament; but, at least for the theological student, it is also often one of the most problematic. It is internally problematic, in that the gospel's different theological ideas and themes seem hard to fit together; and it is externally problematic, because it differs so noticeably in language and

ideas from other parts of the New Testament, most significantly from the synoptic gospels. This brief study looks at a few key Johannine ideas, suggesting how they can be fitted together and arguing that they have striking parallels elsewhere in the New Testament.

2. Spirit and life in John

2.1. *The problem: 'eternal life' and 'the Holy Spirit' two unrelated blessings for the believer?*

Two of John's most important and distinctive themes are 'eternal life' and the coming of the Spirit. John is clear that the way to receive both is

through believing in the Son (e.g. 3: 15; 7: 39), but what is not so clear is how the two blessings are related. On the basis of John 3 we might conclude that the Spirit is the one who initiates us into the experience of eternal life; but from other passages it is clear that the Spirit is much more than the midwife in the new birth. The new birth is indeed through the Spirit, but it is also birth into the Spirit: the Spirit is *received* through faith in Jesus.

What then is the relationship between the Spirit and eternal life, both of which are received through faith in Christ? We cannot say that one is present and the other is future, since in John's realized eschatology eternal life is something received here and now (3: 18; 5: 24, etc.). The fact that various New Testament theologians in discussing John's theology treat the two topics quite separately might lead us to conclude that we must simply accept that the two ideas cannot be closely related. It is, however, the argument of this study that the two ideas have a definite and close connection in Johannine thought.

2.2. *John 17: 3: eternal life as fellowship with Father and Son*

A key verse for seeing the connection between life and Spirit is John 17: 3, where the fourth evangelist gives his definition of 'eternal life'. Eternal life for John is not (or is not only) endless existence; it is something much more. The Greek phrase *aīōnios zōē* may itself be better understood to mean 'life of the age' (i.e. life of the new age of the kingdom) rather than to mean 'everlasting life',¹ and here in 17: 3 John defines the life of the new age as 'knowing thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent'. The word 'know' here, as elsewhere in John, may be understood in the Hebraic sense of 'have fellowship or personal relationship with', and so eternal life in John is primarily and essentially 'fellowship with the Father and the Son'.²

2.3. *John 14: 15–24: Father and Son come to the believer through the Spirit*

It is when the definition of eternal life in 17: 3 is borne in mind that the relationship between eternal life and the Holy Spirit may begin to become clear, especially if we compare 17: 3 with 14: 15–24. In

this passage we find a promise and a condition three times: (a) verses 15, 16: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth.' (b) verse 21: 'He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.' (c) verse 23: 'If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.' The parallelism between these three promises/conditions within the one discourse makes it very probable that we have here the same thing being said in different ways; and, if that is so, then we see that the gift of the Spirit (verses 15, 16) is the same thing as Jesus manifesting himself to the believer (verse 21), and the same thing as Jesus and the Father coming to the believer and making their home with him (verse 23). To put the matter more accurately, it is through the Spirit that Father and Son come to the believer.

2.4. *Thus the coming of the Spirit, fellowship with Father and Son equals eternal life*

When the point from John 14: 15–24 is appreciated, the relationship between 'eternal life' and the coming of the Spirit becomes clearer. 'Eternal life' is, more than anything else, fellowship with Father and Son, and this fellowship is realized in the believer's experience through the coming of the Spirit. The phrase in 14: 23, 'We will come to him and make our home with him' (which we take to be a reference to the coming of the Spirit—see above), is similar to John's definition of eternal life in 17: 3, 'that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' We could conclude that eternal life in John is the Father and the Son 'making their home' with the believer—through the Spirit. Receiving the Spirit and receiving eternal life are thus to be seen not as two separate blessings, but in a very real sense as the same blessing.

2.5. *But the future experience of eternal life is fuller than the present experience*

Although eternal life and the Spirit are in a real sense one blessing, not two, it would be a mistake to identify them entirely. In John, eternal life (equals fellowship with Father and Son) has a present and a future tense. John indeed emphasizes that eternal life is experienced now in the present, as the believer has fellowship with Father and Son through the Spirit; but eternal life will also be more fully and completely experienced in the future (e.g. 4: 14, 5: 29), when the believer will be personally

¹ The phrase may be seen as a translation of the Hebrew *hayyē hā 'ōlām*. Cf. R. E. Brown *The Gospel according to St John I* (London, 1971), pp. 505–8; G. E. Ladd *A Theology of the New Testament* (London, 1975), pp. 254–9.

² The ideas of 'knowing God' and 'eternal life' may well have other connotations in John; but I agree with those who argue that the primary thought is that of fellowship. The first epistle of John tends to confirm this: the ideas of eternal life, knowing God and having fellowship with God are there very closely related to each other; see 1:1–4, 2: 4, etc. Also see R. Bultmann on *ginōskein* in *TDNT* 1, p. 711.

in the presence of Jesus and of the Father. At present paradoxically we may say that Jesus and the Father *are* present with the believer (through the Spirit), and yet at the same time they are absent.³ In the future they will be present in a more complete and glorious sense—not only through the Spirit, but in person face to face.

2.6. Conclusion: the present experience of eternal life equals the experience of the Spirit

The observation of the difference between the present and future of eternal life in John means that we must qualify our earlier conclusion that eternal life is the same blessing as the gift of the Spirit: eternal life in the future is a greater fellowship than that experienced in the present through the Spirit. What we may say is that the *present* experience of eternal life is the experience of the Holy Spirit, but the future experience will be something more. Not that they are different experiences—both are experiences of fellowship with Father and Son—but the future experience will be a greater one.

3. The Johannine understanding of Spirit and life compared with parallel ideas elsewhere in the New Testament

3.1. Jesus present with and absent from the believer

If our analysis of Spirit and life in John is anywhere near correct, then it is interesting to note the similarity between John's ideas and those of other New Testament writers. In John we found the idea of Father and Son having present fellowship with the believer (through the Spirit), but also the idea of Jesus going away and of a future greater fellowship face-to-face. The same seemingly paradoxical thought of Jesus being present with the church in one sense and yet absent from it in another sense can be found in several other New Testament writings or writers. Compare, *e.g.*, Matthew 24: 3, 27 with 28: 20, or Philippians 1: 23 with Romans 8: 10.

3.2. The Spirit in Paul as a firstfruit of our future fellowship in God's family

More striking and significant is the parallelism between John's view of the Spirit as the present experience of eternal life and Paul's teaching on the Spirit of 'firstfruits' or 'downpayment' of our

³ Jesus has gone away to his Father's house to prepare a place for his followers; and it will be only after his coming again that his followers will be 'with me . . . to behold my glory' (14: 2, 3; 17: 5, 24). If we wish to be more precise, we may distinguish three different experiences of Jesus' presence: (a) the experience of his fleshly presence on earth; (b) the experience of his post-ascension presence through the Spirit; (c) the future experience of his heavenly presence. See below.

future inheritance (Rom. 8: 23; 2 Cor. 1: 22; Eph. 1: 13f.). The Holy Spirit in Paul gives us a first experience of living as sons of God who call God 'Abba', but the full experience of this fellowship lies in the future. (This idea of fellowship as members in the family of God has parallels in John, *e.g.* 1: 12; *cf.* 1 Jn. 3: 1.)

3.3. The synoptics: the kingdom is present and future

The thought of a present first experience and a fuller final experience is, of course, also present in the synoptic gospels in Jesus' teaching about the kingdom. Scholars are now almost all agreed that Jesus taught both a present and a future kingdom: the longed-for kingdom of God had indeed come near in Jesus' ministry and was 'in your midst' in the person of Jesus: the blessings of the kingdom were beginning to be experienced through Jesus' miracles, life and preaching. But the present experience of the kingdom was like a minute mustard seed when compared with the future kingdom that would one day be revealed. The future kingdom would not be something different from the present kingdom; it would be the same, but in far greater, more glorious measure. It will be something complete and not partial.

3.4. The synoptics: the kingdom equals fellowship with God

The parallelism between the present and the future of the synoptic kingdom and the present and the future of Johannine eternal life is clear, and the parallelism is the more striking when we recall that eternal life in John is essentially fellowship with Father and Son and that the kingdom in the synoptics means (among other things and perhaps pre-eminently) a restoration of fellowship between God and sinners. This restored fellowship is already experienced now as Jesus, in God's stead, feasts with reconciled sinners, and it will be consummated in the future at the messianic banquet.

3.5. The synoptics: the supreme blessing of the kingdom is the Holy Spirit

We have seen certain parallels between the synoptic view of the kingdom and the Johannine view of eternal life, but we should beware of oversimplifying the picture by concentrating on the similarities and ignoring the differences. We need to consider two differences. In the first place we recall that the present experience of eternal life in John is the experience of the Holy Spirit; but at first sight at least this is not the case with the synoptic idea of the present kingdom. Indeed the Holy Spirit seems to be notably absent from the synoptics. A second related difference between John and the synoptics is that, although John and the synoptics have a

present/future tension, in the synoptics the present of the kingdom is the ministry of Jesus, but in John the present experience of eternal life through the Holy Spirit is a post-Easter experience, since John makes it clear that the Spirit was not given until Jesus' glorification (7: 39).

With regard to the first point—the absence of the Spirit in the synoptics—it is true that during Jesus' ministry, as the synoptics describe it, receiving the kingdom does not lead to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; rather Jesus' followers experience the kingdom, the rule of God, in Jesus' works and words (which, however, we should note, are Spirit-inspired).⁴ But all the synoptics are unanimous in recording John the Baptist's prediction that 'he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit'. Interestingly all the evangelists give a prominent place to this prediction at the start of their gospels and are then remarkably silent about it for most of their gospels. The reason for this silence in Luke's case is made clear at the end of the Gospel and in Acts: although the Holy Spirit is the supreme blessing of the new age of the kingdom (looked forward to by the Old Testament and proclaimed by John the Baptist), the blessing was not in fact given by Jesus or experienced until after his resurrection; and so it does not receive much attention during the course of Luke's Gospel.

If we may assume that the same understanding was shared by Matthew and Mark—and I see no other satisfactory explanation of the prominent recording of the Baptist's prediction—then the synoptic view is that the Holy Spirit is both the power of the kingdom at work in Jesus and the supreme blessing of the kingdom in the believer's experience; but the Holy Spirit was not given to believers until after Jesus' ministry. If this is a correct understanding of the synoptics, then John and the Synoptics are evidently much closer to each other than might at first appear.⁵

3.6. *The synoptics and John: three tenses of kingdom/eternal life?*

Our observation about the significance of the Spirit in the synoptic gospels throws light on the second point of difference between John and the synoptics that we noted, namely that in the synoptic present/future tension the present is the ministry of Jesus, whereas in John it is the post-resurrection age of the church. Now it seems that we should more carefully describe the synoptic view of the kingdom;

⁴ Cf. Mt. 12: 28-32; Mk. 3: 28-30; Lk. 4: 14-17; Acts 10: 38.

⁵ For the Spirit upon Jesus see 1: 32, 33; 3: 34f.; for the Spirit being given to believers after Jesus' exaltation see 7: 39 and chapters 14—16.

in the synoptics the kingdom is experienced in one way in Jesus' ministry; it is to be experienced in a very important new way with the coming of the Spirit; and it will come in final power and glory at the end. Thus we may think of a three stage coming of the kingdom.⁶ If we compare this with John's view of eternal life, then evidently he has equivalents to stages 2 and 3: eternal life is experienced after Jesus' glorification through the Spirit, and it will be experienced completely at the parousia. But what of stage 1, the ministry of Jesus? Can we say that eternal life in John is experienced even before the giving of the Spirit? This might be hard to prove very directly from John,⁷ although we may well argue that Jesus' promises of eternal life in John to people like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman seem to have immediate relevance to them and are not promises that will take effect only at a later time.⁸ However, if we approach the question through the definition of eternal life given in John 17: 3, then the probable Johannine answer to the question becomes clear. If eternal life is knowing Father and Son—fellowship with Father and Son—then John's gospel suggests that this was indeed possible during Jesus' ministry. Although the disciples' understanding is faltering, yet they do believe and come to know Jesus, who is the manifestation of the glory of God (*e.g.* 6: 69; 17: 6f.). They do experience fellowship with him, albeit not so close a fellowship as that which the Holy Spirit will bring into their very hearts. If, as we suggested before, an alternative Johannine definition of eternal life would be 'Father and Son making their home with the believer,' then we can find an exact parallel to the kingdom idea of the synoptics: (a) in the incarnation and ministry of Jesus 'the Word . . . dwelt among us' (1: 14); (b) through the Holy Spirit Father and Son dwell with the believer now; (c) in the future believers will be with Father and Son in glory face to face.

4. Postscript: the love command in John

Having completed the main argument of this paper and suggested (a) that the two Johannine ideas of

⁶ Maybe it would be better to retain the idea of a two-stage coming, but the first stage is itself in two parts—the giving of the Spirit is the completion of Jesus' historical bringing of the kingdom.

⁷ Some would argue that such a historical question would not be of interest to John, since he was writing from and for a church situation. We do not deny that John's writing does reflect his situation, but we cannot so quickly dismiss John as a-historical in outlook, as the now not so 'new look' on the fourth gospel has made clear.

⁸ We would wish to maintain this point, even if it is granted that John has expressed Jesus' teaching in the terminology of his (John's) own day and situation.

Spirit and life cohere closely in John's thought, and (b) that the Johannine ideas have notable parallels in other parts of the New Testament, not least in the synoptics,⁹ we return finally to John and remark that an appreciation of John's view of eternal life (as expressed in 17:3) also helps us understand the Johannine emphasis on love and unity as proper marks of Christian living. According to John, God's purpose in sending the Son was to give eternal life to men, which means to bring them into fellowship, or we could say into a relationship of unity and mutual love, with himself. This unity is a reflection and extension of the relationship that already exists between Father and Son (see chapter 17), and God's purpose is seen to be not just the unifying of individuals to himself, but the extending of the family fellowship. As Father and Son are one, so God's purpose is that believers be one with the Father and Son and one with each other. When this is appreciated, then the logic of the love command is clear: in a real sense the unity of believers is part of eternal life, and it is theological nonsense to claim eternal life and to refuse to love my brother.¹⁰

5. Conclusion

I began this paper by commenting on the difficulty of relating different themes in the fourth gospel and

⁹ As well as having parallels elsewhere in the New Testament, John's ideas have important links with the Old Testament, where the eschatological hope for the future includes as important elements (a) the 'knowledge' of God, (b) the thought of relationship/fellowship between God and his people (e.g. 'I will be their God, and they shall be my people'), (c) the hope for the presence of God among his people, (d) the giving of the Spirit to God's people (as well as the coming of a Spirit-filled Messiah). See Is. 11:9, 60:19, 61:1f.; Je. 31:33ff., 32:38; Ezk. 37:14, 27f.; Ho. 2:23; Joel 2:27, 28; etc. These ideas, as in John, are closely related to each other.

of relating John to other parts of the New Testament; but taking 17:3 as my starting-point I have attempted to show how various of the Johannine themes, e.g. eternal life, the Spirit, unity, the love of God, may cohere, and also that these distinctively Johannine themes have important and often quite close parallels elsewhere in the New Testament. My contention is that not only has the fourth gospel more internal coherence within itself, but also more external coherence with the rest of the New Testament, than is often recognized. I have, of course, bypassed many difficult questions (e.g. about the precise connotation of Johannine terms such as 'eternal life'); but whether or not my whole analysis is valid, I hope that certain of the lines of thought suggested may be useful in the important and exciting task of interpreting John's gospel.

¹⁰ This is made much more explicit in 1 John than it is in the gospel, e.g. 1:6, 2:4ff., 3:14, 4:7, etc. 1 John specifically points out that love is the nature of God. The love between Father and Son and the love which reached out to save us must be reflected in our lives, if we know or are in fellowship with him.

It is interesting to compare the teaching in John on love and unity with that in Ephesians. Paul there speaks of God's plan to 'unite all things in him' (i.e. Christ; Eph. 1:10), and goes on to speak of the church, in which Jew and Gentile are united, as a demonstration of this divine plan of universal unification (3:9, 10); in line with this he urges his readers to live out this unity (4:1ff.). So in John's gospel Jesus' followers are to live in unity as a demonstration to the world of the glory and life of God. They are to live out eternal life now in their relationships with each other.

The Johannine and Pauline teaching on this point may be related to the synoptic picture of Jesus' teaching and life: one of the effects of the eschatological kingdom in Jesus' ministry is the breaking down of barriers between men (e.g. Jew and Samaritan). Jesus in his lifetime, and his community afterwards, are (or in the case of the church should be) a living demonstration (or prototype or first-fruits) of the unity that God is going to bring completely at the parousia.

The Old Testament prophets' self understanding of their prophecy

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Our concern is to answer the question, 'How did Old Testament prophets *themselves* view what they were doing in fulfilling their prophetic call from God?' This is not the same as asking, 'What roles did Old Testament prophets in fact have?', though it is closely related.

For the answer to our question, we have relatively little explicit data. It was obviously not the primary intention of either the authors or the compilers of the Old Testament to satisfy our curiosity about what prophets thought of themselves *vis-à-vis* their prophecies. Nevertheless, from an intelligent look at what they say and do, *i.e.* the nature of their message and actions, we may make some reasonable extrapolations about their own views toward the message they preached, and their sense of what they were doing in preaching that message.

In service of this goal, one might ask any or all of the following questions:

Did prophets consciously think that God was speaking directly through them, or is this something that later generations attributed to their messages which were in fact creations of their own intellects and nothing more?

Did prophets actually get 'taken over' by God's Spirit? Was this always/sometimes/only rarely the case? Could it be that most of the time their words were their own inventions, created along the lines of and in support of the more occasional special 'direct' revelations from God?

Did prophets simply speak convincingly and authoritatively as a modern day preacher tries to do? And did their disciples or later redactors then collect and edit just those words (among the many they spoke) which came true in a way that makes the whole seem divine?

Did prophets actually understand all that much of what they were saying even if it was said under God's inspiration? Did they perhaps fashion highly ambiguous, symbolic, 'deep' sayings to which

people of faith later assigned a significance that the prophets themselves would not necessarily have understood?

Did prophets in fact understand that their message was fully from God; and what it meant and how it would apply to their own generation? Could they have had any inkling of things so distant in time from them as the new covenant, the church, the reign of Cyrus, the ministry of the Messiah? Or would they be nonplussed to find that thousands of years later parts of their oracles are exegeted by theological students as presaging these very things—the students then going on after graduation to proclaim such interpretations to congregations of Christians?

It is obvious that fully-convincing, thoroughly documented answers to all these questions are not going to be found in a brief article such as this. Complete answers require in the first place an enormous amount of exegetically sound study of Old Testament narrative passages about the prophets, of the prophetic corpus itself, and of extra-biblical evidence from the ancient near east where prophecy as an institution was hardly limited to Israel and Judah. Even then, one's chosen orientation to such heuristic issues as the general trustworthiness of scripture, the doctrine of inspiration *per se*, and the notion of canonicity will shape decisively one's approach to such questions.

I propose therefore to offer, via four affirmations, my own understanding of the issues, and to suggest, with a modicum of documentation from which we can only extrapolate, what sort of evidence one would draw on to support these affirmations. It is my hope that this format will at least bring the matter into clear focus for the reader, even if it does not fully address all the relevant concerns.

Four affirmations

1. The prophets considered themselves servants of God, vehicles through whom God himself spoke.
2. They considered the content of their message unoriginal.
3. They considered themselves as occupying a

divinely appointed societal office, correcting illegal beliefs and practices.

4. They understood what they preached.

We shall comment on these affirmations in order, offering a sampling of evidence from the Old Testament, and considerations based thereon. Our discussion of the prophets is meant, by the way, to refer to the orthodox, true prophets, as opposed to the many professional pretenders (*cf.* 1 Kgs. 22: 1–28).

1. *The prophets considered themselves vehicles through whom God himself spoke*

In Exodus 7: 1 Yahweh says to Moses, 'I have made you like God to Pharaoh.' Moses, the paradigm prophet in the Old Testament, speaks with an authority not his own. So it was with the other Old Testament prophets. It is their consistent contention, and the contention of the biblical descriptions about them, that they spoke God's word, not their own. In every case, it is God who decides who shall be a prophet (*cf.* Ex. 3: 1ff.; Is. 6; Je. 1; Ezk. 1–3; Ho. 1: 2; Am. 7: 14–15; Jon. 1: 1, *etc.*). Indeed, if one were to take the office of prophecy upon himself, this would constitute evidence that he was in fact a false prophet (*cf.* Je. 14: 14; 23: 21). From the venality and 'pleasant oracles' of these false prophets the true prophets took pains to disassociate themselves (*cf.* Am. 7: 14; Mi. 3: 5, 11).

All of them came to their work as the result of an experience of a divine call. Because the word they spoke was Yahweh's word and not their own, they prefaced it, concluded it, or even intermittently punctuated it with reminders like 'Thus says Yahweh' (*kōh 'āmar yhw̄h*) and 'oracle of Yahweh' (*ne'um yhw̄h*). Indeed the vast majority of the time they phrased their message in the first person, quoting Yahweh directly, as if their mouth were his mouth. There is no evidence that they simply felt permitted to do this—they clearly consider themselves required to do it.¹

Regardless of how personally risky this task sometimes was, or how likely the message was or was not to be believed, they represented God and said what he told them to say. For example, Jeremiah had to relay God's message to Judah that submission to Babylon (treason, as far as his hearers thought)—was their only option (Je. 27–28). In preaching aspects of this message he says 'This is what Yahweh said to me . . .' (27: 2); and quotes God's words: 'Then send word . . .' (27: 3); 'Give them a message . . .' (27: 4); 'Say, This is what Yahweh Almighty, The God of Israel says . . .'

(27: 4); and adds ('Oracle of Yahweh' (27: 11); *etc.* He *knows* that those prophets who oppose him are *ipso facto* false prophets because God himself says so (27: 16ff.). On what authority does he so firmly reject prophecies contradictory to his own? On God's authority (28: 15, 16). How could his listeners (or we) be sure? They couldn't of course, and we can't, except according to faith. Jeremiah however could be sure, because *he* knew God had given him that message to pass on. That was his self-understanding.

The prophets got some of their oracles by being allowed by God to overhear heavenly deliberations or to be told directly by God the content of his plans (*cf.* 1 Kgs. 17: 1; 22: 19; Je. 23: 22; Am. 3: 7). The prophets as auditors of the heavenly *sōd* ('council' and/or 'counsel') understand themselves to have knowledge not otherwise available to humans. The very word prophet (*nābī'*) in the Hebrew means one 'called', having a special commission directly from God. They saw themselves in a special position among mankind. Whether in ecstatic bands, accompanied by music (1 Sm. 10: 5–13) or standing alone in prayer against the moral opposition of a massive state and clergy alliance (1 Kgs. 18: 16–39), the prophets were God's men and women. Sometimes called 'men of God' (Dt. 33: 1; 1 Sa. 2: 27; 9: 6; 1 Kgs. 13: 1), often called by God 'my servants' or the like (2 Kgs. 17: 13; Am. 3: 7; Je. 7: 25; Ezr. 9: 11). The prophets report their self-understanding of their prophecy in a servant mode. The master's word 'came to' them.

Some of their commissionings were rather dramatic (Je. 1: 9). Some were made to prophesy even against their will (Num. 22–24; *cf.* 1 Sa. 8; 10: 18–19) or tried to avoid their commission—though without success (Jon. 1: 1ff.). But it was God who was behind all. They attributed their inspiration directly to the Inspirer, the Holy Spirit. There are eighteen Old Testament passages in all which link the inspiration of the prophets to the Holy Spirit.² Indeed it is only as the prophets themselves knew with utter confidence that the word they spoke was fully God's Word that we can expect to understand them at all. We may or may not choose to believe their words. They had no choice.

2. *They considered the content of their message unoriginal*

Some years ago I served briefly as a translation consultant to a project preparing for publication a study edition of the Authorized Version of the Bible. One unusual feature of this edition was to be

¹ *Cf.* J. Bright, *Jeremiah* (Anchor Bible Vol. 21, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), pp. xxiv–xxv.

² See J. A. Motyer, 'Prophecy, Prophets', *New Bible Dictionary* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962), p. 1039.

its 'red letter' Old Testament. On the analogy of so-called red-letter New Testament editions which print in red ink the words of Jesus, the Old Testament text was to print in red ink the words recorded as spoken directly by God.³

If you think about it for a moment, I believe you can guess quite easily where the printer had to use most of the red ink. Red predominated in two large blocks of sacred text: (1) the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 20—Dt. 33) and (2) the prophetic books.

This may perhaps serve to illustrate the role the Old Testament prophets played. They were of course spokesmen for God, persons through whom he proclaimed his word, both to his own covenant people, and often to the rest of the world. *What* he spoke through them was almost exclusively related to the original covenant he had given through Moses. If there had not been a covenant, it is hard to imagine what sorts of things Israelite prophets, if they had existed in the same sense, might have had to say. Perhaps they would have introduced particular aspects of Yahweh's will to particular people at particular times.⁴ In the absence of any previous covenantal revelation, perhaps they might have developed and promulgated some sort of relatively enlightened social ethics as a counter force to the oppressive characteristics of the society they lived in.⁵

³ These editions of the New Testament have not generally been popular precisely because marking Jesus' words in red ink tends to give the impression to the reader that they are more important—perhaps even more sacred—than are the 'regular' words printed in black.

In the case of the Old Testament, to print the words of God in red suggests that somehow the other words are just a bit less directly the words of God. Thus the red letter approach in practice unfortunately may serve to promote a sense of canonicity that elevates some kinds of biblical statements above others.

In regard to the OT prophets, the editors usually found it impossible to decide when the prophet was speaking and when God was speaking, so closely does prophetic speech blend with divine speech. A prophet need not say 'Thus says Yahweh' to quote God (e.g. 1 Kgs. 21: 20-22).

⁴ This is exactly what a non-empirical, evolutionistic approach to OT history tends to conclude.

⁵ Such a view of the prophets as innovators gained prominence in past generations on the theory that if the Mosaic law had been in existence, the prophets would have cited it more as the basis for their ethics. This theory prevailed because its proponents were unaware of two facts: (1) No ancient law codes were ever cited precisely in court cases or prophetic oracles anywhere in the ancient world. 'Chapter-and-verse' citation of legal formulations or precedents is strictly a modern legal development. (2) The Old Testament prophets *do* refer to the Mosaic law in all sorts of ways, and rather constantly, but largely periphrastically and paraenetically as opposed to verbatim. It would make little sense for God to assign them the task simply of repeating the words of the pentateuchal covenant. His word through the prophets was rather designed to cajole, threaten, invite and otherwise motivate the people to return to the covenant already revealed.

In this connection, note that the New Testament speakers

But there was a covenant, and the prophets were raised up by God to summon people back to obedience to that covenant. The Old Testament prophets did not think of themselves as innovators.

Consider the situation of Hosea, for example. His prophecies date from the reigns of Jeroboam II and the several succeeding northern kings (*i.e. circa* 750—722 BC). This means that the legal stipulations of the Mosaic covenant, ritual, religious, ethical and civil, had been known in Israel for as much as six hundred years* by the time he, the second earliest of the 'writing prophets', came on the scene.

When one carefully examines the message that Hosea preached it becomes evident that this message has in essence two facets only: (1) to call people back to obedience to the Mosaic covenant; (2) to remind them of the blessings and cures contained in that covenant. There is no passage in the book that does not have the Mosaic scripture as its basis. God's words of judgment or blessing fall into the categories already proclaimed in the covenant curse and blessing passages, especially those of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-33. Indeed, a remarkably high percentage of key vocabulary words and metaphors in Hosea reflect the previous revelation of a single chapter of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy 32.⁷

For a single example of Pentateuchal allusion in a single verse, consider Hosea 4: 2.

Cursing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery break forth, and the idols crowd against one another.⁸

Here in this verse, six of the 'ten commandments' are mentioned, though not strictly 'cited'. In three cases (murder, stealing, adultery) the very vocabulary word of the two-word prohibition in Exodus

and writers, including Jesus, cite the Old Testament verbatim only rarely. The percentage of word-for-word citations of the Old Testament in the New Testament is about as small as the percentage of such citations from the Mosaic law in the prophets. The vast majority of the ample references in later portions of scripture to earlier portions take the form of allusions rather than citations.

⁶ This assumes a date in the mid-fifteenth century for the exodus. This early date, once out of favour with archaeologists, has recently gained a number of adherents among both evangelical and non-evangelical archaeologists. Cf. provisionally J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest* (JSOT Supplement Series 5, Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978).

⁷ A complete documentation of the interconnection of Hosea with the Pentateuch will appear in the author's forthcoming commentary on Hosea. On Dt. 32 and Hosea, see W. Kuhnigk, *Nordwestsemitische Studien zum Hoseabuch* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1974), pp. 35-39.

⁸ On the translation of *dāmim* as 'idols' rather than 'bloodshed' see Kuhnigk, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-28.

20/Deuteronomy 5 is repeated. In the remaining instances (cursing, lying, idols . . .) the term used in Hosea 4: 2 summarizes a relatively longer commandment that in its entirety could hardly be cited in the poetic context of Hosea 4 without utterly disrupting the poem.

This example is only one among hundreds that could be adduced from the prophetic books. But it makes our point adequately. According to their inspiration to do so, the prophets recast and re-ordered the covenant stipulations. They took the mostly prose legal material and shaped it (mostly poetically) especially employing a rich imagery via metaphors and allegories, God's purpose through them being to express the essence of the covenant message effectively. Their inventiveness is always in service of the long-extant Mosaic covenant. What they do cannot be described as innovation, *i.e.* making new theological points.

3. *They considered themselves as occupying a divinely appointed societal office, correcting by divine word illegal beliefs and practices*

When the prophets are called to excoriate Israel or other nations what they attack in effect are crimes against the covenant. These crimes were sometimes religious-doctrinal, that is crimes of heterodoxy (*cf.* Hos. 2: 4-13; Ezk. 8: 6-16) and sometimes civil-ethical, that is crimes of heteropraxy (*cf.* Am. 8: 5-6; Is. 1: 15-17), and quite often they were of both sorts, intermixed (*Mic.* 3: 8-12; *Ezk.* 7: 15-27). The covenant provided a paradigm for all the nations of the earth and Israel alike (*cf.* Am. 1: 3-2: 15; *Mic.* 5: 5-15).

Such a ministry was sometimes considered the equivalent of treason (Am. 7: 10-11). It was not anything that the prophets themselves initiated, however. Yahweh's word was the agent of correction, not the prophet. As Amos answers the complaint that his preaching was unfairly negative, he offers no response of his own. His appointment to office was God's doing ('Yahweh took me . . . and said to me, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel . . ."). He answers Amaziah not with his own rejoinder, but with God's: 'Therefore, this is what Yahweh says . . .' (Am. 7: 14-17).

Indeed the prophets were neither radical social reformers nor great religious thinkers or pioneers. It was Yahweh's word that accomplished these tasks. Yahweh was the reformer, the theologian, the author of words and events. The nature of his reforms and his religious demands was contained already in the law. The prophets were ardent patriots, as the covenant demanded. For those to whom the covenant sanctions demanded punish-

ment, they insisted on that punishment at God's behest, denouncing the guilty party, even if king (2 Sa. 12: 1-14; 2 Sa. 24: 11ff.; 1 Kgs. 18: 4; 20: 42; Ho. 1: 4) or priest (Ho. 4: 4-10; Am. 7: 17; Mal. 2: 1-9). By God's word they installed kings (1 Kgs. 19: 16) and deposed kings (1 Kgs. 21: 17-22), or even declared war (2 Kgs. 3: 18-19; 2 Chr. 20: 14-17) or against war (1 Kgs. 12: 22-24; Je. 27: 8-22).

By the mid-eighth century, prophecy as a national institution appears to have hit a low point in its responsiveness to Yahweh, comparable in some ways to the days of Ahab (874-853) when prophets of Baal and Asherah dominated the religion of the nation. The mid-eighth century saw the corruption of the nation by pagan worship and a largely paganized Yahwism (Ho. 2: 4-13; 3: 1; 5: 4-7) as well as social and moral decay. The rich oppressed the poor openly and greedily (Am. 2: 6-8; 4: 1; 6: 1-7), with apparent state support. The prophets brought against this sin their sole weapon: Yahweh's word. Denouncing the sin and the sinner, proclaiming judgment according to the covenant curses of deprivation, devastation, disease, deportation and death.⁹ It is clear from their language and their demeanor that the prophets consciously accepted this role to plead the case of the oppressed (Dt. 24: 19-22) against the oppressor (Lv. 19: 9-18). In some cases this brought them even into the role of intercessor (*cf.* 1 Kgs. 18: 6; 2 Kgs. 19: 4; Am. 7: 1-6) though still on the model of Moses (Ex. 32: 30-35; *cf.* Dt. 9: 18-21), and still entirely at God's sufferance.

4. *They understood what they preached*

By this affirmation we do not intend to imply that the prophets were fully cognizant of every conceivable implication or ramification of the words God gave to them. For example, we cannot assume that they understood exactly how and when God would perform the promises for Israel's future beyond the level of detail that the prophetic oracles themselves contain. We do wish to suggest that they did not preach words fully or partly meaningless to themselves, the significance of which can now for the first time be understood by modern exegetes.¹⁰ The evidence suggests that even those

⁹ The prophets frequently employed alliteration in both prosaic and poetic oracles. These five 'd' terms do happen accurately to summarize the general categories under which the covenant curses may be grouped.

¹⁰ This does not mean to suggest that the prophets were always able *immediately* to understand everything God's word implied. Sometimes they were confused about its significance for a period, until the word's meaning was clarified to them (*cf.* Je. 32: 25-44). The parallels to the situation of Jesus' disciples at times (*e.g.* John 12: 16; 13: 7; 13: 22ff.; 14: 26f.) are inescapable.

prophecies delivered in a manner called 'ecstatic' were comprehensible to the prophets who spoke them. There is nothing to support the idea that the rational, cognitive faculties were bypassed in the course of any inspiration. We judge that there is sufficient evidence for this contention, though largely inferential in nature, and sometimes involving speculation.

a. The prophets display a keen awareness of exactly what their message can or will result in. Jonah flees at first from his divinely appointed task because he understands full well his cry against Nineveh might serve as a vehicle for Assyrian repentance and therefore avoidance of God's wrath, an eventuality he finds intolerable (4: 3). Micaiah knows exactly how objectionable his true prophecy will be to Ahab, so first sarcastically delivers a false prophecy (2 Chr. 18: 14). He knows very well how the destruction he prophesies will affect even the prophets who oppose him (verse 24) as well as the king (verse 27).

✓ b. The intercessory stance sometimes assumed by the prophets demonstrates their awareness of the implications of their revelation. Even the symbolic visions of locusts and fire (Am. 7: 1-6) clearly indicate to Amos the unsparing wrath of God, against which he intercedes. Jeremiah is actually forbidden by God to intercede for Israel against the wrath to come (7: 16; 11: 14; 14: 11). God's message to him is not simply of *what might happen if* but *what will happen no matter what*. The prophet who would be the first to see the implication of this message would have been inclined to intercede with God had he not been proscribed from it.

c. Even the oracles about the future appear quite comprehensible to the prophets. This is partly because the oracles themselves are so clear. After all, how could Ezekiel misunderstand what God was going to bring about in Israel after the conversation in Ezk. 37: 1-14 had concluded? That Israel will be reconstructed and returned from exile is crystal-clear. But the evidence goes even beyond this. Hosea's artfully alarming portrayal of the coming Judean counter-attack on Benjaminite territory in 732 BC (Ho. 5: 8-10) includes this confident assertion: 'I proclaim what is certain.' Amos' statements about prophetic insight are paradigmatic: 'Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing his counsel to his servants the prophets' (3: 7). Indeed, the process is not really a voluntary one: 'The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?' (3: 8). It is noteworthy that God's revelation is given *to* his prophets as well as *through* them.

Oracles of future deliverance and blessing display

the same level of creative involvement stylistically, and the same level of specificity as regards the application of covenant blessings (renewal of people and land, agricultural abundance, changes in natural phenomena, *etc.*) that characterize other types of oracles. It is a misunderstanding to consider the prophets 'vague' on the future. Their oracles are usually just as clear about the future as about the past; for this they have Mosaic precedent (*e.g.* Dt. 4: 25-31). Virtually all the prophets function partly as predictors. But their predictions are consistently related to contemporary circumstances and events, so that those actually hearing the message are motivated by its portents to respond to the covenant (*cf.* Is. 30: 6-18), and not just regaled with glimpses of the future. In other words, there is a practicality to futurism, which implies a comprehensibility. An irrational apocalypticism (and the Old Testament contains none of that) could hardly be applied to people's existential concerns in the way that the Old Testament prophets, whether apocalyptic or not, are led to apply their revelations.

In some cases God patiently explained first to the prophets exactly what he would do, *before* the prophets were to pass it on to others (Ezk. 14: 2ff.; Dn. 7: 16-28; 10: 4ff.; 12: 8-10).

d. The specific nature of most prophecies, giving particular directive for particular circumstances, implies that the prophets would comprehend what God was saying through them. If they had not, the prophets might simply have pronounced general, invariable answers for given kinds of problems. In fact, their oracles in relation to a given problem varied enormously depending on the specifics of the situation. God's word through Isaiah about the deliverance of Jerusalem (Isa. 37: 33-35) was hardly the right answer for Jeremiah to give in the days of Zedekiah (*cf.* Je. 27). This in turn could not apply to the yet later days of the exile (Je. 50).

e. The personal involvement of the prophets in seeking acceptance for their divinely appointed word suggests that they fully understood its significance. It is unlikely that they would have contended so ardently for the authority of their message before kings, prophets, priests and people if they did not share God's sense of urgency that the word be believed. It is not unreasonable to conclude that they saw then, just as well as we can see now, how important belief in God's word through them would be for Israel and the nations.

f. The prophetic oracles were so carefully composed that it seems unlikely that the prophets did not fully comprehend them. Group oracles (characteristic of the earlier periods for the most part),

highly polished complex poetic oracles (*e.g.* Is. 5: 1–30; Ho. 4: 1–19) and dramatic oracles requiring lengthy preparation or execution (*e.g.* Ho. 3: 1–3; Ezk. 4: 1ff.) are not the kind of thing one could easily undertake ‘in the dark’, so to speak, mindless of their meaning.

g. In some instances, prophets were afforded unusual knowledge by God, of things humanly impossible for them to learn (2 Kgs. 6: 12; Ezk. 8: 3—11: 25). These narratives emphasize the keenness and detail of the prophets’ knowledge, in contrast to the entranced opacity that would be expected if the prophets did not really understand the revelation given to and through them.¹¹

¹¹ Jeremiah’s ability to re-dictate a large corpus of prophetic oracles (Je. 36) is often cited as evidence that the prophets knew the content of their prophecy ‘cold’ as it were.

Finally it must be noted that even the most exhaustive analysis of prophetic self-awareness, far beyond the depth of this brief scan, would never be able to reveal much of the inner self of the Old Testament prophets. Our modern fascination with introspection and psychological probing was simply not shared by the ancients. Therefore we must recognize the emphasis that the Scripture itself makes: as regards the prophets, *their* prophecy was in fact *God’s* prophecy; and their self-understanding depended on his self-revelation.¹²

¹² On the lack of introspection in biblical sources, see K. Stendahl, ‘The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West’, *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963), pp. 199–215; also published in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), pp. 78–99.

Tensions in Calvin's idea of predestination

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A couple of weeks ago I had an opportunity of talking with a friend about the credibility of the Christian faith. When the conversation became somewhat personal, he bluntly said: 'You don't need to urge me to consider Christianity. I know there is a thing called 'predestination' in your religion. Now, if I am elected by God, I will be saved with or without your persuasion. If I am not chosen to heaven, why waste your time to convince me of the Christian belief? In either way, human effort has little place.' The theological implication of this comment is significant.

Many an educated evangelical layman knows that the doctrine of predestination has a strong advocate in John Calvin, the sixteenth-century Protestant reformer. But not many are familiar with the strength and the weakness of his theology of predestination which is a central theme in the era of Reformation. As Philip Schaff, a prolific church

historian, has observed: 'All the Reformers of the sixteenth century, . . . under a controlling sense of human depravity and saving grace, in extreme antagonism to Pelagianism and self-righteousness, and . . . in full harmony not only with the greatest of the fathers, but also with the inspired St Paul, came to the same doctrine of a double predestination which decides the eternal destiny of all men.'¹ In this essay we attempt to analyse several areas of tension in Calvin's thought.

In the first edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536, the doctrine of predestination is only briefly discussed in connection with the Apostle's Creed and the definition of the church. During his exile in Strasbourg, Calvin expanded his concept which betrays his Augustinianism and attentive reading of Martin Bucer's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. In the final edition of the *Institutes* in 1559, the setting of the doctrine is changed but not the essential content. Certainly, Calvin's controversies with Bolsec, Pighius,

¹ *Creeds of Christendom*, 1 (1877), p. 451.

Melanchthon, and Castellio over the years had enriched his thought.

Calvin regarded soteriological predestination as God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition: rather, eternal life is fore-ordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.²

The logical counterpart of election is reprobation, since election cannot, in Calvin's view, stand unless it is set over against reprobation. He continued:

God is said to set apart those whom he adopts into salvation; it will be highly absurd to say that others acquire by chance or by their own effort what election alone confers on a few. Therefore, whom God passes over, he condemns: and this he does for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children.³

Theological tensions in the idea of predestination are contained in his definition of the doctrine. And in Calvin's exposition the motivation in resolving them is easily recognizable.

The first tension is epistemological. Since the decree is eternal, how can we identify the God-favoured or the God-condemned? In the *Institutes* of 1539 Calvin warned against wishing to know too much about the mystery of predestination, probably as a reply to Zwingli's *The Providence of God*. He acknowledged the incomprehensibility of God but not divine unknowability. However, he disapproved Melanchthon's fear that investigation of the subject would harm the faith of believers. It is wrong to expound only that part of the doctrine understandable to our mind in order to make it more acceptable as if God's honour were protected by our hiding the truth. He was willing to go as far as scriptural revelation allowed.

Predestination, in Calvin's thought, is an article of faith, and reprobation, a doctrine of the elect. The non-elect never know that they are the reprobate. The logical opposite of the grace of salvation is known only to the believer who has experienced redemption, from which perspective the double decree is to be viewed. Every age has its number of reprobate. Calvin never spoke specifically of the reprobate in the present or future tense. Even

Michael Servetus, who was burned at the stake in Geneva, was not regarded as such in his time. It is sacrilegious to exclude from the number of the chosen a sinner as being already lost. Calvin taught a 'certain judgment of charity' that Christians should consider as elect those who profess faith in Christ. From the inspiration of St Augustine's *The City of God*, Calvin admitted that the reprobate will dwell side by side with the elect until the Day of Judgment.

How is election confirmed? Although it is impossible to be certain of the electing activity of God, assurance can be secured in Christ. The grace of election is where Christ is. Calvin regarded Christ as the 'mirror of election' in whom to contemplate our predestination. He did not imply a passive role occupied by Christ, for Christ also 'claims for himself, in common with the Father, the right to choose'.⁴ No human factor would have influenced the electing process or would undo the benefits of it. Both Scripture and the sacraments of the church are objective evidences of Christ's presence in the community of the elect, and the prompting of the Holy Spirit enlightens and convinces us of its reality. Thus divine election is to be apprehended by faith in the gospel, but not dependent upon it. Calvin pointed out two misconceptions regarding faith: 'Some make man God's co-worker, to ratify election by his consent' and others 'make election depend upon faith, as if it were doubtful and also ineffectual unless confirmed by faith.'⁵ When he spoke of faith, he often came back to the conviction that the elect cannot lose their salvation, for Christ will not let his members be estranged from him.

The second tension in Calvin's doctrine is: If God foreordained every event to happen, is he the author of evil in reprobation? This question involves the relation of predestination to providence, foreknowledge, and causality.

Predestination presupposes providence, and in Calvin there is a remarkable continuity between the two. The notion of providence means that God's rule is extended to all parts of the world by his infinite wisdom and justice. Some medieval theologians, like Thomas Aquinas, regarded predestination as a particular application of the universal providence to the redemptive activity of God. Calvin saw the unifying cause of all phenomena in an omnipotent and omniscient deity, who is the author and consummator of all things. For 'not only the heaven and the earth and the inanimate creatures, but also the plans and intentions of men, are so governed by his providence that they are

² *Institutes*, III, 21, 5; trans. by F. L. Battles (Westminster, 1960).

³ *Institutes*, III, 23, 1.

⁴ *Institutes*, III, 22, 7.

⁵ *Institutes*, III, 24, 3.

borne by it straight to their appointed end' (*Institutes*, I, 16, 8).

In late medieval time, the nominalist idea of *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* of God was popular. This signified divine, gratuitous mercy according to which 'he chose, absolutely free from external interference, undetermined by any cause whatever apart from himself, to accept man's moral virtue as meritorious for his salvation'.⁶ God does not impart salvation without merits. Man's free will should decide between good and evil. And predestination depends on divine knowledge of man's future response. To help man attain personal virtues God has graciously assisted him to do his best. On the principle that the end includes the means, Thomas Aquinas held that predestination of the individual to eternal life includes in it all necessary graces and qualifications as effects, not causes, of predestination. In Thomas's view, God predestines grace to the elect that they may merit glory. Following this tradition, Pighius, Calvin's contemporary, argued that the reprobate are those foreknown by God to be unworthy of his goodness. This was the case with God's discrimination between Esau and Jacob.

But in Calvin's understanding, foreknowledge does not mean prior in time but transcendent in time. God operates in the realm of eternity, which is qualitatively, not quantitatively, different from the temporal continuum. He embraces the entire human history in his eternal present. This simultaneous knowledge implies that God does not make a decision at some past moment and then, after an interval, brings it into action. Only human activity goes this way. God does not only conceive events through ideas but 'he truly looks upon them and discerns them as things placed before him'.⁷ He is no passive observer of events to occur.

Like foreknowledge, predestination is not to be understood in temporal terms. It does not depend on foreknowledge. Both belong to God, and it is preposterous to represent one as contingent upon the other. No causal connection between foreknowledge and predestination can be established, whether this foreknowledge is of human merits or of divine grace imparted to man. To say that predestination is conditioned by foreknowledge is to introduce an indirect human factor, outside the divine intellect, that will destroy the absoluteness of the sovereign will.

Calvin maintained two important premises regarding foreknowledge and causality. First, foreknowledge is properly so called only if what it

foreknows happens. Secondly, purely on the level of foreknowledge, no causal necessity is imposed on men. These two assertions exposed Calvin to the criticism, launched by Jerome Bolsec, that he had made God the author of sin. As Bolsec argued, the grace of God enlightens every man, enabling him to believe in Christ if he wishes. The cause of predestination, conceived by God in eternity, is not to be found in God's will but in man's work. Election and reprobation are divine confirmation of human response.

The whole issue has much to do with the meaning of causality in Calvin's double decree. Predestination, according to his definition, is an *a priori*, exclusive business within the triune Godhead. It is an eternal decision for the eternal destiny of each human individual. Nothing about the temporal world is yet mentioned. Viewing from this perspective, the question, Is God the author of evil? is wrongly asked, because it is an *a posteriori* question, taking the ethics of human history into consideration. Sin and evil are categories of the created order, and they cannot be applied to the Creator. If man were to peep into the realm of divine logic, he would from that standpoint comprehend the rationale of the divine decree. However, to say this much was not enough to silence his foes in the controversial situation of Calvin's day.

Calvin continued to point out two kinds of causality. Primary causality belongs to God alone, an activity beyond external interference. This causality is different from the human understanding of cause and effect, such as smoke coming from fire. Predestination has been wrongly regarded as a projection of this kind of rational causality to the divine plan. Understood in this manner, when God reprobates some to damnation, he cannot escape the title of being the author of evil. But Calvin's view of primary causation is different. He admitted his ignorance of, and forbids any human inquiry into, the eternal and concealed counsel of God in predestination. The question 'Is God the author of evil?' is a challenge to God's primary causality, which Calvin could not answer logically. He only dogmatically defended the wholesomeness of the first cause by affirming that God's will is just and that God is not the author of evil. He appealed to the holy and gracious nature of deity rather than the consistency of human logic which he disparaged as invalid description of the eternal purpose.

However, when predestination is to be preached and historical contingency is considered, another kind of causality comes into play: proximate causality. God displays his power through secondary media and his power is never separated from

⁶ H. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, p. 186.

⁷ *Institutes*, III, 21, 5.

these media. In rebutting Pighius, Calvin argued that the origin of man's ruin was in Adam and that each man finds the proximate cause of his ruin in himself. There is no parallel treatment between election and reprobation. In election there is a direct relation between God and man. But in reprobation, there is a proximate factor in the process. A judicial element is present which has no counterpart in election.⁸ Election presupposes no human merits, but sheer grace. Reprobation results in eternal damnation which presupposes human sin. Such proximate cause, the solution offered by Calvin, enabled him to ascribe all praise to God for his election and all blame to man for his damnation. For him the two causalities always harmonize in the sovereign will. Thus a twofold theodicy is developed.

The third tension deals with morality. If man's destiny has been fixed from eternity, how can he be a free and responsible agent? If he is made unable by God to choose for salvation, why should he be condemned?

In criticizing Calvin's view of predestination, Pighius, followed by the Armenians in the seventeenth century, argued from the assumption that divine sovereignty and human responsibility are mutually exclusive. The fall has not disrupted man's volitional faculty in such a way that he cannot choose what is good. God has never forced men into his kingdom for to do so would violate his principle of justice. Faith is not divinely given, but generated and sustained by the believer himself. The entire human race is elected in Christ, and only personal refusal can relinquish it.

The divine will is undoubtedly holy, just, and good. From this conviction Calvin derived courage to defend the ethics of God's will by asserting that it is the 'highest rule of perfection' and 'the law of all laws'. There is an intrinsic correlation between divine nature and divine will. In predestination God's ethical nature conditions his will; therefore, God is not the author of sin. Reciprocally, God's will governs his nature as he is the author of reprobation. Absolute sovereignty is the necessary function in predestination and the final court of appeal for Calvin. The divine will is self-reasoning and self-judging, and is entirely beyond human understanding. Consequently it is impious to investigate the cause of the will of God, than which nothing is higher.

How does man's will operate? In the original creation Adam was given an integral, free will to choose good or evil. But after the Fall, this genuine liberty has been forfeited to his posterity. Calvin

accepted St Bernard's threefold analysis of liberty that man is free from necessity, which characterizes man as man, but not free from sin and misery. Because of this man sins 'inevitably' yet 'responsibly', and it is man's own choice without coercion.

Calvin emphasized both the difference and the coincidence of God's will and man's will. He maintained with St. Augustine

that both man and apostate angels, as far as they were themselves concerned, did that which God willed not, or which was contrary to his will; but that, as far as God's overruling omnipotence is concerned, they could not, in any manner, have done it without his will.⁹

Man may will 'contrary to God's will' but 'not without his will'. In the same event two different wills, sinful and holy, are in joint function. For 'it came to pass that by this same will of the creature, God, though in one sense unwilling, yet accomplished what He willed'.¹⁰ 'In one sense unwilling' is to be understood as due to the disobedience of man, but the omnipotence of God overrules the situation to achieve the divine purpose. God's will is simple, never at war with itself, although it appears manifold to us because of our mental incapacity to understand how in diverse manner it can will and does not will the same thing. Both wills converge on the same event. Man's will stands to be judged and God's will, to judge. With this dynamic relationship of wills, Calvin dismissed the charge of fatalism and determinism.

With respect to evangelism, Calvin sought to reconcile the two facts that by external preaching all are called to repentance and yet that the Spirit of repentance is not given to all. Would God be contrary to himself if he universally invites all but admits only the elect? Herein lies the fourth tension.

In Calvin's opinion, vocation is the work of the Spirit employing the means of the external word. Word and Spirit have to proceed together for effectual calling. The preaching of the Word itself does not constitute vocation. Nor does the efficacy of divine vocation depend on the receptivity of man, otherwise man may at least boast that he has answered the call and has offered himself.

Calvin acknowledged the reality of an external call in which the preached Word is not accompanied by the internal testimony of the Spirit. This is seen in the history of salvation and in the development of the covenantal relationship. After the creation of Adam, a universal covenant was established between God and man. Man is categorically dif-

⁹ *Calvin's Calvinism*, trans. by H. Cole, p. 126.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸ *Commentary on Romans*, 9: 11, 30.

ferent from animal and is to rule over the earth. Then precedence was given to one race over others. Abraham was chosen, and God freely offered to grant blessing to his children. The third stage consisted in a distinction within Abraham's family, a more limited scope of election. Later on when the whole Israel was chosen as a nation, only a spiritual remnant shared the grace of salvation. In this context the final stage of election is set: the election of individuals. For 'God has made a covenant of eternal life and calls any people to himself; a special mode of election is employed for a part of them, so that he does not with indiscriminate grace effectually elect all.'¹¹ Equal distribution of grace is not divine obligation, and inequality indicates that it is free.

General election is not always effectual because the Spirit of regeneration is not immediately bestowed on those with whom God has made a covenant. And the external calling, without the internal illumination of the Spirit, is an intermediate stage between the rejection of some and the election of others. God has the full right to give or to withhold the working of the Spirit. Thus the entire Israel was called the inheritance of God, but there were many foreigners.

What, then, is the relation between election and vocation? Will the eternal counsel of God conflict with the temporal proclamation of the gospel? In resolving these apparently opposite motifs, Calvin

¹¹ *Institutes*, III, 21, 7.

insisted that the two standpoints must not be mixed. On the divine side, there is no duality of will, though it is not demonstrable to us. On the human side we should confine our attention to scriptural instruction. The invitation of the gospel always has existential significance for the audience. When the Word is preached, it means a time for decision. The election of some through universal invitation does not rule out a sincere offer of the gospel to the non-elect. Calvin repudiated the way of preaching which consists in telling the people that if they do not believe, the reason is that they have already been destined for destruction. Sloth and bad intention will be produced by this perversion of the gospel message. This will be cursing rather than teaching.

Calvin's basic approach in dealing with the tensions in his concept of predestination is to keep both the human and the divine perspective unconfused. The inadequate human way of knowing cannot scrutinize the infinite counsel of the eternal decree, which is only partially revealed in Scripture. Man should stay within scriptural limits and be satisfied. This theological division of labour enables Calvin to resolve the conflicts in his theology. Reckless consistency is applied to the hermeneutic of the two fold decree. After human effort has been exhausted, Calvin seeks 'refuge' in the realm of divine mystery in face of irreconcilable tenets. His argument stems from sound reasoning although his theology may not be convincing enough to some people at this point.

Godliness and Good Learning: Cranfield's Romans

Tom Wright

The great work is finished at last. Four years after the first volume, Cranfield's commentary on Romans (the first in the new series of the *International Critical Commentary*, of which he is joint editor) has now been completed by the arrival of the second.¹ And a great work it truly is. It represents

¹ *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, by C. E. B. Cranfield, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark: vol. 1 (Rom. 1-8) 1975, vol. 2 (Rom. 9-16) 1979. The first volume has now gone into a further edition, in which mention is made (p. 44) of commentaries which have appeared since 1975, and in which the many misprints in

the best part of a lifetime of patient and careful exegetical study, an easy grasp of the classical languages, a thorough familiarity with the work of commentators from the earliest times to the present day, and, by no means least, a godly, wise and

the first edition have been corrected. Of these, warning should be given to possessors of the first edition that on p. 66 the phrase 'the faith which consists in obedience' has replaced 'the obedience which consists in faith' (due, no doubt, to Pelagian gremlins at the printers') as option (vii) on the phrase *hypakoē pisteōs*.

sensitive approach to the subtle and delicate theological and practical issues with which Romans deals. The author richly deserves the chair in Durham to which he has recently been elevated. To think his thoughts after him is to be given a lesson in theological scholarship at its very best—that is, in the peculiarly delightful combination of godliness and good learning.

Any treatment of Romans in this detail is bound to make considerable demands on the reader, and Cranfield is no exception. Though most Hebrew words are transliterated, they are usually left untranslated, as are quotations from (e.g.) Chrysostom, Pelagius, Bengel and the modern French and German commentators. At the same time, it should quickly be said that almost all non-English material occurs in the footnotes, so that readers with only English and Greek will have no trouble with the text: and that it is of course in the interests of exact scholarship that authors should speak for themselves (Cranfield is quick to point out weaknesses in some translations).² Otherwise the commentary is easy to use. It follows the Nestle text (though Cranfield disagrees with it at certain points, and discusses a good many of the variants with commendable clarity³), and the use of heavy type ensures that one can see at a glance (in contrast, for instance, with Käsemann) exactly where one is. The pagination runs on from the first to the second volume (like Kuss, unlike Murray), so that cross-references are simplified. The indices are very full and helpful, with the odd exception that sub-apostolic literature is not listed in the usual way, but instead occurs, by author's name only, in the general list of secondary writers. This means (e.g.) that, though the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* is cited (e.g. p. 809), one cannot tell at a glance whether use is made elsewhere of this or other early Christian writings. The bibliographies, though occasionally needing supplementation from Käsemann, are extremely helpful. In particular, the list of commentaries at the start compares well with Käsemann (109 in the 1973 edition, against Käsemann's 40): and Cranfield has made careful use of almost every one he lists. This use of, and debate with, his predecessors, is an important feature of the work: unlike many writers, he has cast the net wide and culled the best of Christian scholarship of the last two thousand years. The index reveals that his favourites are Barrett, Barth, Bengel, Calvin, Chrysostom, Gaugler, Käsemann, Lagrange, Michel, and of course Sanday and Headlam. Others who crop up regularly are Huby, Origen,

Pelagius (who emerges with more credit than one might have thought) and Zahn.⁴ This underlines Cranfield's stated intention of making exegesis prior to the wider theological issues:⁵ and it is no doubt because of this that other names well known in recent Pauline research—Davies, Schoeps, Stendahl, Wrede, Schweitzer—are hardly mentioned at all. Ridderbos is one of the most striking absentees, in view of the fact that his commentary takes a theological stance fairly close to Cranfield's own. But in general the coverage is extremely full: and Cranfield is always scrupulously fair to his opponents.⁶

In one respect Cranfield stands out from most writers on Romans, namely, the full coverage he gives to every single part of the epistle. After 44 pages of introduction (authenticity, structure, purpose, the church in Rome, etc.: and a good brief history of exegesis), chs. 1-8 occupy 400 pages, with 9-11 taking 150 and 12-16 requiring 200. What Cranfield says of Michel⁷ is just as true of himself: it is very difficult to find him unaware of questions which need to be asked. The section on chs. 12-13 reproduces almost exactly the earlier *Commentary* on those chapters,⁸ except that one or two of the detailed practical applications in the earlier volume are missing, and one or two others, including a rare peep into the author's background,⁹ are added. The only significant modification of stance is that, though Cranfield still thinks it is wrong simply to dismiss the idea of a double reference for *exousiais* in 13.1 (i.e. to heavenly powers as well as to earthly ones), he has 'now come to regard it as less probable than the interpretation according to which Paul in using *exousiais* here had in mind simply the civil authorities as such'.¹⁰

The commentary is then concluded with two essays. The first¹¹ deals with Paul's purposes in writing the letter, and the second¹² is entitled 'Concluding remarks on some aspects of the theology of Romans'. Of this, about one-third is taken up with a revised form of Cranfield's deservedly famous article 'St Paul and the Law',¹³ the

⁴ Käsemann, Black and Schlier appeared too late to be used in vol. 1: the third volume of Kuss, and the first of Wilckens, came too late for either volume.

⁵ Cf. pp. 1, 823f.

⁶ Cf. e.g. p. 778 re Michel.

⁷ P. 43.

⁸ *A Commentary on Romans 12-13* (SJT Occasional Papers no. 12), Edinburgh and London, 1965.

⁹ P. 688. Note too the addition of the phrase 'and quite often even in others' in the last sentence on 13: 10 (p. 679).

¹⁰ P. 659.

¹¹ Pp. 814-23.

¹² Pp. 823-70.

¹³ *SJT* 17, March 1964, pp. 43-68, reprinted with slight alterations in R. Batey (ed.) *New Testament Issues*, New York and London, 1970, pp. 148-72.

² E.g. p. 43 n. 3 re Barth's shorter commentary.

³ E.g. p. 784 n. 2, re 16: 3-5.

revisions consisting mainly of the deletion of material now covered in the body of the commentary. For the rest, the reader is offered a useful summary of Cranfield's understanding of Paul, particularly of his Christology, soteriology, pneumatology and use of the OT (in the last, he holds that Paul has been given, as the servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, the 'legitimate freedom . . . from time to time to take a certain liberty with a particular passage, in order thereby to bring out the more faithfully and clearly the overall sense of the OT's witness', as opposed to the idea that Paul shows 'a readiness to force [the text] to render service to the interpreter's own purpose, in other words, a freedom of arbitrariness').¹⁴ I suspect that Cranfield had to curtail these essays—some sections of which are very brief—in the interests of the publisher's plans: were he to enlarge some of them (perhaps particularly his welcome rejection of the common assumption that Paul wrongly believed that the Parousia would certainly occur in the very near future) he would win considerable further gratitude.

Three features of this commentary, hinted at in the title of this review, call for particular comment. First, Cranfield's extraordinary analytic skill. To one who has waded through many discussions of difficult points in Romans, reading Cranfield is always refreshing, because of the painstaking clarity and honesty with which he sets out the alternative options which the text suggests or permits, and the ruthless logic with which he examines their strengths and weaknesses and reaches his conclusion—which is sometimes that the matter must be left undecided between two or more possibilities. Even where one disagrees with the results, one can always see more clearly just where the issues lie.¹⁵ I think particularly of his discussion of 8: 28¹⁶ (in which he understands 'all things' as the subject of 'work together'): his arguments for treating 5: 1, not 6: 1, as the start of the new section of the epistle:¹⁷ and his masterly

¹⁴ P. 869.

¹⁵ Occasionally the method becomes too heavy: e.g. pp. 613-6, dealing with 12: 3, where we are invited to compare 'the combination of (i)(b)(β), (ii)(c) and (iii)(a)' with 'the combination of (i)(b)(β), (ii)(b) and (iii)(a)', and both against 'the combination of (i)(a)(β), (ii)(b) and (iii)(b)'. And Cranfield's clear and logical mind sometimes draws him into sentences where only the brave will follow without a tremor: e.g. (p. 239): 'Paul's meaning may then be understood to be, not that it was not through the instrumentality of the law but through that of the righteousness of faith that the promise was given, but that it was not through the instrumentality of the law but through that of the righteousness of faith that the promise was to be appropriated, or—to put it differently—that the promise was not given on the condition of its being merited by fulfilment of the law but simply on the basis of the righteousness of faith.'

¹⁶ P. 425ff.

¹⁷ P. 252ff.

analysis of 11: 30f,¹⁸ 14: 16,¹⁹ and 15: 4, 7 and 9.²⁰

Second, the sensitivity to the finer points of grammar, and their theological significance. It is good to have pointed out the significance of the presence of *te* in 1: 16,²¹ of *to* in 9: 5,²² and of the absence of *ho* in the same verse.²³ There is also a nice distinction between *gar* in its explanatory and confirmatory senses²⁴ (Cranfield never tires of pointing out the importance of Paul's connecting words, and the significance of the occasional sentence that is *not* connected to its predecessor): an interesting suggestion, on the basis of the aorist indicative active in 16: 12, that Persis may have already completed a significant amount of Christian work:²⁵ and countless other similar points. I particularly liked the footnote warning English and German readers not to assume that, just because 'so' in both languages could translate *hōste* in the sense of 'therefore', *hōste* could also carry the meaning of 'so' in the 'as . . . so . . .' sequence—all this by way of pointing out that 7: 1-3 is not an allegory but an argument.²⁶ With this kind of thing always present though never obtrusive, one feels one has learnt more from the commentary than just theology, though everything in the book is tied in to the central theological themes.

Third, godliness (I can think of no better word. 'Piety' sounds a bit wet, and 'devotion' suggests that the book is 'devotional' which, though heart-warming to the understanding reader, it is not). It is always apparent, though again never obtrusive, that Cranfield takes very seriously indeed the responsibility of the theological exegete towards the text he handles and towards the church he serves, as well as the responsibility to set before himself, as a member of that church, the many challenges and exhortations the text provides. His practical comments are always worth pondering²⁷ and his various remarks on prayer, though brief, are excellent.²⁸ Above all, his sense of awe and reverence before the wise, gracious and loving God of whom Paul speaks is reflected in his writings

¹⁸ Pp. 582-6.

¹⁹ Pp. 715ff.

²⁰ Pp. 735, 739f., 742: an example, this, of Cranfield's patient exegesis even at the stage when most commentators, with the end in sight, are skating quickly over complex issues.

²¹ P. 91 (though it is odd to criticize RV here and not AV which is identical).

²² P. 464.

²³ P. 469 n. 3.

²⁴ P. 582: though it seems very forced to take *gar* in 12: 3 (p. 611) as drawing out the implications of, rather than explaining the reason for, 12: 1-2.

²⁵ P. 793 n. 2.

²⁶ P. 335 n. 3.

²⁷ E.g. p. 610-11, re the last phrases of 12: 2.

²⁸ E.g. pp. 399f., 422, 777 n. 1.

throughout. It is hard to think that anyone could work humbly and attentively through this commentary and not be a better Christian for it: and it is not every work of massive NT scholarship of which that could be said.

Cranfield rightly refuses to treat his commentary as a theological treatise in which to argue a point of view. Nevertheless, a definite theological stance emerges: and it is so distinctive, and so important, that we must describe it a little and direct some questions towards it. The position can be illustrated in two typically Cranfieldian sentences, from p. 867:

Because he kept his eyes so steadily fixed on Jesus, the author of Romans was able to hear and to comprehend the message proclaimed by the OT; and, because in his total commitment to Jesus as Saviour and Lord he never ceased to be seriously engaged with the OT scriptures, he perceived with amazing clarity of vision vast and splendid reaches of the truth of Christ which lie beyond the ken of all Marcionites and semi-, crypto-, and unwitting, Marcionites. Because he saw Christ steadily in the light of the OT—not abandoning the real Christ, who is the Christ of Israel, for any imaginary Christ more flattering to human self-importance—he did not refuse to grapple with the mystery of God's gracious election or fail to hold firmly to the truth of God's faithfulness—His faithfulness (which does not exclude, but includes, severity) to the Jewish people, all human unbelief and disobedience notwithstanding, His faithfulness to all mankind (Paul saw the Gentile mission foretold in the OT) and His faithfulness as the Creator of heaven and earth to His whole creation.

From these two sentences there emerges Cranfield's main theological contention. Against all suggestions that God has had two plans of salvation, that Jews were to obey the law but that, when they failed to do so, God made an easier way of justification (i.e. faith), or that Israel was to be got rid of to make way for the true people of God—against such suggestions, standard though many of them have been in NT scholarship (not to mention evangelicalism), Cranfield reasserts the Reformed position which often goes by default in these debates. The law is not abolished, but fulfilled: faith is not a work, but the surrender of man to the gospel in which all the 'work' is done for him:²⁹ Jesus Christ, by his obedience culminating in but not to be reduced to his death, has earned that righteousness which he now shares with his people. In the same way, Israel is not abolished: God still

²⁹ NB. p. 89f., where this is set out very clearly.

has purposes for the Jews (Romans 9–11 is no mere apocalyptic dream), purposes whose all-embracing end is mercy.³⁰ It is good to see Marcion, and his many modern followers, thus put in their place, though one could wish that Cranfield had attached names to the tantalizing descriptions in the quotation above! They have for too long had the field of Pauline studies all to themselves, with the only debate being whether Paul was a Lutheran or a Rabbi. And at virtually no point can Cranfield be accused of reaching his conclusions by special pleading. He has outgunned his opponents by good old-fashioned exegesis.

Yet there remain questions. Without any desire at all to return to Marcionism in any of its forms, it may be suggested that the stress on the continuity of the purposes of God (it is important to see the argument against Marcionism and that against anti-Semitism, the arguments that the law is not abolished and that Israel is not 'replaced by the church', as essentially the same point), right and proper though we believe it to be not least as a correction of current imbalance, needs in turn to be balanced by the emphasis on the *discontinuity* between BC and AD, for which Cranfield scarcely allows at all. This discontinuity is not a Marcionite invention, nor need it be understood in a Marcionite fashion. It is there in Paul, particularly in Galatians, at which Cranfield is clearly uncomfortable:³¹ we surely should not play Romans and Galatians off against each other, but look for a larger theological framework within which both will be at home. The Lutherans have traditionally started from Galatians and ignored (e.g.) Romans 3: 31: Cranfield begins from Romans and makes heavy weather of Gal. 3, where Paul explicitly says that the law (while no doubt retaining a permanent validity in the sense of Gal. 5: 14: this is most important) held nevertheless a *temporary* function in the over-arching purposes of God, which function ceases when the Messiah comes. Bound up with this is of course the exegesis of Romans 10: 4, particularly the meaning of *telos*. Here it may be asked whether the meanings of 'goal, fulfilment' (which Cranfield supports) and 'termination' (which he rejects) are necessarily mutually exclusive. If I travel by train from Edinburgh to King's Cross, the latter station is surely the goal, fulfilment *and* termination of the journey. Until a solution is found in which the temporary purpose of the law, and its abolition in

³⁰ The obvious Barthian overtones of this—to which we will return—are symptomatic of Cranfield's deep indebtedness to Barth. This is almost always a great gain (e.g. p. 371ff., re 8: 1–11), but very occasionally leads the exegesis into unusual conclusions, e.g. p. 754f. on 15: 15f.

³¹ E.g. pp. 522 n. 2, 858 point (2).

that sense by Christ, can be explained in a non-Marcionite sense (i.e. within a wider view of the single and unchanging purpose of God), one of the most pressing of all Pauline problems remains on the agenda.

This problem can also be expressed as follows. Granted that Marcionism presents an odd picture of God, setting out on an impossible plan and changing his mind half way, is it not equally odd to think of God promulgating a law with the intention of one man, the Messiah, eventually coming to keep it and to earn righteousness for himself³³ and for his people, but equally with the intention that his people should in the meantime understand the law quite differently, namely, as something to provoke not works but faith? In other words, does not Cranfield's theology³³ either make Christ himself a legalist (i.e. one who misunderstood the law's purpose, wrongly imagining it to be a means of acquiring merit or 'righteousness' by works), or imply that, when the Jews treated the law as a legalist's charter (assuming for the moment that they did) they were not misunderstanding it at all, but merely doing with it what God intended the Messiah to do? I suspect that this view, like the one it opposes, has not quite shaken itself free from an ethical meaning of 'righteousness' and fully grasped the forensic nature of the word: though to take up that question would require several more articles at least as long as this one.³⁴ (To avoid misunderstanding, I hasten to add that Paul would have dismissed any suggestion that Jesus Christ disobeyed the law—though some, in their eagerness to save the Messiah from legalism, have suggested this.)³⁵

Another aspect of the same problem is the use made by Cranfield of the *theologia crucis*. Granted his splendid treatment of the doctrine of the atonement, in which he does not shrink from the always unpopular conclusion that God 'purposed to direct against his own very Self in the person of His Son the full weight of that righteous wrath which [sinful men] deserved',³⁶ it is not clear that he has seen (as the Germans, particularly Käsemann, see so clearly) the implications of the cross for the place of Israel and the law in the purposes of God.

³³ This is odd in itself: why should the Messiah, if (as Cranfield believes) he is fully divine, need to *earn* anything for himself? Is he not already God's beloved Son? Yet Cranfield seems to assert that his works do earn something for himself as well as for others: see the references in the next note.

³⁴ See e.g., pp. 240, 290f., 505 (though see n. 1 there), 522.

³⁵ For similar hints towards a solution, see G. B. Caird's review of E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, in *JTS* n.s. 29, 1978, pp. 540ff.

³⁶ Cf., e.g., A. T. Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology*, London, 1974, p. 50f.

³⁷ P. 217: cf. pp. 647f., 827ff.

(A further consequence is that he is unable to attack the Lutherans here with the corresponding, and equally Pauline, *theologia resurrectionis*, which does not reverse the verdict of the cross so much as break out into newness of life beyond it. This, I believe, points the way to the resolution of some of the issues mentioned above.) As we need to state the abolition of the law without Marcionism, so we need to state the *theologia crucis*, and its implications for Israel, without anti-Semitism. In other words, Cranfield's perfectly valid points need to be set in a framework which will include the strengths of the opposing case as well.

The law is also central in the issue which many will regard as the most controversial in the whole commentary, namely, Cranfield's powerful support for the 'minority' position that sees in Rom. 7: 13–25 a description of (one aspect at least of) normal Christian experience. As usual, Cranfield has unerringly put his finger on important weaknesses in the opposing majority view (which, contrary to usual suppositions, is not so much that the passage describes how Paul remembers feeling before his conversion, but rather that it is how Paul, the Christian, analyses what in fact had been the case, theologically, about his pre-Christian life). In particular, he exposes the shallow view of the Christian life, and of sin and ethics, that presumes to have left behind a state in which the believer says 'the evil I would not, that I do'.³⁷ He is right to see, behind the normal (existentialist) view, the same incipient Marcionism which he attacks elsewhere. But I am not quite convinced. It seems to me that Cranfield has not fully allowed for the fact that the passage is not first and foremost describing anyone's experience (though no doubt, in some sense at least, it does that even if incidentally): the passage is basically about the law, and its conclusion is that the law is God's law, holy and just and good, but at the same time impotent to rescue man from the plight described. This does not settle the burning issue, since it could still be the Christian who realizes that the law by itself could not save him, but only (8: 1–11) the law fulfilled by the Spirit. It is possible, however, to maintain on the one hand that Paul would have agreed with Cranfield's view of the Christian life as a struggle for obedience in which one is always conscious of indwelling sin, while asserting on the other hand that this does not happen to be what he is talking about here. While, therefore, I prefer Cranfield's interpretation to any others I have read—and particularly to the standard Kümmel-Bultmann-

³⁷ Cf. pp. 342ff., 365ff.

Käsemann line—I cannot help feeling that the last word has not been said on the subject.

Finally, the vexed question of Romans 9–11. One cannot but applaud Cranfield's determination to wrestle seriously throughout with this notorious passage, and there are several discussions to which I shall often return for illumination. But I do not feel he has done full justice either to the section itself, or to its integration within the whole epistle (though his exposition of the latter point is better than most). It seems to me that 9–11 is not merely a discussion that Paul cannot omit without loss of integrity,³⁸ but a vital part of the *same* argument that has occupied him in the first eight chapters. Though Cranfield suggests that this may be so,³⁹ he does not develop the point: and, when it comes to the connection between 9–11 and 12ff., he notices the link of 'mercies of God' in 12: 1 with 9–11 rather than with 1–8 specifically and yet seems to play it down.⁴⁰ For the detail, he appears to regard the questions of election and predestination, rather than the issue of God's purposes for the Jews, as the main problem in these chapters: and this, I believe, starts off a false (though well-trodden) trail which results in distortion at several points. Thus, despite the clear soteriological language used in connection with predestination in ch. 9 (cf. 'sonship' and 'glory', coming so soon after ch. 8), he takes the old line that predestination is not here to salvation but to a place in God's purposes. Again, despite Paul's emphasis on the unity of Jew and Gentile in 10: 9ff., he seems to regard this as incidental to the real point of the passage, which he takes to be the proof of the Jews' responsibility. This in turn leads to the idea that 10: 14ff. is all about the Jews', not the Gentiles', hearing and obeying (or not) of the gospel. Despite p. 533, it is surely more natural to identify the subject of 'call' in v. 14 with that of the same verb in the previous verse—i.e. to see it as the worldwide company of (potential) believers, not merely Jews. To maintain that in vv. 18–19 Paul was proving that the Jews must have heard the gospel by saying that the Gentiles had heard it⁴¹ is surely much more awkward than making Paul's basic point, as in 9: 30ff. where this section begins, the inclusion of Gentiles within the people of God. Cranfield's very proper concern to counter any suggestion that Paul had fallen into anti-Semitism has, I believe, led him astray in a good cause, a cause moreover which Paul himself champions fully in ch. 11. By that

stage, though, Cranfield is on course for a Barthian solution, which is duly propounded: though universalism is not required by ch. 11 (since Paul 'may actually in this context only have meant that God has shut in the various groups he has mentioned as wholes'),⁴² it is preferable, he thinks, to refrain *both* from seeking to establish the doctrine on the basis of this or other possible texts *and* 'to refrain from treating the solemn and urgent warnings, of which the NT assuredly contains an abundance, as clear warrant for confidently proclaiming the certainty of the final exclusion of some from the embrace of God's mercy'. This is a typically cautious solution (even non-universalists would hardly want to make 'confident proclamations' about Hell), but the whole discussion leaves one with the impression that Cranfield would like to be a universalist even though he realizes that the text of scripture not only does not support the doctrine but actually tends on occasion, at least *prima facie*, to oppose it. Though I do not enjoy this debate at all, I have argued against such a position elsewhere.⁴³

My underlying impression throughout the discussion of chs. 9–11 is that, though there are undoubtedly nettles to be grasped, the issues are clarified by the recognition that Paul has indeed *in some senses* transferred the privileges of Israel to the Christian (Jew-plus-Gentile) church: that this is precisely the point which raises the question of God's righteousness not only in ch. 9 but also in 1: 16 f. and 3: 21 ff.: that Paul's answer to the problem is given in terms of the OT prophecies which warned Israel that God would (righteously) both punish her and call Gentiles to join a remnant of Jews as his true people, the family of Abraham:⁴⁴ and that, though 11: 1 ff. shows Paul's awareness of a potential anti-Semitism at this point, justified not least by the history of exegesis, a deeper understanding of God's purposes for his people makes such an attitude impossible. In short, as with the law, I believe that within the scheme of the continuity of the people of God, which Cranfield is absolutely right to stress against all Marcionism and anti-Semitism, there must be included a proper element of discontinuity, though this must be formulated in a very different way than has usually been imagined.

I would like to emphasize in conclusion that these comments are in no way intended to detract

³⁸ See pp. 446ff.

³⁹ On p. 445f.

⁴⁰ P. 595f.

⁴¹ Pp. 537f., 539.

⁴² P. 588.

⁴³ Cf. *Themelios* 4.2, January 1979, pp. 54–8, and other references in the first footnote of that article.

⁴⁴ Cf., e.g., the way in which the OT background to Rom. 9: 21 (the potter and the clay) is set in the context of God's strange ways (not with men in general but) with *Israel*.

from the deliberately high praise given above. Cranfield's theological judgments are a breath of fresh air and an incentive to hard work and further debate, and it is towards that task, not to destroy but to fulfil his true intentions, that my questions are directed. This is a superb commentary, a masterpiece of Christian scholarship: to presume

even to criticize it makes me feel uncomfortably like the thistle challenging the cedar. Before I am trampled down for my impudence, let me conclude with a bold assertion and prediction: this book is the finest work on Romans to appear in English this century, and has a good chance of remaining at the top of the list for several decades to come.
